

Enablers and Outcomes of Employee Engagement: An Overview

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Abstract: Employee engagement (EE) has been a useful concept since its inception. It has been used in different industries and diversified areas. EE is an intangible aspect associated with an individual's psychological, emotional, and behavioural characteristics. Engagement depends on the enablers that provide an appropriate environment and act as pillars for its growth and development. Therefore, this study has emphasized on identifying enablers of EE. Another major aspect of engagement is its outcome and these are the benefits produced due to the engagement of individuals. So, in this study, the focus has also been given to identify outcomes of EE. Another major emphasis of this study is to develop a proposed model of enablers and outcomes of EE. This is a review-based paper and information has been collected from different secondary sources such as books, articles, websites, etc. In this study 6 enablers: job resource, job demand, safety, communication, leadership, and co-employee support, and 2 outcomes: individual outcome and organizational outcome have been identified. Individual outcome comprises quality of work life, experience of work, job satisfaction, motivation, employee turnover, and commitment. The organizational outcome encompasses financial performance, growth and productivity, talent retention, extra-role behavior, innovative behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior. The study has developed a model showing the relationship between enablers and outcomes of EE. Further studies may test the model to get its empirical validation.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Antecedents of employee engagement, Outcomes of employee engagement

Date of Submission: 26-01-2024

Date of acceptance: 08-02-2024

I. Introduction

Employee engagement (EE) is a useful idea for academicians and human resource practitioners in the 21st century (May et al., 2004). It is the attachment of organizational members to their work roles physically, mentally, and emotionally. Engagement includes three major elements: Meaningfulness, safety, and availability (William Kahn, 1990). This term first appeared in academics but later on spread to the business world. This EE is not a new concept rather it is “old wine in a new bottle”. However, there is sufficient evidence present to ensure that EE is related to but different from other concepts in the field of organizational behavior such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and job involvement (Saks, 2006). Engagement is an individual and psychological concept that is brought by the people to the organization (Harter et al., 2002; Goddard, 1999). It is an individual experience produced in the workplace that leads to a person's behavior rather than the mass (Mc Cashland, 1999; Miles, 2001; Harter et al., 2003). (Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008) have stated that it is a personal decision that can't be forced or mandated for everyone to be engaged in their work.

This concept is voraciously studied by researchers to identify its enablers and outcomes in different organizational settings. Enablers help to know about the requirements that need to be focused on while adopting engagement in the organizations. These enablers are not the same in all organizations; rather they vary in different industries and different sectors. Several authors have identified different enablers in their study. In this study, attempts are made to congregate those enablers of engagement. On the other hand, understanding the benefits of engagement is equally important for its implications and use. It helps the organization to speculate the expected profit of using this concept. Several authors have found out the outcomes of engagement in their study. These outcomes are different in different perspectives. Therefore, the second attempt of this study is to define the key outcomes of engagement.

II. Method

This is a review-based study where attempts are made to develop a proposed model of EE and its outcomes. Therefore, below is a brief review of the concept of EE, the factors affecting EE, and the benefits of EE have been elaborated. A proposed model of factors and outcomes is furnished at the end of the discussion.

III. A Brief Review of Literature

3.1: Employee Engagement (EE)

The term EE has gained popularity in the field of human resource development (Macey & Schneider, 2008). It refers to the zeal, enthusiasm, passion, dedication, commitment, involvement, focused effort, and energy of individual toward their work and organization. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “the state of being in gear” and “state of being involved and committed” (Truss et al., 2014, p-15). Maslach & Leiter, (1997) have cited the opinion of the Conference Board of USA (2006) has described “EE as a heightened emotional connection an employee possesses with his organization that influences him to exert greater discretionary effort to his work and see them as able to deal completely with their job demand”.

Employee engagement is first appeared in an academic journal and popular in academics but most of the working definitions have come from consultancy firms and business houses. According to Maslach et al., (2001) defined EE as a “persistent, positive, affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees” characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure. But, Schaufeli et al., (2001) have elaborated that EE is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind which is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”.

Harter et al., (2002) have defined EE as “individual’s involvement and satisfaction as well as enthusiasm for work”. They have found that by analyzing the engagement of top performers of different business units the companies can learn more about management of talents and practices. Gubman, (2004) has described engagement as “heightened emotional connection of employees with their work that goes beyond satisfaction”. It includes two things: what you do and where you do it. What you do refers to whether a person enjoys the work, finds the challenges in work, and works fits to skill. Where you work refers to workplace culture, senior leadership, organization policies, reward systems, and co-worker relationships in the workplace. Erickson, (2005) has said that engagement is beyond satisfaction and it includes employment arrangement or basic loyalty to the employer. EE is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior (Schaufeli et al. 2002). An engaged employee is aware of business conditions and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job to achieve organizational benefits. Organizations must work for the development and sustainability of engaged employees in the organization. But engagement at the organizational level refers to “an employee being fully intellectually and emotionally committed to a particular job” (Woodruffe, 2006; and Czarnowsky 2008). In this state, he wants to give his discretionary effort towards the work which is not necessary for a worker to give and contribute to his employer’s success and accomplishment of business objectives in the form of extra time, brain power, and energy Devi, (2009).

The major concern of EE is an existing discrepancy between the perceived importance and actual level of engagement existing in the organization today is the cause of major concern Czarnowsky, (2008). Confusion also exists in defining the EE concept. A report published by CIPD (2010) where it has mentioned that an engaged employee is positively present during work performance and willingly contributes to intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connection to others. From this definition, three core components of engagement: intellectual engagement, affective engagement, and social engagement are highlighted. Intellectual engagement refers to thinking about your job and trying to improve performance. Affective engagement is a positive feeling about doing a good job. Social engagement is the optimum utilization of opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work.

3.2: Factors of Employee Engagement:

Since the emergence of the concept EE, many studies have been conducted on identifying factors of EE. Meaningfulness, safety, and availability are key enablers of engagement that impact individuals’ engagement and disengagement at work (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). Saks, (2006) has carried out explicit research to test the antecedents and consequences to EE. In the study, he has characterized EE as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components and is associated with individual role performance. He has argued that EE develops through the social exchange model (SEM) and defined two separate types of engagement: job engagement and organization engagement. Macey & Schneider (2008) have conceptualized trait, state, and behavioral engagement as separate but related engagement constructs. According to them, a trait in engagement refers to the inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point. State in engagement is defined as an antecedent to behavioral engagement (such as the constructs of satisfaction, involvement, commitment, and empowerment). Behavioral engagement refers to a discretionary effort. This contributes to the field to clear the scattered and unfocused conceptual state of EE by breaking the engagement construct into distinct parts and exposing the falseness of the definitions.

3.2.1: Job resource

It refers to physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job. These aspects try to reduce job demands, become functional in achieving job goals, and ensure personal growth, learning, and development (Hobfoll, 2002). Job resources also include other measures like performance feedback (Bakker et al. 2008; Schaufeli et al, 2009), social support from employees, and organizational job context (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Hakanen et al., (2005) have incorporated five job resources such as job control, innovativeness, variability, positive patient contacts, and peer contacts in their study. It includes two other measures such as autonomy and social support (Richardson et. el, 2006; Bakker et al, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Muono et al., (2007) have defined that job resources are an antecedent of EE. Three aspects of Job resources: job control, organization-based self-esteem, and management quality predicted engagement in a better way. Therefore, engagement and job resources are closely associated with each other. (Hakanen et al, 2005; Richardson et. el, 2006; Mauno et al; 2007).

3.2.2: Job demand

It includes physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job. It requires both physical well as psychological effort from employees and is related to their physiological and psychological costs (Muono et al.2007; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Job demand refers to the characteristics of a job that enhance employees' strain and exceed their adaptive capacity. It is also called stressors (Hakanen et al., 2005). Maono et al. (2007) in their study have focused on three aspects of the job: Perceived job insecurity, time demands at work, and work-to-family conflict. Out of these three aspects, two aspects such as work to family conflict, and job insecurity are rarely regarded as antecedents to engagement. Job demand includes elements such as qualitative work load, emotional dissonance (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), physical work environment, negative changes (Hakanen et al., 2005), work hours, and conflict (Richardson et al., 2006)

3.2.3: Safety

Safety refers to social situations that possess the characteristics of predictability and consistency (Kahn, 1990). In the context of the organization, these two characteristics are vital in relation to the distribution of rewards and procedures used in their allocation. In this situation, two terms are essential to be brought into the limelight. One is distributive justice which means one's perception regarding fairness in decision outcomes and fairness in the allocation of resources, benefits, and rewards of organisation among members. Another is procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of means and procedures used in deciding the amount and distribution of resources (Colquitt, 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001). Both distributive justice and procedural justice are parts of organizational justice and are related to the organizational outcome: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, withdrawal, and performance (Colquitt et al., 2001). Organizational justice was first identified by Greenberg (1987) as the perception and reaction of individuals regarding the prevalence of justice in the organization. Employees' feeling of prevailing justice in their organization leads them to be obliged and be fair in their role performance resulting in high levels of engagement (Maslach et al., 2001). Both distributive justice and procedural justice are the antecedents of EE (Saks, 2006; Rasheed et al., 2013).

3.2.4: Communication

Mac Leod & Clarke (2009) have emphasized on the importance of clear communication from superior to related employees with their role with leadership vision of the organization. They have clarified that poor communication is a barrier of EE. Karanges et al., (2015) have identified the relationship between engagement and internal communication and the study result has found that there is a positive relationship between engagement and internal communication. Internal communication channels, particularly face-to-face communication and e-mail are responsible for increasing the sense of engagement Neill et. al., (2015). A report published by CIPD (2006) has described the two most significant drivers of engagement as "opportunities to have employees voice" and "feeling about what is going on in the organization". Therefore, communication is considered as one of the vital drivers of engagement Kahn, (1992; Mac Leod & Clarke, 2009; Sundaray, 2011; Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Junghoon Lee, 2012; Swathi, S., 2013; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Neill et al., 2015; and Sharma, 2016).

3.2.5: Leadership

Leader plays an important role in empowering employees which results in increasing their level of engagement. Empowerment means to provide opportunities to increase employees' sense of efficacy by identifying situations and conditions that increase powerlessness among them, finding methods of its removal either through formal organizational practices, and providing sufficient information through informal techniques (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Employees having such opportunities lead them to have a say in the organizational

decision-making process. It helps in enhancing their sense of commitment leading to engagement. Psychological empowerment is an antecedent to EE (Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011). It is the quality of leading and guiding people for the accomplishment of objectives and environmental response (Billsberry, 2009). It acts as the source of motivation and satisfaction for subordinates and creates a healthy work environment to support employees' work engagement. EE can be enhanced by exercising proper leadership styles (Bakker et al, 2011). Many studies have been conducted to identify and test the link between these two constructs such as leadership and EE. Datche & Mukulu (2015) have examined the effect of transformational leadership on EE among civil servants in Kenya. The result shows the existence of a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership behavior and EE (Wefald, 2008). Supportive leadership and EE have a positive relationship between themselves (Wahyu, 2014). The leadership team's conscious focus on increasing EE is a positive antecedent of engagement (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). Leadership possesses a strong positive relationship with EE and works as an antecedent to it (Xu & Thomas, 2011; Sundaray, 2011; Khan; 2013; Swathi, 2013; Zainol et al.2016; Sharma, 2016).

3.2.6: Co-employee Support

An employee working in a cordial environment where each one has cooperative interpersonal relationships is a soul essence of an organization (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Individuals possessing good interpersonal relationships help them to enhance co-employee support (Andrew and Sofian, 2012). This co-employee support provides greater meaning to employees in their work. This meaningfulness of work leads to enhanced engagement (Locke & Taylor, 1990; Kahn, 1990). Such relationship prevailing in the workplace has a vital positive impact on increasing levels of EE (May et al., 2004; Anitha, 2014).

3.3: Outcomes of EE

1. Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002) have tried to define the relationship between EE and business unit outcomes (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). They identified engagement as "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work". Human Resource (HR) practitioners use this term in an organizational context because of its proven link with profit, customer satisfaction, loyalty, productivity, turnover, and safety (Czarnowsky, 2008; and Harter et al., 2002). According to (Kathryn Q. & Thirolf, 2017) increased job satisfaction, heightened sense of belongingness, and commitment to college are the major outcomes of EE. Organizations and institutes want to maintain and develop the level of engagement of their employees because of its proven outcomes such as employee intent to stay, low turnover, productivity, customer satisfaction, employee loyalty, etc., and link with the key factors promoting sustainable organizational performance (Miller & McCartney, 2011). Corporate Leadership Council (2004) has proved that by increasing EE level, organizations can enhance employee performance by 20 percent and reduce 87 percent of employees' probability of departure from the organization. It has a statistical relationship with productivity, profitability, employee retention, safety, and customer satisfaction (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002). According to (Macey and Schneider, 2008) task performance and organizational effectiveness are two important outcomes of EE. Gujral and Jain, (2013) have identified three primary outcomes of like-employee commitment, employee satisfaction, and organization citizenship behavior.

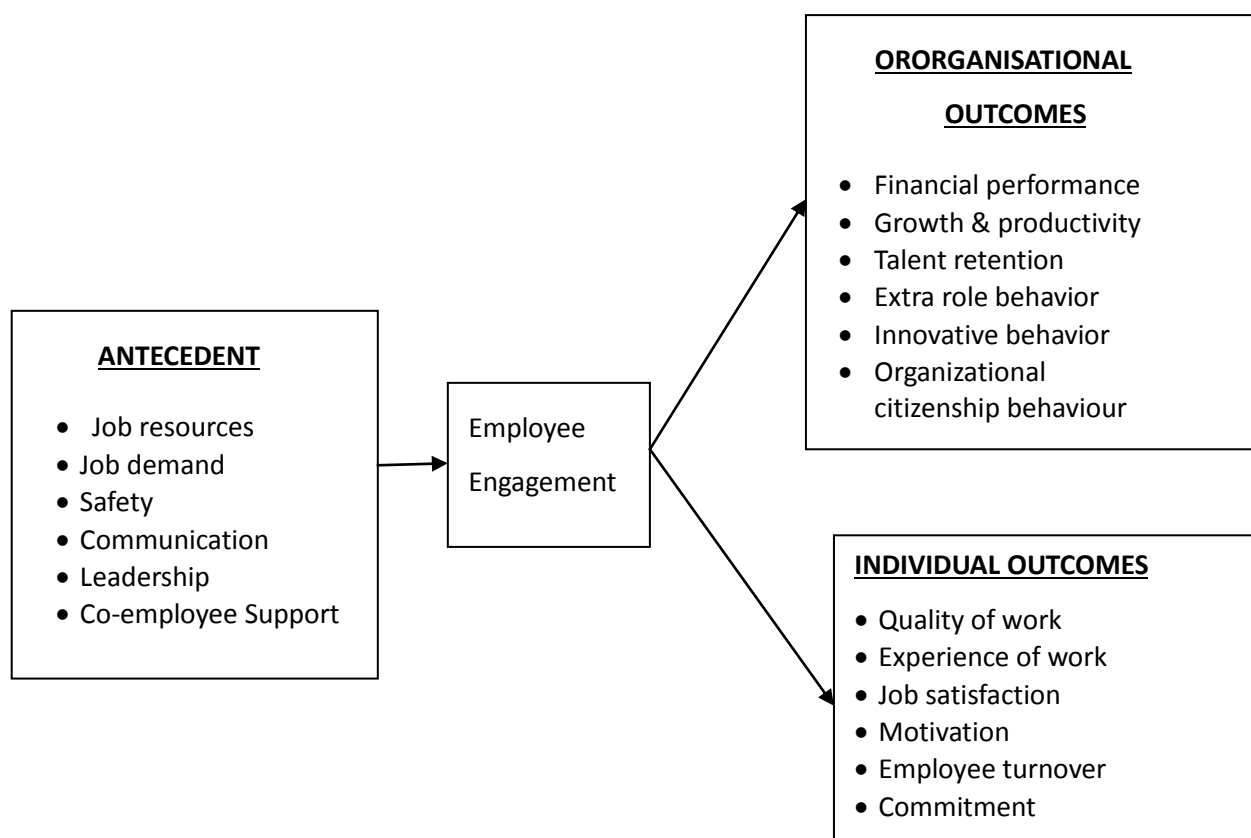


Fig.1: Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement

Source: Develop by Authors

IV. Conclusion

Employee engagement is found as one of the most focused concepts that has been widely studied since its inception till date. It is because of its business profit linkages. Even if the company is going through financial crises, investment and care given to EE can't be ignored. Because it is the only concept, that may help an organization to survive and revive again in this era of extreme competition. Several enablers and outcomes have been developed by the researchers for EE. However, in this study, 6 key factors, as well as two outcomes, comprise of 6 dimensions each have been identified and highlighted more structurally irrespective of any specific organization perspective. These are more common antecedents and outcomes that must be known to any employer, supervisor, entrepreneur, any other person running the business, and academicians. This paper also has proposed a model of EE.

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