



Emotional Intelligence: A Key to Reducing Work-Life Stress

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Abstract:

Human Resource Management has drastically evolved over the past few decades. From only being a mere regulator having the job of monitoring the employees, to now taking up responsibilities of facilitator and developer by nurturing them. Concepts like employee satisfaction, employee development, etc., came up which helped the organizations in having a happy and satisfied workforce. One such concept which has become popular in recent times is 'Employee Engagement'. The concept also becomes important due to the recent pandemic, i.e., COVID-19, which brought the whole world to a standstill. Remote work surely helped the organizations by letting the employees work while sitting at home. However, humans are social animals, and the lack of social interaction made it very hard to keep the employees engaged and motivated. The purpose of this research is to find out the importance of employee engagement and, the hurdles in achieving the same and also come up with ways to engage employees in this 'new normal', as engaged employees are the ones responsible for success in any organization. This research is also important as employee engagement is studied from a holistic viewpoint covering aspects like challenges for employees in the new normal and ways to eliminate them, giving clarity and a plan of action to make the most of it. The research is based on secondary data analysis integrated with personal observation to determine the effect of employee engagement in an organization. The results of this research provide clarity and a better understanding of the concept and its importance in any organization. Also, the study proposes ways to increase employee engagement in an organization.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement, Human Resource Management (HRM), COVID-19.*

Introduction:

Employee engagement is one of the most important functions of Human Resource Management (HRM). Employee engagement, in simple terms, means to make employees feel as if they are a part of the organization. Employee engagement has emerged as one of the hottest topics in HRM especially due to the recent pandemic, i.e., COVID-19. Organizations were forced to continue the work through remote working which resulted in several problems for both the employee as well as the employer. Employees faced issues like demotivation, lack of communication, ergonomic issues, etc., whereas for employers, retaining

employees was one of the biggest challenges as a plethora of possibilities came up for them as geographical boundaries were not a barrier anymore. Even after so many problems, HRM focused on binding the organization and keeping the employees engaged. Engaged employees are a valuable asset to any organization as these are the employees who go the “extra mile” to get the work done. However, the meaning of employee engagement is often interchangeably used with employee happiness, employee satisfaction, or employee well-being by the practitioners while talking to the client. This study tries to differentiate between these terms while studying the importance of the said concept and proposing ideas to turn the needles of employee engagement.

Review of Literature:

A lot of work has been done by various authors on the subject matter. Some of the prominent research has been discussed:

William H. Macey, in their research, has divided the concept based on three facets that determine the success of employee engagement in any organization. These are – psychological state engagement, behavioral engagement, and trait engagement. The study illustrates how job attributes and leadership play a key role in moderating the relationship between these facets. Using employee surveys, the study answers how these can be used to the company’s advantage to achieve desired results.

Alan M. Saks has talked about how the meaning, measurement, and theory of employee engagement are still quite vague, and defining them continues to be a concern. The study also proposes a plan to improve employee engagement by reconciling and integrating Khan’s Theory of Engagement (1990) and the JD-R model by Bakker & Demerouti (2007).

Solomon Markos, in their study, has talked about the importance of addressing every aspect of human resources perfectly as the secret ingredient to having higher employee engagement. According to them, job satisfaction, employee commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior are the foundation in determining the success of employee engagement. Employees who are engaged and highly emotionally attached to their jobs are the ones who go the extra mile to benefit the organization.

Simon L. Albrech, in their study, pointed out that a successful employee engagement plan can promote organizational success and give the much-needed competitive advantage. They further added, that employee engagement not only helps increase productivity, and imbue positive energy in the organization but also enhances the overall reputation of the organization within the industry which is what companies strive for. According to Simon, creativity and innovation can help gain maximum ROI in human capital.

Anitha J. has beautifully illustrated the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance in their study. According to the author, working environment and co-worker relationships are the major determinants of employee engagement. Taking into consideration the viewpoint of lower and middle managerial level employees through a questionnaire, the study concludes that employee performance is highly impacted by employee engagement.

Sl. NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	YEAR	FINDINGS
1	Rogis Baker	The Influence of Work-LifeBalance on Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress	2024	The study highlights how Self-management psychology plays a crucial role in developing self-identity, particularly in balancing job and personal life, where various factors influence work-life balance. Researchers in organizational behavior, human resource management, and psychology are increasingly focusing on this area. Work-life balance is typically defined as

				the absence of conflict between home roles and work responsibilities. This study investigated how emotional intelligence, depression, anxiety, and stress affect the work-life balance of 995 Malaysian military personnel. Results showed a positive correlation between overall emotional intelligence and work-life balance, while depression, anxiety, and stress had negative correlations. These findings can guide Malaysian military leaders in enhancing psychological self-control activities for their personnel.
2	Fatin Aina Leong Abdullah	The Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and the Quality of Work Life	2024	Emotional intelligence has been extensively studied for its impact on individual performance, social interactions, and work-life quality. Recent research highlights that emotions significantly influence leadership behaviors, work performance, and managing workplace situations. This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and quality of work life among 63 support staff at a local Malaysian university using a quantitative method. Data analysis involved descriptive, correlation, and reliability tests, utilizing a 33-item emotional intelligence scale and an 11-item quality of the work-life questionnaire. Results showed a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and quality of work life, particularly in the dimension of social integration, with a strong emphasis on utilizing emotion.
3	Banji Rildwan Olaleye	Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Resilience on Workplace Bullying and Employee Performance: A Moderated-Mediation Perspective	2024	This study investigates the rising reports of workplace bullying and its impact on productivity in manufacturing firms, focusing on the mediating and moderating roles of psychological resilience and emotional intelligence in the relationship between bullying and employee performance. Employees from manufacturing SMEs in southwestern Nigeria completed 512 online surveys, with constructs measured using modified scales. Data analysis employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), including regression, factor analysis, and model fit indices. Findings reveal that workplace bullying is positively associated with employee performance, emotional intelligence, and psychological resilience. Psychological resilience moderates the bullying-employee performance and emotional intelligence-employee performance relationships, with mental health factors partially mediating the bullying-employee performance link.
4	Achmad Sudiro	Towards emotional intelligence and quality of work life: Improving the role of work attitude	2023	This study investigates whether key job attitudes—job satisfaction, job involvement, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational support—mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and Quality of Work Life (QWL). Conducted among employees from various Indonesian industries, 400 questionnaires were distributed with an 81% response rate. Path analysis with SmartPLS 3.0 was used to validate the data. The findings revealed that job satisfaction, job involvement, and perceived organizational support mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and QWL,

				while employee engagement and organizational commitment do not. The study, limited in scope, suggests broader future research and uniquely tests the Robbins Model's mediation effect in Indonesia for the first time.
5	Simon L Albrecht	Employee Engagement, Human Resource Management Practices, and Competitive Advantage: An Integrated Approach	2015	This paper supports a model demonstrating how four key HRM practices focused on engagement impact organizational climate, job demands, job resources, psychological experiences at work, employee engagement, and performance at various levels. The conceptual review integrates research on the interrelationships between organizational context, job factors, employee psychological and motivational factors, employee outcomes, and competitive advantage. The authors conclude that HRM practitioners should move beyond routine annual engagement surveys and embed engagement in HRM policies and practices, including personnel selection, socialization, performance management, and training and development, to enhance individual, group, and organizational performance and competitive advantage.

Research Methodology:

The researchers used secondary data analysis, i.e. review techniques, for this study on employee engagement. The researchers have reviewed nearly twenty academic and influential research papers as part of this phase to frame the study's objectives and present discussions on the established objectives. The study aims to add to the current literature on employee engagement.

Discussion:

Some of the major setbacks employees faced in these challenging times are –

- Demotivation among employees

Humans are social animals. The lack of social interaction that has come with Working from Home has adversely affected the productivity of employees by making them demotivated. Many organizations tried addressing this issue by organizing virtual get-togethers and employee surveys but little difference was noticed.

- Lack of resources

Not everyone has enough resources to execute work from home and hence faces a lot of problems in arranging the same. It took quite some time to adapt to these changes and resulted in high electricity and WIFI bills.

- Ergonomic issues

Lack of proper equipment also resulted in many ergonomic issues among employees like back pain, neck strain, strain on eyes, etc. which hampered their productivity. Sitting extended hours without short breaks was the prime suspect behind the same.

- Lack of communication

Adapting to this new change was hard for both employees as well as employers. Accountability and reliability were found missing and miscommunication was also a good “excuse” to run away from mistakes.

- Distraction from work

Another interesting point that came up in our research was, that many female employees showed decreased productivity due to the divided responsibility between the homemaker and profession. The informal environment for them acted as a distraction resulting in inefficiency.

Employee engagement is simply the mental and emotional connection an individual feels towards their work, their team, and the organization. Employee engagement is an umbrella term. Employee happiness, employee satisfaction, and employee well-being are all subsets of it.

Having a high level of employee engagement helps the organization in various ways. Some of these are discussed below –

- Increased productivity among employees

Engaged employees go the extra mile to do their work because they feel they are a part of the organization and believe they are benefiting from the organization’s benefit. These are the employees who think out of the box and take initiative.

- Higher retention rate

Staffing is a costly affair for the organization. They spend a lot of money and time on employee development and training thus making human resources a valuable asset. No organization wants to lose its employees. This is where having engaged employees proves beneficial.

- Increased customer satisfaction

If internal customers, i.e., employees, are happy they work hard and diligently thus making the customers happy. So, for any organization to build a solid customer base first needs to address the happiness of internal customers which can be ensured by employee engagement.

- Lower absenteeism rate

Engaged employees are happy with their jobs and enjoy doing the work assigned to them. This helps the organization by reducing the absenteeism rate as a high -rate of absenteeism can lead to a loss of productivity and dissatisfied customers.

- Decreased injuries at the workplace

Research has also proved that engaged employees are more serious about their work and aware of their surroundings, highly reducing the possibility of accidents and mishappening resulting in injuries or losses to the organization.

Apart from these, an organization with a high employee engagement level enjoys many more indirect benefits like better employee health, which only helps in making the company successful.

HRM has to face some major hurdles to overcome the lack of employee engagement –

- Participation of employees

Many times, getting employee participation in the task at hand becomes a challenge. This can be due to lack of interest, experience, knowledge, or any such reason. Without employee participation, achieving employee engagement becomes a tough job.

- Recognition

A lack of recognition of an employee's efforts also results in low employee engagement. Recognition, especially from peers, results in an increased intrinsic motivation to achieve thus increasing employee engagement.

- Role of managers

According to studies, three out of four employees leave an organization not because of the work but due to their managers. Thus, having a good management team is a crucial step in employee engagement. Managers should be the ones promoting peer recognition to engage employees.

- Low budget

Organizations feel spending on employee engagement is not very useful and thus are hesitant in allotting budgets for the same. However, it was found that disengaged employees cost \$350 billion per year to the American economy in lost productivity. Thus, not creating a culture of engagement would be a big mistake.

- Define employee engagement

The first and most important step to achieve employee engagement is to clearly define what is the aim of employee engagement for your organization. Is it increased productivity? Or maybe a more satisfied workforce? Only then you can measure the outcomes and redirect the efforts in the right direction.

- Employee Recognition

As mentioned earlier, one of the key factors in driving employee engagement is recognition of efforts, especially by peers. Peer-recognition culture should be promoted and 'victories in small battles' should be celebrated to stay motivated for the big wars. Some methods through which hard work can be recognized –

- Saying – “Thank You”: 1 second.
- Writing an Email: 30 seconds.
- Giving a gift certificate: 90 seconds

- Transparency

Managers should be clear and transparent about their intentions and the goals that need to be achieved so that everyone can be on the same page. This not only gets employees indulged in the thought process but also gains their trust in the organization which ultimately results in higher employee engagement levels.

- Feedback

Also, sufficient opportunities should be given to employees to voice their opinions. A positive and healthy work environment should be maintained by giving constructive criticism rather than just harsh critiques without suggesting corrective measures. Employees can be frequently asked to fill out questionnaires and surveys can be conducted to better understand the needs of the employees and their grievances can be addressed efficiently.

Finally, hosting engaging informal activities now and then is important to understand employees at a personal level and keep them stress-free. Fun game events with little prizes and various workshops can be organized to free employees from the monotonous work life and keep them motivated.

Conclusion:

We can see that employee engagement is not just employee happiness or employee satisfaction, it is a much broader concept. Having an engaged workforce is crucial for any organization as they are the ones who give the company a competitive advantage by putting in extra time and effort into the work. COVID-19 brought lots of difficulties, from a lack of motivation in employees to hardships in retaining them for the organization. Which only added to the existing problem of achieving employee engagement. But what COVID-19 also brought is opportunities, and positive disruption, it acted as a catalyst in making organizations realize the true potential of the technology that needed to be uncovered. Financial incentives are not always feasible or may not even work every time, in such a situation, recognizing someone's efforts is another key determinant in igniting intrinsic motivation among employees. Incorporating simple habits like saying 'thank you' or writing a gratitude e-mail to someone for good work can go a long way in making employees feel appreciated. It is also noticed that three out of four employees quit their jobs solely because they are not able to adapt to the teams or have a bad relationship with their immediate superiors. Thus, managers play a crucial role in facilitating employee engagement. Surveys and one-on-one employee interviews should be conducted at regular intervals so that a better understanding can be developed. Customer satisfaction is only achievable when the 'internal customers' of the organization are happy.

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