

Engagement among IT Employees as a function of Job Category and Experience

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Abstract

The concept of employee engagement has been receiving greater attention from the corporate world as much as the academic world. Engagement is defined as “the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do and feel valued for doing it.” What make it the most interesting of all the management concepts pertaining to the problems of involvement of the employees in the work place are its startling research results across the world? For example, in a global survey of the employee engagement, only 11 percent were found to be engaged in their workplace and larger percentage of them are either neutral in their engagement or disengaged. What is more startling to note from such results is that it is costing billions of dollars for developed and the developing nations in terms of lost productivity. Thus, as usual, the research on engagement focused on primarily on conceptualization and operationalisation of the concept; secondly, what are the antecedents and consequences of engagement. However, there are no studies that focus on what are the effects of the type of job and the years of experience of the employees on their engagement in work. Such issue forms the foundation of this research. 195 cross-sectional employees from a large ITES company participated in this study while responding to a structure questionnaire consisting of a standardized engagement scale. Two way ANOVA was computed to see the independent and main effects of job category and experience on engagement. Job category and experience, independently and in combination were found effecting engagement significant. Implications for engagement are drawn.

1. Introduction

Perhaps, we have arrived at that point of time in the history where the meaning of the world of work has come to a relatively exhaustive understanding. These long perspired efforts have been more than 60 years all across the world attempted to understand how the employees attach meaning to their experiences in their work place. These have influenced a very many work-related outcomes for the realization of business objectives. One such classic attempts were made by Boyett & Conn (1991) in their publication ‘workplace 2000’.

During the sixty’s the concept of work motivation was a major focus of all associated with the management of human resources. Ambrose and Kulik (1999) and Gellerman’s (1978) seminal works on motivation bears the evidence of immense value the research works have made for designing motivating work systems for the workforce. The seventies witnessed the resurgence of the concept of participation and satisfaction (Mitchell, 1974) as an indirect measure of organisational effectiveness. During 80s, the concept of quality of work life/experience as a buzzword was claimed to be a long enduring management change programme. A detailed work was carried out to understand the concept and programmes of QWL

(Chandrasekhar, 2007). During 90's the much touted concept called empowerment was assumed to be the panacea to many work and customer related problems (Chandrasekhar and Anjaiah, 2005). Nevertheless, there are many discouraging results pertaining to the failure of empowering strategy in increasing productivity across cultures (Chandrasekhar, 2007). In recent years, world over, the organizations have started giving increasing importance to the concept of employee engagement. Would this concept be yet another hype and fad? We need to examine what tangible benefit this concept of employee engagement would produce to the employees themselves, the corporate bodies and their shareholders if this concept does not consistently produce, it would be yet another fad.

1.1 Concept of Engagement

In the recent times, employee engagement and related concepts have received a great deal of interest in HR and management circles.

There is a plethora of definitions of employee engagement since last five years. The number will further increase as the studies are conducted in future. Let us look at the conceptualization of engagement according to various authors. It is the extent to which employees commit consistently to work and organizations (Richman, 2006), loyal to the cause of the business (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), emotionally and intellectually involved in their work place (Shaw, 2005), put discretionary efforts into their work extraordinarily (Frank et al., 2004). However, there are arguments and counterarguments about the redundancy of the concept of engagement as it reflects the OB concepts in one way or the other (Saks, 2006). Robinson et.al (2004) states that “... *engagement contains many of the elements of both commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), but is by no means a perfect match with either. In addition, neither commitment nor OCB reflect sufficiently two aspects of engagement – its two-way nature, and the extent to which engaged employees are expected to have an element of business awareness.*”

Recently, employee engagement is defined as “the degree to which employees internalize and support their company's mission and values, feel a sense of pride in

working there, plan to stay, and are willing to exert extra effort” (ISR,2007). Although the definition and meaning of engagement in the practitioner literature often overlaps with other constructs, in the academic literature it has been defined as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance. Furthermore, engagement is distinguishable from several related constructs, most notably organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job involvement (Saks, 2006).

In this study, it is conceptualized as “the extent to which employees commit to people and processes in their organization and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment. Components of engagement include rational engagement and emotional engagement. Rational engagement denotes the employees focus on financial, developmental and professional, needs being met. Emotional engagement denotes employees belief in the valuing, enjoying their work, people and the place.

The outcomes of engagement are also in the same lines as the components of engagement are. For instance, the rational outcomes of engagement results in attraction or retention of the employees. The emotional outcomes of engagement results in discretionary efforts expended by the employees. On the other hand, studies also were conducted to understand what are the drivers of engagement (Robinson, et.al, 2004; TPTR, 2003), the effect of leadership and managerial effectiveness on engagement (Trinka, 2005), engagement and organisational performance (Parsley,2005), engagement and customer focus (Townsend & Gebhardt,). This list is quite likely to increase more in the future.

2. The Study

The interest in engagement is continuously increasing, as evidence has been accumulating which shows that organizations, where employees are more engaged, also tend to perform better on a number of business metrics, including customer satisfaction, productivity, efficiency, revenues, and profits. Contrary to such contention, those organizations where employees are fully disengaged, are relatively poor in such business metrics stated. Research attempts to understand

the concept, measurement and applications of employee engagement are still in their fundamental stage. Nevertheless, the few research works across the world reveal that the concept has a great potential for predicting performance and productivity consistently, resulting in profits for the business entities and value for shareholders. As in the case of earlier concepts in management, engagement also in the process of conceptualization, dimensionalisation, model building, assessment and interpretation. However, all such issues are beyond the confines of this study. Here, its primary intention is to measure engagement using standardized instrument and measure the independent and interaction effects of job category and the levels of work experience of employees on their engagement.

Many studies on employee experiences at work place are conducted using the standard OB approaches to assess the relationships of antecedents and consequences to the study variable. However, in this study, the primary research question is to understand whether employee engagement is the function of job category and work experience of the employees from an information technology company. Here the job category includes Junior Content Analyst, Content Analyst, Senior Content Analyst, Technical Support , Team Leader, and Other staff. Level of Experience includes Less than 6 months, 6 months to 1 year, 1to 2 years, 3 to 5 years and More than 5 years.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to see the main and interaction effects of job category and work experience of IT employees on their engagement at workplace. In view of this, it is hypothesized that “job category and work experience do not effect employee engagement either independently or in combination”.

3. The Method

A two year old software company, using internet technology provides solutions to the clients in the ecommerce and IT/ITES projects in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad has been the study area. Using descriptive research design, this study attempted to understand the dimensions of employee engagement on one

hand and the effects of job category and experience of employees on their engagement. A questionnaire consisting of two parts namely Profile and the employee engagement scale named as DDI's E3 Engagement Survey (Wellins et.al, 2004). Details of the scale are presented in table 1. When this was administered to randomly select 200 employees, only 195 have responded. The data collected were processed and analyzed using SPSSv.15. Two-way ANOVAs was carried out on the dimensions of employee engagement using job category and job experience as independent variables.

Table 1 : Engagement Scale Details

Sno	Engagement Dimensions	Conceptualization	Items	Alpha
1	Aligning Efforts with Strategy	Extent to which employees understand the relationships between clear-cut job descriptions and performance expectations	5	.77
2	Empowerment	Extent to which employees feel that they have authority to make decisions, follow through, and get things done	2	.72
3	Teamwork and Collaboration	Extent to which employees feel that they experience good relationships between and across the workgroups.	4	.81
4	Growth and Development Plans	Extent to which employees enjoy learning culture and personal development plans of the company	3	.73
5	Support and Recognition	Extent to which employees feel that they are listened to, supported, and recognized for their contribution	3	.72

4. Results and Discussion

As it was hypothesized that “the job category and work experience do not effect employee engagement either independently or in combination”, it's testing was carried out using ANOVA. Results in this regard are presented in the following sections.

4.1 Interaction Effects on Employee Engagement (EE)

Table 1 presents the main effects of Job Category (A) and (B) Experience (B) and their interactive effects on EE scores obtained by the respondents.

TABLE 1 : SUMMARIES OF ANOVA

Engagement Dimensions	Source	Unique Method				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P=
Aligning Efforts with Strategy	Job Category (A)	34.195	4	8.549	6.793	.000
	Experience (B)	7.159	3	2.386	1.896	.132
	(A) x (B)	39.275	7	5.611	4.458	.000

Empowerment	Job Category (A)	205.501	4	51.375	8.119	.000
	Experience (B)	20.882	3	6.961	1.100	.350
	(A) x (B)	216.202	7	30.886	4.881	.000
Teamwork and Collaboration	Job Category (A)	809.992	4	202.498	7.893	.000
	Experience (B)	262.016	3	87.339	3.404	.019
	(A) x (B)	1677.221	7	239.603	9.339	.000
Development Plans	Job Category (A)	32.756	4	8.189	7.608	.000
	Experience (B)	14.053	3	4.684	4.352	.005
	(A) x (B)	47.438	7	6.777	6.296	.000
Support and Recognition	Job Category (A)	401.565	4	100.391	10.918	.000
	Experience (B)	154.196	3	51.399	5.590	.001
	(A) x (B)	622.068	7	88.867	9.665	.000

4.2 Aligning Efforts with Strategy

It is clear from the table that job category has significant main effect on the 'aligning efforts with strategy', whereas experience did not have. Surprisingly, in combination, both had significant effect on this dimension of engagement. This indicates that job categories with various types of jobs performed by the employees were evolved carefully while aligning their efforts with the business strategy. However, mere chronological experience that employees have is not effecting such alignment. When combined, both category and experience are effecting such alignment. This further states that designing work systems should carefully include the component of alignment built into the job categories and also ensure that employees experience such alignment in their efforts.

4.3 Empowerment

A similar trend is observed in this case also. That is, job category is found to be having significant main effects on the empowerment as a dimensions of engagement. Also in combination along with experience it has significant combined effect on empowerment. This means that empowerment is consistently dispersed across all the job categories and employees in these categories experience empowerment. However, independently experience did not yield significant main effect on engagement.

4.4 Teamwork and Collaboration

It is quite surprising to note that job category and experience found having either main or combined effects on 'teamwork and collaboration' as dimension of engagement. This means that the jobs designed in IT companies are very consciously designed for teamworking and collaboration since the interdependent nature of the relationships of the employees is very crucial in the completion of the projects, and hence their experiences along with their job category were found to be influencing this dimension.

4.5 Growth and Development Plans

A similar trend is observed. That is 'job category' and 'experience' were found having both significant main effect and combined effect on 'growth and development plans'. This means that irrespective of the job category and the experience, employees feel that they enjoy learning experiences and are assured of the opportunities for advancement in their workplace.

4.6 Support and Recognition

As in the case of previous dimensions of engagement, similarly, in case of support and recognition, it is found that 'job category' and 'experience' were found having both significant main effect and combined effect on 'support and recognition'. This means, that irrespective of the job category and the years of experience, the employees feel that their voice is heard, they are provided with the requisite support and their efforts and achievements are recognized and appreciated.

Thus, the summaries of ANOVAs given in table show that 'Job Category' did have a significant main effect on all of the Engagement variables. Whereas, 'experience' is found to have a significant main effect on all the dimensions of engagement except on 'aligning efforts' and 'empowerment'. Interestingly with regard to 2-way interaction effects, the interaction term 'AxB' did have a significant interactive effect on all the dimensions of EE. This means that the effects of job category on EE also depend upon experience. In sum, it could be stated that both job category and the experience employees have yielded significant main and interaction effects on employee engagement. Thus, rejecting the null hypothesis. This further indicates

that employee engagement is effected significantly by both job category and the experiences of the employees.

5. Implications

What do these results convey from the corporate context and what implications? Does it have for the managerial strategy for engaging the talent in IT companies. Findings distilled from this research work show that employee engagement is a function of job category and experience of the employee. This study also addresses an implication as to why talented people want to stay with a company. The elements of work system design should include, the following if the talented people are to be engaged in IT companies.

1. Career growth, learning and development
2. Exciting and challenging work
3. Meaningful work, ability to make a difference and a contribution
4. Great people
5. Being part of a team
6. Good boss
7. Recognition for work well done
8. Autonomy, a sense of control over one's work
9. Flexible hours and dress
10. Fair pay and benefits

Future research may also be initiated for the replication of the concept and methodology in order to witness more consistent results for confirmation of the influences of job category and the experience on the employee engagement. Besides, the job category and experience, many other job related variables could be identified from the research. For instance, the future research could trace the influences of age, level of functioning, gender, and type of Organisation. These may provide more comprehensive understanding of the effects of such variables on employee engagement.

6. Conclusion

The defining distinction is that employee engagement is a two-way interaction between the employee and the employer, whereas the earlier focus tended to view

the issues from only the employee's point of view. In this study, the former view is adopted. In view of this, this study intended to provide alternative framework for analyzing the influence of job category and the experience of employees from an IT company on their engagement. While rejecting the hypothesis, this study found that employee engagement is a function of job category and experience. Further, implications were drawn for designing work systems that could produce engaging experiences among employees according to their job categories.

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