

Employee Engagement- A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT - Business organizations have an important role of attracting and retaining the key talent of the industry in order to achieve the competitive edge. In recent times, employee engagement has attracted much of the attention of the industry leaders, HR experts and research experts. This conceptual paper tried to know the key factors and impact of employee engagement, knowing the importance of employee personality dimensions which support the higher level of employee engagement and key drivers of employee engagement. The paper also discussed the key theories of employee engagement. Every organisation is coming out with innovative and practical strategies to ensure employees are engaged to the maximum levels. Many factors influence the employee engagement like the policies, work environment, supervisor support, career development, challenging roles and assignments, effective learning and development opportunities, skill enhancement programs, motivational elements, job involvement, leadership role, empowerment, being valued in the organisation etc. Two-factor theory, self-determination theory and existence relatedness growth theory were the key employee engagement theories. Katz and Khan's model, Gallup Q12 model, David Serota model etc were the key models of employee engagement.

Key Words: Employee engagement, factors, theory, significance 1.0.

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become the most attention driven and highly researched human resource aspect in the recent decades. There seems to exist a wide lacunae in terms of employee engagement concepts, though there is a large research has taken place regarding its policies, systems, modules, practices and innovation in employee engagement programs. Large number of researchers and organisations have contributed key findings which has resulted in the milestone evolution of engagement concept. But due to the various reasons and evolving business environment and different challenges there exists a lot of confusion and uncertainty in the engagement aspect. Many experts have tried to define employee engagement from their own perception and experience, but still a universally accepted definition is yet to evolve.

This study on employee engagement tried to study various research works on employee engagement published in various sources. Many articles have identified that it is very common across different organisations where employees tend to be really engaged, some of them seems to be totally disengaged. Many researchers have arrived to the findings where high employee engagement has cascading effects or positive association with employee performance and achievement of expected business goals.

The review tries to identify the key variables and factors of engagement. Issues that can be key gaps and engagement

drivers would be stressed upon. Many interventions and its effects on the employee engagement is summarized. Predictors of engagement, personality dimensions of individual employees, research in developing and under developed countries, bird view on the current research dimensions, outcomes have been explored in detail in the current research work. Most of the research outcomes have pointed out that highly engaged employees have direct relationship with high rate of performance, low attrition and demonstration of greater efficiency. It is agreed that employee engagement research is still under its nascent stage and requires in detail study to bring out its key dimensions.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (a) To analyse the important factors of employee engagement
- (b) To extract the key theories and models of employee engagement
- (c) To evaluate the major impact of employee engagement
- (d) To examine the significant drivers of employee engagement.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

: Defining Employee Engagement

Many experts have failed to arrive at a universally agreed

meaning on the employee engagement. In the earliest of the time, Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance”. Emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation is referred to as the employee engagement (Baumruk 20004, Richman 2006 and Shaw 2005). It is the extent of empowered decisions made and action initiated by employees regarding to their job (Frank et al 2004). According to Truss et al (2006) defines employee engagement as the ‘passion towards work’. Organizational commitment and Organizational citizenship behaviour is referred to as employee engagement (Robinson et al 2004). Research consultant organisations have defined employee engagement as that attitude which exists in the employee to add value to the growth of the business which is not asked or defined in the employment contract (CIPD,2007). Some of them have gone to the extent of identifying the employee ability to take the business ownership and work towards the achievement of the goals is known as employee engagement (PHRPS Research,2002). In simple words, industry experts opine it is “going the extra mile” is employee engagement (Roffey Park Institute,2008).

Finally many researchers, business organisations and consultancies have given different views about employee engagement. Some of them interpreted the concept from only viewpoint of what benefit the organisation is going to get. While others concentrated on the mutual benefits or extent of relationship established between the employee and the organisation. Also researchers focused heavily on the employees’ psychological state of association and rate of production. Along with the above concept, research gained significance from interpreting the engagement levels at personal, department and organisation levels.

It is interesting to note that there existing certain common elements of engagement interpreted by many researchers like involvement, extent of commitment, enthusiasm, energy levels, attitude and employee behaviours (Macey and Schneider,2008a).

: Employee Engagement Factors

Saks (2006) believes that organizational commitment, person’s attitude, commitment, voluntary and informal behaviours tend to act as key variables of employee engagement. May et al.,(2004) finds job involvement and flow would form the part of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) proposed that people’s attachment, detachment would influence the extent of engagement. Several disciplines and its knowledge tend to influence significantly the employee engagement aspect. Motivational theories concept, self-expression and self-employment integrates into the idea of engagement. Whereas disengaged employees exhibited half-hearted performances, more like

routine in their performance and not committed to new ideas and interventions. It is generally found that employees are highly engaged in situations which are psychologically more meaningful and comfortable which provides adequate psychological safety. International Survey Research (ISR), 2004 described four very important worldwide relevant factors like career development, leadership, empowerment and organisation image.

Meaningfulness, safety and availability had a good relationship with the engagement (May et al.,2004). Job enrichment and role fit had a positive effect on meaningfulness. Rewards to coworkers, good supervisor relationship tend to be related to safety aspect. Following the team norms, self-consciousness tend to show negative association with safety. Resources has a positive relationship with psychological availability.

Usually burnout in the work leads to consistently decrease in the job engagement (Maslach et al 2001). Employees tend to have liking or disliking workplaces depending on their engagement levels (Holbeche and Springett,2003). Also it is identified that employees tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional engagement where they have specific confirmation about their career growth, security and also fulfilment of their individual aspirations. Engagement is a two way relationship between employees and employers (Robinson et al.,2004). Generally high levels of engagement is witnessed in non- profit sectors when compared to other sectors (Towers Perrin,2003).

Employees in the present era has diverged from the previous era practices due to the shift in the belief systems of the current generation. Life time employment with one firm was the mostly accepted trend many decades ago, but it is not true among the present generation. They firmly believe in short term engagements with the business firm, gain the experience and move on to other firms for better prospects. Hence the leaders need to end the autocratic style of leadership and nurture the empowerment strategies and create a win-win association culture among the employees for better results

: Impact of Employee Engagement

The concept of employee engagement itself is a positive one and always associated with the progress and growth aspect of the business organisation. There is always a cost aspect linked to the better employee engagement levels starting from the recruitment of best talent and also the energy and time invested in nurturing and developing such talents (Johnson,2004). This section tries to explain the different outcomes generated as part of investing the money for the achievement of better employee engagement levels in the organisation.

According to Saks (2006) engagement has two broad classification like job engagement and organisation engagement. High levels of engagement has a positive effect on individual and organisation engagement levels

(Kahn,1990). Strong employee engagement has a positive relationship with expected outcomes like **loyalty** exhibited by the customers and growth prospects of the business. Higher engagement leads to **higher earnings per share**. (Gallup study,2004).

Making employees engaged for the organisation responsibilities would be one of the key emerging challenges in the current scenario. It is predicted that human resource department need to come out with innovative interventions to keep the employees engaged in their jobs (Mike Johnson,2004). Employee engagement has emerged as the key concept for the commercial success of any business organisation which creates an **ethical and transparent** systems (Levinson,2007). Higher engagement levels would increase the **financial wellness** of the firm (Baumruk,2006). Great organisation **brand** is created nurturing a culture which promotes high level of engagement (Martin and Hetrick,2006). Many research studies have pointed out high levels of **positive outcomes** to the business organisation due to the higher levels of employees' engagement. But still most of the business organisations have failed in the implementation of good engagement systems. More than 400 HR professionals have accepted that implementation of employee engagement is the significant challenge (Tasker,2004). Higher engagement leads to greater **employee productivity** is revealed by many studies (Lockwood,2007;Watson wyatt,2007; Balain and Sparrow,2009).

Business organisations associated with higher levels of engagement would achieve success in the **employee retention** and higher levels of **organisational commitment** (Blessing white, 2008; Sonnentag, 2003). There is a general debate whether employees are real positive brand ambassadors of the organisation. It is interesting that many researchers have concluded that **advocacy** or positive interpretation of the organisation is carried out by highly engaged employees (Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007). While disengaged employee tend to talk bad or negative about the organisation, leaders, products and discourage potential candidates to join the organisation, such employees are interpreted as **corporate terrorists**

(Penna, 2006). The characteristics of highly engaged and proactive team constituted by the great leaders and team members is the existential proof of successful implementation of engagement systems in the organisation. Traits of great team include initiation of responsibilities, putting continuous effort, effective and efficient work culture, synergistic behaviour are mentored and exhibited due to the catalyst role played by the engagement aspect (Luthans and Peterson,2002; Bandura,1986). Higher sales, productivity and profitability is witnessed easily among the higher employee engaged organisations (Hewitt Associates,2004, Towers Perrin,2007; Crush,2007). Change is the order of the day in almost all the fields of our life. Organisational change is very common in the dynamic and globalised market. It is widely accepted that higher employee engagement levels would help the management and key leaders to bring essential **changes** in the polices, systems and culture of the organisation (Green,2008).

Employees health and wellbeing which include physical and mental health shows a positive development and having a happy state of mind and playfulness in the work environment which is characterised by great leaders, supportive management, cooperative colleagues (Mauno et al.,2007).

IV. DIMENSIONS OF EMPLOYEE PERSONALITY FOR HIGHER LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Employee personality traits and its various dimensions tend to influence the overall employee engagement levels. Many researchers have studied the personality trait aspects and its influence on the engagement. Proactive and autotelic personality is found to be exhibiting higher levels of engagement (Macey and Schneider,2008). Locus of control, work self-discipline, affective commitment tend to have strong association with greater engagement (Maddi et al.,1979). Low neurotic individuals with adaptable temperament and being flexible in their nature which allows them to be adaptable for all the changes would tend to show higher engagement (Schaufeli,1996).

V. KEY DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

	Construct	Researchers
1	Cognitive drivers	Shuck & Reio (2013), Mone & London (2011), Gallup (2011), Brown & Leigh (1996 in Shuck & Reio, 2013, p. 3), Fredrickson (1998; 2001 as cited by Shuck & Reio, 2013, p. 4), Khan (2010 in Shuck & Reio, 2013, p. 4), Collins, (2014), TBS (2011)
2	Emotional engagement	Shuck & Reio (2013), Hughes & Rog (2008), Gallup (2011)
3	Behavioral engagement	Shuck & Reio (2013), Johnson (2011), Shuck et al. (2011), Parkes (2011), Varnee (2006), Shroeder-Saulnier (2014), Vance (2006)
4	Feeling valued and involved	Johnson (2011), Shuck et al. (2011), Gallup (2011), Konrad (2006), Robinson et al. (2004)
5	Having an engaged leadership team	Johnson (2011), Mone & London (2009), Kanaka (2012), Gallup (2011), Brunone (2013), Hewitt (2013), Crim & Seijts (2006), Mone et al. (2011)
6	Trust and integrity	Hughes & Rog (2008), Mone & London (2009), Gallup (2011), Covey (2009), Mone et al. (2011), Schroeder-Saulnier (2010)
7	Nature of my job	Hughes & Rog (2008), Kanaka (2012), Gallup (2011), Custominsight (2013)
8	The connection between individual and company performance	Hughes & Rog (2008), Kanaka (2012), Mone & London (2009), Gallup (2011)
9	Career growth opportunities	Hughes & Rog (2008), Mone & London (2009), Kanaka (2012), Gallup (2011)
10	Stress free environment	Kanaka (2012), Aveta Business Institute (2014)
11	Change management	Kanaka (2012), (Dicke et al., 2007), Vance (2006)

(Source: Lailah et al., Problems and Perspectives in Management, Vol.12, Issue 4, 2014)

Drivers of employee engagement is explained differently among researchers, industry experts and academicians. Differences exist due to variations in the context of the market place, industry association, size of the company, legal context, nature of competition etc. It is widely accepted that one size fits all approach does not exist for studying and practising the employee engagement.

Organisation culture, leadership development, strong communication systems, styles of leadership, extent of trust and mutual respect created by the organisation, reputation of the firm among the various stakeholders, emotional commitment of the employees are the key drivers of employee engagement (Nancy Lockwood,2007). Also it is commonly observed that trust, integrity, nature of the job, alignment of individual and organisation performance, existence of good career development opportunities, element of self-pride among the employees for being associated with the reputed firm, a system of nurturing great coordination and relationship among the colleagues, leaders and management, effectiveness of the learning and development programs are considered to be the most significant employee engagement drivers (Conference board,2006). Work environment and its characteristics like different work process, difficulties associated with the job, organisation values, extent of work life balance, encouragement of strong and formal information flow mechanism, reward/recognition system, effective and dynamic management are considered to promote greater employee engagement levels (Glen,2006).

The kind of work undertaken by the employees, the relationship with the manager and the extent of autonomy an employee enjoys as part of the roles and responsibilities tend to influence the level of employee engagement (Cleland et al.,2008). Opportunities to express the feedback for higher levels of management, having an effective system of being consulted and communication system, the calibre and commitment levels of the managers and leaders would be considered as the key drivers of employee engagement (CIPD, 2007).

Research studied from different countries indicate that leadership is the most significant driver of the employee engagement. Four universal drivers of engagement related to the leadership have been identified like the leaders who very positive and tend to inspire the employees about the future possibilities, the conduct of the managers who have inherent behavioural culture of respecting and giving positive appreciation for the employees achievement, allocating the exciting and challenging work responsibilities to the employees with proper training support and the genuine concern and feelings expressed as true actions and implementation of welfare programs to the employees and society (Kenexa Research Institute, quoted by Wayne,2008).

Organisations sustained commitment towards CSR

initiatives would create an impression that their firm is trustworthy, sensitive to the society's need which would increase the employee engagement levels (Smith,2007). Also individual employees development ambitions followed by the suitable opportunities to fulfil their ambitions would create a positive perception about the organisation and enhances the employee engagement levels (Robinson,2007). A good policy support for the achievement of work life balance has a positive association with enhanced employee engagement levels (Lockwood,2007).

VI. THEORIES OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Two Factor Theory

There existed a strong relationship with motivation and satisfaction of the employees which again impacts the employee engagement. Many motivational theories have a strong influence on the employee engagement, but Herzberg's two factor theory stands out as one of the key theory which influences the engagement. The theory describes that two key characteristics of the job influences the job satisfaction while others will lead to job dissatisfaction. Famously known as motivator and hygiene factors. Herzberg has clearly identified the factors which results in the job satisfaction and others which will lead to job dissatisfaction. Usually motivation factors lead to satisfaction and hygiene factors lead to dissatisfaction. In turn motivation factors include achievement, sense of recognition for achievement, the kind of work itself, extent of responsibilities handled and proportionate growth or advancement. Key hygiene factors include types of company policy and administration, nature of supervision, kind of interpersonal relationship, working conditions, salary, status, security and personal life. Motivation factors lead to the high job satisfaction and greater engagement while bad hygiene factors lead to job dissatisfaction and low levels of engagement.

Self Determination Theory (SDT)

The work engagement theory SDT was first introduced by researchers Deci and Ryan in 1985 which analysed the employee motivational factors. It is explained that there existed a natural connection between employee engagement, human behaviours and self-determination theory. The extent to which an employee can control their personal behaviour and goals influences the relative employee engagement. It is proved that extent of engagement has a strong influence on the rate of production. Motivational level and emotional state effects the engagement. It is observed that employees tend to withdraw their own identity, active participation, generation of new ideas and feelings which indicates their slow and steady progression towards disengagement. Leaders urge the active adoption of SDT to inculcate a positive and

growth oriented attitude towards the organization (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse,2014).

Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG Theory)

Alderfer developed this theory in 1969. In this theory, safety, meaningfulness and availability were related to engagement factors. Frustration- regression principle was incorporated to explain the employee behavioural aspect like thinking of going back to previous job position and responsibilities when the current position dissatisfies them from getting the required needs. ERG theory explain that employees will progress or regress to meet their needs and any failure to achieve their needs will result in the great fluctuation in motivation levels. Kahn used this theory to express the presence or absence of the fulfilling needs would lead to engagement or disengagement.

Job Characteristics Theory (JCT)

Hackman & Oldham developed Job Characteristics Theory in 1980. This model conceptualized the important workplace characteristics that enhances the employee motivation levels. The core job dimensions discussed in JCT theory include skill variety, task significance, task identity, autonomy and feedback. Key psychological states emphasized in the JCT include the relevance of employee meaningfulness, responsibility and generated results. It gave more significance for job redesign leading to modified workplace which further impacts the motivation, satisfaction and performance of the employees.

Path Goal Theory of Employee Engagement

Robert house developed this theory in the year 1996. This theory describe about the leadership styles, employee characteristics and culture of the organisation. Enormous

David Sirota Engagement Model



(Source: David Sirota,2013)

This model explain about determining the goals of the organisation, building a great relationship among the employees, establishing a fair systems and policies which promote a equity pay matrix based on their performance and also equal opportunity for the career promotion for all the eligible employees.

amount of engagement is attributed for the leadership influence on the entire organisation. Set goals is achieved by the effective work environment.

VII. MODELS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Katz and Kahn’s Model

There existed three levels of employee engagement like selection of the employee into the organisation, dependable behaviour which ensures the employee behaviour exceeds the set standards of the performance. Also in the time of innovation, it demands extensive new set of proactive employee behavioural norms for the achievement of the organisational goals.

The Gallup Q12 Survey Model

There existed a strong and direct relationship between the levels of engagement and their performance. Some of the employees are engaged while most of them are actively disengaged. It is found by the research of the Gallup study that highly engaged workforce tend to have high loyalty, take up the responsibility, work towards the attainment of the goals, strive hard to achieve customer satisfaction and high performance standards. Gallup model explains that if the needs are met then their engagement levels will be high. It is also interpreted that employee needs keep evolving over the period of time and it is not constant in nature. Gallup model had very important 12 questions describing the employee engagement hence it is famously known as Q12 survey. Companies who got very high scores in the survey had less turnover rate, maximizing sales trend, improved productivity and high levels of customer satisfaction which are the key traits of superior performance.

Thomas Engagement Model



The key factors of engagement include strengths, vulnerability, engagement levels of groups, management styles and benchmark practices. It is established that highly engaged employees are happy and result in high performance in the workplace. It is required to have a great measurement tool to know the success or failure of engagement activities.

Total Rewards Model

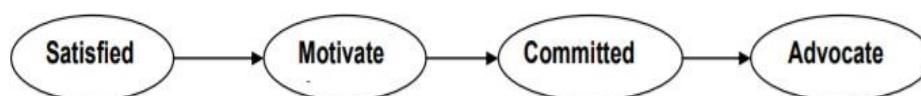


(Source: Mikael.ahlfors@company.com)

This model proposes to have an effective strategy for attracting the potential employees to the organisation. They need to be effectively inducted, trained, mentored and guided for all the possible individual and organisational achievement. Culture, strategy, work environment, policies become the critical components of employee engagement.

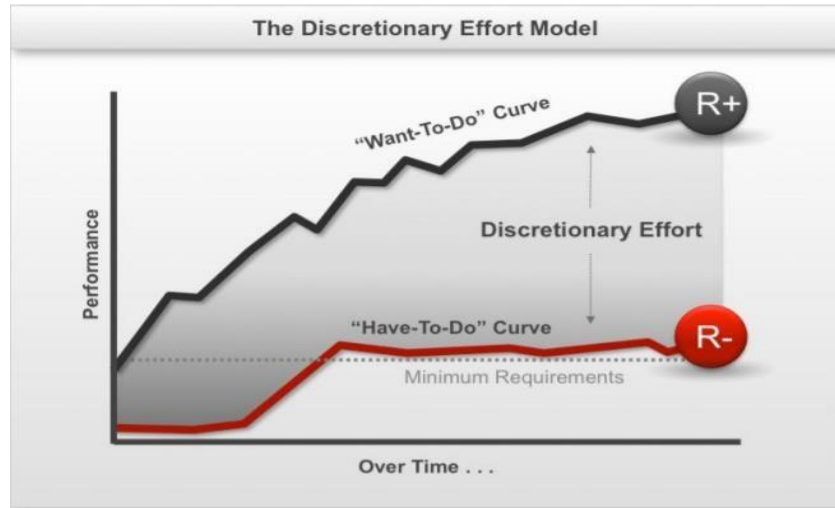
Mercer’s Employee Engagement Model

The survey asked 13 dimensions among the employees belonging to various industries. It included work processes, quality and customer focus, benefits, communication, work/life balance, job security and career growth, teamwork and cooperation, ethics and integrity, immediate manager, performance management, compensation, leadership and direction, training and development. Among these drivers four key global drivers such as work, development opportunities, confidence and trust in leadership, recognition and rewards and organisational communication. Thus following Mercer’s Engagement Model was developed.



(Source: Mercer,2007)

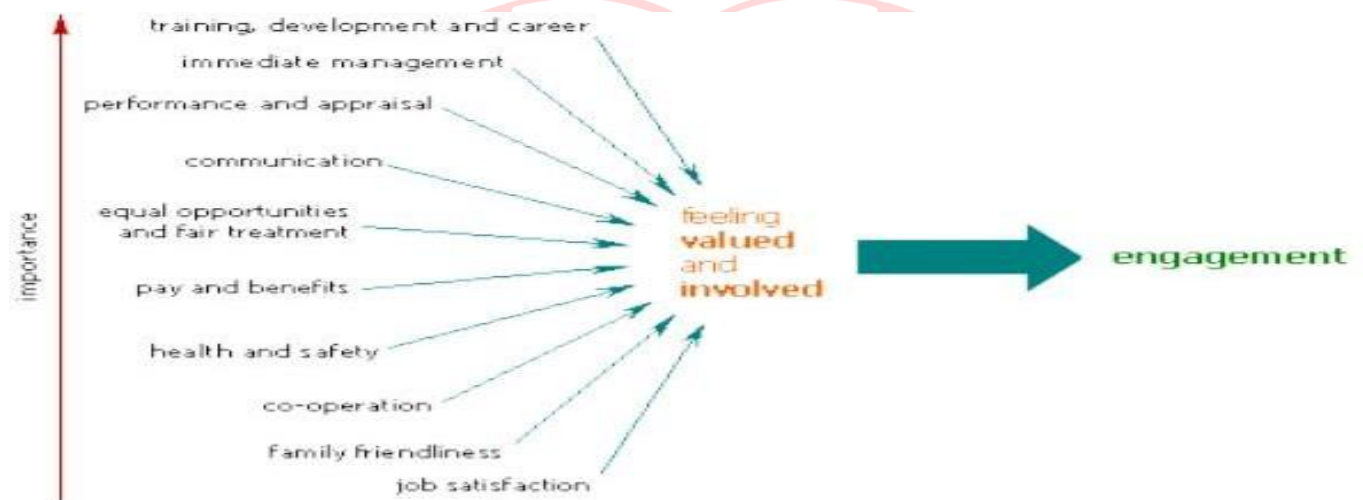
Discretionary Effort Model



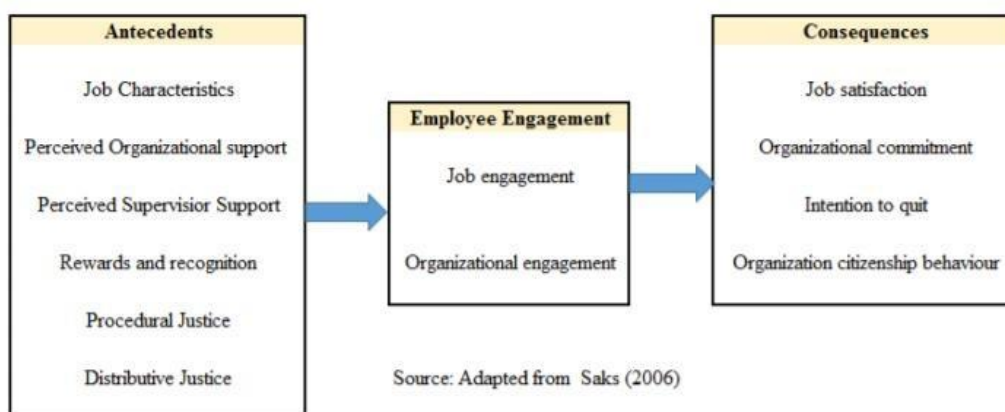
Employee goodwill results in the immense benefits to the organisation. Yankelovich & Immerwahr (1983) first described discretionary effort as the voluntary performance of the work over and above what was allotted to them or their job description. It is the attitude of employees which aspires to contribute more, work more, think more, take up the additional problems and find solutions, always innovate to add extra solution etc. Organization citizenship behaviour are also known as discretionary behaviour is known as extra role or contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo,1997).

Robinson et al., Model

This model emphasized the emergence of work environment which has a strong support for the individual employee behavioural traits such as supporting involvement, pride of the workmanship are encouraged which enhances the performance and better wealth of the employees.



Saks Model

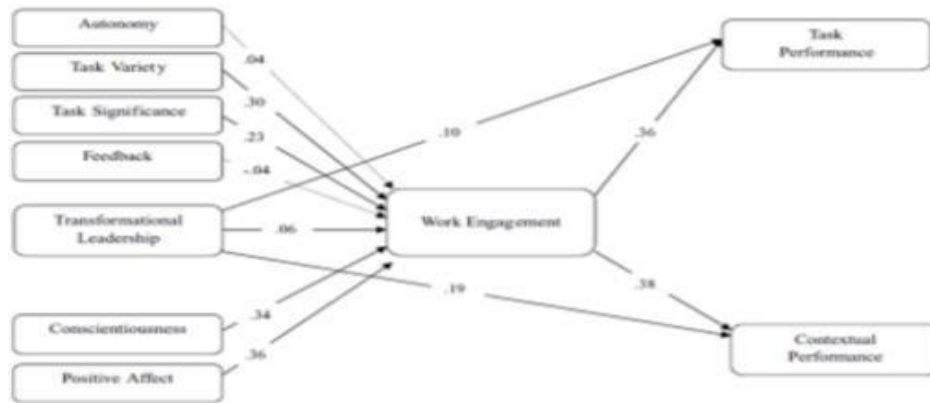


(Source: Saks Engagement Model)

This model was developed on the basis of Social Exchange theory. Significant difference exist between organisation and job engagement. Variables like job characteristics, organisational and supervisor support, rewards, procedural justice would greatly influence the engagement.

Micheal Christian et al Model of Engagement

Individual involvement in the execution and completion of the job responsibility has a great difference with the kind of satisfaction they achieve resulting from the job or organisation value. Elements like task variety, freedom, job significance, leadership and conscientiousness influenced the employee engagement.



(Source: Micheal Christian Model of Work Engagement)

Say-Stay-Strive Model of Engagement (Aon Hewitt)

This model emphasized that six key drivers shapes the engagement experiences of the company like work, people, opportunities, total rewards, company practices and quality of life. The important engagement outcomes involves Say, Stay and Strive. The three key elements for complete employee engage includes business outcomes such as talent, operational, customer and financial.



(Source: Hewitt model of engagement)

possible levels by ensuring all the necessary interventions would drive them towards engagement and effective performance.

X. SUGGESTIONS

1. The key factors of employee engagement should be incorporated during the designing and implantation of the policies and programs.
2. The drivers of employee engagement plays a critical role in the selection of appropriate strategies of employee engagement. Experts should carefully do the permutation and combination while choosing the drivers of employee engagement.
3. Key theories and models of employee engagement gives a bird eye view which has been studied and implemented by other business organisation. Taking the help of theories and models suitable for the business situation of the firm will definitely assists in the designing of suitable employee engagement model for the organisation.
4. Disengaged employees should be systematically mapped for the reasons of engagement and parallel engagement interventions should be made available so that slowly they can also be actively engaged in the assigned responsibilities.

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