

Employee Engagement during Pandemic: A study of Employee engagement mechanism during covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Employee engagement has been termed as one of the major tools of Human resource management which ensures Job satisfaction and synchronizes the workforce to collectively strive towards the achievement of organizational objectives. The Covid-19 pandemic however changed the implementation and practices of several personnel management tools. The remote working/work from home culture has reduced the impact of traditional mechanisms and has given way to innovations that can be deemed suitable for the “new normal”. This paper attempts to analyze the new 5 C model propagated by several Human resource management practitioners. The assistance of existing literature and investigative articles has been taken while formulating this paper. This paper is of immense importance to scholars/ academicians/professionals working in the field of Human resource or personnel management

Keywords- Employee engagement, Pandemic, Human resource management

1. Introduction:

The pandemic has taken its toll on human resource and personnel management globally over the last couple of years. Ever since the break of the pandemic in January 2020, the entire world has been witness to rampant and frequent waves of the pandemic¹. With some countries fearing the arrival of the second/third wave of the pandemic. The mutation and double mutation of the virus has aroused the fear of catching the virus even after mass vaccination drives in all most every country, including India.

The pandemic has resulted in Holistic changes in the workplace environment and workforce management. The remote and home-based workplace has replaced the traditional workplace mechanism with some sectors in a few countries still opting for work for home culture even after lifting the restrictions². A case in point is Information technology companies operating in India which are still following this culture which they started in March/April 2020³. As a result, employee engagement activities of the organizations have also witnessed a paradigm shift.

Employee engagement is of mutual benefit to both employee and employer. An effective employee engagement activity will result in an improved relationship between the two parties which results in improved performance output as an emotionally and professionally engaged employee will certainly follow the principle of adjudication of personal interest for organizational objectives⁴. Many people tend to mix employee engagement with employee motivation however employee engagement is a much broader concept. However, since the pandemic, the employee-employer relationship has gone for a toss. While in some sectors, the virtual workplace has completely replaced the physical workplace, which has resulted in the complete absence of physical interaction. Other sectors such as essential services like banking, health, etc. have witnessed stretched working

hours, health risk, and several other negatively perceived complications⁵. In certain sectors /Industries such as education, reduced physical interaction has also resulted in mass layoffs and wage deductions which has installed a sense of fear in employees. As a result, innovation in employee engagement has become the need of the hour.

2. Objectives and Methodology:

The following are the major objectives of this study-:

- To find the major factors which have a direct influence on employee engagement during the time of pandemic/health emergency.
- To analyze the existing Redressal mechanism, used by various organizations during the pandemic.

The study is based on the available literature on the field as several scholars and academicians have written about these factors in detail over the last year. The assistance of publically available data has also been taken along with several informative and investigative articles available on various media platforms.

3. Literature review:

Employee engagement has been a subject of significant research with several scholars working in this field. The importance of employee engagement and fair and transparent policy has been emphasized by several scholars ⁶. The significance of transparent and clear communication between employer and employee with proper feedback mechanism has also been emphasized⁷. The importance of employee engagement in change management⁸ along with the importance of the awareness regarding the existing performance matrix of the organization⁹ has also been covered. Some researchers have also demonstrated employee engagement through the human capital approach¹⁰. Recently, the concept of employee engagement has also been correlated with Job satisfaction¹¹ with the identification of several factors which lead to employee engagement.¹²

4. **Components of Employee Engagement:** Robinson et al has defined many elements and their drivers which can in turn explain how the organizations can improve the employee engagement practices and enjoy a competitive advantage from the employee point of view. All the components stress upon the essence of providing esteemed feeling to the employees for retaining them with the organization. The important components and drivers are explained as follows :

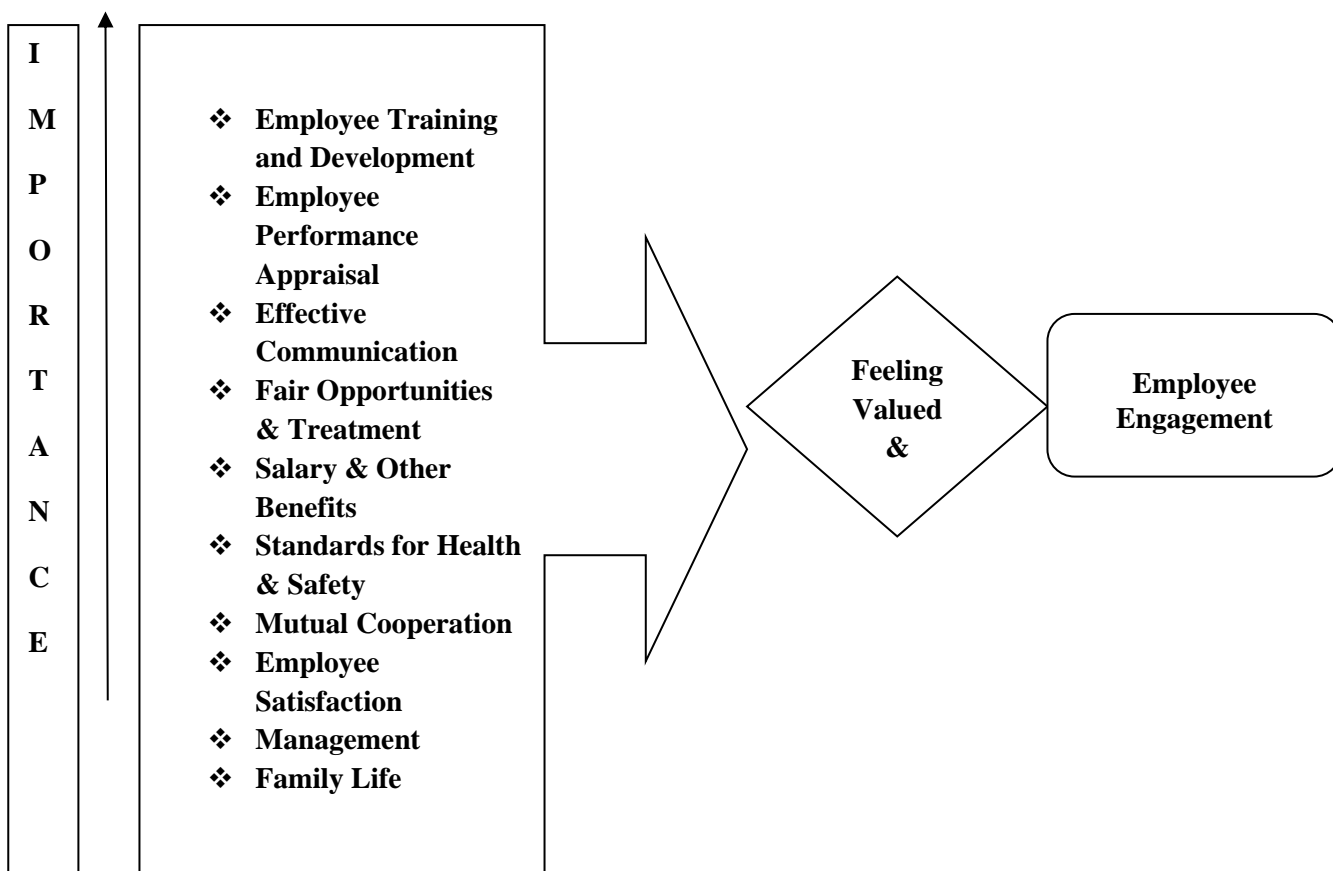


Fig. 1(Components and Drivers of Employee Engagement) Source: Robinson et:al¹³

4.1 Employee Training and Development: Training emphasizes the concept of knowledge development, skill set, attitude while development activities are set in the form of an employee's work ethic in the organization and job planning can be replaced here by the succession of management and employee. working for future senior positions within the same organization.

4.2 Employee Performance Appraisal: Every organization should have fair and transparent standards and procedures for evaluating the performance of its employees leading to higher employee engagement and increased productivity.

4.3 Effective Communication: Organizations should emphasize effective communication channels to reduce conflicts resulting from vague communication and employees may maintain better relationships with their managers, supervisors and co-workers.

4.4 Fair Opportunities and treatment: Organizations should also focus on providing equal opportunity to all employees within the organization and fairness in their dealings with employees. It should focus on reducing employee grievances and reducing bias in decisions.

4.5 Salary and other benefits: Remuneration and benefits are the most important aspects of employee engagement. While deciding on pay factors and benefits, the employer should consider the market situation and competitors' philosophy about this aspect in the same industry.

4.6 Standards for Health and Safety: In the event that appropriate health and safety measures are not available within the organization, employee participation will be limited. The employer must understand the employees as an important asset of the organization and must comply with the essential principles relating to the health and safety of employees at work.

4.7 Mutual Cooperation: The employer must regard the employee as a trustee of the organization and must therefore participate in the affairs of the organization. It is always better to cooperate with others than to go it alone and it depends on the people and the organization. If possible it helps with employee involvement.

4.8 Employee Satisfaction: A satisfied employee will be a true employee committed to the right compensation, working conditions, training, promotions, leadership, challenges, and opportunities. It is, therefore, clear that a high level of job satisfaction leads to higher employee engagement.

4.9 Management: Quick management plays an important role in employee involvement as effective managers recognize the efforts of their team and guide them in the right direction that builds trust, trust that leads to employee involvement.

4.10 Family life: The employer should focus on developing those policies that are family-friendly so that they feel happy, satisfied, and satisfied that leads to their involvement with the organization.

5. Employee engagement during Pandemic

A major limitation of employee engagement during the pandemic is that most of them are focused on short-time functioning; i.e. the hidden assumption is that as soon as things will be back to normal, these initiatives will not be required. However, given the repeated waves of the pandemic, and the possibility of such kind of pandemic, in the future it is of significant importance to developing a tool that facilitates the employee engagement process during such kind of health emergencies.

Duran et. al(2021) have developed a model because of the pandemic¹⁴, which is as follows:-

$$\text{Employee engagement} = C_1 + C_2 + C_3 + C_4 + C_5$$

Where; C₁= Conciliation, C₂= Cultivation, C₃= Confidence, C₄=Compensation, C₅= Communication

5.1 Conciliation

The pandemic has given birth to a new culture of work from home¹⁵. Although, the concept of work from home was available previously, however it was only sporadically present in European and American countries and was negligible in developing and third world countries. The pandemic has popularized this culture globally and has also assisted in preventing the disastrous scenario of massive job cuts. This culture has enabled better work-life balance and flexible working hours. This strategy enables us to reconcile family and work life. This increases satisfaction in both work and life.

5.2 Cultivation

Although the work from home culture has improvised the functioning of an organization during the pandemic, yet several organizations have still opted for layoffs and other cost-cutting measures. This scenario has certainly created a sense of uncertainty and job insecurity. Under these circumstances, an organization must have a clear understanding of employees' expectations and plans. Also, organizations must facilitate a culture of upward communication that ensures honest and realistic feedback by the employees.

In this changing scenario of the "new normal", human resources are essentially required to be trained in modern technologies used by the firm operationally. Training, coaching, and mentoring of employees is a must to foster them towards upgrading their technological skills. These are essential for the sustainability of an organization in this *new normal*¹⁶.

5.3 Confidence

In this era of the pandemic, mental health has become a major issue. The firms are required to pay special attention to their employees, many of whom might have faced the consequences of the pandemic. This thing has a dual aspect also. As many firms have opted for remote functioning, it becomes immensely important that the firm also respects the privacy of its employees. If the organization respects the privacy of an employee even while remote working, a sense of trust is developed between the two parties which increases the confidence of employees¹⁷. The increase in confidence also enhances

the satisfaction of the employees which results as a catalyst in increasing their participation in achieving organizational objectives.

5.4 Compensation

Compensation refers to the way of rewarding the services of a person in an organization¹⁸. Under normal circumstances, it generally focuses more on the monetary component, specifically wages and incentives. However, after the pandemic, non-monetary components have also started to play a vital role. Additional benefits such as health insurance, Hospitalization facilitation, etc. have started playing a vital role¹⁹. Allocation of non-monetary benefits results in the realization that the organization has an interest in the well-being of employees and will act as a guardian to ensure that well-being

5.5 Communication

Communication is a two-way process. In this uncertain time, the dialogue between employer and employee becomes necessary. An effective organizational model must ensure open communication and feedback from the employees. In this era of remote functioning, this dialogue becomes even more important. In the absence of physical communication, virtual communication mediums must also ensure that it remains a two-way process. While engaged in physical interaction, both formal and informal communication is prevalent. Informal communication is very vital to ensure fostering of relationships, both horizontally as well as vertically. In absence of such interactions, an organization needs to provide informal networking and virtual gathering to break the monotony.

Table. The “5-C model” for reinforcing the strategies for employee engagement during COVID-19 and its indicators for assessment.

Source: Duran et.al (2020)²⁰

| Category | Factors |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Conciliation | Working remotely Private life-Professional life Diverse Families |
| 2. Cultivation | Career Advance technology Opportunities for Growth |
| 3. Confidence | Wellbeing Security Control & Leadership |
| 4. Compensation | Rewards Efforts Other benefits |
| 5. Communication | Making contacts Feedback Participation |

6. Conclusion

Employee engagement activities have witnessed a paradigm shift after the advent of the pandemic. The 5C model will act as an efficient and effective tool not only in the current pandemic, but this framework will also assist organizations and employees in future health emergencies. (2020)²¹ Over the last few years, the world has been witness to several Pandemics and epidemics such as Ebola, Nipah, and now covid-19. This framework can be implemented and perceived as a holistic framework with global implications. However, the quantifiable results can be measured only after a certain period. It will be of major assistance if in the future researchers can conduct quantifiable impact analysis for the same model.

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