A REVIEW ARTICLE ON THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGERS IN ENGAGING EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of leadership (top management to line managers) in ensuring that employees are engaged. It reviews some literature in relation to how leadership contributes to the engagement of its employees. Amongst the drivers of employee engagement, Leadership is considered as one of the key drivers because organizational leaders have a driving force in strategy formulation, implementation and management of the organization. Leaders have control of resources, structure, capacity and capability, people, systems, and processes of an organization. This is very clear in the Rights Model of Employee Engagement and organizational effectiveness framework.

Lowly engaged or disengaged employees exist in organizations despite the presence of leaders. They continue to negatively impact the organization. Some leaders are also disengaged. Understanding the positive effects of employee engagement on organizations success and understanding how managers can ensure engagement of subordinates is very key to unlocking improved organization performance. Managers who understand issues of Employee engagement can engage in measuring the levels of engagement in their employees and ably intervene in the right manner when there are engagement challenges. It is therefore important to let managers understand their role in engaging subordinates for the benefit of the organization.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, leaders, managers, subordinate employees, organization

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Employees remain a very important resource for organization success. Without the employees' positive efforts or engagement, the organization will not succeed regardless of the resources it may have. Engaged employees may act as the key to unlocking an organization's potential and Engagement is the engine for organizational change because they will assist in solving organization challenges through innovation whilst in the front line. It is the aspiration of every organization to have an engaged workforce considering the benefits attached.

Low engagement or disengagement of employees is disastrous to the organization as it may lead to organization failure. According to Osborne S. (2017) in United States of America, disengaged employees typically cost U.S. corporations $350 billion alone annually. J Harter in Gallup (2023) workspaces highlights that in 2021 the worldwide statistics of engaged employees was at 12 percent. As of 2022 only 23 percent of employees are engaged worldwide whereas 32 percent were engaged in the US. As for the few best performing organizations in the world, only 72 percent of their workers are engaged.

Research by Gallup indicates that as of 2023 more than half of employees (59%) are quiet quitting (not engaged), and 18% are loud quitting (actively disengaged). More than half (51%) of global employees working for an employer are actively looking for another job or watching for openings. Actively disengaged employees are 42% more likely to be actively looking or watching for openings in comparison to engaged employees. Quiet quitting employees cite issues related to employee engagement or culture, pay and benefits, or wellbeing as areas they would change about their workplace to make it better.

As of 2023, as per Gallup research statistics managers who are able to create an enabling environment for employee engagement are only 20% worldwide. This is not a good sign for the growth of organizations because research indicates that 70 percent of the variance in employee engagement is dependent on the management. It is high time to focus on improving employee engagement and focus on the role of management.

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2.0 AIM

The review paper aims at analyzing the role of leadership and managers in ensuring that the employees are engaged based on the Rights Model of Organizational effectiveness, the social exchange, job demand and resources and leadership member exchange theories.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

1.   To identify the position of management and leadership and employee engagement in the organizational effectiveness framework.
2.   To identify the different ways which management can take to ensure that their employees are engaged.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Definition of Employee engagement
Researchers have defined the term employee engagement in different ways and currently there is no universally accepted definition. According to Kahn (1990), engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organizational role.
Schaufeli et al 2002, defines employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Robinson et al (2004) defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment.' Agyemang and Ofie S. B. (2013) define employee engagement as something given by an employee but benefits the entire organization which can be dedication, discretionary effort and being supportive to the organization's goals and objectives. According to Quereshi (2014) common idea in the definitions is that employee engagement encompasses the positivity in the behaviour (physical, social, cognitive emotional etc)of the workers that ends in high end performance.

4.2 Position of Leadership in the "Right Management's Organizational effectiveness framework".
The Right Management's organizational effectiveness framework clearly places leadership on its position in ensuring organization performance. With this model it may be argued that the nature of leadership explains the levels of engagement in employees.

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Figure 2. Right Management's organizational effectiveness framework as presented by research paper - Influencing Factors of Organizational Performance in Nepal Airlines Corporation (2019)

The framework above illustrates how important employee engagement is important to organization performance and effectiveness. It the key areas which make leadership the key to organizational performance through employee engagement. Gyanwali S & Walsh JC (2019) indicates seven elements (strategy, structure, capacity and capability, leadership, people, systems and processes, culture and value, employee management and customer experience) in the organizational effectiveness framework. Of all these elements as outlined in the framework leadership remains a push factor for employee engagement and any gaps by leadership will have an effect on the levels of engagement for employees which will later affect the organizations performance.

4.3 Theories of Employee engagement

There are several theories in relation to employee engagement. Among others, the Job Demand and Resources, Socio Exchange and the Leader Member exchange theories explain the basis of engagement in employees.

4.3.1 Job Demand and Resources theory

According to Hakanen et al 2008, job resources are key in achievement of goal. When resources are not available, the work goals are not reached. According to many researched lacking resources results in disengagement. Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005 ; Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004 ; Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli & Schreurs, 2003 ; Demerouti et al., 2001 ; Hansen, Sverke & Näswall, 2009 ; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). According to Taylor and francis (2008), Job resources refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job like feedback, job control, and social support. Resources like feedback may promote learning, thereby increasing job competence, whereas decision latitude and social support satisfy needs for autonomy and relatedness, respectively. Hakanen et al (2008) highlights that resources apart from playing an intrinsic motivational role like initiating willingness to spend more compensatory efforts, they encourage the employees to have confidence in themselves that they will perform well as expected. Supervisors and managers must consider themselves as resources which through mentoring, coaching, training reduce the gap of performance in the work of employees. Success brings confidence in the job and encourages people to work more.

4.3.2 Socio Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1967; Homans, 1958) is predicated on the idea of reciprocation in relationships. It stresses that individual actions are based upon a cost–benefit analysis, which theoretically explains the relationship between employees and organizations (Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002). From a social exchange framework, Employees expect to be treated in a particular way (but to their benefit) by the organization and when treated in an unexpected manner it is reflected in their levels of engagement (Colquitt et al., 2013). Researchers in Gupta et al 2019 highlights that the organization is considered as an exchange system where social interaction of members consists of a trade-in of valued resources. The resources may include consumable goods, money, affection, attention and most basically information. This theory contends that social behavior is the outcome of an exchange, the purpose of which is to maximize benefits and reduce expenses (Saks 2006). According to Colloquit et al (2013) employees expect to be treated in a particular way and they tailor their actions based on this perception. Masterson et al (2000) highlights that the socio exchange theory is more linked to how employees perceive organizational justice and workplace relationships. Al fes et al (2013) adds that the employees who benefit from the organization economically, socially, and emotionally feel obliged to reciprocate. This means that the employees also give back by involving themselves physically, socially emotionally and even economically where possible. This behavior explains why and how engaged they are in their job.

4.3.3 Leader Member Exchange Theory

This theory emphasizes that the social relationship between workplace leaders and follower's matter and a good relationship between employees and their managers influences the levels of employee engagement.

Kimberely B. et al (2015) highlights that the way the leaders reciprocate in meeting certain job demands by employees with additional resources like autonomy, information and opportunity to decision making process depends on the nature of their relationship. This resourceful environment increases the level of employee engagement. Shukla A and Chaurasia S (2013) suggest that when the relationship of employees with their leaders is of high quality, the employees' level of engagement is also high.

From the theories, we find that engagement is based on some sort of exchange either social or monetary and to the benefit of the exchanging parties (the employee and organization). Any exchange or treatment which makes the employee feel he has not been treated fairly or feels duped results in reduced levels of engagement.

4.4 Leadership Role in Engaging Employees.

Employee engagement is one of the primary responsibilities of leaders. According to Gallup (2023), 70% of the variance in team engagement is determined solely by the manager. Managers are required to ensure that

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employee engagement is at their heart, and they are able to implement all its enablers in the workplace. To be successful, they have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve engagement in employees.

4.4.1 Leaders have to own employee engagement and empower managers to engage employees.

Employee engagement is not solely the responsibility of the Human Resource and Management department. Harter 2023 highlights that the employee engagement process is a continuous process which starts before the employees are hired. The primary task of leadership and managers is to ensure that when intending to hire, the team responsible attracts and hires the right people who will be engaged.

Harter (2023) also states that leadership must not only task the managers to own engagement of their subordinates but also equip them properly by clearly redefining their roles and expectations. In addition, the leaders must ensure that the managers are evaluated to find out if they are able to carry out the employee engagement work in the right manner. The leaders must also provide training tools, resources, and development which the managers need to supervise subordinate employees. This will help the line managers to fully understand the technical work to be done by the subordinates so that they are able to coach or support the employees as required and make them highly engaged.

According to Burke et al (2006) leaders must be person-oriented because it enables development of team members and promotes interactions in the team which in turn increases the engagement levels., Salas V et al (2021) adds that leaders must encourage teamwork and ensure that the managers leading the teams are engaged. Teams led by engaged team leaders have high levels of happiness and trust in their leaders and in turn are more engaged.

Ed O'boyle and Andrew Robertson in Gallup (2022) highlights that managers are required to utilize tools that ensure the reality of employee engagement in the organization. Some of the tools which can be used are validated employee engagement surveys. He further indicated that issues of culture and productivity can be explored using the validated in-depth engagement measurement tools. Measuring the levels of employee engagement will assist in knowing the real problems and applying the right interventions to solve them.

4.4.2 Leaders must be engaged so that they set an example for employees to emulate.

Leading by example is also key in ensuring employee engagement. Salas V et al (2021) stresses that engaged leaders boost engagement in employees. According to Robinson et al (2004) superior quality line management and visible commitment by managers at all levels drives engagement insubordinates. Gosh R., et al (2019) highlights that leaders need to lead by example because the employees emulate the example they portray and this either increases or lowers their levels of engagement. Juevesa R D and Pinaflor M B (2021) engaged in a study to understand the experiences of the employees in terms of job engagement as a result of their management practices in the workplace. They found that among others leadership by example positively impacts on the levels of employee engagement. The senior leaders as the key influencers must be engaged themselves for the subordinates to emulate the example.

Popli S. & Rizvi I.A (2016) conducted research to study leadership as a driver of employee engagement. The findings highlighted that transformational leadership is an enabler to employee engagement passive and avoidant leadership style reduce the levels of engagement. It is therefore important that leaders watch their leadership stye so that they contribute positively and constructively to employee engagement. Bakker et al (2023) explains that when leaders show exemplary behaviors in relation to engagement (e.g., job crafting, playful work) that can be modeled by followers.

4.4.3 Leaders must help employees to understand their organization, vision, mission and values etc

Vision statement and values of all organizations are very important and need to be mastered by every employee in the organization. The research findings by Taylor and Francis 2008 indicate that organizations are not putting in much effort to ensure that the organization vision, values, and culture are well understood by the employees. It is the duty of leaders to ensure that this area is understood by the employees.

According to Bakker et al (2022) leaders in organizations may organize lectures, workshops, and training in which employees are given a true picture of the organization's vision, mission, values and culture. They may also be taught how to recognize and regulate job demands and job resources. constructive feedback, social support, and opportunities for skill variety and personal growth. Leaders may also enrich followers' job design by facilitating resource exchange among followers.

According to the Right Management model for organization effectiveness it is clear that the management leadership is at the center of organization business management, controlling, planning and they have to live the organization values if the employees are to emulate their example.

Jimmy Harter at Gallup (2023) has found that management needs to have effective and meaningful conversation with employees which will in turn boost their levels of engagement. It is further highlighted that helping employees understand what their organization, leaders and manager expect from them requires more than someone telling them what to do. The managers must define and discuss each employee's explicit and implicit expectations to paint a picture of outstanding performance and help employees recognize how their

work leads to the success of their coworkers, their business area, and the entire organization. Harter (2022) further explains that it is the duty of managers to regularly discuss about engagement and how to create its culture in the organization. In addition to this the manager need to integrate Employee engagement with performance and team development discussions.

4.4.4 Leaders must provide the resources (Tangible and intangible) required for employees to be engaged.

Kulikowski, K. and Sedlack P (2020) found that in relation to JD -R theory, monetary rewards cannot impact on Employee engagement if no resources for the job are there. Burke et al (2006) highlights that managers must build team resources which motivate members and enable them to perform.

Gallup 2023 highlights that management has to provide employees with the required resources for them to do their job and engage themselves more. Its further highlighted that the resources are not materials and equipment only but also office supplies, software, knowledge sharing and permissions etc. The most effective managers don't assume what their team needs. They ask for and listen to their employees' needs and advocate for them when necessary. Mazzetti G, Schaufeli WB (2022) highlights that team leaders who through performance feedback, instilling trust and stimulating communication are able to inspire, strengthen and connect team members are able to draw up more team resources which in turn create growth and employee development for the members and assist them to be more effective.

Breevaart & Bakker (2018) explains that leaders must function as key job resources themselves. By using charisma tactics, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation, leaders help employees deal with their hindrance and challenge job demands.

Tummers and Bakker 2021 highlight that leaders may learn to facilitate the right job demands and resources or may directly encourage employee proactive work behaviors (including job crafting, proactive vitality management, and playful work design.

4.4.5 Leaders must create opportunities for the employees to perform to their best levels.

Successful managers get to know their employees as individuals and give them opportunities to apply the best of their natural selves -- their talents. They talk to each employee about their unique value and adjust align work, when possible, with team members' talents.

Gallup (2023) explains that the best managers know and position employees strategically so that they are engaged and provide maximum value to the organization.

Wang et al. (2023) showed that proactive actions by leaders like consulting, delegating, enabling, and informing stimulate follower job crafting, empower the employees, and make them more engaged.

Tims &Bakker (2010) adds that where the leader gives employees opportunities to work to their potential, the employees are able to proactively seek job challenges and resources so that they are fit for the job and increase their own engagement.

4.4.6 Leaders/manager must have meaningful and effective communication with employees.

Leaders have a role to initiate and take part in meaningful and effective communication which boosts engagement in employees. According to Gallup (2022), leaders must communicate to the right people with the right information using the right channel at the right time.

Khan 1990 in his conceptualization of employee engagement, Miller (2008) and AlMaktoum (2015) highlighted that communication is key to employee engagement. They state that managers have a role to ensure that they effectively and meaningfully communicate with the employees. Managers must have a two-way clear communication with their employees and teams so that the goals are achieved. Gallup 2023 emphasizes that short meaningful conversations with employees even once a week which on recognition, collaboration, goals and priorities, and strengths encourage employees to engage themselves more.

Saks, M. et al (2006) and Moore et al 2019 stressed that managers and supervisors have a responsibility to clearly communicate to subordinates what they are required to do in contributing to the success of the organization otherwise they may do it the wrong way or not engage themselves to the required standards. The Rights managements Organizational Effectiveness model shown above clearly indicates that managers are responsible for ensuring that the employees are aware of strategy, culture, values, systems, but also the mission and vision of the organization.

Litvin et al (2018) found that once the millennial employees know the reason for the task, they are to do they engage themselves more, so it is important that managers make them understand much better new tasks by using aids to communication. Stephens (2021) in his study on how to engage Millennial employees found that for managers to communicate effectively to their employees and induce engagement, they need to tailor their communication to suit the nature of employees they are communicating with. They also need to coach and mentor the employees. These initiatives will ensure they understand properly and boost their engagement levels. This aligns with findings by Merriman K, et al (2016) that communication has to be tailor made for individual groups so that they feel important based on the communication they receive.

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Mishra, K et al (2015) states that mutual communication between managers and employees increases feedback, decision making, and staff involvement and this in turn enhances employee engagement. Ruck W. et al (2017) highlight that Communication between the subordinates and the managers, but also amongst team members if clear, helps in ensuring that the employees are engaged since it gives employees a means of explaining their work-related challenges. Sievert and Scholz (2017) highlight that communication with managers and amongst team members can be through social tools in organizations. This internal communication makes employees feel valued and brings out engagement amongst them.

4.4.7 Leaders/managers must motivate employees by ensuring fairness in rewards and recognition, so that the employees feel valued.

Employees expect to be fairly rewarded for their efforts. Baker (2000) highlights that when employees are fairly rewarded, they to feel valued and engage themselves more as a way of reciprocity. Kapoor & Meachem 2012; Al Maktoum 2015 & Mohamad R. S. (2016) in their different research work about rewards and employee engagement found that rewarding schemes help improve the levels of employee engagement and these rewards may be intrinsic, extrinsic, and social rewards. Wang Xi (2020) and Bradler et al (2016), in their separate studies shed more light on rewards that they truly contribute to employee engagement when employees perceive them as fair enough because the feeling of being treated fairly enhances psychological functioning in employees' minds and give them a feeling that they are valued assets of the organization. They further state that these rewards should not be only promotions or pay but simple rewards like of gifts, a simple thank you, conference attendance, representing a company outside or written recognition like a certificate matter more to employees. Bashir & Hassan (2020), and Kumasey, et al (2021) research findings highlight that employee perceptions of fairness in rewards can increase employee engagement and reduce counterproductive (disengaged) and unethical behavior.

It is therefore the role of management to put in place and implement fairly the reward and recognition mechanisms. They also need to ensure that recognition is a regular agenda item to demonstrate appreciation for individuals' different contributions to the team and organization. Lack of fairness in reward and recognitions will end up disengaging employees.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed is very clear that leadership is one of the key drivers of employee engagement and leaders have a very big role both at strategic down the tactic level in ensuring employees are engaged. Leaders direct, control, plan and organize the affairs of the organization. What they portray as very important will be seen in employees' actions. The role of leadership is seen as crucial from the time the organization realizes a need to recruit employees for the organization up until the person parts with the organization. As strategist leaders need to properly understand the vision, mission, values, and culture of the organization and always communicate it to the world through their daily deeds. Living the organization values will enable subordinates to have a clear understanding of the way they have to behave in the organization. The literature has also highlighted that apart from owning employee engagement and empowering managers to ensure engagement of employees, leadership and managers have to create an enabling environment for employee engagement. This environment is characterized by meaningful and effective interactions, availability of resources, presence of fair reward and recognition policies, mechanisms that help employees to be coached and perform better than always being criticized for their mistakes.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the various research findings and expert opinions it could be concluded that leadership plays a big role in ensuring that the employees are engaged. The engaged the leadership, the probability of having an engaged workforce. Leaders need to be living examples of engaged persons in their organization to their subordinates. Mostly employees follow what the leaders are doing including the behavior and when the employees observe that the leadership is not engaged, they will follow the example and stay lowly engaged or disengaged. Leaders have to be engaged first before engaging others.

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