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Engagement in the workplace: Identifying its key drivers

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Engagement in the workplace

Identifying its key drivers

Dimensions of employee engagement

Positive behaviors among employees can significantly enhance performance in any organization. Work engagement is a prime example. Engaged employees are usually characterized by their positive frame of mind and enthusiasm.

Definitions of work engagement vary but by and large incorporate three dimensions labeled as:

1. *Vigor*: Mental resilience and high energy levels during work reflect this dimension.
2. *Dedication*: Which refers to strong involvement in work together with experiencing feelings of significance, eagerness and being challenged.
3. *Absorption*: The key aspects here are total concentration and engrossment in work to the extent where it becomes difficult to disengage from it.

In addition, engaged individuals rate high in self-efficacy. Being positive at work helps them perceive a degree of control over their environment. They also possess the confidence to recognize and validate their own efforts. Working is regarded as a fun activity and their constructive attitude, passion and demeanor often has a positive impact on the morale and motivation of those around them.

All the evidence indicates that work engagement possesses the capacity to significantly influence organizational performance and enhance its well-being. It is therefore critical to identify key drivers of the concept.

Job resources

How people perform in the workplace is at least partly determined by resources at their disposal. That much is obvious. Where engagement is concerned, various job resources can have an important influence. These include:

- social support from colleagues and superiors;
- feedback on performance;
- range of skills;
- independence; and
- scope to learn.

These resources are linked to physical, organizational or social elements of work. Helping to achieve work-related aims, reduce demands and stresses associated with the job and facilitate employee growth and development are recognized benefits. Their potential to

positively affect both personal aspects and those more directly connected with the workplace goals illustrates the value of job resources. They essentially serve as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Research evidence from different types of workplace environments reveals close associations between various job resources and the three work engagement dimensions. Job control, managerial support, coaching, feedback and recognition and rewards were among resources identified. Work-life balance and an innovative climate also serve to predict engagement.

Perhaps even more significant is the indication that engagement levels become higher when firms increase certain job resources. The impact seems to be greatest if this concerns provision of social support, autonomy, performance feedback and development opportunities.

The motivational qualities of resources become even more evident in times where demands of the job are high. Heavy workloads and emotional pressures spring readily to mind in this respect; take education, for example. Schools are often cited as stressful environments in which to work. In addition to meeting learning targets, it is unfortunately common for teachers to have the unwelcome distraction of unruly pupils to deal with. But studies conducted in Finnish schools show that resource availability can help to reduce the negative impact of such misconduct on engagement. Support, appreciation and workplace climate are especially important in this context.

Personal resources

As well as job resources, work engagement is influenced by the presence and level of personal resources. High levels of such resources are linked to motivation, goal setting and satisfaction at work and in life in general. This is due to the depth of positive self-regard that emerges when personal resources are abundant. Engaged employees have been found to rate highly in the personal resources self-efficacy, optimism and self-esteem as relating to their organization. Having sufficient resilience to cope with an evolving workplace environment is another personal resource closely linked with engagement.

The positive influence that engagement can have on output should not be underestimated. Engaged employees typically:

- perform better in their roles than those identified as non-engaged;
- are willing and able to undertake tasks external to their main responsibilities;
- find more creative solutions to problems; and
- are able to inspire their colleagues.

Superior performance by engaged individuals is attributed to:

- *Positive emotions like joy, contentment and interest:* Such emotions prompt greater intensity of thought and creative urges along with interest in exploration and seeking new experiences. Those who are satisfied at work are more confident, inclined to identify opportunities and help others.

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- *Good health:* Engaged individuals feel healthier both physically and mentally. They suffer fewer emotionally related health problems than non-engaged workers and are thus able to perform better.
- *Ability to mobilize resources:* The positivity of engaged employees helps to further augment psychological resources and strengthen their mental health. Both personal resources and job resources increase as a consequence of engagement, thus indicating the existence of a self-perpetuating cycle of positivity. Mobilization of these resources serves to stimulate future engagement.
- *Crossover of engagement:* This refers to the transfer of experiences between people. In this instance, the influence of engaged individuals over fellow workers might enhance team performance. Engagement effectively becomes contagious among those working closely together. The optimism and proactive nature of engaged team members helps nurture a positive atmosphere throughout the team. Influence is particularly strong when group leaders are engaged.

Work engagement is a powerful indicator of the well-being of both employees and the firm. It is therefore critical that human resource functions are aware of engagement levels and the impact of its drivers. Findings should then be used to ascertain where appropriate actions need to be carried out to improve engagement scores.

Comment

The review is based on: "Towards a model of work engagement" by Bakker and Demerouti (2008). Employee engagement is explored in an article which is both comprehensive and interesting. Bakker and Demerouti note key drivers of engagement and how they relate to its three main dimensions. A profile of a typical engaged employee can be inferred from this work, and their value to an organization is pointed out.

Reference

Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2008), "Towards a model of work engagement", *Career Development International*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 209-223.

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