

Employee Commitment: A Giant Leap in Employee Engagement

–Sri Deepti Kocherlakota*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how organizations are intertwined with challenges put forth by today's modern workforce who is highly adventurous and passionate & the means adopted by the organizations to tackle the hurdles surrounding employee loyalty towards the organization and facilitate high employee commitment. This paper also helps the reader understand the evolution of the concept of employee engagement to employee commitment, through bird's-eye view of an organization. The main purpose is to understand how employee commitment binds an employee to his/her organization. Through secondary research, the foundation of this paper has been laid. The opinions expressed in this paper are based on review of various academic research papers and surveys along with crucial data obtained from the internet. Through the observations made from secondary and primary data, it can be established that employee engagement plays a crucial role in ensuring employees commitment. Employee engagement builds a healthy relationship between the employer and the employee. High employee commitment leads to organizations becoming more profitable. This paper can also help determine the future trends of employee engagement in the workplace. It gives a snapshot of what companies are doing right and what is it that will help them maintain their position and help them attract and retain quality talent now and in future.

Keywords: Employees, Employee commitment, Employee engagement, Organization, Workforce

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly globalized world, where technology is fast replacing manual tools and equipments, tightly-bound teams are being replaced by

* Student, SIBM Bangalore, E-mail: deepti.kocherlakota15@sibm.edu.in

virtual teams and employee loyalty keeps swaying from one organization to another; it is extremely essential for any organization which wants to maintain its position of excellence in the market, to have a highly positively committed workforce. Employee commitment plays a major role in determining the fate of an organization in the VUCA (read: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world where change is the only constant. The expert definition of Employee Commitment is the psychological attachment and the resulting loyalty of an employee to an organization. This certain term dates back to the mid 1960's when Kanter first talked about the three different types of commitment, way before the term employee engagement was introduced by Kahn in 1990.

According to Kanter (1968), different types of commitment results from the variety of behavioral requirements expected out of the employees from the organization. These include:

1. Continuance Commitment wherein employees make sacrifices for the organizations in order to ensure the survival of the organization.
2. Cohesion commitment wherein employees engage in ceremonies (Maluti, 2012) that enhance group cohesion, thus helping in bind the organization.
3. Control Cohesion wherein employees believe that organization's values are important to shape their behavior.

Meyer and Allen (1991) further developed a framework which talked about the mindset of the employees in order to be committed towards their organization which include: Affective commitment (emotional attachment to the organization), normative commitment (obligation to remain with organization due to organizational values and social norms) and lastly continuance commitment (factors such as pay, benefits which constitute the opportunity cost for leaving the present organization).

This paper explores the current scenario of how the idea of employee commitment has been incorporated by organizations vigorously practicing employee engagement. Looking at the past and the present, the future shall only call for greater employee commitment measures to be undertaken by organizations if they want to make it to the top.

The objectives of this paper are:

- To look at how employee commitment and employee engagement are related
- To understand future trends of employee commitment

- To keep a track of HR policies and practices which can ensure that an employee stays for a longer time with the company
- To look at how organizations have been using various engagement initiatives to ensure that employees stay attached to their respective organizations for a longer duration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact on personal lives has been well-explained in the article 'Personal Consequences of Employee Commitment' (Romzek, 1989). The article talks about the non-work consequences of employee commitment such as Schmitt and Melon (1980) who found out that *general life satisfaction affected work satisfaction*. The author's analysis of research study carried out independently indicated that organizational commitment has positive consequences for employees. Employees with high organizational involvement may not necessarily be workaholics.

Some more recent articles have been explored to understand how employee commitment has shaped up in the past five years, as recency is an important factor in determining the importance of Employee Commitment in Organizations.

The paper 'Employee organizational commitment: the influence of cultural and organizational factors in the Australian manufacturing industry' (Su*, Baird, & Blair, 2009) explores the connection between cultural, organizational and demographic factors with levels of employee organizational commitment (EOC). The findings of the study conducted by the author report that organizational size was negatively related to EOC for general managers, level of EOC was higher amongst employees with greater job satisfaction and higher perceived organizational support and lastly, training was negatively associated with the level of EOC for product and IT managers while positively associated with the level of EOC for plant and quality managers.

Another important paper by the title 'Gaining Employee Commitment: Linking to Organizational Effectiveness' (Shahid & Azhar, 2013) talks about how employee engagement plays a major role in ensuring employee commitment and have highlighted the major drivers for drivers for attraction, engagement and retention which help in contributing towards increased employee loyalty.

EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT: A BETTER WAY TO JUDGE EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

Aberdeen Group in 2012 published a report which stated that employee engagement is a critical component to success. However, only 31 percent organizations have a formal strategy for implementing and measuring employee engagement and most of them are done through annual surveys which are of little or no use.

Just because the survey indicates that employees are fairly engaged or meeting expectations doesn't mean that they are committed to the organization. The good results from the survey might just provide a falsified feeling of security to the organization, whereas in reality attrition might actually be growing year-on-year.

Paying more attention to employee involvement/commitment helps the organization dig deeper into the meaning of the organization for the individual rather than obtaining results merely on the surface.

When organizations measure and analyze the levels of involvement of their employees, in terms of talent measures and so on; they are in a better position to mitigate risks, address key talent concerns and connect with the employees in a better manner.

Employee involvement helps in increasing organizational well-being and employees who feel their contributions matter end up getting more employees for the organization and building its brand.

RELATION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

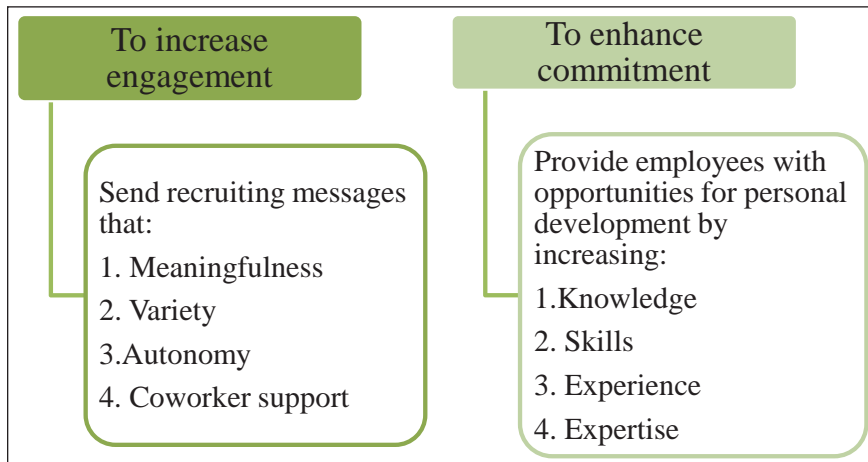
Employee engagement is a workplace approach formulated to ascertain that employees remain committed to their organization's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organizational success and ensure higher productivity along with personal job satisfaction. Good employee engagement initiatives translate into better working conditions and closely bound individuals. Is employee engagement is a new wine in an old bottle i.e. is it something that can be interchangeably used with employee commitment? Else, is it something different from employee commitment? Employees who are highly engaged in their work and are committed to their organizations provide a competitive edge to the organization.

A recent report published by SHRM (Vance, 2006) talks about 10 major themes related to engagement which is:

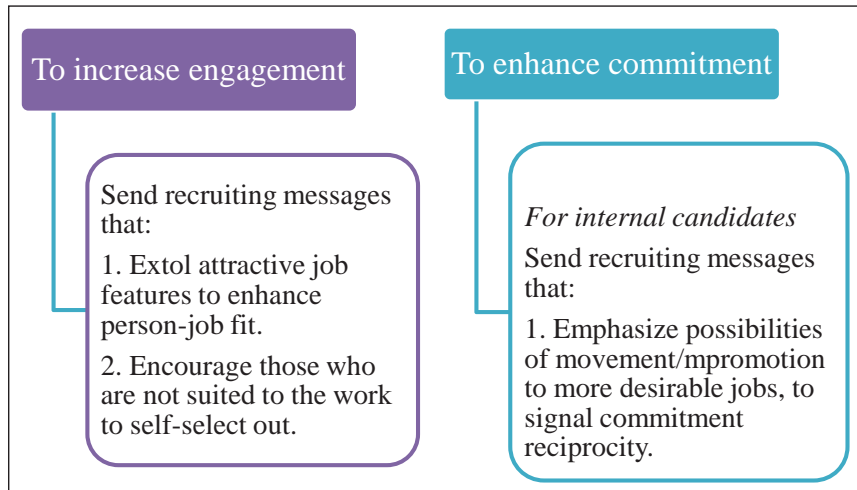
1. Pride in employer
2. Satisfaction with employer
3. Job satisfaction
4. Opportunity to perform well at challenging work
5. Recognition and positive feedback for one's contributions
6. Personal support from one's supervisor
7. Effort above and beyond the minimum
8. Understanding the link between one's job and the organization's mission
9. Prospects for future growth with one's employer
10. Intention to stay with one's employer

These themes help an individual in identifying with the vision, mission and values of the organization and thus, feeling s a piece of the bigger puzzle. The HR practices adopted must be encouraging, exciting and at the same time challenging enough to reach out to the minds and the hearts of the employees. Some of the key HR practices in areas like recruitment, job design, compensation and training can help create an ambience of mutual trust and teamwork (add figures 1-2 here) which helps in making the employee stay in the company for a longer term. A culture of 'positive engagement culture' takes the employee further to the higher level of commitment.

Figure 1: The power of Job Enrichment: SHRM Report (2006)



**Figure 2: Recruiting for Engagement and Commitment:
SHRM Report (2006)**



A research article titled ‘Employee engagement and commitment: a study conducted in Delhi and NCR with special reference to telecom industry’ (Bhavet & Chandok, 2014) found out the extent of employee engagement and commitment of telecom sector employees in Delhi and NCR in India. The results showed a significant relationship between employee engagement and commitment is accepted and proven to be true (Add figure 3) through the correlation table wherein Pearson correlation statistic is used to determine the relationship between employee engagement and commitment.

**Figure 3: Correlation Between Employee Engagement
and Commitment**

TABLE 6.1: CORRELATIONS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT

		EMP_ENG	EMP_COM
EMP_ENG	Pearson Correlation	1	.198**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	300	300
EMP_COM	Pearson Correlation	.198**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	300	300

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DRIVERS OF COMMITMENT

Various factors such as demographics, organizational size, organizational culture, pay structure etc. influence employee commitment. (Dooley, 1995) Individual characteristics may also play a major role in influencing commitment.

Commitment results from employee empowerment. The more empowered the employee feels, the stronger are the ties with the organization. A paper titled 'Employee empowerment and individual commitment: An analysis from integrative' (Bahera, Tripathy, & Sahoo, 2010) explores the major drivers of commitment which involve:

- Span of supervision/control which should be wide.
- Supportive HR policies with emphasis on multi-skilling
- Role clarity which involves defining the role clearly
- Challenging job to keep the employee engaged
- Supportive top management which is the role model for the employees.
- Appropriate rewards and recognition on time.
- Feedback during performance appraisal.
- Access to desired information and other resources.

Benefits of an Engaged Employee

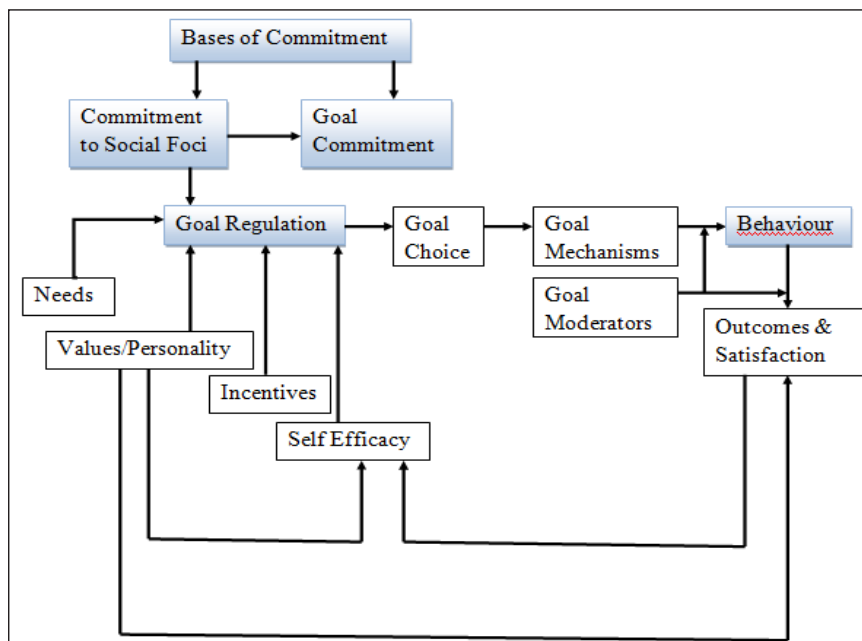
1. Higher productivity and lower unauthorized absenteeism.
2. Greater contribution to business results
3. Newer innovations in the company's interest
4. Taking up more challenging assignments for breaking the bar.
5. Leadership and zeal to have a say in organization's decisions.
6. Being an employer advocate to promote the organization's brand
7. Helping towards bringing profits for the particular department or the organization as a whole.

Given above are some of the numerous benefits of having a highly engaged employee within the organization. An engaged employee can help increase the profits of a company to a very large extent and can help build the company's reputation thus fetching tangible as well as intangible benefits for the organization. But as experts say, engagement can only fuel employee's performance. The actual journey of achieving higher productivity and success for the organization lies in an individual's ability and willingness to do so. (Bahera, Tripathy, & Sahoo, 2010)

MODEL OF EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

We are already aware about the three components of the commitment framework put forth by Meyer and Allen (1991). However, we shall take a look at one more models of employee commitment suggested by Meyer and Becker (2004). It integrates commitment and motivation theories which include factors like goal choice, self-efficacy, and goal mechanisms and combining with concepts like goal regulation and multi-dimensional view of commitment. The model basically tells us about how commitment influences goal regulation which in turn influences the behavior which forms the basis of commitment. So this is a virtuous circle which is bound to impact the performance of an individual directly. (Add figure 4)

Figure 4: Outline of Integrated Model of Employee Commitment and Motivation Suggested by Meyer and Becker



SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE INDUSTRY

Through the various research papers intricately examined, there are some indicating the real-time triggers and effects of employee commitment in various sectors across various nations.

According to the paper by SHRM, Construction-equipment maker Caterpillar saved \$8.8 million annually in European plant obtained 70% increase in output in less than four months in the Asia Pacific region and so on. (Vance, 2006)

Similarly, in the Australian Public sector; various factors such as attention to detail, outcome orientation and perceived organizational support helped in triggering employee commitment amongst managers of Australian public and private sector. (Su*, Baird, & Blair, 2013)

In Northern Ireland, the local government sector was facing the severe problem of employee absenteeism. This incurred a major cost to the local economy. On further probing, it was revealed that data from 25 district councils in the year 1998-1999 showed a mean loss of 3.85 percent (8.7 days) at an estimated cost of 4.5 million Euros. Major factors that contributed to the absenteeism were low employee morale, not feeling valued by the management, presence of 'blame' culture, low chance of promotion and boring nature of work. Further the results brought to light major facts such as:

- Good relations between managers and staff foster higher level of attendance.
- Lesser the bureaucracy, greater is the mutual trust amongst the employees.

Thus, government organizations in Northern Ireland reached to the conclusion that both management and employees recognize absence of internalized commitment which was translating into higher employee absence levels and thus eating into costs of Northern Ireland Government sector. (Bennett, 2002)

Another study of Assam cooperative jute mill in India proved that there exists a relationship between the tenure of service and a willingness on the part of the employee to stay with the organization. Also, when the job meets employee expectation; the employee intends to continue with the organization for a longer term. Also, job tenure of an employee has an impact in terms of employee commitment. There is a strong relation between employee commitment and productivity and quality of work in the organization. Lastly, employee commitment contributes to lower absenteeism as was observed in the earlier case (Add figure 5) wherein the p value in chi-square test is found highly significant. (Baruah & Subedi, 2012)

Figure 5: Chi-Square Test Wherein p (Pearson Chi-Square) Value in the Chi-Square Test is 0.000 i.e. (<.05)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	48.013	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.326	16	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	.463	1	.496
N of Valid Cases	191		
a. 17 cells (68.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.			

Flexibility has a dramatic effect on employee commitment. In a Deloitte survey, those who had higher access to flexibility scored a striking 32% higher in their commitment to the company than those without flexibility. (<http://workplaceflexibility.bc.edu>)

Similarly, AstraZeneca surveyed its employees and found that commitment scores were 28% higher for employees who had the flexibility as compared to employees without flexibility.

Another study conducted in state financial corporation's (SFCs) in Kenya (Maluti, Warento, & Shiundu, 2012) explored the extent to which employee commitment impacted employee retention in SFCs in Kenya through cross sectional study based on descriptive census survey. The survey highlighted the facts that exit interviews should be harnessed by the employers to determine the reasons for failing employee commitment and increased absenteeism. Also, CSR activities undertaken by the organizations should be targeted first towards the employees in order to make them liable as owners of the initiatives, which will propel their interest and loyalty towards the cause and in the longer run, towards the organization. However, there was no statistical evidence to suggest that there is a significant relationship between employee commitment and employee retention.

Contrary Views About Influence of Individual Characteristics on Commitment

The question of whether commitment has to do anything with age is a controversial one. As per a paper 'Factors that influence employee

commitment to the organization' published by (Dooley, 1995) ANOVA methodology used by the researcher on 134 respondents' responses yielded the result individual characteristics have little or no influence on organizational commitment. According to another research paper titled 'Relationship of organizational commitment and job satisfaction: a field study of tax office employees' (Çelik) there no difference in terms of gender when it comes to organizational commitment. Also there are no differences in organizational commitments components in terms of the duration of service within the organization.

ROLE OF HR IN PROMOTING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

HR can play a major role in ensuring employees stay engaged and hence, remain committed to business goals by aligning their personal goals with those of the business. For e.g.- In Walmart, career managers attend a week-long training at Walton Institute at University of Arkansas. The Walmart culture is carefully maintained by the HR and hence the entrepreneurial-minded employees act like business owners looking for greater opportunities.

Department for Education (DfE) launched foster-family-friendly HR policy in October 2014 wherein employees who foster will be offered up to 20 days of leave to attend trainings or meetings relating to their role as a care-giver.

Adding transparency in the entire HR process helps in employee commitment. Johnson and Johnson's HR department constructs a total compensation document, known as "Investment statements" for each employee annually. These documents include all compensation components of the employee.

Some measures that can be taken by the HR include:

1. Committing to the employees first by putting the values in writing. This should be followed by everyone right from the lowest level employee to the topmost CEO.
2. Guaranteeing organizational justice and fairness and extending organizational support wherever possible.
3. Building and sharing value-based homogeneity and practices to encourage mutual cooperation and unity.
4. Providing the right environment for employee development.

5. Employees need to be given the authority to participate in decision-making of the organization.
6. Either implicit or explicit incentives should be given to employees for them to participate.

PRIMARY RESEARCH FOR MEASURING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

An online survey revolving around the meaning of employee engagement had been shared with people from different organizations and the observations from the survey have been analyzed and presented in a graphical format.

Methodology Used: An online Questionnaire was floated to friends and acquaintances through personal mails and social media.

Sampling Technique: The sampling methodology adopted was *Random Sampling* owing to time constraint and ease of access to working professional in different companies.

Sample Size: 32 respondents from different companies like National Thermal Power Corporation Ltd. (NTPC), Infosys, Tech Mahindra Ltd., ICICI Prudential, National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Accenture etc. took the survey.

ANALYSIS

Analysis 1 → Summary of demographics characteristics

Gender: Out of the 32 respondents, 17 (53.12%) were females and 15 (46.88%) were males.

Age: The respondents were in the age range of 22-55.

Analysis 2 → Relation between age and employee commitment

Here, the variables *Yes*, *No* and *Maybe* in the responses were allocated 1, 2 and 3 as numerical values for finding correlation between age, the no. of years of work experience and personal opinion on whether employee commitment increases with age. The formula ‘=IF (cell=“Yes”, 1, IF (cell=“No”, 2, IF (cell=“Maybe”, 3)))’ was used to substitute *Yes*, *No* and *Maybe* with their respective numeric values in the excel sheet.

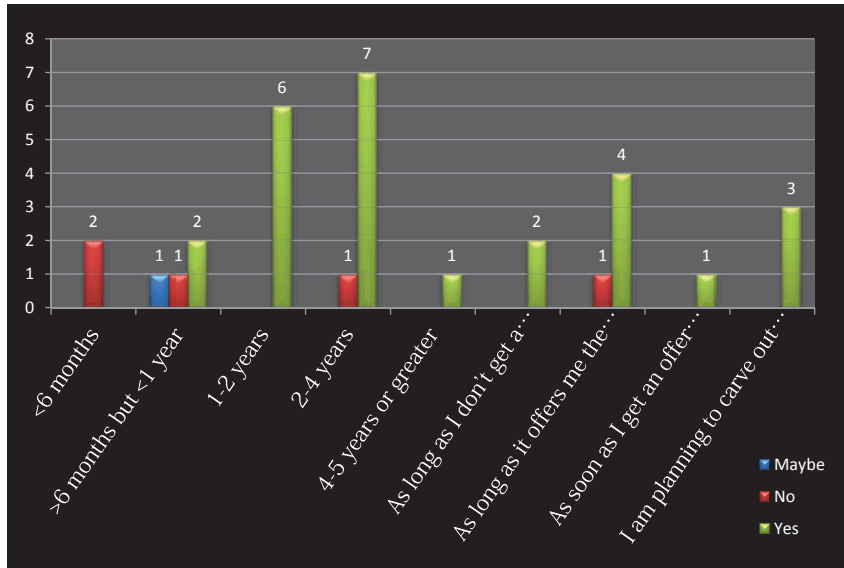
Table 1: Relation between age and perception towards Employee Commitment

	Age	Years of exp.	commitment increase with age
Age	1		
Years of exp.	0.933572	1	
commitment increase with age	-0.20161	-0.233781454	1

Age and the perception that *commitment increase with age* are slightly negatively correlated. The *years of experience* and the perception that *commitment increase with age* are also not correlated.

Interpretation: This table shows that when *age* of the respondent will increase, the perception that *commitment increase with age* will decrease as both of them are slightly negatively correlated. Also, the *no. of years of service* is unrelated to the perception about *increase in commitment with increase in age*. Therefore, we can safely conclude that age does not play a major factor in increasing employee commitment towards the organization.

Graph 1: Relation between Employee Engagement and long term service in the same organization



Analysis 3 → Relation Between Employee Engagement and the Desire to Remain with the Same Employer for A Longer Term

This analysis has been explained in a graphical format wherein the relation between employee engagement initiatives being currently undertaken by the organizations employing the respondents and the respondents wish to remain with the company for a longer duration has been charted out.

Interpretation: The graph shows that although majority of the respondents have answered *Yes* to the question ‘Do these engagement activities make you feel more attached to your organization?’ yet however, only a mere 3 respondents out of 32 have answered *I am planning to carve out my entire career in this company* when asked ‘How long do you plan to stay with this company?’

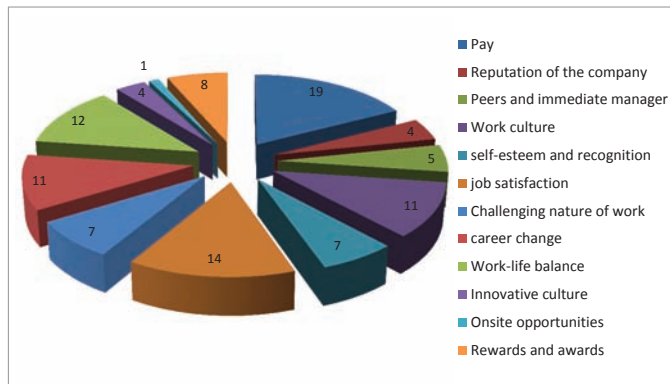
This is evidence to the fact that although employees are happy with their current jobs, yet majority of them plan to leave the organization sooner or later owing to different reasons such as work-life balance, company brand image, pay etc.

Analysis 4 → Reasons for failure in employee commitment towards the company

There was a question in the survey which probed much deeper into the respondents’ mindset as to why employers failed in retaining the talent that they have invested so much in. The question ‘Given the no. of engagement activities conducted by your HR dept., where do you think you lack the commitment to stay with you company for a long time?’ gave a set of options for the respondents to choose from along with a textbox titled ‘other’ in case the respondents wanted to fill up reasons of their own. The following were their responses:

Interpretation: As observed from the pie chart, *pay* was sighted as the biggest reason for failure in employee commitment towards the employee. Thus, continuance commitment (CC) was lower as per Meyer-Allen’s framework. Also, reasons like job satisfaction and work-life balance indicate that the respondents are also low on affective commitment (AC). Although, respondents are not very low on normative commitment (NC), yet factors like work culture and innovative culture were desired by a few of them.

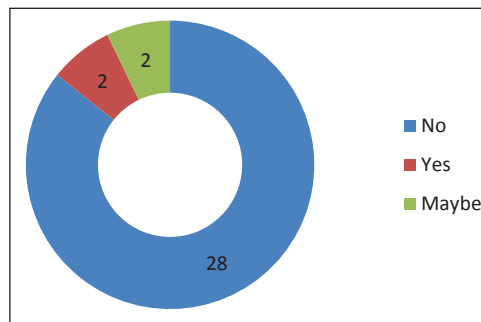
Graph 2: Different reasons for failure in Employee Commitment



Analysis 5 → Relation between employee engagement and employee commitment

Out of 32 respondents, 28 clearly felt that employee engagement and employee commitment are not the same.

Graph 3: Depicting responses to the question ‘do you feel employee engagement and employee commitment are the same?’



FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analyzed responses to the questionnaire:

- Employees belonging to different genders, sectors and companies believe *pay* and *job satisfaction* play a major role in making them feel committed towards the company.
- Even though the employee engagement activities like giving flexi hours, organizing competitions, having supermarket/gym within the campus premises and so on do have an impact on an employee's way of associating with the organization, yet many of them don't plan to remain with the organization for a long-term owing to reasons which are under the organization's control. For e.g.:- HR can redesign jobs to help employees derive more satisfaction out of them and employees' compensation restructuring can be done in order to make it more lucrative.
- To the question 'What is your notion about employee engagement and employee commitment?' in the survey, a lot of respondents said that employee engagement was the only way to ensure employee commitment and engagement. However, the above analysis proves otherwise. Employee commitment may or may not be a result of employee engagement.
- Lastly, age factor has got to do very less with increase in commitment. Although respondents did feel that commitment increases with age, however their current ages when combined with their perception of commitment were slightly negatively correlated. Also, no. of years of service has no impact on the perception of the respondents.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Although random sampling has been used and an online questionnaire was floated, however sample size obtained is very small to do full justice to the primary research, primarily owing to time and availability constraints of the respondents.
- The views of the respondents may be biased or hurried responses.
- The online surveys maybe affected by bias, time constraints and the interest of the respondent.
- The questions covered in the questionnaire are also limited revolving around various engagement activities currently being undertaken in different companies, the respondents' perception of relationship between age and employee commitment and the difference between employee engagement and commitment (if any) through the respondents' views.

- The results may differ for a different sample considered.
- All the analysis obtained from the study may or may not be completely justified or in conformance with the actual observations made.
- The ratio of male: female in the sample was 54:46 i.e. 27: 23. The results may vary across different mix of genders.
- The responses obtained were more qualitative in nature as opposed to being completely quantitative or statistical.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Thus, although it is extremely difficult to determine the future trends of employee commitment which may or may not depend on employee engagement initiatives undertaken by the HR department, yet the factors that influence employee commitment can be somewhat controlled by the organization.

Also, grooming the future leaders of organizations so that they propagate the feeling of commitment through a trickle-down effect might encourage employees to feel the attachment towards the business that they contribute towards.

Spreading awareness and making information readily available for employees to use can also help employees decide better if this is 'THE' company they want to stay in for a long time to come.

More employee friendly policies can help win good quality talent for the organizations. Recently, Apple and Facebook announced that they will provide incentive for their female employees to freeze their eggs, so that even if their biological clock ticks away, their desire to become mothers need not be stifled. Such initiatives can give an entirely new meaning to employee commitment and such new ideas will constantly see light of the day as time passes by.

Conducting timely employee engagement and commitment surveys and giving and analyzing feedback timely can help save oodles of money for the organization if it takes its employees seriously.

Lastly, as we are experiencing VUCA times and we shall continue to experience it, the key to employee commitment will lie with the employee himself/herself and it is up to him/her to constantly communicate with the HR and the immediate managers in order to let go of any feelings of bias, disappointment or hostility and to utilize any opportunity that can contribute towards his/her success. As long as an employee keeps mum

about his/her problems or new opportunities that he/she wants to explore, the organization's attempts to engage as well as make the employee feel attached to the organization shall remain unfruitful.

The Gulf Times recently published an article on 13th October 2014 talking about ways to gain employee commitment towards achieving marketing goals. The three steps stated by the author included: getting the valuable input of the employees, communicating the plan of action back to them along with the inputs incorporated and finally, making employees accountable to follow up their goals.

CONCLUSION

Employee Commitment is an age-old concept which is being revisited once again by organizations worldwide to ensure they tap in the best talent and ensure their retention. Employee commitment cannot be ensured 100 percent by employee engagement, but employee engagement does play a major role in retaining the interest of the employee towards the organization. Commitment begins from the organization's end whose mission, values, ethics and long-term vision should echo the sentiment of commitment. Only then shall an employee feel the true meaning of loyalty towards the organization and become its true brand advocate. The future is extremely uncertain owing to rapid globalization, technological boom, extremely demanding customers, rigorous competition and the erratic behavior of employees in terms of organizational loyalty and involvement. It is time companies started taking notice of it and make employee commitment their priority in order to ensure their well-being and survival. As Marcia Wieder- CEO and founder of Dream University stated it as a matter of fact that 'commitment leads to action. Action brings your dream closer.'

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