

Analyzing Role of Occupational Stress in Employee Engagement

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ABSTRACT-Employee engagement is the level to which an employee is committed to the values, vision, functioning and performance of the organization. Based on this, there can be three categories of employees, namely, Engaged, Not Engaged, and Actively Disengaged. Employee Engagement is a prerequisite for growth, efficiency, productivity and image building of the organization. Occupational Stress is inherent and inevitable in today's globalized work environment but it must be dealt with because persistent and high levels of occupational stress can reduce the employee engagement which can further have retarding effects on the organization. In this paper, the researcher has conducted a study on the employees of an IT company to study their levels of Employee Engagement and Occupational Stress and try to establish a relation between the two, if any. The results of the study were that Employee Engagement of the employees is not normally distributed, Occupational Stress was found out to be normally distributed and there was a negative and inverse relation between the two.

KEYWORDS: Employee Engagement, Emotionally Unemployed, Job Burnout, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Occupational Stress.

INTRODUCTION

Companies have always been interested to improve their employees' engagement. Managers can induce their workers to perform,

but an induced worker may not be engaged. An engaged employee need not be treated with carrot-stick policy because he/ she has this inner sense of responsibility and accountability towards the organization which is his/ her driving force to perform. In this globalised and hyper-competitive environment where the mantra is 'to do more with less', occupational stress, overt or covert in nature, has become unavoidable for the employees. In this paper the researcher is trying to identify if there is any relation between Employee Engagement and Occupational Stress, can a stressed employee be engaged or can an engaged employee be more resilient towards occupational stress. The importance of the study lies in that organizations need to realize that a stressed employee cannot carry on forever and a less engaged or disengaged employee cannot be an asset to the organization and reasons for his/ her disengagement need to be unearthed.

CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYEE

ENGAGEMENT: According to the Gallup Consulting

Organizations there are different types of employees:

ENGAGED--"Engaged" employees are builders. They want to know the desired expectations

for their role so they can meet and exceed them. They're naturally curious about their company and their place in it. They perform at consistently high levels. They want to use their talents and strengths at work every day. Engaged

employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They work with passion and they drive innovation and move their organization forward.

NOT ENGAGED---Not-engaged employees tend to concentrate on tasks rather than the goals and outcomes they are expected to accomplish. They want to be told what to do just so they can do it and say they have finished. They focus on accomplishing tasks vs. achieving an outcome. Employees who are not-engaged tend to feel their contributions are being overlooked, and their potential is not being tapped. They often feel this way because they don't have productive relationships with their managers or with their coworkers. Not-engaged employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleep-walking through their workday, putting time, but not energy or passion into their work.

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED--The "actively disengaged" employees are the "cave dwellers." They're "Consistently against Virtually Everything." They're not just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. They sow seeds of negativity at every opportunity. Every day, actively disengaged workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish. As workers increasingly rely on each other to generate products and services, the problems and tensions that are fostered by actively disengaged workers can cause great damage to an organization's functioning.

ELEMENTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

1. The employees know what is expected of them and know what materials are being provided.
2. The employees feel they are contributing to the organization.
3. The employees must feel that their opinions are important and are being

heard. The employees have the opportunity to discuss their progress.

OTHER FACTORS

FAMILY FRIENDLINESS: A person's family life influences his work life. When an employee realizes that the organization is considering his family's benefits also, he will have an emotional attachment with the organization which leads to engagement.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYEE

ENGAGEMENT: The research also reveals some barriers to employee engagement that present challenges for organizations. Some of the practices to avoid include:

1. Inconsistent management styles based on the attitudes of individual managers, which can lead to perceptions of unfairness.
2. Reactive decision making by superiors that does not address workplace problems until after it is too late.
3. Lack of knowledge-sharing within the company due to rigid communication channels or company culture norms.
4. Poor work-life balance for staff due to having to regularly work too many hours within a company culture that supports frequent use of overwork schedules.
5. Low perceptions of senior management based on lack of visibility and interaction with employees.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

According to Seley (1956) stress means uncertain reaction of the body to demand, and also basic demand from internal or external environment, or reaction result against threat of balance condition. French (1971) defines stress as the consequence that an individual's ability or skills fail to coordinate with the job or the job environment cannot satisfy the individual demand. Ivancevich & Matteson (1980) define

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stress as some adaptive reaction, a consequence of special psychological or physical demand from the event, and such reaction takes personal character as intermediary. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. The primary sources of occupational stress within an organization originate from four areas. These areas include task demands, physical demands, role demands, and interpersonal demands. A concept closely associated with occupational stress is job burn-out. Job burnout is held to result from the combined effects of work-related factors that create unrelieved work stress, which, in turn, leads to a generally debilitated psychological condition in individuals. Certain behaviors associated with job burnout have been observed in a wide variety of occupations.

SOURCES/ CAUSES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS: The causes of occupational stress are many. These sources or causes can be divided into three broad categories:-

1. Environmental
2. Organizational
3. Individual

JOB CONDITIONS THAT MAY LEAD TO STRESS

1. THE DESIGN OF TASKS
2. MANAGEMENT STYLE
3. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
4. WORK ROLES
5. CAREER CONCERNS

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Stress shows itself in a number ways. Early warning signs of job stress are headache, sleep disturbances, difficulty in concentrating, short temper, upset stomach, job dissatisfaction, low morale etc. According to Encyclopedia of Occupational Safety and Health, extreme levels of stress can lead to cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological

disorders, workplace injury, ulcers, cancer, impaired Immune function, suicidal tendencies.

RELATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Robertson Cooper is a leading Business Psychology company with a diverse and talented team, headed up by Managing Director, Ivan Robertson. They have demonstrated the relationship between well-being, engagement and productivity using data from their measurement tool, ASSET, which measures all three. Traditionally employee engagement has been defined quite narrowly – focusing on behaviours relating to discretionary effort, organizational citizenship (going the extra mile) and commitment. However, their latest model also includes positive psychological well-being. This is because when people feel good and have a strong sense of purpose you have the platform on which to build a fully engaged workforce. As the diagram below shows, two particular aspects of well-being emerge as clear drivers of engagement – these should be a key focus of attempts to achieve employee engagement across the workforce

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research done on the relationship between engagement and stress is limited, but it has been found that engagement may limit the effect of stress in certain domains (Britt, Castro, & Adler, 2005). The less an employee is engaged the more likely the employee is to become more affected by stress levels, but also to voluntarily leave an organization (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). An alternative model of engagement comes from the ‘burnout’ literature, which describes job engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout, noting that burnout involves the erosion of engagement with one’s job (Maslach *et al* 2001). According to Maslach *et al*, six areas of work-life lead to either burnout or engagement: workload, control, rewards and

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recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values. They argue that job engagement is associated with a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. Like burnout, engagement is expected to mediate the link between these six work-life factors and various work outcomes. May *et al's* (2004) findings support Maslach *et al's* (2001) notion of meaningful and valued work being associated with engagement, and therefore it is important to consider the concept of 'meaning'. In their new book, "WE - How to Increase Performance and Profits Through Full Engagement", authors Kevin Kruse and Rudy Karsan offer a simple litmus test for how engaged people are in their work and with their employers. The question is simple: when employees speak about the company they work for, do they use "we" or "they"? If someone says "they make software for the widget liquidation market" it's a very different relationship to work than if they were to say, "we make software for the widget liquidation market". Sucheta Rawal (2010), who is a human capital strategy consultant says that just as self awareness is highest on the Maslow's hierarchy, after food and shelter, Employee Engagement seems to be a stretch goal for organizations operating in third world countries. A recent study by Gallup revealed that "Many of India's successful organizations are losing employee engagement and don't know exactly why." They say the organizations have enjoyed business success even in this tight economy but are not able to keep their employees' happy. Gallup further investigated the drivers behind this trend and speculated them to be – a reactive approach to management, dependency on solely monetary incentives and failure to recognize employee's emotional needs. There is a lot of competition and few opportunities. This is changing with globalization and rising success of the Indian industrialist. Many of these young

workers who enter the workforce are ambitious and hard working. They are asked to meet tight deadlines and work long hours, which has become a culturally acceptable practice. There is also no concept of work-life balance in corporate India. Many workers are called on their personal cell phones at nights and on weekends, by their managers or supervisors. Work is expected to become your number one priority, and there are times when you are reminded of it. All these practices may sound strange to us in the western world, but is quite commonplace in India. As a result, employees spend majority of their time at work. They tradeoff their youth, time, social life and expect something in return. Managers in India believe that financial incentives are the answer to engagement but they are wrong. According to studies in Behavioral Economics, employees who are not emotionally attached to their organizations are more likely to leave for a competitor who offers them better pay. However, when the managers are involved in the personal well-being of the employees, the emotional attachment has a higher play. The Gallup study found "These managers give lip service to employees' emotional health and wellbeing in discussions or assume that this is the responsibility of other departments, such as human resources or employee relations." The short-term thinking approach to management may not work for the corporations operating in India. They need to act quickly and start investing in management training, especially in the areas of human capital. Niki Romanou et al. (2010) explored the perceived levels, drivers and benefits, as well as the levels of managerial engagement at an organisation, a leading support services company in the UK. In total, 25 managers were interviewed at the company's headquarters. The research model consisted of five thematic principles: drivers and counter drivers of engagement, methods of engagement, (perceived) levels of employee engagement, (perceived) benefits of employee engagement, and managers' levels of engagement. Not

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surprisingly, the perceived levels of engagement are moderately high and managers seem to be engaged in their organization driven by the challenging nature of the work, the recognition they receive and the feelings of accomplishment following a successful task.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Much of the research has been done on Employee Engagement and Occupational Stress as separate topics. But very little has been said about effect of Occupational Stress on Employee Engagement. The researcher would like to study and compare the level of employee engagement and occupational stress among employees as both of them significantly affect the performance, loyalty, commitment, job involvement of the employees and the overall profitability and growth of the organization. The knowledge gained from the study can be used for further researches and for enhancing the engagement level and reducing stress among employees.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the level of employee engagement among employees.
2. To examine the level of occupational stress among employees.
3. To study the relationship between employee engagement and occupational stress.

HYPOTHESES

It is proposed to test the following hypotheses with a view to conduct the research study under consideration: -

- H1. Employee Engagement scores are normally distributed among the employees.
- H2. Occupational Stress scores are normally distributed among the employees.
- H3. There exist no significant relationship between the employee engagement and occupational stress among the employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, survey method is used. It is a study of employee engagement and occupational stress among employees of an IT company situated in IT Park, Chandigarh. The total number of employees participants in this study were 65 including both males and females. The respondents were drawn using convenient sampling.

TESTS AND TOOLS

The description of the tests and materials used in the present study used is as follows:-

1. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY: -

Developed by Gallup Organization (1990's).

The employee survey is a diagnostic tool of choice in the battle for the hearts of employees. It identifies strong feelings of employee engagement. Gallup developed its Q12 benchmark specifically to correlate its measure of employee engagement to worker productivity; customer loyalty and sales growth. Each of the 12 questions is rated on a five-point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree) and is one of the following four categories:

1. Basic Needs- two questions
2. Management Support- four questions
3. Teamwork- four questions
4. Growth- two questions

The ratings from all twelve of these questions are then combined into an index, which can be used to segment employees into three categories:

- a. Engaged employees work with passion. Because they feel a strong connection to the organization, they work hard to innovate and improve.
- b. Not-Engaged employees do the work expected of them, but do not put in extra effort.
- c. Actively Disengaged employees aren't just unhappy, but are

spreading their unhappiness to other staff.

2. OCCUPATIONAL STRESS INDEX:-

Developed by Dr. A.K. Srivastava and Dr. A.P. Singh (1981), Banaras Hindu University at Varanasi. It's one of the most widely used tests of measuring the occupational stress and it is specifically designed for Indian population. The questionnaire consists of some statements that employees say or feel about various components and conditions of their job. It consists of 46 statements or questions and five responses (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree). It is a five point scale that is strongly disagree gets a score of 1 and strongly agree gets a score of 5. But there are certain items which are scored inversely that are strongly disagree gets a score of 5 while strongly agree gets a score of 1. The participant has to tick the response which he/she feels is most appropriate according to him/her.

PROCEDURE

Data was collected from the employees of an IT company, Chandigarh, with the help of 2 questionnaires (Employee Engagement Survey and Occupational Stress Index) and utilizing the survey technique.

FINDINGS

The major purpose of any piece of work is not mere collection of facts and figures but also drawing some valuable and useful inferences. It deals with the organization, classification and tabulation of the gathered information through the administration of various tools on the selected sample. Analysis of data means studying the organized material in order to discover inherent facts. The process of interpretation reveals what the results are. It is the most crucial part of the study and not only enables the researcher to test the hypotheses but also to interpret the data, draw conclusions and make generalizations as well. The present study

“A Study of Employee Engagement in Relation To Occupational Stress” is based upon descriptive survey method

1. ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SCORES:

The following hypothesis was tested related to Employee Engagement.

Hypothesis 1: “Employee Engagement scores are normally distributed among the employees”. Mean, standard deviation and skewness of employees on employee engagement have been presented in table below:

Mean, SD and Skewness of Employee Engagement scores for the employees.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Skewness
Employee Engagement	65	44	5.919	-1.52

The result shows that the distribution is negatively skewed, which implies that the employee engagement scores are not normally distributed. Thus hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Furthermore, the 3 categories of employee engagement i.e. Engaged Employees, Not-Engaged Employees and Actively Disengaged Employees Scores were analyzed by calculating their respective percentages for a more comprehensive picture of the scores.

2. ANALYSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS SCORES

The following hypothesis was tested related to Occupational Stress.

Hypothesis2: “Occupational Stress scores are normally distributed among the employees”.

Mean, standard deviation and skewness of employees on employee engagement have been presented in table below:

Mean, SD and Skewness of Occupational Stress scores for the employees.

Stress			
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The result shows that the distribution is not skewed, which implies that the occupational stress scores are normally distributed. Thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

3. ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS SCORES.

The following hypothesis was tested related to the relationship between employee engagement and occupational stress.

Hypothesis3: “There exists no significant relationship between employee engagement and occupational stress”.

Pearson’s Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation is presented in table below:

Coefficient of Correlation with regard to Employee Engagement and Occupational Stress

Variables	N	‘r’
Employee Engagement	65	-0.323(**)
Occupational Stress	65	

**Significant at 0.01 level of confidence

It reveals that the correlation was found to be significant at 0.01 level of confidence, which implies that there exists a significant negative and inverse relationship between the employee engagement and occupational stress among the employees. Thus hypothesis 3 is rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed at studying employee engagement in relation with occupational stress among the employees of an IT company in Chandigarh. For this purpose, 65 IT employees of the company were selected and tested using Gallup 12 point Employee Engagement Questionnaire and Occupational Stress Index. In the beginning of the investigation based on

review of literature it was hypothesized that employee engagement and occupational stress scores are normally distributed, moreover both are inversely related though the relation is not significant was also hypothesized. The scoring was done for the two scales after the administration of the same. The scales were scored according to the response options chosen by the participants and grand totals on each were obtained. Employee engagement and occupational stress, were further statistically analyzed and means, standard deviations, percentages, skewness and correlations were calculated. The hypotheses and the results obtained are discussed below:

Hypothesis 1, viz, “Employee Engagement scores are normally distributed among the employees.” Means were calculated for Employee Engagement, to study the averages. The mean of employee engagement scores came out to be 44 which is the upper limit of the range, therefore, the average shows that majority of employees are engaged or involved in their job, furthermore, the employee engagement scores are negatively skewed -1.52 which means that the employee engagement scores are not normally distributed i.e., hypothesis 1 is rejected. The percentages of the 3 categories of employee engagement namely engaged, not-engaged and actively disengaged are 53.85%, 46.15% and 0% respectively. Analysis of percentages shows that more than 50% of the employees are engaged or highly involved in their job and 0% or none of them are actively disengaged. The reasons behind this positive shift of scores towards high job involvement could be many, such as small sample size, lack of randomization, biased attitude of test takers or some other statistical errors. Moreover, the tumultuous economic conditions i.e. recession and fear generated because of mass retrenchment and downsizing has motivated the employees to work hard and be more committed to their job. Lastly the conducive environment of

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the company, good management and small sized work force makes its employees more engaged than otherwise.

Hypothesis 2, viz, "Occupational Stress scores are normally distributed among the employees." The mean of occupational stress scores came out to be 135 which means that majority of the employees suffer from moderate stress levels, the average shows that majority of employees are stressed but the level is limited. Furthermore, the scores are not skewed which means that the Occupational Stress scores are normally distributed i.e. hypothesis 2 is accepted. The percentages of the 3 categories of occupational stress namely low stress, moderate stress and high stress are 1.54%, 96.92% and 1.54% respectively. Analysis of percentages shows that more than 95% of the employees suffer from moderate stress levels and only 1.54% of employees fall on the either side of the continuum i.e. suffer from low or high stress levels. The reasons behind such an insignificant percentage of employees falling in the two extreme sides could be many, such as small sample size, lack of randomization, biased attitude of test takers or some other statistical errors. Moreover, the satisfaction of having a job in the times of recession goes a long way to reduce the stress levels of the employees. Furthermore, the conducive environment of the company, good management, small sized work force, role clarity makes its employees less stressed than otherwise. Last but not the least the fact that the employees are more engaged also has a positive effect on their level of stress which is also supported by studies done in the past.

Hypothesis 3, viz, "There exists a significant relationship between employee engagement and occupational stress." For testing the last hypothesis, Pearson's product moment coefficient of correlation was calculated which came out to be -0.323. This value is significant on both the levels and shows that there exists a

significant inverse relation between employee engagement and occupational stress i.e. when employee engagement is high, occupational stress is low and when employee engagement is low, occupational stress is high and vice versa. The results obtained from this field study coincide with the studies done in the past, proving the validity and relevance of the study.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the results obtained and studies done in the past it could be said that employee engagement and occupational stress are inversely related and employee engagement can not only significantly lower the stress levels of employees but also improve the performance, productivity, growth and well-being of the employees and well as of the organization.

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