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Employee Engagement Practices During the COVID-19 Lockdown: Human Resource Management Challenges and a Roadmap

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ABSTRACT

Due to the lockdown in the present business environment amid the COVID-19 epidemic, employee engagement has become one of the most significant concerns for human resource managers and practitioners in enterprises. In light of the recent coronavirus pandemic, this essay will analyse the many ways in which businesses kept their staffs active. In order to keep their employees motivated during these trying times, businesses are always coming up with new and interesting methods to do so. This is an exploratory study based on the literature found in academic journals, internet media outlets, and the World Health Organization. Organizations are developing a wide variety of ways to get people involved in the midst of the pandemic. These include: online family engagement practises; virtual learning and development; online team building activities; webinars with industry experts; online conducting weekly alignment sessions; online conducting team meetups over video conference for lunch; online conducting short online game sessions; virtual challenges and competitions; online courses; online appreciation sessions; online courses; online communications exercises; and live sessions for news. Employers and employees alike may reap several benefits from instituting regular engagement activities into the work-from-home schedule. Staff members that participate in such events help their companies grow and develop. Despite the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus, the company's employees have remained committed to their jobs.

Keywords: COVID-19 Virus; Epidemic; Human resource; Employee engagement.

1.0 Introduction

Today, the business landscape is shifting in response to the global pandemic of COVID-19. During this difficult time, human resource managers are constantly developing innovative, creative, and effective ways to engage employees in a healthier way. Employee engagement is a workplace attitude that encourages all members of an organisation to give their best effort every day while remaining committed to the organization's goals and values. Employees who are well engaged in an organisation will lead to higher productivity at work, which generates higher customer satisfaction and, without a doubt, developments in sales and profit for the company.

The main difficulty in the theoretical literature is when we discuss the term "engagement," because there is no general definition of employee engagement. In his study, Kahn (1990) stated that

engagement indicates the physiological and physical presence of performing an organisational role. The three constructs that aid in the development of organisational engagement are the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability. According to additional research, when people are engaged, they use and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their role performances. The cognitive facet is associated with leaders', employees', and working environments' beliefs. Employees' positive or negative attitudes toward the organisation and its leaders are reflected in the emotional facet. The physical effort expended to fulfil an organisational function is referred to as its "physical aspect." May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) tested Kahn's model and discovered that meaningfulness, safety, and availability of psychological conditions are positively associated with engagement. Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker (2002) coined the phrase "job

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engagement” and defined it as a positive and work-related frame of mind characterised by strength, devotion, and absorption. Employee engagement was defined in this research as an individual’s participation, contentment, and excitement for work (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). According to this research, engagement is most closely related to work participation, wellbeing, and emotions (May et al., 2004). Employee engagement has two major components: work engagement and organisational engagement (Saks, 2006). An engaged employee is constantly concerned with their efforts, work, and performance, and people want to believe that their work, efforts, and performance matter.

Employee engagement is often defined as an interior state of mind, that is, a physical, emotional, and mental condition that brings together an employee’s dedication, satisfaction, and job effort.

Employees that are engaged help the firm achieve its objectives, execute its strategy, and deliver substantial business outcomes. Different HR methods, such as job design, recruiting, selection, remuneration, training, and performance management, may improve employee engagement (Vance, 2006). Organizations that encourage employee engagement, effectively manage personnel, and communicate with workers honestly, correctly, and at the proper time will be successful in the future (Robison, 2009). Organizations and workers rely on one another to achieve their aims and objectives. Employee involvement should not be a one-time event but should be ingrained in the company’s culture. Employee engagement at work is influenced by factors such as career advancement opportunities, encouragement, communication, recognition, employee hours flexibility, a fair pay structure, a transparent and open work environment, and participation in decision making (Patro, 2013).

Clarity, confidence, convey, connect, credibility, and career are six C’s requirements that must be satisfied in order to increase the goal of successful employee engagement. An engaged employee is concerned about their job and the company’s success, and they constantly want to believe that their efforts and hard work are making a difference. Employee engagement leads to increased productivity in the workplace, which results in improved customer satisfaction and positive increases in sales and profit for enterprises. Employee and organisational confidence and communication are also critical. This union of the

firm and the employee is required in order for both to work optimally (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016). Employee engagement is based on an organization’s and its adherents’ beliefs, dependability, dedication, and communication. Organizations may boost employee engagement through improving employee decisionmaking, dedication, and openness from top management.

Employee engagement is defined as an employee’s excitement and devotion to his or her work (Chandani, Mehta, Mall, & Khokhar, 2016). Employee engagement is a strategy that increases the likelihood of corporate success by improving organisational and individual performance, productivity, and employee well-being.

1.1 COVID-19 lockdown

A severe respiratory sickness recently developed in Wuhan (Hubei province), China. Epidemiological studies have revealed that the outbreak was linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, China (Fan et al., 2020). COVID-19 is a pandemic that has already confirmed 5,934,936 confirmed cases worldwide, with at least 367,166 fatalities recorded by the World Health Organization (WHO) as of May 31, 2020. The overall number of confirmed cases in the European area is 2,142,547, with 180,085 fatalities recorded. There are 2,743,793 confirmed cases and 157,702 confirmed fatalities throughout the Americas. In the Eastern Mediterranean area, the overall number of confirmed cases is 505,001, with 12,353 fatalities recorded. There have been 181,665 confirmed cases and 7,028 fatalities recorded in the Western Pacific area. There are 260,579 confirmed cases and 7,431 fatalities in the Southeast Asia area. The African area reported 100,610 confirmed cases and 2,554 fatalities. According to the World Health Organization’s risk assessment analysis, COVID-19 poses a very high risk at the global level (World Health Organization, 2020a). People who have NCDs (noncommunicable illnesses) are more likely to get very sick or die as a result of COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020b).

The World Health Organization also offers certain guidelines and guidance to the general population. According to the WHO, the majority of people infected with the COVID-19 virus will have mild to moderate respiratory disease and will recover without needing any specific treatment. People who are elderly or have medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, or chronic

respiratory disease are more susceptible to suffering serious sickness. Individuals should wash their hands often or use an alcohol-based rub to protect themselves and others against COVID-19 infection, according to WHO recommendations. According to WHO (World Health Organization, 2020c), the COVID-19 virus spreads predominantly by droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. According to the study, no viable vaccination or licenced pharmacological therapy for COVID-19 has been established. In this case, most nations opt for lockdown, ensuring that COVID-19 spreads quickly. Several nations have also restricted borders to prevent international visitors from transmitting the virus (Ghosh, Brindisi, Shahabi, Mackenzie, & Andrew, 2020). According to Business Insider (Kaplan, Frias, & MefallJohnsen, 2020), most nations are enacting COVID-19 prevention measures ranging from national quarantines to school closures.

Most nations impose some kind of restriction on the public, such as lockdown, social isolation, or donning a face mask before leaving the house. As a result of the need of the hour, most firms began working online and implemented a work-from-home (WFH) policy. Due to the lockdown, most firms allow their staff to work from home. However, working from home is challenging for workers since they do not experience the organisational atmosphere at home, as well as loss of focus due to frequent interruptions by family members; work-life conflict arises as a result of this. Even if they lack the necessary equipment and tools (computer, mouse, printers, scanners, headphones, camera, internet connection, and dedicated workspace—a peaceful area to work). Because of the global increase of COVID-19 instances, the majority of workers are stressed. They are concerned about their job security as well as their compensation. Employees were unable to concentrate/focus on their job as a result of these issues, indicating the need for employee engagement. The organization's primary job is to ensure the wellbeing and engagement of its personnel. Employees that are fully engaged provide the best results. Leaders should provide encouraging words, promote morale, and create a safe and open atmosphere for workers to express themselves if they are experiencing problems. Leaders may utilise multimedia to communicate. There should be a clear

policy in place so that people do not feel stressed about their jobs and can do them properly.

2.0 Review of Literature

Robison (2009) proposed strategies for managing in turbulent times and keeping employees focused and engaged during times of change. The author provides some tips, such as telling employees what the organisation expects from them, ensuring employees have the right materials and equipment, allowing employees to do what they do best, not forgetting to give recognition, letting your employees know you care about them, and always encouraging their development. Employee engagement can be used as a mediator to help employees develop positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviours that lead to improved job performance (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks, 2006). Andrew and Saudah (2012) concluded that employee engagement can be utilised as a mediator to enhance the behaviour, intentions, and attitudes of employees toward better work performance. Basquille (2013) recommended that managers should be supported by the executive to provide development assistance, career support, and recognition. These factors enhance employee engagement effectively. Patro (2013) revealed that companies have to provide their employees with the freedom to make their work interesting and form an environment for having an engaged work life. Further study suggests that employee engagement should be a continuous process of learning, improvement, and action. Therefore, organisations today should actively look forward to fulfilling employees' expectations and generating an impact on their performance, which directly marks the organization's performance.

Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) projected an integrated model of employee engagement. According to the study findings, the key drivers of employee engagement are leadership, communication, and work-life balance. presence, ease of use, and reputation of Facebook functions are the four factors that significantly contribute towards employee engagement (Abd Latib, Bolong, & Ghazali, 2014). Jalal (2016) study outcomes showed that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on organisational commitment and also found employee engagement as an important determinant of organisational commitment. According to the

study's findings, the more engaged employees are in the workplace, the more committed they are to the organisation or institution. According to the findings of the study, it is difficult for HR professionals to keep current employees engaged in their jobs. Workers were found to be somewhat engaged, indicating that some may be disengaged from their existing responsibilities or frightened of losing their employment. Work engagement is significantly influenced by job satisfaction. According to the findings of Garg, Dar, and Mishra (2017), there is a positive association between job satisfaction and work engagement. According to further research, employee job satisfaction leads to employee engagement. Employee engagement is nearly three times higher in organisations with disengaged employees in terms of revenue growth, profit margins, shareholder return, and operating income. It goes on to say that higher levels of employee engagement lead to lower absenteeism and job stress, as well as improved well-being and health. According to additional research, employee engagement has an impact on a company's bottom line and is strongly linked to business performance (Saks, 2017).

Employee engagement leads to business profits such as cost and time savings if an organisation fosters a strong corporate culture in which employees feel valued and supported. Employee engagement is increased by management trust in employees, slightly flatter hierarchies, and leaders acting as role models (Sievert & Scholz, 2017). Internal communication satisfaction and employee engagement are both related concepts and factors. Further research indicates that internal communication satisfaction plays a significant role in high employee engagement (Veri & Voki, 2017). Employees who are emotionally invested in their work and their organisation are more likely to be productive. Engaged employees have complete faith in the organization's leaders. As a result, engaged employees are more dedicated and committed to their work and the organisation.

Engaged employees are always optimistic, maintain good interpersonal rapport with one another, and perform well in the workplace (Jena, Pradhan, & Panigrahy, 2018). Tiwari and Lenka (2019) discovered that functional, economic, and psychological advantages increase employee engagement. Internal corporate communication, perceived communication satisfaction, knowledge

sharing, continuous learning, and intrapreneurship were found to be positively related to employee engagement. This paper discovered that organisations that invest in their human resources and build a complete human resource management (HRM) system in their organisation produce engaged personnel, which in turn improves organisational performance (Tensay & Singh, 2020). Employees with higher levels of dispositional happiness engage in higher levels of employee engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020).

Employee engagement is critical for an organization's valued employees to be retained. It is critical for an organisation to make effective use of its human resources. An organisation cannot survive for long without employee engagement.

3.0 Rationale of the Study

The majority of countries are under lockdown owing of the COVID19 epidemic. Most firms have developed a workfromhome policy in this challenging scenario. However, at this tough time, the workfromhome routine is difficult for both people and enterprises. As a result of this issue, businesses must engage their workers in more sophisticated ways using different employee engagement techniques. The purpose of this study is to identify many creative and novel methods of employee engagement so that workers may easily work from home while being dedicated, happy, and motivated during this pandemic condition.

4.0 Objective of the Study

To determine the employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown.

5.0 Research Methodology

This is a conceptual study that is based on secondary data. Conceptual articles are arranged into several different streams of material in order to convey some fresh insight (Chermack & Passmore, 2005). The information gathered came from secondary research conducted by numerous scholars and organisations.

During the inquiry, the majority of the material found in research papers, articles, blogs, and online newspapers gave insights into the ideas and practises of employee involvement in relation to COVID19 and difficult times. COVID-19 statistics are derived

from World Health Organization publications. A thorough and extensive assessment of the literature on employee engagement was carried out. Torraco (2005) defines integrated literature reviews as a kind of study that generates new insight and information about the issue under consideration. The goal of a literature review is to summarise the current state of literature related to a certain subject (Chermack & Passmore, 2005). During this COVID-19 epidemic, employee participation is critical for all firms. Employee engagement techniques keep employees motivated, dedicated, fulfilled, and contented during a lockdown.

5.1 Employee engagement is important during tough times

According to the American Management Association, firms may boost employee engagement even during difficult times if they take care and make the correct choices at the appropriate time. According to the research, greater levels of involvement are associated with increased productivity and a healthier bottom line. Worker involvement should be a primary concern for firms in good and bad times (Vickers, 2019).

According to The Guardian, amid tough times, employee engagement helps to generate strong positive views among workers about their employment and their firm. Employee engagement is influenced by characteristics such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship. According to the newspaper, when employees are engaged, firms perform better. To increase employee engagement during challenging times, firms can make extra attempts to make workers believe that their company is really interested in them (Robertson, 2012). According to Groove Management Blog (Formato, 2014), leadership is more obvious during difficult times than at other times. If businesses want their workers to be engaged, executives must take responsibility and encourage them to accomplish the organization's future goals.

In challenging circumstances, an effective communication strategy motivates people to participate in their job and achieve their goals. According to the site, staff involvement is important in tough circumstances, and only leadership can do this via an effective communication strategy. Personnel want to communicate via numerous

channels, and the ideal approach is to disseminate information using multimedia. According to Deal, Stawiski, and Gentry (2010), supplementary benefit packages and fair and equitable compensation structures should be provided to workers during difficult times to keep them engaged and motivated. Organizations also give workers with all of the tools and resources they need to do their jobs efficiently. Managers should offer useful feedback and instruction to their subordinates on a regular basis to maintain employee engagement.

According to Masson (2009), leaders should effectively communicate with workers about their career advancement so that employees believe the procedures are fair and equal. Supervisors should be upfront and assist workers in identifying their developmental requirements as well as improving their abilities through difficult circumstances. The post from DVV media HR group limited (2018) provides some concrete recommendations for employee engagement during difficult times. The most crucial thing to improve employee engagement. Other suggestions include: leaders must be role models during difficult times, include employee input into your business culture, communicate clearly and consistently, support your supervisors, and keep motivation strong via awards and recognition.

Jones and Kober (2019) discussed several ways for achieving improved employee engagement and higher corporate success during challenging times. These are the strategies: Maintaining focus on your basic beliefs boosts staff involvement during challenging times. Explicitly encourage your staff to keep them motivated through difficult times. Solicit employee feedback—ask workers to openly share information, including grievances and suggestions for improvements, in a constructive manner.

Communicate freely and honestly with workers—leaders should communicate openly and honestly with their staff in order for them to perform more efficiently. Employees should be devoted to your company if you commit to their job.

According to Matkin (2016), vision should be clear and simple, and it should be well conveyed to workers so that they can gain guidance during difficult times. There should be open door rules in a company; this kind of platform offers workers a voice. Organizations should be completely upfront with their workers; this kind of transparency fosters employee confidence in the business amid

challenging times. Five ideas for supporting workers who work from home were published in Nature (Fan et al., 2020).

They are as follows: Create a healthy workspace—encourage employees to do the same at home. Encourage staff to operate as ergonomically as possible from home, and examine their workfromhome arrangement. Maintain a schedule—encourage workers to stay to a routine and to keep “work” and “home” time separate. Remember to be social—communication with coworkers is a terrific stress reliever.

A company should organise a session for entertaining activities that would ordinarily occur in the workplace. Encourage well-being practices—organizations should be concerned about their employees’ well-being since it may assist minimise absenteeism, increase engagement, and performance. Invest in technology—communication tools like instant messaging and video and phone calling platforms may help teams stay in touch. Investing in a recognition platform that enables workers to give and receive recognition is critical.

5.2 Employee engagement practices during the COVID-19 lockdown

As organisations build different engagement practises in preparation for the implementation of full-time remote work rules as a result of COVID 19, here are some practises to keep your workers involved in their employment while working from home.

According to Sarkar (2020), a new component introduced by organisations in employee engagement is family engagement, to keep workers’ children occupied for a few hours while their parents work from home during COVID19 lockdown. Genpact, Accenture, Deloitte, AMD, and Hinduja Global Solutions are among the companies that engage in these practises. The essay by Talukar (2020) offered five suggestions for practising employee involvement amid the COVID19 epidemic. Build a much better communication regime with your remote teams; remember to cheer them up with quick praise; relax and assure flexibility; develop a virtual community with all of your personnel; and hold online team-building events. The essay by Goswami (2020) is about engaging downtime staff throughout the lockdown period. Manufacturing firms such as CEAT, SAR, and Aditya Birla are increasing employee downtime. Companies keep their

employees motivated during a lockdown by providing opportunities for learning and growth. Some organisations supply their staff with TED Talks, webinars with industry experts, books, e-learning, and self-developed material. During the epidemic, several organisations strive to excite their staff and alleviate their worries in order to keep them happy.

CEAT employed fitness coaches to keep staff and their families engaged during downtime through podcasts and live calls. Dutta’s (2020) article describes digital learning programmes for workers to improve their skills during a lockdown. Organizations may equip digital staff for the future by generating learning opportunities, giving numerous tools for continuous professional advancement, and keeping employees motivated throughout this difficult moment. During the COVID-19 epidemic, Singh (2020a) said that organisations must prioritise employee involvement. According to the article, workers are inspired and devoted to the business when they have meaningful work and organisations consistently provide them with opportunities for advancement. Engaging remote workers fosters an open atmosphere in which staff may learn new ideas. Employee engagement programmes increase curiosity and assist in bringing out the ingenious and creative aspects of the workforce. As a result, during difficult times, firms must implement effective employee engagement strategies.

Goyal, Trivedi, Nandwani, Changulani, and Lokhandwala (2020) proposed and outlined many methods for increasing staff involvement during the lockdown. Weekly alignment sessions, team meetups, entire team gathering over video conference for lunch, short online game sessions, virtual challenges and competitions, 5 minute informal talks, shared content such as TED Talks, books, online courses, and brainstorming focus; aha; apology and appreciation session, communication exercise, ditch a task, map of alignment, and emphasising results over timelines are examples of these.

Singh (2020b) emphasised the numerous challenges that workers are dealing with during this difficult period. According to the article, companies must recognise their employees’ stress levels at this tough time; there should be an open environment and effective communication channels so employees can come forward to share the challenges they are facing. Most companies organise competitions, challenges, and hackathons for their employees. Companies are

continuously reviewing employee well-being and providing solutions that promote a good work-life balance. During this period, businesses prioritise employee learning and development. Most organisations are using webinars and live sessions for new skill training, as well as online counselling sessions, to assist workers in remaining safe and healthy at home.

According to Anand (2020), lockdown has created significant disruption across the globe since billions of individuals have become self-isolated in their houses. This article offered four suggestions for improving staff engagement during the lockdown. Create reliable communication methods, such as chat platforms, video conferencing, and email. Employee appreciation, recognition, and acknowledgement are critical at this difficult time. Maintain flexibility. Employees will need to take time off to prepare meals, spend time with their children, and do domestic duties. Businesses should schedule virtual meetings with their staff.

Nair (2020) investigated how Capgemini is running various employee engagement programmes during this challenging period. Capgemini implements structured employee engagement programmes such as constant communication with employees via video messages from company leadership; creating and maintaining social networks in virtual communities; creating a sense of belonging; arranging counselling services for employees; conducting webinars dealing with anxiety and stress; sharing best practises for maintaining health and hygiene; and providing guidance for exercise and meditation.

Bhardwaj (2020) emphasised Cars24's efforts to increase staff engagement and foster a feeling of belonging to the organisation. Cars24 hosts a variety of activities, such as challenges such as sharing a picture with your pet, a selfie with your family, fun awards, and "Know Your Leaders," in which employees are quizzed on their general knowledge of the leaders; mental fitness and meditation online classes; a hidden talent show; virtual karaoke challenge; virtual campfire challenge; fostering team spirit; video calls; and various online group challenges to boost employee morale and engagement.

Brunswick Group (Metts, 2020) said that organisations must build employee engagement and communication programmes to maintain morale and

keep their employees engaged with one another. Allow for weekly employee video conferences or conference calls, remind colleagues to take extra precautions against potential data breaches and other cybersecurity issues, and encourage employees to share their work-from-home experience and tips—what they find difficult and how to stay focused and productive. Fallon (2020) expands on teamwork during the coronavirus pandemic. This article discusses several methods for keeping staff interested, such as keeping people informed via open communication, planning effective presentations, and filming everyone. Leaders model effective remote work practises, minimise micromanaging, maintain positive social contacts in the virtual office, and solicit employee input on how they are feeling.

Hasan (2020) described the numerous ways organisations are responding to COVID-19 by servicing their workers. Amway is continuing with earlier plans for raises, promotions, and recognition. The corporation has developed virtual engagement programmes such as external webinars to acquire new skills, as well as employee medicalclaim plans that will cover COVID-19 treatment expenses. Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages has established a virtual employee engagement initiative to engage workers' colleagues and family members online for physical and emotional wellbeing.

McDonald's India has digitalized many of its classroom training modules and provided e-learning courses, quizzes, master classes by management, and many more unique learning sessions that workers may access on their phones while at home in quarantine. Clix Capital is also hosting live sessions on its learning platform, and ITC Hotels has rolled out a number of elearning courses targeted at specific roles and levels through primary channels of elearning to provide an opportunity for self-learning that can be accentuated through anytime app-based hosting.

Various firms are engaging their workers in highly inventive and creative ways to keep them pleased and dedicated to the company. During this terrible period of the epidemic, it is critical to implement staff engagement practises.

6.0 Conclusion

Employee engagement has become critical in today's pandemic situation owing to COVID 19. In this present state of lockdown, gaining the top

position without the backing of your staff would be a pipe dream. Organizations understand that engaged people are the key to success in this difficult time. That is why firms must look ahead to keeping their workers pleased and engaged via employee engagement during pandemic situations. Establishing employee engagement measures with the assistance of technology is critical for the success of firms in the present circumstances.

Numerous companies nowadays are developing numerous employee engagement practises such as virtual team meetups, virtual learning and development, conducting weekly alignment online sessions, webinars with industry experts, and also webinars for anxiety and stress management; online team building activities; online family engagement practises; brainstorming; apology; and appreciation online sessions; shared content such as TED Talks; online books; online courses; and live sessions for anxiety and stress management. Online exercise and meditation guidance; online employee recognition and acknowledgement; online employee feedback; short online game sessions; virtual challenges and competitions; entire team gathers via video conference for lunch; online counselling sessions; and social interactions in the virtual office Employee morale is boosted by these types of engagement practises, and workers feel driven and dedicated to the organisation in this pandemic scenario caused by the coronavirus. All organisations should create unique and imaginative employee engagement initiatives during this challenging epidemic era. in order to keep workers motivated, engaged, devoted, happy, and joyous throughout this difficult period. Working from home is quite important today; it would only be effective with the support of internet activities. To remain competitive during this difficult period, organisations should use an online practise method. Companies should prioritise virtual relationships in order to increase employee engagement. Engaged personnel always attain their goals with ease. Management should also consider how to engage people in order to foster a healthy organisational culture. Organizations must also understand what drives and inspires workers to be interested in their job.

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