



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (A CASE STUDY OF NEST GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, CHENNAI).

M. Nagalakshmi and Prof. G. V. Chalam

Ph.D Scholar, Professor in Commerce & Business Administration, India.

ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is playing a significant role in the present HR practices employed by companies. Due to the advent of globalization and the plenty of availability of working options available to employees they are shifting from one job to another, often leaving the organization and the management panicking. Companies are a victim of their own inefficient practices in recruitment, Selection, training and retention, thus the study gains plenty of relevance in the present situation. The Sector chosen for study is that of educational services and the business processing outsourcing Sector. Recent surveys conducted by various job web sites indicate that the employee turnover in the industry is pretty high and retention practices in the industry are poor and thus the study gains importance.

The article “A Study on the employee engagement activities observed in Educational services Industry a case study in Nest Education Services, Chennai” is a classic example of the problems faced by organizations because of the lack of sound employee engagement practices. The author got curious because of the great frequency of advertisements released by the company for recruiting man power. The Company in question is an upcoming, 500 Crore + company engaged in producing quality educational content for K-12 segment. With more than 1200 employees engaged at different levels of academic content production, quality control,

editing, customer support, HR and Administration wings the company has fast gained the reputation of a quality content provider in the K 12 segment.

In order to conduct the study a sample of 100 employees are chosen from various divisions of the organization. The employees are chosen in various age groups starting from 21 years to 55 years, a combination of both male and female workers are chosen in the ratio of 58:42, and equal proportion from top line executives to bottom line workers. The research is conducted by using a combination of various instruments such as personal interviews with the employees and the HR regarding the Employee engagement practices. The article contains a brief introduction of the article and the company, the problem at hand, the study observations, the study findings and suggestions.

Key words: Employee Engagement, Job Definition, Recruitment, Training.

Introduction

Employee engagement in the present days has become a major worry for the HR managers to cope up with because employee engagement calls for keeping the employee involved in the work and working in line with the organizations objectives at all times. If the employees get deviated from the organizations objectives then it becomes a big hindrance.

“Employee engagement is the process of involving the workforce in the jobs to face work life challenges constantly and yet to keep them happy all the time” (Stephen. P. Robbins, 2007). Most often employee engagement has been defined as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006; and Shaw, 2005).

Robbins definition of employee engagement sets the tone for the backdrop for the study as Employee engagement in traditional organizations, especially in countries like India, with varied cultural and traditional backdrops is an extremely difficult task for the Human Resource Managers. In traditional organizations most of the employees come from rural backdrops and with little education and awareness. They will not be in a position to understand the changing industry environment and the need to compete. They do not appreciate changes in their jobs as well. Most of the time they like jobs which are repetitive and which do not require much of innovation and change. In such a situation aligning the organization goals and individual goals

and making the employees work as per the changing needs of the organization is herculean task for any Human Resource Professional.

The article is a result of the extensive research conducted by the author on the said organization and the employee engagement practices in use. Thus the concept of employee engagement is gaining in popularity these days. The industry chosen for study is NEST Global Educational Services Provider, Chennai.

Conceptual Background

Employee engagement is a concept which is interconnected with all most all the aspects of HR starting from recruitment and selection to employee retention. The conceptual relation of employee engagement with the HRM is defined as shown below:

*. **Recruitment and Selection:** Recruitment and selection of the employees plays a key role in employee engagement, if the right employee with the right frameset is not recruited then the objectives of the employee might differ, thus creating problems for the management in aligning the worker to the job.

*. **Placement:** If the employee is not placed in the right setting by creating all the facilities required then the frame of mind of the employee may deviate from the goals and objectives of the organization and the employee will not be in a position to offer his best performance.

*. **Performance Evaluation:** The best indicator for good employee engagement is improved output of performance from the employee, thus , it is important to study performances of employees in order to identify if there is improvement in performance to judge the effectiveness of employee engagement.

*. **Training:** In case there are performance deviation then corrective measures, in terms of employee training and retraining are to be initiated.

*. **Employee compensation and Grievance handling:** Another classic example to understand the effectiveness of employee engagement is good compensatory system and the existence of a grievance handling procedure, both are necessary to create a happy employee and a happy employee will be involving better in the job.

These are the various components in HRM which are closely associated with Employee engagement and they generate the study objectives as follows:

Literature Review

In order to understand the importance of employee engagement in the present HR Scenario in India and the influence of various factors such as recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and employee retention on employee engagement the author had referred to several research and scholarly articles on employee engagement.

The author had referred to an article by Rica Bhattacharya regarding the training and retention strategies used by KPMG to cut down on its employee attrition rate. The main objectives of the article is cut down the employee attrition by using “Employee Specific Training programs and by improving employee working standards in the organization. Employees will not feel the stress of handling challenging assignments anymore and we expect them to stay back in the company for a long time”. (Rica Bhattacharya, Times of India).

In an article published in the Hindu, Neha Alwadhi writes about the various employee friendly employee engagement policies and measures implemented by Infosys. Infosys was able to cut down the attrition rate to 15%. The main objective of the study is to arrest the high percentage of employee attrition in Infosys. (Neha Alwadhi, 2015).

The author had also referred to a media presentation given by Ms. Swetha Pillai, head of HR, KPMG, who declare that the company is moving away from bell shaped performance appraisals by going for more linear approaches so as to encourage a more collaborative work approach and collaborative performance discussions among employees”(Rica Bhattacharya, 2015).

The author had referred to a scholarly article by Ms. Prachi Verma on the best employment practices by Indian companies without spending too much of money. The main objective of the article is to highlight the importance of introducing employee friendly practices such as recreation facilities, paid vacations etc (Prachi Verma, HR Digest, 2014).

Also, the author had referred to recent news article about Reliance Industries using Prime Ministers “Mann Ki Baat” program to motivate its employees. The company believes that PM’s speech will boost the performance of the employees.

The article planned by the author is different from the literary works cited above in many ways. Firstly the article differs from the rest by conducting a research into the recruitment and retention failures of the company. Secondly the article aims to offer a more comprehensive approach to the study by focusing on a variety of factors and their impact on employee performance.

Employee engagement is a complex, broad construct that subsumes many well researched ideas such as commitment, satisfaction, loyalty and extra role behavior. An engaged employee extends themselves to meet the organization's needs, takes initiative, reinforces and supports the organization's culture and values, stays focused and vigilant, and believes he/she can make a difference (Macey, 2006). In practice, organizations typically define engagement as being a part of the organization, having pride and loyalty in the company, being committed, and going "above and beyond the call of duty".

Research Gap

Although plenty of research has been done in understanding the employee engagement practices in India there is a clearly lack of focus in finding out the various factors impacting employee engagement in India. For example high employee turnover is identified as due to bad employee engagement and the reasons for high employee turnover were not identified. Thus there is a research gap which encouraged the researcher to study the various factors impacting employee engagement.

Profile of the organization

Nest Academic Services was established with the objective of offering quality educational teaching, material and provide them with questions for testing the learning. The whole objective of the E – learning services provider is to bring quality educational facilities to student's doorstep. For self starters and students who can use internet based learning the company will be a good choice to get educated.

Started in the year 2005 and with a capital of less than Rs. 20 Lakhs, the company during the years had expanded its operations to more than 8 cities in India with a turnover of more than Rs.200 Crores and offering its services to more than 7.6 Lakhs children in India and abroad.

With a workforce of more than 1800 employees across the 8 centers the company is fast gaining the reputation of E- learning services provider.

The Company offers its services in different areas such as teacher training, conducting interactive learning with students, supplying them with e-learning material, e-question banks and conducts online examinations for different courses.

One of the biggest problems for the company ever since its inception is the availability of quality trainers, content developers, reviewers and editors. Sometimes employee turnover has reached as high as 60 %.

Though the company gets quality trainers and other development employees the biggest challenge for the company is to retain them. A yearly press release issued by the HR Ministry of India named “Industry and Employability in Digital India” indicate that educational services, especially e- learning services as one of the rapidly developing in India and plenty of employment opportunities available in this sector employees move to other companies who are paying a better salary and offering better facilities.

Thus the company is facing the problems in recruiting the right people, training them because of the technicalities involved in the job and retaining them.

The need for the study in the said organization thus arose to address the HR issues related to employee engagement.

Study Objectives

The objectives of the study are defined as given below:

- *. To study the role of HR function in the selected organization chosen for study
- *. To study the various training programs initiated by the company are reaping the deserved dividends.
- *. To assess whether the salaries and other perks offered are on par with the industry standards.
- *. To study whether the retention strategies used by the company are working correctly.
- *. To assess whether employee engagement is effective in the organization.

Study methodology

Study methodology involves preparation of selecting a sample, preparing a survey instrument, collection of data from respondents and data analysis. The sample for the study is of 100 respondents. The respondents are chosen in the ratio of 58: 42 male to female ratio. Also, the respondents are chosen from a starting age of 21 to 55 years.

Survey instrument used

A questionnaire prepared in Telugu as well as English is used to collect data from various respondents. However, in some cases, where, the employees did not have the time to fill up the questionnaire, interview technique is used and the answers for the questions were filled up by the researcher.

Collection of data:

Primary data:

Primary data is collected by administering the questionnaire and the study is conducted in a stress free environment during Tea breaks and during the employee's journey back home, in the office bus. It is done primarily with the intention to obtain the correct information.

Secondary data:

Collection of secondary data is done primarily from News paper articles and two scholarly articles which highlight the importance of the study topic "Employee Engagement", also concept regarding HRM and employee engagement are collected from Text books on HRM.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher had taken into count three important HR functions which are primarily connected with Employee Engagement and tried to find out the impact of the functions on employee engagement.

In order to find out the impact on employee engagement the researcher had taken into count the turnover rate of the employees, the recruitment and selection of employees, training and development programs conducted by the organization, retention programs initiated by the organization.

The educational services industry (E – services and the BPO industry) is a victim of high employee turnover ever since it is born in India, this is primarily because of the difference in work cultures, time based work assignments and the high level of professionalism and communication skills required. Many newly joined employees find this tough to cope up with the pressures of the job and leave their jobs.

The following table contains the employee turnover rate observed in the organization for the last five years and the data is analyzed as given below

Employee turnover rate in the selected company during the period of study from 2010 to 2014

S. No	Year	Women %	Men %	Industry rate %
1	2010-11	54	41	38
2	2011-12	57	42	36
3	2012-13	58	41	38
4	2013-14	64	48	41
5	2014-15	65	52	42

Source: (Information is gathered from the survey data collected from the employees)

Employee turnover rate data is presented in the form of a table of the company selected for study during the period of study from 2010 to 2014. From the above table it is evident from that the employee turnover of the industry itself is quite high the employee turnover percentage in the company for the last five years is quite alarming.

When enquired about the reasons for the high employee turnover the chosen sample of respondents opined that the high employee turnover is due to reasons such as high work pressure, difference in shift timings etc.

The employee turnover of women is very high because of the rule to work in night shifts, lack of security and surveillance during night shifts etc. An article on “Employee retention strategies used in KPMG” by Rica Bhattacharya published in Times of India highlights the need for creating a stress free environment which helps in retaining the employees for a long time.

Division of the sample respondents based on demographic factors

S. No	Factor	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Age		
	20 -30 Years	48	48
	30 -40 Years	36	36
	40 -50 Years	16	16
2	Gender		
	Men	43	43
	Women	57	57
3	Experience		
	Less than Five Years	64	64
	5 -10 Years	14	14
	10 -15 Years	18	18
	15 -20 Years	4	4
4	Cadre		
	Executive	76	76
	Team Leader	13	13
	Operations Manager	1	1

It can be seen from the above data, that a large number of respondents are primarily chosen from the executive cadre, with less than 5 years of experience and most of them are below 30 years of age. This is because of the fact that most of the employees leaving the organization are from the entry level positions and the number of staff manning the higher positions is considerably less in the industry chosen for study.

Also in order to understand the profile of the respondents better data pertaining to their geographical back ground has been collected and are they are classified into two categories. respondents belonging to urban and rural localities. The data is presented in the form of a table as given below:

Division of respondents based on Geographical location

S. No	Native Location	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Urban	45	45
2	Rural	55	55

The table indicates that a large number of respondents have come from rural background when compared with the number of employees from urban background.

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Employees Opinion regarding training and development programs organized in the Selected Company during the study period 2014.

S. No	Number of program initiated	Opinions of the employees regarding the training programs offered	Men	Women
1	28	Excellent	34	32
2	Including Employee orientation, training and retraining	Good	22	20
3		Satisfactory	38	36
4		Not Satisfactory		
5		Can't be decided	16	22

(Source : Data Collected from the survey data collected from the employees)

Opinions of the employees with regards to the training were collected from the selected company for the year 2014 and is presented in the form of a table 2. From the above table it is evident that the organization had conducted quite a lot of training programs but the employee's opinion regarding the usefulness is mediocre as quite a less number of employees, 34 % of the men employees and 32 % of women employees feel that the usefulness of the training programs is quite good.

The impact of training programs on the employees and their usefulness to the employees is not satisfactory as nearly 38% of the men employees and 36 % of the women employees feel that the usefulness of the training is average. They opined that the training programs were not able to reduce the stress in the job and improve their job performance.

In an article written for HR Digest, 2014 Prachi Verma stresses the need for organizations to organize certain motivational programs such as PM's "Mann Ki Baat". Thus the organization needs to conduct innovative programs which can motivate the employees.

Employee retention in the selected company from 2010 to 2014

S. No	Employee retention	Men	Women
1	2010-11	52	49
2	2011-12	52	52
3	2012-13	42	48
4	2013-14	38	42
5	2014-15	36	38

(Source : Information gathered from company news and articles published in Journals)

Data regarding the employee retention rate from the year 2010 to 2014 of the selected company is presented in the form of a table 3. The table indicates that the company is having trouble in retaining employees for longer periods. The percentage of Men employees working from 2010 onwards is standing at a healthy 52 % while the percentage showed a great decline by the year 2014 by standing at 36%. Similarly the percentage of women employees retained during 2010 stands at a good percentage of 49 % while in 2014 it has come down to 38 %.

The table indicates the great need for the organization to employ some of the employee retention strategies suggested by Ms.Prachi Verma in her Scholarly article published in HR Digest in 2014 and Ms. Rica Bhattacharya published in Times of India in 2014.

Employee’s opinions regarding the various schemes /employee friendly schemes initiated by the company / needed for the company.

S. No	Factor	Opinion of men employees regarding the programs to be initiated	Opinion of Women employees regarding the programs to be initiated
1	Paid vacation	98	98
2	Work from Home when necessary	70	75
3	Employee recreation programs	85	87
4	Pay Hike	97	98
5	Performance Bonus	88	90

(Source: Data gathered from survey data collected from employees)

Data regarding the employee’s opinion about the various employee friendly initiatives suggested by the employees of the selected company is presented in the form of a table 4.

The table shows a number of programs to be initiated by the company and programs in use by the company. The results indicate a very high degree of positive response for such programs

Present day employees are looking for changes in the work culture from that of over worked less paid employee to a well paid and a job with a good quality of work life. The table indicates the urgent need for the organization to introduce some of the innovative measures by KPMG, Infosys etc.

Conclusion

The article made an attempt to probe into the depths of employee engagement practices in use by Nest Educational services and the article highlights the shortcomings of the company in terms of failure of employee engagement practices which resulted in failure of recruitment, training and employee retention. The article suggests the need to improve employee engagement practices which can help the company in improving its employees for a long time and get better results.

Findings of the study

01. When enquired about the reasons for the high employee turnover the chosen sample of respondents opined that the high employee turnover is due to reasons such as high work pressure, difference in shift timings, high level of technical knowledge required in the job etc.

The employee turnover of women is very high because of the rule to work in night shifts, lack of security and surveillance during night shifts etc.

02. The impact of training programs on the employees and their usefulness to the employees is not satisfactory as nearly 38% of the employees feel that the usefulness of the training is average. They opined that the training programs were not able to reduce the stress in the job and improve their job performance.

03. The improvement is a result of the vigorous training and development programs the organization is conducting and the remarkable change in the company's attitude towards employees, the company is changing to a more employee friendly work culture.

The following table indicates employee's opinions regarding various employee friendly initiatives in use / to be implemented by the company.

Suggestions

01. The Findings indicate the need to improve the quality of work life by introducing a variety of employee friendly programs which can improve the employee engagement practices in use by the company.

02. The Company needs to cut down on the employee turnover by introducing personality development and programs for better employee engagement.
03. The study indicates the urgent need for the company to initiate better employee engagement practices.

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