iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 5 **Issue:** XI **Month of publication:** November 2017

DOI:

www.ijraset.com

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor:6.887
Volume 5 Issue XI November 2017- Available at www.ijraset.com

Work Antecedents of Employee Engagement in IT Sector

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Abstract: Employee engagement can be regarded as the emotional connection an employee feels toward his or her employment organization, which tends to influence his or her behaviors and level of effort in work related activities. The objective of the study is to determine the work antecedents of employee engagement. The work antecedents considered in the study are perceived role benefits, job autonomy and strategic attention. Sample comprises of 129 employees of it industry. Simple linear regression was used to analyze the data. The results prove that all the three work antecedents were proved to positively predict employee engagement. Perceived role benefit and job autonomy are the major predictors of employee engagement. Hence the organization needs to emphasis on providing a growth focused work environment for the employees to become more engaged.
Keywords: Employee engagement, perceived role benefit, job autonomy, strategic attention, employees, it industry

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become a progressively pervasive concern for employers as well as employees in an organization. Specifically in IT industry which is wholly dependent on human resources and their knowledge, it is important to focus on employee engagement to elevate the performance and commitment of the employees. The current instability and decrease in the onsite opportunities in IT industry have affected the employee's involvement to a considerable level. Consequently, with the decrease in involvement and commitment, employees have started to look for other alternatives in their career life. As a result, initiatives such as flexibility in choosing the technology in which an employee is going to work, flexible working hours, leave policies and employee assistance programs have become a significant part of most of the company benefit programs and compensation packages. In the present scenario business companies are making use of advanced techniques of operation. As intricacy of technologies continues to evolve, it develops additional challenges for managers since it will increase the need of employees with better technical and professional skills. These expert workers cannot be managed with traditional styles of dictatorial management. Employees expect operational autonomy, strategic attention and role benefits of the job they do. Due to these facts that attention of managers is shifting towards employees' side of organizations. Managers' focus on how to keep employees engaged in their job. Employers now realize that by focusing on employee engagement, they can create more competent and prolific workforce. Any initiatives for development taken by the management will not be fruitful unless they have willful involvement and engagement of employees. Employee engagement as a concept is massive. This article limits itself to determine and verify the work based antecedents of employee engagement. The antecedents considered in this study are perceived role benefit, job autonomy and strategic attention.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kahn (1990) developed employee engagement as a construct which means getting oneself absorbed in work without noting the time. It is the employee's enthusiasm, devotion and readiness to invest their time by engrossing themselves into work.Kahn stated that there are three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement namely Meaningfulness, Safety and Availability.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) define engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized with vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor denotes the level of vitality and psychological resilience while working, the inclination to invest effort in one's work, and perseverance in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption captures the state of being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby one perceives time to pass quickly and has difficulties detaching oneself from work. In this study engagement is defined in line with Schaufeli et al. (2002).

Workers are found to be more engaged when they were in situations that offered greater meaning for the work they do and when felt psychologically safe. Although engagement shares some elements with these constructs, especially job involvement and flow,

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engagement differs from these established constructs. Moreover, studies have shown that the concept of engagement differs both theoretically and empirically from concepts such as job involvement and organizational commitment.

In latest years, there is a remarkable increase in the research interest of employee engagement and its role in work performance and competitive advantage (Kular et al., 2008). Previously, various studies have noted that employee engagement is able to predict employee turnover intention, employee productivity, financial performance, customer satisfaction, and so forth (Richman, 2006). Employee engagement has emerged as a critical element for business success. It has now been the need of the hour to do more empirical research on employee engagement and its work antecedents in IT industry to retain talents. The below listed are the work related antecedents of employee engagement considered in this study.

A. Perceived role benefit

Perceived role benefit, is a construct derived from role theory. Katz and Kahn (1978) have defined roles as sets of behaviours that are expected of a person in a certain job position. Additionally, according to role theory, when an individual is not able to fulfil the expectations associated with the work roles that is expected to achieve, this person will experience stress, or, more precisely, role stress. This study focuses onemployee's perception towards the benefit of status enhancement. More specifically, these study emphases on individual perceptions of career opportunities and professional visibility as being two resources that work role provide. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that an individual perceives these resources as being meaningful contributes to engagement in the work role. The contrary is also possible: an individual who perceives the mentioned resources as being pointless contributes to disengagement in the work role. The positive benefit of multiple work roles stated by Sieber (1974) are Role privileges, Overall status security, Enrichment of the personality and ego gratification and Resources for status enhancement. A person's perception of role benefits is able to enhance the engagement of employees in the work role. Accordingly, in this study employees' perceived role benefit is positively linked to employee engagement.

B. Job autonomy

The five core characteristics of any job identified by Hackman and Oldham (1980) are skill variety, task identify, task significance, feedback and autonomy. These five core characteristics are stated as job resources. This study limits its attention on job autonomy and its relationship with employee engagement. Job autonomy denotes to the freedom and independence given to the people while performing the tasks (Zhou and Shalley, 2008). Previous research has found that job autonomy is linked to certain factors related to employee engagement, such as the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to a work task (Gagne and Deci, 2005), intrinsic job motivation (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), and individual development (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) have examined how job autonomy was linked to work engagement and financial returns and found that job autonomy predicts financial returns through work engagement (mediator). Study by Schaufeli et al. (2008) of managers and executives was to reveal whether job resources (including job autonomy) were predictive of engagement and the results reveal that job autonomy was a positive predictor of work engagement. Based on these, in this study we have studied the positive effect of job autonomy on employee engagement.

C. Strategic attention

Strategic attention refers to how the firm's strategy serves as a guiding principle for the employees in their work role. Day (1999, p. 39) has stated this guiding principle as supportability, which refers to prospects of conditions that must be satisfied before a strategy can achieve results. Day (1999) defined strategy as directional which includes activities to deliver a precise value proposition to gain the maximum competitive advantage. According to Day (1999, p. 10), every employee in the organization contributes to the strategy. Strategy should be goal-oriented, that is a strategy should integrate the motivational aspect of reaching the goals. There should be a close link between strategy as a plan and strategy as an act. Strategy is about how to accomplish and sustain a reasonable level of performance which ensures survival in the future. Taking this into consideration, this study assumes that employee's strategic attention is a driver to engagement; specifically, the more a person perceives a match between the strategy and their contribution towards the strategy, more engaged the person will be.

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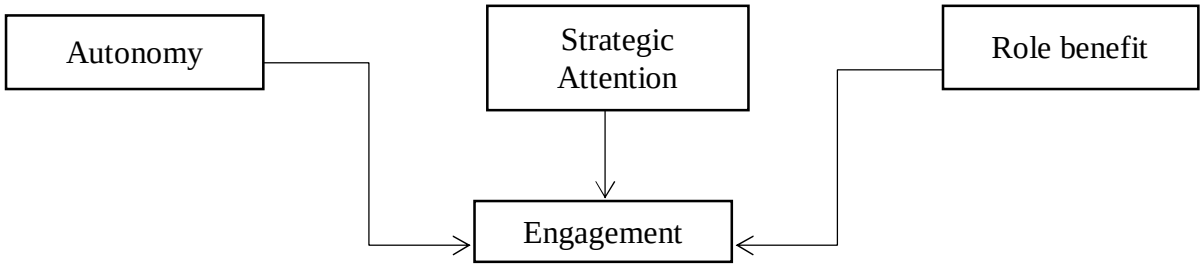

Fig 1.1 Antecedents of Employee Engagement

Some of the previous studies based on which the model was developed is mentioned below.

Luthans and Peterson (2002) suggest that both employee engagement and manager self-efficacy are important antecedents that together may more positively influence manager effectiveness. Roberts and Davenport (2002) suggest that people who are engaged in their jobs- those who are enthusiastic and involved in their day to day work – tend to do better work. This statement makes intuitive sense of most people.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) made a study that focuses on burnout and its positive antipode, engagement. A model was tested in which burnout and engagement has different predictors and different possible consequences. Results confirm the hypothesized model indicating that: (1) burnout and engagement are negatively related; (2) burnout is mainly predicted by job demands but also by lack of job resources, whereas engagement is exclusively predicted by available job resources; (3) burnout is related to health problems as well as to turnover intention, whereas engagement is related only to the latter; (4) burnout mediates the relationship between job demands and health problems, whereas engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and turnover intention.

Saks (2006) found that there is a meaningful difference between job and organization engagements and that perceived organizational support predicts both job and organization engagement; job characteristics predicts job engagement; and procedural justice predicts organization engagement. Kompaso and Sieve(2010) stated that if human resources is not taken care of in appropriate way, employees will fail to get engaged to their job in the response to mismanagement. The construct employee engagement is built on the foundation of earlier concepts like job satisfaction, employee commitment and Organizational citizenship behavior.

Grumana and Saks (2011) propose that increment in performance can be best achieved by focusing on performance management system which in turn will promote employee engagement. The authors describe a new approach to the performance management process which includes employee engagement and the key drivers of employee engagement at each stage. Inveigle and War (2011) suggest that the affective-motivational state of job engagement has been shown to differ between jobs with different characteristics, and they also examined the links with workers' personal attributes. Engagement was predicted to be a primary function of personality factors and sub-factors which match its affective and motivational elements, namely Emotional Stability, Extraversion and Conscientiousness

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected from the employees of Information Technology (IT) industry. The survey included a cover letter that informed participants about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that their responses would remain unidentified and confidential. The structured questionnaire was given to 150 employees and total of 129 surveys were returned with complete response representing a response rate of 86 percent. The demographic profile of the respondents are tabulated in Table 1

A. Measures

The structured questionnaire comprises of four sections. Items were written to assess participant's psychological presence in their job and organization. Participants indicated their response on a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree.The first section consists of questions related to employee engagement. The six items used for this constructs were taken from Schaufeli et al. (2002). The second section measured job autonomy with two items taken from Babakus et al. (2003). The third section measured strategic attention using two items from Liu (2006). The last section measured perceived role-benefit construct with two items from Leavened and Nelson (1993). All the items were modified fairly to fit the aim of the study.

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TABLE 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender:		
Male	68	52.71
Female	61	47.29
Level of management:		
Lower level	51	39.53
Middle level	68	52.71
Top level	10	7.75
Working Hours		
Less than 8 hours	4	3.10
8 - 9.5 hours	83	64.34
more than 9.5 hours	42	32.56
Years of experience		
0 - 3 years	67	51.94
3 - 5 years	29	22.48
5 - 7 years	19	14.73
More than 7 years	14	10.85
Annual Income		
0.5 - 2 lakhs	2	1.55
2 - 4 lakhs	50	38.76
4 - 6 lakhs	41	31.78
Above 6 lakhs	36	27.91

B. Data Analysis

The data analysis is done using IBM SPSS Statistics 19 version. Simple linear regression is done using the data collected to find the strength of the relationships between variables. The regression coefficient values for three independent variables are tabulated in Table2.

TABLE 2: Regression Values of following independent variables on Employee engagement

Model No.	Independent Variable	**β Coefficient**	**Standard Error**
1	Perceived Role benefit	0.465**	0.0554
2	Job Autonomy	0.419**	0.0616
3	Strategic Attention	0.328**	0.0708

IV. RESULTS

A. Employee Engagement and Role Benefit

R, the multiple correlation coefficients, indicates the quality of prediction of the dependent variable. In this model, R value of 0.60 indicates perceived role benefit is a good predictor of employee engagement. R^2, coefficient of determination, denotes the level of variation in dependent variable explained by independent variable. In this model, 35.70% of variance in employee engagement is explained by the perceived role benefit. Perceived role benefit is the significant ($p<0.000$) predictor of employee engagement with beta value of 0.47 which means perceived role benefit is a positive predictor of employee engagement.

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B. Employee Engagement and Job Autonomy

In this model, R value of 0.52 indicates Job autonomy is a good predictor of employee engagement. In this model, 26.74% of variance in employee engagement is explained by the job autonomy. Job autonomy is the significant ($p<0.000$) predictor of employee engagement with beta value of 0.42 which means job autonomy is a positive predictor of employee engagement.

C. Employee Engagement and Strategic Attention

In this model, R value of 0.38 indicates Strategic Attention is a good predictor of employee engagement. In this model, 14.4% of variance in employee engagement is explained by the Strategic Attention. Strategic Attention is the significant ($p<0.000$) predictor of employee engagement with beta value of 0.33 which means Strategic Attention is a positive predictor of employee engagement.

V. CONCLUSION

The earlier researches indicate that employee engagement is closely associated with performance outcomes of employees in an organisation. The organisations which seemed to have engaged employees are able to retain their employees which lead to increased productivity, profitability and organisational growth. Conversely, organisations with disengaged employees are to suffer from waste of effort and drained talent, less commitment from employees, increased absenteeism which will in turn lead to less customer orientation and less productivity. The noteworthy fact is, the findings of the present study, can be used as corner stone to build the complete essence employee engagement. Employee-perceived role benefit, job autonomy, and strategic attention were linked to employee engagement in this study and shows positive relations. These aspects of a job should be taken into account by the human resource manager in order to develop engaged employees. Employee engagement has great impact on the IT industry. An engaged employee will have enthusiasm and satisfaction toward his work. This will pave way for increase in productivity and innovative behavior. This will create a good working environment for all the employees thus taking the organization towards developing path.

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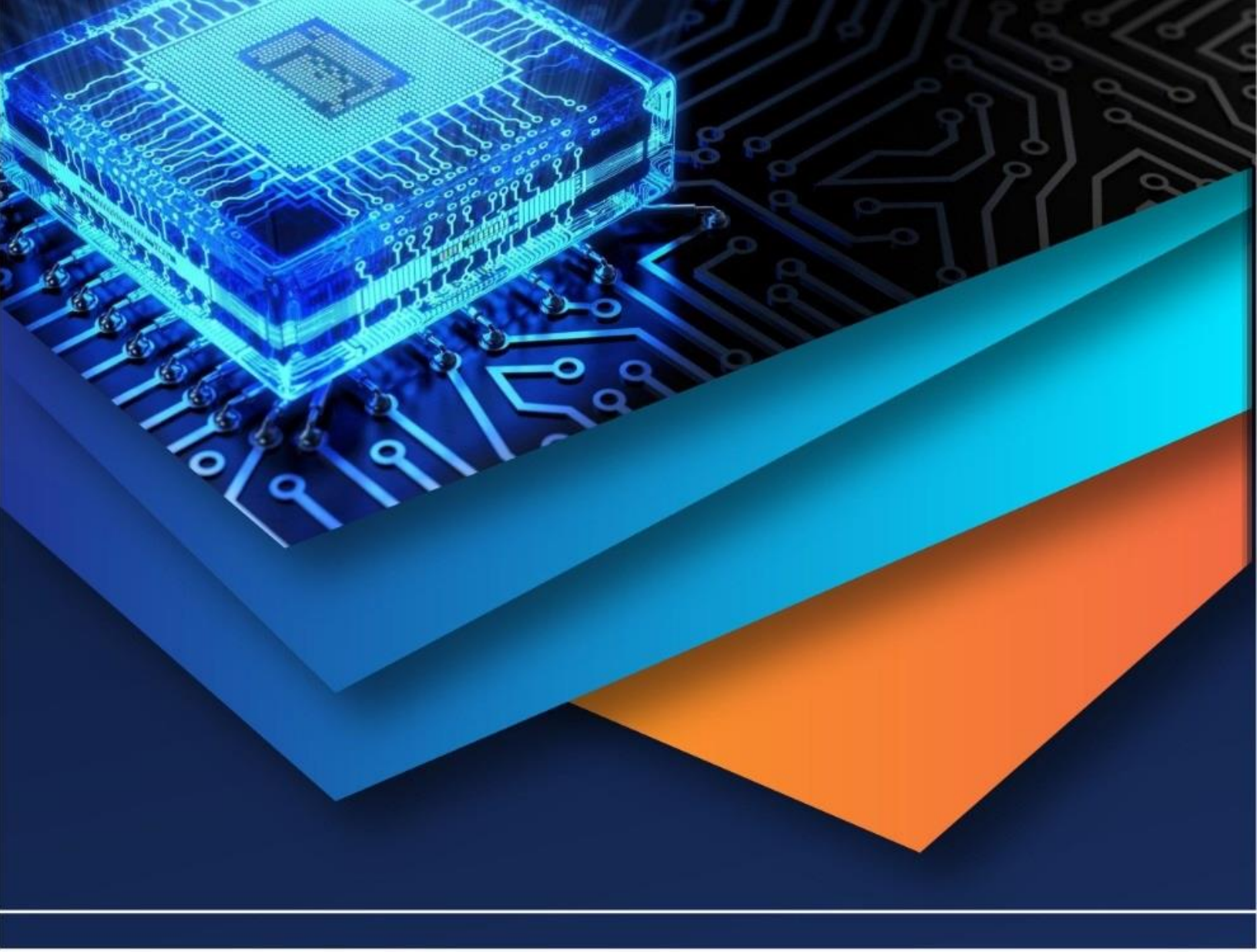

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