

Employee Engagement Among Blue Collar Workers: A Case Study of Vardhman Spinning and General Mill, Ludhiana

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Key Words:

1. Employee Engagement,
2. vigor,
3. dedication,
4. absorption.

Abstract

Gallup, Employee Engagement Survey, 2010 found that an actively disengaged employee leads to lost productivity that costs the U.S. economy \$370 billion annually. Today, employee engagement and loyalty are more vital than ever before to an organization's success and competitive advantage. Researchers have also found a statistical relationship between workplace engagement and desirable employee behavior. Till date most of the research on the topic of employee engagement has been carried out taking into consideration white collar employees. But there exists dearth of research for blue collar workforce, that too in Indian context. Thus the present study primarily aims at measuring the existing levels of employee engagement among blue collar workers of Vardhman Spinning and General Mill, Ludhiana. 22 percent of the workers were found to have below average level of engagement. 60 percent of the workers have shown average level of engagement. And 18 percent of the workers expressed above average level of engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Towers Perrin (2003) conducted a study of more than 35,000 employees in U.S. companies with at least 500 workers, and discovered that organizations with highly engaged workers on average experience on one hand at least 1% increase in revenue growth above industry average and on the other hand lower cost of goods sold compared to the Dow Jones' industry sector averages. Gallup, Employee Engagement Survey, 2010 found that an actively disengaged employee leads to lost productivity that costs the U.S. economy \$370 billion annually. Researchers have found a statistical relationship between workplace engagement and an organization's productivity, profitability, employee attendance and retention, a reduction in workers' compensation claims, safety, customer satisfaction, and constructs like job satisfaction and commitment (Little & Little, 2006). It is also argued that achieving satisfaction without engagement will have significantly less impact on business results as engaged employees are emotionally committed to working hard, demonstrating initiative and expending extra discretionary effort – and doing so in alignment with strategic priorities

to move the organization forward. Today, employee engagement and loyalty are more vital than ever before to an organization's success and competitive advantage. Earlier people used to prefer and get job for life. But today the high turnover rate indicates that the scenario has changed. Thus, the need of the hour is to engage and retain valuable employees as it has a significant impact on an organization's bottom line. To succeed and thrive in the today's tumultuous and rapid paced market, organizations need agile workforce which effectively adapt to and perform under changing business scenarios and circumstances (Schroeder & Saulnier, 2009). These needs can be fulfilled by adopting such Human resource management practices that aim at making workforce engaged. Till date most of the research on the topic of employee engagement has been carried out taking into consideration white collar employees. But there exists dearth of research for blue collar workforce, that too in Indian context. Thus the present study primarily aims at measuring the existing levels of employee engagement among blue collar workers of Vardhman Spinning and General Mill, Ludhiana.

Employee engagement

Employees' Engagement refers to how employees behaviourally apply themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances. Engagement is the

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degree and amount of involvement in the organisation, and disengagement is the degree of withdrawal (Kahn 1990). Gallup research group defined employee engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as, enthusiasm for work" (Little & Little, 2006). The Gallup organization categorized employees into three types on the basis of their levels of engagement based on its G12 employee engagement survey. Actively Engaged Workers were characterized by consistently high levels of performance, natural innovation and a drive for efficiency, intentional building of supportive efficiency, clear understanding about the desired outcomes for their roles, emotional commitment to what they do, high energy enthusiasm, commitment to their organization, work group and job. They have likely been identified as high-potential employees and feature prominently in their organization's succession planning process. Disengaged workers, on the other hand, view their jobs as an exchange of time for a paycheck. They arrive and leave on time, take their breaks, never volunteer for extra work or projects, and do little else in between beyond the minimal effort. Disengaged workers may have been actively engaged workers at one time. Somewhere along the way, though, they became disengaged because of a lack of career growth or promotion, a perception of salary inequity, job dislike, or distrust in their direct manager and senior management. Actively disengaged workers are the most damaging employees in the workplace. They are unhappy and let that unhappiness show in words, attitudes and actions. They undermine the performance of others by constantly voicing their displeasure and listing the many reasons why they are

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on primary data collected from a demographic slice of 100 workers selected primarily from the workers involved in production function at a Spinning Mill. The workers were interviewed personally and the responses were recorded accordingly. A well structured questionnaire composed of demographic details like age, gender, marital status, work shift and tenure of workers, statements related to job satisfaction and employee engagement has been prepared. The employee engagement scale comprised of 17 statements and response was sought in the form of a scale with response ranging from daily (7) to never (1). Majority of the respondents belonged to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and some from rural Punjab. So the instrument was translated into Hindi to enable workers understand and respond appropriately. The detailed demographic profile of the sample of respondents was as follows:

so miserable in their jobs.

For the purpose of the present study work engagement defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Salanova, in press; Schaufeli, et. al., 2002) has been used. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective- cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and Persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Finally, absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Maslach et. al., 2001). Thus, employee engagement is a positive attitude held by employees towards the organisation and its values. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee (Robinson et al., 2004).

Table 1 shows that the sample of workers surveyed were composed of 53 females and 47 males. Out of the total sample of 100 respondents 62 were married and 38 were single. With regard to qualification the workers were categorized as those who have not even qualified matriculation exams and the workers whose qualification was matriculation or above matriculation. Two shifts were

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variable		Frequency
Gender	Female	53
	Male	47
Marital status	Married	62
	Single	38
Qualification	Matric or above	54
	Below Matriculation	46
Workshift	Morning	78
	Night	22
Age	Minimum	18
	Maximum	52
Tenure:	Minimum	6 months
	Maximum	27 years



running – Morning and Evening at the mill. 78 respondents were from morning shift while 22 respondents were from evening shift. Respondent age varied from 18 years to 52 years with an average of 28.6 years. Tenure indicates the period for which a respondent has been working at Mill. The survey was restricted to the workers who have spent at least 6 months in the unit. Thus, the minimum tenure was 6 months and the maximum was 27 years, with an average of 5.27 years.

Employee Engagement Scale

For the present study shortened adapted version of Utrecht Employee Engagement scale (UWES) prepared by Schaufeli, W. B. et. al., 2006, was used to identify levels of workplace engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) includes the three aspects of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The three aspects, totaled 17 items: Vigor (VI, 6 items), Dedication (DE, 5 items), and Absorption (AB, 6 items) scales. The UWES is the most widely used and validated self-reporting instrument to measure engagement used in research around the world (Bakker et al., 2008). Vigor in the UWES engagement tool refers to high levels of energy, resilience, the willingness to invest effort, not easily fatigued, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication in the UWES engagement tool refers to deriving a sense of significance from a person's work, feeling enthusiastic, having pride about a person's job, feeling inspired, and challenged by a person's work. Absorption in the UWES engagement tool refers to being totally and happily immersed in a person's work, and having difficulties detaching oneself from a person's work so much so that

time passes quickly and a person forgets everything else that surrounds him or her (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to examine the results of the survey under the present study norm scores for the UWES-17 have been used. It has used five categories: 'very low', 'low', 'average', 'high' and 'very high'. Table 2 shows the norm scores corresponding to the categories and the percentage of workers under present study falling under the given categories. The recorded responses in the present study were classified into three categories below average, average and above average and can be summarized as 22 percent of the workers had below average level of engagement. 60 percent of the workers have shown average level of engagement. And 18 percent of the workers expressed above average level of engagement. Out of the employees falling in the category of below average level of engagement 2 percent had very low level of engagement that can be comparable to actively disengaged employees. Though a very small percentage of employees express very low level of engagement but need to be cautiously handled as such employees spread negativity among others and hence pose a threat.

An in depth analysis into the components of employee engagement and the percentage of workers falling in the five categories was done. It revealed that very low level of vigor was found among six percent workers. However dedication was very low among one percent of the workers surveyed, whereas none of them was reported to show very low level of absorption. The table 1 above indicates a

Table 2: Levels of engagement

Category	Vigor	Percent of workers	Dedication	Percent of workers	Absorption	Percent of workers	Total Score	Percent of workers
Very Low	=2.17	6	=1.60	1	=1.60	0	=1.93	2
Low	2.18 - 3.20	35	1.61 - 3.00	7	1.61 - 2.75	8	1.94 - 3.06	20
Average	3.21 - 4.80	44	3.01 - 4.90	71	2.76 - 4.40	66	3.07 - 4.66	60
High	4.81 - 5.60	15	4.91 - 5.79	21	4.41 - 5.35	24	4.67 - 5.53	18
Very High	=5.61	0	=5.80	0	=5.36	2	=5.54	0

major difference between the percentages of workers with low levels of vigor (35 percent), dedication (7 percent) and absorption (8 percent). An average level of vigor was prevalent among 44 percent, dedication among 71 percent and absorption among 66 percent of the workers. Above average level (high/very high) of vigor was found among 15 percent, dedication among 21 percent and absorption among 26 percent of the workers.

The survey conducted by way of structured personal interview gave an opportunity to the researchers to understand responses and interpret them. It was found that absorption as a part of work engagement construct was found to be widely prevalent among the workforce. This is mainly due to the nature of work that requires speed and efficiency and tendency to avoid accidents. The reason might be that the workers are well trained for keeping safety at the top priority and leave no room for accidents. The same is supported by the data regarding number of major injuries reported by the workers in the past one year which is found to be negligible. Also the workers are negatively reinforced to work with full attention, failing which may cause injuries and accidents. Thus employees' concern for safety at the workplace is found to be the major cause of high degree of absorption. With regard to the level of dedication among the workers the statement 'I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose' attracted the maximum score. The survey further revealed that the meaning for them was to earn livelihood for the family and education of their kids. The workers also expressed their feeling of pride in their work. The employee vigor was found to be below average among 41 percent of the workers, weakest among the three components and symptomatic of low employee engagement. It can be seen in table 1 that two percent of the workers show very low level of engagement and that too can be related to six percent of workers with very low level of vigor. It could mainly be due to the reasons that workers are already working for double shifts per day or even stretching beyond that too as a routine, due to labour shortage. Secondly most of the workers are migrants struggling hard to meet the challenges of life while staying away from home or even family.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Engaged employees can help your organization achieve its mission, execute its strategy and generate important business results. As per Gall Up study, 2012 overall, among the 142 countries included in the current Gallup study, 13% of employees are engaged in their jobs, while 63% are not engaged and 24% are actively disengaged. However, these results vary substantially among different

global regions. Gallup's 2012 data indicate that among Indians who work for an employer, 9% are engaged, while 31% are actively disengaged. The job types with extremely high proportions of actively disengaged employees in India were found to be 44% of construction and mining workers and 32% of manufacturing and production workers. The reason for employee engagement to be somewhat lower across countries among these industries was thought to be the traditional management mentality tends to put process ahead of people.

In the present study the existing levels of employee engagement among blue collar workers of Vardhman Spinning and General Mill, Ludhiana were measured. It has been found that 22 percent of the workers were in the category of below average level of engagement, 60 percent of the workers in average level of engagement, and 18 percent of the workers expressed above average level of engagement. It can be remarked that employee engagement levels at the unit present a picture that is better than the national estimates. But an in depth analysis into the components of employee engagement namely vigor, dedication and absorption revealed that employee vigor was weakest among the three components and symptomatic of low employee engagement. It could mainly be due to labour shortage, which in turn leaves majority of workers in the state of having overworked as a routine. Also majority of the male workers attend evening shifts to support females and allow them to work in the day time and hence it disturbs their own normal work routine leading to low vigor. On the other hand absorption as a part of work engagement construct was found to be widely prevalent among the workforce. The reasons attributable to such findings are organization's concern for safety at the workplace causing high degree of absorption. Though, findings for the unit under study are encouraging. Yet, it cannot be denied that there is always a room for improvement. In order to identify possible factors that could significantly contribute to work engagement there is a need to explore further.

VSGM draws its workforce from different parts of the country and hence among other possible contributories it needs to understand prevalent work culture. Indian work culture is characterized by an external locus of control (fatalism) and lower levels of ambition; a lack of urgency and a preference for established procedures; higher commitment to family and life roles than to the organization; and high power distance, paternalism and collectivist attitudes than in Western countries (Gopalan, & Rivera, 1997; Farndale et. al., 2011). In terms of culture,



people from India do not think of themselves as 'Indian' but from a particular province or town, speaking a particular language (not dialect), and with a particular religion (Varma, 2007). These characteristics are very important in the workplace and as a result, individuals seek small groups to identify with and are often mistrustful of other groups, as is common in collectivist societies. Thus, motivational tools in Indian organizations are also more likely to be social, interpersonal or even spiritual, with a focus on personalized relationships rather than performance (Kanungo, & Mendonca, 1994). Moreover, the world in which we live and work is comprised of human beings. And one language is learnt naturally by almost all that is mutual give and take. In other words care for the one who cares for you. Thus organizations seeking high levels of Employee Engagement among its workforce have it to show that they not only care for its workforce and its needs but also go beyond the minimum required conditions to be fulfilled. While it is not impossible to re-engage actively disengaged workers, it is really challenging. Letting employees know that senior leaders are aware of employee engagement levels and are committed to taking positive action to address it is a key step.

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