

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A CONCEPTUAL VIEW

Guneet Kaur
Assistant Professor,
Gitarattan International Business School

Abstract:

As per a recent study by Quantum Workplace, employee engagement has hit an eight year low which straight away means that one-third of the employees who turn up for work are not fully present mentally. One popular blog calls them the “working dead”. It is extremely important to understand this vital sideline as it can be detrimental to the organization’s success. Another article in the Fast Company estimated the value of employee disengagement to the US economy to be around \$370 a year. In a business scenario where inter-dependency is inherent, it is extremely important to communicate, cooperate and integrate processes in order to enhance competency. Emotional Intelligence is one phenomenon which has proven to benefit employees as well as managers to carry the right information, social cues and critical insights required to work as a team. EI increases one’s awareness of ability to understand self as well as others. Misreading behavior and emotionally-charged interactions can lead to a weak organization which cannot flourish in today’s business environment. EI training will improve crucial skills like decision-making, coping with stress and inter-personal skills. This would ultimately lead to increased employee engagement and better performance all around.

This paper endeavours to understand the conceptual connection between emotional intelligence and employee engagement and to focus on comprehending how emotional intelligence gives impetus to a much important management criteria employee engagement.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Emotional Intelligence, Workplace Performance, Business Environment, etc.

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence as a construct affects the vast arena of managerial effectiveness as it has proven to be a potential strength for work and organizational performance (Boyatzis, 2009). The second construct, Employee Engagement is termed as the mental and physical involvement into the organizational processes which are valued from a leadership perspective as well as employee commitment to the organization.

Emotional intelligence evolved from works by theorists like Gardner (1983) and Williams and Sternberg (1988), who proposed broader approaches to intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) were the first to coin the term “Emotional Intelligence” and included Gardner’s intrapersonal and interpersonal components in the construct. Goleman (1998) propagated the need for emotional intelligence in the business horizon as an effective tool for leadership and group performance.

EI has been identified as a key capability in building teams and synergizing their energy towards sustainability.

Emotional intelligence could definitely strengthen the current understanding of both emotions and intelligence (Sternberg 2001) and enhance our sense of functionality of human emotion and the breadth of human intelligence. During the 1980s, psychologists started accepting the idea of multiple intelligences along with an array of research on interaction between emotions and cognition. The topic drew worldwide attention from researchers by late 1990s because of this newly coined term and a new form of intelligence. By 2007 the wide diversity of those interested in EI came to be matched by the wide diversity in conceptions they employed. Some defined EI as a capability to reason with emotions, others correlated it with traits like achievement motivation, flexibility, happiness and self-regard. Still, some saw this random like the addition of such attribution to be complicated

and speculated if this abstract concept of emotional intelligence could be identified (Locke, 2005).

EI is considered to be a set of cognitive abilities (ability model), however, other dimensions combine capabilities along with a wide range of personality traits (mixed model). The most famous mixed model was proposed by Daniel Goleman (eg. 1995, 1998a) which includes 25 competencies segregated into 5 categories: self-awareness (emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence), self-regulation (self control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovation), motivation (achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism), empathy (understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity, political awareness) and social skills (influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, bond building, collaboration, team capabilities).

It leads to the conclusion that the four main aspects of EI: (a) appraisal and expression of emotions; (b) use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making (c) knowledge about emotions; and (d) management of emotions (George, 2000). The first aspect specifies the ability to exactly assess and express one's own emotions, knowing, and expressing others' emotions with empathy. The second dimension means the capability to use emotions to focus attention. The third implies the individual's knowledge of reasons and results of emotions, and how emotions progress over time. The fourth aspect encompasses the ability to manage and control emotions. This particular dimension showcases the individual's management of positive moods, to handle negative ones and to improve the management of other three ones. And also there is a strong linkage between these four dimensions.

A lot of research has been done on leadership and its impact because of EI. However, little has been done to know why some leaders have an inborn instinct for creativity while many don't. EI can influence the role of a leader in (a) encouraging a specific behaviour in leaders (b) facilitating leaders' behaviour to emotional and creative requirement (c) promoting a fruitful synergy between leaders and employees. This leads to free will of employees towards a commitment for creativity and enhance the human capital of the organization.

A previous model developed and validated by Rego and Fernandes, 2005 will be closely studied which consists of factor-structure on the basis of six dimensions (1) understanding one's emotions (2) self-control against criticism (3) self-encouragement (4) emotional self-control (5) empathy (6) understanding of other people's emotions. This research aims to show how these areas of a leader's EI explain the two dimensions of employee's

creativity. It is supposed that higher the EI of employees, the higher their creative ideas.

Understanding one's emotions

A leader who is able to understand his emotions clearly is more likely to establish and maintain supportive relationships with his employees. His behaviour will be more realistic in fostering the employee's trust and happiness. They are the role models for their subordinates becoming the beacon of reliability and respect. Employees will feel free under them to put forward any unconventional ideas and present conflicting suggestions without any fear of resentment. This self-understanding makes them extra careful about evaluating employees' ideas and decreased biasness. They can resist their negative emotions which doesn't shatter the trust and respect.

Self-control against criticism

Effective leaders with a good amount of control against criticism don't take comments and suggestions of their employees as personal attacks and are always available for accepting feedback and original ideas. They do not feel threatened by the changes that creative ideas may imply, are more inclined to welcome employees' creative suggestions, maintain high order relations with employees. They are most suitable for constructive criticism and feedback. This valuable information gives a chance to employee in improving their performance without pressure for a particular outcome. Intrinsic motivation is also enhanced which is a stimulant for creativity as a motivated person tends to be (a) curious and learning oriented (b) cognitively flexible (c) willing to take risks and (d) persistent in facing obstacles, challenges and opportunities.

Self-encouragement

Creatively inclined employees need consistency when facing hurdles in their path and encourage themselves

to develop unconventional ideas, which are new as well as useful. Self-encouraged leaders are able to nourish these strengths in employees and would view adverse situations in a more positive light. They would be willing to take more risks without fear of failure. Not only their own they also elevate the spirit of their team members and inspire them with more zeal, excitement and positivity. This kind of attention broadens the cognitive elements of association, thus increasing the probability of creative activities.

Emotional self-control

Going through the process of problem solving involves collaboration and interaction with co-workers. There may be disagreement which may give rise to emotional debates and personal conflicts which are toxic to creativity. Resonant leaders with a good sense of self control are effectively able to manage these conflicts and support the identification of a common goal or direction. Such leaders avoid conflicts and negative emotional explosions. In return, they get respect and a supportive team providing overall emotional safety to the whole team. It has a direct impact on risk taking capability.

Empathy

It is defined as the sensitivity of an individual about other's feelings and concerns. Leaders high in this deeply understand the values, worries, fears and positive emotions of their employees, to recognize and respond to changes in emotional states and to provide support when needed. Communication is respectful and appreciation of ideas is more. It cultivates a culture of positive moods and emotions making them more confident about the future enhancing creative thought and innovation problem solving.

Understanding other people's emotions

Leaders who know people's emotions can exactly perceive when employees

are getting frustrated and recover from setbacks from and disappointments, pinpointing the causes of those negative emotions and helping employees to become aware of the problem and adopt a proactive approach of creatively solving it. These leaders can also identify positive moods in employees and then nourish their optimism to envision opportunities for improvement.

Gender

Some literature also suggests that women score higher on measures of EI than men, while others suggest no difference. Some say gender moderates the relationship between EI and dependent variables. Like Rego & Fernandes (2005) found that understanding of one's emotions explains the health level of female students but not of male.

Employee Engagement

The challenge of engaging employees fully into their work and specifically with limited resources in this VUCA environment has earned a serious interest by business organizations. The key reason for the importance gained by employee engagement is the strategic perspective that every individual worker is committed towards contributing to the organization's overall performance (Truss et al., 2014). Initiated by William Kahn in 1990, there is a serious plethora of research going on in this area. It can be defined as the extent or degree to which employees commit to something or someone within the professional arena, their hard work and the duration of their persistence. It can be classified as a positive emotion that relies on objective setting and its strategic alignment but totally based on the rapport between the manager and his subordinate. Previous findings have established its major impact on organizational factors like job satisfaction, organizational commitment and employee's motive to sustain in the organization (De Clercq, Bouckenoghe, Raja & Matsyborska,

2014). The rationale behind genuine involvement of employees is affected by employee's feelings, ideas and perception about his job. Strong empirical research confirms that employee engagement is a unique psychological state (Albercht, 2010; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Truss et al., 2014).

The manager-subordinate relationship conveys a significant factor in overall organizational performance at each level. The climate and environment created by the management provide a conducive opportunity to the employees to nourish and display not only their talent but also their commitment and feelings towards their work and the organization as a whole. This scenario creates a psychologically happy and emotionally connected workforce. According to a study by Gallop in 2006, organizations with highest engagement scores averaged greater productivity by 18% if compared with lower scored companies.

Literature Review

Suehs studied if there is a correlation between frontline managers and supervisors' emotional intelligence and the degree of the engagement of their direct reports. Using non-experimental, quantitative analytics Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to determine the potential relationship between the emotional intelligence of 24 frontline managers and supervisors and employee engagement of their direct reports. Though a moderate favourable correlation was found with a Pearson r value of 0.39267 at a p value of 0.0577, the hypothesis was denied. Two studies using concurrent validation were conducted. 51 managers and executives were interviewed. Six executives were found out to be outstanding performers and 6 as above average. Eleven of them were categorised as average. Using the same method, 14 middle-level managers were identified as outstanding and

14 as above average. No middle-level managers were identified as average. Then behavioural interviews were conducted on managers in term of efficiency orientation, attention to detail, initiative, flexibility, self-confidence and planning. They were also coded for social competencies like empathy, persuasiveness; developing others, group management, networking, negotiating, oral communication and social objectivity. To measure cognitive skills, they were classified for concepts, systems thinking and pattern recognition. Inter-rater reliability among coders ranged from 0.70 to 0.96 with a mean of 0.89. The study resulted in identifying competencies significant for executives which were efficiency orientation, self-confidence, networking, systems thinking and pattern recognition. Near significant competencies identified for executives were initiative, oral communication and persuasiveness. And those competencies significant for middle managers were efficiency orientation and use of concepts, planning, empathy and group management. The second study involved 133 executives and managers out of which 22 executives and managers were classified as outstanding performers and 76 of them were classified as average performers. This study found some emotional intelligence competencies as significant: efficiency orientation, planning, attention to detail and flexibility. The social intelligence competencies identified were empathy, group management, negotiating, developing others, social objectivity, oral communication and persuasiveness. The cognitive intelligence competencies identified were systems thinking, the use of concepts, pattern recognition, quantitative analysis and written communications.

Brunetto et al. examined the impact of EI upon job satisfaction, well-being and engagement of police officers in explaining their orgn'l commitment and

turnover intentions. 193 police officers in Australia were studied using partial least square modelling method. As expected, eI was expected to lead to job satisfaction and well-being with positive path relationships leading to employee engagement and orgn'l commitment thereby affecting turnover intentions.

Cartwright and Holmes (2006) have studied the challenge of regaining employee engagement and reducing cynicism by understanding the need for redressing the work-life balance and the organizational need to recognize the meaning and emotional aspects of work.

Carmeli (2003) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and work attitudes, behaviour and outcomes among senior managers. Focusing on the importance of emotional intelligence for successful leadership impacting on the social skills of managers improving performance at personal as well as organizational levels. The study narrowed the scope by empirically testing the degree to which emotionally intelligent senior managers in public sector organizations develop high job satisfaction, career commitment, job involvement & effective commitment, diminish continuance commitment and work-family conflict, withdrawal intentions and better job performance. EI has proven to be positively associated with job satisfaction (Smith et.al 1969, p 6) displaying more positive moods and feelings that generate higher levels of satisfaction and well-being.

Luthans (2002) studied employee engagement and manager self-efficacy and its implications for managerial effectiveness and development. They understood the theoretical concept of employee engagement first and then an empirical investigation was done to find out managers' psychological state of self-efficacy and its role in employee engagement. This study suggests

that both employee engagement and manager self-efficacy are important antecedents that together very positively influence manager effectiveness.

Findings

After studying varying literature on Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement, this conceptual research concludes the factors reasonably identifying a connection between both in the following terms:

1. Employee engagement refers to high performance by the employee which is related to the self-regulation and self-awareness factor of Emotional Intelligence.
2. Employee engagement also means highly motivated employee which correlates to the self-awareness and motivation aspect of emotional intelligence.
3. Engagement manifests in empowered employees which can be if the social skills and self-awareness traits of an employee are high.
4. Where engagement is based on effective and strong manager-subordinate relationship which is directly or indirectly related to social skills.
5. Engagement should focus on strategic alignment within the organization which can be achieved by self-regulation, empathy and motivation found in emotional intelligence.
6. Delivering results is required by an engaged employee which is connected to self-regulation aspect of emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is rightly justified to say that there are many aspects where employee engagement is related to emotional intelligence. Working in an organization requires a lot from the employee side as well as from the management side. The endeavour is to be effective and efficiently coordinate

all processes and deliver results. Hence, we can have a better understanding of engagement if there is emotional intelligence in the human mind and the spirit of unity flourishes together combining all important aspects of an organization.

References

- Suehs, Derrick (2015). Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement: A Quantitative Study to Explore the Relationship between the Emotional Intelligence of Frontline Managers and Supervisors and the degree of Employee Engagement of their Direct Reports in a Tertiary Care Health Care Setting *Education Doctoral*. Paper 239.
- Brunetto, Y, Teo, STT, Shacklock, K, & Farr-Wharton, R 2012, 'Emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, well-being and engagement: explaining organisational commitment and turnover intentions in policing. *Human Resource Management Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 428-441.
- Cartwright, S. and Holmes, N. (2006). The Meaning of Work: The Challenge of Regaining Employee Engagement and Reducing Cynicism. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16,199-208.
- Abraham, Carmeli (2003). The relationship between emotional intelligence and work attitudes, behavior and outcomes: An examination among senior managers, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 18 Issue: 8, pp.788-813, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940310511881>
- Fred Luthans, Suzanne J. Peterson, (2002). Employee engagement and manager self-efficacy. *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 21 Issue: 5, pp.376-387, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710210426864>