

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

By

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Abstract

The period of COVID-19 brings some positivity in a few domains while some negativity in other domains of life of an employee. So, the present study is about employee relations and engagement which have affected by the COVID-19 period. The productivity of an employee lies in his/her happiness. A satisfied and happy employee opens the way of success to his/her organization. For this, healthy surroundings play an important role. Happy relations between employee and employer are key to increase the productivity and performance of both-employee and organization. But somehow, productivity and performance also linked to employee engagement. Employee engagement shows the passion and determination of an employee towards a particular job. The commitment and unrestricted efforts towards the achievement of organizational goals are all about employee engagement. But in the scenario of COVID-19 both the factors have suffered. If employee engagement has affected because of pandemic then it also has an impact on employee relations as there is poor communication or face-to-face interactions are missing. Maintaining a good rapport with employees by making excessive communication and interaction is the need of the hour by helping them not only in the technological domain but also in engaging and retaining them during this COVID-19 period.

Keywords: *COVID-19, employee relations, employee engagement, employer, productivity, performance.*

Introduction

Employees' satisfaction is vital for the performance of any organization in the corporate world. Only a happy employee is capable of building good relationships with his/her surroundings which also enhances his productivity. The ongoing Covid-19 episode changed the working scene by and large. Each HR (Human Resource) inside a working scene endeavour to adjust his/her own needs with the necessities of the environment. Remote working has become a

popular expression. It isn't just for the worker, separately, however to each association and the general public, and the world, in general, to get tuned to this new circumstance (Prasad, KDV., Et al. 2020). People are compelled to live in social isolation and emotional and social distancing due to lockdown. Industries and organizations are compelled to Work from Home (WFH) with the help of different online digital platforms like hangout meet, WebEx, webinars, zoom cloud, telegram, etc. During COVID -19 when there is no option.

The online platforms are being used to facilitate a range of services online to the Employee relations programs that are ordinarily part of a Human Resource procedure intended to guarantee the best utilization of individuals to achieve the mission of a business firm. The expression 'worker relations' alludes to an organization's endeavours to oversee connections among managers and workers. An association with a decent representative relations program gives reasonable and predictable treatment to all workers so they will be focused on their employments and faithful to the organization. Such projects likewise plan to forestall and resolve issues emerging from circumstances at work (Rea, A., & Shinn, J. 2015).

There are four main factors to focus on Employee Relations as discussed by the Robbins, A. (2017). These are:

- Feedback
- Rewards
- Invest in employees
- Better communication

Employees need comments, they need to learn and develop and improve. Furnishing them with the tips and direction they have to arrive by holding successive criticism meetings like a month to month one-on-ones, will be profoundly valued. Thankfulness and appreciation mean such a great amount to employees and truly fortifying great work is what moves them to keep it up. Remunerating your group appropriately is the thing that develops a culture of thankfulness among worker and

director, at last rousing your representatives to keep on buckling down for you and the organization. Communicating that representative's satisfaction is imperative to you, on an expert and individual level, is a major articulation that will inspire their regard and keep them locked in. putting resources into their carries on with everywhere and not exactly busy working will be gainful for everyone. In any relationship, correspondence is the key. Representatives spend most of their days at work so it's significant that they feel great with their director and satisfied in their assignments (Robbins, A. 2017). Creating and reinforcing relations among individuals at work is basic for information sharing with the goal that organizations can rapidly react to the present unique business condition (Chen & Tjosvold, 2010). In such a scenario of COVID-19 pandemic, both the employee and employer are responsible for maintaining harmony in relations. According to Abrol, S. & Madan, V (2020), there are some responsibilities an employer needs to pay attention to maintain employee relations in good condition:

- Overseeing and directing all business-related exercises to guarantee the wellbeing and assistance of employees;
- Advancing video conferencing for gatherings over the face to face gatherings and creating a sense of belongingness among the employee.
- Giving a sheltered workplace and proper assets for remote working

- that are arranged, sorted out and kept up;
- Set up plans in case of crisis and emergencies.

Now here are some of the points to focus on by employers and employees to keep the relations in a better mode. Few important issues about how employers and HR personnel /Consultants are challenged to re-think, redesign and think out of the box and bring forth the best practices for running their businesses and industries by bringing the concept of 'Employee-Connect 'and adoption of a system of reskilling, and multiskilling people about technology, design thinking, analytics and to prepare our people more competent and challenging and feeling connected and related with their organization.

- To shield themselves as well as other people from hurt over the span of their work just as the official hardware, for example, dealing with any PC given by the business and announcing any imperfections in the equivalent to the business quickly;
- To report any injury emerging from work action to their manager right away so that corrective measures can be taken at right time for the smooth functioning of the organization.
- To be focussed and firmly determined towards job responsibilities and keep the employee morale high by continuously engaging them with the organization and making a continuous rapport with them by calling them and asking their well

being and providing them all sorts of facilities and amenities along with the monetary benefits during Covid-19 period.

Employee commitment goes past exercises, games, and occasions that drives execution. Engagement of employees plays a very vital role in the entire organization and comprehend their motivation, where, and how they fit in. This prompts a better dynamic. Associations with a connected with the workforce outflank their opposition. The idea of employee engagement is an estimation of how happily individuals are with their particular employments, working conditions, and how productive their exhibition levels are? Overseeing high spirits among workers can be of momentous advantage to any association, as effectively drew in labourers are progressively gainful and remain faithful to the organization. Associations with high representative commitment levels are progressively gainful and the sky is the limit from there beneficial than those associations with low degrees of employee engagement (Mehta, D. & Mehta, N.K. 2013).

Here are five key areas explored by Kular, et al. (2008):

1. The meaning of "employee engagement"
2. Management for employee engagement
3. Consequences to the organisation in case of employee engagement
4. The Relation between individual characteristics and engagement
5. The Relation between employee representation and engagement

The present study is including both the phases- pre and post COVID-19 pandemic scenario. That is based on the basic concepts and factors affecting employee relations and their engagement. There is a need for understanding about the expectations of employees and their performances. Employee relation aspect involves listening, influencing, communicating, solving problems, counselling people when they are so much threatened to maintain work-life balance during this crisis period. People are facing issues on many fronts be it personal or professional front, the employer should redress and counsel and resolve their various issues and empathize them when they need it most

Need of the Study

The pandemic COVID-19 has forced everyone to stay home and nations around worldwide imposed lockdown to avoid the impact of Coronavirus on the health of individuals. Shops, business offices, malls, educational institutions, transport, and all other essentials for routine life remain shutting down. In such a scenario employees are asked to do work from home or by other means without attending offices. That creates a communication gap, avoidance of client and colleague meetings, or face to face interactions. In such a scenario, keeping oneself passionate about work is getting tough for employees. Productivity and performance are getting affected and leads to poor results. The Commitment to achieving goals and determination is not now up to the standards. All that chaos leads to having an impact on employee relations.

At the same time, it is getting tough to remain engaged with full determination and passion for the employees.

Objectives of the Study

1. To interpret the root concept of employee relations and employee engagement.
2. To analyse the impact of COVID-19 on employee relations and engagement.
3. To examine the factors affecting employee relation and engagement.
4. To study the current scenario of employee relationships in context with employee engagement.

Research Methodology

The current study is analytical and descriptive in nature. The secondary data collection method has been adopted from various research papers, articles, and publications as per the requirement.

Literature Review

The intelligence assists employees with seeing how work is connected over all the divisions, levels, and units in the foundation just as adjusting crafted by individuals to the organisational vital bearing and needs (Pulakos& O'Leary, 2011). As indicated by Koster, Stokman, Hodson, and Sanders (2007) sharing mutual objectives empower employees to guide their endeavours to the accomplishment of that specific objective, however for that to occur there ought to be association and coordinated effort among employees. In the absence of clashes, the organization leads to great connections

between employees as they like one another also, bunch participation fulfills employers' have to have a positive and long-haul relationship with others (Giebels and Johnson, 2005). The lack of conflicts is an important condition for good relations, communication, and solid employee connections. Organizational clashes in the business harm the work atmosphere, employee confidence, and group performance (Brinkert, 2010). As indicated by Jing et al. (2011), improper communication and stressed relational connections may fundamentally prompt employment disappointment and along with these lines' poor authoritative execution. The authors further express that if there is better communication inside the association, employees can cooperate in light of the fact that they have solid connections. As per the opinion of Thatcher and Brown (2010), communication encourages imagination and togetherness working relations among an assorted group of employees.

Purcell et al. (2003) featured that representative commitment is just important if there is a progressively authentic sharing of duty between the executives, what's more, representatives over issues of substance. Lucas et al. (2006) saw that Employee voice can be characterized as the capacity for representatives to have a contribution to choices that are made in associations. Robinson et al. (2004) featured the significance of, feeling esteemed and included as a key driver of commitment. Robinson et al. (2004) expressed this can be

a valuable pointer to associations towards those parts of working life that re-require genuine consideration if commitment levels are to be kept up or improved.

Cooper (1997) clarified that if feelings are appropriately overseen instead of closed out at work, they can drive trust, devotion, and responsibility, and incredible efficiency gains by people, groups, and associations. May et al. (2004) contended that worker commitment is identified with passionate encounters and prosperity. As per Robinson (2006) people arrange and make feelings of occasions and circumstances as per their own one of a kind and individual casing of reference, which mirrors their character, past encounters, information, desires, and current needs, needs, and interests. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) opined that connected with representatives are probably going to have a more prominent connection to their association and a lower inclination to stop. Beardwell and Claydon (2007) found that Employee association is viewed as a focal rule of 'delicate' HRM, where the center is after catching the thoughts of representatives, what's more, making sure about their dedication. As indicated by Lawler and Worley (2006) for a high-inclusion work practice to be successful and for it to positively affect worker commitment, representatives must be given force.

In any case, COVID-19 might be unavoidable taking a gander at the present status of social insurance, absence of readiness, and its harmful nature in itself, their monetary partners need not! With the correct

direction and bearings, the administration behind each organization can be taught about the dangers so as to fence against the equivalent. Through a successful wellbeing security protection, the organizations can mitigate the devastating repercussions, for their workforce just as to make sure about their own standings. In these difficult occasions, partnerships ought to vouch to care for the necessities of the representatives in trouble. An HR expert ought to bring the others conscious go into the activities of the organizations. The choices taken by Human Resources sway the vocation of the representatives, and the whole workforce more or less. This incorporates their capacity to win cash to pay for fundamentals like food and lodging among different costs. These are at a hazard for a couple of months (Jaisinghani, A. 2020). As expert social orders, counseling teams, and associations grasp the worker commitment idea, attracted to its capability to take care of unmanageable issues, two significant difficulties have surfaced. The primary test spins around what representative commitment is and how it ought to be characterized (Macey and Schneider, 2008). The term employee commitment is apparently as appealing for associations all things considered for the expert social orders and counseling bunches who advance it. The results of worker commitment are supported to be actually what most associations are looking for: representatives who are progressively gainful, beneficial, more secure, more advantageous, less inclined to turnover, more averse to be missing, and all the more

ready to take part in optional endeavours (Buchanan, 2004; Fleming and Asplund, 2007; The Gallup Organization, 2001; Wagner and Harter, 2006). The current study has observed that being lonely focused on job responsibilities gets more tough as days pass by. Additionally, the absence of up close and personal co-operations with friends and directors makes it harder to get outside inspiration and can bring about losing critical force and spotlight at work. Imaginative approaches to persuade a transcendently remote workforce turns into a key test in circumstances such as these.

Cooperating in an office helps associates fabricate important connections that upgrade collaboration and generally speaking yield. Work from home situations makes a boundary among partners and makes it even harder to arrange errands or impart pivotal data required for the activity. Uniting representatives through challenges and exercises directed practically is the least demanding approach to cause them to remain alert. The study tells about the factors an individual should work on to maintain better relations by engaging oneself focused towards the accomplishment of commitments for the organization.

Discussion and Analysis

As COVID-19 pandemic has made everyone's life at its worst. It has made the survival of the business firm as much tougher. The economy is getting slow down day by day. People are getting more insecure about jobs. Some are losing their jobs. There is no proper workplace, teamwork spirit, and

leadership. People are facing a poor working environment and stuck in salaries which lowering down morale. Individuals are struggling for the attainment of targets whether at a personal level or professional level. So, this is an alarming situation to maintain harmonic employee relations.

There is an inter-relationship between both the factors- employee engagement and relations. To survive in a better mode with both the factors, an analysis is required to have a better understanding of the current scenario. The scenario is hard to keep employees engage for a period of time as everywhere work from home is going on. Though some of the zones are getting free from lockdown but still social distancing is just there. No nation is yet declared free from COVID-19. In such a time one should support each other for better survival in the business firms and for the smooth running of business activities. It is all about making efforts towards maintaining better employee relations and employee engagement. When COVID -19 is spread all over the globe. people all are in a shocking state with this outbreak and it caused all the industry shut down and this all caused an economic slowdown on the global perspective. Gradually people started working from home (WFH) and trying to recover this financial and psychological loss and emerging more stronger day by day and at the same, it also becomes very important for all the employers to timely understand and taking care and concern of their employees and customers and turning all the threats into opportunities with their positive and

energetic mindset. Employees should provide stronger physical, mental and financial protection to their employees by creating an emotional bond with them and by asking their wellbeing and providing them clean and safe working environments and personal protective equipment and financial assistance to them as well as their family members. During this adversity Employers should also distress their team members by engaging them in some of the other activities, changing their outlook and cohesion of their team members and making their members completely busy with different kind of activities, making them more productive, enjoyable, and upward-looking utilizing their time and energy and their abilities in more constructive ways.

Recommendations

1. To maintain healthy employee relations among individuals of an organisation effective communication is necessary. Better communication reduces the gap and misunderstandings among individuals.
2. During the pandemic COVID-19, face-to-face interactions are less possible. So, one should take the help of technology to stay connected with clients and colleagues.
3. High morale is a must to keep focused on goal achievement. One should work to maintain his/her morale boosted up which will help in employee engagement.
4. Goals and targets should be clear in mind which makes a person more determined and committed towards job responsibilities.

5. Employee relation is much-taking care by the employees so that employees remain happy, satisfied, and determined towards the job responsibilities. On the other hand, employee engagement is a factor for which employees should pay attention to.
6. COVID-19 pandemic causing poor employee relations as there is a lack of meetings and interactions among individuals. It is getting tough to maintain harmony and peace. But that is the time to stay focused and motivated and to keep the spirit high for the attainment of goals not only at the personal level but also at organisational level.
7. Acceptance of change and challenges is the rule of life. It is the time to fight back against all the odds and negativities. Because relations matter a lot for both the survival of employee and organization.
8. The current scenario is a testing period for all and one on the planet. I talk about employee relations and employee engagement then, this is the time to support each other for better growth and survival.
9. Employers should also distress their team members by engaging them in some of the other activities, changing their outlook and cohesion of their team members and making their members completely busy with different kind of activities, making them more productive, enjoyable, and upward-looking utilizing

their time and energy and their abilities in more constructive ways.

Conclusion

By briefing this, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic period is a period of exams related to relationships in both the dimensions- professional or personal. Every single individual, directly or indirectly, fighting for the betterment in the relations surroundings. So, it is the responsibility of all the persons (employees and employers) to give the best to maintain harmony and peace in the organizational relationships for the smooth running of business activities. It is a time to develop new skills, stay calm, and be passionate about the work-front. Positively settlement with professional life gives enhancement to personal relationships. It is a time to fight back against all the odds coming on the way of determination and commitment. Change acceptance is must be staying normal in such a scenario of the pandemic. It is a challenging time to keep morale high, happy relationships, and engagement towards the accomplishment of goals. If on the one hand, COVID-19 impacts business organization and economy in a negative way, this has also forced companies to look at alternative ways to run operations through remote connection and adoption of digital technology has been a positive change to many people as it keeps employees productive while helping in maintaining work-life balance.

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