



New Trends
in Psychology

Sources and Outcomes of Employee Engagement: A Qualitative Inquiry on Personnel Perception

Pralhad Adhikari¹

Abstract: The aim of this study was to explore what caused employee engagement and what it caused in the workplace. An open-ended survey was conducted among 42 employees with a set of 12 questions. A total of 504 responses have been analyzed in the framework of qualitative and conventional content analysis. Results: Three concepts emerged as sources of employee engagement: personal skills, good working conditions, and good human resource management. Two concepts emerged as its outcomes: personal outcomes and organizational consequences. A new theme, besides causes and consequences, also came up: barriers to engagement. The conclusion is that Nepalese employees can be engaged at the workplace if their needs are met, if the working condition is made safe, and if they themselves learn skills to adapt, communicate and work well. Consequently, they can give more performance being satisfied at a job.

Keywords: Job attitude; working conditions; management; IO psychology; Nepal

1 Introduction

Employee engagement is the extent of an employee's involvement with, satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for the job they do (Robbins & Judge, 2017, p. 117). It is a job attitude. So, it comes from the evaluation of various aspects of the job and organization an employee works for. The indicators of employee engagement are access to resources and opportunities to learn a new skill, degree of importance and meaningfulness of work, and extent of rewarding experiences gained from

¹ Department of Philosophy and Psychology, TriChandra Campus, Nepal, Address: Kathmandu, Nepal, Corresponding author: pralhad.adhikari@gmail.com.

interaction with other people at work. Other indicators are employees' passion for work and the extent of depth of their connection with the organizations. Engaged employees are emotionally attached. They show more citizenship behaviors and have more job satisfaction. Engaged employees are also more committed (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Employee engagement may have three dimensions: trait, state, and behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Some causes of employee engagement could be appreciation and a good manager enjoyable to work with (Robbins & Judge, 2017, p. 117). Individual causes like absorption, dedication, corporate citizenship, the meaningfulness of work, person-organization fit, vigor, perceived organizational support, work-life balance, core self-evaluation, and value congruence lead to employee engagement (see Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Its organizational determinants are authentic corporate culture, clear expectations, corporate social responsibility, job characteristics, job fit, and task challenge. Other such determinants are chance to use skills, rewards, perceived workplace safety, manager expectations, manager self-efficacy, and positive workplace climate. Working environment and team and co-worker relationship are the major causes of employee engagement (J., 2014). There are effects of training and career development, leadership, compensation, organizational policies, and workplace well-being. In Nepalese commercial banks, training, and development, a chance for career development and performance appraisal significantly predicted employee engagement (Hakuduwal, 2019). The working condition (or facility), participatory culture, and performance appraisal/recognition predicted it (Niraula, 2020). Leadership styles predicted employee engagement in the employees of commercial banks in Nepal (Biswakarma & Khanal, 2015; Lama & Pokhrel, 2019). Transformational leadership was significantly and more correlated with employee engagement than other leadership styles. Among Nepalese employees, employee engagement correlated with the person-organization fit and perceived organizational support (POS) (Baniya-Chhetri, 2017).

A study found that employee engagement was correlated with organizational performance among the workers of Tribhuvan University colleges (Shrestha, 2019). It showed that female rather than male, tenure/experience, and education affected employee engagement. Junior and middle managers' employee performance was predictable with the help of employee engagement (J., 2014). Job satisfaction, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) were correlated with employee engagement among employees of Nepali organizations (Baniya-Chhetri, 2017).

Even though some empirical studies are found on the causes and consequences of employee engagement, the topic has not been studied comprehensively. This topic warrants a qualitative inquiry as such research can generate rich data and thick descriptions to understand events, behaviors, and processes (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

2. Method

An open-ended survey was conducted among 42 employees (a convenient sample) working in Nepalese organizations. In qualitative research, sample size determination is contextual and guided by theoretical saturation; a sample of 12 should suffice for a homogeneous population (Roland, 2016) to achieve saturation. Twelve questions given in Table 1 were asked and a total of 504 responses were generated. Fifteen participants were government employees from Gulmi. Twelve participants were part- or full-time lecturers in a technical private college in Kathmandu. The other fifteen employees were from the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Kathmandu. Fourteen participants were male and 28 participants were female. There were 12 open-ended questions (see table 1) that were made following a literature review.

The set of questions assumes that employee engagement consists of concepts like organizational commitment, emotional attachment to job/organization, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, passion, meaningfulness, and sociability. The last two questions are related to the personality (traits and behaviors) of engaged employees.

Table 1. Structured questions used for open-ended survey

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What should an employer do for an employee to accomplish the tasks in a committed way? 2. Please say based on your experience, on what conditions are employees connected to the organization and job emotionally? 3. Why do you think some employees enjoy the job in an organization while others do not? 4. How can a situation be created where employees get intrinsically motivated? 5. Some people are so excited about a job while others are not. What might be the reasons? 6. What relationship do you see between passion and performance? 7. How do you differentiate between people who enjoy the job and workaholics? 8. How can people who find a job meaningful contribute to the organization? 9. How can employees who want to maintain membership with the organization contribute more to the organization than others? |
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10. How are employees enjoying the company of other employees more useful?
11. What is the trait/personality of employees who want to learn new things?
12. How are the behaviors of employees wanting to learn new things different from others?

Three trained persons were deployed to collect data. Participants were first approached and they were informed about the purpose of the research and their role in it. They signed the consent form and wrote answers for the questions about the causes and consequences of employee engagement.

Conventional (qualitative) content analysis was used for data analysis. It is the type of qualitative content analysis in which initial codes come up from data/text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In other words, it is the journey from data to theory and is inductive.

3. Results

With the overarching themes of causes and consequences of employee engagement, the analysis began. Table 2 shows that there were three themes related to causes. Healthy working conditions, systematic human resource management (HRM), and individual skills. Healthy working conditions had categories of positive working environment, good social ambiance, and adequate facilities. The participants had the perception that things like understanding supervisors, emotional and financial support during crisis, safety at workplace, workplace conducive for teamwork, appreciation of jobs done by employees, appreciation from outsiders like customers, and good management are sources of engagement. Similarly, the reputation of the organization and industry also mattered. Social support in the workplace is a must for employee engagement. Likewise, facilities like easy availability of required resources, health insurance, appropriate compensation, and facilities of transportation and residence would be a plus.

Table 2. Concepts related to causes of employee engagement

Theme/ Concept	Category	Codes
Healthy Working Conditions	Positive Working Environment	Understanding boss, Support during crisis, Safety, Transparency, Readiness for team work, Good management, Recognition from insiders, Appreciation from customers, Organizational/industry brand, Preparation for crisis
	Good Social Ambience	Friendly co-workers, Social support, Mentoring, Sharing ideas, Support/help/care Dining together, Dignity/respect, Celebrating success together, Equality, Trust, Emotional support, Consideration
	Adequate Facilities	Just pay, Health insurance, Bonus, Transport/residence, Availability of resources, Physical infrastructure
Systematic HRM	Employee Selection	Job description, Job-personality fit, Job-ability fit
	Training and Development	Chances to grow/learn, Training, System for promotion, Empowerment, Career development
	Motivation	Meet needs, Job security, Equity, Merit-based opportunities, Quality of work life (QWL), Participation, Rewards, Flextime Rest-work balance, Job characteristics Performance appraisal, Extra work- extra pay policy, Diversity management
Individual Skills	Behaviors	Communication, Knowledge of work/process, Positive attitude, Experience, Balanced/realistic expectations, Interest (job itself), Ethics, Honesty, Citizenship, Goal-setting, Work-life balance, Quality of work life (QWL), Life satisfaction, Critical thinking, Problem-solving, Good listening
	Traits	Active, Interested, Dedicated, Energetic, Assertive, Excited, Hardworking, Happy, Eager, Punctual, Passionate, Satisfied, Curious, Innovative/Creative, Skillful, Knowledgeable, Cooperative, Motivated, Content, Attentive, Loyal, Competent, Humble, Self-efficacious, Disciplined, Authentic, Enthusiastic, Empathetic, Participative, Attached to work

The other contributors of employee engagement were systematic HRM under which things like training and career development, motivation and equity, and right selection strategies are included. Similarly, other causes were in an individual employee and they were related to skills of communication, satisfaction with life, work-life balance, and problem-solving. Employees' personality also mattered. For example, the dedicated, motivated, enthusiastic, active, participative, and honest employees were likelier to be engaged.

The outcomes of employees as perceived by Nepalese employees were classified into two concepts: personal and organizational. Personal outcomes included a decrease in negative behaviors like absenteeism and turnover, and an increase in positive behaviors like dedication, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), well-being, and creativity. In the organizational outcomes, an increase in productivity, positive branding, and innovation were included. Similarly, other organizational outcomes were human-related like customer satisfaction, better coordination among employees, and more job satisfaction.

Table 3. Concepts related to consequences of employee engagement

Theme/ Concept	Category	Codes
Personal	Decrease in Negative Behaviors	Absenteeism, Turnover
	Increase in Positive Behaviors	Dedication, Citizenship, Career growth, Well-being, Creativity, Happiness, Work-life balance
Organizational	Human-related Benefits	Customer satisfaction, Positive work environment, Better coordination, Good relation between employees, Sharing of ideas
	Productivity	Profit growth, Branding, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Innovation, Survival, Risk-preparedness, Better work (plan, prioritize, execute)

A new concept, in addition to the expected concepts of causes and consequences, emerged: barriers of employee engagement. The perception of participants was that individual-related things like perceived stagnation, lack of job security, the stress of transfer, and lack of intrinsic motivation caused the absence of engagement. Similarly, stressed and unhappy employees could not be engaged. Organizational barriers to engagement were exploitation (i.e., extra pay without extra payment), rapid organizational change, heavy workload, quick transfers, biases (like nepotism

and favoritism), and high workload. Similarly, job-ability misfit and non-participatory decision-making also were obstacles to employee engagement. Low pay and conflict also blocked it.

4. Discussion

A research in the US (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017) found that appreciation, reward, empowerment, and bond between leader and employees engage employees. Another study in Finland (Tran, 2018) identified achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibilities and growth as its driving factors. These findings about the causes are similar to those in the current study even though broad concepts/patterns are differently named. It is positively related to intrinsic reward, job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and leader-member exchange relationship according to a study among hoteliers (Lee, 2012). The current study did not reveal many things about leadership except for the participatory approach. Other findings are similar to the ones in this study. One of the seven dimensions of working conditions is social ambience (Adhikari, 2020, pp. 166–167) as this study revealed is necessary for engagement. Reanalyzing data of 2006, a paper (Saks, 2019) concluded that job characteristics and perceived organizational support (POS) are predictors of engagement. Engagement predicts job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention. The findings are similar in this study.

This study was based on open-ended surveys. People prefer to write less these days and they might not have given rich and thick descriptions. They offered opinions that originated from their perception. Since the participants responded in brevity and in a descriptive way, their quotations have not been included in the report. The construct of employee engagement is in the process of agreement among researchers. So, the questions might have been weak in content validity. The findings might appear intuitive.

Future research can explore what employee engagement means for Nepali personnel. Experiences of employees being engaged can also be inquired as the opinions to express might not be vivid to the research participants themselves. Participant's not knowing their own self is a weakness of the self-report method. In the future, the concepts understood in this qualitative inquiry can be operationalized and measured quantitatively in the Nepalese context.

As perceived by Nepalese employees, sources of employee engagement have three broad concepts as causes: individual skills, systematic human resource management, and good working conditions. Its outcomes are person-related and organizational. Barriers to engagement are also personal and organizational. This study adds to the theoretical understanding of employee engagement. Future quantitative studies, especially in the Nepalese context, can base the measurements on terms of concepts presented in this study. The sample was small. So, generalizing should be cautiously done. The practical implication is that organizations have now tips to get their employees engaged. Figure 1 shows the model that resulted from this study.

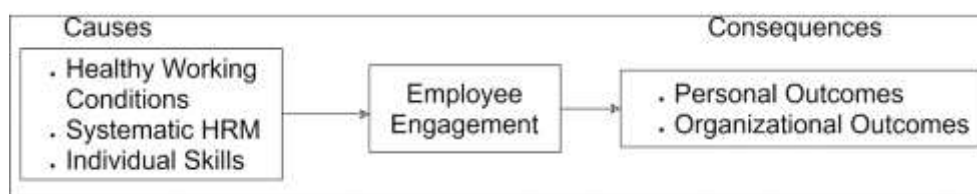


Figure 1. Model showing the relationship between concepts related to employee engagement

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