

Diving Deep in Employee Training to Understand Employee Engagement

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Abstract

Human resource practices have prominently influenced employee behaviors and outcomes at work. This conceptual paper proposes motivations to explore employee training in depth to understand how its key component including need assessment, design, trainer, delivery, and evaluation can significantly contribute towards fostering post-training employee engagement. The paper has tried to model an opportunity for practitioners to understand how apart from other employee outcomes like motivation, commitment and performance; post-training work well-being can be also be enhanced through employee training function through maximum capitalization of the employee training components.

Keywords: Training; Employee engagement; Post-training employee engagement; Training assessment; Training design; Training delivery

Introduction

Research on employee engagement over the years has attracted considerable attention with focus on several workplace and individual characteristics [1]. Engaged workforce plays a critical role in the achievement of organizational objectives. Which is why, employee engagement is becoming a significant factor in measuring and evaluating the workforce performance in the organizations [2].

employee engagement is described as positive, pleasing, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption [3] such aspects requires an employee to be skilled and competent enough so that the key organizational goals could be achieved effectively.

Gallup's recent study of 141 countries suggest that worldwide only 13% of the employees are engaged at the workplace while 63% are disengaged and 24% are actively disengaged [4]. The results outline severity of the issue and the need for urgent action in this regard. Empirical studies have been undertaken to outline what can potentially enhance and influence employee engagement to help support businesses globally.

Empirically, it has been suggested that the components of HRM can play a considerably strong role towards employee engagement. However, very limited studies can be found, outlining the relationship of individual HR functions employee engagement [5,6]. Training function of HRM which refers to the systematic process of planned activities to impart knowledge, skills and necessary expertise in an employee for the responsive achievement of organizational goals Dessler [7]. The characteristics of an engaged employee and the role of training indicates a potential link and motivation for research between these two components. Study by Suan et al. [5] in the Malaysian hotel sector found that work engagement can be enhanced through improving on the service trainings provided. However, the results are limited in terms of their generalizability.

This conceptual paper forwards critical opinion on how Employee training, which one of the most significant role in fostering employee engagement. The paper proposes digging deep into employee training to understand the cognitive significance of each of its component in predicting employee engagement at work.

Literature Review

Employee engagement

There are many definitions quoted to define the term employee engagement and measuring it. Definition we quote here is commonly pictures in the academia that it's a 'positive fulfilling work related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption' [3].

Kahn [8] on the other hand broadly described it as binding and connecting of people with their work in such a manner that they participate and fully contribute in their work roles with physical, emotional and cognitive resources. In other words, engagement is a thriving energy that puts people to work with involvement and focus to achieve company goals. It is very unlikely that there will be any tie when all the researchers on engagement would agree to one single definition [9]. We can see engagement as a related term but it can be conveniently differentiated from the related elements like job satisfaction or job commitment.

Drivers of engagement

The job demands- resources model (JD-R) model by Demerouti et al. [10] is one of the most widely mentioned and cited theoretical model of work engagement. The model explains how job resources including autonomy, feedback and supervisor support and personal resources including self-efficacy, optimism and resilience impacting work engagement. Moreover, Demerouti et al. [10] found that JD-R model also helps to understand and explain critical aspects of an individual's wellbeing such as burnout, work enjoyment, satisfaction at work, sickness absenteeism etc. As inferred with the word job, in the JD-R model, researchers on the topic have worked on highlighting the job and individual level demands and resources impacting engagement.

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But there are a very limited number of research instances that tell us as to how much [11] underline a positive link between HRM practices and employee engagement; however, there happen to be a limited number of studies, highlighting the link of organizational context variables and their impact on engagement, particularly in relation to human resources. The paper also outlines that through linking employee engagement strategically with the HRM functions, an organization can achieve significant competitive advantage [12]. This justifies a potential area for research to help address how strategically come of the HR components can considerably boost employee engagement.

HRM and employee engagement

Human resource management plays a critical role in management and development of the employed workforce. Training is one of the key HR functions which every organization has to implement regardless of their HR focus and expectation out of this business function HR functions primarily help businesses to align its employees with the company objectives. HR department at the core operates as a connecting component between the conceptual ideology, mission and vision of the company and its operational side [12]. Numerous researchers have focused on the key HR components to examine how they impact on employee outcomes and work behaviors [13,14] has evidently argued that HRM practices occupy potential to influence employee behaviors and much need performance outcomes. More recently, Truss et al. [15] argued has underlined that employee engagement is the idea that HR professionals need to focus for strategic effectiveness. The authors have outlined that organizations and their HR departments need to think beyond the orthodox approach and ideology by looking at the engagement of employees at work and how it could be taken to the next level for competitive advantage and survival.

On general grounds, the link between HRM components and employee engagement is largely missing. This is due to the fact that engagement is a relatively new concept and has started gaining prominence over the past two decades. In the similar fashion, employee training, being one of the HR components also seems to be less empirically studied due to the psychological nature of the concept of engagement. Additionally, the well reported and extensively used JD-R model of engagement only considers job resources and demands only [10].

Guest [14] HRM performance model draws as to how critically the HRM recruitment, training and other functions can result in increased employee efforts thus, improving performance and profitability. In connection to employee and making them to commit to organizational mission and objectives, it is important that they remain committed to work and work with potency and dedication. So according to this view, HRM practices are critical for boosting an organization's performance levels through making its employees committed, motivated and capable to give their best towards the organizational goals. Due to this, Truss et al. [11] also states that the level of employee engagement actually outlines as to what extent the HRM practices of an organization are effective which is yet to be investigated in depth.

Employee training

Particularly, employee training is tested and referred as an important HR component to influence employee work outcomes and behaviors [16]. According to Bennett et al. as cited in Stredwick that, Training is a systematic process that is designed to impart necessary skills that are critical for employees to perform effectively and responsibly at the workplace.

Employee training is empirically found prominent in influencing turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior [17], commitment and motivation [18], performance [19,20], post-training organizational commitment, job satisfaction [21]. To achieve the desired organizational objectives, a combination of motivation and necessary job related tools, skills and competencies are essential where, the training function of HR responsively facilitates. Demerouti et al. [10] in the study found that training proved to be vital in helping employees to develop skills and competencies that are critical for the organizational performance and optimal enhancement of employee capabilities. The study found that training helped the employees to modify their behaviors, emotions to enhance their skills and competencies. These skills further proved to be contributing positively towards the achievement of organizational goals.

Employee training and employee engagement

Accordingly, employee training has also been empirically tested with employee engagement. Although a very few organizational scientists have managed to explore some relationship between training and employee engagement. Study by Salanova et al. [6] conducted an empirical test on 114 hotel staffs and found significant impact of training on employee engagement. Additionally, empirical investigation by Suan et al. [5] found training as a significant contributor towards employee engagement across 438 hotel staff in Malaysia. Similarly, study by Rothmann [6] has outlined employee training as a credible predictor of employee engagement. Critical analysis of the aforementioned researches highlights the strategic significance of training and how it can be used to enhance psychological wellbeing (engagement) of employees at work. It also highlights towards the considerable Gap in the literature due to which strong suggestions for further investigation on the relationship has been forwarded by Suan et al. [5].

Critical analysis of the empirical studies in the preceding paragraphs draws attention to several importance concepts. First of all that employee training can notably enhance post-training employee engagement and other aspects of work well-being. As Kuvaas [18] has empirically outlined that employee training is a development practice that fosters employee outcomes and behaviors. The analysis outlines that Employee training has been only studied in terms of perceptions of employees on general grounds in connection to employee engagement. These perceptions generally revolve around the overall effectiveness, and satisfaction of individuals with the employee training and not about the impact of individual components of employee training in specific. For instance, Suan et al. [5] investigated the influence of service training on employee engagement where respondents were asked to rate the frequency of the trainings provided and their overall satisfaction. Similarly, Salanova et al. [6] enquired of their overall satisfaction with organizational factors including training in relation to engagement and performance. Since organizations provide on the job trainings and off the job trainings to their employees and previous studies have also failed to outline as to which approach in particular, is significant in boosting employee engagement.

Conclusively, there are several gaps in the existing knowledge pertaining to employee training and post-training employee engagement which includes lack of studies on the influence of general trainings and employee engagement; no evidence of the influence of individual training components and how they are perceived, on employee engagement and lastly no evidence on the identification of more effective employee training approach.

Training is a highly comprehensive process, involving numerous

elements such as Need Assessment, Training design, Trainer and delivery, and Post Training Evaluation [22]. Although not a lot but empirical evidence is available, outlining the role and impact of individual training components towards enhancing employee outcomes and behaviors. Noe [23] has underlined that when employee perceive that the need assessment is credible and outlines the right needs for skill learning and competency development requirements against the current performance then, they will be more motivated to improve post training performance. Santos et al. [24] have empirically argued that positive perceptions about the training need assessment have a significant contribution towards general motivation and post training motivation to apply the learned skills at the workplace.

Accordingly, Hicks et al. [25] have outlined that effective training design enhances the willingness to learn and motivation which later boosts job performance. Additionally, Frayne et al. [20] have also argued that different training designs can influence employee outcomes and job performance. Role of a trainer is central in enhancing the training effectiveness and predicting employee outcomes and behaviors. For instance, empirical study by Towler et al. [26] outline that trainer characteristics such as organization of lecture and trainer's expressiveness enhanced problem solving performance. In the similar fashion, Farh et al. [27] in their empirical finding revealed that use of technology also holds a significant impression in boosting performance and employee behaviors. This also outlines towards the significance of how the trainer's delivery and the effective use of technology during the training session can enhance employee outcomes.

So, one way or the other, these studies suggest that employee training components have been positively helping organizations in post-training efforts via building the work force through enhancing their skill levels and boosting work outcomes and behaviors; which pin point towards the possibility of training components influencing post-training employee engagement too. According to Surge et al. [5] that the US companies on average spend around \$955 per hired individual on training and development in 2004. There have been a lot of research on training and its impact on the various organizational and individual level elements. So with such huge investments, it becomes more imperative for organizations to understand and explore how to take the maximum benefit from employee trainings.

Replying upon these arguments, this conceptual paper puts the following propositions forward:

P1: Employee Training will be positively related with post-training employee Engagement

P1a: Training Need Assessment will be positively link with post-training employee engagement

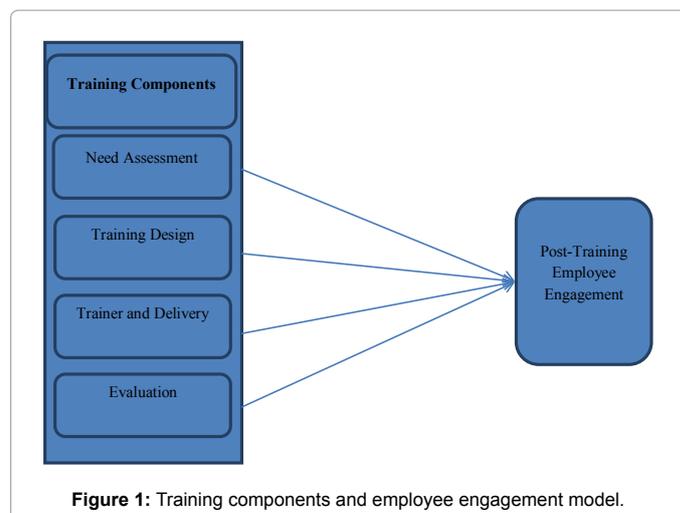
P1b: Training Design will be positively link with post-praining employee engagement

P1c: Trainer and Delivery will be positively link with post-training employee engagement

P1d: Training Evaluation will be positively link with post-training employee engagement (Figure 1).

Conclusion

Based on arguments in the preceding paragraphs, it can be implied that employee training can significantly enhance post-training employee engagement. On a larger note, the model proposes to help engagement practitioners to unveil how HR practices can proactively



contribute towards employee engagement. The model also proposes implications for HRD professionals to understand the importance of employee training and each of its components towards enhancing psychological wellbeing at work.

Since employee engagement enjoys significant relationship with job and organizational performance [28-30] the proposed model proposes to highlight how performance could be enhanced also through employee training function without focusing and investing on other aspects of the business.

Moreover, there is a potential to enhance the impact of employee training through investigating and exploring the link of its several components with post-training employee engagement. The model also proposes to explore and contribute towards numerous theoretical and practical aspects. First of all it encourages organizational scientists for developing a comprehensive instrument, considering all aspects of employee training to measure their relationship and level of significance with employee behaviors and outcomes. Secondly, it outlines the need to understand and empirically explore as to which training component in particular is more critical in predicting post-training employee engagement.

The idea that suggests that employee training can be a potential component to enhance the psychological wellbeing of employees at work through fostering employee engagement. There is a paucity of research and evidence on this relationship, as mentioned in Figure 1. The model also marks for the need of developing a comprehensive instrument to measure the influence of notable employee training components on employee engagement and other psychological work aspects.

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