Engaging Centennial Workforce: The Digital Way

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Abstract

Employee engagement refers to the state of mind where an employee is enthusiastic about his work and is so much absorbed in the organization that he continually takes action to further its reputation and interest. Today's workforce comprises of demanding and aware centennial population often referred as i-gen, cloud natives. The organizations of this era are posed with several serious challenges such as tough competitions, scarce resources, strict legal compliances, turbulent environment and ever changing technologies. The organizations adopt all the measures to get results from their employees. In this scenario the key to sustain for any organization would be to secure a pool of engaged employees who deliver results not out of fear but out of interest and willingness. This paper is conceptual in nature and aims at in-depth study of the strategies adopted by global firms to achieve a higher level of engagement of their employees. Secondary sources of data such as journals, periodicals, books, company websites and consultancy blog sites have been used for collecting information. The paper will bring out trends into practice towards engagement of centennial workforce which can be used by organizations for designing their engagement programs.

Keywords: *centennial, cloud natives, employee engagement, gamification, i-gen*

1. Introduction

Organizations across the world are rolling through a wave of change due to various reasons. To talk of India the entire country is under transformation due to *'Digital India'* mission of the Indian government. Digitization is the proven way to achieve agility and transparency in an organizational setup. It is the first and foremost consideration of centennial workforce in making choice for workplace. Centennial refers to the population born after 1996 (Scott, 2016). Often known as *Generation Z, cloud natives* and *i-gen,* they are the natives of digital era who will form a major portion of workforce in most of the workplaces in coming years. They are characterized by impatience, self-centrism, and for them personal goal is much more important than anything else. They hate rigid rules and information silos. They are experts in the technological tools who expect faster growth in flexible environment with maximum freedom and continuous feedback and encouragement (Karam & Danny, 2014). They pose a serious challenge to employers in getting their emotional involvement in the organization (PWC, 2011). In this era of digital world, technologies play an irreplaceable role in management of human resources in organizations (Strohmeier, Dr. Parry Emma, & Stefan, 2014). Digital workplace refers to the work environment where there is constant focus on fitting enterprise tools to help

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staff work with greater engagement in the organization (Strohmeier, Dr. Parry Emma, & Stefan, 2014).

The workplace today is always connected and instantly accessible. There are unprecedented ways in which communication and collaboration among employees is taking place. (D'Alessandro, 2008). Digital workplace breaks down the communication barrier thus leading to a complete transformation of employee experience. It fosters efficiency, innovation and growth. (Herrera, Chan, Ligault, & Mohammed, 2012). Digitization of business process brings new challenges too. As the use of digital accessories such as mobile devices and internet increases, the rate of change also gets accelerated. These changes create competition. An individual employee begins to feel threat from his colleagues, starts losing interest in his job and performs only under pressure to protect his job. Diminishing team behavior calls for increased role of team leaders (Xu & Copper, 2011).

Tough competition, scarce resources, all time high usage of technology has made it inevitable for organizations to anticipate change and respond to them faster. New technologies have increased the pace of collaboration of employees across the geographies. Main objective of digitizing the workplace is to support and connect employees with each other who are performing on same task and are located remotely, unknown to each other.

Higher level of employee engagement has many pay offs. It leads to increased rate of returns on assets, increased human asset worth and greater market share (Xu & Copper, 2011). An interim report to CIPD by Kingston University (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008) presents case study from four organizations which discusses about the advantages of employee engagement. There is positive correlation between organization's revenue and employee engagement. An increase of 5% in employee engagement led to increase of 3% of revenue of an organization (Hewit, 2015). Globalizations of labor market in most of the professions like financial services, IT / ITES and healthcare has made global talent management as one of the interesting topic for research. To achieve employee engagement is to provide employees an environment where they experience an increased emotional and mental attachment to their duties and responsibilities and their co-workers. (Miller, 2014).

The credit of providing first formal definition to the concept goes to William Kahn who made the term to appear in management theories in 1990s which became widespread in management practices in 2000. Employee engagement then was used as a strategy for employee retention. In this paper we discuss it as a strategy to create a better place to work in order to increase organizational productivity.

2. Review of Literature

Employees use varying degrees of their cognitive, emotional and physical capabilities which have great impact on their work and experiences in workplace. (Kahn, Dec. 1990). A workforce consisting of disengaged employee results into missed deadlines, overrun budget and unrealized investments (Pittenger, June 2015). It is exemplified in withdrawal of products from market (Dovall, 2016) piling of inventories due to wrong decision pattern (Nandi, 2017), multiple issues related with corporate governance, etc. Multiple factors which are involved in employee engagement programs can broadly be categorized into two categories i.e. *Motivators* such as salary and incentive, pleasant workplace environment, personal and career growth and *Activators* such as supportive team based flexible working environment, having a voice in organizational matters, faster recognition for good work, opportunities for rapid learning and faster growth and a measure of workplace autonomy. (Hinchcliffe, 2013). Inclusion of encouraging work environment and technology is quintessential in establishment of employees' roles and responsibilities which

allows them to succeed (Skroupa, 2016). The art of human capital management had never been so challenging for human resource department (Cooper, Roy, Loh, Groark, & Milash, 2015).

An engaged employee is passionate, excited and becomes invested in success. (Bakker & Demerouti, The Job Demands Resources model: state of the art, 2007). Technology can prove to be of great advantage in this regard (Bolton, Parsuraman, & Hoefnagels, 2009). Employee engagement is not only the concern of the management; it is the responsibility of each employee. (Bakker & Leiter, Work Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research, 2010). Engagement is a set of various states of an employee which comprises of commitment, identification, satisfaction, and involvement (Xu & Copper, 2011). Employee engagement refers to positive presence of employee at work, willing contribution of intellectual effort while performing job and experiencing both positive emotions and meaningful connections to others (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008) . Emotional attachments to organization, high involvement in job, extra initiatives beyond employment contractual agreement are the main characteristics of an engaged employee. (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). One major effort towards securing employee engagement is dissemination of information and continuous encouragement and to workers (Khan, 2013). Employee engagement leads towards more sense making at the time of organizational change (Georgiades, 2015). Employee engagement helps organization to achieve employee creativity. (Zenoff, 2015). Application of interactive and communication technologies help to persuade employees to understand the ways in which people located in different geographical contexts perceive, analyze, and produce situated knowledge (O'Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007). Collaboration is the most challenging issue and the most important factor of operation for global firms. A digital workplace as highlighted by Deloitte (Elcom.com.au, 2015) acts as a magnet which attracts new generation talent pool. Co-creation, engagement and essential experience of value creation are prerequisites for co-innovation. Practices of co innovative organizations cannot be easily imitated by competition (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). Digitization reduces information clutter in business processes and makes business functions simpler and effective. (Sharma, The digital workplace: Think, share, do Transform your employee experience, 2010).
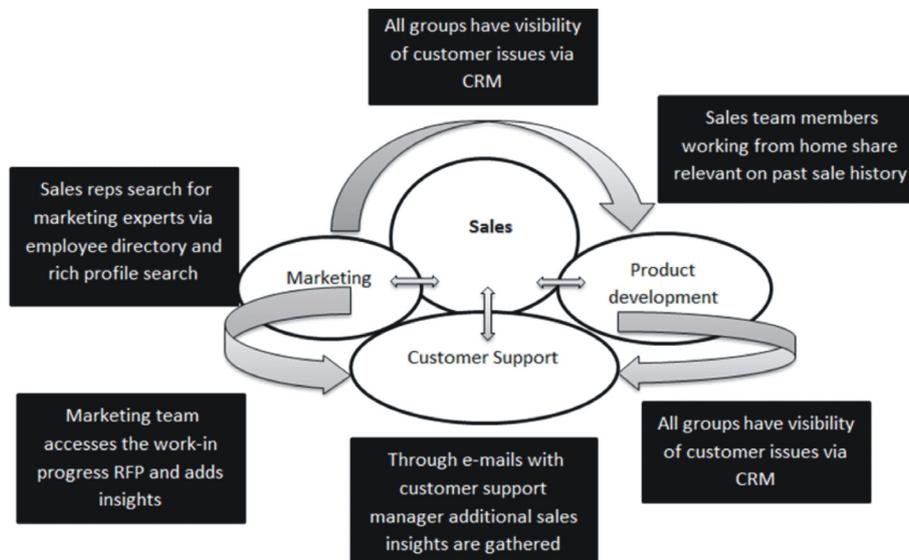
Digitization of Workplace for Simplification of Sales Process
Source: adapted from (Sharma, The digital workplace: Think, share, do , 2010)

Review of literatures exhibit that previous studies have mainly focused on 'motivator aspect' of employee engagement and there is serious dearth of literature on 'activator aspect'. Not much study is found to have been conducted in India with a focus on role of technology in enhancing engagement experience of employees in organization. Present study can be a major add-on to existing literatures on employee engagement and will provide insights to organizations to develop engagement programs for their millennial employees.

3. Strategies Implemented By Global Firms

Strategies of engaging remotely spread employees through online collaboration have been discussed in previous section of this paper. In this section, focus is upon the strategy of gamification which is adopted by very few, highly innovative organizations and is not known to many HR practitioners.

The best and probably the most effective way to influence centennial workforce to adopt productive behaviors around collaboration and knowledge sharing is gamification. It is a process where game mechanism is used to make non-game organizational activities easy adoptable (Xu Y. , 2011) more enjoyable and interesting (Oxford Dictionary & Cambridge Dictionary). It contains three different elements: game elements, game design techniques and non-game context (Leeson, 2013)*.* Introduction of gamification strategy by many companies has improved learning and development experiences of their employees. The technique has been helpful in enhancing outcomes of cultural training. Every multinational team should undergo cultural awareness training at the start of any global business venture for its smooth functioning and profitable returns (Poorna, 2011)*.* Gamification helps in collaborating ideas from customer, employees as well as other stakeholders. This is mainly used by the businesses to encourage personal and professional engagement of employees in organization. Main intention of the program is to make employees feel their work like game (Hosking, 2014). Incentives attached to it leads to healthy competition among players and a positive competition in a positive environment thus promoting engagement.

In following section, success story about the adoption of gamification by some renowned companies   are discussed:

NTT Data: Gamification for Leadership Skills

NTT Data is an IT innovation company. It is headquartered in Tokyo, Japan and has its operations in 42 countries since 1967. "Ignite Leadership" game used by NTT data aims at building critical leadership skills among its employees. The game enables the player to experience a variety of leadership scenarios and provides them the opportunity to learn more about new management areas and the roles that they want to be into. The players can give instant feedback thus leading to instant recognition and visibility of the player as potential leader. The game has shown 50% increase in the number of employees taking up leadership roles in their team when compared to traditional methods of training and coaching. (Sitzer, 2013). This new trend in digital workplace is potential of addressing various challenges and can give immediate solutions which otherwise could be a lengthy process.

IBM INNOV 8: Gamification for Employee Training

INNOV 8, designed by IBM for its employees is Business Process Management (BPM) simulation game which aims at improving the understanding amongst the employees regarding the effects an effective business process management on entire business ecosystem. INNOV8 claims of building a smarter planet by working. It exhibits the benefits of more interconnected and intelligent world on process improvements. INNOV8 comprises of three different online games. They are:

Smarter Traffic: module on evaluating existing traffic patterns and rerouting to avoid congestion.

Smarter Customer Service: it simulates a call center environment. The objective of the game is to prepare the players to learn effective ways to respond to the customers.

Smarter Supply Chains: it provides the player with an environment where he has to evaluate traditional supply chain. He has to balance supply and demand at the same time has to reduce the environmental impact.

Once a player is done with his game he can even compare his scores with others present on the global scoreboard.

(IMB INNOV8 2.0)

ACCENTURE- A3 Game: Gamification for Collaboration

Accenture believes in team work and its games focus mainly on collaboration. It aims at increasing intrinsic motivation. A3 stands for *Addo* which means to give, impart and inspire, *Agnitio, i.e.* knowledge and *Award.* The program is designed to recognize the employees who demonstrate collaborative behaviors (Hsu, 2015). The program has the ability to touch every single employee every day. It has a universal impact and has changed the extrinsic motivation of employees to be engaged into the organization into intrinsic motivation.

Apart from above illustrations about the success of gamification, it is worth noting here the success story of digital initiatives taken by Cisco in order to overcome the challenge of collaboration among its employees spread worldwide.

CISCO: Gamificationn for Collaboration

Cisco is a huge multinational corporation with a workforce of 70,000 employees present worldwide. It is specialized in leading-edge electronics, networks and communication technologies. Being a large and globally spread organization, Cisco faced common problem of collaboration. To counter this problem, the company needed to expand its capabilities; it needed to create integrated workforce experience. In this regard, it launched a video communication and collaboration platform through which an employee from any corner of the globe could share his ideas with another employee in some other corner of the globe. It also implemented enterprise social software for healthy collaboration with personalization. With the implementation of so many distinct collaboration programs such as connected workplace, c-vision, video blogs, expertise locator Cisco recorded a total of $ 1.052B in net benefits from Web 2.0 collaboration solutions (Cisco business solutions, 2010).

4. Challenges in Designing Digital Workplace

The foremost challenge to the process of digitization begins at school level. Digital immigrant educators are contrastingly different from digital native students (Bakker & Demerouti, The Job Demands Resources model: state of the art, 2007). The immigrants have no appreciation for the behavior of the natives who are multi-tasking and fast learners. Learning cannot be fun for them (Prensky, 2001). In theory, digital workplace sounds extremely fascinating and ideal situation but in reality it is a complicated journey to complete. The first challenge that comes in the way of digital innovation is finance. It is mainly seen as expenditure rather than an investment (Pursuing a digital workplace: the challenges and solutions, 2016). Technology may even have a negative impact on employee engagement. As cited by expedite consulting, retention among the virtual teams is lower than the on-site teams and this is mainly because there is lack of employee engagement measures within virtual teams (Bundy, 2016). There is sweeping change in HR activities with technology dominating over traditional methods of functioning (Barbara

Spitzer, 2013). Digitals play a very crucial role in performance management by aligning the process with employee aspirations and entitlement. There is a need to move IT focus from back-office to front-office centric organization that can lead to growth, increased customer experience and profitability of the business (Iyengar, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Most organizations invest in technologies just to follow the trend of digitization but fail to integrate it with their business applications (Karam & Danny, 2014). Digital business is not a 'one size fits all' approach. For successful digitization of workplace the digital solutions must focus on simplifying the style of experience for end users and must provide information security and be in compliance with the organizational objective. (Upadhyay, 2017). Digitization is still at its infancy and has a big journey to cover. Though gamification and other measures of employee engagement through technology have been adopted by few multinationals in India yet the attitude of employees towards these measures and the impact on employee performance is hardly known. This paper is a step in this regard and it proposes to conduct empirical studies to bring out the impact of implementation of such strategies on employee engagement.

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