

DRIVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP COMMUNICATION



Introduction

In the current cut-throat business domain, changes are occurring at a rapid pace and organizations mainly rely on the strengths and skills of their employees for survival. Modern business establishments eager to withstand the tests of time while surging ahead of the competition need engaged employees with high energy levels, are committed and dedicated to their work (Poornima, 2015). Engaged employees possess adequate resource which they leverage within their work. High enthusiasm levels are also observed among engaged employees who dive into work and seldom falter when confronted with challenges. Meta-analytic researches in the past have indicated that employee engagement is a vital predictor of job and organizational performance (Bailey et al., 2016). In addition, research conducted in the past has strongly pointed out that employee engagement leads to major organizational outcomes that include creativity and innovation, positive financial outcomes, reduction of absenteeism and client satisfaction (Al-dalahmeh et al., 2018).

Employee engagement has been defined as a state of mind where employee carrying out a work-related task is totally involved in it, full with energy and high enthusiasm towards the task. Authentic involvement of employees to their work tasks tends to increase their individual aspects such as cognitive, emotional and physical engagement, leading to active and total performance. This idea emphasizes that engaged employees take greater efforts towards work as they strongly associate with it (Anitha, 2014). As per academic literature, employee engagement with work is commonly defined and measured as work-based positive state-of-mind, that is fulfilling and linked with absorption, dedication and much vigour.

Vigour here would refer to greater level of energy and mental resilience when carrying out work tasks, in tandem with the ability to invest significant effort into concerned work tasks. Dedication specifies that an employee is strongly engaged with their work and is enthusiastic, while drawing meaning and encouragement from it. At the same time, absorption refers to a scenario, where the concentration on the whole of the employee is exclusively on the task and they are positively engrossed in work. There is scope to measure employee engagement in a reliable manner with

the help of the Utrecht work engagement scale which was developed by Wilmar Schaufeli (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019).

Communication

Before making an attempt to establish a relation between communication and employee engagement, it is necessary to understand what is meant by communication from the context of this research. Organizational communication or communication is an extensive topic that sociologists, politicians, economists, business experts, and psychologists have delved into (Paul Turner, 2003).

Communication has been defined by Greenberg and Baron (2003), as a process using which information exchange takes place between two or more individuals. Therefore, essentially organizational communication or communication is a two-way procedure that facilitates exchange of information. In addition, it is also possible to split organizational communication into internal and external communication where internal communication falls under the domain of human resources while external communication is communication that takes place between an organization and its stakeholders (Mishra et al., 2014). This current research focuses on internal communication therefore, organizational communication can be considered as a two-way information exchange taking place between management and employees or vice versa (Dolphin, 2005).

Employee Engagement and Communication

An effective communication process is imperative to enhance employee engagement. Thus organizational communication emerges as a vital aspect with regards to how associations within organizations are evaluated (Broom et al., 1997). To put it across differently, an open communication would indicate a robust association. At the same time, the process of employee engagement is a two-way process between employer and employee, which hints that employee engagement, depends on highly impactful two-way communication (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). As opposed to organizations having less impactful communication, organizations with highly impactful communication are likely to have more than 4.5 times highly engaged

employees. Therefore, it can be affirmatively said that organizational communication and effectiveness level would strongly impact employee engagement. Nonetheless, while evaluating employee engagement using communication, it is necessary to take into account top-down and bottom-up approaches into account.

With these factors in mind, the main objectives of this review are to;

- To investigate how top-down communication can improve employee engagement.
- To examine how bottom-up communication can improve employee engagement.

Methods

The systematic review methodology is adopted here where PRISMA, the most preferred terms of reporting a systematic review criteria and guidelines have been adhered to, with the purpose of executing and reporting this review.

Search Strategy

The strategy adopted for search was one where electronic databases like PubMed, PsychINFO, EMbase, ScienceDirect were scanned. After identifying suitable review papers and following the deletion of any duplicate papers, the papers that remained were extensively reviewed and any non-related articles were removed. Abstracts from the remaining research papers were studied in detail to ensure that these papers matched the research objectives framed above.

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies conducted across developing and developed nations were considered.
- Studies that have been conducted with a methodology that was either qualitative, quantitative or mixed methodologies were included along with any cross-sectional and observational studies.
- Studies which were relevant with regards to employee engagement, organisational communication, internal communications approaches were taken into consideration for this review.
- Only studies that were published in English language were included for this review.

Exclusion Criteria

- Similar studies that were executed in underdeveloped nations were excluded from this review.
- Studies that focused on external communication were excluded from this review.
- Studies that concentrated on the role of communication in organisational performance were also excluded.
- In addition, studies that were not published in English language were not taken into account for this review.

Results

The detailed search of literature drew around 105 studies. From the 105 studies, 63 were duplicates which were removed. 23 studies from the remaining 42 were not pertinent and thus excluded. Abstracts of the remaining 19 studies were read in-depth and during the process 7 studies had to be eliminated as they did not directly match organizational communication or employee engagement. Finally, 4 studies from the remaining 12 had to be removed as they were in another language other than English. At last, only 8 studies remained and these were used for this review.

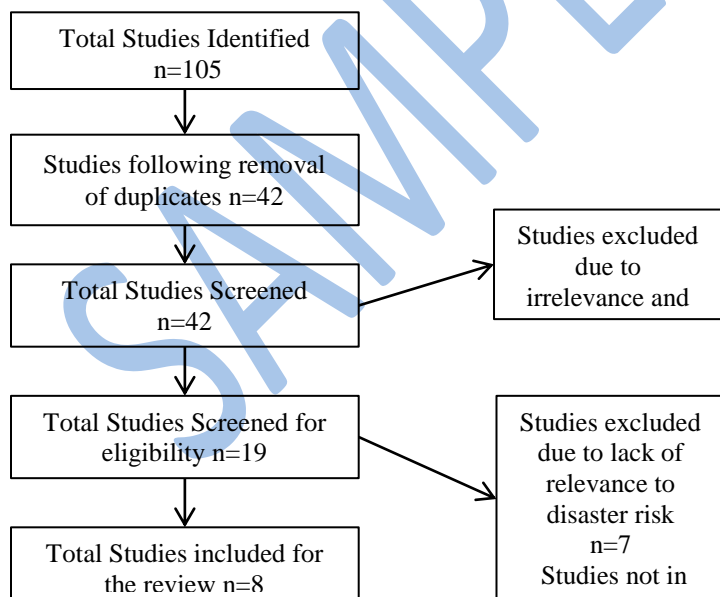


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart

Discussion

Top-Down Communication and Employee Engagement

It has been stated by Ahmad and Aldakhil (2012), that employee engagement was crucial for ensuring positive business outcomes. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to investigate all aspects that might enable employee engagement at the workplace. The communication system in organizations as evident through researches has been shown as a key factor which facilitates an employee to be engaged with an organization. Organizations are supposed to present employees with an opportunity to discuss and reflect their individual aspirations. According to Krohn (1981), employees want to be heard and they need to feel that they are directly contributing to organizational outcomes. The manner in which organizations listen would shape employees to a large extent if they feel valued at work or not. Obtaining feedbacks from employees and overlooking suggestions without any due justification would demoralize them. If employee opinions are ignored, a sense of detachment and insignificance sets in.

Ahmad and Aldakhil (2012) state that top-down communication would be instrumental in building trust among employees and employers. Trust would develop the grounds for encouragement, open communication, employee engagement and retention in organizations. Trust is essential to employee engagement as it enables cooperation, commitment and free flow of ideas. Trust on employees brings in honesty and trusted employees do not shy away from taking risks, nor do they abhor change. It has been posited by Qvortrup (2006), that a successful top-down communication would not take place naturally rather, such a phenomenon is impossible. Therefore, the impact of the medium utilized for top-down communication needs to limit the improbability for success in communication and attributes of the medium could be measured by the way in which it ensures success in communication.

Bottom-Up Communication and Employee Engagement

Krishnan and Wesley (2013) state that there is evidence which indicates employee engagement begins when employees are informed about organizational and inter-organizational functioning. The most significant aspects supporting employee engagement refers to the scope for providing upward feedback and to be kept well-informed about organizational functioning.

Furthermore, it has also been noted that in case effective employee communication occurs, it allows employees to comprehend individual roles in the organization as a whole or in their department. This results in organizational success. In addition, research has indicated that well-informed employees obtain clarity through a series of organizational objectives, and they will be more likely to effectively use the time they spend in an organization (Krishnan & Wesley, 2013). have stressed upon the major role that bottom-up communication has to play with regards to achieving an optimum level of employee engagement. An assessment of employee engagement revealed that bottom-up communication was vital in ensuring engagement amongst employees. Bottom-up communication also brings in a positive difference in employee engagement. Highly engaged employees adopt an open communication with managers, supervisors and senior management regularly as compared to situations where there is poor bottom-up communication.

It has been posited by Wilson and Irvine (2013), based on the debates revolving around the stakeholder theory, it has emerged that approaches in bottom-up communication tend to foster active engagement among employees, rather than being passive participants. Therefore, bottom-up communication approaches are highly favoured as compared to top-down communication approaches driven by management.

This is largely attributed to the fact that bottom-up approaches present a wider potential to achieve organizational goals. Within the United Kingdom, there is high demand for organizations to adopt a bottom-up communication approach that generally focuses on the way in which employees are retained and their well-being on the whole.

Conclusion

Communication as a process is vital within all organizations and therefore it would be deleterious to ignore communication. Improved organizational performance, quality of service and greater satisfaction level of customers, all depend mainly on higher degree of employee engagement and equal participation from the management and employees. Active participation of employees and management might not be possible if proper knowledge and information required is not offered to them.

This highlights the necessity for having proper top-down and bottom-up communication in any organization. In order to ensure effective communication, management at the top-level needs to take the lead while managers and supervisors are responsible to communicate information both ways. While initiating communication, it should offer enough potential for two-way procedure which takes both top-down and bottom-up communication approaches under its ambit.

SAMPLEWORK

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