

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE OIL & GAS SECTOR

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1. Introduction

According to Aon Hewitt (2012), employee engagement refers to the “state of emotional and intellectual involvement that motivates employees to do their best work through examination of employees’ level of engagement relative to the organisation’s antecedents” (p.5). Scarlett (2010) defines employee engagement as “the measurable degree of an employee’s positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organisation that profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at the workplace”. White (2011) however states, “Employee engagement represents an alignment of maximum job satisfaction with maximum job contribution” (p.5).

Varied statistics show that employee engagement is a pertinent aspect in enhancing an organisation’s productivity. Beddoes (2011) states that engagement levels are stabilising globally with a 58% increase in 2011 as compared to 56% in 2010, with the greatest levels experienced in Asia Pacific and Europe. After the economic crisis, engagement levels lagged but economic indicators show increasing improvement between 2009 and 2010 around the globe (Aon Hewitt, 2012). Minton (n.d.) states that four out of ten employees are not engaged translating into 58% engaged and 42% partially or totally disengaged, with motivational factors, career development opportunities, employee recognition and the organisation’s reputation playing a major contributory factor to the results.

This study has developed the following objectives (1) identification of employee engagement levels/models, (2) identification of employee engagement drivers. (3) Identification of effective ways to engage employees, (4) advantages realised by having an engaged work force.

2. Engagement Model/ Levels

Aon Hewitt (2012) define engagement model as “a model that determines employee engagement levels in the organisation through examining employees’ level of engagement towards the organisation in the relation to the set organisational antecedents” (p.5). This model states that engagement in one’s work or organisation is an individual choice but regularly influenced by group affiliations, developed by the employees, psychological and behavioural capacity regarding the organisation. The management particularly human resource managers should incorporate, encourage and develop the model’s components while relating with the employees.

The model incorporates three main components (1) ‘Say component’ that encourages the management and employees to think and speak highly of the organisation and its activities to colleagues, potential employees and clients. (2) ‘Stay component’ that encourages the employees to continually desire to be part of the company through encouraging recognition, appraisal, teamwork and team building activities thus reducing employee turnover and encouraging potential employees and clients (Schneider, White & Paul 1998). (3) ‘Strive component’ that encourages growth of an organisational culture that encourages hard work and achievement of success, thus enhancing input of extra effort from employees which in turn enhances commitment and increased productivity. Incorporation of the above model leads to more engaged employees, which lead to increased quality delivery, client satisfaction and sales, which eventually leads to increased efficiency (Organ, Posdakoff & Mackenzie 2006).

3. Engagement Drivers

Sijts and Crim (2006) define engagement drivers as factors that increase employee engagement in organisation through effective management of engagement levels. These

drivers identify potential improvement areas in the organisation pertaining to employee engagement. These drivers are interrelated thus work in unison. Engagement drivers therefore help management identify lacking areas that prohibit employee potential, thus enhancing focus on improvement efforts that enhance productivity through increased employee commitment (Organ, Posdakoff & MacKenzie 2006).

3.1 Quality of Work Life

Quality of work life refers to creation of a work environment whereby employees' activities are prioritised through execution of work structure activities that deem the activities less routine thus more rewarding to the employees (Sigy, Efraty, Siegel & Lee 2001). It therefore involves creation of a conducive physical environment through availing the required resources necessary for work execution such as proper safety clothing and equipment thus enhancing productivity and engagement. It also involves enhancement of a work-life balance policy, which enables employees to clearly define and separate their work and social lives thus enhancing growth of an all-rounded employee, which enhances engagement leading to increased productivity (Richard & Deci 2000).

3.2 Company Practices

The organisation's practices greatly contribute to employee engagement levels. Integration of interactive human resource policies enhances employee involvement in decision making, which in turns motivates them thus enhancing employee engagement (Aon Hewitt 2012). Introduction of effective management performance policies will enhance creation of efficient performance management and appraisal systems, which will recognise employees' work input thus increasing their engagement leading to increased productivity (Cook, 2008). Extensive brand alignment through increased marketing and advertising will enhance engagement, as employees will view the organisation as a long-term venture as it has demonstrated continuity of operations (Payne 2012). Increasing and developed organisational

reputation will enhance engagement, as employees will be more at ease to work in a reputable organisation thus demonstrating its continuity and job security. Development of a diversity culture relating to the organisation's activities and employment of diverse individuals concerning race or gender, will enhance engagement, as it will eradicate any occurrences or fears of discrimination. According to Hynes (2012), creation of an effective communication system and structure will ensure that any important information pertaining to employees work activities or welfare are timely relayed thus enhancing growth and development of work interrelationships which enhance efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

3.3 Total Rewards

Organisations should clearly outline its reward structure, as this will contribute to the engagement or disengagement of employees. Clear definition of employees' expected pay and benefits package will enhance clear understanding about the pay package thus enhancing engagement (Harter, Schmidt & Theodore 2012). The oil and gas sector should also clearly stipulate systems used to determine recognition payments regarding bonus allocation.

3.4 Opportunities

To effectively enhance employee engagement, organisations in the oil and gas sector should clearly outline career opportunities available to employees who want to further advance their careers within the organisation regarding promotions and transfers that contribute to career development. Organisations should also outline the available learning and development opportunities within the organisation (Richard & Deci 2000). Such opportunities could include sponsorships, study leave and provision of work-study allowances.

3.5 People

People involved in the management, operational and end-user aspects of the organisation have a great impact on employees' engagement. Organisations should therefore enhance

creation of a proper work structure and culture that will enhance effective cooperation and communication among management, employees and customers (Aon Hewitt, 2012). This will in turn enhance development of interrelationships, leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness through increased employee engagement.

3.6 Work Activities

An organisation's work structure can contribute to either engagement or disengagement of employees within the organisation. Development of an elaborate and conclusive work structure will enhance clear development of work tasks, work processes, provision of necessary resources, hence providing the employees with a sense of accomplishment through effective and efficient execution of allocated work (Sahoo & Mishra 2012). This will therefore lead to increased employee engagement.

4. Ways to Engage Employees

Employee engagement is essential to organisations in the oil and gas sector as it enhances efficiency and effectiveness through increased production. Incorporation of various aspects has been identified as potential ways to increase employee engagement. These aspects include (1) Enhancement of employee career opportunities by creating career path for employees through training them in preparation for their next career role by creation of lateral growth opportunities (Aon Hewitt, 2012). (2) Increasing employee recognition through providing them with feedback regarding their work activities and how to improve on them by providing the necessary reinforcements and also rewarding them for work well done (Cook, 2008). (3) Management should strive to engage the employees more with the organisation through its vision, mission and objectives by explaining to them why the employer is the most desirable by offering a compelling proposition, reward and work experience structure thus enhancing the organisation's reputation as the most preferred employer (Payne, 2012). (4) Creation of an engaging communication structure through enhancement of corporate

communication, which will appeal to employees emotional, behavioural, psychological and social aspects thus enhancing commitment to the organisation (Hynes, 2012). (5) Increased management of employee performance as employees will be effectively rewarded for their efforts thus enhancing employee engagement. (6) Provision of favourable pay as it will enhance employee engagement through provision of a pay and benefits package that is relative to their work performance (Zablah et al. 2012).

5. Advantages of having Engaged Employees

Employee engagement directly relates and affects employee efficiency and effectiveness in relation to performance. Several advantages are extended to organisations in the oil and gas sector, which have employees who are actively engaged in the organisation and its production activities:

- Employees exhibit high levels of performance as they are highly motivated leading to increased production that enhances efficiency and effectiveness.
- Development of an interrelating link between employee engagement and profits realised thus leading to increased revenues that enhance organisational growth.
- Leads to increased employee retention and loyalty, which enhances business success through efficient and effective production.
- Enhances creation of a competitive environment, which increases production thus enhancing effectiveness and increased profits.
- Enhances teamwork that provides new ideas that enhance innovation and creativity thus enhancing creation of new and effective products.
- Development of brand ambassadors through employees for the organisations products thus enhancing marketing and advertising activities, which enhance profit realisation.

6. Recommendations

- i. Oil and gas companies should encourage employee engagement through creation of an organisational culture that develops engagement, through increased employers, leaders and stakeholder's involvement in the process by enhancing teamwork and being a part of the process.
- ii. Increasing focus on drivers that provide the greatest impact in organisational improvement such as increasing opportunities for improvement which leads to increased rate of return due to increased profits.
- iii. Increased recognition of employee efforts through provision of feedback, which in turn motivates them thus increasing productivity.
- iv. Organisations should continually connect with employees through regular communication of organisation's strategy, which keeps them focussed on achievement of set organisational objectives.
- v. Creative creation of employee career growth opportunities by re-navigating employees' expectations towards growth in areas that will satisfy growing business needs such as lateral movements.
- vi. Selecting employees during recruitment who show aspects that encourage engagement such as loyalty, diversity and work aggressiveness.

7. Conclusion

Employee engagement is a pertinent aspect in management of employees in the oil and gas industry. Clear understanding of the aspect regarding its impact on the organisation and application of the findings can lead to increased employee engagement through increased productivity, which increases the overall profits realised thus enhancing the sector's growth. This has led to the identification and incorporation of various engagement models/ levels by organisations and they include stay and strive components. It has led to the identification of

engagement drivers, which enhance understanding of the drivers that contribute to increased employee engagement and how they can be incorporated. Engagement drivers include (1) Quality of work life which incorporates physical work environment and work-life balance. (2) Company practices which incorporate human resource policies, performance management, brand alignment, organisational representatives, diversity and communication. (3) Total rewards which incorporate pay, benefits and recognition. (4) Opportunities drive, which incorporates career opportunities, learning and development. (5) People drive, which incorporates management, employees, colleagues, people-focus and clients. (6) Work activities, which incorporate work tasks, work processes, resources and a sense of accomplishment.

The study has also identified ways of enhancing employee engagement which include increasing career opportunities, increased recognition, enhancing organisational reputation, enhancing communication, enhancing performance management, and provision of fair remuneration in relation to one's contribution. Employee engagement extends various advantages to the organisations, which include increased revenues, increased productivity, and quality delivery, decreased turnover, increased employee loyalty and enhanced organisational reputation. Employee engagement is therefore a pertinent aspect in the oil and gas industry and should be considered to ensure that the organisations have increased quality delivery, productivity and revenue generation.

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