

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN CIVIL AVIATION SECTOR IN KERALA

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Abstract

Change and intense competition are the characteristics of today's business environment. Employee engagement is an efficient method to cope up with this changing scenario. Employee engagement is an evolving concept in the present era especially in aviation sector where the need for commitment is very high. When employees are effectively engaged with their organisation, they form an emotional connection with the company. This affects their attitude towards both their colleagues and the company's clients and improves customer satisfaction and service levels. This paper makes an attempt to understand the extent to which employee engagement is relevant in Aviation sector in Kerala. Ten Human resource factors have been identified as attributes leading to employee engagement. A five step action plan has also been developed to measure the extent to which employees are engrossed in their work in the Aviation sector in Kerala.

Key Words: *Employee Engagement, Aviation sector*

1. Introduction

“Engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles and while OCB involves voluntary and informal behaviour that can help co – workers and the organization, the focus of engagement is one’s formal role performance rather than extra – role and voluntary behaviour” Saks, A.M (2006) Schaufeli et al (2002) defined engagement “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption”. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. It is a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organization and its values. This paper focuses on employee engagement in Aviation sector and the ways to make the employees engaged in the organisation. Engagement at work is essentially conceptualized as harnessing effectiveness of organizational members in their work roles. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.

Categories of Employee Engagement

Engaged: The engaged employees are those who work with full passion and are emotionally attached to the organization. They are innovative and provide new ideas to move the organization forward. Such employees are optimistic and spread positivity among the co-workers. They personalize the goals and objectives and always work for the betterment of the organization.

Not Engaged: This is the category in which majority of the employees in the organization fall. These are the ones who seek directions from their superior and do only that work which has been asked for. Such employees do put in their time, but not passion and energy into their work. They like to receive only one instruction at a time and lacks innovativeness. These employees may hold either a negative or positive attitude towards the organization.

Actively Disengaged: They are unhappy, resentful and may spread unhappiness in the organization. Such employees are bad for the organization since they are always provoking and convincing the other employees to leave their jobs and move out of the organization. However, these employees last longer in the firm and remove the prospective employees whom they perceive will attain higher position or move to the next job level in the near future. They do so, to get ahead in their jobs by removing the potential candidates.

2. Importance of engagement

Employee engagement is an important factor in determining employee performance. Sustainable employee engagement involves protection of employee health and wellbeing as well as sustaining performance over time. Employee engagement is assuming importance, because by empowering every individual and ensuring their full participation in the business, innovation will increase, productivity will rise, and the enterprise will become more efficient. There are a few distinct ways to get on track with a better engagement level. Engaged employees will stay with the company, be an advocate of the company; may perform better and remain motivated, have an emotional connection with the company, have trust in the organisation, and may become effective brand ambassadors for the company.

A highly engaged employee will perform consistently and beyond the general expectations of an organisation. The employees should be encouraged to ask 'whether they have the opportunity to do what they do best everyday'. Thus employee engagement is critical to any organization that seeks to retain valued employees. Many studies revealed the importance of employee engagement for an organisation. Ana Tkalac Vercic, Nina Poloski (2017) found in

their study that internal communication is highly positively related to engagement. The study done by Jalal hanaysha (2016) found that employees with organisational commitment, organisational learning, work environment are more engaged. Nada Al Mehzri and Sanjay Kumar Singh (2016) conceptually studied certain factors affecting Employee Engagement. The factors include Organisational culture, leadership, teamwork, perceived organisational support and found that these factors contribute to enhance Employee Engagement. In the AON survey on '2018 trends in Global Employee engagement', it was revealed that rewards and recognition, senior leadership, career development, employee value proposition and enabling infrastructure are the strongest drivers of engagement globally. Talat Islam, et.al.(2019) found from their study that employees who are not able to make a balance between their work and family life are less engaged in their work. Work engagement plays a mediator role between inter-role conflicts and turnover intention.

3. Civil Aviation Sector

The civil aviation sector in India has emerged as one of the fastest growing sectors in the country during the recent past. India is expected to overtake UK to become the third largest air passenger market by 2024. According to data released by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), FDI inflows in India's air transport sector (including air freight) reached US\$ 1,817.23 million between April 2000 and December 2018. India's aviation sector is expected to witness Rs. 35,000 crore (US\$ 4.99 billion) investment in the next few years. The Indian government is planning to invest US\$ 1.83 billion for development of airport infrastructure along with aviation navigation services by 2026. Indian Aviation sector has undergone huge transformation following the liberalization of the aviation industry in India. It has many privately owned airlines with affordable carriers. Almost 75% of the domestic aviation sector consists of the private airlines. There are four international airports in the State - Trivandrum International Airport Limited, Cochin International Airport Limited, Kozhikode International Airport Limited and Kannur International Airport Limited. Despite many setbacks, including the ban on wide-bodied aircraft at the Calicut airport or the 15-day closure of the Kochi airport due to floods in 2018, more people prefer to fly from these airports. A major factor has been the disposable income of the upwardly mobile middle class. With its large emigrant population, Kerala also has the busiest airports in India. A report of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) says about 41% of India's direct international connectivity are to West Asia — much of it to super-connector hubs of the UAE and Qatar. The UAE leads the way, with almost 20%,

followed by Saudi Arabia and the United States, each with just over 9% market share. The Kochi airport, ranked seventh in the country, handled 1,01,72,839 passengers during 2017-18. The number of passengers handled by Thiruvananthapuram and Calicut was 43,93,469 and 31,39,432 respectively during the same period.

This Paper attempts to analyse the extent to which employees are currently engaged with their work owing to modified work environment in Civil Aviation sector of Kerala. A few employees in different cadre from the Civil aviation sector of Kerala including Trivandrum International Airport Limited, Cochin International Airport Limited, Kozhikode International Airport Limited, and Kannur International Airport Limited were approached for the purpose of the study. The information collected from the employees is detailed under each of the factors leading to employee engagement in Civil Aviation Sector. The Paper aims at explaining the viewpoints of the employees with respect to the working environment in this sector which makes them engaged with their work. It was found that when employees get more and more disengaged with their work, the organization may have to face serious consequences.

4. Factors Leading to Employee Engagement

The following Human Resource factors have been identified as leading to employee engagement which will be discussed with respect to Civil aviation Sector.

Career development Opportunities

Organizations intending high levels of engagement provide employees with opportunities to develop their abilities, learn new skills, acquire new knowledge and realise their potential. Thus personal development opportunities are embedded in plans of companies with respect to the career paths of their employees and invest in them. The top management had earlier given critical importance to the training and development of the employees. Some employees feel that, recently routine airport activities are given more importance than training and development. A section of the employees now feel that they are more involved in routine activities without gaining much opportunity for their career development.

Respectful Treatment of Employees

Successful organizations show respect for each employee's qualities and contribution, regardless of their job level. This will help in enhancing the morale of the employees towards

the concern. With the leadership style being participative, earlier the employees were treated well and the management have always encouraged for employee contributions. The core culture changed drastically when the new ways of treating employees were adopted.

Company's standard of ethical behaviour

A company's ethical standards also lead to engagement of an individual. The employees feel engaged to their concern owing to the standards of ethical behaviour exercised by the management. The employees expect that they will be treated fairly and equally being free from bias and undue favouritism. Employees in the aviation sector in Kerala prefer to have an approach from the management which is unbiased and which can build confidence in them.

Equal Opportunities and Fair Treatment

The employee engagement levels would be high if their superiors provide equal opportunities for growth and advancement to all the employees. Every employee in the concern would expect them to be treated equally and fairly by the management and that the management will treat them without any bias. The management should ensure that all the employees are given equal opportunities and are treated fairly so that they can become more engaged with the organisation.

Pay and Benefits

The company should have a proper pay system so that the employees are motivated to work in the organization. In order to boost his engagement levels the employees should also be provided with certain benefits and compensations. The employees must be entitled to bonus and other benefits from time to time. Most of the employees in Civil Aviation sector are benefitted and satisfied with the pay system prevailing.

Performance Appraisal

Fair evaluation of an employee's performance is an important criterion for determining the level of employee engagement. The company which follows an appropriate performance appraisal technique which is transparent and not biased will have high levels of employee engagement. The appraisal system should be transparent. The management should ensure that the system is effective and free from bias.

Health and Safety

Research indicates that the engagement levels are low if the employee does not feel secure while working. Therefore every organization should adopt appropriate methods and systems for the health and safety of their employees. The employees and their family are entitled to insurance and medical benefits which are taken care of by the management. This is another area which ensures that the employee's feels engaged.

Family Friendliness

A person's family life influences his work life. When an employee realizes that the organization is considering his family's benefits also, he will have an emotional attachment with the organization which leads to engagement. Work life balance is an essential criterion which makes an employee engaged with its concern. The work culture in an international airport is unique. The nature of job is of critical importance. The employees feel that they could possibly exercise a balance in their personal and professional life while working in the organisation. It is imperative that the management takes necessary initiatives in ensuring work life balance of its employees.

Job Satisfaction

Only a satisfied employee can become an engaged employee. Therefore it is very essential for an organization to see to it that the job given to the employee matches his career goals which will make him enjoy his work and he would ultimately be satisfied with his job. Some employees feel that there is a gap in the training and development programmes offered. The authoritative nature of top management is also becoming a reason for dissatisfaction of job among the employees. The uncertainty generating from time to time owing to political changes and top management changes also adds up to the lack in satisfaction towards the job. This is an aspect which requires proper attention as lack of satisfaction towards job will lead to disengaged employee community.

Communication

A company should follow the open door policy. There should be both upward and downward communication with the use of appropriate communication channels in the organisation. If the employee is given a say in the decision making and has the right to be heard by his superior, then the engagement levels are likely to be high. In recent times, the top

management though having an open door policy seems not much effective owing to the emergence of power politics. The negative side of informal communication channels have also emerged generating flow of rumours and unauthenticated messages which leads to confusions and agony among employees. The management must ensure that the informal communication channels are effectively curtailed which will prevent unnecessary stress being building up among the employees

To alleviate the level of employee engagement in Civil Aviation sector, following measures of employee engagement can be considered.

i. Listen to Employees

The Management should engage in productive discussions with its employees from time to time to identify their specific concerns if any. When the management listens, employees respond by becoming more engaged. The result will be increased productivity and talent retention.

ii. Measure Current Level of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement needs are to be measured at regular intervals in order to track its contribution to the success of the organisation. But measuring the engagement using feedback through surveys without planning how to handle the result can lead employees to disengage. The employees should be encouraged to understand themselves about the extent to which they feel they are engaged with their work. This will help the management to gain an understanding about the preferences of the employees.

iii. Identify the problem Areas

Identify the problem areas to find out the areas, which may result in employees feel disengaged. The management must make efforts to identify the bottlenecks if any which makes employees disengaged with their work. Conducting customized employee surveys and the feedback generated will help the management in pinpointing problem areas as identified by the employees which makes them disengaged.

iv. Introduce a 360- degree appraisal system for all employees

The employees may feel that they are not appraised effectively if personal biasness acts as a hindrance to the transparency of the appraisal process. Civil Aviation Sector still relies on

Confidential Reports. This system may get biased due to the existence of power politics and in-group members of the top management. A 360-degree feedback process ensures transparency and employee-friendliness and it helps in breaking the traditional mould and inverses the organizational pyramid ensuring reverse accountability where management will also be accountable to the employees. It will make a lot more difference in the employee engagement with the implementation of a 360- degree feedback appraisal system.

Best practices for Employee Engagement in Civil Aviation Industry

Some good practices that Civil Aviation sector could consider with new recruitments are:

- i. Recruiting and giving each person a job fit
- ii. A strong training and development programme
- iii. Regular technical/soft-skill updates
- iv. Activities for improving communication
- v. Strong employee employer relationship
- vi. Reward and recognition schemes
- vii. Team building activities
- viii. Leadership development activities

Conclusion

Employee Engagement is a vital tool for ensuring high performance in any industry. It is a positive behaviour by the employees shown towards the organization and its values for betterment of self and the organisation is very high. In Civil aviation sector, organizations should give importance to employees, as they are the contributors to a company's competitive position. Employee engagement should be a continuous process of learning, improvement, measurement and action. Employees should know exactly what is expected of them. Knowing the critical demands for every role is a key to ensuring that they are effectively engaged. Organisations should create an environment that encourages employees to drive towards innovation and create better engagement level for more productive results. There are several factors including communication, maintaining relationship, making effective working environment and maintaining a good relationship with colleagues which will help the employees to improve engagement and prevent the employee from frustration and may lead to the retention. It can be concluded that raising and maintaining employee engagement is an essential factor in Civil Aviation sector which requires a perfect blend of time, effort and commitment from both the Employees and the Top Management.

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