

TALENT RETENTION THROUGH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

“It should go without saying, if the person who works at your company is 100 percent proud of the brand and you give them the tools to do a good job and they are treated well, they’re going to be happy” - Sir Richard Branson

Talent retention refers to the systematic efforts of management to create a culture which encourages good employees to stay longer in achievement of the organisational goals and contribute to its overall development. Present study was conducted to identify key factors contributing towards the faculty turnover in higher education institutions in India and employee engagement as a comprehensive strategy to diminish the intention to turnover.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Talent Retention, Intention to Turnover, Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

An organisation's ability to achieve high performance and superior business results is closely related to its capability of managing its employee and their level of engagement effectively. It has been observed that the organisations, which have highly engaged workforce, deliver higher productivity leading to increased sales and profits, superior quality adding to the customer delight. At the same time, it results into lower attrition and abated intention to leave the establishment.

According to Forbes “Employees who are engaged in their work are more likely to be motivated and remain committed to their employer thus leading to achieving more business goals and helping to drive the organization forward”(Jessica Brook, 2019).

II. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement has emerged as a buzzword in human resource management during the last three decades. It can be identified as willing commitment and engrossment of an employee by mind, body and soul in the achievement of organisational goals and objectives. An engaged employee identifies himself with the organisation and fully comprehends the business perspective. Such a person joins the fellow employees in improving the total performance for the benefit of entire organisation and all its stakeholders.

The employee engagement can be stated as "the extent to which people value, enjoy, and believe in what they do" (DDI, 2005). Hence, employee engagement is a state of emotional and intellectual involvement of an employee at the work place and in one's organisation (Hewitt Associates, 2011), and is more than mere satisfaction or the paycheck.

III. TALENT RETENTION

Retention simply means ensuring that good performers continue in the organization for a long time performing their duties with full zest and contribute their best to fulfill the organisational goals. A research study conducted in 2010 by Chiboiwa et al. indicated that an employer has to take certain steps to preclude the job switching of its key employees in the process of the talent retention. Another study identified that talented workforce is an invaluable asset to an organization due to their expertise, skills and experience (Ejiofor et al., 2001). Most of the researchers come to an agreement that meaningful strategies of retention lead to longer stay of the employees with the organization and also keep them motivated to do their jobs enthusiastically (Nwokocha et al., 2012). Another research study found that the organisations, which respect their employees and

build their policies around their progress, achieve higher level of employee engagement and attain greater success (Samuel, M.O., 2008).

IV. PRESENT DAY HIGHER EDUCATION PICTURE

Education has changed dramatically over a period of time due to evolving needs of society, technological advancements, pedagogical innovations, and globalization among others. Gone are the days of a Professor just lecturing in a classroom full of students and writing notes on a blackboard and thus simply done with his job? For instance, some of the best courses may be taught completely online to a global audience from some remote corners of the world. Others consist of online lectures with team-based projects, flip learning, presentations/discussions in classroom or a take-home assignment. While teachers are slowly gearing up to the new reality, the institutional leaderships are yet to embrace it whole heartedly.

So, the HR Managers' focus is shifting to building a workforce that is ready for this competitive market and incorporate the innovative ideas in order to achieve the strategic vision of their institutions. Thus, a team of highly motivated, fully dedicated, and completely work engrossed teachers and staff who are always willing to go extra mile beyond the stated job description are invaluable assets to every educational institution.

V. INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SCENARIO

India has made noteworthy progress in last two decades in the field of higher education, leading to the Indian higher education system becoming one of the largest in the world. There has been an appreciable growth in the number of universities and colleges in India since independence from 20 and 500 to 911 and 41935, respectively, as on 31st March 2019 (UGC Annual Report 2018-19). This growth in number of higher education institutions led to the analogous growth in the recruitment and training of faculty. The total number of teachers in the higher education space grew from 12.50 lakh in 2012 to 14.16 lakh in 2018-2019, and the student enrollment in higher

education during this period also witnessed a rise from 291.80 lakh in 2012 to 373.99 lakh in 2018-19.

The National Education Policy 2020 announced recently by the Indian Government envisages the Indian higher education system to move towards holistic and experiential learning, innovative teaching methods, skill based education, socially relevant research and extension activities. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the higher education system particularly the teaching community to develop a pedagogy that inspires students towards a critical thinking and learning which is founded on inquiry, discovery, discussion, and analysis. Hence, Indian institutions cannot afford to have teachers and staff who are not fully engaged in their work and not able to deliver quality education and service to students and other stakeholders achieving the objectives of the NEP.

The question therefore is "are our HEIs well equipped with right manpower to shoulder the responsibility", particularly when no university of the country features in top 200 in any of the global rankings. And exactly for this reason there is an immediate need to examine the status of employee engagement in Indian higher education institutions.

VI. INTENTION TO TURNOVER

'Intention to turnover' has been defined by Saks A. in 2006 as an employee's voluntary intention to leave an employer. It has been assumed to have a direct bearing on the level of employee engagement (Wagner & Harter, 2006; Berry & Morris, 2007). The turnover intent is supposed to be stronger predictive of the actual turnover compared to any other variable.

Some of the research studies have identified a negative correlation of the 'intention to turnover' with certain attributes of 'employee engagement' as summarized below:

**where 'r' is the coefficient of correlation*

i.	Verquer et al., 2003	Job Fit vs. Intention to Turnover	r = -0.58
ii.	Brown & Leigh, 1996	Psychological Climate vs. Intention to Turnover	r = -0.43
iii.	Hoffman and Woehr, 2006	Job Fit vs. Intention to Turnover	r = -0.26
iv.	Rhoades et al., 2001	Affective Commitment vs. Intention to Turnover	r = -0.23

Some other researches have also established that engagement is positively associated with the intention to stay in the current organization (Harter et al., 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Towers Perrin Talent Report 2003 revealed that 2/3rd of the highly engaged employees had no intention to leave their existing organization compared to that of just 12% of the disengaged ones.

Thus, it can be safely presumed that the employee turnover or attrition is directly but negatively related to employee engagement.

VII. REASONS FOR ATTRITION

Intention to leave or stay is rooted in the thought process of an employee who, knowingly or unknowingly, keeps evaluating his position in the organisation on a continuous basis. Whereas some employees leave for the reasons which may be outside the scope of organisational control, the leaders have to be worried when high performers choose to leave due to circumstances within the organization's control (Allen, 2008; Lockwood, 2007).

Even though an extensive research has been conducted in the past regarding employee turnover, it is still not very clear as to what exactly causes faculty's intention to stay or leave their institutions. Hence, a quick survey was conducted by the author among faculty members employed in private universities and unaided colleges/programs in order to identify the factors influencing their choice of continuity or intention to leave.

Firstly, the author discussed in depth with 10 faculty members from different institutions to comprehend common pain points that could have caused their job switching, and finally listed 10

such constructs. In the second phase, 100 randomly selected faculty members were requested to rank these constructs from 1 to 10, where 1 being the *most serious reason* and 10 being the *least serious reason* contributing to switching, and the responses were compiled. 'Modal' values for each of the constructs, which the teachers in private universities and colleges in India are grappling with, were worked out and are presented below in the decreasing rank order with 'Leadership' being the foremost concern contributing to an intention to leave:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Leadership | 6. Feeling valued/
Culture of |
| 2. Job Security | respect |
| 3. Compensation | 7. Work-life |
| 4. Peer Support | Balance |
| 5. Development
Opportunities/
Career
Advancement | 8. Performance
Appraisal and
Reward System |
| | 9. Outdated
Curriculum and
Pedagogy |
| | 10. Overload of
Clerical Work |

Like every other sector of the economy, higher education also suffers its share of costs due to the employee turnover, which can adversely affect the quality of education if not given due attention and addressed in time.

VIII. BENEFITS OF RETENTION

Education sector is primarily dependent on the skills set of human beings while every other resource is in the nature of supporting one. i.e. Faculty are at the core of the education system. Unless an institution has well qualified, skilled and experienced people who are fully engaged, it may not be able to survive what to talk of quality education and excellence. In the long run, retention of good employees not only saves institution's money rather help built a reputed establishment. An employee retained is essentially time and money saved in recruitment and training, continuity in teaching and research

activity, endurance in student and alumni relationship, consolidation of research and knowledge creation, strengthening of inter-institutional association, providing firm foundation to teaching-learning innovations for enhanced quality and achieving excellence.

IX. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AS HR INTERVENTION FOR TALENT RETENTION

Most of the HR interventions for the purpose of talent retention are built around the motives attributed to the employee turnover. A number of HR interventions can be discussed to effect lower turnover and retention of the best talent, while employee engagement being one of such measure providing holistic approach to retention. Many studies have been conducted to ascertain key drivers of employee engagement that impinge upon the attention of HR Managers to retain their finest employees. Corporate Leadership Council, USA identified in 2004 that “most engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their organization”.

John Gibbons (2006) of The Conference Board of Canada, in a research paper entitled “Employee Engagement – A Review of Current Research and its Implications”, presented the following six key drivers of employee engagement:

- Trust and integrity
- Nature of job
- Line of sight between employee performance and company performance
- Career growth opportunities
- Pride about company
- Co-workers and team members

Adequate and timely HR interventions on these key factors is most likely to address the constructs identified in the faculty survey increasing employee engagement and thus reduced faculty turnover.

X. CONCLUSION

Various studies related to the employee engagement have revealed that it is highly

correlated with the job security, nature of job, organisational environment, style of leadership, trust, autonomy, support from peers and organization, performance appraisal system, work-life balance, communication ease, involvement in decision making, personal growth opportunities, among others. Similarly, the studies on employee retention have suggested that factors influencing it mainly include organisation culture, leadership quality, compensation structure, work life balance, feedback system, training and development options which impact the tenure of preferred and dedicated employees.

In the present day scenario of cut-throat competition and inadequate availability of competent, devoted, enthusiastic and loyal employees, it is for the HR Managers to apply appropriate mix of retention and engagement strategies ensuring longer stay and engagement of such faculty and staff thus avoiding adverse impact on teaching-learning process, quality of education, and assisting pedagogical innovations, continuity of research work, better mentor-mentee impact, reduced expenditure on recruitment and training, and hence promoting institution's reputation in the long run achieving a superior competitive edge.

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