

## Week 5: Employee Engagement

- Organisations want and need employees to do a job, which in turn contributes to overall organisational performance.
- So how do organisations get employees to do what they want them to do?
- Traditionally, we would have sought to **control employees via organisational bureaucracy and managerial control**.
- This in-turn causes employees to hate their 'boss' and end up leaving. This can also cause disinterest into their own work and thus reduces performance and makes mistakes.
- Therefore we need a solution to ensure high performance
- Such solution may include;
  - Empower employees instead of controlling employees. We need to support them.
  - Instead of leaving employee burnout (exhausted), we set up HR and management structures to **engage** employees.

### Engagement

There are numerous definitions of engagement:

1. Harnessing of employees to their work roles, including cognitive, physical & emotional engagement (textbook definition).
2. Contains elements of commitment and citizenship behaviour (Robinson et al., 2004).
3. Engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by **vigor**, **dedication**, and **absorption**. Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74-75
  - Where **vigor** is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties.
  - **Dedication** is characterised by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge.
  - **Absorption** is characterised by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and no one has difficulties while detaching oneself from work - '**flow theory**' - .

### Features of Employee Engagement

- Employee engagement is a state of being that has some behavioural and psychological implications.
- It is often connected to a behavioural understanding of employee behaviour
- It is connected to employee motivation; specifically intrinsic processes such as flow.

### Employee Engagement: Flow Theory

- Flow theory refers to someone being so motivated and interested in something that they divert ALL focus and filter out all distractions to focus on a particular job. During this time, employees will not notice the change in time, biological needs and other factors that may hinder performance. A sense of vigor, dedication and absorption.

In what ways can HR improve employee engagement?

### **Flow model of employee engagement**



- **Perceived organisational support**
  - How much does the organisation care for its employees?
  - This is the organisational level support.
  - This can be seen through positive organisation theory
  - Perceived supervisor support theory?
- **Leader member exchange:**
  - Leader support contributes a lot to employee engagement.
  - This is the relational support from line managers.
  - This can be seen through relational leadership theory
- **Employee's psychological capital:**
  - When employees are engaged, they don't think about leaving and will lead to affective commitment.
  - It is the employee's self belief about their jobs
  - This can be seen through positive psychology theory.
- **HRM strategies and programs should stimulate all these support.**

### An expanded perspective

- If an employee has **greater autonomy they will be more engaged**. They are not constantly being 'whipped'.

### Discretionary Behaviour

- Discretionary behaviour refers to the degree of choice people have over how they perform their tasks and responsibilities (Purcell et al, 2003; Hutchinson, 2013).
- **Employees who have higher levels of discretionary power and autonomy of the tasks that they do also have higher levels of engagement.** However, too much discretion can result in employees focusing on tasks which may not be related to organisational goals... it is a difficult balancing act
- The level of discretionary power that an employee has is largely determined by the job design mentality of *the organisation, the manager*, and to a certain point, *the employee themselves*.

- **This can lead to organisational citizenship behaviour and positive discretionary behaviour.**

### The Role of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

#### **Perceived Organisation Support**

- Perceived Organisational Support (POS) refers to employees' perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being.
- *If your organisation cares about you, you will care about your organisation!*
- POS can be indicative of organisational-level strategies, control mechanisms, policies and practices...
- This is very closely aligned with perceived supervisor support theory.

#### **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

- Leader-member exchange theory accounts for the social exchanges between a supervisor and their subordinate.
- There are a number of dimensions to the theory, but the essential components include:
  - Relationship type: Transactional or Reciprocal
  - Relationship quality: In-group or out-group
- The optimal relationship between supervisor and subordinate exists when the exchange is reciprocal, and the subordinate is in the 'in-group'... but achieving this arrangement is contingent on a number of factors

### The Employee's Role in Engagement: The Role of Psychological Capital

- Psychological Capital is a manifestation of positive psychology theory
- It's the idea that **people who are positive at work are more likely to achieve better outcomes than people who are negative...** and there is quite a lot substantial evidence to support this
- Psychological Capital refers to a person's level of **self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience**
  - Self-efficacy is confidence that through your work you will achieve your goals
  - Hope is the belief that you can achieve your goals
  - Resilience is the belief that you can bounce back if you face setbacks
  - Optimism is the expectation that things should run smoothly 'Glass half full'

#### **Summary – Conclusion**

- An organisation can support employee engagement though:
  - Training of managers to encourage well-being (line managers)
  - Reducing the amount of non-work related work (job design objective).

- At a leader level:
  - Reciprocal and in-group relationship
  - To generate a reciprocal relationship, communication is crucial.
  - Reduction in bureaucratic management – reduce power distance
  - Psychological capital of employees can be achieved through positive psychological and training.