Modern organizations are characterized by frequent economic-political and technological changes. Rapid advancements in technology have made access to information faster and easier like never before. Because of this, achieving technological operational competitiveness has become much easier for organizations. At the same time, the way technology is being used in most of the organizations makes it a serious impediment in obtaining the overall engagement of employees. For a large number of organizations, technology remains a mere tool of policing the activities of employees instead of being a mechanism of mutual support. For sustainable growth, organizations must harness technology in such way that it helps to build an environment where employees feel energetic and absorbed, instead of feeling being monitored.

Achieving engagement of quality workforce has always been one of the most challenging tasks for human resource (HR) practitioners. Emergence of a new pool of workforce, the “Millennials” has made it even more difficult. Most of the organizations today are facing difficulty in engaging millennial workforce. A survey by Deloitte (2016) reveals that majority of millennial workers are looking to change their companies by 2020. According to a PwC (2011) report, most CEOs find attracting, retaining, and gaining millennial engagement as the biggest challenge for organizations today. This paper proposes some strategies to engage millennials using technology.

Meaning and origin of employee engagement

Employee engagement is a critical tool for effective talent management. It enhances the competitiveness and image of an organization. According to Saks (2006), engagement is important for achieving both individual outcomes, such as job satisfaction, well-being, and positive affect to work, and organizational outcomes such as growth and productivity.

The first academic work in employee engagement is found in the works of William Kahn in 1990. A closer review of definitions provided by scholars in different time frame highlights three dimensions/aspects of engagement – cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Cognitive aspect reflects an employee’s perception and belief towards the supervisor, working environment, and overall culture of the organization. Emotional aspect reflects the employee’s attitude towards the supervisor and the organization. Behavioral aspect is reflected in the employee’s efforts put forth in his work and his relationship with other coworkers. Millennials believe in reciprocal relationships. They do not owe their commitment to anything unless they find personal interest in it. Millennials expect their employers to help them in advancing their personal goals in exchange for emotional and behavioral commitment to the organization.

Millennial workforce

Millennial refers to the people born between 1980 and 2000 (PwC, 2011). This generation is also known as iGen and tech-savvy because they are born and brought up with smart
technologies. They possess high self-esteem and high expectations combined with reluctance to give whole hearted effort to anything that they consider not very meaningful for their career (Schullery, 2013). Millennials have seen the maximum number of economic crisis and environmental turbulence. This makes them risk-averse, much focused towards their personal development, and unwilling to put all their efforts in one job. Hence, they look for a job setting that allows them to take up more than one job. Self-interest is more important than anything else for this generation. They are highly ambitious, expect fast growth, and hate information silos and rigid corporate structures that bind them in rules. They want immediate result for their efforts. Compared with previous generations, millennials emphasize much more on balancing work with their personal goals and passion. They frequently seek new job opportunities to advance their career, make new friends, and serve the community. They expect their employers to challenge but not micromanage them. They desire a flexible environment with abundant opportunities to better them in their career. Presently there are 2 billion millennials across the world, aged between 17 and 37 years (Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, 2017). With majority of them residing in India, the country is soon going to be major contributor to the global employee base. Hence, strategizing to engage this group is not a choice but a compulsion for employers. This paper proposes strategies that are meant for engaging millennial workforce.

Ways to engage millennials

For millennials, being engaged means to get ample opportunities for their professional development and personal growth. For organizations, achieving engagement means to achieve employees’ passion, intelligence, and enthusiasm in work. More than 30 HR practitioners across industries were contacted by telephone or in person to gather views on how to engage millennials using technology. Common views expressed by the practitioners are hereby proposed as strategies to keep millennials engaged:

- Millennials seek faster career growth and developmental opportunities. A link such as “My Career” on the employee’s dashboard highlighting career path and development process in the organization could be an effective strategy to gain emotional engagement of millennials.

- Millennials want immediate feedback. Technology can be used for communicating feedback in instant, interesting, and transparent ways. A positive feedback with a “Thumbs-up” or other compliments and recognitions that are more public may create an atmosphere of trust, integration, and transparency in organization. “gThanks” strategy practiced at Google to publicly recognize excellent work of employees exemplifies this strategy.

- “Gamification,” which means adding game-like features such as challenges, leaderboards, and badges, can make performance assessment more engaging for millennials. Gamification may also be implemented for making training and learning more interesting.

- Millennials seek importance in their workplace. Opportunity to voice their decisions related to their work creates a sense of belonging with the organization. A dashboard should be designed where millennials can express their views on common issues.

- Employee dashboard can be designed to reflect the significance of the roles played by employees in their teams such as the positions they hold and the responsibilities they assume.

- Millennial roles should be tightly aligned to business needs. Progression should be visible to every employee to allow them analyze how their effort contributes to the organizational goal.

- Fun in workplace may enhance job embeddedness, thus promoting engagement of millennials in the organization. Companies such as Google and Microsoft have been able to achieve commitment of the most creative workforce through fun factors in their workplace.
Conclusion

Employee engagement has great impact on growth of an organization and global economy. Finding the motivation of engagement is changing with changes in generations. How we utilize resources to engage the current generation will determine their engagement level in organization. For example, using technology to give immediate feedback on completion of task will affect cognitive engagement of employee. It will create positive belief toward the supervisor and organizational culture. A flash of recognition on a public dashboard will give a feeling of being valued, thus affecting the behavioral aspects of engagement by making employees perform even better in future. An opportunity to voice in decision-making creates a feeling of belongingness toward the organization, thus affecting the emotional aspect of engagement. Career development opportunities may make employees feel obligated to work toward the betterment of the organization.

According to Bersin (2014), engaging people has become one of the biggest differentiators for businesses. He proposes redefinition of engagement as a continuous business strategy rather than a mere HR measure. Employee engagement can become a business strategy if it focuses on finding factors of engagement for each employee and keeps them engaged throughout their employment. Definition of engagement must include elements of employees' contribution to the organization and the personal satisfaction they derive from this contribution.

References


Further reading


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