
UNIT 2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

One way to foster engagement in a company is through sustainability, also called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It means integrating the company's mission and purpose with sustainable values, and supporting environmental and social goals in ways that connect to the company's business. It is reinforced at multiple levels within an organization. Employees generally perceive that an organization which is socially engaged is one that is concerned about all people including employees. They think that if the organisation is generally concerned about fairness then it is more concerned about fair conditions for the employee. So, they like to work for that particular organization.

In this unit we will discuss about the concepts of employee engagement and corporate branding and also about the relationship between the two. After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the meaning and importance of employee engagement
- Describe the strategies of corporate branding
- Explain the relationship between employee engagement and employer branding

2.2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In this section we will discuss about the meaning of employee engagement and various strategies of employee engagement.

2.2.1 Meaning

Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work. It is a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organization to give of their best each day, committed to their organization's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organizational success, with an enhanced sense of their own well-being.

According to David MacLeod: *"This is about how we create the conditions in which employees offer more of their capability and potential"*.

Employee engagement is based on trust, integrity, two-way commitment and communication between an organization and its members. It is an approach that increases the chances of business success, contributing to organizational and individual performance, productivity and well-being.

It is about being included fully as a member of the team, focused on clear goals, trusted and empowered, receiving regular and constructive feedback, supported in developing new skills, thanked and recognized for achievement. It is about positive attitudes and behaviours leading to improved business outcomes, in a way that they trigger and reinforce one another.

Engaged organizations have strong and authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two-way promises and commitments – between employers and employees – are understood and fulfilled.

It is about drawing on your employees' knowledge and ideas to improve your products and services, and be innovative about how you work. It is about drawing out a deeper commitment from your employees so that sick absence reduces, accident rates decline, conflicts and grievances go down, productivity increases. It is about organization actions that are consistent with the organization's values.

Employee engagement cannot be achieved by a mechanistic approach which tries to extract discretionary effort by manipulating employees' commitment and emotions. Employees see through such attempts very quickly and can become cynical and disillusioned.

Employee engagement is in a sense internal CSR. It is the art of having employees, appreciating their work, and they becoming more productive and active. Vital elements of CSR for an organization are to engage its employees and provide them with rewarding meaningful work. Organizations with a sound track record in social responsibility tend to produce greater pride and performance among their employees.

Organizations need to look carefully at their own situations when deciding how best to engage employees. Organizational context will differ as will employee wants and needs. In the current economic climate there is a need for both organizational engagement as well as job engagement.

We know that people are not all alike, so employee engagement requires that the employer identifies the strengths of its employees and get the best from them. But employee engagement is not just about the company – each person is responsible for his/her own level of engagement.

Most companies that do it well have something in common – they understand that it's a driver of success and that it therefore needs to be a key business strategy, which is everyone's responsibility (not just HR's or the leaders' responsibility). This strategy works best when it translates into behaviours and culture.

They also know that they have to look after their employees so they can look after the customers, or as Wal-Mart's founder Sam Walton said: "the way

management treats associates is exactly how the associates will treat the customers”.

2.2.2 Employee Engagement Strategies

There are many good examples of companies that have achieved great results when it comes to an engaged culture and it's worth reflecting on what they do and why it works. Some examples of particular interest follow.

1) Google - Transparency

Google has been very intentional about creating the culture they want. One aspect of that culture is their focus on transparency. The idea is to break down barriers, encourage creativity and collaboration. Employees, as a result, are feeling empowered by that transparency. Culture comes down to behavioural habits and Google, by creating a culture of transparency and freedom, creates habits of creativity. Formalizing that people spend 20% of their time doing something outside their normal work function facilitates a creative culture. Ultimately culture is about “how things get done” and should not be left to chance. It is too powerful a force not to take control over, and Google has done this well.

The organizations that focus on transparency engage more employees than those who don't. Employees want to be a part of something where there are no hidden agendas and they are experiencing an honest perspective whether that is good news or not. Informed employees feel valued and engagement typically follows.

2) American Express – Focus On Behaviours

In a world where results are everything and goals are often largely about what results people achieve, regardless of how they achieved them, American Express was different even 25 years ago. The company has for a long time had equal weighting between the fact that people achieve their goals and how they do it. It simply should not be possible to achieve top results, ratings, pay and potential bonus without considering the impact of employee behaviour.

‘Behaviour’ is how we conduct ourselves, act and react, towards others. Successful companies understand how behaviour impacts employees at an emotional level, where much of engagement with an employer happens. They therefore value how people do their job. The high performers in companies where engagement is high, understand their impact and behave in a collaborative and respectful way.

3) John Lewis - Empowering

John Lewis expresses a strong focus on people. One way of doing this is to call their employees ‘partners’. It is not just a word, it is also the connection people make with that word, the emotions that it awakens. By calling them partners, the company is clearly expressing that there is a shared responsibility for the customers and the outcomes of the company. So they focus on involving their partners in decisions and solutions, empowering them to create the best customer experience.

4) Hyatt – Employee Development

The hotel group's high employee retention and long tenure speaks volumes in an industry known for its high employee turnover. The focus on employee

development and promoting from within plays a large part in this. Another interesting practice, connected to development, is how they empower their employees (whom they call associates), to listen carefully to each other and their guests, to be able to solve problems and create new solutions, rather than following scripts of what to do, making the guest feel special and heard.

Many organizations share this commitment to employee development and are therefore able to trigger that inner motivation that comes from knowing that you're growing and developing. Besides, continuous development is crucial in order to successfully deal with the constant change all organizations face.

5) Southwest Airlines - Purpose

This airline sees their purpose as connecting people with what's important to them. They don't just see themselves as transporters of people, but as enablers who help people get to people or places they care about. This may be seen as a small differentiation, but it can make a big difference in how important an employee perceives his/her job. A strong, clear purpose connects emotionally with employees, it engages.

This purpose becomes more and more important to employees. To see that you are doing something more profound than just selling a product or service, makes you feel important. It's no longer enough to "just do a job", we're seeing that people want to make a difference, to contribute to something bigger than themselves.

6) Virgin - Listening

This multi-industry organization has a habit of listening to its employees, to show that they are valued; to listen to their opinions and take care of their ideas; to have healthy debates; and to continuously innovate. It's a win-win; the organization keeps learning and employees feel important and engage with the organization.

Listening is at the heart of engagement. Everyone wants to be seen and heard – it's a minimum requirement of leadership, yet often overlooked for the immense value it can bring. We see that employees who feel listened to want to reciprocate and do their best because they feel valued and important.

Activity 1

Read more about steps taken by different companies towards enhancing employee engagement. Write about any one of the strategies that you found interesting and which is not mentioned in this unit.

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Employee engagement is the fuel of an organization. And even if an organization is good at it, we can all get better at it – and maximize that fuel.

Check Your Progress - 1

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words.

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1) What is employee engagement?

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2) How does transparency impact employee engagement?

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2.3 EMPLOYER/CORPORATE BRANDING

2.3.1 Meaning

Employer /Corporate brand is a term that describes the company’s reputation and popularity from a potential employer’s perspective and describes the value the company gives to its employees.

It is the process of creating and maintaining a company’s employer brand. It is how a company sells itself to potential candidates, the way the same company might sell its products and how the organization attracts the best candidates.

In a modern business world of talent acquisition, employer branding is used to introduce the company as a great place to work. It is used for communicating with current employees as well as attracting new, generally passive, workforce.

The employer brand has a direct impact on talent acquisition. Companies with better reputations have higher quality and more satisfied employees. Also, a candidate’s experience is significantly improved and they tend to retain employees longer.

2.3.2 Employer Branding Strategies

An employer branding strategy allows one to control and positively change the dialogue surrounding one’s company, to ensure higher talent acquisition and

retention. At its most basic, employer branding is how one market's its company to job seekers, and what employees say about the company as a workplace. A good employer branding strategy can help one attract better talent, cut down on hiring costs, and reduce employee turnover.

Some Important Steps for Creating Employer Branding Strategies:

1) Know one's company's unique value proposition

To create a powerful employer brand, a company should start by focusing on its mission statement, values, vision, and culture. It could be helpful to identify what the business needs are, and then work backwards to understand what type of talent it needs to acquire to fulfill those objectives.

2) Conduct an employer brand audit

The Company might not be fully aware of the reputation it has among job seekers or even its own employees. It can send out internal surveys, conduct social media searches, etc.

3) Write an employer value proposition

Once the company has done its research and cultivated a list of values and benefits it offers, it should create an employer value proposition. An employer value proposition is a marketing message and a promise – so the company should not say anything that is not true, or that its employees would not agree with. The company might use its employer value proposition on its website,

For instance, Accenture, a global management consulting and professional services firm, created this employer value proposition, which they've displayed prominently on their careers page – “Help build the future. Be yourself, make a difference. Work where you're inspired to explore your passions, where your talents are nurtured and cultivated. Innovate with leading-edge technologies on some of the coolest projects you can imagine. And get the tools you need to keep learning and growing so you stay continually ahead of the game while making a difference in the world.”

4) Leverage current employees

When job seekers want to learn more about an employer's brand, they're going to want to hear from and see real employees at the company. The company can leverage one's employees by conducting employee interviews or testimonials to share on the website.

The company might also leverage employees by asking them to post on their social media accounts when the company does a fun giveaway or company outing. For instance, perhaps the company creates a 'Women in Tech' event and holds a panel discussion. Afterwards, the company might simply ask its employees to post a picture on Instagram or Facebook with a hashtag that the company has created. This is a fun, yet powerful way for the company's own employees to share its culture with their own networks.

5) Cultivate a strong onboarding process

Instilling a positive company brand image starts with a good onboarding process. It's critical that a company gets employees engaged and excited about their roles, and their teams, from the start. By arming its new employees with the instructions

and tools necessary to excel in their roles, it is ensuring a smooth transition, lower turnover rates, and more productive teams.

6) Offer learning and development opportunities

If a company allows employees to pursue learning opportunities and become proficient in new skills, it is laying emphasis on continuous learning and improvement. By challenging its employees, it is ensuring that they won't get bored in their roles – which could lead to higher retention rates and as they develop new skills, they become more valuable employees for your company.

7) Use video, blog posts, photos, and slideshows to tell your company story

When the company is implementing a strategy to improve the market's perception of its product or service, it doesn't just communicate its message through one channel. Instead, it provides videos, photos, slideshows, blogs, and other forms of messaging to ensure that it is reaching the largest audience on whichever platform they wanted its stories to be found.

8) Create a strong diversity and inclusion initiative

If the company wants to create a strong employer brand, it has to show its commitment to building diverse teams. There are plenty of company benefits for investing in diversity and inclusion initiatives, including more innovative ideas, a stronger workplace culture, and better customer service attitude. However, it is also necessary for cultivating a positive employer brand, by ensuring that the Company's brands reach new groups of people.

Some employer branding examples follow.

- Starbucks
- HubSpot
- SoulCycle
- Eventbrite
- Jet

1) Starbucks

Starbucks does a good job of cultivating a strong community among their employees. For instance, they refer to current employees as partners, instilling a sense of pride in each employee. Additionally, Starbucks created Instagram and Twitter accounts specifically for @StarbucksJobs, which they use to promote their employer brand and interact with job seekers.

By creating social media accounts with the sole purpose of demonstrating appreciation for current employees and evoking passion in potential candidates, Starbucks shows its commitment to being more than just a product.

Rather than posting about their drinks, Starbucks uses its social media accounts to share their company mission, congratulate employees on college graduation, and share personal employee stories. The company also uses the platforms to demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

2) HubSpot

HubSpot's culture page begins with a document called the Culture Code, which publicly pronounces every vision and value HubSpot hopes to promote and instill in its employees, candidates, and customers.

Moving further down the page, one will find sections discussing opportunities for learning and development, HubSpot's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and interviews with real HubSpot employees. The language also consistently focuses on the job seeker – "Here's how we can help you grow"

The page ends with a "Day in the Life" video made by a HubSpot employee, demonstrating HubSpot's relentless commitment to communicating its culture via its employees. Ultimately, the page is a powerful example for how you might use interactive media to promote your employer brand.

3) SoulCycle

SoulCycle isn't just transforming the boutique fitness space – it's also aiming to transform the traditional corporate culture, by offering benefits it feels will evoke a sense of purpose and belongingness in each of its employees.

For instance, SoulCycle gives its employees two paid business days off per year to volunteer at a charity of their choice, with the hope that the charity days will help employees feel happy and more fulfilled.

Additionally, SoulCycle offers free classes (about a \$ 30 per-class value) to employees whenever it suits their schedule. This displays SoulCycle's deeper commitment to making fitness fun, and using exercise as an outlet to de-stress and connect with the community.

With high ratings in each category, including four stars on work-life balance and four stars on management, SoulCycle has undoubtedly cultivated a strong employer brand.

4) Eventbrite

To demonstrate its commitment to recruiting high quality talent, Eventbrite created a web page to introduce job seekers to its recruitment team. The bios are funny and relatable, with fun facts about each recruiter.

Additionally, the Eventbrite recruitment team page states, "Interviewing shouldn't be nerve-racking – it should be exciting. It should spark great conversation. We believe in respect, transparency, and timely responses (we don't leave anyone in the dreaded recruiting black hole)." Their language reflects their values, likely inspiring job seekers to apply.

5) Jet

The ecommerce site Jet created an inspirational, employee-focused video to spread awareness for its fun, engaging, motivational workplace. The video is especially powerful because it uses real employee interviews, giving the job seeker a sense for Jet's work culture and values.

Additionally, the video is empowering and pride-evoking for current employees, who can see their company's clear commitment to carrying out its mission statement through videos of its workers.

Activity 2

Read more about the steps taken by different companies towards employer branding. Write about any one of the strategies that you found interesting and which is not mentioned in this unit.

2.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYER/ CORPORATE BRANDING

Employee engagement is the act of having employees appreciating their work, becoming more productive and active employees. Employer branding is how a company sells itself to potential candidates, the way that same company might sell its products. This then leads to better employee engagement. Therefore, employee engagement and employer branding, are not mutually exclusive ideas. Two are closely tied to each other – one attracts people to the organization while the other has more to do with people whom the organization has already hired. Good employer branding attracts better candidates which in turn leads to employees that are more apt for the company. This leads to better employee engagement. Therefore, investment in one is a partial investment in the other.

2.5 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, EMPLOYER BRANDING AND CSR

In the present business world of talent wars, companies are constantly trying to attract the most talented pool of human capital and retain them. And to survive in such competition, building one's employer brand becomes crucial for the business. With the rise of social media, most candidates do a lot of research on the company's employer brand value before joining it.

CSR helps in reinforcing the positive image of an organization. There exists a strong connection between these two concepts of CSR and employer branding. CSR sends out a positive message about the company and thereby increases the employer brand value.

A comprehensive CSR policy needs engagement from employees and internal stakeholders, rather than only the top management in order to be sustainable. Integration of CSR into a company's employer branding strategy is necessary to attract talent required for the business. While developing employer branding strategy, principles of marketing are applied to human resource activities with regard to current and potential employees. CSR being included in the list of employee engagement activities of various organizations is now being used as a tool to increase the employer brand value of organizations.

Several companies have adopted CSR activities which are helping them to strengthen their employer brand as well. Some examples are mentioned below.

TCS

Their CSR activities include water and electricity conservation; green area preservation and enhancement; bio-digesters of canteen waste, etc. across locations. Apart from these initiatives, TCS also has several volunteering and fund raising initiatives which enable their employees to reach out to society.

WIPRO

Wipro Cares is Wipro’s community initiative focused on certain key developmental issues faced by underserved and underprivileged communities. It was formed in the year 2003 and is committed to work with communities proximate to Wipro’s center of operations.

Thus, in today’s competitive business world, employer branding and CSR go hand-in-hand, and since HR has to strengthen the employer brand of a firm, the function must be able to apply marketing principles and incorporate CSR initiatives in the company’s strategies in such a way so as to boost the Employer Brand.

Check Your Progress - 2

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words.

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What is employer or corporate branding?

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2) What is the relationship between employee engagement and employer branding?

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

Employer branding and employee engagement go hand-in-hand. One attracts people to the organization while the other has more to do with people whom the organization has already hired. Good employer branding attracts better candidates

which in turn leads to employees that are more apt for the company. This then leads to better employee engagement. CSR helps in reinforcing the positive image of an organisation. There exists a strong connection between these two concepts of CSR and employer branding. CSR sends out a positive message about the company and thereby increases the employer brand value.

2.7 KEYWORDS

- Employee Engagement** : Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work.
- Employee Performance Appraisal** : A performance appraisal or employee appraisal is a method by which an employee's job performance is evaluated.
- Employer Branding** : *Employer branding* is the process of managing and influencing the Company's reputation as an employer among job seekers, employees and key stakeholders.

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2.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress - 1

- 1) Employee engagement is the art of having employees, appreciating their work, and they becoming more productive and active. It requires the employer see his/her employees on what part they are good and get the best from them.
- 2) The organisations that focus on transparency engage more employees than those who don't. Employees want to be a part of something where there are no hidden agendas and they are experiencing an honest perspective whether that is good news or not. Informed employees feel valued and engagement typically follows.

Check Your Progress - 2

- 1) Employer /*corporate* branding is a term referred to describe the company's reputation and popularity from a potential employer's perspective and describes the values the company gives to its employees.
- 2) Employee engagement and employer branding, are not mutually exclusive ideas. Two are closely tied to each other – one attracts people to the organization while the other has more to do with people whom the *organization* has already hired. Good employer branding attracts better candidates which in turn leads to employees that are more apt for the company. This then leads to better employee engagement.