

**A STUDY OF BARRIERS TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN
TELECOM SECTOR**



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***DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED PARENTS AND
MY TEACHERS.***

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to explore four different barriers to employee engagement and their impact on overall engagement level within telecom sector. Due to cut throat competition the companies in the telecom sector are focusing on excellent customer experience. To ensure good customer service its utmost important that employees take the ownership and are engaged to deliver the results. A comparatively new concept, employee engagement, nowadays is one of the most important priorities through which companies hope to achieve the intended business results. For this, organizations design and implement various initiatives to foster employee engagement, a lot of resources are spent on this, but many times the required results are not achieved. This is usually due to either faulty planning and execution or different factors that reduce the overall impact of these initiatives. We call such factors barriers to engagement. Four of the barriers studied in this research are, inequity and perception of unfairness, lack of involvement in decision making, lack of work life balance and work environment. A case study has been established on one of the leading telecom companies, wherein, these barriers and their effects are studied. The case discusses the company, its pasts, leadership, the overall engagement levels determined by the organization and effects of engagement barriers. 15 employees, belonging to different management levels and employment categories, were interviewed. Their responses shed light on many aspects of employee engagement and the reasons why engagement activities fail. Overall engagement level was also determined by these interviews. This research also includes data collected by observations by the author, since the author has been acting as a participant observer for more than a year for this research within the same organization. The analysis of the data reveals that there is a stark difference in the engagement levels that are depicted in engagement survey and the actual engagement level among the employees. It was also concluded that the four identified barriers are at play in hampering the effectiveness of employee engagement strategy. These barriers are an important cause of low engagement levels within the company. Within the study it is suggested that the organization needs significant changes within its policies and engagement strategy. It is also important to remove the barriers first, bridge the communication gap between top and front line and take employee feedback into consideration.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Latest market dynamics highlight a fierce competition among companies for market share, profitability and human capital, especially within the telecom sector. Most of these companies realize the fact that the source of ultimate competitive advantage lies with their “human resource” and their effective utilization and for that companies are trying to put in place the best possible practices to enhance the capabilities of their human resources and retain them. Various new concepts have emerged to achieve this purpose, Employee Engagement being one of these concepts.

Basic purpose behind using employee engagement initiatives is to keep the workforce motivated and develop in them, a sense of ownership which will boost their productivity and therefore positively affect the company’s bottom line. Once the employees are engaged they will be intrinsically motivated and would remain loyal to the organization which will reduce voluntary turnover. This however is not as simple as it sounds because engaging workforce is one of the most challenging tasks that the HR departments have to deal with. Usually the larger the organization the harder it is to engage employees due to several factors that act as barriers to employee engagement initiatives.

The aim of this research is to study such factors that may act as barriers to employee engagement initiatives and how their effectiveness is measured i.e. do employees actually get engaged or not?

Keeping in view the scope of the research, four broader factors are studied as barriers to employee engagement initiatives. These factors are; inequity and perception of unfairness, work environment, lack of involvement in decision making and work-life balance. Within these major factors there are numerous sub factors that play important role as barriers and will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

Having engaged employees is increasingly becoming a priority for most organizations nowadays. Engaged employees are driven and are more likely to outdo others and thus contribute greatly in achieving a non-replicable competitive advantage for their organization. This is mutually

beneficial for both employer and employee, as the employer is able to obtain profits while the employee gets rewards, salary increase, benefits and most importantly a purposeful job. Organizations often overlook the many issues, such as the barriers, while developing initiatives to foster employee engagement. This results in little or zero effectiveness of the initiatives when implemented and further results in wastages of time and resources. Not only does this create more problems like line's negative perception of HR department as an ineffective department, while also negatively affecting other initiatives aimed to motivate employees. But the most important objective remains unachieved i.e. engaging employees to perform better.

Inequity and perception of unfairness is one of the key factors that act as a barrier to employee engagement. Pay acts as motivator in Pakistan due to socio economic factors prevalent in Pakistan, contrary to Herzberg's theory. Low pay dissatisfies the employee, as it is seen as inequity and injustice. Employees usually compare their salaries and benefits with their peers within same organization or department as well as employees in other organizations. On noticing their colleagues getting paid higher on the same job position creates a sense of inequity leading to dissatisfaction and thus acting as a barrier to employee engagement.

Lack of reward and recognition also leads to inequity because employees expect rewards and recognition for their efforts and good performance. Another issue is the lack of growth opportunities and if there is slow growth potential in an organization the star employees are likely to switch, in search of opportunities offering greater growth and development prospects. For the employees who are unable to switch jobs, staying at one position for a significant amount of time would lead to the perception of inequity as they are not receiving the output (promotions) for all the input being put in (loyalty, efforts, commitment and good performance etc.).

Organizational climate and work environment plays a major role in employee engagement. A strong organizational culture is important for employee's self-identity and motivation. General working conditions have a direct impact on an employee's productivity. Coworker's attitude is another factor that plays a vital role in employee engagement. If these factors somehow negatively impact an employee then they will act as a barrier to engagement. Supervisor's attitude and

management style also plays an important part in motivation of an employee. Negative supervisory attitude would most likely result in low employee engagement.

Often employees get demotivated when new strategies, initiatives or programs are developed without seeking any input from them especially when these strategies directly affect them. In such circumstances employees expect managers to seek their input regarding any initiative because they better understand the business, work processes, and the customers and are able to provide better suggestions that might be more useful. Apart from this, employees that are side lined and not involved in decision making may get used to a particular routine which might bore them reducing their creativity. In either case lack of involvement in decision making acts a barrier to employee engagement.

Many people value work life balance, however it becomes hard for employees to maintain this balance if there is a 'long hours culture' in the organization. If employees are expected to work after assigned working hours on daily basis and are unable to give time to their families and their social life then such workers will get burnt out due to work overload, stress of deadlines and possible domestic issues. This situation will leave the employees demotivated and disengaged.

So far there has been little research conducted in this particular area. Many surveys have been conducted to gauge the engagement levels, conducted by various organizations internally and externally. But there is a lack of research regarding the results of engagement initiatives, their effectiveness and possible obstructions to engagement.

This research is conducted to study the above mentioned factors as barriers to employee engagement, effectiveness of adopted engagement initiatives and methods used by organizations to assess effectiveness of these initiatives.

1.1 MOTIVATION BEHIND STUDY

Employee engagement is gaining a lot of importance in many private sector organizations. Of course these organizations want to have balanced, motivated and engaged employees and spend a significant amount of resources to obtain these outcomes. However even though many initiatives are developed, implemented and published as success by the ‘HR departments’ the workforce remain disengaged at large. To address this issue and implement initiatives that will actually have an impact is the requirement. It is therefore important to be aware the pitfalls and possible barriers that may jeopardize the engagement initiatives. Once an initiative is implemented the next step is evaluation and obtaining feedback, and therefore it is important that the assessment be done in a way to find out actual effectiveness.

This research thus, will be able to help HR professionals develop activities, strategies and initiatives that will have true impact by first dealing with barriers at various levels and then assessing the effectiveness and knowing the actual engagement levels of their employees.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Main objective of the study is to research the four identified barriers to employee engagement in depth to understand why and how these affect the implementation of employee engagement initiatives in organizations. Research questions developed for this research are;

- a. What are the different barriers that affect the implementation of Employee Engagement initiatives and how?
- b. How do organizations assess the effectiveness of employee engagement initiatives?

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis consists of six chapters, beginning with the introduction followed by second chapter i.e. literature review and methodology. Chapter three presents a case on the selected organization and chapter four covers data collection and analysis. Chapter five consists of research findings and

discussion while the last chapter concludes the thesis and presents some recommendations and suggestions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to conduct this research it is first pertinent to explore the literature and past researches undertaken on the subject to obtain the knowledge regarding employee engagement. This chapter, therefore, looks into the relevant literature in order to create an understanding of employee engagement. The chapter is divided into six sections, each dealing with a certain aspect of employee engagement, important to this study. It starts off with an introduction, followed by the definition of employee engagement, different models and theories regarding employee engagement are discussed next. Before delving any deeper into the subject, difference between employee engagement and employee motivation is discussed, which then leads to reviewing of past studies regarding the four identified barriers to employee engagement.

2.1 Introduction

Employee engagement has become one of the most rapidly growing concept and has gained much popularity among organizations around the world. Much of this owes to the fact that organizations now highly prioritize greater engagement levels in their workforce. The term employee engagement is often interchangeably used with motivation by many without knowing that employee engagement goes beyond motivation and is considered a level higher than motivation. Engaged employees do not indulge in a specific work routine e.g. coming in the morning, doing the work, do it right maybe even better and then leave, repeating the same routine every day. One might call such employees motivated but they might not be engaged. Employees that are engaged show higher interest in their tasks, would like to go the extra mile and have a sense of ownership of the organization they work at. This basically means that such employees are dedicated and have an entrepreneurial approach, where they treat their companies as their owners or CEOs.

Since the introduction of motivation and other measures used to enhance employee productivity to get the most out of an employee's potential, we have come a long way. We can see an evolutionary trend starting from coercion, punishment and rewards, focus on human needs and drives, extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation and ultimately employee engagement.

Compared to the famous ‘carrot and stick’ approach (Marciano, 2010) prevalent in many companies even today, employee engagement is long term approach, is much more stable and favorable. This carrot and stick approach often does not work for most employees and often does more harm than good (Pink, 2009). Employee engagement provides an organization with dedicated employees who serve as a huge source of competitive advantage. This emerging concept being one of the focal areas in human resource management has been a key inclusion in the HR strategy of many public and private sector organizations now a days usually as the employee engagement initiatives. The purpose of these initiatives is simple, to engage the workforce and increase their commitment level, to enhance individual job performance. However, many times the HR Department is faced with the problem of inefficacy of these initiatives, with zero to none impact after implementation, the credibility of this concept is questioned. There may be various factors owing to the failure of these initiatives.

Companies conduct engagement surveys for their employees to determine their engagement level. Same is done by many other independent organizations worldwide such as ISR and Gallup. Usually in private sector organizations it is a common practice to conduct such surveys and gather data on employee engagement levels on an annual basis. This data is then used to benchmark the workforce’s levels with some standard, identification of problem areas, development of improvement plans and new initiatives. However, it is very likely to obtain unrealistic data that may not be true which can mislead the top management. When filling questionnaires for engagement surveys employees often carelessly mark options, are prone to exaggerate their responses or they may simply lie. Such inaccurate data then leads to development of ineffective initiatives for future. So it is paramount that organizations conduct surveys in such a fashion that would help in collection of real time data, addressing the realities and actual issues being faced by the employees. Only then an organization can design an effective initiative which will engage the employees and have a positive long term effect.

2.2 Definition of Employee Engagement

It can be a little challenging to define psychological constructs such as engagement, employee satisfaction etc. because these constructs are not easy to measure due to a lot of subjectivity involved. Upon searching for a conceptual definition of employee engagement one might find

more than fifty definitions. However, a composite conceptual definition was created by a panel of experts in a meeting called by conference board. The definition states,(as cited in Marciano,2010 p:57) “Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work.” We can dissect this definition and highlight three main parts, first there exists an emotional or intellectual connection, and second, this connection may exist between an employee and any of the four major distinguished areas such as the job, the organization, manager and coworkers. Lastly on having such a connection, an employee is always influenced to put in extra effort towards his or her work. It is also interesting to note that an employee may be engaged towards either their job, organization, supervisor or peers, unlike the common notion that an employee is usually engaged towards their organization or work only.

(Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) define employee engagement as, “a positive, fulfilling, work- related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. Thus, employee engagement is not just a matter of the work environment given to the employees but it is a positive state of mind which gives a sense of belonging and professional growth to the employees as well. This sense of belonging adds a sense of excitement in employees to work with sincerity and devotion that leads to positive work output. No wonder the concept of employee engagement has also been linked with the idea of “flow”, a state in which an employee is completely absorbed or immersed in his or her work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

Kahn (1990) one of the pioneers in the subject defined an engaged employee as one who is completely connected to their job or work roles cognitively, emotionally as well as physically. He also defines a ‘disengaged employee’ as, someone who would withdraw and rather guard themselves cognitively, emotionally and physically at work. This leads to passivity and low or inadequate job performance.

For Macey et al (2009, p.7), “engagement is an individual’s sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort and persistence directed toward organizational goals.” So, a positive work motivated state of mind gives employees a feeling of confidence to persistently develop their skills and to achieve organizational goals using their full potential.

Saks (2006) drawing from the work of other researchers, Saks identified two main types of engagement i.e. job and organization engagement. He went on using these two type of engagements in his model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement.

Macey and Schneider (2008) proposed that engagement can occur at three different levels and maybe classified as three different types i.e. engagement as “trait”, a psychological “state” and “behavior”. Trait engagement refers to having certain personal characteristics such as being proactive, having an autotelic personality, and being conscientiousness etc. similarly state engagement refers to feelings of satisfaction at work, commitment, and empowerment etc. Engagement as a behavior entails exhibiting positive work behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior, show of initiative, being adaptive etc.

For the sake of this study, definition provided by Macey and Schneider (2008) is used because it brings into consideration three different perspectives or angles of employee engagement i.e. trait, state and behavior. In studying employee engagement, it seems best if the construct is viewed from several dimensions. It is also relevant because many surveys developed to gauge the engagement levels, focus on the psychological state or how the employees feel towards their organization, work or an initiative, the behavioral perspective, with questions asking if employees act in a particular way in response to organization’s policies etc. The definition also helps in understanding why some employees seem more engaged and absorbed than others in the same conditions, much of this is probably due to the fact that these people exhibit engagement as a trait and therefore remain engaged while others are disengaged.

2.3 Models and Theories of Employee Engagement

Over the years different models of employee engagement have been presented by researchers around the world. One of the most comprehensive models of employee engagement was developed by Blessing White (2013), called the X model of employee engagement. The model consists of a matrix with two measures i.e. employee contribution and individual satisfaction. The model thus divides employees into five categories as per their contribution and satisfaction level. According to x model of employee engagement, an engaged employee is at the apex, where they fully contribute towards organizational goals and gain maximum satisfaction for their input or work. As

the contribution and satisfaction lowers, so does the level of engagement. At the lowest level one may find the ‘disengaged’ employees, who exhibit low individual satisfaction and contribution. Other three categories of employees in this model include, almost engaged, honeymooners and hamsters, and the crash and burners.

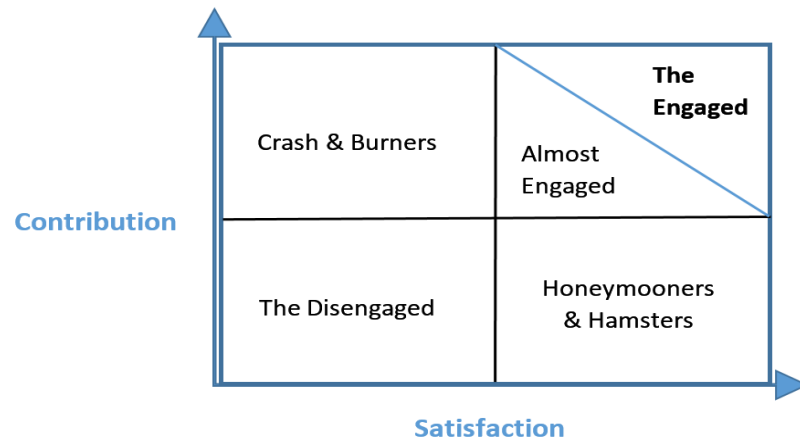


Figure: 1 Blessing White, “X Model of Employee Engagement” (2013)

More recently Aon Hewitt has proposed another model of employee engagement. The model aims to operationalize the concept of employee engagement as a construct of six different factors composed of three main aspects, namely, Say, Stay, and Strive (Aon Hewitt, 2015).

‘Say’ refers to the ability to speak positively about the organization whether among peers or anyone outside of the organization. ‘Stay’, refers to minimal flight risk, attachment with one’s organization and the desire to be a part of it. ‘Strive’ means that the employees are motivated and willing to exert effort towards individual and organizational goal fulfillment. The model suggests that for an employee to be engaged, they must exhibit all three facets.

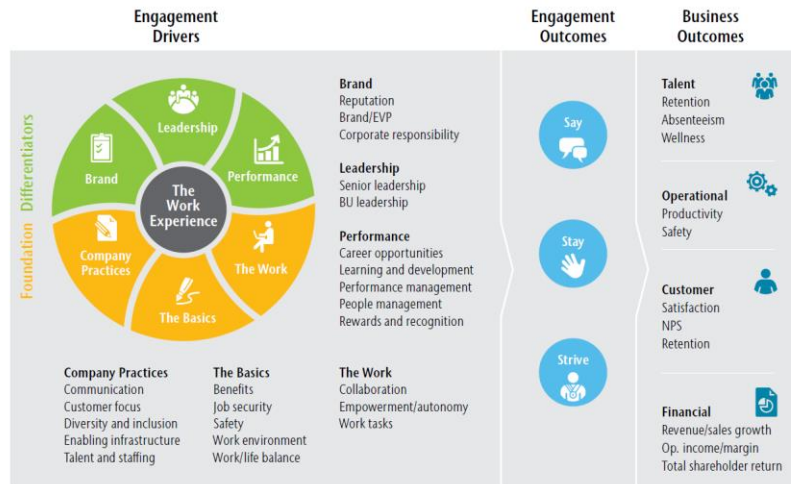


Figure 2: “Aon Hewitt’s Model of Employee Engagement”

One of the most relevant theories to employee engagement is the “**Social Exchange Theory**” (**SET**). Social Exchange include several social interactions, which are interdependent and subject to actions of another person (Blau, 1964). According to SET resources provided by an external party (organization) results in making the employees obliged to reciprocate in positive workplace behaviors related to engagement (Albrecht, 2010). In an organizational context, SET establishes an interdependent relation between an employer and the employee, where the organization provides resources to its employees which makes them obligated to reciprocate with commitment and engagement.

Another widely cited model of employee engagement is the **Job Demands-Resource Model** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R) states that for every job there are two sets of variables, namely, demands and Resources. Simply put, demands are the things which need to be done. Job demands are those features of work that require physical and psychological effort often bearing mental or physiological costs in the form of anxiety, depression and other stressors while trying to meet these job demands.

Resources on the other hand refer to aspects of work that may reduce the job demands and related costs, help in achieving goals, and help in personal and professional growth and development. These resources can be of physical, psycho-social or organizational nature. High Job demands naturally lead to stress, health issues and burnout. Usually under such high demands employees

get burnt out, are stressed and more inclined to leave the organization in pursuit of a better opportunity elsewhere. Such a state would be the antithesis of engagement. Job resources on the flip side help employees to cope with these demands and create positive effects leading to engagement. Organizations therefore, create strategies for tackling high job demand and to foster engagement. (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

It is also important for organizations to realize when their employees are facing high job demands, as this may be confused with enrichment and enlargement without proper support or “resources”, where an employee may be assigned more than he can deliver and consequently end up disengaged or worse burnt out.

Saks (2006) suggested in his ‘**model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement**’ that when employees are provided organizational support and other resources, they felt obliged to reciprocate, and they do so by increasing their level of engagement. Therefore employee’s level of engagement will depend upon the resources they get from the organization. These antecedents namely, perceived organizational support, job characteristics, perceived supervisor support, reward and recognition, procedural and distributive justice, therefore if provided to employees are like to enhance employee engagement leading to positive work related consequences.

2.4 Employee Engagement And Employee Motivation

Motivation, originally a Latin word “Movere”, means to be moved (Steers et al., 2004). As earlier discussed, employee engagement is often used interchangeably with motivation. They may seem similar but actually are quite different. The difference becomes more apparent when comparing employee engagement with extrinsic motivation. Employee engagement thus would involve a deep rooted, intrinsic sense of commitment or pride which is not changed easily. Motivation, especially extrinsic motivation, in contrast is influenced by external aspects such as expectation of a reward for performance or input and therefore is contingent on external factors. Engagement on the other hand “buffers negative environmental factors on motivation”, suggesting that an engaged worker would remain motivated even if the circumstances become adverse at any point. The case may not

be the same with regards to employees with low engagement because they tend to do better in favorable conditions, especially in pursuit of tangible extrinsic rewards (Marciano, 2010).

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation lies in the “Instrumentalization” i.e. the motivation is contingent upon either internal or external rewards. According to (Ryan and Deci, 2000), “intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures or reward.” when compared to employee engagement one can find similarities between engagement and intrinsic motivation, for example the instrumentality for both the concepts is of internal origin. In most cases an employee will be intrinsically motivated if he derives the joy and happiness from doing the work. This becomes a little complicated as (Oudeyer & Kaplan, 2008) argue that intrinsic and Internal motivation are not synonymous and that a person can be partly extrinsically motivated and partly intrinsically motivated. They go on explaining the idea with the help of several examples of a child that does his homework either to avoid negative consequences of not doing homework in which case he is extrinsically and externally motivated, to get a dream job in future where the child is internally and extrinsically motivated or he does his homework because it is fun to solve math problems wherein the child is intrinsically and internally motivated. They however, also suggest that there can be a situation where a person can be partly intrinsically motivated and partly extrinsically motivated, e.g. the child might like solving math problems but at the same time would like to get good grades as well. In the light of above argument, an employee if intrinsically motivated would only perform in an outstanding manner because doing the work gives him or her joy or entails a sense of challenge. This means that at this level the employee does not necessarily consider the overall organizational performance and is primarily focused on his or her own work regardless of any other factor. An engaged employee on the other hand, is one whose efforts, energy and dedication is directed towards organizational goals, implying that the employee enjoys his or her work but at the same time is aware of organizational performance and is dedicated towards organizational success too.

This point can be made even clearer with the help of Ryan & Deci’s (1985) famous “Self Determination Theory” (SDT) which proposes two forms of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The theory states that extrinsic motivation may be there to attain a reward or avoid

punishment known as external regulation, boost ego or remove feeling of guilt (introjection), to obtain some personal goal (identification), and to express one's own sense of self (integration). Integration and identification coupled with intrinsic motivation is referred to as 'autonomous regulation'. External regulation and introjection are known as controlled regulation. Theory states that autonomous regulation is the key to higher performance, perseverance, creativity and initiative. Therefore we can draw the conclusion that an engaged employee is both intrinsically motivated as well as partly extrinsically motivated.

Even though the stress here is more on intrinsic motivation, we cannot ignore the importance of extrinsic motivation. It should be noted that for employees to reach the level of engagement they should first be motivated i.e. both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. This basically alludes to theories of motivation such as Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory and Herzberg's two factor theory of motivation. E.g. Herzberg is his famous two factor theory explains, that to intrinsically motivate employees, hygiene factors should be removed, which means that employees must be satisfied as far as external rewards, and other factors are concerned, only then employees can be intrinsically motivated (Herzberg et al., 1959). Similarly for the employees to reach the level of engagement they first need to be satisfied and then intrinsically motivated. Thus theory suggests that any engagement strategy or initiative adopted to engage employees without first satisfying and motivating them would likely result in a failure.

Regardless of the type of motivation, construct of employee engagement seems to be built upon the concept of motivation but extends into many other dimensions, growing into something larger than simply motivation.

2.5 Drivers of Employee Engagement

One of the most challenging aspects in research on employee engagement was identification of the antecedents or drivers of employee engagement. Truss. C, Mankin. D, Kelliher. C, (2012) explain that research suggests that engagement is influenced by factors at several levels. These factors can be found on individual level, may be related to the job, can be related to supervisor's behavior and finally can be found at organizational level or related to employer.

At the individual level different factors such as demography and personality etc. can play a role in driving engagement. For example it has been researched that women are found to be more engaged with their work than men (Johnson. M, 2004).

Job related factors may include person job fit, job design etc. Behavior of supervisor or line manager is one of the key drivers of engagement. Employees who have developed a great degree of trust with their manager are more likely to be engaged than the ones who experience harassment or bullying. If employees feel that their supervisor's behavior is supportive and rather predictable then they will be more engaged.

Lastly organizational factors such as employee involvement, value congruence etc. are also essential in fostering employee engagement. Voice or employee engagement was found to be a major influence on employee engagement. Similarly a match between a person's value and organization's value also had a significant impact on employee engagement.

The theoretical rational behind the working of these drivers can be explained with the help of famous social exchange theory.

Truss et al. (2012) also notes that any violation of these drivers, especially at the organizational level can result in employee disengagement and can have negative repercussions for the organization. We can therefore also say that lack of these drivers can act as an impediment to any engagement initiative or strategy.

Saks (2006) in his model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement determined the following antecedents of employee engagement;

- Job Characteristics
- Perceived organizational support
- Perceived supervisor support
- Rewards and recognition
- Procedural Justice
- Distributive justice

Saks found that these antecedents were significant predictors of employee engagement and resulted in positive consequences such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors.

2.6 Barriers to Employee Engagement

Carrying forward the pervious section i.e. the drivers of employee engagement, engagement strategies often derail and provide little value if there is a lack of these drivers which then act as barriers. We can extract four barriers that are largely related to the organizational factors and line manager's behavior. These barriers can be enlisted as following;

1. Inequity and perception of unfairness
2. Work environment
3. Lack of involvement in decision making
4. Work life balance.

2.6.1 Inequity and perception of unfairness

J. Stacy Adams proposed his famous equity theory in 1963 stating that individuals expect a fair output for their efforts or input in the form of rewards. They also compare these outputs/rewards among their peers and even people outside their organization. If they perceive this input-output ratio as fair then they will be motivated and happier to work. However, if they perceive there is inequity then they are likely to get demotivated and to get over this feeling of inequity they may act in different ways that might not be beneficial for the organization, for example, employees may reduce their level of effort of input to strike a fair balance between the two, or they might resort to cognitive distortion of these inputs or outputs, even worse they may seek employment elsewhere.

According to Macey et al. (2009) trust and fairness acts as a foundation for employee engagement without which engagement cant not exist.

According to Leiter and Maslach (2003) unfairness can ensue when there is inequity regarding the salary or work load, or when there is some sort of cheating, improper performance evaluations and promotions. It has also been researched especially in the

domain of procedural justice that employees are much more concerned with the processes being fair than the favorableness of the results arising from them.

Mone and London (2010) argue that performance management if effectively implemented will enable an organization in creation and sustaining high levels of engagement leading to higher performance. An antithesis of the same finding would be an ineffective performance management system implementation which will lead to perceptions of inequity and unfairness among employees causing disengagement and low performance. This is supported by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) suggesting that there is a negative relationship between burnout (considered opposite of engagement by many) and employee performance and productivity.

Another issue that causes perception of inequity and unfairness is the improper performance appraisals that may evaluate employees on irrelevant criteria on which employees may not have any control on (Dobbins, Cardy, Fecteau, & Miller, 1993).

Inequity, therefore, is likely to causes dissatisfaction and demotivation causing employees to burn out and disengage.

2.6.2 Lack of involvement in decision making (Employee Voice)

Rusbelt, Farrell, Rogers and Mainous (1988) explained the concept of “voice” or employee voice as an active and constructive improvement of work conditions by discussing issues with higher ups, superiors or peers, taking initiative to seek solutions to problems. According to Folger (1977), Voice in procedural justice context is refers to the degree to which employees in the organization have an opportunity to contribute in decision-making. He also notes that procedures are perceived as fair if employees are given a chance to voice their concerns or opinions.

Albrecht (2010) found a positive relationship between employee voice and employee engagement. Involvement in decision making will ensure that the negative aspects in the work conditions are pointed out to management and corrected. Similarly any decision that affects an employee would be perceived unfairly if employees are not involved causing employees to get disgruntled and disengaged. When employees are given opportunity to

voice their opinion but if those opinions are ignored, it becomes more damaging than having no voice at all.

Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) are of the view that positive feedback stimulated employee engagement. Negative feedback in the form of destructive criticism that may damage employee's self-esteem can have a negative impact on engagement and performance.

The above discussion leads to the fact that lack of involvement in decision making especially those decisions that directly affect employees is a major barrier to employee engagement.

2.6.3 Work Environment

Work environment has a lot of significance in employee satisfaction, motivation and productivity. Both Maslow and Herzberg stressed on the importance of work environment. Herzberg called it 'job context' and stated that it was a major source of dissatisfaction or satisfaction and that motivation comes after removing elements that cause dissatisfaction found in work environment (Herzberg, 1966). According to Boverie and Kroth (2001), developing a work environment which is caring, nurturing as well as challenging and rewarding is vital for employees to feed passionate about their work and feel energized. Work engagement has been defined in numerous ways and has been called a state, trait, behavior or characteristics of work environment (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) JD-R Model can be used to divide work environment into job demands or job resources. In this context job demands would refer to the requirements of the work or features of work such as work overload, role conflict, job ambiguity etc. Similarly job resources would refer to factors that are important and helpful in achieving goals, targets and other job requirements. These resources can be of psychology, social, physical or organizational nature. Common job resources would be salary, career advancement opportunities, role clarity, supervisor or peers support etc. As per this point of view, a conducive work environment is supposed to have optimal number and quality of job resources so that the employees are not burnt out due to overwhelming job demands. Munn et al. (1996) have determined that the best predictor to job dissatisfaction and employee turnover was the lack of support from the supervisor. This

was also confirmed by subsequent research such as Moore's (2002) study of hospital restructuring and its impact on nurses and Kalliath and Beck's (2001) research on impact of supervisory support on components of burnout. In both the works it was found that a support from supervisor decreased symptoms and level of burnout as well as turnover.

Thus having a positive and nurturing work environment that would help employees achieve their work related objective or goals is paramount. A high job demand environment is more likely to create dissatisfaction if not disengagement.

2.6.4 Work-life balance

Work-life balance was defined by Guest (2002) as, adequate time to fulfill commitments at work as well as at home or simply, perceived balance between the job and rest of life. As per this definition it can be assumed that work life balance occurs when an employee is able to manage commitments both at work and home. This balance however can be disturbed if the employee has limited time to give to his home or life outside work. An imbalance may also occur if there is less or no work. Work-life balance, therefore may be considered an individual preference, for example an employee may prefer long working hours due to limited life outside work etc. for such an employee there might be a need for job enrichment, task variety or job enlargement. On the opposite end an employee may have greater domestic responsibilities due to which there might be a need for such employees to have flexible working hours, work from home or they may prefer organizations that foster results only work environment (ROWE). This balance thus becomes an important factor in worker's engagement.

According to Catwright and Holmes (2006) individuals are finding jobs that help them in achieving an adequate work-life balance. Since technology has made it possible to work beyond company premises and that to from anywhere and at any time to a degree that work now invades domestic and personal life of employees.

Wiley, Kowske & Herman (2010) have identified work life balance as one of the key drivers of employee engagement. According to them, employees are more engaged with their work if their organization supports work life balance.

Muse, Harris, Giles and Field (2008) determined that when organizations provide work-life balance, it results in a positive exchange between the organization and the employees. This perceived support by organization gives rise to higher affective commitment to the organization and results in higher levels of performance behaviors. This can be explained with the help of social exchange theory, where employee's perception of organizational support towards work-life balance would determine their reciprocation in the form of engagement, higher performance and positive work behaviors.

According to Catwright and Holmes (2006) individuals are finding jobs that help them in achieving an adequate work-life balance. Since technology has made it possible to work anywhere and anytime, work now infringes on domestic and personal life of employees.

We here conclude that employee engagement, simply can be found at three basic levels i.e. a personal trait, a psychological state and behavior. Employee engagement can be explained with the help of various models and theories. SET or Social Exchange Theory is helpful in understanding how employee engagement works in organizations, as it explains the give and take relation between the employer and employee. Similar to this theory, Saks suggested that organizational resources will act as antecedents to employee engagement which will yield positive consequences for the organization. Blessing White's X model of employee engagement is helpful in categorizing different engagement levels and how to measure them, especially the extremes i.e. engaged and actively disengaged. Employee engagement and employee motivation are often confused or used interchangeably, but both the concepts are indeed different and discussed along with the cardinal points that distinguish the two concepts. This is important in determining if an employee is merely satisfied, motivated or actually engaged. Finally, the nature of the four barriers, i.e. inequity and perception of unfairness, work-life balance, lack of involvement in decision making and work environment is studied in depth, their relevance and impact on employee engagement is also discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter builds upon the literature review from previous chapter and discusses the conceptual framework, proposed conceptual model for this study and the design of the study. The design elements or the methodology adopted for the research is then discussed in detail.

3.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is developed with the help of past studies, theories and model of employee engagement. First of all, the researcher has used a working definition of employee engagement proposed by Macey and Schneider (2008), in which employee engagement can occur at three different levels i.e. psychological state, personal trait or individual's behavior. This is particularly helpful in observing the impact of the barriers on employee engagement at individual or micro level. A general framework to study the impact of barriers on employee engagement, Saks (2006) model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, is referred. For this research Saks' model is modified and the proposed model has been developed in a way to study the linkage of four barriers with employee engagement and employee engagement initiatives. Possible consequences arising from the impact of these barriers are also highlighted. A graphical representation of the model is given below.

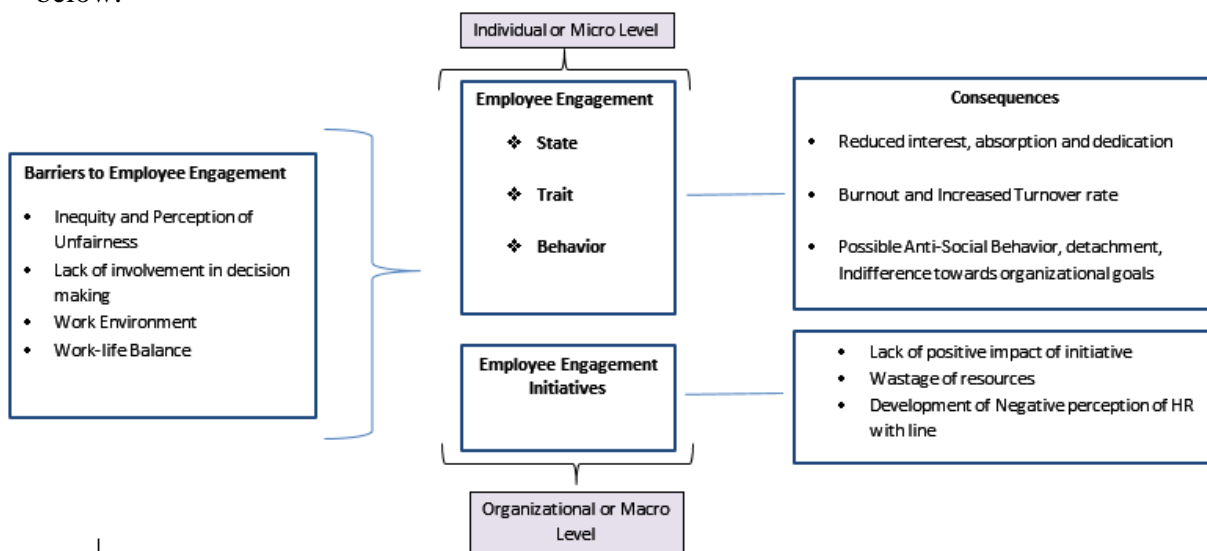


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model of Barriers to Employee Engagement*

*Modified version of Saks(2006) model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, using definition of employee engagement by Macey and Schneider(2008)

The proposed model for barriers to employee engagement shows that presence of four identified barriers is likely to affect the employee engagement level of the workforce. Such reduced employee engagement levels can lead to several unfavorable consequences for the organization. Each barrier has a significant impact on the three different levels of employee engagement and each level has its own set of consequences. These consequences can thus manifest at any level of engagement. The model therefore, represents that barriers will possibly play a significant role in affecting employee engagement levels, which will have unfavorable consequences for the organization.

On an organizational or macro level, failure of employee engagement strategies and initiatives can also be greatly attributed to the presence of these four barriers. Consequences arising from the failure of engagement initiatives may include, wastage of resources and damaged perception of HR with line.

The ultimate results that these barriers are going to produce are mainly, low productivity, poor employee performance and decreased overall organizational performance.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research approach used here is qualitative research. Qualitative research entails studying subjects in their natural conditions or setting. The researcher then systematically enquire or research the meanings, and attempts to understand phenomena and how people interpret them (Shank, 2002). Qualitative research, though often criticized, follows a systematic approach and involves direct engagement with respondents, the field and information for developing a better understanding of the meanings associated to various practices and observed behaviors (Parker, 2003). For the need of this study this approach seems more appropriate instead of quantitative research. This is because the researcher aims to get a deeper understanding of employee engagement, the barriers to engagement and how employees feel about it and what they experience in their daily work lives regarding employee engagement. A quantitative analysis can have several issues, e.g. the response to a questionnaire may be biased and exaggerated. This can lead to unreliable results, as evident in the annual employee engagement survey conducted by the organization. A detailed interview helps reveal many ignored aspects of

professional life, different issues and insights that a standard closed ended questionnaire is unable to cater for. Using a field research methodology and participant observation, the researcher is able to experience and feel exactly how the other respondents do, thus becoming a source of real time data on the spot in a given situation.

The research follows the case study methodology wherein, a case is developed on one of the leading telecom companies. The case focuses on the company's employee engagement initiatives, the overall employee engagement level and a study of four barriers to engagement.

Dul and Hak (2008) define case study methodology as a study in which one or more cases are selected in their real life context, and the data obtained from them is analyzed qualitatively.

Punch (1998) states that, one case is studied in detail with the help of any appropriate method, even though there may be several purposes or research questions, the primary objective is to get a full understanding of that case as much as possible.

Workforce in this organization have been divided into two major categories i.e. the management and the non-management employees. Both categories have a different perspective on the overall engagement strategy, engagement level and various employee engagement initiatives.

Management is responsible for planning and implementing engagement initiatives that they deem best to enhance engagement among employees, non-management in particular. It is also pertinent to note here that due to various management levels and rather big hierarchy, the ground realities sometimes get distorted while reaching the top. This sometimes become a huge factor in improper designing and implementation of engagement initiatives. With such a hierarchy and a huge geographic spread, visibility of bottom or field and communication also becomes less, which at times makes it impossible for the top management to keep into consideration all the factors that are required to be addressed for the field staff and lower level staff while creating engagement strategy.

Therefore, there are two completely different sides to employee engagement when we view the concept among these two employee groups. On one end we have the designers and implementers who have their own view of engagement level and employee needs, while on the other end, we have the non-management employees who are unaware of the challenges of

management and resource constraints, thus viewing engagement initiatives from a totally different angle.

The objective here is to understand management’s perspective of employee engagement as well as non-management employee’s perspective. Only after comparing the two viewpoints we can study the gap and understand how the barriers to engagement are at play in this organization.

In order to find out this gap data is gathered from both the categories of employees through interviews.

Employees were asked questions that helped in determining the overall engagement level, the effectiveness of employee engagement initiatives and if there are any barriers derailing the engagement strategy.

A brief description/characteristics of the two employee categories can be seen in table 3.1.

Management Employees	Non-Management Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planners, designers and executors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primarily field staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Front line to top level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Front line workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contractual as well as permanent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mostly permanent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Influencers/leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The led
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can influence decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unionized
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Includes some outsourced staff

Table 3.1

3.3 INTERVIEWS

A qualitative interview is basically asking questions from respondents in a variety of formats. Interviews can be on a continuum ranging from structured, semi structured to unstructured. Structured interviews are more or less at the quantitative scale while, semi structured and unstructured interviews are more toward the qualitative side (Edwards & Hollands, 2013). The methodology is used as it is one of the most effective ways to gather data from a relatively smaller sample. A wide range of responses can be obtained having personal experiences. Since

the aim is to get rich data, therefore a semi-structured interview serves the need of this study. In order to obtain relevant data for the case study, data was gathered using interviews. The interview questionnaire contains set questions but have additional secondary probes to get details on responses and encourage respondents to share their experiences.

Interviews were conducted from 15 employees in total. Out of 15, 5 were management employees while the rest were non-management employees. Management level was kept into consideration while conducting interviews, so as to learn the perspective of senior as well as regional management. For non-management employees, the focus was kept on a single region. Employees within this region were interviewed at various stations. Locations of these stations presented their own set of challenges and working conditions. Non-management employees included three different employee types, categorized as regular, daily wagers, and outsourced.

Interview questions for both management and non-management employees were developed using IBM Kenexa global employee engagement survey. This survey was conducted in the organization in all regions in the past 5 years and maximum participation was ensured. Using the results of the survey, questions which were marked 'neutral' by the employees were picked to be probed further. Within the survey result engagement areas with lowest and highest scores were also picked for further probing. Questions to understand the perspective of management and non-management employees regarding employee engagement initiatives, different barriers and overall engagement level were also developed separately.

The Interview guide for both management and non-management employees is attached as **Appendix I**. A sheet for interview coding is also attached as **Appendix II**.

3.4 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation, also referred as ethnography in social sciences, is a method wherein a researcher takes a key interest in understanding and explaining the characteristics or features of a phenomenon, instead of actually testing a hypothesis or formulating a theory (Parker 2003). Participant observation methodology was also used in preparing the case. This was done by adding different observations regarding employee engagement and related barriers. This method was helpful in getting a neutral view of both perspectives, since the participant has

been working in the said organization for over a year and have been keenly observing various processes related to employee engagement. The participant also devised and implemented some of the engagement initiatives, received/observed feedback of the employees and have been a part in implementing over all engagement strategy of the organization. Some other reasons/justifications of using participant observation methodology are as under:

1. To help the researcher understand how things are planned, structured and prioritized in the organization, especially with respect to employee engagement, how employees interrelate, and what are the different organizational cultural considerations.
2. To help determine what the employees feel important in leadership, employee engagement, motivation, employee welfare, job content and context etc.
3. To help facilitate interaction with employees (both management and non-management) and data collection.
4. To experience the challenges of successful implementation of employee engagement initiatives as well as the impact of implemented initiatives.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY “COMPANY X”

Company X realized the importance of employee engagement and was eager to implement it and reap the promised rewards. Year after year engagement initiatives were introduced, management was bent upon engaging its employees, because an engaged workforce was the main driver of organizational performance. But it was not so, there was no significant improvement in company performance. So what was happening? Why all these new engagement activities, rewards and recognition programs were not engaging the employees as expected? But if 67% employees appeared to be engaged as per the global employee engagement survey, why were things still the same?

4.1 Company Profile

Company X is one of the leading telecom companies in Pakistan and is considered to be one of the pioneers in telecom sector. The company was established in mid 90s and grew nationwide. The growth of the company can be mainly attributed to it being an SOE, but, was later privatized. It is offering a wide array of telecommunication services to both its domestic consumers as well as corporate clients. The company’s biggest strength is its infrastructure and its people. The organization is spread country wide and is well structured. It is divided into three major zones called, the North, South and Central. These individual zones are further divided into five or six regions. This division has been created to effectively manage the operations as well as the human resources throughout the country. Around 16,000 employees constitute the workforce of this company. Majority of the workforce belongs to the non-management group but a sizeable number of employees also fall in the management group. Due to this geographic division, segmentation of management is also created. At the very top level is the senior management which is usually placed in the headquarters. Within this segment management levels include, the President and CEO, Chief Officers (CXOs), Senior Executive Vice Presidents (SEVPs) and Executive Vice Presidents (EVPs). Within the Headquarters General Managers (GMs) and Senior Managers (SMs) are also at times included in decision making. Zonal and regional management includes General Managers (GMs),

Senior Managers (SMs), Managers and the Assistant Managers (AMs). This zonal and regional management is considered to be the executors with level from SMs and below constituting the front line management. The non-management group is mainly categorized as field staff or office staff. The company draws its strength from its field staff, which has good technical knowledge, is well experienced and conditioned to work in tough settings.

Due to its huge size the organization has adopted “HR Business Partner Model” as its HR model. The model was proposed by Dave Ulrich (1997), called the three legged model. The model comprises of three components i.e;

- a. Center of Excellence (COE)
- b. Shared Services
- c. HR Business Partner (HRBPs)

COE is situated in the headquarters and is responsible for developing various strategies, and running the major functions of HR. The function of shared services is found at the zonal and regional level which is in part done by zonal level HR teams and the regional HRBPs. The HRBPs are placed in all the regions and are responsible for implementation of all the major strategic HR initiatives in the regions. They are also responsible for maintaining good relations with line and actively support them for their HR needs. Success of any key initiative depends on effectiveness of HRBPs.

As a service sector organization and with key focus on customer centricity, one of the major priorities of management is employee engagement and employee wellbeing. The company believes that in order to satisfy its customer it is important that employees are satisfied first.

Due to a strong bureaucratic culture prevalent in the past, The Company today still has more of an autocratic style of leadership following a top-down approach. Strategies are developed at the top by the senior leadership which then trickle down to the front line. Different levels of management are involved in cascading of the strategy for implementation. Thus, one of key roles of zonal and regional management is effective implementation of important strategies.

Due to top-down approach, input from the employees used to be minimal. Platforms to enable the non-management employees to provide their input or feedback regarding any new project, initiative or strategy can be scarcely found. The front-line accepts what comes from the top

and tries to ensure its successful implementation. Sometimes the strategies are successful and sometimes they are not.

In the mid-2016, the company's focus shifted towards more of a participative culture. Much of this was due to the change in top leadership and joining of new President & CEO, who believed in operating with employee participation and feedback. Open-door policy was introduced, the CEO started conducting regular town hall meetings. In these meetings, he explain the current position of the company and imparted a vision and roadmap for the future. He conducted question and answer sessions and invited questions from all the employees while answering them on the spot, noting down things to improve highlighted by the staff. This enabled many employees to voice their concerns regarding different factors that affected them or their jobs. There were many positive suggestions for improvement and several complaints as well. Nevertheless, this initiative created a platform for employees to provide their feedback directly to the President and CXO level.

In order to make communication channels more open and effective, the company launched "workplace", which is basically corporate variation of Facebook. At Workplace, employees have their own company Facebook profiles which are connected with all their colleagues and enable them to communicate with anyone in the organization. Workplace served as one of the quickest and easiest ways to approach the top management, especially keeping in mind the size and geographical spread of the organization. The initiative was welcomed and employees started highlighting their achievement, shared knowledge, best practices and were keen on providing feedback. Using this new technology it became very easy for anyone to get connected, so much so that anyone was able to view any company event taking place anywhere in the country live, e.g. employees were able to view the live broadcast of President's town hall meeting and could participate in the question and answers session using their smart phones or laptops from anywhere in the country.

For any service sector organization, workforce becomes a major source of competitive advantage. Company X heavily relied on its workers, especially the ones that worked in field, interacted with customers and delivered the services. There are several categories or

designations of these front line employees who deal with internal and external customers in different ways. One of the categories, for example, placed in the call centers, took orders on phone from customers who want a new connection and routed the order to the field team for installation. The team which was assigned this order was responsible for installing the telephone line, the broadband internet and smart TV for the customer. Another group of employees were tasked to contact disgruntled customers, rectify their issues and convince them to retain the company services. These employees constituted the bulk of workforce and their efficiency and productivity was essential for company's profitability and market share. Demotivation and disengagement had serious repercussions on business results, therefore it was vital for the company to keep these employees engaged as it helped in provisioning of efficient customer services, maintenance of network, and most importantly, increase in net customer base.

In order to achieve this, various engagement initiatives were introduced for the employees. To assess the employee engagement level of its workforce, the company in collaboration with IBM Kenexa Global rolled out the annual employee engagement survey every year. The results of the survey were later shared and several action plans were developed to take corrective action against areas of concern.

4.2 Employee Engagement Initiatives

Some of the major employee engagement initiatives introduced to boost productivity, efficiency and overall engagement are outlined below in table 4.2.

Initiatives for Management Employees	Initiatives for Non-Management Employees
Monetary Awards e.g. Bonuses, performance allowances etc.	Monetary Awards e.g. Lajawab Inami Scheme incentive, Performance Allowance, yearly bonus, Project specific monetary rewards etc.
Training and Development (Hi-Po, Fuel)	Eid Celebrations with staff on duty
Independence Day Celebrations	Independence day celebrations

Away days	Employee Reward and Recognition
Business Excellence Awards	Provision of Laptops, tool kits, smartphones
President's Excellence Awards	House building, Motor cycle, Motor car loans,
Sports events	Sports events
Pride Sessions	

Table 4.2

The organization introduced several other engagement activities during the year, some of these activities were designed and conducted at regional level by the HRBPs which were not planned by the COE. Such initiatives were usually small events having short term impact, aimed mostly to celebrate or recognize employee efforts or achievements. These initiatives nevertheless were encouraged and appreciated by the top management and had a significant impact on employee engagement.

4.3 Employee Engagement Survey Results

In order to gauge the engagement level of the workforce the company in collaboration with IBM Kenexa Global, launched employee engagement survey each year. All the management employees and few non-management employees (ones with company e-mail ids) were invited to complete the survey. Process of filling out the survey was completely electronic and online. Employees logged into the employee engagement survey portal, entered their assigned user names and password, filled out the survey and submitted it. The entire process took 20-25 minutes on average. After analysis of the data, results were shared with the company. Company's COE, then segregated the results region wise and according to regional heads. Regional heads or GMs were able to view their team's engagement score, engagement level, high and low ranked items in survey. All this information helped them assess the needs of their staff and gave them an idea about areas requiring attention in employee engagement and motivation. At the top level, results were analyzed for the entire company and new engagement plans and strategies were devised to achieve better scores in consequent years keeping in view company's profitability, costs and other constraints.

Results for the year 2015 were very encouraging. Around 5,327 employees participated in the survey. Employee engagement index was found to be at 70% as compared to global benchmark which was at 76% and Asia benchmark at 67%.

In 2016 the employee engagement index dropped to 67% with global benchmark and Asia benchmarks at 70 and 66 percent respectively. **(Appendix III)**

One of the drawbacks of the survey was that out of 16,000 employees, only 5,327 participated which represented only 33% of entire workforce. Another critical issue with this survey was that majority of the participants belonged to the management group. Non-management employees who had their company assigned e-mails are relatively few in number. This pointed to the fact that feedback from the non-management employees was not taken into account. The survey thus reflected engagement level of management employees predominantly and therefore, did not gauge the engagement level of entire workforce.

To ensure maximum participation and under pressure of getting the survey completed by employees before deadline, it was observed that the management especially the HR pressurized the participants to complete the survey as soon as possible. This caused two problems, one, the employees were usually in a rush to complete the survey and often had little time to properly think about their responses. Secondly, employees often doubted the anonymity of their responses and felt that management might vilify them for adverse feedback and were therefore, afraid of the unfavorable consequences. This led to providing responses that were towards the favorable side and untrue. Both of these problems were a factor in compromising the reliability of the data. Relying solely on survey results to determine the engagement levels of entire workforce was therefore inadequate.

4.4 Barriers to Employee Engagement

On interacting with various employees in all groups and cadres, it was noticed that a great deal of dissatisfaction was present. Employee group that was most affected with dissatisfaction was the regular staff, whether management or non-management. Non-management in particular

had a plethora of complains, instances of inequity and other prevailing issues which were neglected by the higher management. This caused most of the engagement activities to have a short term impact.

Four major barriers under study were;

1. Inequity and perception of unfairness
2. Work environment
3. Lack of involvement in decision making
4. Work-life balance

These barriers often were at play and many times the management was unaware of them. The impact was felt later when the intended purpose of engagement activities was not achieved. A closer study of these barriers along with various opinions of employees was helped in shedding some light on the misleading survey results and actual employee engagement level.

4.4.1 Inequity and perception of unfairness

For employees to get engaged it was important that they were first satisfied and motivated. Engagement activities many times failed even before implementation due to this reason.

“I have given the prime years of my life to this company, my youth... and here I am today at the same position, at the exact same point where I was 20 years ago! This is what we get for being life time loyal to our company. And I assure you when I say this, I say it on behalf of most of the (regular) employees here that we don’t feel like celebrating and participating in these events, they are a farce. Give us promotions, give us a raises, that’s what we really need and deserve.” (I4NMR)

This was the response of one of the senior non-management employees when asked why he did not want to attend a dinner organized by zone for its entire staff.

When asked about competitiveness of salary, another employee responded,

“My salary according to my qualification and experience is very very very low. My friends in other government departments are earning a lot more than me at the same pay scale... I feel the company is aware of this issue but is deliberately trying to lower our standard of living.” (I1NMR)

On interacting with various employees over the stretch of a year, the most common plea or complain of regular employees, both in management and non-management groups was that their pay was not competitive according to their skills. Many people identified that the main cause of this was “privatization” and that on gaining the status of private limited company, the company in its pursuit of cost cutting, ended raising salaries as per government pay scales and used its own pay scales. These pay scales allowed low salary raise as compared to the governmental pay scales.

“We are not a government entity, we are not obliged to use government pay scales. We are a private company with our own pay scales and we compensate employees as per company’s resources, constraints and performance.”

Responded the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) of the company when he was asked about employees concern about pay scales. The top management made it clear that the employees were paid according to their performance, their region’s performance and company’s overall profitability. Nevertheless, employees experienced a lot of inequity and considered this as one of the biggest sources of dissatisfaction.

Performance Management System was another area where employees had concerns and serious reservations. Since the system affected both the management and non-management employees equally, therefore their concerns and feelings about the system were mutual. Employees felt agonized due to the fact that biasness and favoritism was common and their appraisals were not fair. Both the employee groups at least till regional and zonal level were of the similar opinion that the

performance management system was flawed. Main reason responsible for this notion was the forced ranking on a bell curve. Employees perceived this to be extremely unfair as all the workers under one supervisor could not be placed in one or two grades. This meant that someone had to be in lower grades, which usually resulted in unfavorable consequences. Supervisors or managers suffered from severe cognitive dissonance while appraising their staff as per system guidelines according to bell curve rule.

While discussing the same issue, one of the SMs of a core department said,

“How can I place my employee in “E” while being hundred and one percent sure that he was been working exceptionally day and night, sometimes even taking life risk...? How is this fair? Even if somehow I do this, how will I face him later and expect the same dedication after they find out that I have rated their performance unsatisfactory despite all their efforts?” (I14MR)

The top management and COE had their own justification for this forced distribution in place. One of the SMs in COE dealing directly with the PMS responded;

“We over here look at the overall performance. When we see that a region has been in loss, then how is it possible that every employee or even a majority of employees’ performance had been outstanding? If this was the case then this region should have been profitable...” (I11MNTC)

At another instance, one of the members of top management said that they were aware of the issues related to the forced distribution and were gradually going to eliminate it from the system.

Over the year, one of the conclusions drawn was that the company needs to deal with inequity and this perception of unfairness. Since the employees expect changes in above mentioned issues first. It is also understandable that impact of engagement activities can only be seen if employees are not annoyed or dissatisfied.

4.4.2 Work environment

Work environment in the headquarters and zone was considered to be good enough that employees felt comfortable working there. However in the regions, situation was not the same. As the researcher had been dealing with administrative issues as well, most management employees within the region were unhappy with their work environment. They complained about not having good ergonomic furniture, had faulty equipment such as personal computers, printers, etc. Many officers complained about faulty lighting, plumbing, availability of water, water filters etc. in resolving this issue it sometimes took days due to red tapism and budgetary constraints. This, however, seriously affected employee performance.

An SM in one of the regions was asked about his work environment and he replied,

“I was transferred here a few week ago, and as an SM I feel very annoyed that in my office I do not have a proper office chair, my desk needs repairing, and in this cold weather I do not have a heater. How does the company expect me to work in this condition?” (I12MR)

While talking to a group of field staff about the same topic, they said that they are most concerned about their safety. They lacked proper safety equipment. One of them elaborated this point by saying,

“When we go in field to rectify faults or provide a new connection, we do not have the proper technical help. It’s usually one person doing this all, so there is no one else to help, we need to climb poles to reach the distribution points and we do not have ladders, safety belts, gloves, helmets etc. in my previous organization at least we had proper safety gear. I am often more occupied with avoiding accidents then the work” (I9NMR)

The top management, however, followed a clear vision of equipping the staff. Priority was given to field staff and in the past few years, field staff was provided company motorcycles and fuel to enhance their mobility. In 2015 and 2016 they

were provided with laptops, especially the staff that required computers for troubleshooting or configuring settings for the broadband internet. In the middle of 2016, almost entire field staff responsible for provisioning of new connections and fault rectification was allotted smartphones for enhancing communication and providing the ability to use company software on the go. Line managers were allotted vehicles equipped with ladders, and other tools for field operations. The company prioritized equipping the field staff and teams as far as operations went. Employees at backend support or in support functions complained for lack of proper equipment and good working conditions.

4.4.3 Lack of involvement in decision making

With a strong autocratic and bureaucratic past, the effects still lingered. This is reflected in the SOPs and rules of the company. Due to a lot of red tape, processes become time consuming. Decision making therefore, seemed slow and had low employee involvement. In strategy development, management did not seem inclined in getting feedback from the non-management staff. They took input from regional heads. Many employees felt ignored and believed that providing input was not any different from providing no input at all. When this issue was probed, many non-management employees were of the view that their feedback was not given any importance. One of them explained with an example that he proposed a solution for better accountability and cost reduction in vehicle maintenance and repair but his suggestion was not implemented.

“My supervisor appreciated my suggestion and admitted it was an effective solution, but I was told that due to some company constraints, SOPs etc. we have to keep things working as they are. It is sad to me that the company is losing money and this practice is still there...” (IINMR)

Employees, at large, felt that strategies developed for their welfare, engagement and facilitation were not addressing their real issues or were not effective.

“I feel that our leaders do not know the ground realities and are not told...”

(I2NMR)

One of the senior non-management employees stated. Many employees also claimed that the feedback they had given in annual employee engagement surveys was not acted upon. As already discussed, employee “voice” has a significant importance and it can prove to be more harmful for the organization if that voice is ignored then no voice at all. Non-management employees at Company X felt this way which was reducing their trust in the management and loyalty with the company.

At the regional level, one of the GMs responded that regional management takes input from the field staff, they even hold meetings and sessions for idea sharing. Practical and good ideas are sometimes implemented (I10MNTC). On the top management level, the CEO also aimed at creating a more of a collaborative culture with President’s regular town hall meetings and Q&A sessions.

4.4.4 Work life balance

Company X, in order to facilitate its employees provided flexi timings. At the headquarters employees were expected to work as per standard working hours i.e. 8 hours per day. Employees in the headquarters also had Saturdays and Sundays off. To facilitate them more, they were given the liberty to work from either 9 am to 5 pm or 10 am to 6 pm. At the regional level, employees had the same flexi timing option but the Saturdays were on. To compensate them, they were expected to work 7 hours per day and had Fridays as half days. Many employees were happy about these timings but this did not ensure work-life balance at the company.

A GM in one of the core departments narrated his daily routine,

“I wake up at 3 am, I offer the morning prayer, then I connect my cell phone to internet. This is the time at which my work day starts. I sort out my mail,

I prioritize action plans. At 4 am I start contacting my team and assign them the critical tasks. My team is aware of my routine so in anticipation they are also awake at this time and get to work right away. During the day I juggle through office work and field work and I rarely get time for things other than my work. Since the nature of our work is so critical we cannot leave anything to chance, delays are not tolerated. I get hourly update from my team and this goes on till 12 pm. Then I sleep and next day I wake up at 3 am again...” (I13MR)

This routine affected not only the GM but also his entire team. The department was responsible for keeping the services of the company up and running at all time, any sort of problem or service outage resulted in customer dissatisfaction. Effected customers now had various options in market and they were likely to switch. The company in current market conditions was not able to afford losing a single customer due to fierce competition, therefore the pressure on the staff was immense. This greatly disturbed the work-life balance in the company, especially for employees in the core departments.

“All we know is that we have to be in the office at 9 am but are not sure when will we go home.” (I3MNTC)

One of the line managers commented.

With the support departments, the disturbance of work life balance was less as compared to the core departments but existed nonetheless. Most affected were the management employees from manager till GM level. Having a smartphone was considered essential for providing statuses of ongoing activities via applications such as Whatsapp groups or checking and responding to email, especially after working hours or when outside of office. This intrusive technology had also tipped the work-life scale and employees often felt occupied with work outside office. Many employees felt this was affecting their physical and mental health.

Employees in zonal offices and at headquarters also had disturbed work-life balance due to almost daily late sittings and long working hours.

This disturbed work-life balance was therefore a major factor in employee disengagement and burnout. It was here that many employees felt that engagement activities play an important role in blowing off steam.

“You must have noticed, our people really like sports events. It helps them relax, cuts the boredom and reenergizes them. I feel these activities are a must for our workers.” (I3MNTC)

Said one of the line managers. But as many employees opined that such events had a short term impact, they were welcomed but the tough routine takes over after a while and the cycle continued. Another interesting observation made during the year was that employees abhorred being called on a holiday, even for a fun activity, completely unrelated to work. Nobody wanted their only holiday to be disturbed.

Employee engagement score seemed to be dropping in the organization. An apparent reason for this was the presence of various barriers to engagement. Apart from four major problematic areas, there were also other factors that contributed into lower scores. Company demographics played a role here. The average age of a company employee was around 45 years. A large portion of the workforce belonged to this age group ranging between 45 to 55 years. Majority of these employees joined the companies in their youth and had served till date. Many of them were not open to change and newer ideas, they were more concerned with their livelihoods, standard of living, welfare of their families etc. Also over the years the permanent field workers had lost much of the vigor and energy due to their age. This was one of the weak areas of the company, although the management was trying to cater to the needs of employees, employees however, felt it was still inadequate.

When told the current employee engagement score of the company, many employees refused to believe it. As one manager responded,

“Overall engagement and satisfaction level is zero”. (I5MR)

The question was that why there was such a huge gap between the survey results and observed employee feedback? Was the management aware of this gap and accepted it? And if it was going to do something about it.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the final chapter major findings derived from the case study are discussed in detail. In the next section the study is concluded followed by recommendations and limitations.

5.1 MAJOR FINDINGS OF STUDY

Employee engagement, one of the biggest priorities of the organization did not seem to be yielding results as it was supposed to be. In light of the data collected and the observations made, it became very clear that there were few core problems that needed addressing immediately. These issues are tabulated below;

- a. Company needs to stop relying on IBM Kenexa Global employee engagement survey as it does not represent the entire workforce. The results obtained from this survey are far from the facts. This leads to faulty assumptions and formulation of ineffective engagement strategies. Implementation of these ineffective strategies is responsible for wastage of resources, creation of negative perception of HR with line, and increased dissatisfaction. The real results can only be obtained by conducting a proper in house survey.
- b. Employees, it seems, are more focused on their lower tier needs (as per Maslow's Hierarchy) these unfulfilled needs are a source of demotivation and dissatisfaction. It is of paramount importance that in order to engage employees, these needs are fulfilled first.
- c. There is wide spread inequity in the company which needs to be removed.
- d. Over the years, communication gap has widen and there is little trust between the management and non-management employees. This implies to the fact that a cultural change is required, slowly but surely a culture of mutual trust and respect will be a key driver for employee engagement.

Referring back to the conceptual model, it is found that these barriers do create negative consequences on all three levels of employee engagement. At the 'state' level, employees suffer from demotivation, cognitive dissonance, lack of interest in work and dedication. At the 'trait' level these barriers cause the employees to burnout or leave the organization. in company X, the permanent employees suffer from burnout while the contractual and outsourced

employees seek other external opportunities. At behavioral level, employees exhibit lack of organizational citizenship behavior, and in more extreme cases resort to anti-social behavior such as deliberate damaging of company assets, reputation, involvement in disciplinary issues and litigation against the company, absenteeism etc.

If these issues are fixed employees will be satisfied and motivated. Only after employee motivation the company should focus on employee engagement. For the company to engage its workforce, it is, therefore, important that very thought out employee engagement plans are created which should be carefully implemented. Failure to do so will keep the company going in a loop, wasting valuable resources and time, while losing its competitive edge, the people!

5.2 CONCLUSION

Since its inception, company X has gone through many ups and downs. The case of company X is quite interesting because from a theoretical point of view a lot is going wrong in the organization which points to negative results. However, when we take a closer look, we find out that the employees in the organization at several levels are found engaged despite the barriers to engagements and a wide range of dissatisfiers. When we consider the employee opinion regarding engagement, we get a very grim picture, but the company boasts of high engagement level, determined from annual employee engagement survey. This may be attributed to two different reasons. One, employee engagement found at company X in some employees is due to “intrinsic motivation”, loyalty and emotional attachment with the organization. Two, as discussed employee engagement can be found as a personal trait as well. It appears that there are certain employees who might be engaged due to these two reasons. The percentage of engaged employees is low as compared to the disengaged or the actively disengaged.

The case study explores the employee engagement levels, four major barriers in the way of employee engagement and their impact. By interviewing several employees from different management levels and groups it points to the understanding that perhaps the findings of the survey need to be interpreted and analyzed in greater depth. This is a big trap which is diverting the focus of leadership away from the core issues that are the main cause of low engagement levels.

It is quite obvious that the top leadership is focused on improving the engagement level, which is evident from several initiatives regarding engagement and employee motivation. Parallel to this however are several barriers at work that reduce the impact of these initiatives. Therefore it is important that such barriers may be eliminated first. This elimination may sound like a herculean task but is possible nonetheless.

Drawing upon the conclusion that the company needs to change its priorities, make significant modifications in its strategies and address the barriers to engagement. Other recommendations that may prove helpful are provided in the following section.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The organization has a lot of options to improve the overall engagement levels. Some suggestions for consideration are listed below;

- The organization must design and use its own companywide employee engagement survey which gathers input from all levels and groups of employees. The survey should be conducted properly so as to obtain factual data. This will help in getting real time feedback, highlight the ground realities and issues faced by employees and help management focus on the real areas of improvement. Such a survey will also make the employee feel valued and cared for.
- The organization must pay attention to the results of the survey and take actions accordingly. These actions must be visible and acknowledged by the employees. As discussed before ignored voice is more harmful than no voice.
- Instead of introducing newer initiatives and strategies for engagement, the organization should address the current dissatisfiers, unfulfilled needs and try to achieve maximum employee motivation.
- One of the biggest causes of dissatisfaction among employees is non-competitive salary. This is also a big reason for high turnover for talented employees, especially the new hires. Employees feel they are not compensated as per their worth or value. Those who have access to better opportunities leave the organization while the ones without such an option

are likely to reduce their input/effort in response to lower and inequitable outcome. (equity theory)

- The company should focus on reducing inequity in other areas. In order to do so, the senior leadership would have to reconsider various SOPs, the promotion cycles, performance management system, talent management, succession planning, learning and growth. Unfair appraisals, lack of career advancement opportunities, favoritism, nepotism and biasness will only make inequity and perception of unfairness a stronger barrier. Every time an employee compares his appraisal, promotion chances, salary, with others they will be dissatisfied especially if they deserved better.
- In order to avoid burnout, organization must update JDs of all employees on regular basis and ensure optimum levels of workload. This will help in balancing the work-life balance as employees will be able to finish their work in time and able to give time to their families. Vague JDs and piling work will reduce motivation especially, since there is no overtime payment or compensatory time off.
- Policies to promote work-life balance should be created, as this has serious repercussions on employee physical and mental health. Linked with previous point, apart from reducing workload and updating JDs, initiatives such as away days, paid vacations, or simple day offs can be introduced.
- Employees in company X feel that they are discouraged to raise their voice, when they do their voice is ignored. The company should create platforms, and devise ways to get employee feedback from grass root level. Employee feedback should be reflected in strategy creation. This will improve the trust gap between management and non-management employees and will give rise to a participative culture.
- Within the organization steps should be taken to involve the non-management employees in decision making, especially in decisions that affect their work, satisfaction or engagement. Such decision making will boost employee morale, make them feel valued and most importantly will help in creating a sense of ownership among employees.
- Basic tools, safety gear, office equipment, should be provided to all employees and the overall work environment should be made conducive for maximum productivity. It is utmost important that employees should be well equipped prior to expectation of results.

Not only employees will feel safe at work but are likely to add more effort, as suggested by Social Exchange Theory and Job Demand-Resource Model of employee engagement.

- Communication gap between the top leadership and the front line should be removed so that the top may be able to know the ground realities and take corrective actions considering these real issues. This will help in addressing real employee grievances. Resources can then be utilized correctly leading to employee satisfaction.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

- The study was carried out in one of the regions of the company. This region was considered as a sample and the results have been deduced from the opinions of employees within this region with an assumption that the opinion is shared across the company in other regions as well.
- The opinion of the two groups of employees, that is, management and non-management may be biased, assuming that both groups want to stress upon their perspectives.
- The observations made in the period of one year was done in only one region, it is possible that employees in other regions may have other needs, opinions etc.
- There are many other factors that act as barriers to engagement and therefore can also be incorporated.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICE 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Management	Non-Management
<p>1. Do you feel the pay in this company is competitive compared to people doing similar jobs in other companies? (Job Satisfaction/inequity & unfairness)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, is this true for all the employee categories in the company?</i> • <i>If no, what are the reasons for non-competitive pay?</i> • <i>Is the management keen on addressing this issue?</i> 	<p>1. Do you feel your pay is competitive compared to people doing similar jobs in other companies? (Job Satisfaction/inequity & unfairness)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If no, what are the reasons for non-competitive pay?</i> • <i>Is the management keen on addressing this issue?</i>
<p>2. Do employees here think about looking for a new job with another company? (Employee Engagement Index)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, then which category is likely to switch?</i> • <i>What is the monthly or annual turnover rate?</i> 	<p>2. If provided an opportunity would you like to work for another company? (Employee Engagement Index)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, then what are the reasons for switch?</i> • <i>Would you like to recommend this organization to your friends and family as a good place to work?</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are there any specific reasons employees want to switch?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Do you proudly tell others that you work in this company?</i>
<p>3. Does management takes actions based on the feedback from previously conducted surveys. (Kenexa Behaviour Change Index/ lack of involvement in decision making)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes? Then what kind of actions are taken?</i> • <i>Please give any example of such action taken.</i> • <i>If no, then why not?</i> • <i>What are the constraints or issues in taking actions?</i> 	<p>3. Have you seen management take any actions based on the feedback from previously conducted surveys? (Kenexa Behaviour Change Index/ lack of involvement in decision making)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes? Then what kind of actions have been taken in year 2016?</i>
<p>4. In this organization do u feel the decisions are made in a timely manner? (Speed and Execution)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, please share an instance of such speedy decision making.</i> • <i>If no, what are the reasons for delay in decision making?</i> 	<p>4. Do u feel that the decisions here are made in a timely manner? (Speed and Execution)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, please share an instance of such speedy decision making.</i> • <i>If no, what do you attribute to delay?</i>
<p>5. Do you see positive changes taking place as a result of the previous year engagement surveys? (Kenexa Behavior Change Index)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p>	<p>5. Do you see positive changes taking place as a result of the previous year engagement surveys? (Kenexa Behavior Change Index)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, please mention a few notable changes that have taken place in the year 2016.</i> • <i>If no, please explain the reason for inaction in your opinion.</i> • <i>Does the organization, in your opinion, prioritize actions based on the survey results?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, please mention a few notable changes that have taken place in the year 2016.</i>
<p>6. Do you often have to late sit? On average how much time do you think you give to office related tasks? (work-life balance)</p> <p><u>Guide to assess work-life balance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For 7-8 hours per day: work life balance exists, provided they do not work at home.</i> • <i>For workers with >8 hours: work life balance is disturbed.</i> • <i>For workers with 7-8 hours but are often required to work at home or attend official calls: disturbed work-life balance.</i> 	<p>6. Do you often have to late sit? On average how much time do you think you give to office related tasks? (work-life balance)</p> <p><u>Guide to assess work-life balance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For 7-8 hours per day: work life balance exists, provided they do not work at home.</i> • <i>For workers with >8 hours: work life balance is disturbed.</i> • <i>For workers with 7-8 hours but are often required to work at home or attend official calls: disturbed work-life balance.</i>
<p>7. Do you like working at your designated work stations/area? (Work environment)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If no, would you prefer a change of your work location, or office plan?</i> • <i>Does the company equip you well to perform your duties?</i> 	<p>7. Do you like working at your designated work stations/area? (Work environment)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If no, would you prefer a change of your work location, or office plan?</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you been provided with necessary equipment, tools, and resources to perform your tasks?</i>
<p>8. Please share any instance in the past year where you took an initiative or gave an idea that was encouraged and implemented. (involvement in decision making)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, do you feel the management encourages new ideas, input or feedback by employees? And how frequently?</i> 	<p>8. Please share any instance in the past year where you took an initiative or gave an idea that was encouraged and implemented. (involvement in decision making)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, do you feel the management encourages new ideas, input or feedback by employees? And how frequently?</i>
<p>9. Name three things that you would like to change in the organization that affects the employees and their performance?</p>	<p>9. Name three things that you would like to change in the organization that affects you as a person and your performance?</p>
<p>10. How would you rate the overall engagement and satisfaction level of the employees?</p>	<p>10. Do you participate in different celebrations, events, and other such activities organized in the region by the company? (Engagement initiative effectiveness)</p> <p><u>Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If yes, what is their impact on your job?</i> • <i>If no, are such events a waste of time? What should the company be doing differently?</i>

APPENDICE II

INTERVIEWEE CODING

Interviews conducted are coded in the following way.

Code elements:

[I 1-15]	[M]	[NM]	[R]	[NTC]
Interviewee (1 to 15)	Management Employee	Non-Management Employee	Regular (Permanent employee)	Contractual Employee

Interviewee Codes	Interviewee
I1NMR	Interview 1, Non-Management (Regular)
I2NMR	Interview 2, Non-Management (Regular)
I3MNTC	Interview 3, Management (Contractual)
I4NMR	Interview 4, Non-Management (Regular)
I5MR	Interview 5, Management (Regular)
I6NMR	Interview 6, Non-Management (Regular)
I7NMR	Interview 7, Non-Management (Regular)
I8NMR	Interview 8, Non-Management (Regular)
I9NMR	Interview 9, Non-Management (Regular)
I10MNTC	Interview 10, Management (Contractual)
I11MNTC	Interview 11, Management (Contractual)
I12MR	Interview 12, Management (Regular)
I13MR	Interview 13, Management (Regular)
I14MR	Interview 14, Management (Regular)
I15MNTC	Interview 15, Management (Contractual)

APPENDICE III

GLOBAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS 2015 & 2016

