

## **Factors Determining Employee Engagement during the Covid Pandemic and Its Impact on Employee Performance**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

#### ***Purpose***

The covid pandemic made a paradigm shift in almost all areas. The purpose of this paper is to understand the key factors contributing to the level of employee engagement during the covid pandemic and its influence on the level of performance of employees belonging to the telecom sector.

#### ***Theoretical framework***

This study tried putting some of the contributing factors of employee engagement together through rigorous literature review and tried to measure the degree of effect of employee engagement on employee performance

#### ***Design/methodology/approach***

A validated survey questionnaire had used to gather data. A method of simple random sampling was administered to determine the respondents and 289 valid responses were received from 300 total questionnaires circulated. Structural equation Modelling and analysis of regression were used to study the relationships among variables.

#### ***Findings***

The study revealed that all the factors identified were determinants of employee engagement. In this study co-worker relationships and working conditions had a greater impact on the performance of employees.

#### ***Research, Practical & Social implications***

Greater focus and efforts need to be given to improve work conditions and co-worker relationships as it has a higher impact on the level of employee engagement and eventually on employee performance. All the elements of employee engagement help the organisation to build a positive working environment that makes a positive impact on the society to which that belongs.

#### ***Originality/value***

This study is specifically looking into contributing to the research developments in the area of employee engagement and for that developing and validating a comprehensive model.

**Keyword:** Employee Engagement; Employee Performance; Employee Relationship; Work Environment.

## Introduction

The term employee engagement is understood as the overall level of employee involvement and employee commitment towards their organisation and all the activities and objectives of the organisation. It is found that an engaged employee is more aware of the responsibility, goals, and duties vested upon him by his organisation. A highly engaged workforce used to have a positive attitude towards their workplace and this is also called the positive emotional linkage of an employee towards his duties and responsibilities. Actively engaged employees deliver higher levels of performance on their duties. Many factors are there contributing to the level of employee engagement. The concept of employee engagement gained its attention from the business world as it is considering all the behaviours of the employees that positively impacted the performance.

This study tried putting some of the contributing factors of employee engagement together through vigorous literature review and tried to measure the degree of effect of employee engagement on employee performance. Employee performance is the sum total of the overall efforts of an employee at work. The level of Performance is considered the master plan to achieve the strategic objective of the organisation. Evaluation of performance is considered as the fundamental aspect of performance management and the performance of each employee and the organisation as a whole is subject to the organisational policies and practices. It is very evident from the results that the configurational approach to strategic human resources management embedded with the integrative perspective is important to achieve the organisational objectives. Numbers of studies have shown that employee engagement is having its own remarkable position in ensuring consistent employee performance.

In this pandemic situation, the entire approach to work is been shifted and taken a new dimension. The objective of this paper is to understand the determinants of employee engagement and its effect on employee performance in a pandemic situation. As the majority of the organisations are shifting back from work from home pattern to a normal work atmosphere it is important for the organisation to understand the employee engagement level

## Literature Review

Human resource is one of the factors through which the organisation could take a competitive advantage over the other organisation. The skill sets of present HR cannot be replicated or copied by the other organisation. HR of the organisation is considered to be an integral part of the key elements to the success of the organisation. The concept of employee engagement helps the organisation to leverage the maximum out of these specific skill sets. This has been identified by many organisations and many researchers like Sendawula et al., (2018) and their research studies prove that employee engagement is the key to organisations' dynamisms. Initially, the researchers identified the relevance of employee engagement only with respect to working effectively in the organisations.

The aspect of employee engagement is mentioned as the aspect of organisational effectiveness in their work. Nevertheless, the subject was stated in wider scope as one of the numerals of requirements to be established to deliver a cooperative and advanced work setting that leads to effectiveness and performance. Kahn (1990, p. 694) presented the idea of

employee engagement first, and he identified three psychological conditions for an employee to be rightly engaged. They are availability, meaningfulness, and safety. Furthermore, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) well-defined employee engagement as a psychological condition that conveys the behavioural aspect of an individual. All these descriptions of the concept represent that an engaged worker is emotionally and intellectually attached to the organisation, feels proud about its vision and mission, and is committed to living by its principles.

In addition, Adhitama, J., & Riyanto, S. (2020) studied and stated employee engagement as the desire for excellence. The study states that there can be three different types of employees in an organisation like engaged employees, not engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees. Those who constantly attempt to provide excellence within their job roles fall under Engaged employees. The employees who are not engaged focus only on the duty assigned to them and are not bothered about the organisational goals. Employees who have actively disengaged are generally risky in nature as they tend to underperform and demotivate other employees too. This concept was very popular and gained importance among managers, consultants, and policymakers during the period 1999 to 2005 and there was a considerable amount of discussion on this aspect.

In various studies by Rich et al. (2010), and May et al. (2004) it was found that the various aspects of the job environment significantly contribute to the level of employee engagement. These studies specify that the organisation nurtures a helpful working environment by displaying apprehension for employees' feelings and needs, providing constructive advice, and inspiring the workers to share their apprehensions, implement innovative skills and resolve work-related difficulties.

Another concept of employee relationship refers to the interpersonal synchronization feature of employee engagement. That is helpful for co-worker relationships and increases the level of employee engagement Kahn (1990). It is found that workplace relationships had a substantial effect on the engagement level of employees and claimed that individuals with interpersonal connections feel a better sense of their work (May et al. 2004).

Leadership is identified as a higher-order, balanced processing of information, a multi-dimensional construct comprising self-awareness, internalised moral standards, and relational transparency (Kertiriasih et al., 2018). The studies demonstrate that when the leaders become inspirational, engagement happens naturally. Leaders are accountable for making the employees understand that the workers' contributions possess a crucial role in overall organisational success. Trustworthy and helpful leadership is conceptualised to influence employee engagement of the followers by increasing their participation, enthusiasm, and satisfaction with work (Schneider et al., 2009).

Career Advancement, subsequently aids the workers to focus on the labor dimension, which is considered another important dimension in the technique of engaging workers. Training advances work accuracy and by this means influences work performance and worker engagement. An employee undergoing apt training and developmental learning programs in his or her work area, his or her confidence level build-up and that motivates the individual to engage more in his or her job. It is stated that providing opportunities to develop in their career is equal to rewarding the employees (Fidyah, D. N., & Setiawati, T., 2020).

Compensation or salary is a very essential characteristic of employee engagement which stimulates a worker to attain extra and henceforth concentrate vigorously on the job and individual development. A study, it is revealed that both recognition and rewards are important

antecedents of employee engagement (Meswantri, M., & Ilyas, A., 2018)). It is also found that when the workers get recognition and rewards from the organisation, they will sense grateful to work with higher engagement levels. Kahn (1990) identified that employees' level of engagement is a reflection of their gratefulness towards the benefits that they receive from the organisation.

The organisational general system decides the degree to which the workers are engaged in an organisation. Numerous other studies have noted that organisation that has a general support system that promotes staffing, work-life balance, and flexible working time can ensure a highly engaged workforce. (Rama Devi, 2009)

Workplace wellbeing is always considered a general aspect that improves employee engagement. It is stated in the studies that well-being is the accurate measure that delivers more variance in the concept of human behaviour. Well-being becomes the utmost vital element for evaluating the impact of organisation on its employees. The most significant contributing factor to the level of engagement was the top management's decisions in worker wellbeing (Rath and Harter, 2010).

Employee performance signifies a straight connection with organisational performance and success. Considerable studies have been undertaken in the same field that illustrate that the nurturing of employee engagement is an imperative technique to enhance employee performance. In the research studies (Christian et al., 2011 and Leiter and Bakker, 2010) it is found that high levels of worker engagement increase, work performance, commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Demerouti and Cropanzano (2010) stated that improved performance is a product of employee engagement. Pulling together the viewpoints from the literature, this study combined a number of determinants that contributed to employee engagement. These various factors were tested empirically and found to be valid.

## **The Methodological Design of the Research**

### ***To understand the determinants that contribute to employee engagement***

There are numerous determinants that have been acknowledged as those that stimulate the level of engagement. However, after a systematic literature review, this paper aims to consider some of the determinants of employee engagement. The null and alternative hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H<sub>0</sub>1.** There is no influence of the identified determinants such as Work Environment, employee relations, Leadership, Career Advancement, Compensation, Organizational Policies, and Workplace well-being on employee engagement.

**H<sub>a</sub>1.** There is a remarkable influence of the above determinants on employee engagement.

### ***To study the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance***

This paper also aims to identify the degree of relationship between employee engagement and employee performance. Therefore, it was decided to identify the impact of engagement on performance by checking the relationship between them. Therefore, the hypothesis was outlined as:

**H<sub>0</sub>2.** There is no significant relationship between employee engagement and employee performance.

**H<sub>a</sub>2.** There is a significant relationship between employee engagement and employee performance.

The level of employee engagement of 289 employees in the telecom sector is been measured through identified factors with the help of a validated instrument. The data was collected from both managerial and lower managerial level employees to assess the level of employee engagement. A questionnaire was developed to measure the significant contributions of factors on employee engagement. Thus, the questionnaire measured Work Environment, employee relations, Leadership, Career Advancement, Compensation, Organizational Policies, Workplace well-being, employee engagement, and employee performance. A pilot study with data from 80 respondents was administered to validate the instrument. It was also found that the various variables in the instrument were significant statistically as in Table I.

**Table I.** *Reliability Analysis*

Sl No	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
1	Working environment	0.878
2	Employee relation	0.917
3	Leadership	0.947
3	Career Advancement	0.863
4	Compensation	0.915
5	Organisational Policies	0.873
6	Workplace well being	0.714
8	Employee engagement	0.862
9	Overall reliability	0.965

For selecting the respondents from the Kerala telecom sector, a simple random sampling method was adopted. 300 questionnaires were circulated and 289 valid answers were collected, which resulted in a 96% response rate. Using an appropriate statistical model, the data analysis was carried out. To measure the level of the estimate made by the several factors on employee engagement the method of regression analysis was adopted. Regression was also used to understand the relationship between employee performance and employee engagement. By using the structural equation modelling technique, it is found that the strength is depicted by the values of the coefficient, and the influence level of the independent variable on the dependent variable was found to be highly significant.

## **Analysis and the Summary of Results**

The determinants acknowledged through extensive literature review were considered as independent variables to study their impact level on the concept of employee engagement. By administering the regression study, as shown in Table II, it was found that all the variables were recognized as determinants of engagement with a 67.3 percent value of adjusted  $r^2$ , which means that it statistically has got high significance.

The  $r^2$  value of this study denotes that the factors identified point to 67% of the variance in the level of employee engagement. While administering the ANOVA, it generated a probability value (Table III) that is very significant. It indicates that all the identified factors such as Work Environment, employee relations, Leadership, Career Advancement, Compensation, Organizational Policies, and Workplace well-being contribute significantly to the level of employee engagement.

This study state that 67.3% of the variance in the variable employee engagement is impacted by determinants such as – Work Environment, employee relation, Leadership, Career Advancement, Compensation, Organizational Policies, and Workplace well-being. Therefore, the null hypothesis H<sub>01</sub> of the study is rejected. That means there is a significant influence of the above determinants on employee engagement.

**Table II.**

Model	r	r <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	SE of the estimate
1	0.839 <sup>a</sup>	0.678	0.673	0.23748

**Table III.**

Model	Sum of sq	Mean sq	Sig	F.	
1	Regression	17.774	3.537	0.000 <sup>b</sup>	43.830
	Residual	7.875	0.058		
	Total	24.649			

**Table IV.**

Model	Unstd Coefficients B	Std Coefficients β	SE	t	Sig.	
1	(Constant)	0.828	0.220	3.867	0.000	
	Working environment	0.464	0.541	5.502	0.000	
	Employee relation	0.326	0.350	3.624	0.000	
	Leadership	- 0.076	- 0.102	0.043	-1.251	0.219
	Career Advancement	0.003	0.004	0.091	0.013	0.972
	Compensation	0.075	0.084	0.092	0.720	0.469
	Organisational Policies	-0.041	-0.048	0.070	-0.497	0.630
	Workplace wellbeing	0.063	0.056	0.048	1.068	0.286

This study, by using regression, focused on the association between employee engagement and employee performance. As regression analysis summary is shown in Table V., the independent variable, employee engagement, influences the dependent variable, employee performance by 58.7%. Moreover, Table VI shows the ANOVA result and it depicts a significant statistical p-value and confirms the significance of the relationship. Hence the alternate hypothesis H<sub>a2</sub> is accepted and the null hypothesis H<sub>02</sub> is rejected. A high β value is shown in Table VII. represents that employee engagement significantly contributes to employee performance.

The regression equation indicates that employee engagement has a considerable significant impact on employee performance. It demonstrates that fostering engagement among workers is vital and has a constructive influence on the worker's performance. By using the regression analysis, the model of the study is validated in two parts. The value of adjusted r<sup>2</sup> depicts the depth of the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable and t denotes the rationality of the pathway between each of the preceding variable and consequent variable.

The results of partial least squares regression denote that the determinants such as work environment (t = 4.364), Employee relation (4.257), Compensation (t = 2.371), and Workplace well-being (t = 2.654) are the most influencing factors of employee engagement at telecom

sector Kerala during the pandemic period. It is also identified that the path validity of employee engagement is  $t = 23.348$  leading to employee performance, and it is found to be highly significant at a 0.05 level of significance.

**Table V.**

Model	r	r <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	SE of the est
1	0.774 <sup>a</sup>	0.599	0.587	0.30376

**Table VI.**

Model	Sum of squares	Mean square	df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	21.517	21.517	1	221.274	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	12.756	0.092	148		
Total	34.273		149		

**Table VII.**

Model	Un-std $\beta$	Coefficients SE	Std $\beta$	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	0.535	0.248		2.118	0.036
Engagement	0.879	0.060	0.774	15.765	0.000

## Discussion

In the present study associated with employee engagement, it is represented that the determinants identified to impact the level of employee engagement have a substantial effect in contributing to the employee engagement level of the employees working in the telecom sector in Kerala. The t values denote that the determinant work environment  $t = 5.502$  is the most influential element of employee engagement. The next influential element of employee engagement is the Employee relation relationship with a t value of 3.624. both are significant at a 0.01 level of significance statistically. As per the  $\beta$  vale, the determinants of work environment and Employee relation relationship influence as a factor of employee engagement up to 54% and 35 % respectively. This emphasises the importance of learning about the work environment and harmonious relationships between co-workers in the workspace for ensuring highly engaged employees. A required or favourable work environment will stimulate the employees to be engaged in the work both physically and emotionally.

Various studies confined that the employee's perception of the workplace plays a vital role in their level of engagement and hence performance. The present study in the telecom sector reveals that employee always tries to find meaning in their job roles and if the organisation is not supportive enough to provide this sense of meaning workers are probably to exit from the organisation. It is important that the work environment should create a sense of meaning among the employees and should encourage the employees to be connected to each other and to the organisation to ensure a high employee engagement level.

Therefore, it is essential to ensure a supportive work environment to generate a positive perception of their work which eventually leads to high-level engagement. also found that the work environment is significantly contributing to increasing employee engagement levels. A higher level of employee performance could be achieved from the employees by providing a better and quality work environment (Islam and Shazali, 2011).

Studies show that the management of performance has a substantial impact on organisational success and therefore it has to be the organisation's instantaneous priority. Studies have revealed that organisations nowadays deal with complications that necessitate immediate consideration to the improvement in managing performance. One significant technique to improve employee performance is to concentrate on fostering employee engagement (T P. Joseph and R Radhika, 2021). Recently the literature review on Performance management comprises studies concentrating on the impact of employee engagement on employee performance thus pointing to the strength of engagement in the organisational process of performance management. The researchers found that the aspects like physical surroundings, harmonious team, secured job, attractive financial benefits, supportive superiors, canteen facilities and open communication are the elements of the work environment. The presence of these elements will enhance the productivity of the employees. All these conclusions are suggesting that organisations should consciously focus on developing an apt working environment for employees in an appropriate manner. Organisations could practice many different ways to improve their working environment. Some of those ways are acknowledging the employees' performance, sharing the success and achievement of the organisation with workers to ensure ownership among workers, ensuring work-life balance, ensuring essential information and resources for better performance, and offering a secure work environment.

In this study, it is also found that the determinant of Employee relation relationship is significantly contributing to the level of employee engagement. Relationships among the team members play a pivotal role in organisational success. Related studies found that harmonious relationships among employees enable them to take on higher responsibilities by sharing their objectives with other co-workers. According to Kahn (1990), one of the significant factors in employee engagement is team relationships. Aspects like team climate, commitment, leadership, collective pride, purpose, talent, continuous improvement, team relationship, team ethics, and communication play a key role in developing effective high-performance teams. The organisations that are looking forward to a high-performing and engaged workforce could look into these aspects.

This study, with regard to the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance, depicts a substantial path validity and coefficient of determination ( $t = 15.76$  and  $r^2 = 58.7\%$  respectively) of the dependent variable. As per the results shown in Table VII, it is very evident that the level of employee engagement significantly contributes to employee performance. These results are concurrent with the results of previous studies which stated that the aspects like employee commitment, employee turnover intentions, and employee performance are influenced by the level of engagement. Furthermore, organisations that develop a consistent level of engagement among employees could ensure a higher level of employee performance. Therefore, all these studies suggest that the organisations focus more on uplifting employee engagement could bring out the full potential of their employees in their jobs and could ensure quality in performance. Hence, the relationship between engagement and performance is consistent with the existing theory, engagement models, and research.

In addition, this present study broadens the possibility of categorizing measures that may improve the organisation aspects like Leadership, and policies and procedures. On the other hand, the organisation in the telecom sector has to focus on developing a peaceful work environment that will ensure an environment favourable for effective Employee relation relationships, career advancement, attractive compensation programmes, and workplace wellbeing. Furthermore, similar studies could be undertaken in different sectors across various levels of management to validate the model. The determinants could be precisely studied to



strengthen the individual effect on the engagement level of employees and hence on the performance of employees. The possibilities for a comparative study are also there with respect to different hierarchical levels.

## Conclusion

The present study identifies several determinants that have a significant influence on employee engagement and emphasises the importance of employee engagement. The results of the study show that there exists a strong relationship between employee engagement and employee performance. It was also found all the determinants have an effect on employee engagement. However, two determinants have very significant t value, working environment and employee relationship. By referring to the previous studies, this study also recommended a few measures to have a better work environment and better co-worker relationships. Overall, the studies related to employee engagement proved that there is a significant positive impact on the organisation with regard to employee performance and hence it contributes to organisational growth. Moreover, the presence of employee engagement determinants brings a healthy work culture fostering a high level of employee satisfaction. This enables the employee to experience a sense of belongingness and could demonstrate commitment towards the assignment that they undertake. On the whole, the organisation that focuses more on the employee performance in this covid pandemic could consider this model and could experience mutual benefits for both employees and organization.

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