

Operating in the Excellence Zone: A Model to Enhance Organizational Performance by Improving Employee Engagement and Work-life Harmony

Arun Bhardwaj

PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Jain University, Bangalore, India

Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal

Dean
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Jain University, Bangalore, India

Abstract—

This paper reviews the factors important for employee engagement in an organization; the relationship between employee engagement and organizational productivity; and also proposes a model to improve employee engagement to enhance organizational productivity. As per a Forbe's article¹ published based on more than 2 million workplace observations from around the world, organizations have tried solving engagement problems by taking employees out to lunch, or asking managers to spend more time with employees. But if lunch or more conversations is not something employee desires, the efforts will have negative effect. Employee disengagement is like a termite that invisibly reduces organizational productivity. On the contrary, when employees are super-engaged, they feel more loyal to the company and put efforts beyond call of their duty and become brand champion of the organizations. The intent of this paper is to propose an implementable model to help employees and organizations reach their best and operate in their peak performance zone – a concept proposed as "Operating in the Excellence Zone". In addition to enhancing employee engagement and organizational performance, the proposed model also supports nurturing of environment conducive to improving work-life harmony.

Keywords— Employee engagement, peak performance, organizational performance, work-life harmony, happiness at work.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to 'The State of the Global Workplace Report' published by Gallup² to provide employee engagement insights to worldwide leaders, only 13% of employees are "engaged" in their jobs, which means only one out of six employees is emotionally invested to create value for the organization that they work. This inference is based on sample data collected from 140 countries. The overall percentage of engaged employees in India is 9% with professional workers a bit better engaged at 18%. Which means approximately one in five employees in India is not doing his or her best. The employee disengagement not only affects productivity of a corporation today, but it also affects innovation culture of a country in the highly competitive world. The gains of employee engagement are tremendous. The companies that successfully engage their employees and their customers are found to get 240% growth in their performance related business parameters. In the regional highlights, the report also suggests that it is important to tap worker's full potential to improve India's economy. Gallup's research provides three suggestions to improve engagement and enhance organizational performance in India. The first recommendation is that organizations need to focus on 'people' aspect of the performance management system. It is found that to nurture high-performance work culture organizations need to develop right employees according to their unique capabilities and talents. The second recommendation is that organizations need to hire and develop good midlevel managers. The third recommendation is to give Indian employees the opportunity to do their best and utilize employee talents to organization's advantage. This paper proposes a model for the organizations to understand employee aspirations, employee talents, employee development needs; and develop a focused organizational process to bring employees to their peak performance zone. The peak performance zone where employees are expected to do their best is introduced as 'Excellence Zone' in this paper.

II. SCOPE

The idea proposed in this paper is believed to be applicable globally and for any sphere of life. Yet in this paper, the scope will be limited to actions and motivations related to professional life of an individual. The paper uses focus on India, wherever a country specific illustration is required.

III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In today's knowledge economy, for Organizations to operate in the peak performance zone, the human resources need to be performing at their best. For human resources to be efficient, it is important to understand inner desires of human beings and to address them. It is important to understand why people act and how organizations can inspire employees to contribute to organizational success. Motivation theories help in understanding the motives for human actions.

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dovseidman/2012/09/20/everything-we-think-about-employee-engagement-is-wrong/>

² <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/164735/state-global-workplace.aspx>

Motivation is an inner desire to satisfy an unsatisfied need (Lussier, 2010:p.343). The motivation theories are broadly classified into two groups – need theories that explain motivation from internal factors; and cognitive theories that explain motivation from external factors; as perceived by the person concerned. Therefore, care is to be taken to identify areas of motivation for an employee. In general term motivation at workplace means a personal's involvement in his or her work. In specific sense, motivation means a particular factor of motivation for a person (Pareek 2008:p.206-207). To improve an individual's performance and resulting collective performance of an organization, it is important to understand specific work motivation of people and then nurturing factors supporting those motivational attributes. Studies have shown that work motivation also depends upon the nature of role. Individual contributors find wages, security, and working conditions to be important; whereas people managers give more importance to achievements, responsibility and work. Security and wages are rated high as motivational factors by the least satisfied employees, whereas lower in the priority list by the most satisfied employees (Pareek 2008:p.370).

The Porter Lawler model suggests that efforts driven by rewards do not lead to performance and satisfaction. Nature of rewards and probability of getting them definitely motivate people to put efforts but accomplishment or performance is influenced by individual's abilities and understanding of expectations from his or her role. An employee derives satisfaction from his or her efforts leading to performance while interacting with rewards (Sapre, 2004:p.91).

In summary, an important dimension of enhancing organizational performance and increasing employee engagement is to understand motivational factors of individuals, their needs and their developmental areas so that employees are inspired to perform to the best of their capability. All paragraphs must be indented. All paragraphs must be justified, i.e. both left-justified and right-justified.

IV. IDENTIFYING SPHERES OF HUMAN ACTIONS AND ESTABLISHING EXCELLENCE ZONE

This paper proposes a dimension of motive for actions that is rooted in three spheres of human activities. These three activity spheres are: actions we **'want to'** perform; actions we **'need to'** perform; and actions we have **'ability to'** perform.

A. *Actions we 'Want To' Perform*

This sphere represents 'desire' world. The actions are performed in this sphere with the intent of obtaining outcome that gives joy and fulfilment to an individual. Since humans are inherently motivated in this sphere, the actions are performed with passion and rigor. It is in this sphere that humans have primary motivation for actions. They expect their actions to result in fulfilment of desires and desired goals.

B. *Actions we 'Need To' Perform*

These actions are to be performed because they are necessary to fulfil either social or professional obligations. These actions are driven by the need to generate resources to enable an individual to undertake actions that he 'wants to' perform. Therefore, the actions are performed because of secondary motivation to generate resource to support the primary motivation. If not contributing to fulfilling primary motivations, these actions may lack passion or sincerity. As per Nicholas Lore, founder of Rockport Institute, in a NY Times³ article, "The way that people pick careers is incredibly primitive. People place too high a value on the external rewards of a job, like money, prestige and power. While these can be important, a job's intrinsic nature — the types of tasks you do, the skills these require and the perceived meaning and value of your work — are more vital to a sense of fulfilment".

C. *Actions we have 'Ability To' Perform*

Any action can only be performed if one has necessary skills and resources. Just wanting to or needing to perform actions does little, if one does not have necessary means and skills. For example a person may want to become world champion boxer, which will provide him much needed cash bounty. But before expecting to win a fight, he will have to acquire skills and physical strength to be a champion boxer.

In an ideal world, an individual should have only one single sphere of action in which all three spheres overlap. What a person wants to do is what he needs to do, and he also has the ability to do those actions. In that case the person will have little reason for disengagement. A good example is Indian Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar. What he wanted to do was 'play cricket', what skills he focused on developing and he possessed was to 'play cricket' and what he needed to do to create resources for his living was to 'play cricket'.

But in the real life, the overlap between "want to", "have to" and "able to" spheres of actions is not 100%. Now even Sachin Tendulkar may not have a single sphere of actions in which all other spheres collapse. He may want to do things beyond just playing cricket and he may not have ability yet to do that; but he definitely had a significant overlap nevertheless. These three dimensions of actions are presented in the 'Motive for Action' Venn diagram with seven distinctive zones. Understanding of the proposed zones will help in setting the context for the opportunities to influence employee motivation, and address inhibitors to the employee engagement in an organization. The intent is to motivate employees to operate in the sweet-spot zone or the Excellence Zone, where the passion, abilities and needs are in harmony.

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/jobs/18search.html?_r=0 accessed on April 1, 2014

V. SEVEN ZONES OF ACTIONS, AND MIGRATION PATH TO THE EXCELLENCE ZONE

A. Zone 1 – Desire Zone

This zone represents unpursued passion. Something a person wants to do but neither has ability nor a strong need to inspire a person to act on these desires. This is an area of potential happiness for a person; and inspiration possibilities for a leader. It is important for any organization to understand employees' interests in this zone as these desires represent seeds of motivation in a human being.

In an organization, it is important to track passionate professional desires of the employees. An organization can nurture an engaged and productive employee if a person's passion can be matched with right training to perform a required job in the organization.

B. Zone 2 – Liability Zone

This zone represents actions that are an obligation or a responsibility on a human being, but the person neither has ability to perform those actions nor desire. The tasks in this zone may be related to a person's profession to earn a livelihood or gain resources to satisfy fundamental needs of life. This is also a region of concern. As a person's livelihood or relationship may depend on these actions, not undertaking them contributes to stress in life. A response to overcome stress induced by tasks in this zone is - to gain necessary capabilities and to start nurturing interest in these needed tasks. The other alternative is for the person to take necessary actions so the tasks in the 'need to' zone move out and become insignificant in life. For example, a highly technical person has an opportunity to become people manager. He takes the role but finds that he is not able to get quality work done from his team in time. This causes him stress. He now has two options: learn people and project management skills; or choose an individual contributor role.

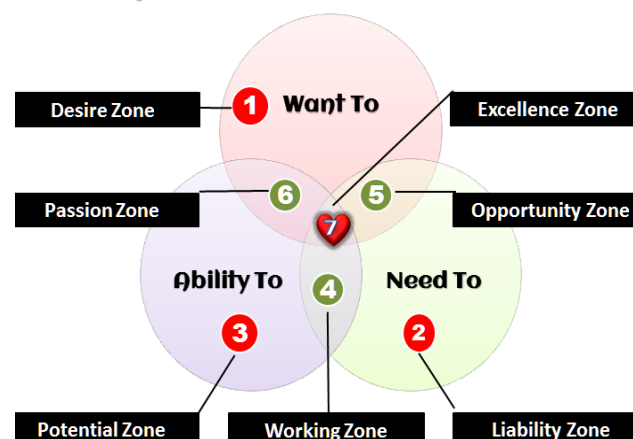
While hiring or promoting an employee, an organization must ensure that a match exists between role and responsibilities of the position and the existing skills and passion of the person. Else, the employee will end up being in the liability zone where he or she is just occupying a place to earn their livelihood without significant contribution.

C. Zone 3 – Potential Zone

This zone represents actions that a person has capability to execute but performing those actions does not contribute towards fulfilment of passion or liabilities currently. The zone represents unused skills that a person has not utilized towards meeting his fundamental needs or to live a happy life. The capability potential offers an opportunity to identify actions in 'want to' or 'need to' zone that can be performed with the unutilized skills. A match found between Potential Zone resource and Desire or Liability zone tasks contributes towards improving quality of personal life or quality of professional life for a person.

An organization also has an opportunity by identifying a person with unused skill and providing them opportunities where the existing skills are required. This helps employee to feel more secure in the job as now his ability is needed as part of his job. If as the next step the person start to enjoy the new assignment, he will be operating in the Excellence Zone.

Spheres of 'Motive for Actions'



D. Zone 4 – Working Zone

This zone represents capability to undertake actions needed to accomplish tasks that a person needs to perform to fulfil personal, social and professional obligations. This is the region of compromise since the person has need to perform these actions and also has necessary skills. But the person is not passionate about the actions being performed therefore the tasks executed in this zone have potential to induce disengagement at work. This is also zone of contemplation. In cultures similar to India, many youngsters become engineers and doctors because of social pressure to excel and under parental direction. But as the person grows independent, it does not provide sense of joy and fulfilment. People living life in this zone, feel a lacking sense of fulfilment.

An individual has an opportunity to either keep performing these actions because they address liability, or develop a passion for these actions as they are necessary for happy living. By taking latter strategy or nurturing passion, one can

move into the Excellence Zone. Organization aware of their employees' underlying motivations can also inspire people to move from Working Zone into the Excellence Zone by nurturing passion.

E. Zone 5 – Opportunity Zone

This zone represents actions that a person is passionate to perform and these actions if performed also satisfy fundamental needs of an individual. But individual does not possess necessary skills or resources. Therefore, lack of skills results in passionate efforts not producing proportionate outcome. This is the biggest opportunity area for the employers and leaders to develop employees and enhance employee productivity by providing necessary training and development support.

This is the most important region for an organization to cultivate engaged employees. The employees in this zone already are passionate about something that an organization need. The issue is skill gap which is easily addressable by proper training or in house mentoring. The employee in this zone can be easily helped into operating in the Excellence Zone.

F. Zone 6 – Passion Zone

A person performs tasks passionately and effectively in this zone. He has desire as well as capability to perform these tasks. Performing actions in this zone adds to a person's contentment and in their absolute form they do not contribute towards resources needed to live a comfortable life. Therefore this zone can also be considered as hobby zone, with the potential of converting one of the hobbies into a profession.

An organization has a potential champion in this zone and effort is needed to identify a role within the organization that matches with the skills and motivation of the employee.

G. Zone 7 – Excellence Zone

Excellence Zone is where all three spheres overlap. This is the desired state for joyful living. Living in the Excellence Zone means a person is performing actions that he is passionate about, is skilled to perform, and the actions are generating necessary resources to address the liability a person has. The paper proposes that to live a happily contented life, a person has to strive to live in the Excellence Zone.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In reality, people are living various dimension of their lives in all seven zones at any point of time. The goal then is to do what is necessary to grow the Zone-7 and live in the Excellence Zone most of the time. As per the presented definition for the Excellence Zone, the actions performed are 'desired' by the person, are 'needed' to generate resources to live a happy life, and the person is also 'skilled' to perform those actions. Therefore, such living will promote working with passion, alignment of personal and professional goals thereby work-life harmony. Living in the Excellence Zone is not necessarily 'once achieved – it is forever' proposition. Various factors can create imbalance. Individual's preferences might change because of change in family circumstances or with age resulting in 'Want To' sphere growing out of the Excellence Zone. Similarly, with age or environment change our capabilities to achieve what we 'Want To' or what we 'Need To' do – might change. This will trigger change in the distribution of needed actions in various zones. And an individual will have to take necessary corrective actions to move life back into the Excellence Zone.

In order to utilize the Excellence Zone model to enhance employee engagement and organizational performance, an organization need to create 'The Seven Zones of Actions' map for their employees as well as a migration plan to move the employees into the Excellence Zone.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hersey, Paul. Blanchard, Kenneth. Johnson, Dewey. 2005. Management of Organizational Behavior. Prentice-Hall of India: New Delhi
- Krogerus, Mikael. Tschappeler, Roman. 2013. The Decision Book. Profile Books: New Delhi
- Lussier, Robert. 2010. Fundamentals of Management. Cengage Learning India: New Delhi
- Pareek, Udai. 2008. Understanding Organizational Behavior. Oxford University Press: New Delhi
- Sapre, Anant. 2004. Organisational Behavior. Symbiosis Center for Distance Learning: Pune
- Thomas, Mark. 2007. Gurus on Leadership. Viva Books: New Delhi
- <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dovseidman/2012/09/20/everything-we-think-about-employee-engagement-is-wrong/> accessed on April 10, 2014
- <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/164735/state-global-workplace.aspx> accessed on April 10, 2014
- http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/jobs/18search.html?_r=0 accessed on April 10, 2014