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Employee Engagement in Abilene, Texas

An Honors College Project Thesis

Presented to

The College of Business

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Honors Scholar

by

Madeline Moore

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This Project Thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee,
has been accepted by the Honors College of Abilene Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the distinction

HONORS SCHOLAR

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Date

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Abstract

Using a convenience sample of HR professionals in Abilene, Texas, a survey was provided to determine the level of knowledge HR professionals in this area had about current employee engagement information. In addition, they were asked about their company's involvement, their personal opinion, and the benefits of having engaged employees. The majority of the professionals agreed with modern research as represented by the true/false section of the survey. HR professionals place great value on the benefits and options to increase employee engagement that directly affect their job.

Introduction

Employee Engagement has greatly impacted the world of Human Resources as companies begin to realize the importance of having engaged employees. As this topic has become more and more popular, people have started to delve into investigating the effects and benefits of employee engagement. While there are many documented benefits and ideas on employee engagement, many of these are broad and vary throughout the country.

There is a need to monitor and evaluate employee engagement which is usually done through surveys given to the employees; however, it is equally important to see what the employers think about employee engagement. Human Resources managers are the people most likely to interact with employees and therefore they are most likely to fully understand the importance of employee engagement and how it affects a company and production.

Due to the influx of research about employee engagement, there are broad ideas about how to engage employees and how it can affect a company. Unfortunately, due to the broad range of ideas, it is far more difficult to truly evaluate the ideals of a specific community such as Abilene, Texas. Though there are commonly agreed-upon traits and ideas, each community is different and this will reflect in their priorities about employee engagement and where they focus their efforts on increasing engagement.

Literary Review of Sources

Importance

Based on contemporary research, the vast majority of HR professionals and business leaders agree that having engaged employees is vital for company success. “The term employee engagement relates to the level of an employee's commitment and connection to an organization” (Developing, 2017) and thus demonstrates in and of itself the importance of having employees who are invested in seeing their organization succeed. Because the business world is constantly on the move, “...business leaders know that having a high-performing workforce is essential for growth and survival. They recognize that a highly engaged workforce can increase innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance while reducing costs related to hiring and retention in highly competitive talent markets” (The impact, 2013).

It has been clearly determined that having engaged or disengaged employees directly affects the productivity and the profitability of a company as mentioned in the articles above and *How Engagement Affects Company Profit and Performance*. While more and more companies strive for increased engagement and engagement measuring, there are some plans of execution that work in certain areas and not in others.

Execution

As with any idea, each companies' method for improving employee engagement will be different and may or may not be effective, not only for them but for other companies as well. The article *Five Ways to Improve Employee Engagement Now* focuses

primarily on management training. Managers should be trained in evaluating and improving employee engagement which involves interacting with their employees on a larger, long-term, scale. *7 Tips to Increase Employee Engagement Without Spending a Dime* has many tips such as recognition for employees performing well, listening to employees when they have ideas or complaints, and supplying employees with the tools they need to succeed. The article *5 Powerful Steps to Improve Employee Engagement and Perceptions of Organizational Surveys Within Employee Engagement Efforts* focuses on giving power to the employee and discussing engagement frequently and in depth.

There is a wide variety of ways to affect employee engagement with only a few of the ideas being mentioned above. However, each company has a culture that will respond to different types of motivation and encouragement. There are countless ways to improve or benefit from employee engagement, and with that in mind, many companies are able to implement multiple approaches to keep their employees engaged and invested.

Methodology

Survey

The first section of the survey was simple true/false base questions about employee engagement. It was important to get this baseline reading to support the accuracy of the following three questions. These questions were based on general research about employee engagement. By asking these questions, credibility was established for the HR professionals as their answers were in line with modern research.

The second section focused on traits of employee engagement that were based on opinions in different sectors of the workplace. HR professionals were asked about their company's goals, their own personal goals, and their opinion concerning the benefits that were available when there were engaged employees.

Sampling

In order to accurately describe the ideas of employee engagement specifically in the Abilene market, a survey was distributed to the local SHRM chapter in February 2018 to get a read from the professional Human Resource managers that specifically deal with this issue.

The survey was distributed around the room at each place setting and was announced both before and after the meeting. Through email, members of the local SHRM chapter who were not available for the meeting were able to send in their survey responses as well. The sample is specific to the Abilene, Texas region.

Survey Results Data

	Frequency	Percentage
It is important to have an engaged workforce.		
True	48	100%
False	0	0%
Having engaged employees affects the success of the company on a monetary scale.		
True	48	100%
False	0	0%
Actively disengaged employees do not hurt the company's bottom line.		
True	2	4%
False	46	96%
3 Characteristics that your company/organization deems most important in order to promote actively engaged employees		
Constructive feedback for employees	40	83%
Incentives or reward programs for performing employees	22	46%
Leadership opportunities	37	77%

Schedule flexibility	15	31%
Clear job definition	30	63%
3 factors associated with engaged employees that are most important to you.		
Having a sense of contribution	44	92%
Identification with their work	27	56%
Sense of personal control	13	27%
Ability to offer suggestions	25	52%
Connections to other employees and supervisors	35	73%
3 main benefits that are most important to you, of having engaged employees are...		
Increased loyalty to the company/organization	35	73%
Higher retention and lower turnover	38	79%
Increased profitability for the company	18	38%
Reduction of employee absences	11	23%
Higher productivity	42	88%

Analysis

The survey results identify different areas where HR professionals and their companies choose to focus their efforts to create engaged employees, as well as why they focus on employee engagement at all.

As indicated in the survey methodology, the first three true/false questions are primarily to establish credibility. Almost 100% of the respondents answered the questions in the same manner, it is feasible to say that the respondents will view the following three questions through the same lens. They all agree that engaged employees are important in the workforce.

Question four asks about measures that the HR professional's company/organization takes to ensure that its employees remain engaged and invested. 83% of the HR professionals surveyed agreed that their company provides constructive criticism to their employees. 77% stated that their company offers leadership opportunities and 63% stated that their company offers a clear job definition.

Question five focused more on the professional themselves and revealed what the HR person values about employee engagement. 92% agreed that having a sense of contribution was important followed by 73% of respondents agreeing that connections to supervisors and other employees was important as well. Finally, 56% stated that it was important for an employee to identify with their work.

Question six focused on the main aspects of why employee engagement was important to the professional. 88% said that higher productivity was valued as most important followed by 79% agreeing that lower turnover was important. A further 73%

agreed that increased loyalty to the company was also the most important aspect of employee engagement.

Discussion

The first three true/false questions are based on current research. They establish a baseline and prove credibility of the sample. Drawn from current research, it is largely agreed upon and studied that engaged employees are important to have, that they affect the success of the company on a monetary scale, and can ultimately hurt the company's bottom line should their employees become actively disengaged. Had the conclusions from the first section of the survey not presented similar to the information supplied by modern research, further research would have needed to be done in the area of education about employee engagement in the Abilene, Texas area.

Question four focuses on what companies do to promote employee engagement, and it was discovered that the top three areas that were focused on were employee feedback, clear job definitions, and leadership opportunities. Upon reflection, these three areas are the easiest areas for a company to concentrate on in order to affect employee engagement. It is not surprising that a company would focus on the easiest areas and in turn, prevent having to take a more active role in establishing engagement. Though all of the available options have been proven to establish and promote engagement, it is unsurprising that companies in Abilene would choose to focus on the easiest areas.

Question five focuses on personally important factors. It was discovered that the majority of the HR professionals valued their employees having a sense of contribution above all other factors by almost 20%. The two following important factors were connections between supervisors and other employees, and the employee identifying with their work. These three factors are similar in that they all focus on connection, whether it

is a connection between an employee and their work, or an employee and their coworkers. The other two options offered by the survey were more personal, but the HR professionals chose the answers that involved connection.

Finally, question 6 inquired about what the HR professionals felt personally were the greatest benefits to having engaged employees. Higher productivity, increased retention with lower turnover, and increased loyalty to the company were the three most commonly chosen options out of the five. Looking at the five available answer choices, it appears once again that HR professionals have chosen the answer choices that are most likely to directly affect them and their own job performance. Choosing productivity over profitability directly reflects upon the HR professionals' job and their workload. Indeed, loyalty to the company and decreasing turnover also reduces the amount of work for the HR professional.

In addition to saying that HR professionals and their companies are looking for the least involved way to produce employee engagement results, it should also be noted that a company can greatly increase their employee engagement by doing little things. It seems that simply treating their employees as if they matter is enough to improve engagement, so this raises the question why HR professionals should invest more into a system that already has a viable solution.

If workers are aware of the expectations placed on them, are kept informed of their status within the company, offered opportunities to be heard and to grow, increasing employee engagement should not be difficult. Unfortunately, there is a gap in this data that should be investigated further, which would be to measure employee engagement in

Abilene, Texas from the standpoint of the employees. HR professionals may believe they are doing all they need to do, but ultimately it is the employee who decides whether or not they are engaged in their environment.

Furthermore, the motivations behind their actions should be investigated. There is a potential ethical/moral dilemma based on the motivations of the HR professionals. Should they be choosing the easiest options because they show care for their employees and generate results, that causes no moral qualm. Simply doing what is easiest without actually investigating what the employees want can raise potential ethical issues into whether the professionals are doing what is right, or simply what is easy, no matter the results of their engagement surveys.

Though it is impossible to say without further investigation, it appears that Abilene professionals are focused on the aspects of employee engagement that directly affect them. There are many ways to increase engagement but it seems Abilene professionals have settled with the most basic. Further research would be required to see if this method is effective. In addition, it also reflects on where the Abilene professionals place their priority among their actions and their ideas of employee engagement.

Resources

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