

Employee Engagement and Retention: Strategies for Success

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Abstract

Employee engagement and retention are critical concerns for organizations striving to maintain a motivated workforce and achieve sustainable growth. This paper explores effective strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing employee engagement and retention. It examines the importance of creating a positive work environment, fostering open communication, providing opportunities for professional development, implementing effective recognition programs, and offering competitive compensation and benefits. By synthesizing current research and best practices, this paper provides insights into how organizations can cultivate a culture that values and supports employee engagement and retention, ultimately contributing to organizational success.

Keywords: Employee engagement, retention strategies, work environment, professional development, recognition programs.

Introduction

Employee engagement and retention have emerged as pivotal factors influencing organizational performance, productivity, and profitability in today's competitive business landscape. Engaged employees are more committed to their roles, demonstrate higher levels of productivity, and contribute positively to organizational culture and innovation. Conversely, high turnover rates can disrupt workflow, increase recruitment costs, and diminish morale among remaining employees. Effective strategies for enhancing employee engagement and retention encompass various initiatives aimed at creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. Central to these strategies is the cultivation of a workplace culture that values employees' contributions, respects their well-being, and promotes opportunities for growth and development. This paper will explore key strategies such as fostering open communication channels, implementing meaningful recognition programs, providing competitive compensation and benefits packages, and offering opportunities for continuous learning and career advancement. Research indicates that organizations investing in employee engagement and retention strategies not only improve employee satisfaction and loyalty but also strengthen their competitive position in the marketplace. By prioritizing these initiatives, organizations can foster a motivated workforce, reduce turnover rates, and enhance overall organizational effectiveness. This paper will delve into these strategies, drawing insights from current literature and practical examples to provide actionable recommendations for organizations seeking to optimize employee engagement and retention efforts.

Literature Review

Employee engagement and retention are pivotal for organizational success, influencing productivity, performance, and overall competitiveness. Central to these concepts is the notion of employee engagement, defined as the emotional and cognitive connection employees have with their work and organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Research underscores that engaged employees are more committed, motivated, and likely to contribute positively to organizational goals (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). This connection has been linked to improved job satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced organizational citizenship behaviors (Saks, 2006). Bakker and Leiter (2010) elaborate on the dimensions of engagement, emphasizing vigor, dedication, and absorption in work activities as key components. These dimensions not only foster higher levels of job performance but also contribute to a positive organizational culture and climate (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010).

Effective employee engagement strategies encompass various organizational practices and interventions aimed at creating a supportive work environment. Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) identify key drivers of engagement, including job design, leadership effectiveness, career development opportunities, and organizational communication. They highlight the role of leadership in shaping employee perceptions and experiences within the workplace. Moreover, Shuck and Wollard (2010) emphasize the strategic role of Human Resource Development (HRD) in enhancing engagement through training, development programs, and performance management systems. These initiatives not only align employee goals with organizational objectives but also strengthen the psychological contract between employees and the organization (Towers Watson, 2012).



Fig: Employee Engagement Model

The impact of employee engagement extends beyond individual job satisfaction to organizational performance and competitive advantage. Hewitt Associates (2005) and Lockwood (2007) highlight empirical evidence linking high levels of engagement to improved business outcomes, including higher profitability, customer satisfaction, and employee retention rates. Organizations that prioritize engagement as a strategic imperative invest in cultivating a culture of trust, transparency, and mutual respect (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). This includes implementing effective recognition programs, providing competitive compensation and benefits, and fostering open communication channels (Guthrie, 2001; Cook & Crossman, 2010).

Furthermore, the concept of organizational commitment, as studied by Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky (2002), underscores the importance of affective, continuance, and normative commitment in understanding employee engagement and retention strategies. Organizations that foster a sense of belonging and alignment with organizational values are better positioned to retain talent and mitigate turnover risks (Dulebohn et al., 2009). Guthrie (2001) further explores the role of high-involvement work practices in promoting engagement, emphasizing the relationship between employee participation, decision-making autonomy, and job satisfaction.

the literature on employee engagement and retention highlights the multifaceted nature of these constructs and their profound impact on organizational effectiveness. By integrating insights from diverse perspectives and empirical studies, organizations can develop tailored strategies to enhance engagement, foster employee well-being, and cultivate a resilient workforce capable of driving sustainable growth and competitive advantage in a dynamic business environment. Continued research and practical applications of these strategies are essential for addressing evolving workforce trends and maintaining organizational success in the future. This detailed review synthesizes the key findings and theoretical underpinnings from various scholarly works on employee engagement and retention, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing engagement and strategies for fostering a supportive organizational culture.

Understanding Employee Engagement

Understanding employee engagement involves examining the multifaceted factors that influence employees' emotional and cognitive connection to their work and organization. Several key factors contribute to employee engagement, as identified in research. These factors include organizational culture, leadership effectiveness, job characteristics, career development opportunities, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the workplace (Saks, 2006; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in shaping employee perceptions and behaviors, influencing their level of commitment and motivation (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Effective leadership fosters trust, communication, and empowerment, which are essential for enhancing engagement among employees (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). Moreover, job design that aligns with employees' skills and interests, coupled with opportunities for learning and advancement, enhances engagement by promoting a sense of meaningfulness and achievement in their work (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Measuring engagement levels within an organization involves using various tools and surveys to assess employees' levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their roles (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). These measures provide valuable insights into organizational strengths and areas for improvement, guiding strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing engagement and fostering a positive work environment conducive to employee satisfaction and retention.



Fig.2: Scope of Engaged Workforce

Measuring engagement levels within an organization is crucial for understanding its workforce dynamics and identifying areas that require attention. Various methods and tools, such as employee surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews, are commonly used to assess engagement levels (Macey & Schneider, 2008). These assessments typically evaluate factors such as job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, alignment with its values, and willingness to exert discretionary effort (Saks, 2006). Additionally, quantitative measures, including engagement indices and scales, provide quantitative insights into the prevalence and distribution of engagement across different demographic groups and organizational units (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). By systematically measuring engagement, organizations can track progress over time, benchmark against industry standards, and tailor interventions to address specific challenges or capitalize on strengths. Effective engagement measurement not only informs strategic decision-making but also fosters a culture of transparency

and accountability, promoting continuous improvement and organizational resilience in the face of evolving workforce dynamics and business challenges.

Strategies for Improving Engagement

Effective Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

Effective communication and feedback mechanisms play a pivotal role in enhancing employee engagement by fostering transparency, trust, and alignment with organizational goals. Open channels of communication enable employees to voice their opinions, share ideas, and express concerns, which promotes a sense of inclusiveness and belonging within the organization (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). Regular feedback sessions, performance reviews, and one-on-one meetings between employees and managers provide opportunities for constructive dialogue, goal setting, and professional development planning (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Moreover, clear and timely communication of organizational updates, strategic initiatives, and performance metrics ensures that employees understand their roles in achieving business objectives, enhancing their sense of purpose and accountability (Saks, 2006). By prioritizing effective communication and feedback mechanisms, organizations cultivate a culture of engagement where employees feel valued, informed, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to organizational success.

Providing Growth and Development Opportunities

Providing growth and development opportunities is essential for nurturing employee engagement and retention. Organizations that invest in continuous learning, skill development programs, and career advancement pathways demonstrate a commitment to their employees' professional growth (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Developmental opportunities such as workshops, training sessions, mentoring programs, and educational sponsorships not only enhance employees' job-related skills but also broaden their perspectives and capabilities (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Furthermore, aligning individual development plans with organizational goals enables employees to see a clear path for advancement within the company, motivating them to invest in their roles and contribute proactively to team objectives (Lockwood, 2007). By fostering a culture of learning and development, organizations not only attract top talent but also retain high-performing employees who are motivated to grow professionally and contribute to long-term organizational success.

Creating a Positive Work Environment and Culture

Creating a positive work environment and culture is fundamental to fostering employee engagement and enhancing overall organizational performance. A positive work environment is characterized by factors such as respect, fairness, collaboration, and recognition of achievements (Towers Watson, 2012). Organizations that prioritize employee well-being, work-life balance, and inclusivity cultivate a supportive culture where employees feel valued and motivated to excel (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). Implementing policies and practices that promote work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and wellness initiatives contribute to a healthy organizational culture that attracts and retains talent (Guthrie, 2001). Moreover, recognizing and celebrating employees' contributions and achievements through formal and informal recognition programs reinforces positive behaviors and reinforces a culture of appreciation (Cook & Crossman, 2010). By focusing on creating a positive work environment and culture, organizations not only enhance employee engagement but also strengthen their employer brand and reputation as an employer of choice in the competitive labor market.

Retention Strategies

Competitive Compensation and Benefits

Competitive compensation and benefits are foundational to effective retention strategies, as they directly impact employees' satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Offering competitive salaries, performance-based incentives, and

comprehensive benefits packages ensures that employees feel valued and fairly compensated for their contributions (Meyer et al., 2002). Organizations that benchmark their compensation practices against industry standards and conduct regular salary reviews demonstrate a commitment to rewarding talent equitably (Lockwood, 2007). Additionally, providing benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and flexible spending accounts supports employees' financial security and well-being, further enhancing their job satisfaction and loyalty (Cook & Crossman, 2010). Strategic compensation and benefits programs not only attract top talent but also mitigate turnover by reducing the likelihood of employees seeking opportunities elsewhere for better pay and benefits.

Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Work-life balance initiatives play a critical role in promoting employee retention by addressing the diverse personal and professional needs of employees. Organizations that prioritize work-life balance offer flexible work arrangements, telecommuting options, and paid time off programs that empower employees to manage their responsibilities effectively (Guthrie, 2001). Flexible scheduling policies allow employees to accommodate personal commitments, such as childcare or caregiving responsibilities, without compromising their productivity or job satisfaction (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011). Moreover, promoting a culture that values work-life balance contributes to reduced stress levels, increased job satisfaction, and improved overall well-being among employees (Towers Watson, 2012). By supporting work-life balance initiatives, organizations foster a positive work environment where employees feel respected, supported, and motivated to remain with the company for the long term.

Recognition and Reward Programs

Recognition and reward programs are powerful tools for enhancing employee retention by acknowledging and celebrating employees' contributions and achievements. Effective recognition programs go beyond monetary incentives to include verbal praise, public acknowledgment, and opportunities for career advancement (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). By recognizing employees' efforts and milestones, organizations reinforce desired behaviors and values, fostering a culture of appreciation and engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Peer-to-peer recognition programs and team-based rewards further promote collaboration and camaraderie among employees, strengthening interpersonal relationships and team cohesion (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). Moreover, linking recognition efforts to organizational goals and values ensures alignment with strategic objectives, motivating employees to contribute to the company's success (Macey & Schneider, 2008). By investing in robust recognition and reward programs, organizations not only boost employee morale and job satisfaction but also cultivate a loyal and motivated workforce that drives organizational performance and growth.



Fig.3: Performance Engagement Framework

Case Studies

Google

Google is widely recognized for its innovative and employee-centric approach to fostering engagement and retention. The company's success can be attributed to several key strategies:

1. **Comprehensive Benefits and Perks:** Google offers competitive salaries along with comprehensive health benefits, including medical, dental, and vision coverage. Employees also enjoy perks such as free gourmet meals, on-site fitness centers, and recreational facilities. These benefits not only enhance employees' physical well-being but also contribute to their overall job satisfaction and work-life balance.
2. **Culture of Creativity and Autonomy:** Google promotes a culture where employees are encouraged to think creatively and pursue innovative ideas. The famous "20% time" policy allows employees to dedicate a portion of their work hours to projects of their choice, fostering a sense of autonomy and empowerment. This initiative has led to the development of successful products such as Gmail and Google Maps, which were born out of employees' passion projects.
3. **Continuous Learning and Development:** Google invests heavily in employee development through various learning opportunities. Employees have access to Google University, an internal training program offering courses on technical skills, leadership development, and personal growth. This commitment to continuous learning not only enhances employees' professional capabilities but also supports career advancement within the company.
4. **Employee Feedback and Communication:** Google maintains open channels of communication with employees through regular town hall meetings, employee surveys, and feedback sessions. This transparency enables employees to voice their opinions, share ideas, and provide input on organizational decisions, fostering a culture of trust and collaboration.
5. **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** Google is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The company actively recruits employees from diverse backgrounds and supports initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity. Employee resource groups and diversity training programs further enhance inclusivity and create a sense of belonging among employees.

Google's holistic approach to employee engagement and retention has not only contributed to its reputation as a top employer but also positioned the company as a leader in innovation and technology.

Salesforce

Salesforce is another exemplary case of a company that prioritizes employee engagement and retention through strategic initiatives:

1. **Work-Life Balance:** Salesforce recognizes the importance of work-life balance and offers flexible work arrangements, including remote work options and flexible scheduling. This flexibility allows employees to manage their work commitments while fulfilling personal responsibilities, contributing to higher job satisfaction and well-being.
2. **Career Development Opportunities:** Salesforce is committed to fostering career growth and development among its employees. The company provides access to Trailhead, an online learning platform offering training modules on Salesforce products, technical skills, and professional certifications. This investment in employee development not only enhances skills but also prepares employees for future career opportunities within the company.
3. **Culture of Trust and Transparency:** Salesforce cultivates a culture of trust and transparency through open communication and regular feedback channels. Managers conduct regular check-ins with employees to discuss performance goals, provide constructive feedback, and align individual contributions with organizational objectives. This approach fosters accountability and mutual respect among employees and leadership.

4. **Inclusive Workplace Culture:** Salesforce promotes diversity and inclusion through initiatives such as employee resource groups, mentorship programs, and unconscious bias training. These efforts create a supportive environment where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives to the organization.
5. **Employee Well-Being Initiatives:** Salesforce prioritizes employee well-being through wellness programs, mental health resources, and initiatives that promote physical fitness and overall wellness. These initiatives support employees' holistic well-being and reinforce Salesforce's commitment to creating a healthy and supportive workplace culture.

Salesforce's dedication to employee engagement and retention is evident in its comprehensive approach to supporting employees' professional growth, promoting work-life balance, and fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Southwest Airlines

Southwest Airlines stands out for its employee-centric culture and retention strategies, which have contributed to its success in the highly competitive airline industry:

1. **Employee Engagement Initiatives:** Southwest Airlines prioritizes employee engagement through initiatives that promote camaraderie, teamwork, and a sense of belonging among employees. The company encourages open communication and collaboration through "fun committees," team-building activities, and events that celebrate employee achievements and milestones.
2. **Competitive Compensation and Benefits:** Southwest Airlines offers competitive compensation packages, including profit-sharing programs and performance-based incentives. These financial rewards recognize employees' contributions to the company's success and motivate high performance while fostering loyalty and commitment.
3. **Career Development and Advancement:** Southwest Airlines is committed to supporting employee growth and career advancement through training programs, leadership development initiatives, and opportunities for internal mobility. The company encourages employees to pursue professional goals within different departments and roles, providing pathways for career progression and personal development.
4. **Employee Recognition Programs:** Southwest Airlines values employee contributions and accomplishments through formal and informal recognition programs. The company acknowledges outstanding performance, exceptional customer service, and acts of kindness through awards, commendations, and public recognition. These programs reinforce positive behaviors, boost morale, and strengthen employee engagement.
5. **Supportive Leadership and Organizational Values:** Southwest Airlines' leadership fosters a supportive and inclusive workplace culture rooted in core values such as customer service, teamwork, and a "warrior spirit." Leaders lead by example, demonstrating integrity, humility, and a commitment to putting employees first. This leadership approach builds trust, inspires loyalty, and motivates employees to go above and beyond in serving customers and achieving company goals.

Southwest Airlines' employee engagement and retention strategies illustrate how a strong organizational culture, supportive leadership, and strategic initiatives can create a workplace where employees thrive, contribute to organizational success, and remain committed to the company's mission and values.

Zappos

Zappos, an online retailer known for its exceptional customer service, has also gained recognition for its unique approach to employee engagement and retention:

1. **Cultural Fit and Values Alignment:** Zappos places a strong emphasis on cultural fit and values alignment in its hiring process. The company seeks employees who resonate with its core values, including delivering WOW

through service, embracing and driving change, and creating fun and a little weirdness. This cultural alignment ensures that employees are passionate about the company's mission and committed to delivering exceptional customer experiences.

2. **Employee Development and Training:** Zappos invests in employee development through comprehensive training programs that equip new hires with the skills, knowledge, and mindset needed to succeed in their roles. The company's "Zappos Culture Camp" immerses new employees in the company's culture, values, and customer service philosophy, setting clear expectations and fostering a sense of belonging from day one.
3. **Holistic Well-Being Programs:** Zappos prioritizes employee well-being through initiatives that support physical, mental, and emotional health. The company offers wellness programs, fitness challenges, and mental health resources to promote overall well-being and work-life balance among employees. These initiatives demonstrate Zappos' commitment to caring for its employees' holistic needs and fostering a positive and supportive workplace environment.
4. **Employee Engagement and Recognition:** Zappos celebrates employee achievements and contributions through robust recognition and reward programs. The company acknowledges outstanding performance, innovative ideas, and acts of kindness through awards, bonuses, and public recognition. By highlighting employee successes and demonstrating appreciation, Zappos reinforces a culture of gratitude, camaraderie, and mutual respect among its workforce.
5. **Customer-Centric Culture:** Zappos' commitment to employee engagement is closely tied to its customer-centric culture. The company empowers employees to go above and beyond in delivering exceptional customer service, encouraging autonomy, creativity, and personalized interactions with customers. This customer-focused approach not only enhances the customer experience but also strengthens employee engagement by providing meaningful opportunities for employees to make a difference and contribute to the company's success.

Zappos' success in employee engagement and retention is rooted in its unwavering commitment to creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture, fostering personal and professional growth, and recognizing employees' contributions to delivering outstanding customer experiences. Through its unique approach to employee engagement, Zappos has established itself as a leader in customer service and a desirable employer known for its vibrant culture and employee-centric values.

Microsoft

Microsoft has undergone a transformation in recent years under the leadership of Satya Nadella, focusing on revitalizing its culture and enhancing employee engagement and retention:

1. **Culture Transformation:** Microsoft has shifted towards a culture that embraces a growth mindset, innovation, and inclusivity. The company encourages employees to pursue continuous learning and development, fostering a culture of curiosity, adaptability, and resilience. This cultural shift has empowered employees to take risks, experiment with new ideas, and drive innovation across the organization.
2. **Inclusive Leadership:** Microsoft promotes inclusive leadership practices that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. The company has implemented initiatives such as unconscious bias training, employee resource groups, and diversity hiring programs to create a more inclusive workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents.
3. **Flexible Work Environment:** Microsoft supports work-life balance through flexible work arrangements, remote work options, and family-friendly policies. The company recognizes the importance of accommodating employees' personal and professional responsibilities, enabling them to manage their work schedules and priorities effectively while maintaining productivity and well-being.
4. **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Microsoft empowers employees by providing autonomy, decision-making authority, and opportunities for leadership and career growth. The company encourages employees to take ownership of their projects, collaborate across teams, and drive meaningful impact within their roles and the broader organization.

5. **Employee Well-Being Initiatives:** Microsoft prioritizes employee well-being through comprehensive wellness programs, mental health resources, and initiatives that promote physical fitness and overall health. The company's commitment to supporting employees' holistic well-being reinforces a culture of care, resilience, and employee-centric values.

Microsoft's focus on employee engagement and retention is reflected in its efforts to create a workplace where employees feel inspired, valued, and empowered to achieve their full potential. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, innovation, and well

Conclusion

Employee engagement and retention are pivotal for organizational success, influencing productivity, innovation, and overall performance. This paper has examined effective strategies employed by leading companies to enhance these critical factors. Companies like Google prioritize transparent communication and regular feedback mechanisms to build trust and alignment with organizational goals. They also emphasize career development through continuous learning opportunities and advancement pathways, as seen with Salesforce and Microsoft's initiatives like Trailhead. Work-life balance and well-being are central to strategies at Southwest Airlines and Zappos, which offer flexible work arrangements and robust wellness programs to support employee health and satisfaction. Recognition and rewards play a crucial role in fostering a culture of appreciation and motivation, exemplified by Google and Zappos' comprehensive programs. Moreover, inclusive cultures promoted by Microsoft and Salesforce through diversity initiatives and supportive leadership practices ensure employees feel valued and empowered. By integrating these strategies, organizations can cultivate environments where employees are engaged, fulfilled, and motivated to contribute their best, ultimately driving sustained success and competitive advantage in the modern workplace.

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