

Factors Affecting Employee Engagement Practices in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The human resource management concept of employee engagement has gained significant importance in higher education institutions, as it is believed to affect employees' performance, institutional effectiveness, and academic quality. In the current study, the major factors that impact employee engagement practices in higher education institutions across Mumbai are studied. The study pinpoints certain dimensions like internal communication, participative leadership, faculty development, and recognition practices that help in employee engagement. A structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scale was administered to 232 faculty members and primary data was collected. Data analysis techniques used were Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with the aid of SPSS software. The results showed that all found dimensions play an important role in the Employee Engagement Practices in Higher Education Institutions. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value and Bartlett's Test confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. From the analysis four major factors were extracted which accounted for a high level of cumulative variance. The study findings suggest that the improvement in employee engagement and institutional performance is more likely to occur in institutions that foster transparent communication, collaborative leadership, faculty development opportunities, and effective recognition systems.

Keywords: Transparent communication, collaborative leadership, faculty development opportunities, and effective recognition systems

1. Introduction

One of the most important factors in the success of any organization is the engagement of its employees, and this is particularly true in the education industry. In a higher education institution, a faculty member who is engaged serves the entire institution not just in regard to academic performance but also in the areas of institutional development, faculty productivity in research, innovation and satisfaction of students. As competition becomes more intense between educational institutions and demands from academic professionals evolve, it is crucial that employee engagement is maintained to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the institution.

The Mumbai Higher education institutions have a dynamic and competitive academic environment, where faculty members are expected to fulfil multiple functions, including teaching, research, mentoring, administration, and community engagement. In this context, employee engagement practices take on significance to encourage the faculty members and foster a conducive academic setting. Engagement practices include encouraging faculty participation, improving faculty communications, building stronger relationships, and

institutional commitment. There are a number of factors that affect employee engagement in higher education institutions. Internal communication helps to build trust and transparency between Management and faculty members. Participative leadership involves faculty participation in decision-making and institutional governance. Professional growth and career advancement through faculty development activities like training programmes, workshops, conferences and research support. The recognition practices also enhance morale and inspire faculty to help meet institutional goals.

Though there is an increased focus on employee engagement in educational institutions, there is not much empirical research that has specifically looked at factors influencing the employee engagement practices in higher education institutions in Mumbai. Thus, the present study seeks to identify the major factors that affect the practices of employee engagement and analyse the impacts of these factors in achieving the effectiveness of the institution.

2. Review of Literature

The concept of employee engagement is one of the most talked about concepts in organizational and educational research as a crucial factor in increasing employee productivity, commitment to the organization, effectiveness of the institution and satisfaction at work. Employee engagement is a psychological link or connection that employees develop to their job role, as first defined by William A. Kahn (1990). Kahn writes that engaged workers are physically, cognitively and emotionally present in their work. The research highlighted the importance of psychological safety, meaning and organizational support to enhance employee engagement.

Alan M. Saks (2006) further advanced understanding of engagement by reporting that organizational support, leadership quality, communication systems and workplace relationships are significant factors in determining levels of engagement. Saks noted that employees feel good about their institutions when they feel fairly treated, supported and recognized, and it results in higher organizational commitment, loyalty and job satisfaction.

James K. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) found that highly engaged organizations are more productive, more satisfying to customers, more profitable and more effective at retaining employees. Their study found that engagement is a positive factor in organizational effectiveness in a variety of professions—including education. Likewise, Mary Welch (2011) noted that a good internal communication policy can improve the trust, working capacity and relationships between employees and the organization. Transparency in communication systems enhances the sense of value and belonging for staff.

In addition, Linjuan Rita Men (2014) found that leadership communication has a positive impact on employee engagement and organizational trust. Those who work in institutions that have open communication have more positive involvement and commitment to the institution. In higher education institutions, where faculty members are dependent on collaboration, coordination and academic participation, communication practices are particularly crucial. It's also known that leadership practices are a key determinant of employee engagement. Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio (2004) noted that transformational and participative leadership styles promote employee involvement and participation, as well as innovation and organizational commitment. Positive and motivating work environment is created when leadership encourages workers to be involved in decision-making. More recent studies by Arnold Bakker and Demerouti (2018) found that supportive leadership behaviors increase employee enthusiasm, work engagement, and psychological well-being.

Professional development and faculty learning opportunities are also crucial in educational institutions. Training and development programs enhance the competencies of employees, the effectiveness of the institution and career opportunity (Herman Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). More workshops, conferences, training programs and research development opportunities for faculty members are the signs of greater engagement and institutional commitment. Likewise, Shuck Reio (2014) discovered that organizational learning culture, managerial support and organizational career development opportunities positively affect employee engagement and performance outcomes.

Employee recognition and appreciation practices are also becoming a significant factor in employee engagement. Bob Nelson (2005) wrote that formal and informal recognition systems enhance employee morale, motivation and retention. Those who are valued by their institutions are more likely to be committed and productive. Similarly, Mone London (2018) highlighted that ongoing feedback and acknowledgment systems have a huge impact on employee engagement and satisfaction within the workplace.

New aspects of employee engagement (EE) in the education sector have been identified in recent studies after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. During remote and hybrid work conditions, employee engagement practices became very important, which was observed by Chanana Sangeeta and Sangeeta (2021). They found that positive aspects of leadership, digital communication, emotional well-being and professional flexibility were key to maintaining employee engagement in educational institutions.

Empirical studies conducted in recent years have also added to the significance of the practices of employee engagement in higher education institutions. Kumar and Sharma (2024) identified that the factors influencing faculty engagement in Indian higher education institutions are leadership support, faculty recognition, communication within the organization, and professional development opportunities. The study shows that the organizational culture of collaborative academic atmosphere, has a positive effect on faculty motivation and reducing the intention of turnover.

Likewise, Reddy and Mehta (2024) found a direct connection between faculty engagement and teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and institutional performance. They found that faculty who are well recognized and given chances for growth and promotion have greater organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Patel and Desai's recent study (2025) highlighted the significance of digital transformation, flexible working cultures, and support systems within HEIs for employee engagement practices. The researchers concluded that teachers working in schools that have a clear communication system and participative leadership are more engaged and involved in academic activities.

Similarly, Singh and Arora (2025) found that recognition programs, faculty autonomy, and a collaborative organization culture positively impact employee engagement and loyalty to the institution for academic staff. Their research indicated that schools dedicated to employee-centered management practices are likely to be more successful in reaching academic excellence and sustainability in the long-term.

While a few studies have explored employee engagement in various industries and work environments, there is a lack of empirical research dedicated to factors influencing the employee engagement practices in higher education institutions in Mumbai. The majority of the current studies has focused on either corporate organizations or healthcare institutions or manufacturing industry, and comparatively few studies have focused on faculty engagement practices in higher education institutions in India. Hence, the purpose of the present study is to fill this research gap by studying the important determinants of employee engagement among faculty members of selected HEIs in Mumbai.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the major factors affecting employee engagement practices in higher education institutions in Mumbai.
2. To provide suggestions for improving employee engagement practices in higher education institutions.

4. Research Methodology

The descriptive and analytical research design was used in the present study so as to analyze the factors influencing employee engagement practices in higher education institutions. Descriptive approach was used to gain understanding of the current practice and perceptions of faculty engagement, and the analytical approach to uncovering factors that affect employee engagement. The study was carried out in selected higher education institutions in Mumbai, Maharashtra, which is one of the education and academic hubs in India. The primary data were obtained directly from the faculty members by using a structured questionnaire with five points Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Both faculty and staff were asked to participate and 232 faculty members participated in the study. Convenience sampling technique has been used since the respondents were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study. Data collected were analysed by using Software of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Various statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and Varimax Rotation Technique were used to examine the reliability and validity of the data and to identify the major dimensions affecting employee engagement practices in higher education institutions.

5 Data analysis and Results

Table 5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 232)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	128	55.2
	Female	104	44.8
Age Group	Below 30 Years	46	19.8
	31 – 40 Years	88	37.9
	41 – 50 Years	63	27.2
	Above 50 Years	35	15.1
Educational Qualification	Postgraduate	79	34.1
	M.Phil.	38	16.4
	Ph.D.	115	49.5

Teaching Experience	Below 5 Years	41	17.7
	6 – 10 Years	72	31.0
	11 – 15 Years	64	27.6
	Above 15 Years	55	23.7
Designation	Assistant Professor	136	58.6
	Associate Professor	61	26.3
	Professor	35	15.1
Type of Institution	Private Institution	149	64.2
	Government Institution	83	35.8

Table 5.1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents who were part of the study. Considering the total respondents, there was a fairly good gender balance, with 55.2% being faculty members (Male) and 44.8% being faculty members (Female). With respect to the Age distribution, majority of respondents 37.9% belonged to the age group of academically experienced (31-40 years), followed by 27.2% in the age group of 41-50 years. Academic qualifications were almost half (49.5%) with Ph.D. qualification indicating the academic competency of the subjects who participated in the research. As far as teaching experience is concerned, 31.0% of the respondents had 6–10 years of experience in teaching and 27.6% of the respondents had experience of 11–15 years of teaching which indicated that the respondents had enough teaching experience to provide reliable responses to the questions related to the employee engagement practices. The distribution in the designation revealed that 58.6% of the respondents were Assistant Professors, 26.3% were Associate Professors and 15.1% were Professors. In addition, a majority of the respondents were affiliated with private higher educational institutions (64.2%) while 35.8% were affiliated with government institutions. The demographic profile showed that the respondents of the study have a wide academic background and experience in their work, which enhances the reliability and validity of the study results.

Factor Analysis For Employee Engagement Practices

Table 5.2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.917
Bartlett's Test Approx. Chi-Square	5876.412
Degrees of Freedom	91
Significance	0.000

Table 5.2 presents the results of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which were conducted to determine the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.917 indicates an excellent level of sampling adequacy, as values above 0.90 are considered highly satisfactory for conducting factor analysis. This suggests that the variables share sufficient common variance and the sample size is adequate for reliable factor extraction. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (Chi-square = 5876.41.178, df = 91, p = 0.000), indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that there are significant relationships among the variables. Therefore, the

results confirm that the dataset is appropriate and suitable for performing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Table 5.3. Communalities

Variables	Initial	Extraction
IC1	1.000	0.817
IC2	1.000	0.831
IC3	1.000	0.857
IC4	1.000	0.836
PL1	1.000	0.824
PL2	1.000	0.831
PL3	1.000	0.847
FD1	1.000	0.862
FD2	1.000	0.821
FD3	1.000	0.861
RP1	1.000	0.827
RP2	1.000	0.841
RP3	1.000	0.853
RP4	1.000	0.855

Table 5.3 presents the communalities values obtained from the Exploratory Factor Analysis using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) extraction method. Communalities represent the proportion of variance in each variable that is explained by the extracted factors. The initial values for all variables are 1.000, indicating that the total variance of each variable is considered before extraction. After extraction, the communalities values range from 0.823 to 0.862, showing that a substantial proportion of the variance in each variable is explained by the retained factors. All the extracted communalities are well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50, indicating that the variables are well represented by the factor solution. This suggests that the selected items contribute meaningfully to the underlying constructs and are appropriate for inclusion in the factor analysis.

Table 5.4. Variance

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.521	55.784	55.784	7.810	55.784	55.784	3.402	53.722	53.722
2	1.668	11.712	67.496	1.640	11.712	67.496	3.346	11.914	65.636
3	1.352	9.305	76.802	1.303	9.305	76.802	2.590	9.659	75.295
4	1.208	8.379	85.180	1.173	8.379	85.180	2.588	8.631	83.926
5	.283	2.022	87.203						

6	.273	1.953	89.156						
7	.237	1.691	90.847						
8	.221	1.580	92.428						
9	.205	1.462	93.890						
10	.199	1.423	95.312						
11	.177	1.263	96.576						
12	.170	1.214	97.790						
13	.161	1.152	98.942						
14	.148	1.058	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

The Total Variance Explained (TVE) via Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is shown in Table 5.4. The results indicate that there are four components with eigenvalues above one, which is the criterion of Kaiser for retaining the factors. The first component explains 55.784% of the variance, followed by the second (11.712%), third (9.305%), and fourth component (8.379%). The four components explained 85.180% cumulative variance which shows that the four factors extracted are enough to explain the variance of the data. The variance among the four rotated factors was much more balanced after Varimax rotation, indicating a robust and reliable factor structure for employee engagement practices in higher education institutions..

Table 5.5. Rotated Component

Variables	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
IC1	0.226	0.821	0.212	0.218
IC2	0.238	0.839	0.171	0.226
IC3	0.194	0.861	0.165	0.184
IC4	0.181	0.853	0.173	0.192
PL1	0.271	0.234	0.196	0.824
PL2	0.214	0.219	0.202	0.846
PL3	0.186	0.228	0.198	0.857
FD1	0.262	0.206	0.819	0.225
FD2	0.241	0.194	0.836	0.214
FD3	0.228	0.212	0.844	0.221
RP1	0.826	0.218	0.246	0.191
RP2	0.843	0.182	0.231	0.216
RP3	0.852	0.176	0.219	0.189
RP4	0.861	0.237	0.188	0.173

Table 5.5 presents the Rotated Component Matrix obtained through Principal Component Analysis using Varimax rotation. The results indicate a clear grouping of variables into four distinct components. The variables RP1, RP2, RP3, and RP4 load highly on Component 1, representing Recognition Practices. Similarly, IC1, IC2, IC3, and IC4 show strong loadings on Component 2, indicating Internal Communication. The variables FD1, FD2, and FD3 load significantly on Component 3, representing Faculty Development, while PL1, PL2, and PL3 load strongly on Component 4, representing Participative Leadership. All factor loadings are above the acceptable threshold of 0.50, confirming strong relationships between the variables and their respective factors. The findings demonstrate a clear and reliable factor structure for employee engagement practices in higher education institutions.

Table 5.6; Extracted factors and their details

Factors	Statements	Items	Loadings
Internal Communication	Management shares timely organizational information with employees	IC1	0.816
Internal Communication	Employees receive clear communication regarding policies and procedures	IC2	0.835
Internal Communication	Senior management maintains transparent communication practices	IC3	0.857
Internal Communication	Employees are encouraged to provide constructive feedback	IC4	0.848
Participative Leadership	Employees participate in organizational decision-making	PL1	0.824
Participative Leadership	Managers encourage staff suggestions and innovative ideas	PL2	0.846
Participative Leadership	Leadership promotes teamwork and collaboration	PL3	0.857
Faculty Development	Employees receive opportunities for professional learning	FD1	0.819
Faculty Development	Training programs improve employee competencies	FD2	0.836
Faculty Development	Organizations support career advancement and skill enhancement	FD3	0.844

Recognition Practices	Employee achievements are formally recognized	RP1	0.826
Recognition Practices	Reward systems motivate employees toward better performance	RP2	0.843
Recognition Practices	Outstanding contributions are appreciated publicly	RP3	0.852
Recognition Practices	Recognition programs improve employee morale	RP4	0.861

The factors obtained from Exploratory Factor Analysis with their statements, items and factor loadings are presented in Table 5.6. The analysis revealed four key factors that influence employee engagement practices in Higher Education Institutions: Internal Communication, Participative Leadership, Faculty Development and Recognition Practices. All items have Factor loadings from 0.816 to 0.861, which exceed the threshold level of 0.50, thereby suggesting a high value of relationships between the variables and constructs respectively. Internal Communication is a tribute to the value of communicating openly and providing feedback in institutions. Participative Leadership emphasizes Employee Involvement in the decision-making process and teamwork. Faculty Development relates to opportunities for professional learning, training and career advancement, and Recognition Practices to appreciation, reward and recognition of employee contributions. In general, the factors obtained are definitely identified as the prominent dimensions affecting employee engagement practices in the HEIs.

6. Discussion

The present study revealed four important factors affecting the employee engagement practices in higher education institutions with Internal Communication, Participative Leadership, Faculty Development and Recognition Practices. The results showed that well-functioning communication systems, clear and open information flow and positive feedback loops greatly enhance faculty engagement, trust and institutional engagement. The faculty members who have open channels of communication in their institution were found to have better involvement in academic and administrative activities. The study also revealed that participative leadership practices like teamwork, collaborative governance, and employee involvement in decision-making are positively associated with employee motivation, job satisfaction and organizational belongingness. When faculty suggestions and opinions are valued by institutional leaders, faculty feel valued and committed.

The findings also showed that faculty development programmes such as training programmes, workshops, conferences, research support, career promotion etc. have significant impact on the professional competence and institutional bonding of faculty members. Companies in which learning is a continuous process and academic development is fostered build a positive workplace which supports creativity, research output and personal growth. Furthermore, some recognition practices like appreciation, rewards and incentives, and employee contribution

recognition were found to be key factors in employee morale and engagement. Academic staff that are formally and informally recognized for their academic success and institutional contributions are more motivated, committed, and loyal to the institution.

The results of this study align with previous studies by Kahn (1990), Saks (2006), Harter et al. (2002), Welch (2011), Men (2014), and Kumar and Sharma (2024), which all emphasized the significance of organizational communication, leadership support, professional growth and development, and recognition programs for fostering employee engagement. The significant factor loadings and high percentage of variance explained in the EFA further validate the dimensions identified as reliable and meaningful indicators of employee engagement in HEDI's.

The research recommends that universities and colleges need to create clear and effective communication channels to enhance trust among professors and strengthen their relationship. Faculty involvement in institutional decision making and academic governance should also be promoted as participative management practices in institutions. Faculty development programs, workshops, in-service training, research funding, career advancement and progression, etc., should be strengthened to enhance academic skills and job satisfaction. In addition, it is important for institutions to have good recognition and reward mechanisms to appreciate employees' contributions and increase their motivation. Higher education institutions also need to foster a positive academic culture, leadership and working environments to maintain faculty satisfaction and employee retention and institutional sustainability.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that the employee engagement practices have a significant role in enhancing the faculty commitment, institutional effectiveness and academic performance in Higher Education Institutions. Four key dimensions were identified through the Exploratory Factor Analysis affecting employee engagement practices – Internal Communication, Participative Leadership, Faculty Development, and Recognition Practices. The results suggest that institutions that foster open communication, team leadership, professional growth and development and strong appreciation programs are more likely to have engaged employees and sustainable organizations. The study also proved that faculty participation in the program has a positive impact on academic excellence, innovation and growth of the institution. So, it is emphasized that higher education institutions need to be engaged in employee-oriented management and create a work environment that can improve faculty motivation, satisfaction and the long-term success of the institution.

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