

**HUMAN SKILL DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT: RESULTANTS OF FEEDBACK POLICIES
IMPLEMENTED**

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Abstract:

The rapid pace of competition and increasing impact of internal environment necessitates firms to continually invest and focus on the skills and satisfaction of their key asset base, the human capital. This paper will represent the impact of feedback policies implemented on human capital investments and their engagement levels in an organization, which has experienced double digit growth rates in the last decade. Indian services firms invest significant resources towards training and education of their employees. It has been examined whether these human capital investments directed towards employee training are effective in improving employee performance and productivity. Controlling for unobservable employee characteristics and possible selection bias, we find significant and positive impact of feedback and training on skill development and employee engagement resulting in enhanced performance. It has also been investigated the mediating role of employment related characteristics and the type of training on the link between training and performance. Interestingly, it has been find out that there is systematic superiority in the high experience laterals' ability to extract value from firm-provided training. This paper concludes significant differences between the impact of specific versus

general feedback and domain versus technical training on performance. Taken together, these findings suggest that the employee engagement is conditional upon a focused curricular approach that emphasizes a structured feedback and competency development program. The findings of research have both theoretical and practical significance, most important of which is that they justify increased engaged human capital investments to fuel future growth of this important component of the global economy.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Feedback, Human Capital, Human Skill Development, Training.

Introduction:

Today, the business scenario is seen to be unremittingly changing. Human resource, being an important asset, is playing its role as a strategic partner instead of supporting administrative tasks in the organizations. So, this is an organization's need to effectively develop these assets by getting them polished with the help of training programs to succeed in a highly competitive marketplace. Although, it is important to note that the notion of human capital management had been around since the 70's (Schein, 1977). The business scenario is changing rapidly due to which a new concept of human development has been introduced regularly and which is being followed by a lot of organizations also. Success in achieving business objectives requires engaged human resources which can be possible only if their antecedents are like proper human development policies and feedback policies are implemented. Engaged employee has become a precious commodity and how organizations develop or increase these assets has great impact on the success of organization. Every business struggle for survival in increased competition and a lot of challenges are being faced by it due to several reasons :

- The recent economic downturn where keeping ahead of competitors to survive and flourish has become imperative. Moreover globalization process has increased competition upto global level also.

- To face competition committed employees are required who contribute in achieving the objectives of business. Plenty of employees are available but it is too difficult to get engaged employees.
- Effective antecedents of employee engagement are not known to the employers .
- Employers are not aware of the procedure and results of following proper feedback policies and human resource development.

To study these challenges in detail the main terms which should be made cleared and discussed are Human resource development, Feedback and Employee engagement. After understanding these terms their relationship can only be discussed.

Human resource development:

The part of human resource management that specifically deals with training and development of the employees is human resource development. It includes training an individual after he/she is first hired, providing opportunities to learn new skills, distributing resources that are beneficial for the employee's tasks, and any other developmental activities.

Now a days human resource leaders work closely with senior management to attract, hire and develop employees. Yet the skills shortage presents both socio-economic and cultural challenges as talent crosses borders. Thus, in view of workforce trends such as shifting demographics, global supply chains, the aging workforce and increasing global mobility, forward-looking organizations must rethink their approach to employee engagement to best harness talent. By doing so, they will be positively positioned to succeed in a highly competitive marketplace. Human resource makes a business competitive in the market.

Feedback:

Feedback is only information, that is, data, and as such has no necessary consequences at all. (Feedback Interventions) FIs are defined as actions taken by (an) external agent (s) to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of one's task performance. This definition is similar to the notion of "knowledge of performance" interventions (Ammons, 1956), "augmented feedback"

(Annett,1969; Salmoni et al., 1984), or "extrinsic feedback" (Annett,1969; Frese & Zapf, 1994), and as such it has several implications for the boundaries of our investigation. FIs for a wide spectrum of tasks, such as test performance, memory tasks, physical tasks, attendance behavior,complying with regulations, and so forth. Scholars continue to ignore findings suggesting that FI effects on performance are highly variable, and Ammons's (1956) review is still cited as evidence for the positive effect of FI on performance (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983).

Employee engagement:

Among all the stakeholders, the most preferred one is the customers for any business and to keep them satisfied depends on the employees of that organisation and the employees can satisfy the outside stakeholders only when they themselves are completely satisfied and are positively attached with the organisation and that is what called *employee engagement*. In the academic literature, a number of definitions have been provided. Kahn (1990, p. 694) defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” Thus, according to Kahn (1990, 1992), engagement means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the effective ways or methods of human development to be used in an organization.
- To study the relationship between human resource development and feedback policies.
- To analyse the consequences of effective feedback policy implementation mainly human resource development on employee engagement.
- To evaluate the impact of enhanced employee engagement on productivity of the organization.

- To study the effective antecedents of employee engagement for an organization.

Literature Review

There have been hundreds of articles written about feedback and its role in knowledge and skill acquisition in by human development and resulting in employee engagement. Many of these articles describe the results from experimental tests examining different features of feedback, and several represent important historical reviews (a few going back to the early 1900s, such as Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Kulhavy & Stock, 1989; Mory, 2004). Despite the plethora of research on the topic, the specific mechanisms relating feedback to learning are still mostly murky, with very few (if any) general conclusions. Researchers who have tackled the tough task of performing meta-analyses on the feedback data use descriptors such as “inconsistent,” “contradictory,” and “highly variable” to describe the body of feedback findings (Azevedo & Bernard, 1995; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Ten years later those descriptors still apply.

Feedback has been widely cited as an important facilitator of learning and productivity of employee.(Bandura, 1991; Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Fedor, 1991; Ilgen, Fisher,& Taylor, 1979), but quite a few studies have reported that feedback has either no effect or debilitating effects on learning resulting in employee engagement.(for examples of nonfacilitative effects of feedback on learning, see Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996;Mory, 2004. Feedback that is construed as critical or controlling (Baron, 1993) often thwarts efforts to improve performance (Fedor, Davis, Maslyn, & Mathieson, 2001). There is vast research on feedback and performance similarly on the human resource development but this study is on relationship between these two. Some other researches on these variables are also discussed here.

Moderator Analyses: Major Conclusions

The moderator analyses suggest two major conclusions. First,several FI cues that seem to direct attention to meta-task processes *attenuate* FI effects on performance, whereas several FI cues that seem to direct attention to task-motivation or task learning processes *augment* FI effects on

performance. This pattern of findings provides reasonable support for the first two propositions. Specifically, both praise and FI designed to discourage were postulated to increase attention to meta-task processes and were found to attenuate FI effects. The debilitating effects of praise on performance received some direct experimental support both in the laboratory and in the field and were explained, respectively, by a model of self-attention (Baumeister et al., 1990) and by control theory (Waldersee & Luthans, 1994). This pattern of results is largely consistent with FIT's argument that, *ceteris paribus* (everything else being equal), FI cues affect performance by changes in locus of attention: The lower in the hierarchy the FI-induced locus of attention is, the stronger the benefit of an FI for performance.

The second major conclusion is that FI effects are moderated by the nature of the task. However, the exact task properties that moderate FI effects are still poorly understood.

The third proposition of FIT suggested five variables that should moderate FI effects. None of these moderators showed a clear effect. Yet, three of the five variables were weakly or interactively related to FI-moderating effects.

In summary, the moderator analyses have lent reasonable support to the major propositions of FIT. The propositions are supported, however, only with an overall pattern of results and not with detailed evidence at the single-variable level. However, this type of support, we believe, justifies accepting FIT as a preliminary theory that now requires further validation with primary and detailed research. Such research should investigate both the processes suggested by the propositions and explore additional issues suggested by some of the non significant moderators.

Approaches to employee engagement

Three approaches to employee engagement exist. First, it is conceived as a set of motivating resources such as support and recognition from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, opportunities for learning and development, and opportunities for skill use. The so-

called “Gallup-12” questionnaire operationalizes employee engagement in this way. A meta-analysis of studies using this measure in almost 8000 business units of 36 companies (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), showed that levels of employee engagement were positively related to business-unit performance (i.e., customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity, turnover, and safety). The authors conclude that engagement is “. . . related to meaningful business outcomes at a magnitude that is important to many organizations” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 276).

Secondly, employee engagement is conceived in terms of commitment and extra-role behavior, for instance, as “a psychological state where employees feel a vested interest in the company’s success and perform to a high standard that may exceed the stated requirements of the job” (www.mercerhr.com), or as “personal satisfaction and a sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from work and being a part of the organization” (www.towersperrin.com). Clearly, this seems like putting old commitment wine in new engagement bottles.

The third approach defines engagement independently from job resources and positive organizational outcomes—such as commitment—as a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that is the antipode of job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Based on this conceptualization, a brief work engagement questionnaire has been developed that consists of three interrelated dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

Consequences and antecedents of employee engagement

The driving force behind the popularity of employee engagement is that it has positive consequences for organizations. As indicated earlier, there is a general belief that there is a connection between employee engagement and productivity or business results (Harter et al., 2002). However, engagement is an individual-level construct and if it does lead to business

results, it must first impact individual-level outcomes. Along these lines, there is reason to expect employee engagement to be related to individuals' attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. Although neither Kahn (1990) nor May et al. (2004) included outcomes in their studies, Kahn (1992) proposed that engagement leads to both individual outcomes (i.e. quality of people's work and their own experiences of doing that work), as well as organizational-level outcomes (i.e. the growth and productivity of organizations). Furthermore, the Maslach et al. (2001) model treats engagement as a mediating variable for the relationship between the six work conditions and work various outcomes and like burnout, should be related to outcomes such as increased withdrawal, lower performance, job satisfaction, and commitment (Maslach et al., 2001). There are a number of reasons to expect engagement to be related to work outcomes. For starters, the experience of engagement has been described as a fulfilling, positive work-related experience and state of mind (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, 2003) and has been found to be related to good health and positive work affect (Sonnentag, 2003). These positive experiences and emotions are likely to result in positive work outcomes. As noted by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), engaged employees likely have a greater attachment to their organization and a lower tendency to leave their organization. Thus, individuals who continue to engage themselves do so because of the continuation of favorable reciprocal exchanges. As a result, individuals who are more engaged are likely to be in more trusting and high-quality relationships with their employer and will, therefore, be more likely to report more positive attitudes and intentions toward the organization. In addition, there is some empirical research that has reported relationships between engagement and work outcomes. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found that engagement was negatively related to turnover intention and mediated the relationship between job resources and turnover intention. Therefore, it is predicted that job and organization engagement will be related to work outcomes as follows:

Employee engagement will be positively related to (a) job satisfaction, (b) organizational commitment, and (c) organizational citizenship behavior, and negatively related

to (d) intention to quit.

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Finally, given that the antecedents are expected to predict engagement and engagement predicts the outcomes, it is possible that engagement mediates the relationship between the antecedents and the consequences. This is consistent with the Maslach et al. (2001) model and is all the more likely given that most of the antecedents (e.g. feedback, job characteristics, justice perceptions) have been associated with various work outcomes. Furthermore, several studies have found that engagement mediates the relationship between antecedent variables and outcomes (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, 2003). Therefore, the final hypothesis of this study is the following:

H9. Job and organization engagement will mediate the relationship between the antecedents and the consequences.

Engagement involves the active use of emotions and behaviors in addition to cognitions. also suggest that “engagement may be thought of as an antecedent to job involvement in that individuals who experience deep engagement in their roles should come to identify with their jobs.”

Job characteristics were measured by six items from Hackman and Oldham (1980) with each item corresponding to a core job characteristic (autonomy, task identity, skill variety, task significance, feedback from others, and feedback from the job). Participants indicated the extent or amount of each characteristic in their job using specific seven-point anchors such as (1) very little to (7) very much. Participants' responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree.

Rewards and recognition was measured by a ten-item scale designed for this study. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they receive various outcomes for performing their job

well. They responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) to a small extent to (5) a large extent to items such as, “A pay raise,” “A promotion,” “Praise from your supervisor,” and “Some form of public recognition”. Colquitt’s (2001) seven-item scale was used to measure procedural justice and his four-item scale was used to measure distributive justice.

Participants responded using a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) to a small extent to (5) a large extent. A sample item for procedural justice is, “Have you been able to appeal the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures,” and a sample item for distributive justice is, “Does your (outcome) reflect the effort you have put into your work?” for procedural justice and a $\frac{1}{4}$ 0.92 for distributive justice).

Conclusion

As Kahn (1990) suggested, broadly defined constructs such as job involvement (Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965), organizational commitment (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), or intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975) add to understanding employee perceptions of themselves, their work, and their organization. However, these understandings are too general to be easily applied in practice because they exist at a distance from the day-to-day experiences of employees within their work situation. That is, employees are proud of their company and satisfied with their job in part because their basic needs are met fairly consistently and they are being properly developed by the organization.. As in Kahn’s conceptualization, we see engagement occurring when individuals are emotionally connected to others and cognitively vigilant. Employees are emotionally and cognitively engaged when they know what is expected of them, have what they need to do their work, have opportunities to feel an impact and fulfillment in their work, perceive that they are part of something significant with coworkers whom they trust, and have chances to improve and develop. Having a measurement tool with items that make sense to employees and managers is critical to employees and managers acceptance of the instrument’s results and for their motivation to take action as a result of feedback based on such items.

As the authors observed (Kluger & DeNisi, 1998), FIs may be viewed as double-edged swords, cutting both ways. Care should be taken to know which interventions increase performance and under which conditions and at what time. Bangert-Drowns et al. (1991) examined 40 research studies on feedback using meta-analysis techniques. They examined such variables as type of feedback, timing of feedback, and error rates in terms of their respective effect sizes. This widely cited article describes both behavioral and cognitive operations that occur in learning. The basic idea is that to direct behavior, a learner needs to be able to monitor physical changes brought about by the behavior. That is, learners change cognitive operations and thus activity by adapting it to new information and matching it with their own expectations about performance. They emphasize that any theory that depicts learning as a process of mutual influence between learners and their environments must involve feedback implicitly or explicitly because, without feedback, mutual influence is by definition impossible.

Hence, the feedback and human resource development construct appears often as an essential element of theories of learning and instruction. Although recent writings repeatedly suggested that the effects of FI on performance are not automatic and far from being understood (Balcazar et al., 1985; Ilgen et al., 1979; Locke & Latham, 1990; Salmoni et al., 1984), the study provided, through FIT, a positive identification of several moderators. Moreover, these empirical results may provide the necessary information to mitigate the persistent and unwarranted belief that FI always improves performance (e.g., Pritchard et al., 1988).

This study results three major types of explanations for the persistence of this view: psychological, economical, and theoretical. First, feedback is psychologically reassuring, and people like to obtain feedback, although they may refrain from seeking it when the cost (social and otherwise) of obtaining it is prohibitive (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Otherwise, people appear to seek feedback about their performance even if it does not affect their performance (Kluger & Adler, 1993; Kluger, Adler, & Fay, 1992). Furthermore, when costs are low, people

may seek feedback repeatedly, even when they are informed that it cannot benefit their performance (Kroll, Levy, & Rapoport, 1988). This suggests that FI about task performance is often used to assess progress toward goals of the self (meta-task processes),¹³ which may be independent from the goal of achieving an objectively superior performance. Therefore, we believe that researchers and practitioners alike confuse their feelings that feedback is desirable with the question of whether FI benefits performance. This may indicate that FIs have benefits other than positive effects on immediate performance. For example, feedback may increase satisfaction (Fried & Ferris, 1987) and may contribute to long-range persistence on the focal task—a variable that was not studied in the FI literature.

Second, many intervention techniques that are sold by practitioners in educational and work settings are based on the assumption that FIs improve performance, so there is an economic incentive for some practitioners to continue to laud the positive effects of FI. An early example is Pressy's (1950) selfscoring device, which was largely beneficial for learning but yielded detrimental effects as well. Clearly, those who have a financial stake in the assumption that FI always improves performance would have very little interest in carefully testing this assumption. Finally, we believe that the major culprit is a lack of a general theory regarding the effects of FI on performance. Without a comprehensive theory, there is no way to integrate the vast and inconsistent empirical findings. Furthermore, the vague nature of most views about how FI works are not likely to lead to any theoretical revisions because they are not articulated well enough to begin with. Without a clear theoretical expectation, it is not possible to interpret findings as posing serious contradictions, and thus there is no progress. Even worse, in Popper's (as cited in Robinson, 1986) terminology, the vague hypotheses about FI were unfalsifiable and, hence, nonscientific. We believe that with appropriate caution, FIT offers a remedy for this situation.¹³

A. Rapoport (personal communication, March 13, 1995) suggested that people are inclined to seek feedback repeatedly even when it appears useless to verify that the environment remained stable. Therefore, in the long run, such a strategy may be adaptive. Before we conclude, we must

reflect on the applied implication of our study. The identification of a number of moderators suggests that in certain situations, FI can yield a large and positive effect on performance.

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