Employee Engagement and its Dynamics: An Empirical Study of an Information Technology Company Sri Lanka

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Abstract

An engaged employee is the most valuable asset of any organisation for they are the key drivers of business activities. This empirical study aims to analyse the relationship between the variable of employee engagement and its antecedents. The selected dynamics of employee engagement, identified through a thorough desk research, are organisational culture, leadership, high-performance work practices and rewards. Non-probability convenience sampling is utilised as the sampling method to test four hypotheses, using data gathered from 169 executives from an Information Technology Company located in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The results showed that high performance work practices and rewards have significant, positive relationship with the construct of employee engagement.

Keywords:

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of new Information Technologies (IT) has made organisations eager to adopt emerging IT in their quest for survival and success. However, IT projects often fall below managers' expectations in terms of their expediency in improving organisational performance and employee engagement (Xiao & Dasgupta, 2005). International Standish Group (2001) uncovered that 23% of IT projects fail completely, and another 49% run over time and/or over budget. According to Kendra and Taplin (2004) one of the reasons behind the high failure rate of IT projects is poor understanding and management of organisational culture and leadership practices. However, there has been a dearth of research investigating how organisational culture and the other three factors mentioned affect employee engagement in the IT field. Sawner (2000) states that organisational culture is considered to be an essential factor of organisational success or failure in the IT field. High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) is a Human Resource Management (HRM) practice that provides a more significant influence on the success of the organisation (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2018; Kroon, 2012).

According to Gallup (2017) report, 38% of employees in Sri Lanka are engaged. Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) identified that HPWPs, leadership, work-life balance, personal character and religiosity are the dynamics of employee engagement. Iddagoda and Opatha (2020) tested the relationship between these dynamics and employee engagement among the managerial employees in the public listed companies in Sri Lanka. The population gap identified is that there is no empirical evidence about the impact of organisational culture, leadership, high performance work practices, and rewards on employee engagement in the IT Company.

The objectives of this study are to identify the impact of organisational culture on employee engagement, the impact of leadership on employee engagement, the impact of HPWPs on employee engagement, and the impact of rewards on employee engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employee engagement

Shuck and Wollard (2009) state that employee engagement is the new employment context that describes a positive relationship – both emotional and cognitive – of an

employee towards the output of their organisation. Andrew and Sofian (2012) mention that Kahn (1990) is the first researcher who published scholarly work on employee engagement. Kahn (1990) defined "employee engagement" as the "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances". Iddagoda et al. (2016) define employee engagement as the extent to which an employee gets involved in the job and the organisation cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. Graça et al. (2019) point out that an engaged employee experience his/her working conditions more positively and tend to have less sick leave and turnover intention. Engaged employees take an extra effort in achieving organisational goals, and they are talk positively about the organisation when they move with the society (Aon, 2018; Aon, 2012). Stangrecka and Iddagoda (2020); Bulińska- Anitha (2014) identified that employee job performance is a consequence of employee engagement. The primary intention of business organisations is to gain profit, while making contributions to society. Another main consequence of employee engagement is organisational performance, which has also been the view of Iddagoda and Gunawardana (2017); Harter et al. (2002).

2.2. *Organizational Culture*

Ojo (2009) states that culture is one of the most valuable features of an organisation. Sawner (2000) points out that the organisation's culture is considered an important factor that affects organisational success or failure in the IT field. Employee behaviour within the organisation is governed by organisational culture, which includes values, beliefs, stories, and symbols (Iddagoda et al. 2021). Ersin et al. (2016) defined the organisational culture as an essential factor in the organisations to improve employee engagement towards the organisational success and the development of the intellectual structure. Armstrong and Taylor (2017) mention that culture is reinforced over long periods, making it so firmly embedded that one may find it difficult to change in a short period without leading to upsetting and distressing incidents. Culture helps to interact with the creative organisational activities and work towards the success of the organisation is the view of Ersin et al. in 2016. Cameron and Quinn (2011) have a similar argument that understanding the concept of organisational culture is crucial for leaders. The reason is that ignoring organisational culture

in plans for any organisational changes would lead to negative consequences. The researchers of this study believe that these facts give insight into how the organisational culture will affect employee engagement.

2.3. Leadership

Truss et al., (2013) states that leaders can inspire employees just as they can enhance performance, as the leaders are in a position to influence the experience of employee engagement. Avolio et al. (2009) state that leadership is exercised when persons mobilise institutional political, psychological and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers. Avolio et al. (2009) state that transactional leadership style is based on the exchange of rewards depending on the performance of the followers. Further, Avolio and Bass (2001) recognised that leaders with a laissez-faire leadership style avoid interfering when serious issues occur.

2.4. High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs)

Becker and Husslid (1998) point out that HPWPs reflect a new interest in people as a source of competitive advantage rather than as a cost that needs to be minimised. Accordingly, people as intellectual assets and the systems within an organisation designed to attract, develop, and retain them are emerging as significant elements of the strategic decision-making process is the view of Becker and Husslid in 1998. Appelbaum and Batt (1993) state that HPWPs facilitate employee involvement, skill enhancement and motivation. A bundle of specific human resources practices which make a relatively higher impact on organisational effectiveness is the definition given by Iddagoda and Opatha in 2018. Realistic job previews, psychometric tests for selection, well-developed induction training, extensive training, regular appraisals, pay for performance, staff attitude survey, self-directed teams, and symbolic egalitarianism are some of the high-performance work practices (Iddagoda and Opatha, 2018; Guest, 2000).

2.5. Rewards

According to Opatha (2009), reward is a certain payment, and all employees should be entitled to a pay according to their contribution or service. There are two types of rewards; namely, financial rewards and non-financial rewards.
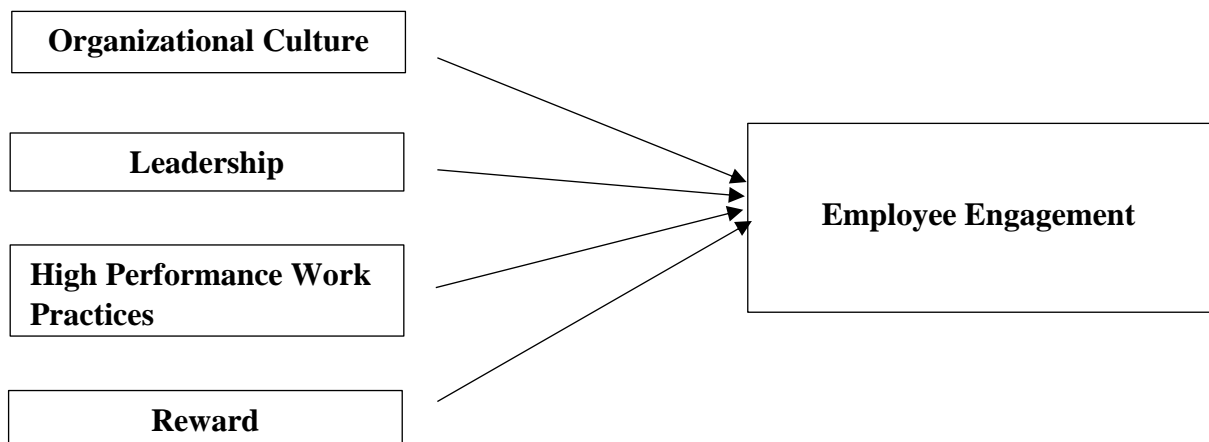
Opatha (2009) wrote: *"Pay can be defined as wage or salary. When concerned about the difference between these two terms, theoretically that could have a difference; however, practically, the distinctions between these two terms would not be that important."*

Opatha (2009) further wrote: *"Wage is a basic reward for the non-managerial employees where the salary is a basic pay of the managerial employees. Further wages are paid according to the number of units or product sold, but the salary is paid according to the time spent working."*

Armstrong and Taylor (2017) mention that rewards that do not involve any direct payments autonomy, recognition, training, career development opportunities are the nonfinancial rewards.

The dependent variable in this research is employee engagement. The independent variables include organisational culture, leadership, compensation, and HPWPs, or employee engagement dynamics. The conceptual framework/nomological network is shown in Figure 1

Figure 1
Conceptual Frame Work/Nomological Network

2.6. *Theoretical Assertions derived from the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Justice Theory*

The idea of social behaviour, founded on the exchange, was introduced by Homans in 1958 as the social exchange theory (SET). According to Saks (2006), a solid theoretical

rationale for explaining employee engagement can be found in social exchange theory. Symbolic egalitarianism is a high-performance work practice. Iddagoda and Opatha (2018) state that the term symbolic egalitarianism implies using symbols to minimise the differences among employees at all levels. The reason is all the employees are there to achieve a common organisational goal. When there is equity, through symbolic egalitarianism, employees' self-concept increases and they like working in their organisations. They become enthusiastic employees, which leads to a high level of employee engagement.

Seijts and Crim (2006) presented 10 Cs for employee engagement, which lead to employee engagement; i.e., connect, career, clarity, convey, congratulate, contribute, control, collaborate, credibility and confidence. Leaders should strengthen these 10 Cs in the view of Seijts and Crim (2006) to enhance employee engagement. For instance, the moment the leader see great work done by his/her subordinate, then he/she should be congratulated, which motivates the employee to make extra efforts to achieve the organisational goals. Aon (2012) identified that making the extra effort to achieve the organisational goals is a characteristic of an employee who has a high level of employee engagement. Since the employee behaviour within the organisation is directed by organisational culture, as per Iddagoda et al. (2021), the moment the employee hears about a story about one of the great employees in his/her organisation who has a high level of employee engagement, ultimately his/her level of employee engagement also goes high.

2.7. Relationship between Employee Engagement and its' Dynamics

Rana (2015) identified a theoretical linkage between HPWPs and employee engagement. Meanwhile, in their study about the managerial employees in the public listed companies in Sri Lanka, Iddagoda and Opatha (2020) presented empirical evidence on HPWPs and employee engagement. Researchers such as Christian et al., 2011; Papalexandris and Galanaki, 2009, have identified a positive relationship between leadership and employee engagement.

Distributive, the degree to which employees perceive outcomes that they receive as fair, according to Opatha (2015), comes under justice theory. Salary is a type of reward, and when the employee gets a fair amount of salary, the employee is inspired, resulting in employee engagement level going high.

These theoretical, literature and empirical evidence lead to the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant impact on Organizational Culture on Employee Engagement

H2: There is a significant impact on Leadership on Employee Engagement

H3: There is a significant impact on High-Performance work practices on Employee Engagement

H4: There is a significant impact on Rewards on Employee Engagement

The logical linkages between the research gap, research objectives and hypotheses are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Logical flow of research gap, objectives and hypotheses

Research Gap	Research Gap Type	Research Objective	Hypothesis
There is no empirical evidence about the impact of organisational culture, leadership, high-performance work practices and rewards on the construct of employee engagement in ABC IT Company	Population gap	To identify the impact of organisational culture on employee engagement	H1: There is a significant impact on organisational culture on employee engagement
		To identify the impact of leadership on employee engagement;	H2: There is a significant impact on leadership on employee engagement
		To identify the impact of HPWPs on employee engagement;	H3: There is a significant impact on High-Performance work practices on employee engagement
		To identify the impact of rewards on employee engagement.	H4: There is a significant impact on rewards on employee engagement

3. **Methodology**

This research is quantitative in nature. Sekaran (2003) has identified that there are six components of research design. They are namely, the purpose of the study, extent of

researcher interference with the study, type of investigation, unit of analysis, study setting and time horizon of study. Table 2 provides the details of the research design of this study.

Table 2

The Research Design

Research Design Component	Description
The purpose of the study	Hypothesis testing
Extent of researcher interference with the study	Minimum interference
Type of investigation	Correlational
Unit of analysis	Individual
Study setting	Non-contrived
Time horizon of study	Cross-sectional

The population of the study are the employees working in leading IT Company in Sri Lanka, which comprise 300 executive-level employees. The sample size of 169 is selected based on the Morgan table. The 40.8% of the respondents were women and 59.2% were men. Significant part of the respondents were degree holders (75.7%), 16% have a Master's degree and 5.9% a diploma, while 2.4% possess a GCE A/L Pass. With regards to professional experience, 44.4% of respondents have between 2 and 5 years of experience, 36.1% between 6 and 10, and 14.2% work between 11 and 15 years. Only 4.7% of respondents had worked between 16 and 20 years and 0.6% had experience of more than 20 years.

Data were collected through the self-administered questionnaire. The research questionnaire consists of five parts which includes organization culture (OC), leadership (L), reward (R), high-performance work practices (HPWP) and employee engagement (EE) assessment. The scaling values are 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, and 5- Strongly Agree.

The measure of reliability is illustrated in the table 3. The Cronbach test proves that the questionnaire has attained a high level of reliability (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, all measures are retained.

Table 3

The Reliability Test

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha value	Number of Items
Organizational Culture	4.09	0.585	0.877	4
Leadership	4.32	0.598	0.888	5
High Performance Work Practices	4.27	0.536	0.908	10
Reward	4.37	0.577	0.866	4
Employee Engagement	4.34	0.510	0.927	12

In order to achieve the objective of the study, both primary and secondary data have been used. A primary data questionnaire was used with web documents and other source documents used as secondary data. Similarly, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 16th Version, R studio and Excel 2016 were used to analyse data.

4. Findings and Discussion

To verify the hypothesised relationship, multiple regression analysis was used. The following conceptual model was derived from the analysis of the literature:

$$Employee\ Engagement = \beta 0 + \beta 1 OC + \beta 2 L + \beta 3 HPWP + \beta 4 R + \varepsilon$$

Where $\beta 0$ is the constant (intercept), and ε is the error term.

The data was diagnoses with the Collinearity Statistics and Q-Q plot to residuals, and no violation was found.

Table 4

Correlation Analysis of Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

	Organizational Culture	Leadership	High Performance Work Practices	Rewards
Employee Engagement	.610[**]	.562[**]	.745[**]	.715[**]

Note: Sig. (2-tailed) =0.000; N= 169

There is a significant relationship between HPWPs and employee engagement with 0.745. Iddagoda and Opatha (2020) also found that that there is a highly significant

relationship between HPWPs and employee engagement of the managerial employees in the public listed companies (PLC) in Sri Lanka. There is a strong significant relationship between the two constructs namely rewards and employee engagement. However, organizational culture and employee engagement as well as leadership and employee engagement, the relationship is moderate.

Table 5

Regression Analysis

Predictor	Hypothesized relationship	B	SE	β	95% confidence interval		t	p
					Lower	Upper		
Intercept		0.6900	0.2053		0.28454	1.0955	3.360	<.001
OC	-	0.1100	0.0573	0.1261	-0.00319	0.2233	1.919	0.057
LD	-	-0.0285	0.0596	-0.0334	-0.14620	0.0891	-0.479	0.633
HPWP	+	0.4186	0.0748	0.4394	0.27091	0.5662	5.598	<.001
R	+	0.3525	0.0506	0.3987	0.25262	0.4523	6.970	<.001

R^2= 0.671; F= 4.164

Notes: n=169; B-unstandardized beta; SE B is the standard error for the unstandardised beta; β is the standardised beta; t is the t.test statistic; p is the probability value.

As a result of the multiple regression analysis, the significance of the model has been confirmed, $F_{(4.164)}$ =83.6, p<0.001, with an R^2 = 0.671. This model explains 67 per cent of the variance in employee engagement. The results indicate that High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP) have the most significant influence on Employee engagement (B=0.4186, p<0.001). The Rewards (R) have the second significant influence on employee engagement, with B=0.3525, p<0.001. However, the impact of leadership (L) and organisational culture (OC) has not been statistically proven.

In the light of the analysis results presented, High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP) and Reward (R) play the main role in shaping employee involvement in the IT organisation in question. The results suggest that short-term incentives significantly shape employee engagement, a relationship presented in the conceptual framework or the nomological network (Figure 1).

Results in table 5 further explain that HPWP is positively significant. It indicate that high performance work practices such as realistic job preview, pay for performance, staff attitude surveys, self-directed teams, regular appraisals, extensive training and symbolic egalitarianism has a noteworthy effect on the construct of employee engagement. Symbolic egalitarianism can be implemented in an organization through consistent dress codes,

common cafeteria, common parking area and permanent office arrangements (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2018). When an organization pays attention on symbolic egalitarianism, employees feel all are equal and that organization gives them due recognition. These ultimately result to high level of retention where employees become good team player and talk positive about the organization when they move with the society and perform their duty. These are the consequences of employee engagement.

The relationship between rewards and employee engagement is also strong and positive. This can be explained using the social exchange theory (SET). When the organization provide rewards based on proper mechanism, the employees in exchange act as a passionate and productive employee. Engaged employees are passionate, productive and energetic (Sharma & Nambudiri, 2020; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

Leadership and employee engagement is negatively significant in 90% significance rate. Moreover, there is a weak relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement. Shuck et al. (2011) found that leadership plays a key role on employee engagement. On the other hand, Jiony, et al. (2015) identified that organizational culture is a driver of employee engagement. The result of this study is different than the finding of Shuck et al. (2011) and Jiony et al. (2015). This paves the way for a future research.

5. Conclusion

The study is mainly based on four hypotheses carried out using the Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression analysis. The analysis of the relationships supports better comprehension on how the organisational culture, leadership, HPWPs and rewards influence employee engagement. The first objective was to identify how organisational culture influences employee engagement in the field of Information Technology, with special reference to a selected large-scale IT company in Sri Lanka. Pearson correlation analysis is conducted to identify the relationship between organisational culture, leadership, HPWPs and rewards on employee engagement. All the tests were two-tailed tests, and the *P*-value is equal to the sig value. The conducted regression proved the importance of HPWPs and rewards in building employee engagement. This is consistent with other findings that suggest the role of incentives (Hoole & Hotz, 2016; Scott et al., 2010) and HPWP (Karim & Qamruzzaman, 2020) on shaping employees' engagement. The study emphasise the

importance of organisational mechanisms and the way work is organised in influencing employees' attitudes. Furthermore, the results of the study allow directing managerial activities to gain specific outcomes, while providing tools needed to effectively shape employee engagement.

The limitations of this study are mainly related to the research sample. The analysis was conducted based on data of one IT organisation. Therefore it is essential to develop the study by supplementing it with qualitative research. Further, future research should focus on a broader spectrum of organisations.

An important implication of this study is that the organisation under investigation has a more substantial impact on awards and specific personnel practices compared to the capacity of generally understood organisational culture and leadership. Hence, the conclusions require further verification in a broader context.

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