

## The Impact of Employee Engagement on Employee Loyalty

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### ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry in recent times have shown an increase in the level of attrition across all the companies, especially in the hotels. To tackle this issue of loyalty among the employees the impact that engagement of employees which is a closely related concept with loyalty is studied in a unit of a prominent south Indian hotel group. First, the various approaches to both employee engagement and employee loyalty are studied through literature review and the instruments for measuring them both are created by adopting it from other studies. Correlation, regression and ANOVA were conducted. The analysis of the information collected revealed that there is a strong positive correlation between the variables and employee engagement is also seen to have a major impact in predicting the level of employee loyalty. It was also found that the level of engagement differed based on department and job level and the level of loyalty differed based on department, level of service and age of participants. The results of the study are also seen to be consistent with other studies analyzing the same. In the end a model is suggested to be used for further research.

**Keywords:** *employee engagement, employee loyalty, employee commitment*

### INTRODUCTION

With the changing times there has been a lot of changes in how way things are done by people of each generation and no time in the past has seen a change so drastic as it is today. The new age employees, the millennials, see that the right time frame to stay in an organization is between twelve months to two years. This is a relatively short period of time and does not

give enough time for the employee to given returns to the organization for the amount of investment the company has made on that employee. This shows that there is a key problem with the level of loyalty that exists among employees today.

This problem is seen commonly in the hospitality industry. The hospitality and tourism industry in India contributes to the major portion of the country's GDP. In such an industry the prevalence of such high levels of attrition can affect the future growth of GDP as most of the efforts made by the company will be focused on retention than improving value for the customer. In 2013, an article written in the India Hospitality Review, a lot of experts from the industry have cited figures from 20% to 50% and some have even warned that the attrition rate can increase further. This will have a drastic impact on the level of performance of the companies.

Further, there is also the challenge of rising levels of contract workers in the hotel industry. The ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) survey on contract labours found that there has been 35% increase in contract labour hiring in the hospitality and travel industry during the year 2013 and this trend is seen to continue. This trend does not only exist in the hospitality industry but also in the industries like IT and BPO. This trend is a problem as Blake, Broschak and George (2003) in their study have shown that the existence of non-standard workers can have an effect on the loyalty levels of standard workers.

In the other hand however, it is seen that the level of job satisfaction has a positive impact on employee loyalty. This has been proven in research conducted by Hussain (2012) and also in the service profit chain model by Heskett et al (1997). Job satisfaction is a multi-dimensional variable and employee engagement which is a similar variable is seen to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction and has drivers similar to that of job satisfaction and at the same time employee engagement is a distinctive concept from job satisfaction. Hence, it can be said that employee engagement might have a positive impact on employee loyalty and very few studies have studied this relationship. Thus, in this study the impact of employee engagement on employee loyalty is examined at a hotel business.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the constructs of employee engagement and employee loyalty reviews of literature were conducted. The reviews provided better understanding on the previous studies conducted on this relationship.

The concept of employee loyalty is seen from various perspectives. Guillon and Cezanne (2014) have found that employee loyalty has as much as seventeen broad approaches to it. There is a psychological contract perspective by Hart and Thompson (2007) that says that loyalty is high when the psychological contract is not breached. There is the most common commitment perspective seen in Ibrahim and Falasi (2014), Vokic and Hernaus (2015) which views loyalty itself as a form of commitment. There is a moral values perspective by Coughlan (2005) that says loyalty is formed by adhering to common moral values of the organisation. According to Hirschman it is seen as the attitude that leads to voicing out and prevents a person from leaving the organisation. Few studies also see loyalty as being able to identify oneself with the organization seen in Hussain (2012) or having a sense of attachment with the organisation and the people in it by Haar (2017). All these are seen to be broadly as attitudinal perspectives. There is also another behavioral perspective observed in Fielder (1992) and Ewin (1993) which sees loyalty as the observable relationship between employee and the employers. Intention to stay or leave, degree of counterproductive behaviour and organisation deviance, whistleblowing, keeping organization secrets are all seen to measure loyalty. In this study, the moral values perspective

proposed by Coughlan is taken as loyalty because of its ease in measuring and the lack of extensive study in that perspective.

In the number of scales available for loyalty the one dominating scale is the Allen and Meyer scale of organisational commitment because the perspective of organisational commitment is the one where researchers focus on employee loyalty for. In any kind of scale that is witnessed on employee loyalty one, two or all the types of commitments are used to measure employee loyalty with other variables like organisation citizenship behaviour or intention to turnover. This scale contains three factors. The normative commitment which contains items that talk about feeling an obligation to remain with an employer, it is where a person puts the organisation's needs over personal needs. Affective commitment is the type where a person feels a sense of affection or an emotional connection with the organisation. It is usually high when personal values and goals are more aligned with the organisation. Continuance commitment is the type of commitment where a person might decide to continue on with his/her own job because the person feels

Employee loyalty is seen to be related to employee engagement through employee satisfaction Hussain (2012) found relationship between work condition, rewards and recognition with loyalty which is the same type of link used in the Gallup's survey that was used in a lot of literatures that measured employee engagement. Jones, Ni, and Wilson (2009) also examined how employee engagement has an impact on absenteeism which is another variable used to measure loyalty. Inerson and Berechet (2011) considered career development as a factor to predict loyalty in the hotel industry and almost all studies on employee engagement has it as a predictor for the level of engagement. In an IRS survey from 2004 the key job satisfaction and commitment drivers were found. They were, relationship shared with managers, peers, quality of line managers, recognition given to contributions made by employees and the visibility and confidence of leadership. The similar influencers are found to be drivers for engagement. The Hewitt's model consists of twenty-one drivers for employee engagement which can be broadly classified into total rewards, people, work motivation, procedures, quality of work-life balance with organisation values balance and career development.

Apart from these links that have been established it is also seen that there is a link in the form of commitment. Employee loyalty in a lot of researches has been witnessed to be interchanged with commitment and employee engagement is also perceived to be a higher form of commitment. Hewitt in its definition of employee engagement has highlighted that “engagement is an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation” and loyalty is also a type of commitment and Ibrahim and Falasi (2014) has found this relationship in while examining the link between loyalty and employee engagement, though only affective commitment had a significant relationship with employee engagement.

In the same way in which loyalty is subjected to various perspectives employee engagement also has the same issue. Employee engagement has been found to be suffering from conceptual chaos. There are numerous studies that measure employee engagement in different ways, but in the end, there is a lot more similarity in their definitions. The approaches in employee engagement is found to be limited to three broad schools of thought. The Role Theory approach, used in Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010), is seen as the psychological presence required to fulfil the organisational role required to perform an organisational role occupied by that person. The burnout approach, that views engagement as the opposite of exhaustion or a burnout energy, involvement and efficiency are the key measures to see the level of engagement.

The next is Social Exchange Theory which is seen in Unal and Turgut (2015). This theory states that engagement is a behaviour exhibited by the employees in response to the social and economic benefit received from the organisation. Employee engagement has been defined in various ways and in today's time the relevance of employee engagement is high and thus is used intensively by many consultancy companies. The first organisation to do so was Gallup right after the development of their Q12 survey that measures employee engagement on 12 key questions. Gallup was also the first to coin the term employee engagement from the predominant work engagement that existed before. They caused a shift in looking at engagement from the job performance aspect to more intrinsic on the employee. The Gallup researches also said that employee engagement overlaps commitment and organisation citizenship behaviour and thus the reason for the possible interchanging of employee

engagement with commitment. Their definition of employee engagement is “Employee engagement is the involvement with and enthusiasm for work”. Another prominent definition for it is given by the development dimensions internationals which explains employee engagement as “the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do, and feel valued for doing it”. This definition is said to be closer to employee loyalty and job satisfaction. These definitions cover almost all the types of perspectives that exist in relation to employee engagement. The Gallup Q12 survey, the Utrecht Work Engagement survey and the Aon Hewitt employee engagement survey are the most popular instruments for measuring employee engagement

From the literature review it is seen that employee loyalty has always been measured as a form of commitment and perspectives of shared values and psychological contracts have not been looked into much. It is also seen that employee engagement has not been measured with the aspects of Hewitt's employee engagement scale in academic researches. It has been identified that while measuring the relationship of employee engagement with loyalty only affective commitment is commonly used and normative commitment is not taken into account. The gap is also seen when there is no clarity on tackling the negative impact of using non-standard workers can have on standard workers' loyalty. It can also be seen that the relationship studied was not conducted in India.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, the two variables under this study are employee engagement and employee loyalty. The earliest ever definition of employee engagement was provided by Kahn 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.” For this study employee engagement will be looked from the Socio-economic theory perspective and thus employee engagement is “a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance” Saks (2006).

Employee loyalty is however a little complex because there has not been a lot of research in this. There are

various perspectives to it like psychological contract Hart and Thompson (2007) and organization commitment Meyer and Allen (1997) and 15 other approaches. In this study loyalty will be looked as "... (a) behavior that can be tied to an implicit promise, voluntarily made by an individual operating in a community of interdependent others that adhere to unverbalizable moral principles in pursuit of individual and collective goals" Coughlan (2005) which is a moral value-based perspective and goes beyond classifying loyalty as organizational commitment and takes into consideration the normative commitment, attitudinal and applied loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is the "employee's feeling of loyalty toward co-workers and the moral principles of the group" and Applied loyalty is "The application of the moral principles in cases to common workplace dilemmas".

**METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in one unit of a well reputed South Indian hotel chain that also has one of the largest jewelry retail business in Southern India. A sample of 101 employees was collected from a total of 300 employees. The sampling method in this study is convenience sampling. The questionnaire contains in total 32 questions of which 14 questions are used to measure employee engagement and items for it were derived from Hewitt's engagement survey, Gallup Q12 survey and Pati (2012) engagement survey. Employee loyalty is measured with 12 questions of Coughlan (2005) scale. The responses were coded as 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree. Descriptive statistics, correlation, Linear regression, test of normality and one-way ANOVA were conducted. IBM SPSS Version 21 was used.

**HYPOTHESIS**

The hypothesizes of the study are,

H1: Employee engagement has a significant impact on employee loyalty

H2: There is a significant difference in employee engagement based on demography

H3: there is a significant difference in employee loyalty based on demography

**DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Demographic analysis of the data showed that the major participation has been from the food and beverage service department (22.8%) and followed by the food and beverage production (21.8%). Looking at the length of service most respondents have been working with GRT hotels for 1-3 years (36.6%). It is also seen that almost half of the respondents were at the staff level (48.5%). 77.2% of the participants were between the age of 20-35. 85% of the participants were male. Most participants surveyed had a Diploma/ITI degree (43.6%) as their highest level of education qualification. The overall mean value of the engagement scale is 4.25 which shows that the level of engagement is high among workers within the company and the standard deviation is 0.42 which is not big enough to cause a major difference in the mean value. The overall mean value for loyalty is 3.9 which is relatively less compared to the level of engagement. The standard deviation is at 0.45 which again is in a comfortable level to cause a lot of difference in the mean value.

The data collected was first tested for reliability. The Cronbach's alpha was used to carry out this test. For the employee engagement questionnaire, the value was  $\alpha = 0.845$  and the employee loyalty questionnaire had  $\alpha = 0.836$  both of which are high values and the data sets are termed to be valid

The first hypothesis was tested with the help of correlation and linear regression. The analysis revealed a correlation value of  $r = 0.733$  which was also significant at 99% levels. This helped to prove that there is a strong positive relationship between the variables.

		Employee Engagement	Employee Loyalty
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.773**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	101	101
Employee Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.773**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	101	101

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 – Correlation Analysis

Next a regression analysis was conducted and the results revealed an  $R^2$  value of 0.598 which means that 59.8% of the changes in employee loyalty is

predicted by the changes in the employee engagement. This value was also found to be significant from the ANOVA table for the regression which showed  $F(1,99) = 147.4$ ;  $P < 0.05$ . As the P value is less than 0.05 we say that the regression is significant. Based on the coefficients, the regression equation of  $Y = 0.83X + 0.45$  is established for this relationship. Thus, it can be said that the first hypothesis H1 is accepted as it has been proved that employee engagement has a significant impact on employee loyalty. It is also seen that this impact is strong and positive.

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 <sup>a</sup>	.598	.594	.28460

a. Predictors: (Constant), Average employee engagement score

Table 2 – Regression Model

The next hypothesis tests the difference in employee engagement based on demographic factors using ANOVA. The demographic factors measured are department, length of service, job level, age, gender and highest education qualification. The ANOVA results revealed that the department, and job level has significant difference in employee engagement within the groups and length of service, age, gender and highest education qualification had no significant difference in employee engagement between the group. Thus, we can partially reject the hypothesis H2.

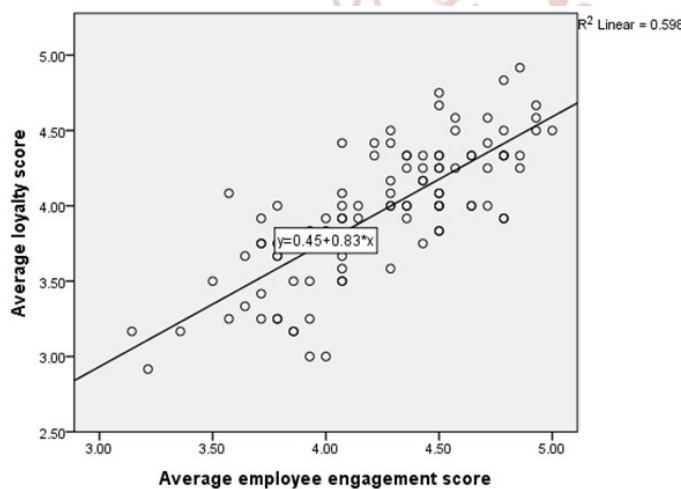


Figure 1 – Regression Graph

The Tukey table for highest education qualification revealed that there is a significant difference in

employee engagement between those with SSLC and Post graduate degree as their highest education qualification.

The next hypothesis also uses ANOVA. The employee loyalty scores are used to analyze to find if there is a significant difference in its value between its groups. The same demographic variables were used for this too. The ANOVA results showed that department, level of service and age have a significant difference in the employee loyalty scores between its groups. Length of service, gender and highest education qualifications do not have a significant difference in employee loyalty levels between its groups. Thus, we can partially reject the hypothesis H3.

The Tukey table revealed that there is a significant difference in loyalty levels in departments between Food safety with F&B production and F&B service.

## DISCUSSIONS

From the results arrived through the data analysis conducted we can say that they are consistent with that of the similar studies conducted in this relationship by Vokić and Hernaus (2015); Ibrahim and Falasi (2014); Preko and Adjetey (2013). Though the researches proved the same result it is to be noted that various research took in various perspectives of employee engagement and employee loyalty to measure and study the relationship. In Ibrahim and Falasi (2014) the study analysed loyalty as affective commitment and continuous commitment, but in this study, it is being looked at normative commitment, applied loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. The same difference can be highlighted in Vokić and Hernaus (2015). In all these similar studies different scales were also adopted to measure employee engagement. Ibrahim and Falasi used the Harter’s scale while Vokić and Hernaus preferred using a scale used by the US metric system protection board. This study however tried to encompass all the three main approaches of employee engagement within its scope and hence tried merging various item relevant from the Hewitt’s, Gallup’s Q12 and Pati’s engagement scale. This scale already has relevant item to measure engagement and a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85 proves that the scale is highly reliable and has internal consistency too. It is also seen that the results of this study contradict the observation made in Haar (2017) where it was found that the female employees are

more loyal than the male. But in this study, it is seen that there is no significant difference in level of loyalty between men and women.

It is observed that because of this difference in approaches the end result might have been same, but the degree or intensity of impact of the relationship might vary. Though the samples are totally different in every study it cannot be said for sure that the different approach caused the variance in the level of impact. In Vokić and Hernaus (2015) the correlation between employee engagement and employee loyalty is seen as  $r=0.53$ . But in the analysis conducted by this research it is seen that the correlation  $r=0.773$  which shows a stronger relationship compared to the other study. Thus, this study adds in more detail about the relationship between employee engagement and employee loyalty by taking in a different perspective for both the constructs and at the same time improve the credibility of the business's action of improving the employee engagement to improve loyalty among employees.

The study has revealed that the company can still improve on the employee engagement aspect. It is seen that the hotel does not use an annual appraisal for all the employees but only to a certain cadre of it. If not an annual appraisal, regular feedback sessions on the employee's job performance will make a big difference in improving the employees engagement levels and in turn loyalty. Ensuring person-job fit, skill enhancement activities, proper appraisal systems, enhanced induction program, data driven decision making, etc are all the best practices in engagement that can be applicable in the hotel to improve employee engagement levels. These with a supportive organization culture that resonates with the values, the loyalty levels of the hotel will also improve.

In order to answer the issue identified through Blake, Broschak and George (2003) of the impact of non-standard workers on employee loyalty and intent to exit, this study has shed some light on the issue and has provided some evidence as to how improving employee engagement could have a better impact on employee loyalty of standard workers. The regression analysis conducted in this study shows that employee engagement can cause a substantial amount of increase in the level of employee's loyalty and by also considering the normative commitment, the employee's feeling of obligation to remain with an organization, into picture the standard workers can be

made to feel obligated to the organization. And also applying the socio-economic theory approach of engagement it is observed to be a two-level obligation to stay with the company. Thus, it can be theoretically proved that improving employee engagement can prevent standard worker's loyalty levels and reduce the impact of the sub-standard worker's impact on their intention to remain with the organization. Though this is just theoretical linking of another study's results with this study, an empirical analysis on this same is recommended to be conducted for further research. By investing in engagement activities, it is observed in Rooney et al (2011) that it helps retain high performers during times of economic depression.

### LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study too. The results of this study are limited in applicability to employees at the surveyed hotel. It cannot be used to make an overall opinion of the organization because of its limit in scope. It is not assured that the same relationship will exist with any group of employees as there are a number of uncontrollable factors like culture, ethics, etc. that might have had an effect on this study. In short, the results cannot be universalized. The study represents samples from only 12 departments of the hotel property and few departments are not covered. There are also two departments, namely IT and Spa that had only one sample each, thus might have given a hazed picture during analysis. The study looks at loyalty as a form of shared values, with normative commitment, applied loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. The other approaches to loyalty or to engagement are not represented by the results of this study. Words like suspected unethical behavior and moral principals were tough to understand for a few respondents and thus were orally translated to Tamil.

### CONCLUSION

This study has tried to analyse the relationship between employee engagement and employee loyalty using empirical data from the hotel. The analysis has found that there is a strong impact of employee engagement on employee loyalty. By studying this relationship businesses can take proactive measures into tackling loyalty issues. As it has already been established that there is existence of a crisis related to high levels of attrition in the hospitality industry,

especially in the hotel industry. This study sheds light on how this issue of higher attrition can be controlled by improving the level of employee engagement activities, which in turn influences employee loyalty. A major part of this study measures employee loyalty with normative commitment, which is the feeling of obligation to remain with an organization. Though there are authors that say loyalty is a two-way process and cannot just be expected out of an employee, by instilling greater engagement among employees we can see that such a behaviour is already a behaviour of giving back to the organization, i.e, Socio-economic theory. Thus, by focusing on improving engagement the socio-economic theory might also imbibe the sense of loyalty among the employees.

Employee engagement and employee loyalty are a part of a bigger model of how employer practices might affect the business outcomes. From Vance's model we know that employer practices influence employee engagement and job performance and these two variables interact with each other. And it was also examined based on the literature review conducted that there exists a relationship between employee loyalty and job performance. We can also observe from other theories explained that job satisfaction is a product of the practices undertaken by an employer. And this job satisfaction is seen to have an influence over employee engagement and at times also an antecedent for the same. Vokić and Hernaus (2015) established that job satisfaction has an impact over employee loyalty with employee engagement playing a mediatory role in the relationship. Taking the Heskett's service profit chain model, we know that employee loyalty is also linked to job satisfaction, which is seen in Silvestro (2002). Loyalty of employees is also seen to influence customer satisfaction and in turn, the customer loyalty. In the end it is seen that both the models converge together again at the end result of business outcome, measured using higher profitability, higher revenue generation, better value created for shareholders, etc. All this study focuses on is the relationship between employee engagement and employee loyalty, which is a small connection in this large model of attaining highest level of business performance. Though links were made between the variable theoretically, it is important that a study encompassing all these variables into its scope, examines the inter-relationships existing among these variables and also shed light on various other hidden relationship between variables in this model. And in the end, create a clearer plan for

organization to identify issues in a better way and in turn help the Human Resource department take necessary action to provide key organization results that can be measured based on the activities conducted by the Human Resources Department. It is important that empirical data is used from the same organization for this study to declare that this model can be practically executable.

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