

STRATEGIES TO SATISFY, ENGAGE AND RETAIN EMPLOYEES DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

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Abstract: This study aims to enhance our understanding of strategies used to engage employees with relation to work overload during pandemic. Review of literature suggests that generally job satisfaction is negatively associated with job overload whereas it is positively associated with institutional, supervisor, emotional and coworker support but all these are almost missing at the times of covid. However, these workplace support variables and role overload are also independently associated with job satisfaction. Enhancing job satisfaction of employees during pandemic will likely require a multipronged approach. As coworker support and physical interaction is absent during pandemic times, so motivating and retaining employees is a farfetched solution.

Introduction: Job satisfaction describes how contented a person is with his or her job. The happiness of people with their job is positively associated with the level of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is not same as motivation; motivation is something that is forced by outside elements whereas satisfaction is something that comes from within, although both these elements are clearly linked. Another important element i.e. Job design also aims to influence job satisfaction and performance. Other influences on job satisfaction include management style, management culture, employee participation, empowerment and independent work position. Job satisfaction is frequently measured by organizations as it influences employee retention, employee absenteeism and employee involvement along with other important measures. The most common way of measuring Job Satisfaction is the use of rating scales where in employees register their reactions to various aspects related to their jobs. In order to measure Job Satisfaction, general questions relate to compensation rate, work roles and responsibilities, variety of assignments, promotional opportunities and attitude of co-workers. Measurement of job satisfaction was possible in a proper way when offices were working offline but now during online mode satisfying, engaging and retaining employees is a bit difficult for the employers. As almost everywhere, work from home and social distancing are being practiced indefinitely, maintaining and engaging staff will be a complex scenario for the stability of companies.

Various strategies adopted by companies to attract employees during pandemic

1. Speed up Hiring Process: Companies have to consider new methods for interviewing such as virtual interviews, virtual job fairs, and tech-enabled job tryouts as physical interviewing is not possible. Various online technology enabled modes such as Zoom, Google meet, WebEx, can be used to ease communication with candidates. Use of such methods can enable companies to access prospective candidates more quickly that enables hiring decisions to be made faster. Whereas the disadvantage of this speedy process is that it increases the risk of hiring the wrong candidates for the job and organization.

2. Use Creative Job Titles: Recruiters have to consider creative job titles that inspire and showcase impact/purpose – for example instead of HR Manager, companies can term it as “HR Power Ranger”. Such terminology can have a deep impact on the psychology of candidates and they seem more attractive also. Such creative job titles allow creative culture to shine and boost employee pride, while minimizing expenses. While naming the jobs, job description and the specifications must be clear otherwise it will be difficult to manage internal equity.

3. Offer Sign-on Bonuses: Certain jobs demand high performing candidates with lot of expertise and knowledge. In order to attract such talent during pandemic times, companies must provide some bonus. No doubt such practice may increase expenses of the companies, but this practice may be necessary if such talent is in high demand.

4. Utilize Third-Party Recruiters/Staffing Agencies: If possible, companies may engage a third-party recruiting/staffing agency to help source and/or hire high-demand jobs on a permanent or temporary basis. Such practice will help in spending less time, resources, and money on sourcing, screening, interviewing, and hiring procedures to allow more time for other necessary activities. This enables a company to move faster and with better hiring quality. Such practice can be used to hire on a temporary or needs basis (e.g., week-to-week or day-to-day) to keep costs down.

5. Temporarily Increase Base Pay for High Demand Service Roles: Companies may consider offering a temporary base pay increase for those roles that are performing essential duties and in high demand. Even though such practice may increase expenses; however, it may be less expensive than losing these employees. HR manager has to be sure to fairly determine which jobs get increase and to communicate that these are temporary increases. Negative impact of this practice is that it may decrease morale for employees not receiving temporary increase.

6. Connect with Businesses that have Laid Off Employees: Companies may partner with other local businesses to find permanent or temporary employment for laid off employees as such employees have experience as well as they are in need of jobs due to laying off. This benefits organizations as they can easily find talent and benefits the other by helping reduce unemployment.

Various strategies adopted by companies to retain employees during pandemic

1. Offer Flexible Work Hours/Schedules: Companies can consider offering staggered shifts or longer days to allow for an additional day off during the week. Such practice promotes employee retention as well as enables essential business operations to continue. However, it may require more management intervention to ensure all assignments/work is being covered.

2. Re-allocate Employees and/or Responsibilities to Balance Workload

Companies may assess essential duties for business operations and consider reallocating such duties across other employees/jobs. It helps to assess transferrable skills from employees performing nonessential work to assist in high demand work areas. This also mitigates the risk of employee burn out by having many share in the workload and doing multiple and essential jobs. This also positively affects business through continuance of essential business operations.

3. Temporarily Waive or Relax Attendance Policies: Companies may consider temporarily relaxing attendance occurrence policies, relieving employees who may need to be tardy or absent for situations beyond their control such as being sick or for taking care of the sick family members. It will provide support to employees who may be struggling to balance work and family needs. Such practice may also reduce the number of employee dismissals due to attendance resulting in less hiring. Some employees may however abuse such relaxed policy and demand rigidity.

4. Develop an inbuilt Donation Policy: Companies may also develop a policy which would enable employees to donate their earned paid time off hours/days to employees in need. Working on different jobs, the extra time of all employees is not equal due to variances in pay, which impacts accruals and payouts so keeping an account of such policy may be tedious for the companies. Companies must involve financial and legal counsel before making such changes to leave policies as it will create extra financial burden.

5. Offer Group insurance schemes to employees so that they can pay off hospital

bills: Companies must ensure having a group insurance scheme for all the employees and they must also include new ailments in the virtue of such policy covers. Companies must try to include covid in the claim policy so that they are not financially burdened.

6. Consider Compensation Policy for family members of deceased employees: Companies must consider lenient compensation policy for family members of deceased employees. This will create a sense of security to the existing employees also as they will be sure that if something will happen to them the company will take care of their family members.

Various strategies adopted by companies to motivate employees during pandemic

1. Temporarily Offer Premium Pay/Bonus for Extended Working Hours or Hazardous Conditions: Companies may consider offering premium pay for employees working extra or critical shifts or for those who are at greater risk of COVID-19 exposure. Some options could include per hour extra amount, a flat amount per shift or an overall bonus amount, varying for full-time and part-time employees. This provides recognition for employees that are necessary for continued business operations during this stressful time. No doubt this may increase expense but it may be administratively burdensome.

2. Provide Small Denomination Spot Bonuses for Extraordinary Work: Companies may also consider offering spot bonuses/gift cards for employees who have shown extraordinary work, effort, and/or are going above and beyond. This practice shows appreciation for work done above expectations, which increases employee motivation. It ensures clear communication as to why the spot bonus was awarded and how it was determined to promote fairness and reduce entitlement risk. It acts as a source of motivation and reduces mental stress.

3. Re-train or Cross-train Employees: Companies must train staff for new roles and/or responsibilities. As times have changed and everything is going digital or online so companies must consider free online training for employees to learn new skills that could help with current and future business operations. Such enhanced knowledge may develop employees to find greater meaning and impact in their ability to support the organization, which increases motivation. It also enables essential business operations to continue.

4. Recognize Employees: Recognizing the efforts of employees on a more frequent basis given the need now is higher than ever. Companies must consider peer-to-peer

recognition (e.g., point programs, virtual high-fives, etc.) in addition to awards and top-down recognition. They must continue to recognize birthdays and work anniversaries through virtual celebrations. This will help to decrease loneliness and isolation and results in higher productivity. This practice also keeps employees engaged and motivated.

5. Engage Team in Improving Business Operations: Companies may seek help of their employees for generating new ideas to enhance business in such testing times. They may consider brainstorming with and/or empower various teams to identify cost saving or revenue generation opportunities. Monetary benefits must be provided to the employees on a percentage basis for the amount saved. This practice gives employees greater purpose and connection with others, which increases employee morale. However this also requires time and potential investment to investigate and consider worthwhile ideas.

6. Feedback and Communication: Companies must maintain open lines of communication in order to describe practices that are important for retaining employees. Workers should feel free to come to higher authorities with concerns, questions, and ideas. Employees should also be able to expect managers to be open and honest regarding improvements that should be made in performance. Companies have to be sure to contact every staff member regularly. They must never let problems or issues build up until yearly review – this can lead to serious issues.

7. Transparent communication Policy: The information about any staff member getting a positive test result should be immediately communicated to the entire workforce. Companies must make sure to include preventative measures to ensure the safety of employees working offline.

Conclusion

These workplace support measures will definitely help to engage, retain and motivate employees and will create higher job satisfaction. No doubt such policies will create work overload to companies as well as employees in the new online era. But this will have a far reaching impact. The factors such as job security, reputation of the organization and bonus pay neutralizes the pressure created by work overload. There will be a time once the coronavirus scare reduces when businesses have to re-evaluate their entire process, but being organised now will put employees in a much better position to get back on top of processes once usual business is resumed.

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