Eurasian
Chemical
Communications

SAMI

Impact of COVID-19 on employees' engagement and burnout: The case of IT companies

Sadhna Sudershana[a] | **Ipseeta Satpathy** | **B.C.M. Patnaik**

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Employees' engagement or employees' commitment is the most sought-after skill in employees for yielding maximum productivity at the work front as well as being happy at the personal front. There are many factors that affect engagement levels such as work culture, job satisfaction, remuneration, etc. However, 2020 brought another new factor, i.e. the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the lives of people around the globe. This lockdown introduced new modes of work in the form of remote working conditions. Accordingly, Covid19 has had a huge effect on the motivation levels of people and thereby impacted productivity. The objective of this study is to map the impact of this pandemic on the engagement levels of the employees in information technology companies. This research has adopted a descriptive survey method and has used both primary and secondary data to deduce results. The findings of this study can help organizations to adopt new methods to keep their employees committed towards their work during periods of crisis such as Cornona pandemic.

*Corresponding Author:
Sadhna Sudershana
Email: sadhnafca@kiit.ac.in
Tel.: 9438566653

Introduction

The difference between the post and pre business set-up for different domains has been massive after the Covid19 impact. This pandemic has altered the business DNA for various sectors. The information technology (IT) domain is no exception in this case. For any business to succeed, the commitment of employees plays a vital role. Employees' engagement is a much-researched topic all across the world. The greatest challenge lies in a dearth of a general definition when we search through the literature. Kahn (1990) defined it as an indicator of physiological and psychological existence of executing an organizational role [1]. Job engagement can be rightly defined as a fulfilling and positive condition which has factors including vigor

and absorption of employees [2]. It has been observed that employees with job insecurities are more likely to be disengaged at work as they make less efforts to achieve organizational goals [3].

A) Engagement during lockdown: The biggest hurdle faced by companies on their path to productivity is to keep their taskforce motivated and engaged during these trying times of the lockdown phase. Although it is obvious that even before the lockdown, working conditions suffered due to technological modifications, economic turbulence and political insecurities make the engagement scenario unstable [4]. Organizations face job insecurities for two reasons [5]: Firstly, it is caused due to lay-offs, merging and down-sizing and secondly, due to stressors being interpreted in a similar

fashion by different work units. Different organizations have conducted various activities to increase employee involvement such as:

i) Employees of Ritz Carlton (Marriot International Group) performed songs and uploaded videos along with motivational messages.

ii) Workers of GENPACT arranged virtual potluck, home tours and 'chat at coffee' sessions.

iii) HYUNDAI MOTORS INDIA LTD. is giving regular online challenges to keep their employees motivated.

iv) Some other companies arranged online fitness programs and music concerts for their employees.

B) Mental health of employees During Lockdown: This lockdown took a toll on the mental well-being of people. Maintaining sanity during the pandemic is a major impediment in everyone's life. In these difficult times, keeping oneself motivated is the biggest challenge. There has been a plethora of reactions to this, while some organizations have sacked employees for better financial security, others have retained their reputation by keeping their employees charged and motivated with bonuses, positive speeches, training sessions etc. Nevertheless, what is more important is that insecurities with respect to the job is highly stressful [6, 7]. This has a negative relationship with elements related to job attitude and the psychological well-being of employees [8, 9, 10]. Many people become severely stressed due to loss of motivation, panic, health issues of loved ones, insensitive work culture, rigid management rules etc. 2020 taught us lessons of maintaining positive well-being for ourselves as well as others.

Research gap

The outbreak of Covid19 has adversely the regular lifestyles of people. Different developed as well as developing nations around the globe are trying to fight this out using different strategies. Due to these extreme conditions work from home has become the new normal.

The research problem that arises here is to understand the effect of the Corona virus pandemic on the mental make-up of the employees and how they are coping up with the new work set-up.

Research objective

i) *Primary Objective:* To study the impact of Covid19 on the engagement levels of employees in the IT domain.

ii) *Secondary Objective*: To evaluate the drivers of disengagement during 'Work from home' in the lockdown phase.

Review of literature

The word engagement has been widely researched since past years. The workers who are engaged are more productive and happier compared with other employees. Many research studies have been conducted to deal with the various factors affecting engagement as well as the manifold variables of engagement.

Kahn (1990) has defined 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" [1]. Thus, employee commitment talks about the passion of employees that pushes them to take an extra mile for the organization.

Rothbard (2001) defined engagement as the psychological presence of employees at work, involving 2 major components: Attention and absorption [11]. Attention is the focus and time investment in the work for maximizing productivity. Absorption describes the involvement and concentration that an individual invests to achieve efficiency and the highest possible output.

Whenever anyone runs a business, the vision is maximizing profits, creating a brand value, accomplishing complete customer satisfaction as well as growth. This is not possible unless the company keeps its employees happy by engaging them actively.

Maslach et al. (2001) has outlined six areas of work-life, leading to either burnout or engagement. These are workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, fairness or unbiased culture and value system [12]. To declare an employee as happy or unhappy all the above factors play a major role. For an individual to be satisfied at work and remain committed the job profile, freedom at work, rewards, recognition, fairness and justice and work ethics and values really matter.

Holbeche and Springett (2003) noted that the perceptions and ideas of people with respect to their workplace are clearly connected to their levels of engagement and their performance [13]. The happy and satisfied employees generally provide a good feedback about their organization. The loyalty index of these workers is also higher than that of other employees.

According to Buckingham and Coffman (2005), remuneration and benefits are equally important to every employee, whether engaged or disengaged [14]. A company's payment should be comparable to the market average. Salary inequities lead to disengagement in many cases. Hence, organizations must always ponder on these gaps and try to fill them up so that they create a strong and committed workforce.

Saks (2006) discussed that the only way in which people repay to their organization is through their levels of engagement [15]. From this statement, it can be inferred that employees choose to engage themselves to varying degrees in response to the resources they receive from their organization. This means that employee engagement is a two-way process dependent upon how well the worker or staff is taken care of by the organization.

According to Pech and Slade (2006), elements like globalization, speed, and ambiguity in the business scenario demand the highest levels of engagement, efficiency and fitness which facilitate organizational survival [16]. In a volatile environment like this, those with the right combination of output, trust, innovation and leadership have the greatest chances of survival.

Mone and London (2010) defined engagement as a state in which employees feel involved in their work. They are committed, passionate, and empowered and reflect these attributes in their work behavior [17].

A host of other research studies have discussed many other facets of engagement in different sectors and verticals. If a company wishes to succeed in terms of maximization of wealth and brand building, then it needs to keep its workforce as engaged as possible.

Methodology

The present inquiry used a quantitative research method. It was in fact exploratory in terms of its design.

Data Collection Method: The survey was conducted through questionnaires. Questionnaires were given to the respondents to be filled up. The questions were of both open and closed types. For our study, the questionnaire consisted of 19 questions, out of which 8 questions (Table 1) were selected as per the objective. These questions were assigned codes from D1 to D8 to ease the analysis and interpretation process.

Sample Size: 108 employees participated in the study. They were working in the IT Sector.
Data Analysis: SPSS and MS Excel were used

TABLE 1 The list of questions chosen for the study with their IDs

S. No	Questions	ID
1	My organization acted to the best of my interests during the lockdown.	D1
2	I feel that shifting to remote working conditions has been effective during the pandemic.	D2
3	Working remotely makes me feel safer than when I was working on the office premises.	D3
4	I felt emotionally exhausted at times due to work stress during the pandemic.	D4
5	I am more productive in the work from home setup rather than the regular work environment.	D5
6	I fear me or my family catching COVID19 in the current scenario.	D6
7	I enhanced my skills during the pandemic.	D7
8	The work from home setup enhanced the happiness quotient of my family.	D8

Results and discussion

An analysis was done on the responses received from 108 employees working in the IT Sector. The objective of the study was to find out the impact of the pandemic on employee engagement of employees working in the IT sector. The questionnaire contained various questions on the work engagement, job satisfaction, motivation, organizational support, mental health etc. Based on these responses of the 108-sample size, an analysis was made and interpretations were drawn. Interpretations were made rationally, and care was taken to draw a valid and approvable interpretation.

The analysis and interpretation was done keeping in mind a number of pertinent questions asked in the questionnaire relating to work experience, work stress, remote work conditions, anxiety management, employer – employee connect and many more.

TABLE 2 Results of the statistical analysis of the Likert scale data

Statistics	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
D1	4.03	4.00	1.12	0.11
D2	3.89	4.00	1.13	0.11
D3	3.75	4.00	1.04	0.10
D4	3.47	4.00	1.24	0.12
D5	3.11	3.00	0.74	0.07
D6	3.83	4.00	0.87	0.08
D7	3.92	4.00	0.80	0.08
D8	4.08	4.00	0.76	0.07

From Table 2, it is clearly shown that for D5 the median value is 3, which shows that there is mixed response to the question regarding choice between work from home set-up or office set-up for better productivity.

The employees were not sure whether productivity was better from home or office. Some felt that they were more productive in the work from home set up while others felt they performed better when at office. For all other questions the employees mostly agreed with them.

Based on Figure 1, the highest agreement is in D8, 63.95%, thereby showing that 'work from home' could increase the happiness quotient of the employees. In D5, it is mixed

reactions to the question relating to productivity rate from home or office. In almost all the questions the employees represented their agreement.

In Figure 2, the scope of responses varied between strongly agree to strongly disagree and it is observed almost almost all the employees agreed or fell in the zone of neither agree nor disagree.

Conclusion

i) From the results, it is evident that both of the main hypotheses are accepted and the null hypotheses is rejected, clearly stating that the Corona pandemic has had an impact on employee engagement.

ii) It is also obvious that the happiness index of employees increased due to remote working conditions.

iii) The employees felt safer to work from home during the lockdown

iv) The IT organizations were able to enhance engagement of employees by keeping them motivated and driven through various innovative ways.

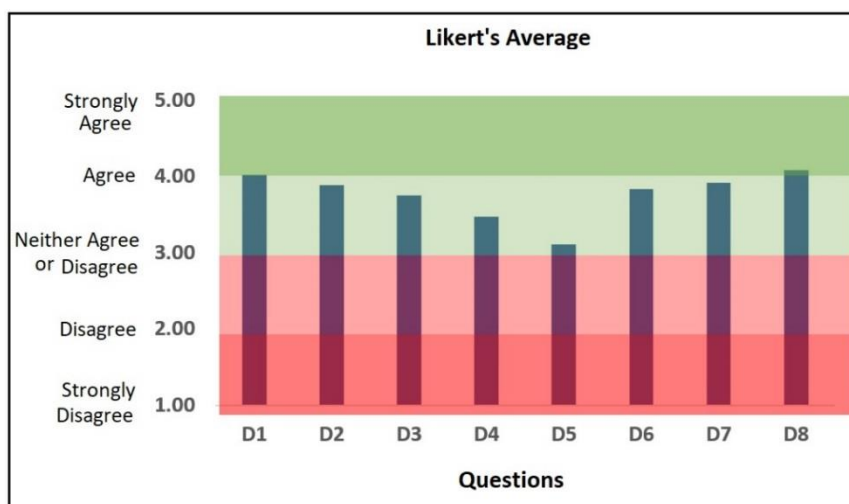v) Productivity levels were maintained during the lockdown.

vi) At times frustration and work stress were prevalent, but organizations could remain connected with their employees.

In sum, this research study made an effort to map the effect of this pandemic on the commitment level of IT employees. It is expected to help organizations in devising new techniques to engage its employees. Therefore, employee retention can be done and productivity shall also increase. The employer-employee relations will thereby be sealed with goodwill and trust.
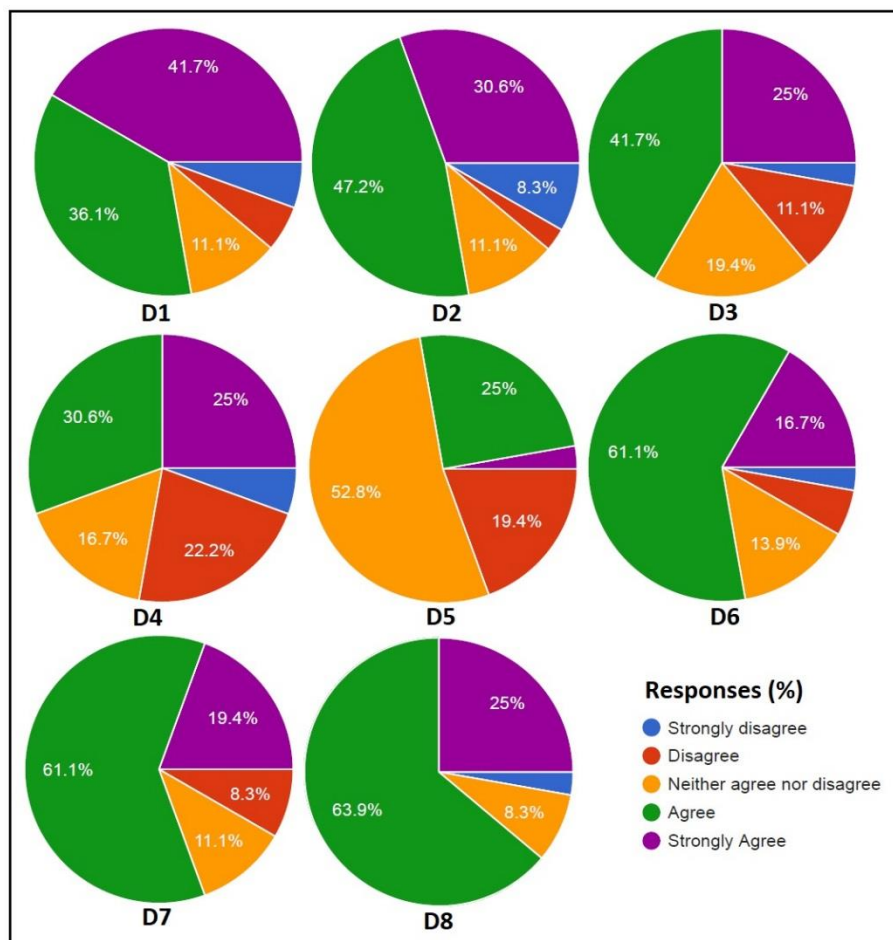
FIGURE 1 Likert's scale response in percentages

FIGURE 2 The average of the Likert's scale for questions D1 to D8

Orcid:

Sadhna Sudershana:
https://www.orcid.org/0000-0003-0502-9411
Ipseeta Satpathy: *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0155-5548*
B. C. M. Patnaik: *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5979-0989*

References

[1] W.A. Kahn, Handbook of employee engagement: Perspectives, issues, research and practice, *Edward Elgar Publishing*, **2010**.

[2] W.B. Schaufeli, I.M. Martinez, A.M. Pinto, M. Salanova, A.B. Bakker, *J. Cross-Cult. Psychol.*, **2002**, *33*, 464-481.

[3] L. Greenhalgh, Z.Rosenblatt, *Acad. Manage. Rev.*, **1984**, *9*, 438-448.

[4] B. Etehadi, O.M. Karatepe, *J. Hosp. Mark. Manag.*, **2019** *28*, 665-689.

[5] S. Mauno, N. De Cuyper, A. Tolvanen, U. Kinnunen, A. Mäkikangas, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, **2014**, *23*, 381-393.

[6] P.J. Jordan, N.M. Ashkanasy, C.E. Hartel, *Acad. Manage. Rev.,* **2002**, *27*, 361-372.

[7] R. Gaunt, O. Benjamin, *Community, Work and Family*, **2007**, *10*, 341-355.

[8] K.D. László, H. Pikhart, M.S. Kopp, M. Bobak, A. Pajak, S. Malyutina, G. Salavecz, M. Marmot, *Soc. Sci. Med.*, **2010** *70*, 867-874.

[9] H. De Witte, T. Vander Elst, N. De Cuyper, *Sustainable Working Lives*, **2015**, 109-128.

[10] Q. Tian, L. Zhang, W. Zou, *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.*, **2014**, *40*, 29-36.

[11] P.N. Rothbard, *Adm. Sci. Q.*, **2001**, *46*, 655-684.

[12] C. Maslach, B.S.Wilmar, L.P. Michael, *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, **2001**, *52*, 397-422.

[13] L.L Holbeche, N. Springett, *In Search of Meaning in the Workplace*, Roffey Park Institute Limited, **2003**.

[14] M. Buckingham, C. Coffman, *First, break all the rules*, Pocket Books, London, **2005**.

[15] A.M. Saks, *Manag. Psychol.*, **2006**, *21*, 600-619.

[16] R. Pech, S. Bret, *Handbook of Business Strategy*, **2006**, *7*, 21-25.

[17] E. M. Mone, M. London, *Employee Engagement Through effective performance: A practical guide for managers*, 2nd Edition, Routledge (NY), **2010**.