Research Article

A study on Employee Engagement during Covid-19 in IT and Finance Sector

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the various online engagement activities being conducted in the IT and Finance sector and how were the engagement levels of employees during COVID

Design/methodology/approach – 102 employees were surveyed of the IT and Finance sector who were working during the covid -19 pandemic in India through Google Forms. The data was also collected from secondary sources like newspaper articles, websites, etc. to further support our findings.

Findings – By drawing on the concepts of various employee engagement activities taken place during online working were made predicting that the alignment of the various activities done by the organizations to engage the employees will be leveraged in the present as well as the future to enhance the engagement and will help the organization to improve the Job Satisfaction, Job Involvement, Job Commitment of the employees along with building the Organizational Citizenship behavior within the employees.

1. Introduction

1.1| Work from home

Work that is performed remotely, rather than by employees commuting to a central office, is referred to as work from home, remote work, work from anywhere, telework, remote job, mobile employment, or distance work. For convenience, the notion is abbreviated as "WFH." Since many people are considering working from home, the office is no longer the sole place to do work. For millions of workers worldwide, working from home has been the new norm since the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, many employees and businesses were forced to abruptly and unpreparedly transition to remote work.

After everyone settled in, what quickly became apparent to many office-based teams is that employees could be productive and focused when not in the office—in many cases, even more so. Employers everywhere began to understand that remote work really works and can be adapted even after the pandemic to take advantage of the many benefits it has. The big question was that there are many advantages to working remotely, but are the employees engaged?

1.2| Employee Engagement

The current business landscape is changing as a result of the global COVID-19 outbreak. HR managers are always coming up with innovative and effective strategies to engage the staff during this difficult period. Employee engagement is a way of thinking about the workplace that motivates all employees to continually give their all in support of the goals and fundamental principles of the firm. Organizations typically take into account the fact that motivated employees boost workplace morale, which in turn raises customer satisfaction and always results in higher sales and profitability for the company. Employee engagement can act as a catalyst for changing employees' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in order to boost job output (Andrew &

Sofian, 2012; Saks, 2006). Andrew and Saudah (2012) concluded that employee engagement can be utilized as a mediator to enhance the behavior, intention, and attitudes of employees toward a better work performance.

Employee engagement helps the business achieve its goals, carry out its plan, and produce meaningful financial returns. Different HR methods, including job design, recruitment, selection, compensation, training, and performance management, can increase employee engagement (Vance, 2006). An engaged employee is focused on their work and the success of the firm, and they constantly want to believe that their tenacity and diligence could make a difference. Engaged workers are more productive at work, which results in increased customer satisfaction, a rise in sales, and an increase in the organizations' profits.

A characteristic of a company's relationship with its employees is described as employee engagement. In other terms, employee engagement refers to employees' cognitive and affective involvement in the business. Additionally, the link that exists between employees and their employment is precisely described by the term "employee engagement." Employee and organizational efficiency will increase as a result of more employee engagement, which will also minimize absenteeism, injuries, and attrition.

Employee engagement is linked to concrete indicators of an organization's efficacy, including effectiveness, success, quality, customer satisfaction, benefit, and development (Moetaz Soubjaki, 2011). The findings of Garg, Dar, and Mishra (2017) showed a correlation between job satisfaction and work engagement that is favorable. Further investigation revealed that employee engagement is a direct result of work satisfaction. Employees who are actively engaged are consistently upbeat, maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and perform at a high level for the company (Jena, Pradhan, & Panigrahy, 2018). According to Tiwari and Lenka

(2019), the level of engagement among employees is increased by functional, financial, and psychological rewards. The findings show that employee engagement was positively correlated with internal corporate communication, perceived communication satisfaction, knowledge sharing, continual learning, and intrapreneurship. This paper found that if organizations invested in their human resources and building complete human resource management (HRM) system in their organization, it produces engaged personnel, and, in return, organizations improve their performance (Tensay & Singh, 2020).

Employees who are engaged are enthusiastic and full of energy. In addition, they are frequently preoccupied with work, and time is limited. Employee engagement is one of the key characteristics that has a significant impact on organizational performance, according to leaders and managers around the world. Beyond the traditional notions of involvement, organizational commitment, and work happiness, employee engagement continues to drive business success. Utilizing one's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral resources while working toward the organization's objectives and tactics constitutes the engagement (Tanveer Ahmed, 2020).

Employee engagement is described as one of the crucial issues that each association attempts to maintain among its employees and to make sure that workers give their jobs their all in Adhitama and Riyanto's (2020) definition. On the other hand, according to Baumruk (2004), Shaw (2005), and Frank et al. (2004), employee engagement is typically defined as employees' level of voluntary effort in their work or their enthusiastic and intellectual commitment to the organization.

1.3 | Disengagement

The signs of disengagement, which include slow working pace, lack of interest in work, being easily and repeatedly distracted, and minimal production, are frequently used to describe it (Pech& Slade, 2006). Employees that are disengaged frequently have unfavorable attitudes regarding their jobs and employers. It has been demonstrated that these unfavorable sentiments have a negative impact on organizational success and productivity. As was stated at the outset of this research, organizational managers and leaders must act promptly to pinpoint the underlying variables that cause disengagement. The following is a list of the three main elements cited by Rastogi et al. in 2018:

1. Lack of Job Resources refers to the absence of the many elements of a job that support the work experience, encourage growth and development, or directly assist with job duties.
2. Lack of job control refers to an employee's inability to decide on their own work (i.e. the path or approach taken toward task completion). Employees with less job control tend to be less independent and determined.
3. Lack of Job Complexity: When duties are assigned, there isn't much innovation, complexity, or challenge. Work that is monotonous and repetitive immediately affects how engaged employees are.

1.4 Research Gap

There were various articles that were looked at to see what their future scope was and tried to implement that in our research paper. (Meenakshi and Neha, 2020) said in their paper that it would be better to combine primary data along with secondary data to enhance the study and understand the current scenario.(Aileen, Nina, Janna, Leonard, Angeline, April, Jhoselle, 2021) and (Moetaz, 2021) also mentioned in their research paper that future researchers should use primary data along with secondary data. They also suggested expanding research in other sectors to improve results and accuracy. (Juliet Shambhi, 2021) also suggested the same as above. Furthermore,(Nisha and Sangeeta, 2020) suggested that it is vital to identify the different factors that affect employee engagement and what activities are being carried out. Lastly, (Andriyastuti, SuhartiniI, Majang, Fereshti, Muhammad, 2021) suggested that future studies should examine the effect of existing variables by focusing on specific institutions.

The research is an attempt to bridge the gap by combining primary data by conducting a survey and secondary data by taking relevant data from various sources such as different articles, news, research papers etc. Furthermore, the research survey identified different variables that would affect Employee engagement such as Job satisfaction, Job involvement, OCB and Job commitment. Also, the research was focused on specific sectors such as IT and Finance with existing variables.

1.5 | Research Objectives –

1. To identify the employee engagement activities in IT and Finance sectors during COVID-19
2. To analyzethe difference in the level of employee engagement brought about by engagement activities conducted by IT and Finance sectors.

2 | Hypothesis:

To understand the engagement level and if the activities that were performed in the organization impacted employees during the online working mode the following hypothesis were taken into account -

a. H(a) - The level of job involvement of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

b. H(b) - The level of organizational citizen behavior of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

c. H(c)- The level of job satisfaction of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

d. H(d) - The level of job commitment of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

3| Study

3.1| Participants and Procedures

The survey collected data from 102 employees of the IT and Finance sector who were working during the covid -19 pandemic in India through Google Forms. The employees across various companies provided an overall idea of the employment engagement environment that different companies are providing in both sectors. Integrating both positive and negative work-from-home engagement activity processes developed how to make the employees feel a part of the organization and bring about a sense of belonging as well as a sense of security during the hours of uncertainty.

The uncertainty in the world due to covid-19 had brought about various levels of anxiety and stress in the lives of many. People were not only struggling to provide for themselves and their families but what could have been done as a society. Moreover, it was the organization that had to boost the morale of the employees and keep them engaged while working to be able to survive in the competition and to keep the business upfloat. The task of Human Resource Managers had become very important and challenging to know and understand how to bring about the required changes. A total of 102 participants completed the survey, among them 58.7% were male respondents and 40.4% were female respondents. The demographics were that out of all the respondents the majority of participants were of the age bracket of 26-30 years.

3.2 | Measures

Surveys were administered in English, as PAN India the people are well versed with English Language and it is one of the official languages of India, moreover in both sectors i.e., IT and Finance Sector the English Language is prevalent in the corporate sector. Unless otherwise noted, our variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale wherein 1- Strongly Disagree, 5-Strongly Agree).

Further, before testing the hypotheses, a reliability test was done to test using the SPSS tool for the entire data as well as variable wise as it was necessary to check how reliable the data was. In the reliability analysis, the indicator system yielded an overall Cronbach's value of 0.930, Job Satisfaction variable reliability of 0.782, OCB variable Cronbach's a value of 0.867, Job Satisfaction variable Cronbach's value of 0.803, and a Job Commitment variable Cronbach's a value of 0.833 as shown in table 1

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.930	18

3.3 | Virtual Working

The research assessed the employee engagement level during the remote and virtual mode of working during the sudden shift to work from home post the spread of COVID-19. The employees of Finance and IT were asked for their experience while being in an uncertain situation of working conditions and virtually online. It was important to observe the level of involvement and the impact of the same on the employees. Since the employee engagement would not only boost the morale but also help in controlling the attrition rate of the employees in the organization. The following variables were further taken into consideration-

3.3.1 | Job involvement

The research focused on understanding the activities and their impact on the employee's involvement in their organization. The employees were asked to answer the questions like "I willingly participated in all the activities that took place" i.e., all the virtual activities that were done during the time of Virtual working mode. They answered the question using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 - Strongly disagree.

In a research paper, job involvement was said to "represents a type of attitude toward work and is usually defined as the degree to which one identifies psychologically with one's work, i.e., how much importance one places on their work." (Jelena,Milan, Slavica, Dubravko, 2018).

3.3.2 | Job Commitment

Job Commitment is the psychological attachment of an employee to the organization.

The research tried measuring the positive impact of a person's commitment to the job which he is working at in the organization by saying "Post these activities, I relate to and enjoy the company's culture. They answered the question using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 - Strongly disagree.

3.3.3 | Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) refers to the behaviors of individuals that promote effectiveness in organizational functioning. OCB accomplishes this effectiveness by providing a positive social and psychological environment in which task work can flourish along with the employee. The same was understood to gain knowledge and find out whether the activities that were done for employee engagement brought an impact and improvement in the OCB behavior of the employees or not. The same was noted by the question like "After the online engagement activities, I feel proud to work for Company".They answered the question using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 - Strongly disagree.

3.3.4 | Job satisfaction

For any employee it is important to be satisfied with the work and the working environment of the organization to give their hundred percent and

work efficiently for themselves and the growth of the organization as a whole. Job satisfaction has become one of the vital elements of any employee engagement activity. The research measured the satisfaction level by questions like "The employee engagement activities helped me feel satisfied with the development of my work during COVID-19". They answered the question using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 - Strongly disagree.

4| Results

4.1 | Analysis

Table 2: Demographic Analysis

Sl No.	Demographics	Categories	Percentage
1	Gender	Male Female Prefer not to say	58.6% 40.4% 1%
2	Age	20-25 26-30 31-35 Above 40	30.8% 46.2% 19.2% 1.9%

The survey carried had 102 responses where 61 Respondents were Males which is about 58.7% of the sample size, 42 of them were females which is about 40.4% of the sample size and 1 person preferred not to say which is about 0.9% of the sample size.

Furthermore, in the survey carried out, out of the 102 responses 46.2% are from the age group 26-30, 30.8% are from the age group 20-25, 19.2% are from the age group 31-35 and 1.9% from each age group i.e., 36-40 and above 40 years.

Employee engagement activities in IT and Finance sectors during COVID-19

To understand what all activities have been part of the Online Work Model in IT and Finance Sectors, some of the working professionals were reached out to and interviewed on what were the online activities they remember which their organization conducted during the COVID times.

Out of the list of the activities 11 activities were chosen i.e., Virtual Lunch dates with the team, Fashion Shows, Online Games, Courses made available by the company, treasure hunt, Singing competitions, Town Halls, Yoga and health related activities, Concerts, Festival Celebrations and Others.

When participants were asked which activities, they were a part of, 57.6% answered that they were a part of Online Gaming, 47.8% said that they were also part of Town Halls that were conducted in their organizations.

Further, the research went ahead to understand which of the activities that were listed by the survey was best preferred by participants based on their participation in the said activities. By the information collected it was understood that Online Games were the most popular and liked by the participants followed by Online Courses that were made available by the company.

Table 3 :list of activities based on preferences of the participants

	Virtual Lunch Date	Fashion Shows	Online Games	Courses made available by Company	Treasure Hunt	Singing Competition	Town Halls	Yoga and Health Activities	Concerts	Festival Celebration	Others
IT	17	1	19	16	3	3	7	11	3	6	5
Finance	3	2	9	7	7	2	6	9	2	6	5
Total	20	3	28	23	10	5	13	20	5	12	10

This gave an understanding that the employees were largely engaged in various activities and were liking Online Games played during their online activities. The second preferred activity was Courses that were offered by the company and it was followed by Virtual Lunch Date with Team members and yoga and health activities.

Then, further the research tried to find out the mean of the overall data that was noted as - 2.479. Further the sector wise mean value obtained was 2.488 for the IT sector and the mean value obtained for the Finance sector was 2.467.

Table 4: Mean of Sectors

Sector	Mean
IT	2.488
Finance	2.467
Both Sectors	2.479

By looking at the mean values individually as well as overall, it was understood that both the sectors and not entirely engaged in the activities. Both the sectors have moderate mean values and do not show a high employee engagement.

To understand the trend better the research further moved to the data set and tried to understand the significance of the data set with the help of T-test and to further be able to understand the significance difference between the two sectors and it was statistically proven that there is no significant difference between the two sectors.

Table 5. Job Involvement in IT and Finance sectors.

	IT Sector			Finance Sector			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Number	Mean	SD	Number	Mean	SD			
Underproductive and the time investment	65	3.77	1.042	37	3.92	.954	-1.019	80.981	.311
Part of the community or the organization	65	3.91	.964	37	3.81	1.050	.478	66.513	.102
Willingness to participate	65	3.58	.950	37	3.46	1.095	.640	63.602	.524
Team building/ Cohesiveness activities	65	3.75	.969	37	3.89	1.125	-.728	63.501	.469

Independent Sample T-Test

H(a)- The level of job involvement of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

For the Variable *Job Involvement*, the statistical values were taken and it was understood the significance difference for the questions to understand the employee engagement through Job Involvement in both sectors. It was found that there is no significant difference between the two sectors to see the difference in Job Involvement, i.e., the significance (P value) for the (2-tailed) test was not below 0.05. Same can be seen in the table 5. Thus, rejecting the (a) alternative hypothesis.

Table 6. Organizational Citizenship Behavior in IT and Finance Sector

	IT Sector			Finance Sector			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Number	Mean	SD	Number	Mean	SD			
Feel proud to work for (company)	65	3.52	.752	37	3.65	.889	-.816	62.545	.417
Great place to work	65	3.63	.894	37	3.65	.919	-.189	70.233	.851
Employee Value	65	3.57	.790	37	3.78	.917	-1.298	63.606	.199

Independent Sample T-Test

H(b)- The level of organizational citizen behavior of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

We followed the trail to further understand the *Organizational Citizenship Behavior* enhancement of the employees in the sector. We aimed at the three questions we asked to evaluate the OCB in the employees. The statistical values showed that there was no significant difference and none of the P- values were not below 0.05 as can be seen from the table 6. Thus, rejecting the (b) alternative hypothesis.

Table 7. Job Satisfaction in IT and Finance Sector

	Independent Sample T-Test								
	IT Sector			Finance Sector			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Number	Mean	SD	Number	Mean	SD			
Improved Efficiency	65	3.32	.886	37	3.27	1.045	-.086	63.345	.932
Recognition of my suggestions	65	3.35	.909	37	3.70	.845	-2.259	79.945	.027
Satisfied with the development	65	3.38	.860	37	3.81	.811	-2.424	75.235	.018
Work Routine was maintained	65	3.63	1.039	37	3.43	1.094	.952	68.676	.344
Work-Life Balance	65	3.09	1.057	37	2.97	.957	.717	78.780	.475
Employee orientation activities	65	3.37	.928	37	3.54	1.016	-.768	66.357	.445

H(c) - The level of job satisfaction of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organisations differ between IT and Finance sector

For the third variable, the research was focused to know whether the pattern is the same or different, whether there is a significant difference for *Job Satisfaction* level among employees in both sectors or not. For the same the research tried taking the variable and understanding the difference from the questions that were asked in the survey. The same trend was seen i.e., no significant difference was found between the two sectors i.e., P- Value was found to be above 0.05, as shown in table 7 Thus, rejecting the (c) alternative hypothesis.

Table 8. Job Commitment in IT and Finance Sector

	Independent Sample T-Test								
	IT Sector			Finance Sector			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Number	Mean	SD	Number	Mean	SD			
Suggestions to the Management	65	3.35	.975	37	3.43	.867	-.478	79.107	.634
Feel active part of the organization	65	3.42	.934	37	3.46	1.095	-.133	62.688	.894
Open communication with Manager	65	3.38	.963	37	3.59	.798	-1.459	89.096	.148
Open communication with Team and Other Departments	65	3.34	1.004	37	3.54	1.120	-.960	65.350	.341
Company Culture	65	3.49	.937	37	3.51	.932	-.039	72.126	.969

H (d) - The level of job commitment of the employees due to engagement activities conducted by the organizations differ between IT and Finance sector

The last variable that was wanted to understand whether it has any significance difference or not is *Job Commitment* of the employee as a part of employee engagement procedure. The same was taken up by the 2-tailed T test, thus it was again found that there is no significant difference between the two sectors for this variable, i.e.,the P- value is not below 0.05 thus it would reject the (d) null hypothesis as mentioned earlier.

5| Findings and Discussion

Thisresearch was set to find out about the employee engagement activities during COVID-19 that were done by various organizations in the IT and Finance Sector. To understand the effectiveness of the employee engagement activities used in each sector that helped enhance the Job Involvement, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Job Satisfaction andOrganizational commitment among the employees. It was found out that the organizations were not successful in engaging the employees and enhancing the above-mentioned variables. It showed that the activities only made the employees engaged in a mediocre manner and the employees did not feel the activities were engaging as the organization planned them or set out to be for the betterment of the employees. The research found that the employment engagement activities were shown to be less effective and did not show results as planned by the organization.
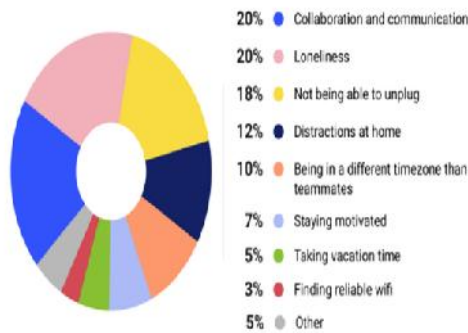
Moreover, there was no set pattern that could be drawn from the data collected. Since there was no pattern with the primary data collected, the research looked for some secondary data which would help to understand the responses and the pattern.

Researchers found that the Employee Engagement is not showing any significance difference or has mean values to the middle i.e., showing less engagement, according to the secondary research it is believed that following are the reasons for the less engagement amongst employees -

Firstly, as COVID -19 pandemic was a sudden change for all the companies, managers did not know how to adapt to this big change overnight. In one night, everything went digital, suddenly people could not step out, production was stopped, etc. So, in this situation it was really difficult for HR managers to think out of the box and adapt to these drastic changes. Therefore, it was not possible for the companies to come up with activities specifically suited for the employees to feel motivated and engaged. In the survey that was conducted, it was found that both the finance and IT sector conducted the same kind of activities which were very generic and not customized to the sector. This led to lower levels of engagement in both the sectors or similar kinds of engagement in both the sectors.

Secondly, during the second wave of the pandemic which was during the period of March 2021 to August 2021 which was much more devastating than the first wave of the pandemic was when companies in all the sectors actually started initiating and introducing the employee engagement activities to engage and motivate the employees in a better way. According to the data found on worldometer, covid cases were averaging to about 200,000 per day. This meant that almost every household in India had a death or someone who was hospitalized or was in a very critical health state. In this situation of constant worry and fear of losing their dear ones it was impossible for any company to effectively engage their employees in work as people were not in the right mindset to even work so thinking about engaging them through other activities was very far-fetched. During this period of time, people just wanted to finish their work and be with their close ones, instead of engaging in these fun activities or employee engagement activities that companies were hosting after work timings or even during work timings. This led to lower level of engagement during the second wave of covid- 19 pandemic even though engagement activities were being carried out

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What's your biggest struggle with working remotely?

- 20% Collaboration and communication
- 20% Loneliness
- 18% Not being able to unplug
- 12% Distractions at home
- 10% Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 7% Staying motivated
- 5% Taking vacation time
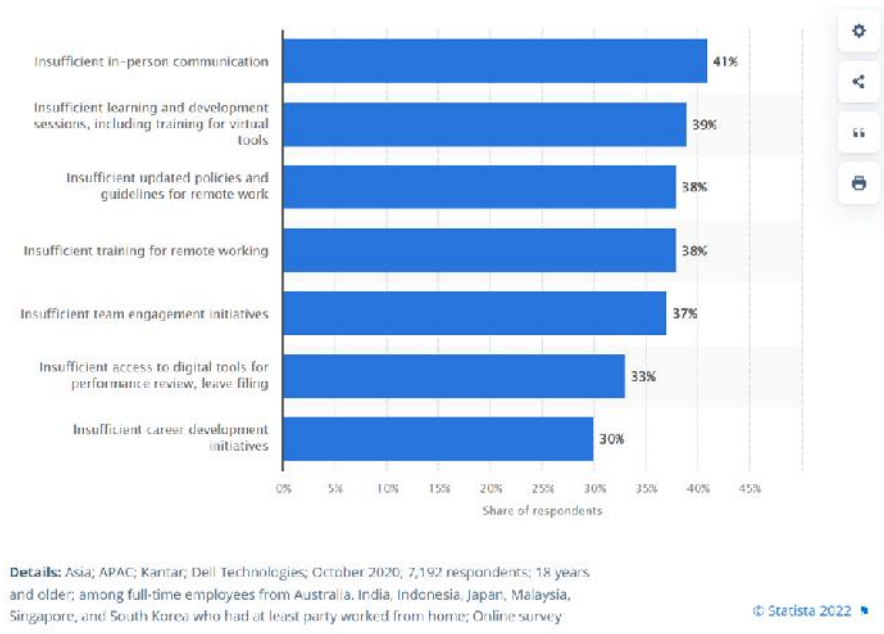- 3% Finding reliable wifi
- 5% Other

State of Remote Report 2020
buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020

The pie-chart according to State Remote Report 2020 shows us various struggles faced by employees while working remotely. The biggest struggles faced are clearly collaboration and communication, Loneliness and distractions at home. This proves that while employee engagement activities were being conducted people were still facing these challenges which means that the engagement levels were low due to these contributing factors. This justifies what this

research is showing which is there were low engagement levels during COVID-19 pandemic despite the engagement activities being conducted. Engagement activities were being conducted so that employees will not feel the struggles mentioned above in the pie chart but that was not the case.

Details: Asia; APAC; Kantar; Dell Technologies; October 2020; 7,192 respondents; 18 years and older; among full-time employees from Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea who had at least party worked from home; Online survey

© Statista 2022

A graph from Statista 2022 shows that the Leading HR challenges faced working from home (WFH) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Asia-Pacific region as of October 2020. From this graph, it can be inferred that during the second wave of the pandemic which is assumed was the time when all companies were conducting engagement activities, the engagement levels were quite low due to reasons like insufficient in-person communication, insufficient training for remote working and insufficient team engagement activities. Therefore, it proves what this research suggests that there were low engagement levels across all companies.

5.1 | Limitations

First, the limitation in the research is that the sample size was limited to only 102 respondents. This sample size is very small to represent the employee engagement levels of PAN India.

Second, out of the 102 respondents,65% of respondents were in the IT sector and 35% were in the Finance sector, thus, the respondents from each sector were not represented equally, which was unsuccessful due to some factors.

5.2 Conclusion and Future Directions

It is challenging to keep an employee interested in a virtual workplace. Every non-work-related activity that used to engage employees has been limited by the employee-employer relationship through a virtual platform. Work has become routine, dull, and non-creative as a result of the decrease in opportunities for team engagement, team gathering, and individual development. Those who like this new work environment concur that there are organizational sectors. Work is more akin to a task that requires more engagement and expression in order to convey thoughts. Firms are using a variety of activities to increase engagement in the virtual workplace, including games, interactive sessions, video call celebrations, and many more.

In this paper, it was conceptually explored how effective online employee engagement activities were during the work from home model in engaging the employees and making them feel motivated, satisfied and committed across IT and Finance sectors. By drawing on the data of various employee engagement activities that were being conducted, it can be concluded that during the pandemic, despite the online engagement activities being carried out, the engagement levels were still very low across both IT and Finance sectors. Considering its theoretical and practical importance, it is hoped that future research in this field will find out about the engagement levels in other sectors apart from IT and Finance as well. Also, we encourage researchers to carry out this research in different countries apart from India to derive insights on the engagement levels where it might be different than what we found out.

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