

Chapter 9

Impact of the COVID–19 Lockdown on Employee Engagement and Efficiency

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced organizations to adapt quickly to new ways of working, such as remote work and hybrid work arrangements. This has led to some challenges but also some opportunities to improve employee engagement and efficiency. One of the biggest challenges has been maintaining employee engagement during a time of great uncertainty and change. Organizations have tried to address this by developing creative and productive ways to engage their employees, such as online family engagement practices, online learning, virtual team building exercises, webinars with industry experts, weekly online alignment sessions, team meetings through video conference, short online game sessions, online contests and competitions, online programs, and online fitness and meditation. These activities can help employees stay connected with their colleagues and the organization, learn new skills, and improve themselves. Another challenge has been maintaining employee efficiency while working remotely.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 virus quickly began at the turn of 2020 and continues to obstruct people's livelihoods, economies, and workplaces. As the virus started to rise globally, the federal and state governments of the economies started to implement strict lockdowns and asked to adhere to the standing operating procedure of COVID-19. During this pandemic, a large number of employees became jobless. Still, there are many organizations that shifted their workforce from office to remote working for the health and well-being of the employees. The COVID-19 Pandemic compelled the organization to implement drastic changes in the workplace, and the outcomes of this force caused an entire disruption in the employees' work and experience (Batool et al., 2023).

Social distancing and extended Lockdown have resulted in a completely remote work environment. Organizations have moved into the virtual world (Kanaan-Jebna et al., 2022). Employee communication took place among the stakeholders via online mode. Face-to-face interaction is totally prohibited. The change of circumstances may not change in a couple of times (Harter et al., 2002).

Considering all the facts of the situation, this sudden and uncontrollable factor forced organizations to change their work style, but in this contingent situation, the organizations try to pay attention to the most important '*P*' factor of their business continuity and success, i.e., '*their people*'. However, it's very tough for employees from remote work with restricted resources. The major issue with employees' equilibrium between the work-life and personal life as well as it distracts them functionally and emotionally from their team and managers (MacLeod & Clarke, 2011). As per the present economic situation, financial stability is also one of the major concerns which disconcert them. At such times, it becomes essential for an organization to look out for the anxiety of its employees, and the organization has to help them to come up with ways to give their best while staying healthy and safe at the same time (Soni, 2019).

It is apparent that contemporary working conditions, even before COVID-19, were volatile due to technological advances, economic fluctuations, and political uncertainty, which would prevent all employees from ensuring job stability. The perceptions of insecurity in employees – the perceptual and unintentional perceptions of job loss have been increased by organizational restructuring and scale-downs, but COVID-19 has made the situation worse. Occupational insecurity can extend all over employees for two particular purposes. Initially, shifts in an organization, such as layoffs, reduction in volume, and fusions, are induced by measurable job insecurity. As well as secondly, employees from different work units can interpret certain threats or stressors in the same or collective manner. The most important thing, however, is that job insecurity is a major stressor for employees, which affects their efficiency and is adversely associated with employee engagement, Job attributes, and employees' psychological health. Considering that insecurity at the job is a risk factor for employees to be harmful by negative psychological responses which decline employees' performance.

In fact, during a crisis, there are only three opportunities for employee engagement - to increase, fall, or stay constant. There is plenty of evidence suggesting that the employee engagement level may have remained consistent, wherever the level of employee engagement noted with minute changes of 1- 2 percentage points year- over year for more than a decade.

The employees are one of the core valued assets to gain the competitive advantage with a set of capabilities to enhance efficiency in the organization. It may be one of the core competencies for the organization to concentrate on to engage employees. Many researchers and HR experts have found over the years that the organization's enthusiastic employees are a productive asset to the. In addition, research findings showed a positive connection between engagement and the desire for work. The differences

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