

Communication practices at abellio scotrail



Aim

- To investigate and establish the impact of internal communication practices on employee engagement and performance at Abellio ScotRail Ltd.

Objectives

In order to achieve the above aim, the below research objectives have equally been set out as:

1. To critically review the literature on both concepts to enhance the understanding of the concepts and associated theories, and their interaction by exploring the meaning and drivers of employee engagement, as well as internal communication's meaning and role as a vehicle to support organisation performance.
2. To adopt a case study strategy, this will facilitate the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary information necessary for the baseline of this research.
3. To critically examine the existing internal communication policy, and practices at Abellio ScotRail Ltd and their contribution to employee engagement.
4. To critically analyse employees and managers perspectives of internal communication and employee engagement at Abellio ScotRail Ltd.
5. To present and then discuss primary research findings through comparison with the literature to date.
6. To draw conclusions from primary and secondary research before providing recommendations where appropriate.

Literature Review

Employee engagement is recognised as an important factor affecting organisational effectiveness, innovation, and competitiveness (Goodman et al, 2009). Consequently, several authors and professionals have made an empirical contribution towards establishing an explicit meaning and understanding of the concept, however, there are many definitions of the employee engagement as there are authors without any consensus on the subject. This paper aims to make a brief contribution by considering the role of communication in enhancing employee engagement. Goodman et al, (2009) research study identified employee engagement as one of the three top trends facing organisations and the term has its roots more in an academic exercise. Given a global leadership concern about employee engagement, human resources and communication professionals involved in internal communication management need an in-depth understanding of the concept so that they can develop strategies and tactics which would contribute to building engagement in the workplace. Additionally, internal communication has been suggested to be an important factor in the development of employment engagement. This study now intends to tackle the gap in the literature with a proposed model of the role of internal corporate communication in enhancing employee engagement.

This section intends to firstly provide an overview of the evolution of the employee engagement concept, discussing definitional approaches, and highlighting components of engagement. Secondly, it discusses issues arising from the review concerning the nature of the concept, including its relationship with overlapping and related constructs such as commitment

and motivation; and finally, it develops a corporate communication perspective of employee engagement.

The Development of employee engagement

Analysis of employee engagement literature has enabled the identification of stages in the development of the employee engagement concept, conceptualised here as a series of waves.

Wave 1 (1990-1999)

The wave begins in the 1990s with academic work on personal engagement been led by Kahn. His work has a significant impact without the direct use of employee engagement as concept in his qualitative research nevertheless, by using personal work engagement, he defined it as “ the harnessing of organisational members selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” Kahn, (1990 p. 694) He further postulate the necessity of three psychological engagement conditions for an employee to engage themselves in their work role performance.

Wave 2 (2000-2005)

This second wave is characterised by professional consultancy firms that associated high engagement to increase corporate performance. Harter et al. (2003); Harter and Schmidt, (2008) made a report to Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) questionnaire designed to measure series of elements that are called employee engagement. Consequently, they define employee

engagement as a combination of cognitive and emotional antecedent variables in a work environment.

Wave 3 (2006-2010)

Taking the lead in the third wave of employee engagement work, Saks (2006) regards employee engagement as a concept more rooted in practitioner literature than academic literature. He is in agreement with Kahn's view of employee engagement which consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Equally in this league is the work of professional body such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2006) as well as Bakker and Leiter, (2010) published work that throws more light on work engagement as it was then called

William A. Kahn (1990) regard the concept of engagement in a workplace as the “ harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles” in his research study through which he identified three dimensions of engagement as emotional, physical and cognitive. Kahn (1990) developed the concepts of personal engagement and disengagement which are used in describing the behaviours by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances. He defined personal engagement as the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Personal disengagement was defined as the extrication of oneself from work roles; that is, people pull out and shield themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during work role performances. Kahn (1990, 1992), stated that employees can be engaged on

one dimension and not the other. But, the more an employee is engaged on each dimension, the higher his personal engagement. In consequence of this, Kahn concentrated on the emotional, cognitive and physical aspect of engagement in his research study.

In the work of Macey and Schneider (2008) engagement is defined along the line of the psychological state, trait, and behavioural engagement which is characterized by feelings of passion, energy, enthusiasm, and activation. Behavioural engagement is described as an adaptive behaviour; Trait engagement as a number of interconnected personalities while attributes relate to state engagement whether directly or indirectly to behavioural engagement.

A different definition of employee engagement stems from the “ positive psychology” – champion by Maslach and Jackson (1981) – with its centre of attention on the positive as against the negative aspects of work described as a burnout. They conducted a research on employee burnout and developed what is now known as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), burnout is a psychological condition that ensues from persistent interpersonal relations at work. In addition, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) in their view regard engagement as the exact positive diametric of workplace burnout. This is a reversal model score of the Maslach Burnout Inventory measurement of engagement, Maslach, et al, (2001). This indicated a low score on job fatigue and a high score on professional efficiency are indicators of engagement.

Furthermore, Theresa M. Welbourne (2007) defined engagement in relation to the behaviour of the managers when she posits that engaged employees are those that work and prosper in the noncore job roles using a performance model she developed. The model identified six major roles that employees engage at work. These are (i) Core job-holder role, (ii) Entrepreneur/ innovator role, (iii) coming up with new ideas, participating in others' innovations, (iv) Team member role, (v) Career role, and (vi) Organizational member role or citizenship role.

Going by Saks, (2006) term, employee engagement is job and organisation engagements which are related but distinct constructs. They attributed the rationale for Employee engagement to Social exchange theory explaining that employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization. The two most dominant roles for most organizational members are their work role and their role as a member of an organization.

In the opinion of Robinson et al (2004) employee engagement is an inspirational disposition held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. Gallup, as reported by Dernovsek (2008), compares employee engagement to the employees' positive emotional sentimental attachment and commitment to the organisation.

The CIPD (2016) recognises employee communication, better known as internal communication, as “ an essential part of the business and the HR function”. It continues that “ effective internal communication is important for developing trust within an organisation and it is shown to have a

significant impact on employee engagement, organisational culture and, ultimately, productivity” (CIPD, 2016). This collaborates Boynton and Mishra’s (2014) earlier research study that examined the role of communication in the public relations (PR) industry and suggested that internal communication can play an important role in building trust and behaviour as shown by public relations professionals in the industry.