EMPLOYEE AND WORK ENGAGEMENT: AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT
Handloom has been a vintage industry. Its roots can be dated back to the early stages of human civilization. Over time the handloom sector has endured various challenges and setbacks. Some of the major challenges faced have been due to the advancement of technological know-how and mechanizing of the production process. Lack of modernization, migration of workers to other fields have been some of the other problems faced by this industry. All these problems have left a huge impact on the workforce or employees engaged in this industry and hence the problems have become graver. On the other hand, employee engagement and work engagement, in particular, have been recognized to influence the work performance of the employees as well as the overall performance of the organization. With this paper, we will try and understand how work engagement and employee engagement can aid the handloom industry to tackle its problems.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Work engagement, Organizational Performance, Handloom Industry, Textile Industry
1. INTRODUCTION

The handloom sector is one of the oldest sectors of production in India and is recognized as one of the finest all over the world. Handloom includes weaving of clothes without the use of electricity. When the yarn is hand-spun then it is identified as khadi and when the mill is used then it is identified as handloom fabric. It has been a source of employment for many in the rural parts of the country. It seems that the skills and the craftsmanship are often transferred from generation to generation in a family. According to Reservation of Articles for Production Act, 1985, the definition of handloom is expressed as “any loom other than power loom”. Weavers are notably shifting to other sources of income from the traditional and hereditary source moreover the employment providers in this sector are themselves facing financial crunches hence traditional handloom has been facing a dire situation (Bag, 2020). It is noted that at present the handloom sector is going through a difficult phase. Some of the problems faced by the handloom industry involve the human factor and to overcome these factors the role of different Human Resource approaches can be used. Employee engagement and work engagement can succor the handloom industry in different ways and can lead to a productive workforce, increased production, improved product quality, innovative product, retention of the manpower.

1.1. HANDLOOM IN INDIA

The history of handloom in India can be dated back to Mohenjodaro and the Indus valley civilization. India has not only been producing but has also been exporting these products to other countries for a long time. Different parts of the country have notably contributed to its production differently. Through India’s handloom productions one can easily see the diversity and richness in its culture, since the style of production and the product design and product features depict vast differences. Some of the major regions recognized for their handloom production in India are Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Odisha, etc. After agriculture, it is considered as the second-largest economic activity of the country which directly and indirectly employees a large number of individuals and families. Weaving in India has been a traditional and hereditary-based occupation where they are still using traditional methods of production and the traditional designs owing to the lack of exposure and knowledge about the technological changes (Soundarapandan, 2002).

Handloom also contributes to the economy of the country by engaging in the export of finished products. Indian handloom products see a huge demand in the world market where these products are highly sorted after due to their unique designs.
As per the Ministry of Textile, Annual report, 2019-2020 Handloom sector employs around 35.23 lac both directly and indirectly. It contributes around 15% of the total production of cloths of the country. Out of the total hand-woven fabric production of the world, India claims 95%. During the year 2018-19 handloom export amounted to Rs.2392.39 crore and in 2019-20 it was Rs. 1405.41 crore.

(Bortamuly et al., 2014) By generating employment and income the Indian Handloom industry plays an important role in the Gross Domestic Production of the country.

1.2. PROBLEMS FACED BY THE HANDLOOM SECTOR

Referring to the Annual report 2002-03 of the Ministry of Textile of India, the major obstacles for the handloom sector includes obsolete technologies, unorganized production system, low productivity, inadequate working capital, conventional product range, weak marketing link, overall stagnation of production and sales and, above all, the competition from the mill sector. Since the handloom sector is eminently reliant on innovation and the skill of the worker, how he uses the different elements to present something unique, hence innovation is a predominant requisite for the sector. Along with product innovation, production process innovation is also a requirement for the upliftment of the industry. (Amaravathi & Bhavana Raj, 2019) lists the following problems faced by the handloom industry like competition faced from powerloom and mill sector, the supply of raw material, credit, ineffectiveness, new designs, work environment, lack of training, absence of research, diminishing quality, scarcity of manpower, and the difficulty of being an unorganized sector.

The Handloom sector has been confronting huge competition from the power loom industry which has created an enormous setback for the produces of the handloom sector in terms of market share and the percentage of contribution in total textile production. Being the most vintage cottage industry in the country these industries must be preserved. By way of preserving these industries, the country can also preserve and foster its cultural heritage and the skills that go with it. Moreover, these industries are collectively responsible for employing a large workforce hence the livelihood of many households depends on it.

1.3. ROLE OF EMPLOYEE AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

The construct of Employee Engagement has gained a lot of interest in recent times. Employee engagement was first discussed in 1990 by (Kahn, 1990) according to whom “In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. As per Scarlett Surveys, “Employee Engagement is a measurable degree of an employee’s positive or negative emotional attachment to his job, colleagues
and organization which profoundly influences his willingness to learn and perform at work.” Employee Engagement circles around Emotional and Intellectual commitment and unprompted efforts displayed at work. (Saks, 2006).

An employee can be identified as an engaged employee when they are emotionally invested in their organization and identify with the organization’s views and philosophies. Such employees are known to be more productive and dedicated to their work and the organization. Engaged employees not only perform their duties well but also are a source of motivation for other employees, as they encourage others to be vigorous for their work. Engaged employees are noted to be more dedicated to the associated organization and their job roles. Hence, organizations have started making use of the positive impacts that employee engagement has on the functioning of the organization as employee engagement is a very efficient way of Performance Management. An organization can drastically improve its performance by promoting engagement in its employees. (Sorensen, 2013) Employee engagement is an important predictor of how an organization will perform even at a time of economic slowdown. Employee engagement can become the new best practice of Human Resource Management; however, it is not necessary that engagement will have the same effect on the employees (Truss et al., 2013). Personal Engagement was found to be most touched by three psychological conditions, viz. meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990) (Simpson, 2009). Employee engagement, in general, has always been measured by the hodgepodge of four distinct categories which are job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Gallup (2002) categorized the employees working in an organization into three categories which are Engaged Employees, Not Engaged Employees & Actively Disengaged Employees where Engaged employees are identified as being highly committed to their work and the organization, Not engaged employees are the ones who perform their work without any passion and Actively Disengaged employees include those who are purely unhappy at their work. In order to enhance the performance of the organization, it is essential to obtain a good result from the employees, for this engagement of the employees emerges to be one of the essential constituents.

Different studies have identified different antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Employee engagement is often associated with the refinement of different problems associated with the manpower of the organization such as absenteeism, employee turnover, employee performance, loyalty, etc. To boost the sense of engagement in employees, the organizations need to
employ different engagement boosting activities (antecedents) which can be monetary and non-monetary such as rewards and compensation, Recognition, Organizations policies and practices, Job characteristics, appraisal, perceived organizational support, communication, involvement in decision making, etc. On the other hand, the consequences may include organizational performance, employee performance, employee retention, innovation, loyalty, etc.

Work engagement refers to the measurement of work-related well-being with a prominence to the emotional experiences and it is more psychological than behavioral (Bakker et al., 2011a; Parker and Griffin, 2011) (Bujacz et al., 2016). Work engagement is when the employees are involved in their job, committed to their job, and enthusiastic and passionate about their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008) (Attridge, 2009). Work engagement is a positive state of contentment, concerning the work of an individual which is illustrated by vigor, dedication & absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Work engagement and flexible human resource management practices both are responsible for shaping the Job performance of the employees (Sekhar et al., 2018).

The employees face many difficulties at the workplace where different elements can trigger stress which can even affect the performance of the engaged employees (Kane-Frieder et al., 2014). (Schaufeli et al., 2006) Work engagement can work as a remedy for burnout. (Rich et al. 2010) (Kim et al., 2013) Work engagement acts as a mediating force between the value compatibility of the employee and the organization, perceived support from the organization, and self-evaluation and the job performance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Tanusree, 2015) Handloom workers are migrating from the trade to other jobs. Apart from this change in technology, comparatively low wages, price rise has left the handloom sector and the handloom weavers associated with it. The Handloom sector is highly labor intrinsic hence to satisfy the workers the wages should be adequate but in reality, the workers in this sector are observed to be underpaid. Since the study was centered in Varanasi the author found the wage system substandard due to which the workers have migrated.

(Wing & Nagar, 2017) The Handloom sector falls into the cottage industries and is highly labor intrinsic and the production methods used in this sector are highly labor-oriented.

(Arshi & Rao, 2019) the study establishes a positive relationship between employee engagement and innovation. This notion that employee engagement and innovation have a causal relationship has also been supported by many other studies. Such employees are identified to be more equipped to handle pressure and when required are ready to ditch
the individual role and collaborate with others. Engaged employees can also give their inputs to improve the organization and promote innovation.

(J., 2014) suggests focusing on providing a proper working environment, healthy relationships among the employees as it shows a substantial impact on engagement and the performance of the employees. The study submitted the following determinants of employee engagement viz. workplace wellbeing, work environment, compensation, leadership, team spirit, organizations policies, and training & development. Engagement substantially affects the performance of the individual and hence the organization.

(Laguna et al., 2017) identified the reciprocal relationship between self-efficiency and work engagement. (Markos & Sridevi, 2010) Employee engagement is positively associated with good organizational performance. Engaged employees showcase great enthusiasm and are ready to go beyond their job role to contribute to the organization's success. When maximum job satisfaction and maximum job contribution are allied, organizations can move towards engagement. Employee engagement is noted to have a positive impact on the organization's outcomes such as productivity, profitability, employee retention, and loyalty from the customer. The study highlighted few strategies for engaging employees viz. start it on day one, start it from the top, enhance engagement through two-way communication, give satisfactory room for development and advancement, ensure that employee has everything they need for the job, provide appropriate training, strong feedback system, Incentive system, build a distinctive corporate culture, and focusing on top-performing employees.

(Truss et al., 2013) Explores how the attitude construct of engaged employees can affect the organization’s performance. Many perceptions exist w.r.t. being engaged and doing engaged indicates that engagement has gone through fixing, shrinking, starching, and blending which has helped in further developing the construct of engagement.

(Bhagavatula et al., 2010) The entrepreneurs in the handloom sector are generally known as the master weavers who are responsible for raising finances, providing raw material, facilitating the production based on the demand in the market, and is additionally responsible for furnishing the design based on which other employed weavers prepare the textile and are accordingly paid for. The production is done either at home or in a small workshop. It was noted that normally around fifty weavers were working under the master weaver. The handloom industry like other craft-based industries needs to properly balance creativity and the consumers’ requirements.

(Bujacz et al., 2016) The study was primarily based on the workers engaged in the creative field. Self-
employed individuals show a higher level of work engagement as compared to employed as they have more autonomy at work and freedom to experiment with their creativity and when they have more learning opportunities. Job control is one of the factors which lifts work engagement in high skilled workers, where job control involves having control of their tasks. As a general practice less educated and highly skilled workers enjoy a high level of job control but it is highly subjective to the sector and the form of employment.

3. HOW EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MAY BE USED IN HANDLOOM SECTOR

Various industries and sectors have benefitted from the different approaches and techniques of enhancing engagement in employees. Despite the fact that the handloom sector is unorganized and containing mostly cottage industries, it can still make use of the construct. Even though employee engagement has many drivers but considering the different aspects of the handloom sector following antecedents of employee engagement can be utilized to improve the engagement and hence the overall performance:

**Strong and supportive leadership** – Any organization that wants to support its employees in their personal growth will try to foster strong and supportive leadership. This will not only motivate the workers in performing their job roles but allow them to explore and implement new elements in their job performance. When employees believe that they are supported by their leaders, they display Innovative Work Behaviour (Amabile, 1996; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2014) (Javed et al., 2018). The free flow of communication is the essence of supportive leadership. When the workers feel they are heard and when different pieces of information are communicated properly, they tend to feel inclined in contributing to the organization’s success and think of themselves as an integral part of the team and the organization they are associated with. Hence the workers tend to be more vigilant and dedicated towards their work.

When the workers feel that kind of psychological connection with the system they tend to become more engaged and hence boost the production in different ways. Innovation flourishes only when the organization nourishes the employees with care and encouragement (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) (Kwon & Kim, 2020). Therefore the organizations need to have a strong and supportive leadership

**Training and Development** – With the change in time different products, procedures and techniques are devised that either increases the quality of work or make the procedure easy. Hence, training of the workers involved in these activities becomes essential to ensure better production and to sustain in the market. This training
can either be given to the worker by more experienced workers in the organization or through off-the-job training. Training acts as a catalyst for the development and personal growth of an individual as well. Hence, this will lead to the creation of a positive image of the organization that the worker is associated with, which can ultimately lead to engagement of the worker towards the organization as well as their job role.

(Farouk, 2014) (Zondo, 2020) identified training and development as the main strategies that can be put to use to raise the level of employee engagement moreover it can also enhance leadership and work design in the organization.

**Autonomy at work** – Employees are presumed to perform exceptionally when they have control of the different aspects of their job role. Autonomy gives a leg up to innovation. When the workers have control of how they want to perform and what they want to produce they will have an opportunity to access their creativity and produce novel products and hence induce innovation into the system. When the workers have a free hand, they comprehend the sense of responsibility bestowed upon them which helps in setting up a connection between the employee and the organization and they become more involved and satisfied at work. This also leads towards work engagement and employee engagement. The produces of the handloom sector involve a lot of artistries which requires creativity and innovation which can be boosted by providing the workers’ independence in their role performance. The correlation amid employee engagement, performance, and perceived autonomy at work together moderate the relationship between engagement and creativity (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2020).

**Adequate wages and incentives** – A well-paid employee is more content at his job and performs his job roles diligently. In the handloom sector, it can lead to retention of the works as the major volume of migration that is seen in the workers is predominantly due to inadequate wages. Adequate wages will not only improve the retention rate of the workers but surge the sense of engagement in them. Compensation forms an indispensable component of employee engagement which inspires the employee to give his best performance by having full attention to his work and personal development (J., 2014).

**Healthy and safe working environment** - The presence of both physical and emotionally safe environments together can be labeled as a desirable work environment (J., 2014). These may include proper equipment, adequate lighting, hygiene facilities, proper ventilation, safety measures, proper workstations or spaces, a friendly environment, etc. These factors are essential for job satisfaction and smooth functioning and production. The absence of these factors or scarcity of any of these can
cause dissatisfaction in the workers, which will reflect on their performance. Whereas the availability of the same will provoke the workers towards an elevated rate of engagement. (Holbeche and Springett, 2003)(J., 2014) insists on the perception that employees consider their workplace and their work performance as a major predictor of their engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

Since the Handloom sector falls into the unorganized sector and further comes under the category of cottage industries hence the role of HR and the approaches and HR practices are somewhat an alien concept to it. When it comes to handloom the young generation is observed to be less keen on taking the trade forward perhaps due to their perception that it will not yield as per their expectation. Many are observed to leave to pursuing the trade as they do not find it profitable and satisfying. Hence here the approaches and tools of increasing employee engagement and work engagement can assist in increasing productivity and the quality of products by stimulating innovation in the workers. Work engagement will lead them to be more involved in their job and their job role. Engagement will lead to more dedication and loyalty towards the craft. Since the handloom sector does not comprise of big industries but the small cottage industry which involves few employees or workers only, hence no elaborate engagement activity can be acted upon, but these industries
can use engagement activities such as training of workers, autonomy in work, strong and supportive leadership, adequate wages and incentives, healthy and safe work environment all these factors will coax the workers towards a satisfied and engaged state. Unlike the workers involved in the power loom sector, the handloom sector requires skilled workers hence to anticipate a tremendous performance will require the workforce to engage towards their work and the industrial unit. The workers should be given room to develop their skills and learn new techniques to facilitate the growth and development of their skills. All these efforts will ultimately lead to the upliftment of the workers/craftsmen engaged in the handloom sector as well as the handloom sector itself.

6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

To the best of the knowledge of the authors, not many studies are conducted upon the role of employee and work engagement in the textile industry and let alone in the handloom sector. However, an attempt is made to link the antecedents and the outcomes of employee engagement to the expected performance of the handloom sector. Through different studies conducted on Employee Engagement and Work engagement, many antecedents and consequences are identified, however, for the present study only, these are considered. Moreover, the suggested tools and techniques in the present study to increasing employee engagement and the overall performance can vary situationally and subjectively.

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