

Analysing Effectiveness of ‘Pep Champ’ – An employee engagement initiative

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Case Synopsis: *Case Study: Analysing Effectiveness of ‘Pep Champ’ – An employee engagement initiative aims to analyse the effectiveness of an employee engagement initiative rolled out by a leading Indian Information Technology and Enabled Services (ITES) company. One of the most crucial factor that is contributing to India’s position as the most favoured IT hub is its unparalleled human capital. Hence, it is a challenge to design & run the employee engagement initiatives in such organisations wherein the majority of the employees are scattered across various locations away from the centralised HR team. Moreover, it is essential to imbibe the sense of belongingness amongst the employees at the client site due to the proximity barrier involved.*

This case study discusses an employee engagement initiative of the company to increase its reach amongst the employees deployed at the client site. It focuses on the scope & design of this initiative wherein ‘Pep Champ’ is an appointed employee (someone not belonging to the HR team) who facilitates the implementation of employment engagement initiatives onsite. The employee engagement initiatives are planned by the centralised HR team (present offsite). In order to analyse the effectiveness of this initiative, structured personal interviews were conducted of 15 Pep-Champs based at company’s various client sites in & around Mumbai.



Employee Engagement – the need of the hour:

Employee Engagement has been a critical area of concern for HR departments across sectors. With the premise of ‘Happy Employee’ should also be a ‘Productive Employee’, the challenges for the HR department are myriad. In today’s times of talent retention and talent management, balancing between organizational aspirations, customer demands and employee expectations is complex. Specifically, with reference to the Information and Technology sector, there is an ever increasing list of expectations from employees and constant pressure on organizations to create ‘best places to work’ to attract and retain talent. Work alienation is a growing concern with knowledge workers. Lack of meaningful work, poor work relationship quality and low self-expression opportunity has been sighted as critical antecedents for workplace alienation in knowledge workers (Nair and Vohra, 2010). In the light of these concerns HR departments need to gear up to create better engagement opportunities for employees.

Employee Engagement means different things to different people. Employee engagement is the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization and its values. Employee engagement is defined as “the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment.” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). Employee Engagement has been associated to important business outcomes such as financial growth of the company, customer satisfaction and low employee turnover. When employees feel more engaged in their work,

customer receives better-quality service, thus promoting customer loyalty (SHRM Research Quarterly, 2007). The practical implication of these empirical evidences is that organizations need to focus on engaging employees better. The global trends in employee engagement indicate that engagement has been increasing in 2014 as compared to 2013. For Asia Pacific at large, the Employee Engagement in the year 2014 has been found to be 61%, a three point growth in comparison to 2013 (Trends in Global Employee Engagement, 2014). The Aon Hewitt Report on Global Employee Engagement trends shows an interesting finding that more and more employees are saying good things about the organization (67%). However, their probability of staying in the company is comparatively low (56%). Thus there are signs that the employee value proposition is breaking down.

Work Culture is an important aspect that influences Employee Engagement. Organizations must provide employees with ‘three C’s of Culture:’ Connection, Contribution and Credibility. (Adapted from Corporate Leadership Council Report, 2004). Research shows that organizations that provide a workplace culture with the psychological conditions of meaningfulness (job enrichment, work-role fit), safety (supportive manager and co-workers) and availability (resources available) are more likely to have engaged employees (Gilson and Harter, 2004). Organizations which build on pillars of respect, genuine concern and integrity would promote a firm ground for Employee Engagement. Such organizations stand out from others due to their attempt at proactive management of employee issues and innovative methods to engage employees at all levels.

The work place antecedent conditions necessary for a good employment engagement can be explained theoretically in terms of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). A basic tenet of SET is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain “rules” of exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). For example employees may reciprocate to caring organizations by way of loyalty and productivity. This is consistent with Robinson et al.’s (2004) description of engagement as a two-way relationship between the employer and employee (Saks, 2006). May et al. (2004) found that meaningfulness, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement. If these are considered as basic resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles if and when the organization fails to provide these resources. Thus, the amount of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources that an individual is prepared to devote in the performance of one’s work roles is contingent on the economic and socio-emotional resources received from the organization.

Thus one of the key tools that such organizations utilize is open, consistent and constant communication. HR in such cases is an advocate of a strong and strategic communication channel which fosters employee engagement by aligning employee’s personal values, aspirations with organizational goals and values. Keeping in view the critical role played by the manager or the team leader, HR would invest in creating line managers and Team Leaders as a strong bridge between themselves and employees through mentoring and coaching activities.

About the Organization in the case:

This case talks about a leading manufacturer of computer hardware and provider of IT services in India and the Middle East region. Backed by strong quality processes and rich experience managing global clients across various business verticals, this Company aligns IT strategies to the business goals. From simple changes in process to innovative solutions, helping its customers harness the power of IT to achieve profitable growth, market leadership, customer delight and sustainability. Along with its best of breed technology partners, it also helps with the hardware and IT infrastructure needs. Organization’s vast service portfolio includes consulting, systems integration, application development and maintenance, technology infrastructure services, package implementation and R&D services among others.

Around 10000 core employees currently work in this organization. Almost 90% of these employees are deployed at its various client sites or customer locations to work on variety of projects. The employees based at client sites are more exposed to the environment of the client organization & its work culture. Since these employees are at a distance from their parent organization; there may be a lack of connect between these onsite deputed employees and their parent organization.

For example, an employee working at client site of Dena bank - a leading public sector bank may have to follow work timings of a typical Government organization like 9 am to 5 pm and may have holidays on 2nd and 4th Saturday of a month. He may face issues like unavailability of basic hygiene conditions – clean washrooms, potable drinking water etc.

Whereas an employee based at a client site of HDFC, a corporate bank, may have good infrastructure facilities and extended work timings similar to any IT company. He may have to work 6 days a week for the entire month. Thus, an employee has to adapt to the work culture of its client or the customer.

The aim of 'Pep Champ' – An employee engagement initiative is to develop connect between the parent organization and its employees working at the client sites, so that their attachment with the parent organization remains intact. Thus overcoming the distance barrier.

Remote Employees: the constant reality of the IT Sector

World of work is changing rapidly. Workplaces have evolved from steady traditional physical workplaces to dynamic virtual worlds and have thrown a number of challenges at the HR department. In fact the growth of the IT and Information Technology enabled Services (ITES) sectors sector in India has changed the very concept of Human Capital management and employee motivation. India is one of the fastest-growing IT services markets in the world. It is also the world's largest sourcing destination, accounting for approximately 52 per cent of the US\$ 124–130 billion market (<http://www.ibef.org/industry/information-technology-india.aspx>). The sheer need to cater to customer requirements has prompted IT companies to be dynamic in their working structures.

Distributed teams comprise of people in the same organization who work in different places. These teams face most of the challenges that cross-organization teams face in terms of building trust and connectedness with the parent organizations. Such remote teams on one hand get influenced by client site work place culture and dynamics and on the other hand stand a danger of feeling alienated and cut-off from the parent organization.

Client-site workers typically face the danger of experiencing a diminished sense of connectedness with the parent company (Richman et al, 2001). The lack of face to face interaction with co-workers of one's organization can lead to issues of trust and communication. Past research has also indicated that while off-site workers are a critical mass, there is an absence of policies, guidelines, support and training program for managing and engaging these employees. (Richman, 2010). Hinds and Bailey (2003) have indicated that prevalence of conflicts is another major challenge with respect to distributed teams. Oftentimes these conflicts go unidentified and unaddressed for longer than conflicts with collocated teams (Armstrong and Cole, 2002). The organization thus has to grapple with the question of how trust, respect and empowerment can be cultivated remotely. They also need to create an HR champion at client site who can keep the flame of loyalty, connectedness and spirit kindled in the hearts of remote employees. Simultaneously the champion can assist in ensuring minimal operational discomforts for the remote employees and increase the general engagement quotient.

Objectives of the Case Study:

- To analyse the case and build observations about the 'Pep Champ' initiative
- To identify the engagement parameters having scope of improvisation
- To propose enhancement measures for the 'Pep Champ' employee engagement initiative

Understanding 'Pep Champ' – An employee engagement initiative:

- *Pep Champ* is an employee from the on-site IT operations team (not belonging to HR team). He / she is appointed by the superior/ Program Manager on identification of traits like leadership skills, ability to influence others and potential to perform the HR tasks.
- *Pep Champ* acts as an on-site facilitator for the HR initiatives planned by the HR team by helping in implementation of the HR initiatives & activities at the client's site.
- Thus, *Pep Champ* acts as a co-ordinator between the HR team and his fellow employees at the clients' site.
- There is no fixed ratio as such, between the *Pep Champs* to number of employees.
The tenure of *Pep Champ's* role is also not fixed. A *Pep Champ* can be newly selected when the earlier employee has a change of his work site or he resigns.
- Rewards are given quarterly by means of certification or with Winner Circles' points, a concept similar to gift vouchers. Recognition by providing a badge of *Pep Champ* and a Standee to be kept on desk, so that peers can easily locate their *Pep Champ*.
No monetary rewards are provided to *Pep Champs*.
- In order to enhance the communication & co-ordination between the *Pep Champs* & HR team, quarterly meetings are supposed to be planned by the HR.

Research Methodology:

Fifteen ‘Pep Champs’ were selected from the prominent client sites in and around Mumbai forming the subjects for this study. Methodology involves non-probability and convenience sampling techniques. Structured personal interviews of selected Pep Champs are conducted.

'Pep Champs' are selected from the following Client Sites			
Barclays	9	HDFC	1
Tata AIG	10	Dena Bank	2
Euronet Services India	11	Yes Bank	3
Reliance Capital LTD	12	Axis Bank	4
WBPO Belapur	13	R.COM Infra	5
Central Bank of India	14	Birla MGT Centre	6
Colgate Palmolive	15	Kotak Mahindra	7
		Idea Cellular	8

Responses received to the interview questions are related to the following parameters of employee engagement:

- **Role Clarity**
- **Motivation**
- **Rewards & Recognition**
- **Support**

However the questions are shuffled and arranged in random sequence while conducting the interview to seek Pep Champ’s more authentic & accurate response. Parameter wise segregation of the questions can be referred in the Annexure.

Interview of ‘Pep Champs’ was conducted using Structured Questionnaire as follows:

Table 1: Client Sites for Pep Champs selection

Table 2: Structured Questionnaire

Is the role of 'Pep Champ' clear to you?	Q1
Does being Pep Champ makes you feel recognised & rewarded?	Q2
Do you expect any additional reward(s) for being a Pep Champ?	Q3
Are your suggestions/ ideas considered while designing activities/ initiatives?	Q4
Have you pro-actively planned or implemented any initiative at your site?	Q5
Do your colleagues' positively respond & help in the activities/ initiatives?	Q6
Are you successful in meeting your superior's expectations?	Q7
What difficulties do you face while implementing activities at the client's site?	Q8
Is your Program Manager supportive?	Q9
If given an opportunity, would you continue as a Pep Champ?	Q10
How often Pep Champ's meets are expected to be organised?	Q11
Does being Pep Champ exhausts you?	Q12
Is it difficult to manage Pep Champ activities, with the budget available?	Q13
Have you ever incurred any self-pocket expenses for any activities?	Q14
Have you received your Pep Champ badge & standee?	Q15

Table 2: Structured Questionnaire

Observations & Analysis of the

responses:

- Q1. Is the role of 'Pep Champ' clear to you?
 Q2. Does being 'Pep Champ' makes you feel recognised & rewarded?
 Q4. Are your suggestions/ ideas considered while designing activities/ initiatives?
 Q5. Have you pro-actively planned or implemented any initiative at your site?
 Q6. Do your colleagues' positively respond & help in the activities/ initiatives?
 Q7. Are you successful in meeting your superior's expectations?
 Q8. What difficulties do you face while implementing activities at the client's site?

Q10. If given an opportunity, would you continue as a *Pep Champ*?

Q11. How often *Pep Champ*'s meets to be organised?

Q13. Is it difficult to manage *Pep Champ* activities, with the budget available?

Q14. Have you ever incurred any self-pocket expenses for any activities?

Inference	Parameter wise segregation of questions to facilitate analysis:	
Role		
Experienced <i>Pep Champs</i> are observed have fair role clarity. However, new appointees demand for better understanding of their role.	Is the role of ' <i>Pep Champ</i> ' clear to you?	Q1
<i>Pep Champs</i> are pro-actively involved in implementing various engagement initiatives at their respective sites.	Have you pro-actively planned or implemented any initiative at your site?	Q5
<i>Pep Champs</i> are aware of the deliverables expected from them and are fairly successful in meeting these expectations.	Are you successful in meeting your superior's expectations?	Q7
Motivation		
The ideas/ suggestions of <i>Pep Champ</i> are positively considered by their colleagues & superiors while activity planning/ implementation.	Are your suggestions/ ideas considered while designing activities/ initiatives?	Q4
<i>Pep Champs</i> are enthusiastic to continue their role.	If given an opportunity, would you continue as a <i>Pep Champ</i> ?	Q10
<i>Pep Champs</i> don't get exhausted while they handle additional responsibilities apart from their regular work.	Does being <i>Pep Champ</i> exhausts you?	Q12
<i>Pep Champs</i> have incurred self-pocket expenses for supporting the activities at their site.	Have you ever incurred any self-pocket expenses for any activities?	Q14
Rewards & Recognition		
<i>Pep Champs</i> find themselves to be recognised with being nominated for this role.	Does being <i>Pep Champ</i> makes you feel recognised & rewarded?	Q2
No additional rewards are expected by <i>Pep Champs</i> but for some formal recognition in the form of certificates of tenure completion/ momentum.	Do you expect any additional reward(s) for being a <i>Pep Champ</i> ?	Q3
The <i>Pep Champ</i> badge & standees are yet to be received by majority of them.	Have you received your <i>Pep Champ</i> badge & standee?	Q15
Support		
<i>Pep Champs</i> experience active help & support from their colleagues.	Do your colleagues positively respond & help in the activities/ initiatives?	Q6
<i>Pep Champs</i> face various kind of difficulties while working at their client's site.	Do you face difficulties do you face while implementing activities at the client's site?	Q8
<i>Pep Champ</i> activities are soundly supported by their superiors.	Is your Program Manager supportive?	Q9
Quarterly meets are expected by <i>Pep Champs</i> for timely interaction with HR team and ideas exchange.	How often <i>Pep Champ</i> 's meets to be organised?	Q11
Budget constraints is largely experienced by majority of the <i>Pep Champs</i> .	Is it difficult to manage <i>Pep Champ</i> activities, with the budget available?	Q13

Table 3: Parameter wise analysis

Detailed Inferences & basis of analysis:

actionables proposed on the

- **Ensuring better Role Clarity for Pep Champs:**
- *Pep Champs* should be provided with a brief role description or basic information about the 'Concept of *Pep Champs*' or the basic purpose of this initiative.

- **Increasing awareness about Pep Champs:**
- Flash mail should be sent by HR & respective Program Managers to inform employees at sites about their *Pep Champs*.

- **Provide clear understanding of budgets to Pep Champs:**
- *Pep Champs* should be clearly communicated about the budgets available/ allotted to them and reimbursement process, if any.
- Since budget constraints are strongly voiced by *Pep Champs*, they should be effectively addressed.

- **Forming 'Support team' for Pep Champs:**
- Aim is to help *Pep Champ* to co-ordinate better while implementing activities.
- Support teams form the need of client sites with large employee strength, where employees operate from multiple & distant locations.
- Support team may be shuffled on regular basis, to confirm maximum participation of employees.
- Engagement activities can reach employees at remote site locations with the help of support teams.
- It is observed that such informal support groups already exist at certain sites; formal appointments can provide essential recognition to these support teams.
- The support team's efforts can be linked with their performance management systems, similar to *Pep Champ's* performance.

- **Improvising Pep Champ's Rewards:**
- *Pep Champs* expect non-monetary rewards; though they did not express any expectations about monetary rewards.
- We can reward *Pep Champs* by felicitating them with -
 - Certificates on completion of a fixed tenure.
 - Certificate for 'Best *Pep Champ*'.
 - Certificate for 'Best *Pep Champ Initiative*' to recognise *Pep Champ's* additional engagement initiatives [initiatives in addition to those planned by HR].
- Since majority of *Pep Champs* have not received their badge & standees, we should ensure that they receive them at the earliest.

- **Increasing connect between HR & Pep Champs:**
- Quarterly meetings should be organised to have regular communication between HR & *Pep Champs*.
- We can organise brainstorming session to think about new engagement initiatives which can be implemented.
- HR can give an ear to the difficulties faced by *Pep Champs* at their sites.
- Felicitations of *Pep Champs* can also be conducted during these meetings.

NOTES