

Virtual Employee Experience – Cognitive Era of HR

Mrs. Veena Shenoy, Research Scholar, National Institute of Technology, Karnataka. She has 11 years of rich experience in industry and academics. Her areas of research interest are behavioral science and human resource management.

Dr. Rashmi Uchil is Assistant Professor, National Institute of Technology, Karnataka. She has 15 years of academic experience. Her areas of research are interest Organizational Culture, Organizational Identification, Mergers & Acquisitions, International Finance, Cross Border Acquisitions.

Prof. Jacob Alexander is a Business Consultant. He has 22 years of rich experience in industry and academics. His areas of research interest are Nuero Marketing, Cognitive Psychology, Integrated Marketing Management and Services Marketing

Abstract

Purpose -The purpose of this study is to examine the cognitive era of HR and to understand the antecedents of virtual employee experience.

Design/ Methodology /Approach: This study is descriptive in nature and inductive reasoning is used.

Findings: Cognitive Era of HR is era of employee experience, preferences. Employees experience is all about set of perception employees has towards various situations in virtual work setting. Positive employee's experience can contribute to higher motivation to apply extra effort at work. Creating sound employee's experience helps in protecting organization's best interests, enhances productivity, supports the Human resources mission and better work-life balance , helps in meeting employee quality of life, increased employee engagement, improved employee productivity and performance.

Practical implications: This article constructs a practitioner-oriented framework for virtual employee experience. This can serve as a starting point to guide HR managers, Virtual team leaders / members and scholars to identify tools to improve well-being and functioning in creating sound employee's experience.

Originality/Value: The cognitive era of Human resources is an era of employee experiences. In this era, employees are treated as customers and their preferences are considered as customers preferences.

Keywords: Virtual employees, Cognitive Experience.

Type: Research Paper

Introduction:

Virtual working is a major transformation in the workplace. As baby boomers and transitions out of the workforce, new breed of employees are taking a shape in virtual world. Employees get into the organization with much higher expectations in relation to work, work environment and work place practices. Hence it is a challenge to for the organization and the Human resources (HR) practitioner to give them an enriching experience in the workplace. In the industrial era, too much importance was given for employee task completion, and in the same way in the information era, knowledge of employees became a central sense of economy. However, in the cognitive era, importance had been given to employee experience and preferences. It is a time when work translates into a rewarding experience for employees. In the Cognitive era, employee's cognitive experience is considered as key to employee engagement and thereby resulting in organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, a positive employee's experience is associated with improved employee outcomes viz a viz - better job performance, increased efforts and higher retention.

Contrary to the past, employees perceive higher expectations to in the workplace thus having greater demands on their work. One third of the Information Technology (IT) projects fail not because of obsolete Technology but because of people. Positive employee experience create higher motivation among employees which help them go beyond their mundane job responsibilities.

Definitions of the terms:

Virtual Employees: An employee who has option to work (once in the week or twice in the week) from home or virtually / remotely, according to the internal policies of the organization.

Virtual Work Place: A virtual workplace is a workplace that is not located in any one physical space.

Employee experience: Employee experience as “a set of perceptions that employees have about their experiences at work in response to their interaction with the organization” IBM workforce analytics 2017.

Virtual employee experience: A set of perceptions that virtual employees have about their experiences at virtual work in response to their interaction with the organization.

Creating a sound employee's experience protects the organization's best interests, enhances productivity and support's HR's mission. Now, in a cognitive HR era, employees are more collaborative and connected in the fast-paced workplace. In this era, work is rewarding experience for employees.

It is imperative to observe the elements of virtual employee experience as it helps in employee involvement and employee performance. Some of the antecedents or elements of virtual employee experience are:

E-Leadership: Managing virtual team is a challenge for most of the leaders (Zander & Butler, 2010; Zander et al., 2012). E-Leadership acts as the key to virtual employee experience. As in virtual setting, employees feel isolated so they expect leaders to be supportive and flexible. Leaders play a core role in the decision making and the flow of work (Judith g Oakley 1998). Great leaders influence people to perform task to the best of their ability. Leader's approach and relationship with his/her employees plays an important role in building positive employee experience. With consistent flow of communication from a dedicated leader, virtual employees can reach to their maximum potential.

Autonomy: Another antecedent for virtual employee experience is autonomy. As employees work virtually, they should be given freedom to take decision on matters relating to their jobs and roles assigned. When employees have autonomy and are empowered at work, they feel satisfied and happy to be associated with the organization for a longer time. It also helps in creating sound employee experience.

Interpersonal relationships: Virtual employees feel isolated as they cannot have interaction with employees physically. Spontaneous online chat and scheduled video or audio conferences will help team members establish rapport. A strong interpersonal relationship with colleagues helps in reducing grievances in workplace (Zimmermann, 2011).

Organizational Culture: Employee engagement is an outcome of sound organization culture. Organizations should ensure transparency and clarity in the mission and core values. By doing so it nurtures mutually supportive co-worker relationship through implementing social networking technologies that help employees to develop continuous communication and thereby improving performance.

Communication: It is very important to keep virtual employees engaged (Staples, 2001). Internal social networks are used for building a sense of personal community between remote employees, and are also a convenient tool for knowledge sharing. LinkedIn, Facebook and even MySpace groups on the internet have become popular tools for employees to connect with one

another. Poor communication may lead to lower commitment, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism and higher turnover (Hargie et al.,2002). The phone remains the most frequently used and effective communication tools for remote employees. Open communication is essential to enrich employee experience.

Human resources (HR) Practices/ Internal Policies:

Successful organizations have sound internal policies or HR practices. Internal policies of organization has direct link with employee experience. Fair internal policies help employees feel good and productive thus helps in building better organization culture. (Guest & Woodrow, 2012).

Recognition, Rewards and Growth:

Recognition, reward & growth are essential to employee morale. Some virtual employees feel that they are not recognized nor rewarded for their effort. Better recognition and reward programs help to retain employees in organization (Stanley Stough, Sean Eom, James Buckenmyer, 2000).

Work-life Balance:

There is a positive and negative affect in working in virtual teams. It drastically reduces commute time and helps in quality time with their family. Similarly it has an adverse affect in which employees may work in different continent with a different time zone. This may hamper their personal lives as at times they have to schedule video conferences or phone calls in the night or early morning to allow all members to participate in these meetings. Hence it is important that International Human Resources Management (IHRM) takes into account the work-life balance of virtual employees

Job demand and resources/ Task-Technology Fit:

Technology is a key factor to explain the successful functioning of virtual teams (Gilson et al., 2015;Martins & Schilpzand, 2011) . The technology infrastructure should fit well with the team's tasks and characteristics. Human resources managers (HRM) should help virtual team members to select the right technologies for their tasks so as to reduce job demands that may results from cultural diversity, geographical dispersion and electronic dependence.

Not a one –size fits all: Each employee is unique, different in their behavior and has certain perception about their experiences towards various antecedents of virtual employee experience. Based on the preferences and attitude, employee dimensions of virtual employee experience may vary. Organizations must ensure in creating sound workplace practices that

helps in strengthening the systems which ultimately helps in diagnosing all the other elements of virtual employee experience.

Impact of Virtual Employee Experience-

Happy workers are productive workers. Virtual employee experience has many outcomes such as increased performance, increased productivity, higher engagement of employees, low attrition rate, better work life balance, and thereby increasing organizational effectiveness.

Managerial Implication:

Employee experience is one of the latest trends in H.R. practices. This trend began a new chapter in the emergence of new roles such as chief executive engagement officer or head of the employee experience. This article constructs a practitioner –oriented dimensions for virtual employee experience. This can serve as a starting point to guide HR managers, Virtual team leaders / members and scholars to identify tools to improve well-being and functioning in virtual teams (Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kamiyama, & Kawakami, 2015).

The above mentioned elements of virtual employee experience helps in creating sound employee experience that protects organization's best interests, enhances productivity, supports the HR mission, enables better work-life balance. This also helps in enhancing employees' quality of life, increased employee engagement, improved employee productivity and performance.

It is a challenge for the organization to create a sound employee experience as it is cognitive in nature. Each employee is unique and different in the way they behave and perceive things. Understanding experiences of employees is a critical task for HR practitioners and organizations. Hence, it is imperative to identify all the elements/ dimensions of virtual employee experience so as to enable organizations to implement employment practices. This exercise may translate in achieving organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

This article helps to understand the cognitive era of HR and to explore the key elements of virtual employee experience. In cognitive era, employees are essential part of the organization and employees expect them to be treated as customers. Employees and their preferences should be treated as customer preferences. This poses a tough challenge to the organization where they have to create sound employee experience in workplace. Positive employee

experience helps organization to achieve increased productivity, increased engagement, and low employee retention. International Human resources Management (IHRM) and Virtual leaders can consider above mentioned elements of virtual employee experience for enriching employee experience. References

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