

A Case Study of Employee Engagement in AkzoNobel Corporate HR

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Abstract:

Employee engagement becomes a popular topic of the workplace instead of job satisfaction and organizational commitment which is approved to affect the organizational outcome. AkzoNobel as the largest global paints and coatings company also set its ambition on employee engagement and conduct employee engagement survey once a year by using Gallup's Q12 and the engagement score in Corporate HR is far lower than other functions of AkzoNobel and benchmarks from Gallup database. It becomes critical to improve employee engagement in Corporate HR for achieving the company's ambition. Structured interviews were conducted in Corporate HR to explore the management behaviors that affect the employee engagement and techniques for improving employee engagement were recommended based on the interview and existing literature review. The research findings and recommended solutions were presented and discussed in the team meeting of Corporate HR. The quantitative research results show that job autonomy, performance feedback, challenging work, work-person fit, development support and the connection with co-workers have a strong linear relationship with employee engagement. And the recommended solutions like building an action team; have more team activities and develop a formal action plan for employee engagement both for big team (Corporate HR) and smaller team will improve their engagement over time. During the research, it is obvious that employee regard engagement as an important topic but not priority. They know they should do something for engagement but no real action has been taken. It is critical to firstly create the awareness for every employee and start with some activities or team discussion.

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1. Introduction

It has been a big challenge for managers to lead the business to success in a fierce competition nowadays. Organizations are striving to increase their performance by increasing both efficiency and productivity. Managers would hardly deny that employees make a critical difference in innovation, organization performance, competitiveness, and ultimately lead to the business success (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Driving employees to work proactively and collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own career development and also to be committed to high quality performance standards becomes one of the priority tasks for organizations (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Employee engagement which was defined as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Maslach et al., 2001) became a hot topic within organizations as many research results have shown that employee engagement have a statistical relationship with productivity, profitability, employee retention, safety, and customer satisfaction (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002).

1.1. About AkzoNobel and Corporate HR

AkzoNobel is the largest global paints and coatings company and a major producer of specialty chemicals. AkzoNobel's portfolio includes well-known brands such as Dulux, Sikkens, International and Eka. Headquartered in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, AkzoNobel is a Global Fortune 500 company and is consistently ranked as one of the leaders on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes. The company committed to excellence and delivering Tomorrow's Answers Today™ (AkzoNobel, 2012).

In AkzoNobel, the interest of stakeholders always comes first. AkzoNobel has Board of Management and Supervisory Board in its two-tier corporate structure. The Executives Committee takes the responsibilities of managing the company day-to-day to make sure AkzoNobel's strategies, policies and resources are used to meet the companies' business objectives and targets. Four members of the Board of Management and as well four leaders with functional expertise comprised the Executive Committee. Under the Executive Committee, there are three Business Areas (i.e. Specialty chemicals, Decorative Paints and Performance Coatings) which have their own Business Units. At the same level, there are functions and country organizations.

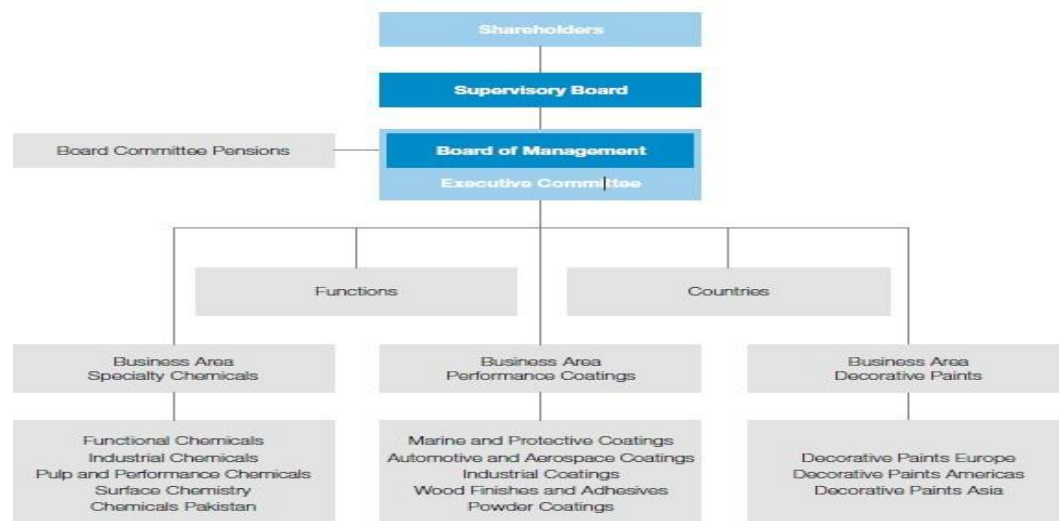


Figure 1: organizational chart

According to the Global HR business partner for HR function who is working in Corporate HR: The Corporate headquarters of AkzoNobel coordinates key tasks in the areas of strategy, finance & control; human resources; legal affairs and intellectual property; communications; health, safety and environment; information management and risk and insurance management. According to Farndale and Paauwe (2005), at corporate level the major strategic decisions are taken. The staff on corporate level develops steering mechanisms, quality improvement projects and the directives for social policy, the HRM policy, and HSE policy. Within the overall HR function, corporate HR plays a significant role in designing and monitoring the implementation of global HR policies and decisions. The global HR business partner also recognized the description of Corporate HR role.

Three years ago, AkzoNobel started to involve HR in the Executive Committee (Exco) as Chief Human Officer (CHO). Under the CHO, three BA HR Directors and one Corporate HR Director sit in Corporate HR. Three main job areas of Corporate HR in AkzoNobel are Center of Expertise which including recruitment, learning & development and compensation & benefits, HR Shared Service and HR Business Partners. The Directors of Global HR Service, learning and development, compensation and benefits who directly report to CHO are working as Corporate HR with their own team. Global functional HR Business Partners (e.g. HR business partner for finance, HR business partner for HR) are also working in Corporate and report to Corporate HR Director.

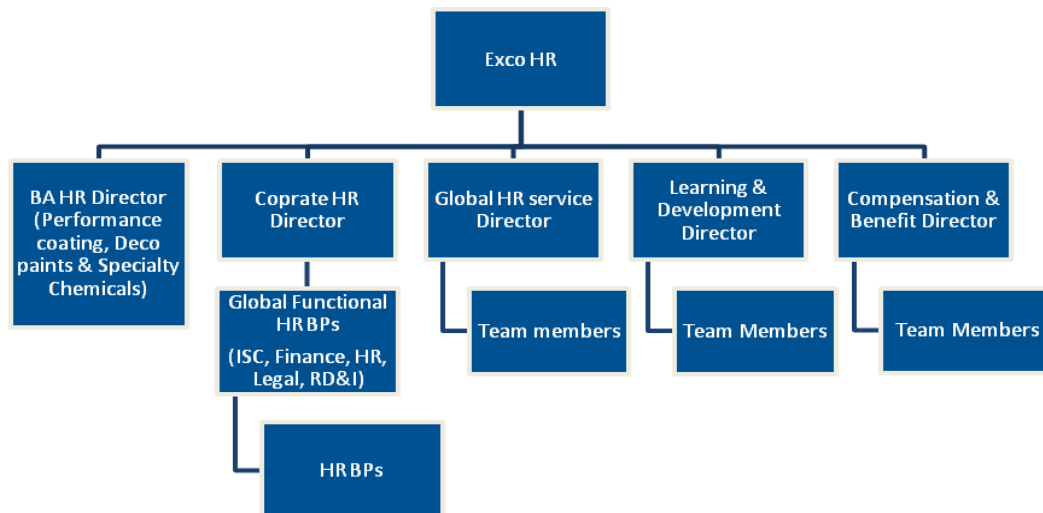


Figure 2: structure of Corporate HR

1.2. ViewPoint Survey in AkzoNobel

In 2008, AkzoNobel has outlined its strategic vision to become the world's leading Coatings and Specialty Chemicals company. For supporting this vision, AkzoNobel has defined value and values for both accelerated growth in financial performance and sustainable growth in safety, sustainability, diversity, engagement, talent development and eco-efficiency. AkzoNobel has set its ambition to achieve top quartile performance in employee engagement.

AkzoNobel started the ViewPoint Employee Engagement program as an ongoing annual program since 2010 for achieving the ambition. ViewPoint survey is conducted once a year by using Gallup's Q12 as an important part of the program to help the company to measure the progress and to find out where need to be improved. The aim of ViewPoint Survey is to give everyone in the organization a chance to have their say about their working environment and make a difference by working together in their teams. HR plays an important role in the employee engagement program with the responsibilities of leveraging the survey, providing feedback on results, promoting communication in different groups of people, encouraging people to take actions and providing educational opportunities.

Employee's growth, teamwork, management support and basic needs are measured by relevant questions in ViewPoint survey by using five-point scale. Personal growth is measured by talking about the progress and having the opportunity to learn and grow. The opinions count, clear mission and purpose, fellow employees who committed to quality work and having a best friend at work are identified as the questions for measuring team work in Q12. Management support is measured by opportunity to do the best, recognition or praise, care and encourage the development. Knowing what is expected at work and having materials and

equipment to do the work are related to basic needs.

Besides the 12 questions, Gallup also designed specific items for AkzoNobel which are related to AkzoNobel's core values which are customer focus, entrepreneurial thinking, integrity and responsibility, courage and curiosity to question and developing talents. The accountability for engagement is also incorporated in the specific items like "My team participated in an effective action planning session following last year's ViewPoint Survey" and "My team has made progress on the goals set during our action planning sessions after the last ViewPoint Survey."

1.3. Employee engagement in Corporate HR

From the diagrams below, it can be seen that only two business units surpass the 50th percentile. The overall engagement score of Corporate is 3.81 and the Corporate HR is at the bottom with a score of 3.56 when comparing to other functions in the Corporate. If look into the ViewPoint Survey result of HR functions in different business units across the organization, the result of Corporate HR is only slightly better than one business unit (DP ISA). The diagram also demonstrates that there is no difference between the grand mean in 2011 and 2012, which means there is little improvement in employee engagement in the Corporate HR during the past two years. AkzoNobel has set its ambition to reach percentile rankings of 75 which are considered best practice when compared against the Gallup database while the Corp. HR is still below the 25th percentile (3.63) which has far fallen behind the expected trajectory. It's like what people say: "shoemaker's children don't have shoes."

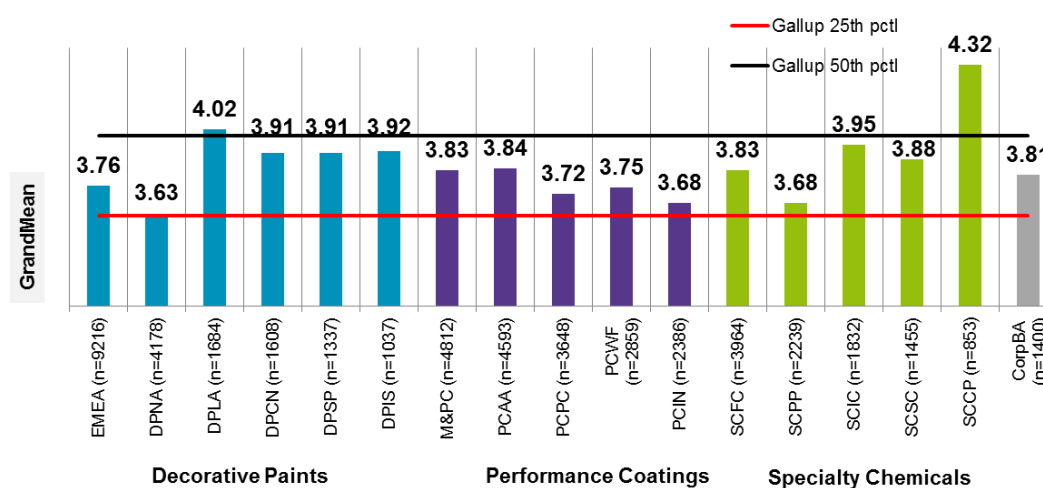


Figure 3: AkzoNobel Q12 Score 2012

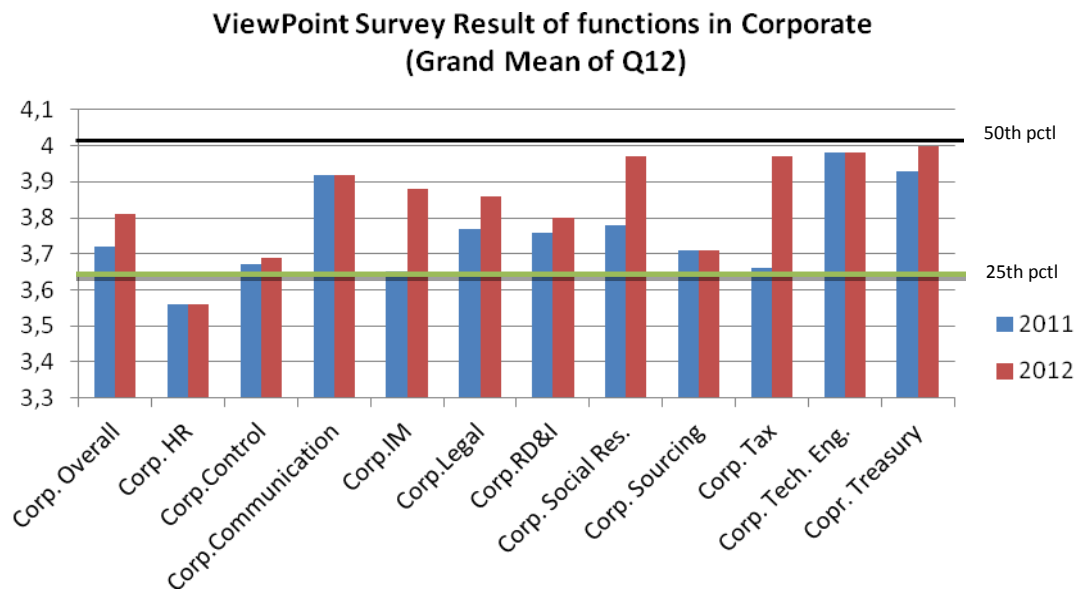


Figure 4: ViewPoint Survey Result of functions in Corporate

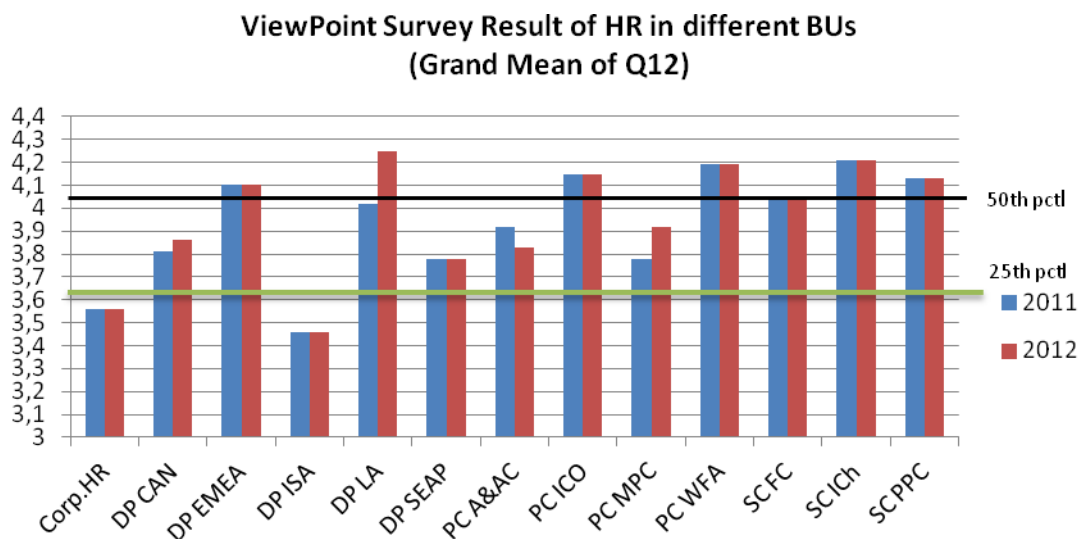


Figure 5: ViewPoint Result of HR in different Business Units

Employees of Corporate HR said: “We already have the viewpoint survey for the past three years and every time we fill the survey in, we get the results, and say that the scores are low. Afterwards, nothing happen” (employee A). “We are always talking about engagement, but look around, we did nothing. People are busy with their own careers” (employee B). “We should create connections with each other; managers should take initiatives to make employees integrate as one organization.” (Employee C). “I really want to get more “real” feedback from my manager, not only: you are doing fine, you are doing well” (Employee D).

1.4. Problem Statement

Employee engagement became a very popular concept during past two decades. Organizations try to figure out if their employees are engaged and how to make them engaged by using different surveys and tools to stay competitive and improve performance. In AkzoNobel, the engagement survey in 2012 was conducted in May and 88% of employees took part in the survey. The overall engagement score went up slightly this year from 3.74 in 2011 to 3.80. As a function that drives the ViewPoint program in the organization, HR itself ranked in the second place in survey results of global functions of 2012 with a grand mean of 3.92, which is higher than AkzoNobel Overall (3.80) and also a little improvement on last year's result (3.90) while the result of Corporate HR is 3.56 which is below the 25 percentile in Gallup's database and has no change in the score of last year's survey. As employee engagement become an important topic in AkzoNobel, low engagement in Corporate HR becomes an issue that need to be addressed. There are four main topics in the engagement survey: growth, teamwork, management support and basic needs. The result showed the most items in management support were scored relatively low such as the mean of development support from manager was 3.33 which is far below the 25 percentile. The mean of managers' recognition and opportunity to do the best were both 3.51 which are the bottom two ranked percentile. Many organizations were focusing on designing a successful reward system to keep employees engaged and productive. But most are missing a key trick because the line manager which is a critical audience is often overlooked. Managers who ultimately serve as the face of an organization to its employees are typically the ones who work or fail the engagement tools (Stark & McMullen, 2008). Tangible rewards or intangible incentives such as job design, career development are all heavily influenced by management behaviors which have an enormous effect on employee engagement (Amble, 2006). Research undertaken on behalf of the CIPD (Alfes et al 2010) indicated that Positive perceptions of line management are significantly related to employee engagement. Specifically, in order to foster employee engagement, it is important for line managers to ensure that: the right people are in the right jobs; goals and objectives are clearly communicated; effort is appropriately rewarded; and opportunities for development and promotion are provided.

1.5. Research Question

To what extent the management behaviors affect employee engagement in Corporate HR?

Sub questions:

The research questions will be answered by answering the sub questions below.

1. What is employee engagement?
2. What are the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement?
3. To what extent the management behaviors influence employees' engagement?

1.6. Research approach

The employee engagement in Corporate HR will be studied as a single case. The purpose of the case study is to identify the problem and its causes and provide with the alternative solutions to this problem. Case study is used as the research method in investigating the phenomenon of low employee engagement in AkzoNobel Corporate HR because case study was defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 1994). The case studies are useful in answering the “why?” and “how?” questions. In case study, multiple data collection methods like observation, interview and documentation can be used. In this case study, the research question will be answered by the following approach:

- a. Review the existing literatures on employee engagement for understanding “what is employee engagement?” and “what are the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement in an organization?”. The literature review will provide with a firm theoretical foundation to the research.
- b. Conduct the structured interview in Corporate HR to collect the data for quantitative data analysis.
- c. Analyze the AkzoNobel engagement survey result as secondary data.
- d. Conduct the quantitative data analysis and test the model to identify “to what extent that management behavior affect employee engagement”.
- e. Propose some techniques and answer the questions of “what actions can be taken to improve the employee engagement in Corporate HR?”
- f. Test the feasibility of proposed solution by asking for employees’ feedback.

2. Literature review

2.1. What is employee engagement?

There is no universal definition on employee engagement. Engagement has been defined in numerous different ways by academic researchers, consultancy and research institutions and companies.

In the academic literature, employee engagement was first conceptualized by Kahn (1990) as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p.694). According to Kahn (1990), the engaged employees are physically involved in the tasks, whether alone or with others, cognitively concern employees’ belief about the organization, its leaders and working conditions and display their thinking and feeling, their beliefs and values in their ways of working and service. Engagement is not only about physical energies of involving or accomplish the tasks, but also about the psychological aspects of how people’s experiences of themselves and their work contexts. So the definition of employee engagement includes both employee’s psychology about their work and workplace and the resulted employee’s behaviors in the workplace.

Similar to Kahn (1990), many other academic literatures about employee engagement refers to engagement as a psychological state. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) suggested that engaged employees have high levels of energy and the willingness to invest effort in their job without fatigue (Vigor); engaged employees feel enthusiasm and significance by involving in their work and feel proud and inspired (Dedication); engaged employees who completely immersed in their work and feel pleasant (absorption). Later, Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) define it as “being charged with energy and fully dedicated to one’s work” (p.119).

The definitions of engagement in academic literatures are mostly about employees’ attitude towards their jobs and companies. IES (the institution of employee studies) which is a center of research and consultancy in human resource issues investigated 10000 employees in 14 organizations and defined engagement as “engagement is a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to nurture, maintain and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee” (Robinson et al., 2004 p.IX).

In one of the researches on employee engagement of CIPD (the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) which is the largest Chartered HR and development professional body in the world, the employee engagement was defined as “being focused in what you do (thinking), feeling good about yourself in your role and the organization (feeling), and acting in a way that demonstrates commitment to the

organizational values and objectives (acting)” (CIPD, 2011).

Other than the academic research, employee engagement was also defined differently by many international organizations in their business context. For example, ING suggested an engaged employee will be energized by work to provide better service to customers and will be more open to change and deliver better results. In turn, that leads to better business results (ING, 2010). Heineken recognizes that engaged employees understand the ambitions for the company, feel a connection to it, and deliver on the individual and functional contributions they can make (Heineken, 2012).

In AkzoNobel, being engaged means knowing what’s expected of you, being able to do your best, and feeling valued. It means feeling proud and emotionally connected to the company, understanding what you need to do to help AkzoNobel achieve its ambitions, and being committed to making it happen (AkzoNobel, 2012).

Summary of definitions

The definitions which are used by academic researchers or consultancy and research institutions are mostly about employees’ emotions, feelings and psychological attitude about the work and the company. Engaged employees commit to the companies’ values, feel fulfilled and enthusiastic in their work, they are focused and energized in their work. The positive outcomes of engagement are also identified in the definitions. Engaged employees will be fully involved in their work, they are willing to spend time and make efforts on their work to perform better. Engaged employees will more behave in the interest of the companies. The companies tend to link the employee engagement to organizational benefit in the definition. Engaged employees will deliver better service to customers, make more contributions to the companies and help the companies achieving their ambitions.

2.2. Employee engagement and other constructs

It can lead to confusion that many definitions of employee engagement have overlaps with other constructs (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and organizational citizenship behavior). Many researchers start their study with a question of “is the engagement old wine in the new bottle?” or “is it same lady-different dress?” (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Newman & Harrison, 2008).

2.2.1. Employee engagement and job satisfaction

Locke and Lathan (1976) gave a comprehensive definition of job satisfaction as pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experience. Employee engagement and job satisfaction are directly linked to each other. Job satisfaction is more and more used as a measure of engagement. In the study of relationship between job satisfaction, employee engagement and business

outcomes which was conducted by Harter (2002), employee engagement was referred to the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work (Harter et al., 2002). However, the measures of job satisfaction we have seen in many articles have a big similarity with the measures of employee engagement. Supervisor, interpersonal relationship with co-workers, recognition and work conditions are identified as major characteristics of job satisfaction by many researchers in their studies (Cross, 1973; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Khaleque & Rahman, 1987; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983; Smith et al., 1969; Yuzuk, 1961). Those items are also important in measuring employee engagement. Even though, Erickson (2005) articulated that engagement is more than simply satisfied with the employment arrangement or being loyal to the employer—characteristics that most companies have measured for many years. Engagement is about passion and commitment that makes people willingness to invest themselves and expend their discretionary effort to help the employer succeed. Engagement connotes passion and involvement while job satisfaction only connotes contentment and satiation (Newman et al, 2010).

2.2.2 Engagement, Organizational commitment and organization citizen behavior

According to Northcraft and Neale (1996), commitment is an attitude reflecting an employee's loyalty to the organization, and an ongoing process through which organization members express their concern for the organization and its continued success and wellbeing. Many definitions of engagement are also referred to the positive attitude towards the organization and employees' concern for the organization. More than attitude, engagement is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles (Saks, 2006).

Blessingwhite is a global consulting firm which focused on employee engagement and leadership development suggested that engaged employees are not just committed. They are enthused and in gear, using their talents and discretionary effort to make a difference in their employer's quest for sustainable business success. Robinson et al. (2004, p. 8) state that: "employee engagement contains many of the elements of both commitment and OCB, but is by no means a perfect match with either. In addition, neither commitment nor OCB reflect sufficiently two aspects of engagement – its two-way nature, and the extent to which engaged employees are expected to have an element of business awareness".

2.3. Why is employee engagement important for organization?

Why are organizations nowadays spending so much time and money on studying their employees' engagement and empowering their engagement just like AkzoNobel. What are we expecting from the highly engaged employees?

2.3.1. The consequences of employee engagement at the individual-level

Many researches have been conducted for studying the positive outcomes of employee engagement. Engaged employees experience activated positive affect such as feeling inspired and enthusiastic. It has been verified that such active and positive feelings that result from engagement promote employees' proactivity at work especially when employees perceive the situation as important and have control or influence over that situation. Engaged employees will behave more proficiently and adaptively due to their positive affect especially in the team and organization or in a highly dynamic and ambiguous situation (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Engaged employees also exhibit innovative behaviors. They will proactively involve the creation of a new product, service, idea, procedure, or process (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993). Many definitions of employee engagement were also referred to the employees' positive working behaviors (Kahn, 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Robinson et al., 2004; CIPD, 2011). Those researchers have proposed that engaged employees are willing to make effort in their job and engaged employees will display their feeling, thinking and values and beliefs that are in accordance with organization's value and ambition in their why of working. More than their working behaviors, disengagement has been found to be more associated with health issues, such as depressive symptoms and physical problems, which may affect employee well-being (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). Disengaged employees are sleepwalking through their workday, they pass the working time without energy or passion. They do not work with their managers and coworkers productively. Some employees who are actively disengaged are busy acting out their unhappiness other than just being unhappy, they undermine what their engaged coworkers have accomplished (Sundaray, 2011).

2.3.2. The consequences of employee engagement at the organizational –level

Engaged employees will contribute to organizational effectiveness because they are involved and see the intrinsic value in the work they do, they understand organization's strategy and the connection between their job and organization's strategies and goals and they are empowered to make decisions (Castellano, N.D.). A conclusive compelling relationship between engagement and profitability through higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction, and employee retention was established by Hewitt Associates (2005). Many research results have shown a statistical relationship between engagement and productivity, profitability, employee retention, safety, and customer satisfaction (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez- Molina, 2002). Employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance (Bates, 2004; Baumruk, 2004; Harter et al., 2002; Richman, 2006). Engaged employees will have less intention to leave, they will actively advocate the organizational culture and its external image, they will drive high customer satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). A critical link between employee engagement, customer loyalty, business growth and profitability has been found by Gallup (2004). It is critical to drive employee engagement not only for retaining employees, but also for a better organizational

performance (Greenberg, 2004). A meta-analysis of financial performance showed the working behaviors of engaged employees positively related to financial performance: cash flow and brand equity, return on assets, profits and shareholder value (Schneider et al., 2007). On the contrary, disengaged employees cost companies \$300 billion per year in lost productivity in the United States alone, and they destroy customer relationships with remarkable facility, every day (Fleming, Coffman & Harter, 2005).

2.4. What makes employees engaged?

The impact of employee engagement on employee's working behavior and organizational outcomes is impressive. We do believe engaged employees will bring productivity, profitability and business success, more important thing is driving employee engagement for better organizational outcomes. Understanding what are the antecedents and what elements in organization makes employee engaged or disengaged is critical for driving employee engagement.

2.4.1 JD-R Model

The most popular model which used in analyzing the antecedents of employee engagement is job demands-resources model (JD-R model). Job demands and job resources are two categories of psychosocial work characteristics. Job demands refer to those aspects of a job that require sustained physical and /or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs (Mauno et al., 2007). Job resources refer to those aspects of a job that are functional in achieving work goal and will stimulate personal growth, learning and development while reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs (Mauno et al., 2007). Job demands may lead to fatigue, burnout and health problems of an employee. Job resources may foster either extrinsic or intrinsic motivation at work that is positively related to work-related engagement and commitment.

Many longitudinal studies have verified the effect of JD-R model in employee engagement especially the positive between job resources and employee engagement. Job resources including autonomy, social support, supervisory coaching, performance feedback and opportunities for professional development are verified to relate to work engagement reciprocally over time (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). It means those job resources will cause work engagement and high work engagement also predict employees' satisfaction on the job resources they have. The study which is conducted by Xanthopoulou (2009) also showed the day-level coaching had a direct positive effect on day-level work engagement, which in turn, predicted daily financial returns. Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen (2007) tested the job control as one of the job resources and confirmed it will positively affect the work engagement over time. Autonomy which is an important job resource was verified to predict work engagement over time while a reverse causal relationship between other job

resources and work engagement was showed in the result. The result demonstrated that work engagement positively predict social support from colleagues, supervisory support and departmental resources after a period of time (De Lange et al., 2008). Employees will also feel less engaged because of the role ambiguity (Lorente et al., 2008).

Many existing studies have confirmed that more job resources, more autonomy, more support and feedback from colleague and supervisor, more development opportunities will cause employees' better engagement in the work over time which are covered by Gallup's Q12. Vice versa, better engaged employees will be more satisfied with their job resources.

2.4.2 Management behaviors and leadership

Managers should act as a role model for their employees. According to the contagion effect, the positive or negative experience may transfer from one individual to another (Westman, 2001). It has been studied and verifies that in the workplace, manager's mood will influence their followers'. Managers will exhibit more coordination and expended less effort then they are in positive moods and their staff will also experience more positive moods (Sy et al., 2005). The engaged managers will make extra efforts and enjoying what he or she is doing and these positive behaviors will likely be mimicked by their employees (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). Except being and role model, it has been verified that managers/leaders can increase employees' engagement by giving support, coaching, more autonomy, performance feedback and providing more development opportunities which are regarded as job resources for employees (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; De Lange et al., 2008; Mauno et al., 2007; Hakenen et al., 2006).

Transformational leadership theory was raised in measuring the effect of managerial style in employee engagement. Transformational leadership is identified as a series of management behaviors including encouraging follower's positive behavior, motivating employees to participate in organizational development, helping followers to achieve their goals working in the organization, etc. Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested that the transformational leadership will cause employees' feeling of mutual respect, reciprocal trust, being supported by their leaders in their capabilities and in turn make them feel engaged. Later on, the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement was examined and supported by the result (Ghafoor et al., 2011; Tims et al., 2011; Raja, 2012).

There are four aspects of transformational leadership which known as four I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. Managers with idealized influence are the role models for employees that can be respected and trusted. The employees in a team will be encouraged and motivated by managers with inspirational motivation to reach the goals for

organization. Intellectual stimulation describes a manager who will encourage innovation and creativity in the team. A manager with individual consideration will act as a coach and an advisor to employees to help them to reach the goals.

Individual consideration has been proved to be an important leadership behavior in the workplace (Sarros et al., 2002; Bass, 1985) which consists of two dimensions: supportive leadership and development leadership. Managers with supportive leadership will show their sympathy, caring and listening as well as appraisal support to their followers (House, 1981; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Developmental leadership is about supporting and encouraging employees' career development with counseling, observation and recording their progress (Bass, 1985; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Both leadership styles are the positive forms of leadership which is significantly related to employee engagement (Seger et al., 2009; Tuckey et al., 2009).

It is evident from those studies that management and leadership are playing a key role in driving employee engagement with positive leadership style. Those positive leadership styles are formed by a series of positive management behaviors including providing feedback and recognition, supporting employee growth, regular communication, and personal caring, etc. CIPD conducted a research that measured the importance of management competency for employees for identifying the specific management behaviors line managers need to show in order to enhance employee engagement in the workplace. The result showed the competencies 'reviewing and guiding', 'feedback, praise and recognition' and 'autonomy and empowerment' are perceived as important management competencies by the most interviewees (CIPD, 2011) which are also the key elements of job resources in JD-R model mentioned before that drive employee engagement. Besides, availability and individual interest are also important manager competency. In the research, the behavior indicators of these management competencies are almost same as the positive management behavior mentioned in the previous studies.

However, in the CIPD's quarterly employee outlook survey, the result showed a significant contrast between how managers say they manage people and the views of employees towards their managers. For example, 50% of managers say they meet each person they manage on a weekly basis; however, just 17% of employees report their manager meets them each week. Employees are most likely to say that their manager meets them less frequently than once a month, with 30% saying this is the case compared with just 17% of managers that report they meet their employees less frequently than once a month. Besides regular meeting, a significant gap also exists in the topics of coaching, discussion on employees' development and career progression (CIPD, 2012). Blair McPherson (2012) who published a number of people management books indicated that there is often a gap exists in one-on-one session which are booked and those that happened. Managers were surprised at how many sessions failed to take place because one or the other was on holiday or something else came up at the last minute. Once cancelled, sessions weren't rearranged, often

because there was another one booked in what was already a crowded diary. Also some managers simply said that they had too many staff to provide all of them with regular sessions. Some managers have good intentions but are just too busy.

2.4.3. HR's role in employee engagement

Organization's HR system including reward, benefit and performance management practices can motivate employees to work and help achieving organization's ambition. And staffing, training and development practices contribute to employee's capabilities development and ensure the functional excellence which means right people in the right position. HR development practices can also enhance leaders and managers' capability so that employees can work under a supportive environment. HR also play an important role in fostering the organizational cultural and create a desired work environment through the organizational design and job design practices (Castellano, N.D.).

Task characteristics are found to be important job resources. The skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and performance feedback are the job resources at task level and have found to be related to positive work outcomes (Bakker et al., 2004). Similarly, employees will experience more psychological meaningfulness when the work is perceived challenging, clearly delineated, varied, creative and with a lot of autonomy (Kahn, 1990) which in turn will influence their engagement. Performance feedback, reward and praise, opportunities for professional development, role clarification are the key drivers of employee engagement which are also closely link to HR practices.

2.4.4. Relationship with co-workers in influencing employee engagement

In the JD-R model, support and feedback from colleagues are also found to be the driver of employee engagement. Besides, employees' relationship with other co-workers becomes more critical when they are working in a team. Employee engagement is not only an individual-level variable, but also a unit or team-level phenomenon (Little & Little, 2006). Some researchers argued that employee engagement analysis in the organization and the strategies or practices for boosting the engagement should be targeted at business unit level or team level rather than individual level because engagement at individual level is too complex and too big a concept to be able to consistently and reliably explain much organizational performance (Sparrow, 2010). Sometimes engagement works through intermediate outcomes that can be measured at the individual level, and different employees respond differently to the same work context and conditions which will reflect in the way they answer the engagement survey questions. It is difficult for the organization to manage individual engagement.

When looking at engagement at team level, engaged work teams will interact more

frequently during the work like more regular team meetings and also more social interactions on an informal basis like having lunch together (Richardson & West, 2010). High interaction frequency has recently been shown to be critical for the crossover of daily work engagement between team members (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009).

More interaction can also create more information sharing which is critical for the team performance. Team members have opportunities to share their knowledge, skills and experience with each other so they can learn from each other and also work in a collaborative manner that can contribute to the task performance. However, team members in an unengaged team may behave defensively or competitively and unwilling to share the information with others. In an engaged team, employees will exchange information regularly and have more open communication, they are willing to make efforts and contribute to other's work (Richardson & West, 2010).

2.4.5. Employee Engagement model

Based on the literature review, the support from managers including job autonomy, development support, coaching, performance feedback, regular meeting and information sharing will affect employee engagement. And the relationship with co-workers is also an important factor for engagement. It is important for employee to have a manager who provides him/her with job autonomy, training and development opportunities, regular performance feedback and a platform for sharing information. Managers should equip with the competencies to support employee's development, coach employees, provide sufficient performance feedback on a regular basis and encourage and create more occasions for employees to share information. HR also has certain responsibilities in developing management competencies. Employee engagement is not an issue for HR or Managers, employees should take the ownership of their engagement. They should have awareness to find the problem, take actions to improve their own engagement and also help others for their engagement. This model provides a theoretical basis in investigating the employee engagement in Corporate HR. The model will be tested in the research to see to what extent the model is correct in Corporate HR.

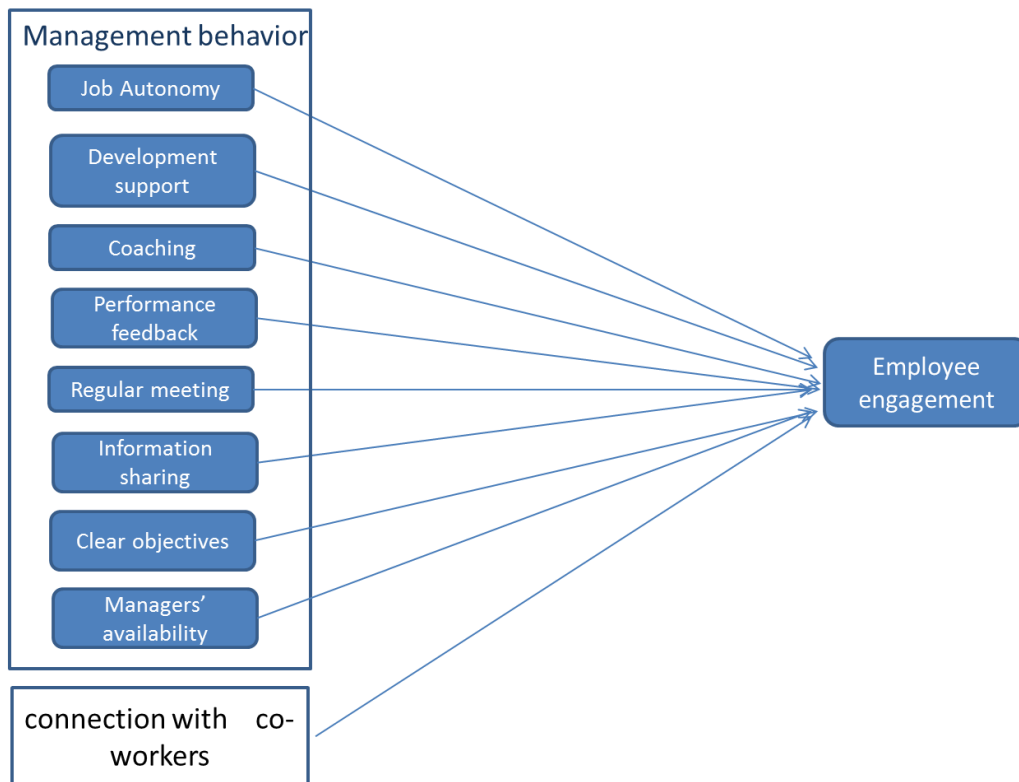


Figure 6: Theoretical Model of Employee Engagement

3. Methodology

The research is a case study which targets at Corporate HR. Low employee engagement in the Corporate HR department is an evident problem. The research aims at investigating to what extent do management behaviors influence the employee engagement in Corporate HR and make recommendation on the solutions. The existing situation of employee engagement in Corporate HR is presented by analyzing the secondary data which is the annual engagement survey result. The primary data was collected by conducting structured interviews with employees to further explore the impact of management behaviors on employee engagement and the gaps between managers' self-image and employees' views. In addition, the post hoc analysis was used to further test if employees agree with the research result and what do they think about it.

3.1 Questionnaire

The result of engagement survey of 2012 in Corporate HR was analyzed as the secondary data. The secondary data analysis can provide a solid statistical basis for investigating the cause and designing the solutions because the secondary data is the output of the reliable and valid survey. A questionnaire was used in annual engagement survey in AkzoNobel which consists of 12 items for measuring the employee engagement and 11 additional questions which were designed for AkzoNobel for testing if employees live the company's values. 12 items were categorized into four elements which were identified to affect the employee engagement: basic needs, management support, team work and growth. The analysis of survey result helps the better understanding the current situation in Corporate HR and also helps the selection of interviewees.

The engagement survey is conducted in June each year in AkzoNobel. Employees need to complete the survey on AkzoNobel website. The data of the survey will be collected and analyzed by a third party company- Gallup. Every function in different organizations will receive its result report. All the people managers who have at least 5 direct reports will receive their team engagement report. In 2012, 49 employees (n=49) in Corporate completed the survey and four teams in Corporate HR had their engagement result. The percentile ranking is used for measuring the data which is calculated by comparing the mean of each item against all other teams from all companies in Gallup's database. A percentile ranking indicates how many scores were achieved above and below the team's score. For example, if the percentile score is 60, which means the score is higher than 60% of all other scores in Gallup's database and lower than 40% of all other scores. Percentile rankings of 75 and above are considered best practice when compared against the Gallup database.

3.2 Structured Interview

The primary data source is the structured interviews with employees who is working in Corporate HR and have contributed to the engagement score in 2011 and 2012. The purpose of the structured interview is to understand how does employees

perceive their managers' behaviors and help analyzing if managers' behaviors would impact employees engagement. The structured interview is defined as one of the quantitative research method by which all the respondents are asked to answer the same questions in the same sequence (Corbetta, 2003). The structured interview was used in this research because its strengths are best suited the purpose of the data collection. The questions in structured interview are standardized. It is easy to code the responses and conduct the statistical analysis to compare the responses across the group (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998). In investigating the gaps between managers' self-image and employees' feel, two questionnaires (Appendix1) with the same set-up of questions were designed and used for managers and employees. Managers and their employees were asked to answer the same questions from their own perspective. For example, employees were asked "do you have regular meeting with your manager for discussing your progress" while managers were asked "do you have regular meeting with your employees for discussing their progress".

Sampling

There are 40 employees currently working in Corporate HR. 18 employees (n=18) including 3 managers and 15 employees who are the team members of these 3 managers were interviewed. The interviewees were selected by my judgment. In judgmental sampling, the person doing the sample uses his/her knowledge or experience to select the items to be sampled without a statistical measurement (Westfall, 2008). The people who were selected for the interview made contribution to the Corporate HR engagement score in both 2011 and 2012. And they are the leader and the members of the teams that had lower engagement score. During the past 2 years, a lot of movement happened in Corporate HR because of the projects and the regular movement for personal development. So the employees who left or recently joined Corporate HR were not selected for the interview. In this case, judgmental sampling can help selecting the interviewees are representative and valid source for studying the low engagement in 2011 and 2012.

Data Collection

18 employees were interviewed face to face in a structured way. The questions that are used in structured interview are usually very specific and very often are close-ended questions (Bryman, 2001). The Likert scale was used to code the answers of questions in interview. The questions were designed based on the elements that were identified to significantly relate to employee engagement in literature review. Both employees and managers who were interviewed were asked to answer 19 close-ended questions and 2 open ended questions. Same set-up of questions is used for employees and managers but was asked in a different way during the interview. For example, when asking the question about job autonomy, employees were asked "does your manager allows you to do the job the way you want?" while manager was asked "do you allow your employees to do the job the way they want?" The answers of employees and managers were coded and recorded in a separate excel sheet.

Data Analysis

The result of interview with employees was analyzed by using the bivariate correlation test to see if each independent variable has a strong correlation with engagement. Then the linear regression test will be made between the engagement and independent variables which have a strong correlation with it. The correlation and linear regression analysis are used to investigate the relationship between the interviewed employees' engagement and the elements that may affect the engagement according to the literature review which are used for testing hypothesis1 including hypothesis1.1—1.8, hypothesis2 and hypothesis 4.

For testing the gap between managers' self-image and employees' view which is the hypothesis3, independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of managers' responses and employees' responses on main items especially which have been confirmed to influence employee engagement in Corporate HR in correlation and regression test. All the quantitative analysis was done in SPSS.

3.3 Post-hoc analysis

Lunch & learning session is a monthly session in Corporate HR for sharing information on the specific topics. The sessions are not mandatory but highly recommended for employees in Corporate HR to participate. The session with the topic of engagement was organized right after the engagement survey period of 2013 ended. 30 employees (n=30) participated the session in which the research findings and possible solutions were presented. In the end of the session, they were asked to fill in a short survey which consists of 8 questions. 5 open questions for understanding what do employees expect for their engagement and if the research findings reflect their expectation well. 3 close-ended questions use five-scales to test if the proposed solutions would work in improving their engagement. The frequency analysis was conducted in analyzing the data which was collected by 3 close-ended questions.

1. Did you complete your viewpoint survey?
2. What one thing AN can do better for you?
3. What makes you look forward to going to work when you get up in the morning?
4. What you will do if you get your manager's job?
5. The research findings reflect the current situation in Corporate HR well. Strongly Agree Agree not sure Disagree Strongly Agree
6. I am confident that the proposed solution will improve my engagement over time. Strongly Agree Agree not sure Disagree Strongly Agree
7. I commit to support the action plan on engagement. Yes not sure No
8. Any other comments / suggestions?

4. Research findings

4.1. Questionnaire

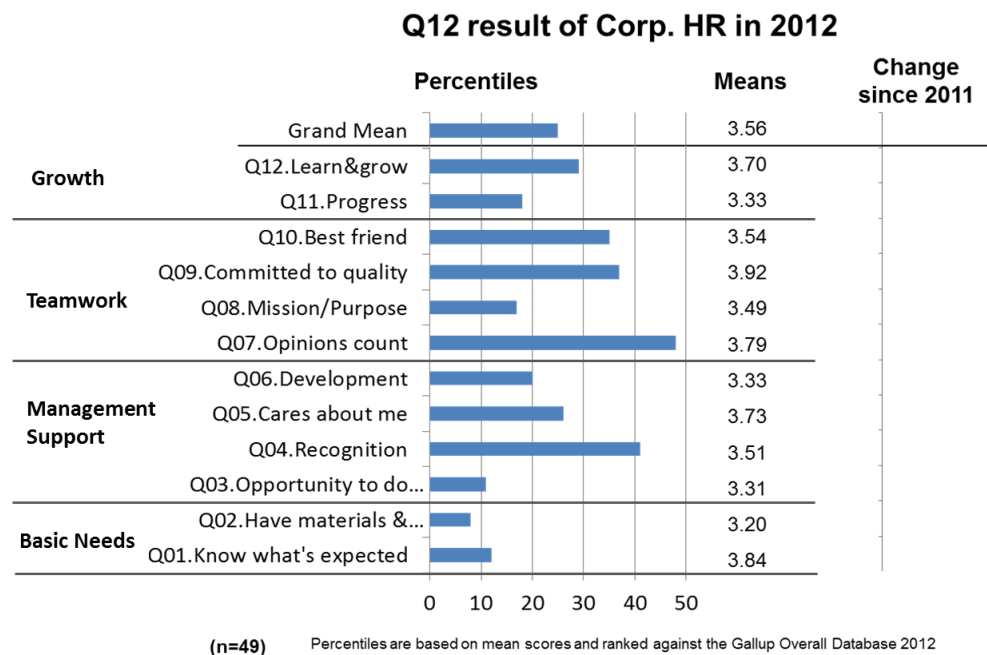


Figure 7: Corporate HR Q12 Result 2012

In 2012, 49 Corporate HR staffs participated the ViewPoint survey. There are 17 outstanding items of which scores are lower than 30 percentile especially the basic needs. The results show that employees feel they didn't have materials and equipment they need to do their best (8th percentiles) and they were not sure about what was expected from them at work (12th percentiles). Management support is also an outstanding item especially in the question about development (20th percentiles), opportunity to do the best (11th percentiles) and care (26th percentiles). The result indicated that employees in Corporate HR felt they don't get the opportunities to do their best and they expected their manager can support and encourage their development and also care about them as a person. Another two items that need to be addressed are progress (18th percentiles) and mission/purpose (17th percentiles). Employees scored low in "in the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress" and "the mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important".

It is also worth notice that the lowest score in 11 AkzoNobel specific items was given to "My team has made progress on the goals set during our action planning sessions after the last ViewPoint Survey". It also reflect the current situation of engagement in Corporate HR and to some extent, it also explains the reason of the same low score during past two years.

4.2 Structured Interview

Bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to see if all the elements in the research have strong statistical correlation with engagement. Regression analysis was conducted between engagement and the variables that are strongly correlated with engagement to prove they do have strong linear relationship with engagement.

According to the correlation and regression analysis (table1, table2), the connection with colleagues is significantly related to employees' engagement (sig. =.005). When employees have more social events with colleagues and feel connected with colleagues, they will feel more engaged while sharing with colleagues about work does not have strong correlation with their engagement. The result reflects that when employees are more satisfied with their managers, they will be more engaged, which also indicates that managers' behavior will impact employees' engagement to a large extent (sig.=.000) Other five items which were found to have a strong linear relationship with engagement also support the impact of management behavior on employee engagement. Employees will feel more engaged when managers allow them to do the work the way they want (sig. =.004). Managers who give more challenge (sig. =.000) and the work that fit employees' interest and strength (sig. =.000) are likely to have more engaged employees. Managers should be more proactive in helping employees development (sig. =.002) and also give more real feedback both positive and critical (sig. =.000) if they want to engage employees. The result also indicated that management behaviors are significantly related to employee engagement in Corporate HR (sig. = .014)

The result of independent sample t-test (table3) shows the difference between manager's self-image and employees' feeling which proved the hypothesis3. The significant mean differences were found in some items especially in the development support, regular meeting, coaching and openness. An outstanding difference was showed in "proactively help employees' development" (sig. =.000). Managers and employees also have different opinion on work delegation, having regular meetings for their personal progress, open to feedback and behavior change after received the feedback.

Employees perceive themselves get less job autonomy from their managers while their managers think they allow them to do the job the way they want for most of the time. Managers said they always proactively support their employees' development and coach them when it is needed, however employees think it happens occasionally. Most managers think they are quite open to feedback and changed their behavior after received the feedback, but obviously employees didn't perceive the same. Even some agreed that their managers are open to the feedback but the feedback didn't impact managers' behaviors. There also exists a gap between work-person fit. Managers think they assign the work that fit employees' interest, strength or aspiration to employees but many employees responded that they are doing the work that doesn't fit their interest or talent for most of the time.

There are three open questions in the interview: What is engagement in workplace to you? What make you engaged? What make you frustrated? Engagement for interviewees can be grouped into 4 dimensions: having fun in the work and feel enthusiasm about their work; be recognized and appreciated for what they did; support, delegation and commitments; connection with people. Most interviewees feel engaged because of the job itself and colleagues. But they feel frustrated when they feel they are doing irrelevant /unimportant job so their skills and knowledge cannot be applied in the work which confirm the data analysis result. The slow pace and complexity of decision making process also upset them. Some said they feel other people make decision about their work.

Based on the results, a model is built to show what are the factors that influencing employee engagement in Corporate HR:

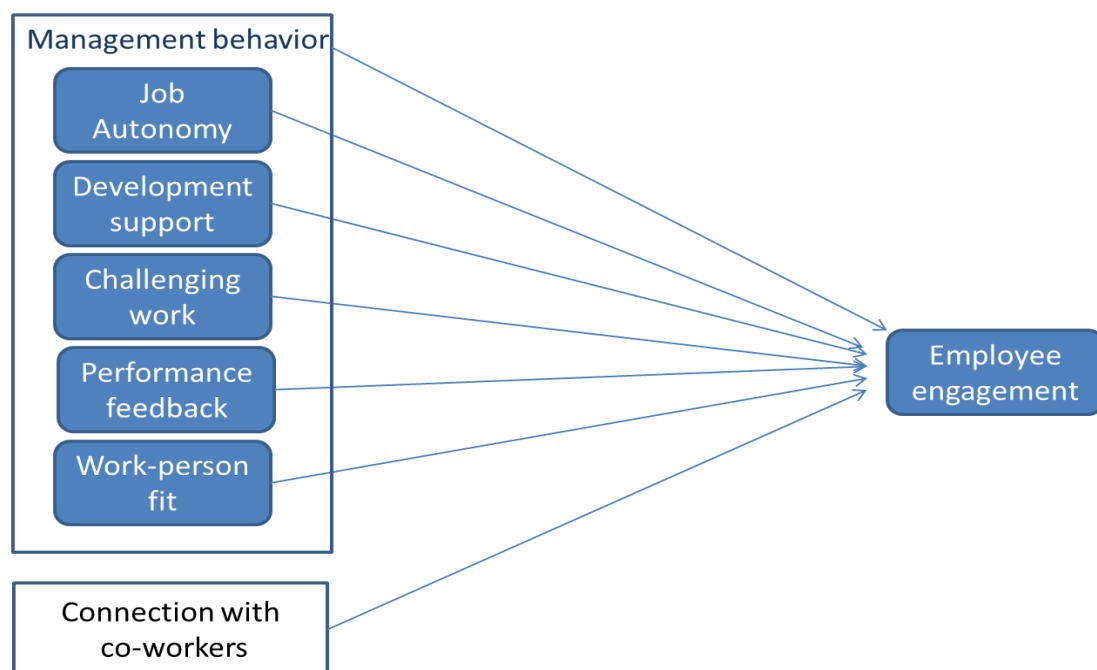


Figure 8: factors of employee engagement in Corporate HR

Table1. The correlation analysis result (*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed))

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Engagement	1																		
2. Management behavior	.620**																		
3. Connection1	.550*	0.399																	
4. Connection2	.676**	.569*	0.294																
5. Connection3	0.385	0.248	0.388	0.306															
6. satisfaction	.801**	.739**	0.44	.621**	0.157														
7. job autonomy	.689**	.722**	.555*	.549*	0.192	0.672													
8. decision	0.014	0.426	0.233	0.14	-0.091	0.284	0.472												
9. objectives	0.416	0.377	.638**	0.212	0.074	0.2	0.429	0.016											
10. challenge	.821**	.501*	-0.231	0.352	0.367	.622**	0.359	-0.171	0.139										
11. fit work	.850**	.581*	.755**	.720**	.544*	.656**	.703**	0.095	.580*	.563*									
12. development	.728**	.725**	0.354	0.459	0.085	.747**	.545*	-0.193	0.255	.555*	0.482								
13. meeting1	0.179	.774**	0.036	0.077	-0.108	0.437	0.318	0.236	0.113	0.304	0.039	0.2							
14. meeting2	0.227	.649**	0.481	0.131	-0.163	.557*	0.14	0.167	0.075	0.329	0.01	0.372	.815**						
15. feedback	.806**	.584*	0.036	.635*	0.433	0.469	.526*	-0.005	.539*	.597*	.752**	0.403	0.167	0.063					
16. open	0.055	.555*	0.311	0.16	0.433	0.05	0.345	.529*	0.301	-0.043	0.215	-0.169	0.369	0.265	0.296				
17. change	-0.255	0.098	-0.29	-0.213	0.03	-0.067	-0.187	0.362	-0.507	-0.085	-0.286	-0.497	0.315	0.108	-0.201	0.026			
18. coaching	0.131	.595*	0.108	0.144	-0.055	0.42	0.391	0.053	0.192	0.057	0.153	-0.03	0.389	0.641	0.6	-0.017	0.244		
19. info. sharing	-0.22	0.335	0.207	0.276	0.157	-0.154	0.047	0.102	-0.05	-0.073	-0.196	-0.057	-0.187	0.437	0.258	0.033	0.469	0.32	
20. availability	-0.281	0.13	0.398	-0.038	-0.469	-0.054	-0.275	-0.463	-0.074	0.017	-0.185	-0.277	-0.241	0.381	0.306	0.058	0.263	0.302	0.217

Table2. Linear Regression analysis result

Dependent variables	R Square	df	F	Sig.
Management behaviors	.385	1	8.131	.014*
Connection with colleagues	.592	2	8.698	.005**
Satisfaction with manager	.641	1	23.239	.000**
Job autonomy	.475	1	11.773	.004**
Impact on decision making	.000	1	.002	.961
Clear objectives	.173	1	2.725	.123
Give challenge	.673	1	26.813	.000**
Give work that fit	.722	1	33.711	.000**
Proactively help development	.531	1	14.702	.002**
Regular meeting	.052	2	.328	.727
feedback	.650	1	24.135	.000**
Open to feedback	.003	1	.039	.847
Change behavior after receive feedback	.065	1	.904	.359
coaching	.017	1	.226	.642
Information sharing	.048	1	.660	.431
availability	.079	1	1.113	.311

*linear relationship is significant at the 0.05 level

**linear relationship is significant at the 0.01 level

Table3: Independent Sample t-test result *sig. <0.1 **sig.<0.05 ***sig.<0.01

1=No 2=Sometimes 3= Most of the time 4= Yes

Question	Mean (employee)	Mean (manager)	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. Error Difference
allow to the do job the way they want	2.47	3.67	-1.200	-1.874	16	0.079*	.640
Micro-management	2.47	3.33	-.867	-1.831	7.090	.109	.473
Impact on decision making	2.87	3.67	-.800	-1.904	4.809	.118	.420
Clear objectives	2.60	2.67	-.067	-.094	2.522	.932	.707
Give challenge	2.20	2.67	-.467	-1.240	3.213	.298	.376
Give work that fit with interest, strength	2.27	3.67	-1.467	-2.245	16	.039**	.653
Proactively help development	1.93	3.67	-2.000	-5.164	16	.000***	.387
Regular meeting	1.47	3	-1.533	-2.445	16	.026**	.627
Give real feedback	2.47	3	-.533	-.759	16	.459	.702
Open to feedback	3.13	4	-.867	-3.389	14	.004**	.256
Change after received feedback	1.87	3	-1.133	-2.578	16	.020**	.440
coaching	2.60	4	1.600	-7.483	14	.000***	.214
Info. sharing	3.20	3.33	-.267	-.495	16	.627	.539
availability	2.53	2	.267	1.293	14	.217	.206

4.3 Post-hoc analysis

All the employees said they completed the viewpoint survey and put priority on it in their calendar. When asked “what one thing AkzoNobel can do better for you”, employees showed their expectation on more sharing, more coordination in the work and really behave as ONE AkzoNobel. Employees also expressed their desire to have more entitlements and authorities. The company is expected to use more capabilities, experiences and talents of employees and foster a learning culture. Visibility of the leaders/managers is also considered as the key to the engagement by employees. Another important thing for employees is their messages can be really taken into account to improve their engagement. If employees get their managers’ roles, they noted they will praise the work their employees do, find their people’s talents, delegate work to their people and give them more trust and responsibilities. What they will also do is to know their people, and manage on both employee’s role and soul. Engagement is highly valued by employees, and they expect their say to be heard and a real action plan can be implemented. Employees expect to be developed and their capabilities and talents can be deployed, they also expect their effort to be

recognized and appreciated by their managers.

63% of employees who participated the post-hoc survey agreed and 20% of employees strongly agreed that research findings reflect the current situation in Corporate HR well while 17% of participants were not sure or partially agree with it (three employees indicated they partially agree with the research findings on the paper). 25 employees which is 83% of participants are confident that their engagement will be improved by implementing the action plan as I proposed and there are 5 employees are not sure about it. 90% of participants committed to support the action plan. Many employees suggested that not only the action plan for Corporate HR as a group is needed, each team in Corporate HR should also has their own action plan since different team will have different priorities.

5. Discussion

The research in Corporate HR confirmed that managers are playing a significant role in affecting employee engagement and overall management behaviors have impact on employee engagement. Same as many existing researches, job autonomy, development support, performance feedback are the key elements that influence employee engagement in AkzoNobel Corporate HR. Challenging work and work-person fit were also proven to be two factors of employee engagement. These items reflect the employees' strong will to further develop themselves in the workplace and show their talent.

Big gaps were found between manager's self-image and employee's perception on job autonomy, work-person fit and development support which are proven to have big impact on employee engagement. Employees are expecting more job autonomy from managers while managers think they have done it well. Employees also perceive they don't get the work that fit them and they don't get enough support from managers for their development which may frustrate employees and lead to their low engagement. It explains why employees in Corporate HR scored low in management support especially on opportunity to do the best. When a person is assigned to the right jobs and jobs are assigned to the right person, the person would have opportunity to do the best. Individuals have different talents, different interest and also different weakness, it is important but also complicated for a manager to understand the inner talent of the person and understand what kind of jobs can utilize the person's talents.

The gap in development support may due to their different definition on "proactively". Managers will expect employees to take charge their development and to ask for development opportunities proactively. Employees perceive it is one of the managers' responsibilities to develop employees especially when the manager is an HR professionals, they should be more aware of employees' development. It is also the fact that in an organization which has many well-defined policies or procedures, employees will need more real support from managers on their development activities (e.g. training, job rotation). Sometimes managers tend to keep the "talents" for their own or employees don't want to make them looks too ambitious by talking too much about their development.

Employees become disengaged when they didn't get what they expect and managers don't have any actions on it because they don't see it is a problem. When employees perceive their managers are not really open to feedback and don't often change their behaviors after received the feedback, they will lose confidence to give their managers feedback and tell their managers what do they feel and what do they expect. Less open communication will lead employees and managers to different directions and turn out to be the disengaged employees. It is critical for managers and employees to reach a consensus on 'what does employee want', 'what does manager expect' and 'how are they going to meet each other's expectation'.

The research failed to verify the impact of coaching and information sharing on employee engagement in Corporate HR. Neither information sharing with colleagues nor information sharing with managers is strongly related to their engagement. Regular meeting and managers' availability are not the factors of engagement in Corporate HR which is different from the existing researches.

The biggest issue for employees in Corporate HR now is their personal development. Employees want to take the job and challenges which can utilize their talents. They want to be trusted and supported so they can use their own ideas and way of working to accomplish their own tasks. They want their talent to be seen and to be developed. However their managers didn't realize it is an issue.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Problems and challenges in Corporate HR

In the interview with employees and managers in Corporate HR, it is evident that employees are disengaged because they feel they don't have enough development opportunities and their managers don't proactively support their development. Leaders and managers behavior need further improvement in Corporate HR for better employee engagement like the managers are expected to give more performance feedback, and they should be able to give them more challenges in work. Besides, employees expect to have a job that fit their interest, strengthens and ambitions while work-person fit has been a problem in Corporate HR that frustrated employees. Employees are disengaged when they are doing the job which they think cannot utilize their talent or excite them.

Although the problems of employee engagement in Corporate HR are significant, it is a big challenge to take actions to solve the problems. There are many personnel changes are happening because of the Dynamo project which is now the most important project in AkzoNobel. And also because of the project, people are too busy with the project of building One HR (e.g. One HR system, global functional capability building) to do extra work for engagement.

Unlike employee performance, employee salary or other HR topics, employee engagement is relatively new topic and intangible. People may believe it or not. It should not be regarded as an independent project or topic, employee engagement is relevant to everything you will think of or you will do in the workplace for example how you talk to others, how you respond to others, how you behave in the teamwork, etc. which means people will not see the outcome or the influence on their work in a certain period of time after the actions. It to some extent decreases the momentum of employees to take actions for employee engagement. During the several team meetings in Corporate HR, employee engagement is always the topic on the list that should be discussed but be parked to next meeting because of the time constraints or other priorities. It is obvious that people all regard employee engagement as an important topic because of company's strategy and objectives on employee engagement but not priority because people don't see its direct effect on their own work.

6.2 Recommendation

Employee engagement is about employees' own feeling, so it is critical for driving employee engagement through the practices that can meet employee's need and want. For driving employee engagement in Corporate HR, employee's say will be the key basis of the solution design. Leaders and managers play a key role in employee engagement because they can affect the employee engagement to a great extent. As employees, leaders and managers can be a role model in the organization and their engagement will infect employee's engagement. The leaders and managers who are

equipped with the engagement capability and positive management behaviors can provide employees with more job resources that are significantly related to their engagement.

A team objective for engagement should be set together by managers and employees. The objective should be specific, measurable, attainable and time-bounded. The objective should be related to the managers' accountability and team bonus. It can help create employees' awareness of engagement. It is not only an annual survey, but also an important job that need team effort.

Regular communication should be conducted by managers more often, and employees also need to be encouraged to initiate the one-on-one meeting instead of waiting for managers' initiatives. Both managers and employees should be coached how to conduct an effective communication and give feedback. Managers also need to participate the HR coach which is training for coach skills. Managers to have regular one-on-one discussion at least once a month with their employees to talk about their working progress and performance in the past month, give some real feedback (e.g. what is good, what can be improve). More than giving feedback, managers should also ask that resources and support employees will need more. Management diary should be used by every manager to record the key points of the discussion so that they can use it to remind themselves for their action points they agreed in the discussion, and employee's monthly performance, strength, interest, requirements and their feedback on the managers.

In AkzoNobel, P&D dialogue is used for manager and employee to review and discuss about employee's performance, development objectives and development plan which is twice a year. In Corporate HR, the dialogue should be extended to quarterly review and discussion. Every three months, manager and employee need to check if their development is on the right track.

A shared HR calendar can be developed which captures recurring HR processes, global learning & development programs and HR events. The quarterly performance & development dialogue should also be in the calendar. It helps employees to understand what is going to happen and what should they in the following months. It can also be used to support their development. AkzoNobel has a lot of events and programs for employees' development. For example the matching forum which is organized in a country basis to share the talent information and talent needs. Managers can recommend their talent in the matching forum for the important vacancies. There are also a lot of learning programs in place and for which participants will need their manager's nominations. A calendar can support managers in helping their people's development plan such as job rotation, short-term assignment or training.

Clearly define the work & tasks and what kind of people is needed for the work.

Increase the transparency in Corporate HR of work planning. Management team should not decide the work planning (e.g. who does what) alone, they should communicate and discuss it in the big team so employees have right to make suggestions or volunteer to do the work if they are interested in it. Ensure assigning the right work to the right person or right person to the right job.

The teams should measure their status and progress of implementing team action plan every month. During the big team meeting, each teams' progress will be presented and evaluated by other teams. It can encourage teams to make effort on their action plan and also help them to learn from other teams' best practices.

An engaged workforce is informed and involved, and communication is one important part in an organization which is also the area that organizations routinely fail to inform and involve the employees (Melcrum, 2007). The communication in the organizations mostly start from the top and getting pushed down to the front line employees which is also the case in AkzoNobel. The workers on the end of the communication pipeline rarely get an opportunity to voice their concern or opinions (Melcrum, 2007). Building an action team that represents employees' voice and feed back to the managers and leaders as a bridge can effectively create a two-way communication.

6.3 Practical and scientific relevance

Employee engagement has been a popular topic instead of employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Many researches have been conducted to study the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. After knowing the engagement will influence the organizational outcomes and various factors that will affect the employee engagement, it is critical to know "how to drive employee engagement in the working context" which still need more research on it. The problem-oriented case study of Corporate HR in AkzoNobel can contribute to the solution design for improving employee engagement in the similar work context and with similar problems.

Employee engagement is one of the most important topics in AkzoNobel. And in AkzoNobel, it is believed that business can only grow as fast as people grow. Grow people is not only about developing employee's capabilities but also engage employee so they will stay in the company, contribute to the company and help AkzoNobel achieve its ambition. HR is playing an important role in managing employees including their engagement as employee engagement is regarded as an HR topic. HR should play as a role model in engagement. However there is a big gap between the ideal situation and reality in AkzoNobel, engagement score of Corporate HR is at the bottom and lag far behind the company's aimed score. The research contributes to improve the current situation of low engagement in Corporate HR and bridge the gap.

I joined AkzoNobel in August in 2012 as an intern. My main responsibility is

supporting the HR works for Global HR function which is basically building HR people's capabilities. Engagement is not in my work scope. The employee engagement in Corporate is already an issue when I joined. My role in the research is a combination of insider and outsider. I started the research after three month's work. At that point of time, I have been participating almost all the activities in the team (Corporate HR). And I have many informal conversations with different colleagues who are mostly employees but not managers about their sense and feel about the work and the company. But because I am the new joiner and I'm in a neutral position in the team, I did the research on engagement as an outsider which is more objective viewer.

6.4 Limitation of the research

There are many changes of personnel during one year. 49 employees filled out the survey of 2012 and until February this year, Corporate HR only has 40 employees. Some inter-organizational movement or resignation happened which means some people who contribute to the engagement score of Corporate HR in 2012 left the team and some employees are new in the team. The people who were interviewed are the employees who have been working in Corporate HR for at least one year. 18 out of 40 employees were interviewed which is a relatively small group of people. Although 18 employees included employees from all the teams, the result cannot be generalized to the whole population of Corporate HR.

The structured interview was used as the data collection method. A set of standardized questions were used in the structured interview. With the close ended questions, the respondents may be not able to express their real thoughts because they were given a limited choice of possible answers. Interviewees were limited in the pre-coded questions and may not have opportunity to dive into the question. It is also a drawback for interviewer that may not probe the relevant information. During the interview, respondents may hear and interpret or understand the questions in a different manner and researcher's verbal comments and non-verbal cues can cause bias and have an influence upon respondents' answers (David & Sutton, 2004).

By using the judgmental sampling, the interviewees were selected without the use of any mathematical calculation on the size of the sample but based on interviewer's own judgment. It may cause bias in selecting the respondents and a gap may exist in the representativeness of the sample.

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Appendix A: Questions used in structured interview

Questions for employees:

1. What is engagement in workplace to you?

2. Do you believe in it?

Yes	most of the time	Sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

3. Are you engaged in your work?

Yes	most of the time	Sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

4. Why engaged?

Job itself	people here	sense of achievement
recognition & reward	Good pay	have impact on others &
organization	others:	

5. What makes you frustrated?

Relationship in workplace:

6. Do you have social events with your colleagues except business talk?

Yes	most of the time	Sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

7. Do you feel connected with you colleagues?

Yes	most of the time	Sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

8. Do share with each other about what your work?

Very often	often	sometimes	never
------------	-------	-----------	-------

About your manager:

9. Do you satisfied with you manager?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

10. Does your manager allow you to do the job the way you want?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

11. Does your manager micro-management?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

12. Do you have impact on your manager's decision making?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

13. Do you always clear about the objectives?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

14. Does your manager like to give you new challenges?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

15. Does your manager give you work that fits to your strengths, interest, aspiration?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

16. Does your manager proactively help your development?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

17. How often do you have regular meeting with your manager for discussing your progress?

Once a week twice a week once a month less.

18. Does your manger give you real feedback? (both positive and critical feedback)

Yes most of the time sometimes No

19. Does your manager open to feedback?

Yes most of the time sometimes No

20. Have you ever given him some critical feedback?

Yes No

21. Does he change his behavior after he received the feedback?

Yes to some extent No at all

Questions for managers:

1. What is engagement to you?

2. Do you believe in it?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
3. Are you engaged in your work?	Yes	most of the time	
Sometimes	No		

4. Why engaged?

Job itself	people here	sense of achievement
recognition & reward		
Good pay	have impact on others & organization	others:

5. And for which part of work makes you frustrated?

Relationship in workplace:

6. Do you have social events with your colleagues outside business?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

7. Do you feel connected with you colleagues?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

8. How often do you share with each other about what you are doing now and how?

Very often	often	sometimes	Not at all
------------	-------	-----------	------------

As a manager:

9. Do you know your team's engagement score?

Yes	No
-----	----

10. Are you surprised about the score?

Yes: higher than expected	Lower than Expected	No
---------------------------	---------------------	----

11. Do you think your employees are engaged?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

12. Do you allow your employees to do job the way they want?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

13. Do you micro-manage your employees?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

14. Do you involve your employees in your decision making?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

15. Do you set clear objectives for your team?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

16. Do you often give your employees new challenges in their work?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

17. Do you consider your employees development plan, interest, strength and weakness when you assigning the work to them?

Yes	most of the time	sometimes	No
-----	------------------	-----------	----

18. Are you proactive in helping their development?
- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | most of the time | sometimes | No |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
19. How often do you have meeting to review and discuss their progress?
- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|------|
| Once a week | twice a week | once a month | less |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|------|
20. Do you give your employees real feedback? (positive and critical)
- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | most of the time | sometimes | No |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
21. Are you open to the feedback?
- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | most of the time | sometimes | No |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
22. Have your employee ever given you some critical feedback?
- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | most of the time | sometimes | No |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
23. Have you changed behavior after you received the feedback?
- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | most of the time | sometimes | No |
|-----|------------------|-----------|----|