

Exploring the Factors of Workplace Environment Influence Employee Engagement Level: A Thematic Case Study of University Grants Commission, Nepal

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Abstract:

This study proposed to explore the factors of the workplace environment and their relationship. The environment plays a role in influencing the engagement level of employees in the University Grants Commission, Nepal. UGC Nepal has been a reputed government institution that is authorized to accredit colleges and universities in Nepal. The study followed a qualitative approach in which the researcher adopted thematic analysis. The respondents of the study were permanent and contract staff of UGC, Nepal. The findings explore the themes like work-life balance, team culture and role clarity have been contributing in the workplace environment of UGC while the issues of a culture of unfair treatment based on permanent and contract staff and lack of rewards and recognitions based on the performance result in the lack of motivation and dedication in the employees resulting the low vigor as well. Apart from this, employees are found to be less likely motivated enough to take noble initiatives and are less satisfied with the existing unfair practices of promotion at their perceptual level.

Key Words: Employee Engagement, Workplace Environment, Work Engagement, Motivation, Job Performance

1. Introduction:

Building better performing workplace demands an understanding on how the workplaces affect organization behavior and how these behaviors again drive workplace performance. Indeed, the workplace becomes an essential component of the performance in the relationship of employees, work, and the workplace (Joroff et al., 2003). Hughes and Parkes (2007) in a survey reported that nine out of ten workers believed that quality of work place affects the attitude of employees and increases their productivity.

While a positive work environment is important for an organization to produce better outcomes, employee engagement also has an impact on a company's overall output (Bakker, 2011). Career opportunities, benefits, corporate responsibility, coworkers, employee health and well-being, intrinsic motivation, manager, managing performance, middle management, organizational reputation, pay, people or HR practices, physical work environment, recognition, resources, retirement savings, senior leadership, work-life balance are among the 21 key drivers or components, to enhance employee engagement (Mishra et al., 2014). Therefore, managers and the entire company must endeavor to ensure that workers are interested

in their work environment, the activities that are arranged by the organization, and their job responsibilities. The senior management must also make sure that every employee is working in the appropriate capacity. Employees must also be given the opportunity to learn about the company's vision and objective, and any efforts made by them must be recognized and rewarded (Yu and Frenkel, 2013). According to Saks (2006), there is currently a dearth of research on employee engagement, thus more work has to be done in this area. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how working environment affects employee engagement.

On one hand, the workplace environment and its effects on employees' engagement has been a prominent research topic for private enterprises while on the other hand, public enterprises are still not in a stand to accept that workplace do affects employees' engagement and performance. May be because of this, there is a severe gap in the productivity level of public and private enterprises. The challenge is that, in the shadow of a mediocre and bureaucratic working environment, encouraging employees is not an easy undertaking. Due to their unfavorable working conditions, government personnel have a reputation for being sluggish and apathetic (Wright, 2001), and managers are

powerless to change this due to strict civil and public service laws and acts. One of the biggest issues in public management is how managers and institution as a whole not being able to motivate their workers (Behn, 1995).

This shows that public enterprises need an immediate intervention to identify whether their employees perceived the workplace environment favorable or not to and how does it affect the employee engagement. In this background, this study aims to explore the status of workplace environment from the view-point of employee and try to identify its effect in the employee engagement level at UGC, Nepal.

The influence of workplace environment on employee engagement level has always been the issue of research and discussion in the discipline of organizational behavior and human resource management across the globe and Nepal is not an exception.

However, very few studies have been done with special focus on a particular organization of public sector. Further, this study is supposed to generate insights that could fill the knowledge gap in the decision-making authorities of the concerned organization so that they can ameliorate their workplace environment and ensure better employee engagement level through policy, managerial and operational interventions in the days to come. Apart from this, this study could be a reference material for capacity development service providers like NASC to endorse case-based teaching-learning approaches in classroom sessions to impart hands-on knowledge and skills in the trainees with evidence informed case study representing diverse spheres of Nepali Public Service and institutions at large.

Operational Definitions:

Employee Engagement:

Despite the fact that there are many definitions of employee engagement, the well-known study by Schaufeli et al. (2002)) claims that managers are not always the factors that influence an employee's engagement but rather that engagement is "a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior." The opposite of engagement, according to researchers who study "burnout," is said to include "exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficiency" (González-Romá et al., 2006). In contrast, engagement is said to consist of "energy, involvement, and efficiency" and "vigor and dedication" (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees that are well balance and are emotionally attached to the organization's vision and mission are more likely to be involved in achieving those goals. A motivated employee will work with a forward-thinking mindset, enhancing the organization's reputation and worth. Employers create cultures that reward high levels of employee engagement, and happy workers are eager to take advantage of all the resources provided by their employers (Kaliannan and Adjovu, 2015). In order to engage employees and link their ambitions with those of the corporation, businesses define well-equipped designs. Employee engagement is a useful strategy for

preventing employee burnout and disengagement, as well as for indulging their good feelings and promoting ethical behavior at work.

Workplace Environment:

Employees' desire to continue working for the company is significantly influenced by workplace conditions. Previous research has demonstrated that the work environment is a component that may be utilized to assess each employee's level of involvement within the firm (Popli and Rizvi, 2016). According to research by Miles et al. (2001) and Harter et al. (2002), different features of the workplace might lead to different levels of employee engagement. Management that promotes a supportive work environment is defined as organizations that perform their responsibilities, demonstrate their concern for employees' needs and feelings, provide constructive feedback and allow workers to voice their concerns, develop new skills, and resolve work-related difficulties (Deci and Ryan, 1987). In fact, Kahn (1990) found that supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships as well as supportive management promoted psychological safety. Organizational.

Influence of Workplace Environment in Employee Engagement:

The working environment at a company is significant, according to Garg and Talwar (2017), because it is thought to encourage employees, which leads to improved productivity, stronger business enthusiasm, and deeper customer involvement. It is also thought that when someone feels respected and appreciated at work, they will positively contribute to the success of the company. Because it may reduce turnover rates, a happy environment is always beneficial for both the individual and the company. The working culture, working style, hierarchies, and human resource practices that have been adopted or followed in an organization are all included in the work environment, in addition to work engagement and motivation at the workplace (Agarwal and Mehta, 2014).

Despite the numerous research work on employee engagement and workplace environment, it is yet difficult to contextualized the factors of workplace environment in the public institutions of Nepal and through this study, the researcher try to fulfill this gap. However, the researcher focused on one public institution that is University Grants Commission and try to explore the factors of their workplace environment that is influencing their work engagement.

2. Materials And Methods:

This study employed thematic analysis following the explorative approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to explore the factors within the workplace environment that affect employee work engagement.

The study population are the employees of University Grants Commission of Nepal. Altogether seven respondents were selected through purposive sampling

considering different department, different age group and years of experience (Creswell et al., 2007). All the respondents were thoroughly interviewed through in-depth semi-structured interview method.

Data collection for the qualitative study were begin after receiving the approval from the UGC, Nepal and participants were informed with consent documents. Following the submission of the informed consent documents, data collection was accomplished through conduction of semi-structured interviews following an interview guide. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule as the main instrument for data collection. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to seek a deeper understanding of the human experience (Bearman, 2019) as it allows the opportunity to develop personalized open-ended questions based on participants' response (Robson, 2016). Interviews with each participant was conducted face-to face. The questions were developed based on the literatures on the factors considered in the conceptual framework.

The research team pre-informed the respondents of the study about the study objective and purpose and received their consent.

In addition to this, the research team mentioned about the professional treatment of the insights and information shared by respondents ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. This allowed respondents to open up and freely share their valuable experiences and feelings during the interview sessions.

This study used thematic analysis. This required the transcription of interview recordings and followed coding. Initially, the researcher read and re-read transcripts in order to identify potential themes, which then forwarded to the lead researcher. The second level of analysis involved reviewing these initial codes. The lead researcher reviewed themes prior to defining and naming them. Finally, the themes were finalized and the write-up of the report began.

Findings:

The thematic analysis produced five themes under work environment that influence the employee engagement of UGC. The themes included are: Work Life Balance (WLB), Role Clarity, Team Culture, Rewards and Recognition, and Fairness and Diversity Management at Workplace.

Work Life Balance (WLB):

In UGC the respondents were clear about the healthy work life balance that they have been experiencing till now. The finding also suggested that it depends on the people nature on how they handle the work pressure otherwise the work that are allocated to be done by the staffs are enough to be done within the working hours in UGC.

"As a working mother I never want to take office work at home, and neither the office forced me to do so".
(Respondent 6)

The findings also suggested that the employees would be more satisfied if there is a documented provisions for the welfare of employees in terms of WLB. Male and Female counterparts have also given the same response supporting the findings that suggests that work life balance in UGC, Nepal is well maintained however in near future if any imbalance occurs there is no any office provisions in case of work life balance so they are not sure this will prevail for long.

Role Clarity:

The findings of several studies on employee motivation showed that perceived role clarity has many advantages in the form of positive employee outcomes. The findings from the in-depth interview of UGC staffs indicated the struggle to engage and encourage their workers in their work because of the lack of clear job description. UGC has a certain standard job description which sounds charming but is not objectified.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Respondent	Gender	Position	Age	Nature of Job	Years of Experience	Qualification
1	Male	Officer III	40	Permanent	14	Master in Journalism and Public Administration
2	Female	Assistant I	29	Contract	5	Master in Business Studies
3	Male	Officer II	54	Permanent	20	Masters
4	Male	Officer II	45-50	Contract	10	IT Engineer
5	Female	Assistant II	29	Contract	4	M. Phil in Public Administration
6	Female	Officer III	49	Permanent	20	Master in Public Administration
7	Female	Assistant I	37	Permanent	13	Masters in Sociology

"Our JD is given to us but it very unclear. It considers of superficial things like achieving project goals with utmost efficiency and effectiveness however we are not clear with the project goals. The detailing and simplification of the job description is required for role clarity". (Respondent 7)

Team Culture:

While organizational culture affects the effectiveness of the organization, team culture influences team effectiveness, commitment and work engagement of its team members and this can be seen in UGC as the finding showed that despite organization culture of UGC was not appreciated by many of the staffs, the team culture of one or two division seems to be integrated, valued and as (Costa et al., 2014) mentioned that the team member who feels contributed and valued are also the one who feel inspired, energetic and willing to work with that team even despite possible external setbacks.

"In QAA division, out of 7 members, 5 of us are contract staffs but we never felt that way. We love our work and we perform our work equivalent to permanent employee. Also in case of team cohesiveness our QAA division is considered the best in the organization itself. This is because in QAA our voices are heard, our ideas are respected and roles are clear". (Respondent 2)

Rewards and Recognition:

The finding shows that employees of UGC might lack emotional attachment to the organization which is an important part of engagement as it can be measured by looking on how they feel motivated in their work. Employee tends to be more motivated if they get something that can make them feel more excited in the workplace. So, the vigor of coming to work is highly affected by the lack of formal recognition in an organization. However, the personal character of a person can play a mediating role in case of dedication of performing the work as if an employee is a hard-working person, even in the absence of reward he/she will give his best at work.

"There is no any recognition or rewards based on my performance, instead after giving 9 years of my valuable time in an organization, my office even did not provide me a paid leave when I get an opportunity from to pursue my master degree. What can I expect from this organization, the best employee award is given in roll call based rather than evaluating a performance. This has demotivated me to come to work but if you ask particularly about performing my duties, yet I am doing with my full dedication". (Respondent 1)

Fairness and Diversity Management at Workplace:

"I am academically a sound scholar. I have done my M. Phil in Public Administration. I am highly interested in research and academic work. But the irony is despite working in a academic institution like UGC, just because

I am a not permanent staff I am not eligible to apply for research grants or PhD fellowship. I don't understand what kind of provision is this. How can institution like UGC can discourage its own staff to pursue for research works". (Respondent 4, Heena)

There is no any seen biasness in terms of diversity in the organization. However, the findings depicted that employees do give sarcastic judgement based on education and ethnicity in UGC which is taken normally in the organization culture.

"As a Newar I am always judged for my accent and I am not given chance to speak in programme or host any event." (Respondent 7)

"People keep telling me that I am not in a right place as per my education. I don't that this there is sincere concern or just trying to let me down". (Respondent 4)

3. Results And Discussion:

The variables of workplace environment are primarily identified through the work environment scale of (Moos2005) while other variables like team culture, rewards and incentives, diversity is equally relevant (Deci and Ryan, 1987). On the other hand, the aspects of employee engagement are adopted from the work engagement scale of Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) that consists of vigor, dedication and absorption. The term "vigor" describes having a high amount of drive, stamina, perseverance, readiness, and mental toughness when working. Being dedicated to one's work and feeling fulfilled, satisfied, and challenged are examples of dedication. Absorption refers to being engaged and fully engrossed in one's work (without knowing the time passing by) and finds it difficult to separate from that task. For this study, only two determinants vigor and dedication were considered.

The researcher explored work life balance as the first theme. Work-life balance (WLB) has been described in a variety of ways over the years. WLB is vital in determining an employee's attitude toward their business and their lives, claims Scholarios and Marks (2004). Timms et al. (2015) looked at WLB as a potential indicator of job engagement. They also took into account the impact of WLB on work performance, both good and bad and the study demonstrated a relationship between all three aspects of job engagement (i.e., absorption, devotion, and vigor). Our findings of UGC depicted that work place environment is heavily influenced by the informal WLB and it boost the engagement level because of the flexibility and freedom it creates through informal WLB. Most work-life balance policies are organized programs or rules established at the human resources level, with the goal of assisting employees in integrating their paid employment with other vital life responsibilities. Formal policies, such as role induction, can help individuals gain professional awareness and increase work engagement.

However, informal practices of work-life balance are more beneficial in creating a balance between paid work and life (Eberman et al., 2019).

In regards to the role induction, the second theme that was developed was role clarity. Rao Jada et al. (2019) correctly said that managers should emphasize creating clear job descriptions as well as communicating to staff members what is expected of them. By frequently outlining job goals and expectations, management may help workers understand their roles better (Hassan, 2013). According to a study by Kundu et al. (2021) on perceived role clarity, innovative work behavior is directly impacted favorably by role clarity, employees have a tendency to act better when they understand their work duties. The unclear JD and key performance indicators have created ambiguity in the job to be performed in UGC resulting in the lower dedication in the staffs. Additionally, Dalal (2018) made the correct point that when employees are unclear about their jobs, they lose energy in bewilderment rather than completing their tasks, which lowers their level of engagement at work.

Team Culture as the another theme refers to members who share the same insights about emergent and simplified sets of norms, values and beliefs developed after mutual interactions and expect the same type of work ability and behavior among its members (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). Employees who work in the same team interact more frequently, so they can be more influenced by their direct workgroup than by the organization itself (Shin et al., 2015). The QAA team of UGC stood as the instance which shows that stronger the team culture, the greater the team work engagement of its members.

Engagement of the employee cannot be separate from the employees' individual interests. Maslach et al. (2001) have suggested that a lack of rewards and recognition can lead to burnout and appropriate recognition and reward is important for engagement Equity, and in essence - fairness, is a key driver of employee engagement. Other factors that impact perceptions of fairness include; proximity (how close an employee is to the situation and their level of involvement), expectations and entitlement (Beugré, 1998). Demographic factors also impact perceptions of fairness; level of education, occupational status, occupational tenure and gender where men are more likely to perceive fairness as equity, whereas women are more likely to perceive fairness as equality (Beugré, 1998).

4. Conclusion:

This study proposed to explore the factors of workplace environment that plays role in influencing the engage-

ment level of employees in University Grants Commission, Nepal.

UGC Nepal has been a reputed government institution that is also an authorized organization that accredited colleges and universities. It is important for an organization to have a strong human resource management as the function of UGC demands wide range of human resources from academic as administrative view. Effective human resource management is also synonymous effective employee engagement and the literatures suggested that the environment of workplace plays a vital role in the creating the level of engagement of employees in an organization.

The human resource of UGC Nepal has been comprised of permanent and contract employees. This study demonstrated the issues of culture of unfair treatment and biasness on the basis of permanent and contract staff and lack of rewards and recognitions based on the performance result in the lack of motivation and dedication in the employees resulting the low vigor as well. Apart from this, employees are found to be less likely motivated enough to take noble initiatives and are less satisfied with the existing unfair practices of promotion at their perceptual level. Moreover, The lack of succession plan, career growth, reward and recognition are few noticeable issues for an organization because of which organization are not being able to retain talented and intellectual staffs which eventually make the workplace worse. Thus, with this study we can conclude that to create a better workplace environment the system should be developed in such a way that it addressed the issues of employees. A better workplace environment is the result of formal and informal system that addresses the issues of employees because when employees are heard, they are engaged which eventually contributes in the productivity of an organization.

5. Funding Statement:

This study did not receive funding from any specific grant or funding agency.

6. Completing Interest:

The authors confirm that they have no competing interests to declare.

7. Acknowledgment:

The authors would like to thank all the respondents for participating in this study.

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