
“WINNING EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN IT SECTOR: AN ANALYSIS ON EMERGING TRENDS & CHALLENGES.”

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Abstract

IT industry in India is confronting with a multitude of challenges ranging from talent crunch & its effective management, growing insecurity among employees & the apprehensions raised by automation, a few among the prominent. Maintaining a highly motivated talent pool with proper engagement mechanisms always proved to be the key for achieving a competitive edge, & therefore profuse groundworks & experimentations are happening to boost the employees as well as the organizations in this regard. Trust in management and in the future of the company is a key component of employee engagement. Employees want to know what drives the company they are working for, what its long term goals are and how they will be involved in achieving these objectives. Communication and transparency across all levels of management are what foster this trust and determine the degree of discretionary effort that comes with a high level of engagement. Apart from the extensive researches happened, happening, on the extrinsic & intrinsic motivators, organizational culture & climate, the researchers throughout the world have been scrutinizing for a solid, hidden factor that command employee behavior; as the motivational & cultural researches are only partially successful in identifying the deciding factors behind employee behavior. This study throws light into the various challenges that come on the way of effective engagement mechanisms in the IT sector & also provides a brief overview of the engagement trends in vogue. The study also suggests a model that can be used for engaging employees in a more effective way in organizations by satisfying both the career aspirations of employees as well as the organizational goals.

Key words: Effective employee engagement, Challenges, New trends, IT sector.

1. Introduction

The Information Technology & Information technology Enabled Services (IT- ITeS) sector with its rapid evolution & cutting edge competitions is changing the shape of Indian business standards. The Indian IT & ITeS industry is divided into four major segments - IT services, Business Process Management (BPM), Hardware & Software Products & engineering Services. By being the world's top sourcing destination (2016-17) with a share of 55 % & setting up over 1000 global delivery centres in more than 200 cities around the world , the Indian IT industry serves to be a crucial factor that imparts economic transformation of the country & brought back the country a significant position in the global economy. Identifying the abundance of cost effective eminent talents & market opportunities, several global IT firms have started innovation centres in India, thereby gaining the country prominence in terms of intellectual property also. The boom in the industry has its imprints on the Indian education sector also & it has created enormous demand for courses like engineering, computer science etc. Apart from the splendors enjoyed, the industry is facing critical external as well as internal challenges. The globally fluctuating socio-economic, political & legal conditions accounts for the external challenges where as talent crunch, cultural impacts on the performance, dis engaged employees & the growing insecurity among the employees leading to trade unionism tends to shake the internal equilibrium of the Indian IT industry. Employee engagement as a propulsive concept & practice is gaining momentum because, now the organizations focus on strengthening the internal environment by constantly employing effective engagement mechanisms in order to retain a highly motivated work force. So a detailed study on the topic is inevitable, to understand the various factors that creates a favourable engaging environment for the employees in the IT organizations as well as to identify the factors that raise apparent challenges for imparting effective engagement mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Employee Engagement

Understanding employee engagement in its full sphere has become the need of the hour for both the business concerns as well as the academic world. Early research on Employee Engagement was pioneered by Kahn (1990) & it provided the cardinal foundation for the ensuing works on engagement. The term "Engagement " was coined by Kahn in 1990 & it got first published in his article the "Psychological Conditions Of Personal Engagement & Dis engagement at Work " which appeared in a 1990th edition of the Academy Of management Journal. Kahn defined personal engagement with work "as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ & express themselves physically, cognitively & emotionally during role performances"(page 694). Kahn opines that the psychological presence in a role involves three aspects physical, emotional & cognitive. When people are engaged in their work, they have a tendency to express their preferred selves or identity, physically, emotionally & cognitively during role performances. On the other side, when they are disengaged they lose their interest for self expression & will defend & withdraw themselves. According to Kahn , in addition to using one's full self in work, an employee could be physically engaged, emotionally engaged, & cognitively engaged & these states of being were affected significantly by three psychological domains namely

Meaningfulness, Safety, & Availability .The concept of engagement recognizes that employees need self expression& role clarity in their working lives . Kahn's theory of employee engagement has its foundation on a wide net of early research works (Freud 1922; Goffman 1961, Maslow 1970, smith & Berg 1987) to provide a better understanding of his framework & it also includes the use of previous, well researched organizational constructs such as Job design (Hackman & Old ham 1980),Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Meil 1989), Job Stress theory (Thoits 1991) & emerging literature on emotion in the work place (Hoschchild ,1979).The recent academic research movement (May et al2004, Luthans & Peterson 2002, Johns & Harter 2005) which emphasizes more on employees' strengths & capabilities rather than their weaknesses & the potential benefits of employee well being (Luthans 2002, Harter et al 2002, Peterson & Spiker 2005) is very much influenced by Kahn's framework of employee engagement.Employee Engagement has been conceptualized as a positive psychological state of motivation with behavioral manifestations like OCBs , discretionary efforts etc(Saks 2006,Schmidt, Harter & Hayes2002,Reio & Rocco) & researchers like Shuck (2010) has identified its relationship with organizational & performance outcome variables such as discretionary efforts & intention to turn over. Lepine, Rich, & Crawford (2010) details on the relationship of employee engagement on the overall performance of the Organization. Anitha (2014) details on the link of Employee engagement with the outcome that contributes to employee job performance. Employee Engagement is conceptualized as the positive antithesis to burn out (Maslach et al 2001) & he defines engagement as a "persistent positive affective state characterized by high levels of activation & pleasure. Maslach et al (2001) defines "Burn out" as the erosion of engagement & in this stage the employee turn out to be in other side of the continuum, where he/she finds everything which was once important, meaningful, & challenging in the work became unpleasant, meaningless & unfulfilling. In 2003 Shrirom came up with a new perspective that the previous researches on engagement (Kahn 1990, Shaufali et al 2002, Maslach et al 2001), instead of conceptualizing engagement as a separate state, put it on the continuum just the opposite of a negative & it limits the reach into the manifold aspects of the concept. Saks(2006) first suggested two separate states of engagement "job engagement" & "organizational engagement". According to Saks employee engagement is a distinct & unique construct consisting of cognitive, behavioral & emotional components & which is associated with individual role performance. To test the cognitive-behaviour-emotional model of engagement Saks(2006)conducted a study at a Canadian University & the results indicated a positive relationship between the antecedent variables of job characteristics, perceived organizational support & procedural justice. According to Saks(2006) antecedent variables such as supportive climate, fairness & job characteristics influenced the development of engagement.Macey &Schneider(2008) identifies a positive relationship between employee engagement & job characteristics, leadership & personality. Based on the previous frameworks (Kahn 1990, Maslach et al 2001,Shaufeli Salanova et al 2002, Vallerand & Haulfort 2003) Zigarmi et al put forward an operational construct titled "Employee Work Passion" which is defined as an "individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning - based, state of well being stemming from reoccurring cognitive & affective appraisals of various jobs & organizational situations, that results in constructive, consistent work intentions & behaviours"(Zigarami et al ,2009,page 310.)The significance of the concept "Employee work passion" is that it is the first emergent concept noted in the literature to have developed from contemporary employee engagement research. The future prospects of

Employee Engagement research lies on its usability & also on differentiating the concept from other well defined job attitude & Organizational constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job affect & job involvement (Sparker, Newman, Joseph & Carpenter 2011).

2.2 Employee Engagement in Indian Industries.

Each organization have their on perspective on the engagement strategies that have to be followed based on their vision , mission & core values .Therefore employee engagement takes up different facets & patterns in different organizations. While practitioner organizations focus more on the benefits that the organization should receive from engagement policies without giving much explanations on the role of organizations & the state of engagement, academicians & consultants consider “engagement” as a mutually beneficial relationship & also provides some explanation on the psychological state of engagement. As an ardent practitioner of “Employee engagement” the IT organization “Wipro” considers effective engagement as a major tool in fostering a culture of participation, & which helps to bring employees & leaders closer together on a common platform & which also reinforces a culture of transparency & ownership. (Wipro Annual Report 2014). Employee engagement is a multi phased process & it involves the attracting, acquiring & advancing the talent pool within the organization. It is not a one time process & cannot bring rapid results. An effective engagement program takes place as a step by step process starting from the Preparation & design of the program, Conducting an employee engagement survey, Analysis of the survey results, Action Planning & finally Action follow up. Communication at each level of organizational hierarchy, careful planning, watchful resource allocation, vigilant budget control & proper monitoring serves to be the ideal conditions for an effective engagement program.

Organizations now conduct their own studies & surveys to identify the key factors that could engage the employees effectively in the work place. Earlier the personal context of the employee was not given much importance in designing the engagement strategies & due importance was given to rewards, recognition, security aspects ,etc. But the digital revolution , cut throat competition ,inception of the global village concept, & the outset of a parallel virtual world ultimately changed the attitude of employees towards personal life & work life & the present organizations are now compelled to reconstruct their organizational set up as well as their engagement strategies.

According to a study conducted by Rama. J. Joshy & J.S. Sodhi (2011) Work life Balance, Job content, Monetary benefits & Team orientation are found to be the common drivers of engagement for both the executives as well as non executives, where as Top management – employee Relations , Scope for advancement remained as the key engagement drivers for the executives.

Madura Bedarkar & Deepika Pandita in their study “A study on the drivers of employee engagement impacting employee performance “(2014) tries to analyze the concept of “employee engagement” & its key drivers by specifically focusing on communication, work life balance & leadership .

In their study Tara Sankar & Jyotsna Bhatnagar (2010) tries to provide a broader canvas for the concept Work -Life Balance rather than considering it as a mere work & family aspect.

The study also tries to unveils the relationship of Work Life Balance with other variables such as employee engagement, emotional consonance/dissonance & turn over intention.

According to the study “Employee job satisfaction &engagement :Revitalizing a changing work force”(April 2016) conducted by “Society For Human Resource Management”, levels of employee engagement are typically defined by the actual conditions of the workplace & workers’ opinions & behaviours as they relate to their jobs. SHRM research has shown that the engagement levels of employees are often determined by the strength of their relationships with supervisors & coworkers, as well as their belief in their own ability to perform their jobs effectively & contribute to their organization. The findings of SHRM research also identifies maintaining high levels of engagement as a significant challenge among HR professionals & executives.

L.K Jena, P. Bhattacharyya, Sajeet Pradhan (September ,2017) leads the literature on employee engagement to a different dimension by focusing on the mediating role of “employee voice” in explaining the relationship between employee engagement & affective organizational commitment in their study among Indian Service Sector employees. The findings of the study emphasize the mediating role of “employee voice” in the relationship between employee engagement & affective organizational commitment.

These studies points to the changing perceptions on the key drivers of engagement thanks to the rapidly changing social & work life patterns.

2.3 Research Gap

Employee engagement has been identified as one of the critical HR challenges by several studies (SHRM 2017).Being a multilingual, multicultural society employee engagement in Indian industry always calls for special attention & interest. The sole dependency of IT industry on technological advancements, the related stress & intensive competitions makes “Employee engagement” a more intricate practice in the same & the industry has to come up with ingenious solutions to overcome this hurdle. Lots of researches have taken place to identify the predictors & antecedents of employee engagement, as well as to analyze the relationship of the construct “employee engagement” with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, motivation, stress, coworker & organizational support & other jobrelated constructs.But, the emerging trends & their impact on “employee engagement” in IT industry has yet to be explored. The challenges faced by effective engagement mechanisms in IT industry also remains as a grey area & this study tries to throw light into these two aspects.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 The Objectives of The Study

The major objective of conducting this study is as follows:

- To identify the emerging trends & challenges in implementing effective employee engagement mechanisms in IT industry.
- To understand the effectiveness of employee engagement in IT Sector.
- To understand the impact of employee engagement in achieving organizational goals.
- To suggest a model for a more ‘effective employee engagement by blending both the career aspirations of the employees & the organizational goals’.

3.2 Research Design

The study is a qualitative secondary research, exploratory in nature, & involves a detailed review on the existing literature on employee engagement. The study also explores into the emerging trends & challenges in “employee engagement” in Indian IT industry. This study is based on secondary data through existing literatures on employee engagement.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Secondary data is used in this study & data was collected through journals, magazines, articles, blogs & professional HR groups. A group of IT professional were interviewed to get the feedback on the study and related literature in the area.

3.4 Limitations of The Study

The secondary data collected from the reliable and authenticated sources were sometimes not very specific and this leads to making fair assumptions by the researcher, which may not be 100% valid all the times. Secondary data was very risky and is to be used only when their reliability, suitability and adequacy have been ensured. If this is not done, the results of the investigation may not be fully correct and the published data may not be always reliable and exactly as per the needs of survey work undertaken. However, to overcome the limitations and maintain the effectiveness of research work sincere efforts were put into the study.

3.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Being an exploratory research this study tries to explore the various challenges & emerging trends in employee engagement in Indian IT industry. More conclusive researches in these dimensions is needed to construct a strong theoretical base for the “Employee Engagement” practices at Indian IT industry. A comparative study on the different engagement models of different companies is also a prospective research area as employee engagement is now regarded as a core competitive advantage.

4. Findings:

4.1 New Trends in Employee Engagement in The Indian IT sector.

Indian IT sector in its challenging course of action is focusing on exclusive engagement strategies bottom lined with the principles of communication, appreciation, rewards, recognition & care. The present day witnesses the transformation of the workplace into a ‘nurturing hub’ of employees where their personal & professional aspirations are taken care of in an imperative manner; identifying the critical role played by employee engagement in enhancing the overall performance of the organization. Earlier the scope of employee engagement was very much limited & it just existed as an extension of employee satisfaction & motivation policies. With the advent of Generation Y & Generation Z employees, a tremendous change has taken place in the attitude of IT organizations towards “engagement” & it just revamped as a top-notch tool for competitive advantage. So it is very important to analyze the changing trends in “Employee engagement” as the reliability & validity of the newly added factors remains as prospective research areas in employee engagement. The

emerging trends in “Employee Engagement” can be explained briefly to understand the transformation that has happened in the concept.

- **Open Communication Platforms.**

The twenty first century organizations stresses on the importance of open communication in organizations. Organizations conduct special events & webcasts to encourage the employees to open up with the seniors & top management so that a sense of transparency & belongingness can be nurtured in the organizations. An open organizational culture is definitely a booster for effective employee engagement.”

“ Wipro meets” at Wipro is an ideal example for such an open platform. Usually such sessions witnesses presentation of the financial results, new initiatives, & updates from different parts of the world over the organization.

- **Social Media As A Tool For Internal Communication**

Social media has proved to be an effective tool for external activities such as branding, marketing & recruiting .Recently social media has been adopted as a tool to enhance internal organizational communication, collaboration, innovation & knowledge sharing amongst the employees. Both public as well as companies’ internal social media platforms are made available to the employees. The social collaborative platform called MEME(HCL), Accenture People(Accenture),Infy Bubble(Infosys) are successful examples of social media enacts a critical role in enhancing internal communication, peer relationships, & collaborative learning among the employees.

- **Blogs For Imparting Informal Dialogues**

Communication has become the watch word of success today & identifying this pulse organizations are trying to impart open, informal communication among the employees through blogs, which is an effective medium for healthy discussions & expressions. Such initiatives help the organization to boost up creative ideas as well as to create an emotional bonding among the employees & also with the organization.

- **Collaboration With Academia**

Organizations are well aware about the precedence of knowledge in this era of cut - throat competition & arrange for ample facilities to impart knowledge & higher education for their employees. Collaboration with world class universities has now evolved as a new engagement strategy. To help their employees learn & grow HCL has tied up with two leading institutions -U21 Global & Harward Business School Publishing, for the purpose of advanced learning & higher education to its work force. On the other hand IT organizations opens a new chapter by contributing to improve the overall engineering/technical education in the country by empowering the faculties with innovative teaching techniques & tools. Mission 10 X by Wipro is such an initiative.

- **Gamification**

The usage of Games or Gamification at the workplace usually for repetitive tasks, engaging in smart hiring, for gaining performance related task has proved to be useful in increasing the involvement of employees at their job. This strategy helps to avoid the brain drain created by monotonous jobs.

- **Eco- Sustainability Initiatives**

The Eco-sustainability initiatives & Go Green campaigns such as planting trees, making the work place more ecofriendly, screening ecological movies, putting up stalls for eco-friendly products, encouraging the use of mass transport than individual vehicles etc. creates among the employees a feeling of respect & dignity for their work place & this thought can indirectly influence them to engage in their work more productively.

- **Women Empowerment & Appreciation Programmes**

“Employee Engagement” practice is now moving through an exigent phase of exclusive “Women employee engagement programmes”. Floating through the stress & stringency of family life & work life women employees are losing their personal space for creative & innovative thoughts & even though they are not at all happy with the workplace their proximity causes prevent them from switching over the job; the ultimate result is a totally disengaged employee. Luckily, the organizations are now seriously approaching this issue & lots of measures have been implementing in this regard. Apart from the flexi timings& day care facilities ensured, a healthy relationship with the work place, co-workers & superiors, can engage a women employee more effectively.

- **Fitness Programmes**

The new-fangled organizations focus much on ensuring proper health for their employees. Employees in their busy personal life sometimes fail to spend time for regular health checkups & diagnosis. Fitness programmes offered by the organizations to a certain extent solve this issue.

- **Rewards & Recognition Programmes**

Rewards & recognition programmes remains the all- time spectacular component of employee engagement programmes. But the pattern of such programmes have changed catering to the changing needs. Online-instant recognition programmes which is reachable for all the employees irrespective of their location is a new trend in this regard. Identifying & rewarding the leaders who have institutionalized best practices to motivate, engage & retain the employees in their team will help to motivate the team leaders as well as the employees to utilize their full potential in the jobs.

- **Family time at the Campus**

Building a strong bond with the employees as well as their families have now found to be an effective engagement strategy practiced by the business tycoons. By arranging family meets in the work place & conducting entertaining events for the employees' kids, organizations transform the official work environment into an informal but productive hub where the organization & the employees merge into a "Family". Petit Infosyon day(Infosys), Kids @ Wipro(Wipro) are such initiatives by the organizations.

- **CSR Programmes**

Focusing on creating a social value for the organization , conjointly building a stature among the employees ,CSR programmes are taking up new faces by being more inclusive , & providing the employees more opportunities to be a part of it.

- **Start Ups**

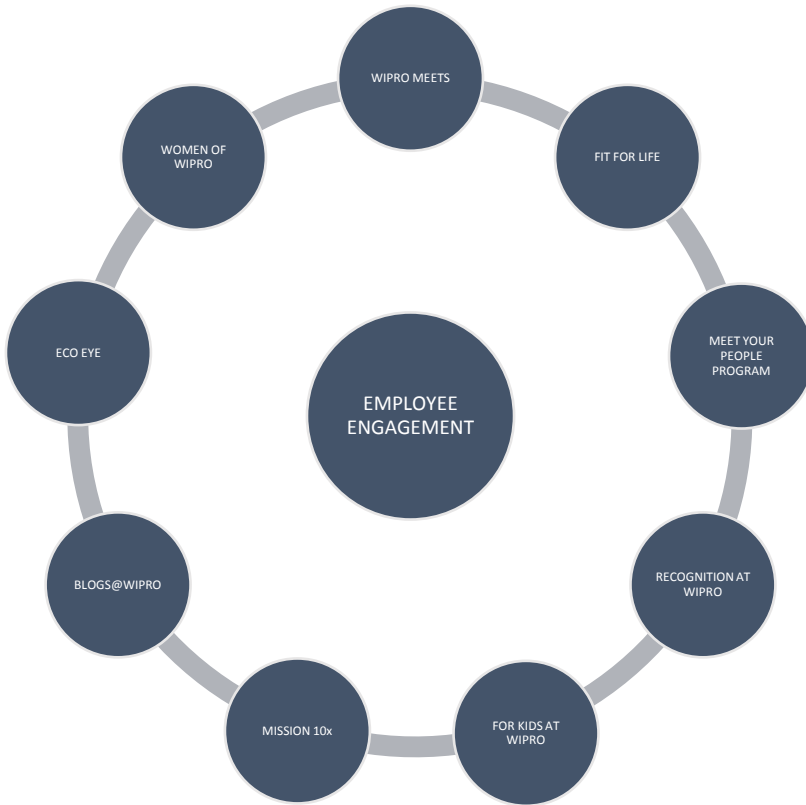
Incubating startups helps the companies to tap into a repertoire of new ideas. Nurturing niche start ups& providing them with ample opportunities & assistance organizations achieves multiple benefits such as gaining access to external digital talent, highly committed & effectively engaged employees, & good reputation.

- **Fun At Workplace**

Fun@ workplace has been emerged as an effective engagement strategy &a study conducted by Bright HR points out that employees who have fun at work are less likely to take sick leaves & more likely to report feeling creative at work & are more committed to their organization.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MODELS AT DIFFERENT COMPANIES.

Figure:1



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MODEL AT WIPRO.

Figure :2



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MODEL AT HCL TECHNOLOGIES.

4.2 Major Challenges Identified in the Engagement Programmes in The Indian IT Sector.

The consistent efforts by the organizations to effectively engage their employees often met with potential challenges that totally disrupt the engagement mechanisms which in turn affect the overall health of the organization. Some of the major challenges identified in this study are:

- **Poaching & Cut -Throat Competition**

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Fervid competitions, lucrative offers & unethical practices like poaching raise serious threats to the employee engagement mechanisms. Engagement mechanisms have to be elated in order to overcome such challenges. Though the working organizations provide excellent packages & benefits employees sometimes carried away by the offers of the competitors'. So it is imperative to identify such sensitive factors that come on the way of effective engagement of employees.

- **Dis-Engagement of Women Employees**

As multiple role players the women employees face lots of challenges at their work space & personal life. Due to family, travelling concerns, they sometimes get forced to stick to an unhappy work place which in turn leads to total dis engagement; which is detrimental for both the organization as well as the employee. So engaging the women work force by scrutinizing the sensitive issues should be a priority for the organizations. Work stress, Lack of coworker- supervisor support, unsafe working environment, lack of recognition, health related issues etc are identified as the potential challenges in “women employee engagement”.

- **Generational Differences**

Each generation is unique with its traits & demeanors, attitude towards work & work environment, expectations from the workspace, opinions on rewards & recognition programmes & approach towards coworkers & technological advancements. So it is a real challenge to devise an engagement programme which full fills the expectations of a multigenerational work force.

- **Insecurity Issues**

The fear of job loss grapples IT industry at frequent intervals, & the insecurity rushes up with the globally fluctuating legal, political & economic scenario. The related stress & anxieties hold back the employees from effectively engaging in their work & negatively affects their productivity.

5. Conclusion

Employee engagement is a critical function that needs consistent research & constant monitoring throughout the life of an organization. Devising an ideal employee engagement programme needs the support from the employees & the organizations should take into account the personal, professional, & social aspirations of the employees while designing & implementing the programme. The changed lifestyles of the employees & the potential challenges present in both the internal & external environment have deep impacts on the employee work life. The success of an employee engagement programme lies in tackling such crucial challenges & changes.

6. Suggestions

The IT organizations should adopt a comprehensive “Employee Engagement “model which accommodates & nourishes the personal, professional & social life of the employee by giving due consideration to the gender & generational differences. “Employee Engagement” is a sensitive yet complicated concept that requires constant research & experimenting. The “Employee Engagement” programmes of each organizations embodies their culture, values, & prerogatives & it is an arduous task to go for a one hand solution. Recognizing the limits, this study put forwards an “Employee Engagement model” which could be used as a common basement for the employee engagement programmes in IT organizations.

6.1 Bottom-line Model for Employee Engagement Programme in Indian IT Organizations.

The model is based on four pillars such as Quality time for the employees, Exclusive engagement programme for women, breaking the generational silos, Rewards, Recognition&Relationship with the society(R3). It envisages the cumulative result that an ideal comprehensive engagement programme is expected to provide.

- **Ensuring Quality time for the employees.**

The organizational initiatives to ensure quality time for the employees through different policies like flexi timings, family tours, get togethers at the office etc. could create an emotional bond between the employees & the organization this would lead to tendency to work productively during the work hours.

For IT employees constant upgradation of skills & training is mandatory to cope with the rapid advancements in the technology. Organizations should provide the employees ample opportunities to develop & grow by consistently employing training programmes & higher education programmes at the work place.

Providing a platform for creative & innovative initiatives by the employees will definitely boost up their motivation & commitment towards the organization & studies shows up that highly motivated & committed employees can be effectively engaged in the work than others.

- **Engagement programme for women**

An exclusive engagement programme for the women employees will definitely help the organization to mould a highly motivated, engaged, productive women workforce & such programmes contrive a more refined organizational culture where there is no room for gender disparities, atrocities against women& glass ceiling issues. A healthy organizational climate with its crux on supervisor support & coworker support is the foremost requirement for effective engagement of women employees. Organizations should be capable of providing equal opportunities for the women employees, because a feeling of getting sidelined imparts a baleful shade on engagement. Regular health checkups, Safe transportation facilities, a platform for creative initiatives & for raising grievances ,day care facilities, flexi timings etc. can provide the women employees a feeling of support, security & dignity.

- **Breaking the generational silos**

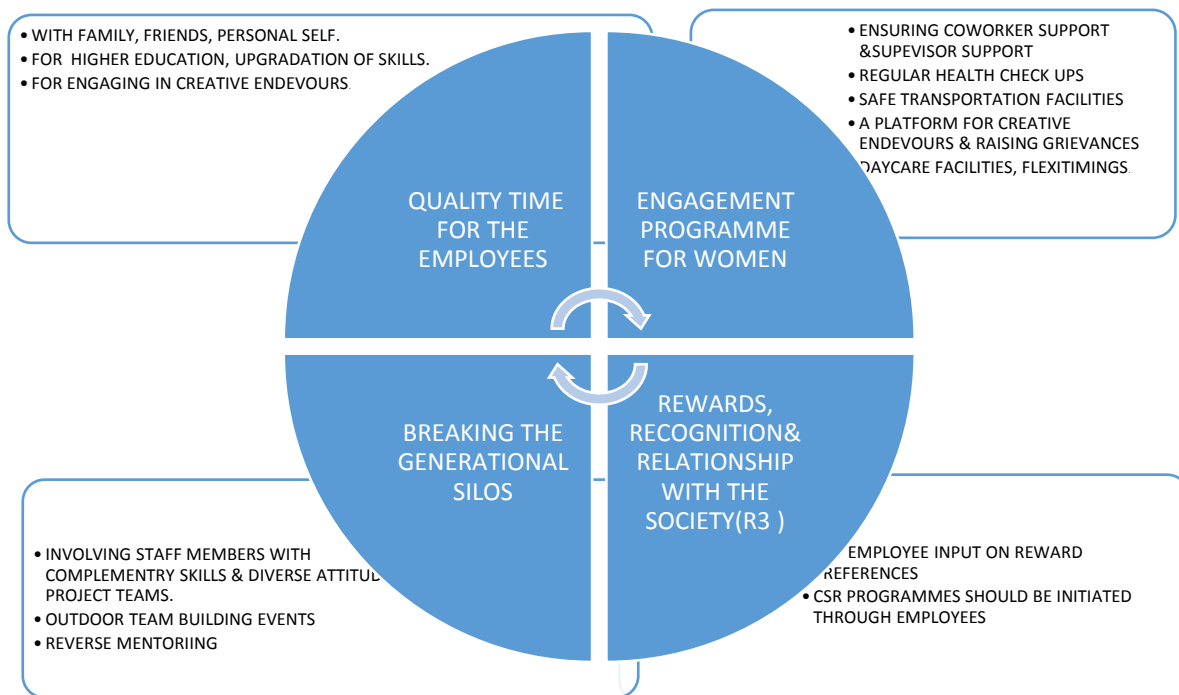
Generational differences can have an adverse effect on employee rapport & this in turn is a potential threat for effective engagement of employees in their work. By involving staff members with diverse attitude & complementary skills in project teams, conducting outdoor staff events, & implementing programs like reverse mentoring such generational silos can be broken & a team spirit can be developed among the employees.

- **Rewards, Recognition & Relationship with the society(R3)**

Collecting employee inputs on reward preferences & following an inclusive approach in recognition programmes improves the relationship of employees with the organization & the result can be a highly enthusiastic, engaged employees.

Organizations should ensure that employees should not shrink into their silos without knowing, understanding, & feeling the happenings in the outer society. So instead of employing a special team for the CSR initiatives, organization should give the employees opportunities to participate in such programs & this would provide the employees a sense of self-respect & value, which in turn get reflected in their work.

Figure:3 BOTTOM LINE MODEL FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN INDIAN IT ORGANIZATIONS.



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