Impact of New Normal Human Resources Management Practices on

Work Engagement: A Study of Manufacturing Companies in Nakhon Nayok, Thailand

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Abstract

Employee engagement is an important factor that influences the success of an organization, work efficiency, and employee well-being. This research explores the impact of various human resource practices including workplace support, compensation and benefits, health and Safety, communications, and training and development towards work engagement in the production sector of Nakhon Nayok Province. This study is based on a variety of manufacturing employees. A total of 167 responses were considered for analysis. Regression analysis is used to examine the effect of four human resources practices on employee engagement. The result shows a significant impact of communication, and training, and development on employee engagement at 0.05 significance level. While the impact of the other two HR practice constructs was not significant. It provides insights into the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement. The implications of these findings are discussed in the context of increasing organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

1. Introduction

For many years, the manufacturing industries in Nakhon Nayok were great contributors to the economy of the province as well as the country. Locals and people from other provinces get their livelihood from these manufacturing companies. This is the major reason for government's endorsement for their survival. However, Thailand was severely hit by the pandemic, COVID-19, like almost all other countries in the world. Many sectors of the government like education, emergency services, gas and oil, health care, infrastructure, law enforcement, and manufacturing industries were affected. These different sectors cannot operate normally as they used to. Employees face numerous serious threats to their occupational health ranging from those associated with direct exposure to the virus to those reflecting the conflicts between work and family demands. It's difficult to imagine a more extreme stressor, affecting the global population simultaneously than the coronavirus pandemic. Although the virus itself can cause ill health and death in those infected, work-related stress associated with the pandemic can be another cause of disease. The pandemic increases occupational stressors like workload and environmental dangers.

The pandemic has not only transformed the operations in organizations but has also required a reassessment of human resource strategies in order to adjust to the changing environment. An essential element that has emerged as a crucial factor in this transformative process is the notion of work engagement-a complex concept that encompasses an individual's dedication, passion, and active participation in their work. The contribution of the employees is an important concern. The manufacturing industries cannot produce more with less employee output. Producing more output with less employee input cannot be achieved. Considering that employees are means to the desired end of the organizational productivity, the pursuit of employees' happiness, health, and engagement creates valuable goals and ends in themselves (Wright, 2003). With this new normal period, several working conditions in the manufacturing industries in Nakhon Nayok had changed affecting the productivity of these companies, not even to mention the possibility of the closure of some of these manufacturing companies. In order to continue their existence and productivity, the human resource role therefore, is very important to help the employees to sustain their work engagement despite this challenging time. In the post-COVID era, it is crucial for firms to comprehend the complex relationship between work engagement and human resource strategies. The importance of cultivating a committed workforce is emphasized by its ability to impact employee welfare, organizational adaptability, and overall productivity. This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between work engagement and the changing human resource environment in a post-pandemic era.

Organizations are currently facing a distinct mix of challenges and opportunities as a result of the global health crisis aftermath. The redesign of human resource strategy has placed significant emphasis on remote work, digital transformation, and prioritizing employee well-being. In light of this context, the objective of this study is to examine the degree to which work engagement influences the development of post-COVID human resource practices, either by promoting or impeding their implementation. This research aims to provide valuable insights for firms aiming to prosper in the post-pandemic era by analyzing the complex interconnections among employee engagement, organizational policies, and workforce dynamics. These insights can guide strategic decision-making.

As we begin this investigation, we aim for the results of this study to not only enhance the scholarly comprehension of the relationship between work engagement and human resource practices, but also offer practical insights for organizational leaders and HR professionals seeking to foster a committed and adaptable workforce in the current circumstances.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Work Engagement

In recent years, employee work engagement has gotten a lot of attention. However, there is still some debate in the academic literature about how management might influence employee work engagement. There has been a lot of interest in employee engagement, but there has also been a lot of misinformation.

Employee engagement has been defined by Baumruk (2004) as the voluntary effort employees provide above and beyond what is required of them in their job.

Falcone (2006) argues that employee engagement is a good feelings toward their work, a belief that their work is personally important, that their burden is reasonable, and that they have optimism for the future of their company. To be fully engaged, one must be actively involved in and excited about the task at hand. Schaufeli & Salanova (2003) believes that work Engagement has been enhanced to better predict engagement and now includes three composite aspects of engaged behavior: energetic, devoted, and absorptive.

Due to the current economic situation, organizations are now more than ever deciding to reorganize and shrink, which has led in organizations studying innovative techniques to sustain and improve participation. Organizations compete to acquire and train their talent, therefore they must do everything possible to keep it. Organizations must strike the correct balance between encouraging and strengthening employee involvement without jeopardizing their competitive advantage.

2.2 Theories supporting HR practices-work engagement relationship

Work engagement refers to a psychological state marked by high levels of enthusiasm, commitment, and deep involvement in one's job. Several theories and models have been suggested to elucidate the connection between job engagement and human resource (HR) practices. Two notable models that substantiate our claimed link are the job demand-resource model (JD-R) and the person-environment fit (P-E Fit) theory.

The JD-R model proposes that job characteristics can be categorized into two distinct groups: job demands and job resources. Job demands necessitate continuous exertion and are linked to the cost of work engagement, whereas job resources facilitate accomplishment and individual development, hence enhancing work engagement (Bakker, Demerouti, de Boer, & Schaufeli,. 2003). HR strategies that are effective can be viewed as job resources that provide support to employees in their work.

The P-E Fit theory posits that individuals strive to achieve alignment between their personal characteristics and the demands of their work environment (Edwards, Caplan, & Van Harrison, 1998). Human resources strategies that are in line with the values, talents, and preferences of employees lead to a favorable match between individuals and their work environment, which enhances their level of involvement and commitment to their work.

2.3 Employee engagement and Workplace Support

Workplace support refers to acts and work practices that are intended to improve the productivity and well-being of employees. Wefald, Reichard, and Serrano (2011) discovered that agreeableness predicts employee involvement in the workplace. Workers are motivated by emotional impulses rather than economic factors.

According to Holbeche and Springett (2003), strong levels of employee engagement can only be fostered by workplaces that have a common purpose that connects people on an emotional level and thereby advances their own goals.

According to Morgeson, Reider, and Campion (2005), engaged employees require teamwork in order to achieve good achievements in their work. As a result, pleasant people require teamwork, they are easier to engage than disengaged workers.

Therefore, we hypothesize that there is a relationship between workplace support and employee engagement

H1: Workplace support influences work engagement

2.4 Work Engagement and Compensation and Benefit

Compensation and benefits can be a good motivator and facilitate work by producing happiness for employees and ensuring the organization's well-being. According to Bernadin (2007), Compensation refers to any monetary rewards and tangible benefits received by employees as a result of their employment. Johari, Yahya and Ahmad (2012) further define compensation as both monetary (compensation, pay, and incentives) and non-monetary (awards, recognitions, praises, and status) incentives used to attract and retain employees.

Khoshnevis and Gholipour (2017), believe that some organizations compensate and benefit their staff during difficult times in order to deal with the issue.

Compensation and benefits are the management of monetary and non-monetary compensation, such as salaries and benefits to employees who can help the organization achieve its goals. The salary structure and clear welfare and equal to other companies in the same industry to be able to heal those who have knowledge and ability to stay with the organization for a long time (Delaney & Huselid, 1996)

According to Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010), Organizations with engaged employees have higher shareholder returns, profitability, productivity, and customer happiness.

Work engagement has been linked to HR strategies such as compensation (Gruman and Saks, 2011), awards and recognition (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). Therefore, we relate this HR practice (compensation and benefit) with employee engagement.

H2: Compensation and benefit has positive affect on work engagement

2.5 Work Engagement and Health and Safety

Srimannarayan (2009) discovered that a positive HRD climate increases the organization's entire internal environment, employee dedication, involvement, and job satisfaction, as well as employee health. Employee engagement and involvement benefits both the employees and the company. May et al. (2004) find that meaningfulness, safety, and availability are all highly positively connected with engagement.

Considering the importance of health and safety, we hypothesized that health and safety has positive impact on work engagement

H3: Health and safety positively influence work engagement

2.6 Work Engagement and Communication

According to Druskat and Wolff (2001) Communication is important, as is task engagement. The first of the standards we looked at is "interpersonal understanding," which is defined as members working to comprehend one other's feelings, interests, worries, strengths, and shortcomings. It's similar to exhibiting empathy or compassion, the latter of which is described as comprehending another person's emotions without necessarily feeling those emotions.

People may be able to overcome motivational barriers (Van Dijk, 2005) to trying out and adopting novel modes of communicating as a result of the epidemic and associated lockdown measures.

Work engagement has been linked to HR practices such as communication and information exchange (Bakker et al., 2011). Therefore,

H4: Communication positively affect work engagement

2.7 Work Engagement and Training and Development

Men (2012) investigated how human resource management affects job satisfaction and productivity. The organization's work discovered that the job nature was flexible, and the organization has team training, resulting in the company's success and the use of performance evaluation findings as a judge. Employees will be satisfied as a result of this.

Training, according to Dessler and Tan (2009), is a means of providing people with the skills they need to do their jobs in the business. Organizations should raise their training expenditure, according to Islam and Siengthai (2010), in order to enhance and expand employees' abilities so that they may be a more adaptive and flexible workforce.

According to Tang et al. (2018), training also aids employees in adapting to changes at work. Development, on the other hand, allows employees to advance in their roles. Training and development, employer–employee relations, recognition through awards, culture building, career development, salary and perks are all key HRM strategies, according to Saxena and Tiwari (2012).

Work engagement has been linked to HRD practices such as training, development, and learning opportunities (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Therefore, we also hypothesized as:

H5: Training and development influences work engagement

2.8 Conceptual framework:
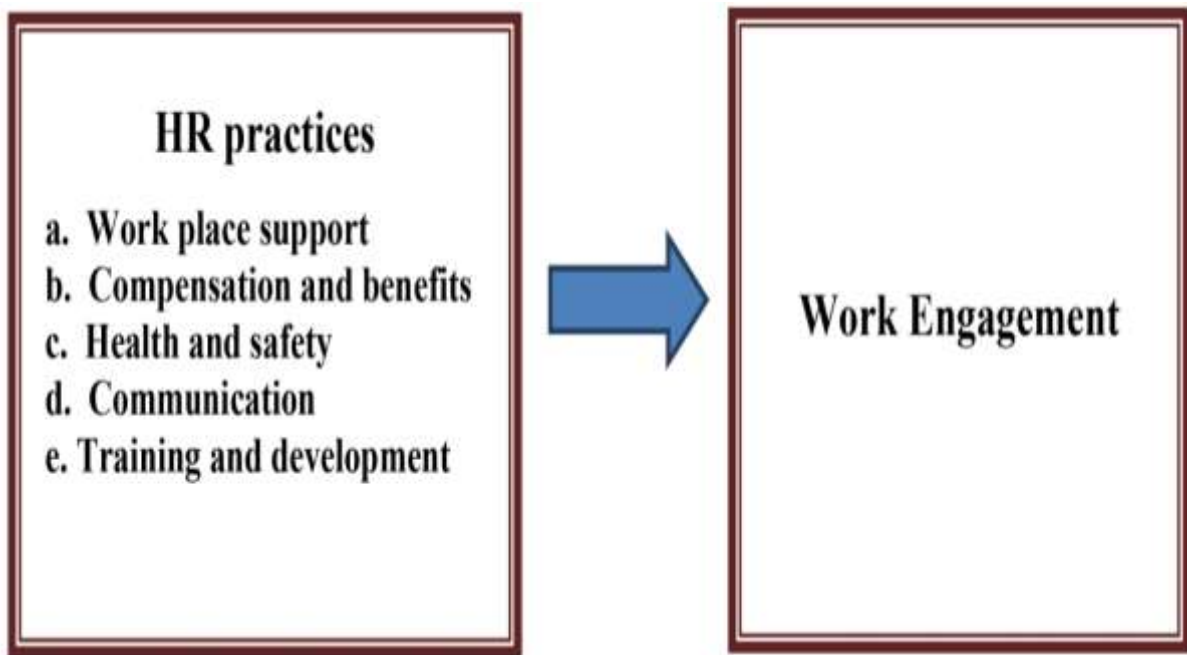
3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes quantitative research methods to conduct the investigation. Regression analysis is used to test the conceptual framework. The research results are divided into two types. Descriptive analysis for demographic information and regression analysis to test the model and hypotheses.

3.1 Population and Sample

In Nakhon Nayok Province, there are 150 production establishments with a total workforce of 5,666 people (Nakhon Nayok Provincial Office, 2023). Convenience sampling technique was used to collect data. A total of 1,500 employees were contacted using various electronic media (email, Line, Facebook Messenger, etc.). From the distributed questionnaires 173 completed survey were received and considered for further analysis.

3.2 Measurement and data analysis techniques

All the HR practices variables are measured using 5-point Likert scale, work engagement is measured using a 6-point Likert scale. We used the Statistics for Social Science program to run the data analysis process, using frequencies, means, and standard deviations in descriptive analyses. To understand the nature of the data collected categorical variables are expressed using percentages. Correlation and regression analysis were performed to test the hypotheses. The results of the data analysis are displayed in the results section.

4. Results

This section summarizes the data collection results. First, the demographic details of the respondents are presented to understand the background of the surveyed population and how do the results relate to this population. Second, a data set was created to perform a multiple regression analysis.

4.1 Mahalanobis Distance

We conducted Mahalanobis Distance test to detect multivariate. Mahalanobis distance scores were calculated using multiple regression analysis. The Mahalanobi distance uses a chi-square distribution ($\chi 2$) with degrees of freedom equal to the number of independent variables in the regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The test shows six cases where the Mahalanobis distance score exceeds our critical value. Therefore, all six responses were removed before further processing.

4.2 Demographic characteristics

In this study there are 167 respondents in total after excluding the outliers; 76 of them were male, while the female participants are 91. Respondents of this study are divided in five age groups: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, and 56-65 years. The highest percentage of 32.3% was found to be in the 26-35 age group, the second higher 28.1% corresponds to the age group 36-45 years old, and the percentage of the final age group, 56-65 years old, is the lowest (3.6%)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Construct	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	91	54.5
Male	76	45.5
Age		
18-25	33	19.8
26-35	54	32.3
36-45	47	28.1
46-55	27	16.2
56-65	6	3.6
Position		
Staff	101	60.5
Senior	42	25.1
Manager	24	14.4
Department		
Storing	15	9.0
HR	12	7.2
Production	70	41.9
Accounting	43	25.7
Marketing	13	7.8
Packing	12	7.2
Other	2	1.2

4.3 Reliability

The authors conducted Cronbach's alpha test to examine reliability. Besides, item total correlation is also considered to measure the loading in the variables. Only one item shows item total correlation less than 0.3 (TnD15=0.057), so, we exclude the item from further calculation. The results show that all other item total correlations were 0.30 or higher, demonstrating evidence of good loading. Regarding the Cronbach's alpha according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the value for each factor was higher than .60, which indicates evidence of reliability.

Table 2: Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)

Variable/Scale item	Item number	Alpha
Workplace Support	5 items	0.789
Compensation and Benefit	7 items	0.813
Health and Safety		0.870
Communication	10 items	0.904
Training and Development	18 items	0.911
Engagement	17 items	0.952

4.4 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was conducted with the help of SPSS 23 to examine the impact of the five dimensions of HR practices on work engagement. The regression model in the regression table confirmed that HR practices explain the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.264$; F = 11.573; P < 0.01). In other words, Employee workplace support Compensation and benefits health and safety Communication and Training and Development together explaines 26.4% of the total work engagement variance.

The hypothesis was also further tested. H1 proposed that workplace support has a positive effect on employee engagement. The findings (β = .199, p >.05) is not significantly supporting H1. Similarly, H3 proposition of health and safety impacting employee engagement was not also supported (β = .044, p >.05). Hypotheses no. 4 (communication influence engagement) and 5 (training and development affects engagement level) were significantly supported by the findings (β = .639, p <.05; β = .485, p <.05). The results also demonstrated that compensation and benefit negatively influence employee engagement (β = -.374, p <.05).

Table 3: Hypotheses testing

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Significance
	Beta	Std. error	Beta		
WS→Eng	.199	.188	.101	1.057	.292
CnB→Eng	-.374	.185	-.172	-2.017	.045
HnS→Eng	.044	.267	.020	.163	.871
Comm→Eng	.639	.226	.301	2.821	.005
TnD→Eng	.485	.237	.221	2.044	.043

5. Discussion, Implication and Conclusion

5.1 Workplace support and engagement

The study in question sought to examine the impact of workplace support on employee engagement within an organizational context. The positive beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.199$) suggests that there is a positive effect of workplace support on employee engagement. This means that for each unit increase in workplace support, there is a corresponding increase in employee engagement. However, the lack of statistical significance ($p > 0.05$) indicates that this effect is not strong enough to be confidently attributed to workplace support alone. It is essential to consider both effect size and statistical significance when interpreting research results. The findings of current study is contradictory of previous research findings, including Thapa et. al., (2022) and Fang (2023).

The difference between the findings of previous research and current study could be due to the changing workplace practices (Anthony Samy & Teck, 2022). The absence of statistical significance may be influenced by contextual factors not accounted for in the study. Factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, and the specific type of workplace support provided can influence the relationship between workplace support and employee engagement. Future research should delve deeper into these contextual variables to better understand the nuances of this relationship.

5.2 Compensation and Benefits and Engagement

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between compensation and employee engagement (Allen & Bryant, 2012; Watson, 2012). A negative relationship was found in the research ($\beta = -.374$, $p < .05$).) implies that as the level of compensation increases Employee

engagement tends to decline. This result may seem counterintuitive at first glance. It is expected that higher pay would lead to greater job satisfaction and commitment. However, there are several factors that could explain this phenomenon. Relative Compensation Comparison is one such factor. Employees often compare their compensation to their peers and industry benchmarks. When they perceive inequality. This can have a negative effect on their level of participation. Where employees believe they are undercompensated compared to their co-workers. They may fall out of participation. This results in decreased work efficiency and job satisfaction. (Tziner & Dikstein, 2014)

Another theory that may explain this phenomenon is "expectation and reality" hypothesis. High compensation may increase employees' expectations about the work environment and job satisfaction. When expectations are not met Burnout and decreased engagement may occur (Boxall & Macky, 2016). Unrealistic expectations may result from overemphasis on the role of compensation in job satisfaction.

5.3 Communication and Engagement

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between communication and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.639$, $p < 0.05$), consistent with growing empirical evidence. Effective communication is not limited to top-down communication. But it also includes peer-to-peer and lateral communication. A study by Men and Stacks (2014) found that organizations that promote open communication channels at all levels experience more engagement. Research by Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasizes the role of internal communication strategies such as newsletters, intranets, and regular team meetings in promoting employee participation.

Leadership also plays a key role in shaping organizational communication. A study by Eisenbeiss and colleagues (2019) found that transformational leadership, which is characterized by open and transparent communication. It greatly increases employee engagement.

6. Implications

Research indicates that providing workplace support, such as flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and employee assistance programs, positively affects employee engagement. Organizations should prioritize initiatives that enhance work-life balance, promote mental health, and facilitate employee growth to foster higher engagement levels.

Competitive compensation and benefits packages are essential for attracting and retaining talent. However, the research suggests that these factors alone may not guarantee high levels

of engagement. Organizations should align their compensation strategies with employee expectations and market standards while also focusing on non-monetary rewards and recognition to boost engagement.

Employee well-being is a foundational element of engagement. Employers should invest in creating a safe and healthy work environment, adhering to regulatory standards, and implementing proactive safety measures. A culture of safety and wellness not only protects employees but also contributes to higher engagement levels.

Effective communication practices, including transparent leadership, regular feedback, and open channels for employee input, significantly impact engagement. Organizations should prioritize clear and consistent communication to foster trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among employees.

Providing opportunities for skill development and career growth is crucial for employee engagement. Research suggests that a well-structured training and development program can lead to increased job satisfaction and motivation. Organizations should invest in ongoing learning initiatives to empower their workforce and boost engagement.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the multidimensional nature of employee engagement and its interconnectedness with various human resource practices. While each of these practices—workplace support, compensation and benefits, health and safety, communication, and training and development—plays a distinct role, they are interdependent and collectively influence employee engagement.

Organizations that prioritize these HR practices are more likely to experience higher levels of employee engagement, which, in turn, leads to improved performance, reduced turnover, and enhanced employee satisfaction. However, a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient, as employee engagement is influenced by the unique needs and expectations of the workforce. Therefore, organizations must tailor their HR strategies to align with their specific context and the preferences of their employees.

In a rapidly evolving workplace landscape, the importance of employee engagement cannot be overstated. It drives organizational success as well as the overall well-being of employees. To remain competitive and resilient, organizations should continue to adapt and refine their HR practices, with a strong focus on fostering and sustaining employee engagement. This research serves as a valuable reference for HR professionals and organizational leaders seeking to enhance employee engagement and, in turn, the overall success of their organizations.

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