

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People produce profit:

The opportunities and challenges with employee engagement

By Sarah Hudson

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Purpose – This paper explores employee engagement, a contemporary business topic. The study aims to improve relationships at work by identifying people-management practices associated with employee engagement in high-performing organisations and to assess how these practices affect performance. Each practice was discussed to determine whether they were transferable and whether context plays a role.

Design / methodology / approach – Research took the form of a comparative case study between Google and W. L. Gore & Associates, drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from documentation, archival records and secondary interviews, closely following Yin's guidelines. Data was analysed through thematic, narrative analysis and content analysis, together with time-series analysis. Work by Kahn is synthesised in the JD-R model of work engagement by Bakker and Demerouti and further reference is made to work by Maslow and McGregor.

Findings – Findings were extensive for both Google and W. L. Gore & Associates. Numerous practices and contexts were working together. Key themes identified were structure, autonomy, hiring, retention and culture. Minor themes supporting these were type of person, strategy, nature of work, support and communication. Most of these practices were transferable but often with terms and conditions. Assessing how they affect business performance was challenging since no single practice could be directly linked with a certain type of performance. This illustrated the complexity of the business phenomenon.

Research limitations / implications – Determining the extent to which each practice was evident in both organisations was a limitation. For example Google had a flat structure in the department of Engineering but this could not be determined for other departments such as Sales. Time limitations restricted the research to use of secondary data only. This meant data from employees could not be taken specifically *during role performance* as Kahn had defined the concept of engagement.

Originality / value – The research led to the creation of a new theoretical model. Workplace tensions are balanced on employee perceptions, where employee perceptions are founded on a hierarchy of wants that are personal and unique to each employee. In addition, whilst reviewing the literature and analysing the JD-R model of work engagement, a new concept was identified. Organisations would benefit from both a Challenge Manager and an Opportunity Manager. A Challenge Manager manages the demands of the business objectives and an Opportunity Manager manages the departments' resources and relationships. It is also recommended that a new division, referred to as *Creative People Relations*, is introduced to promote personal engagement and develop better workplace relationships.

Keywords – Employee engagement, Google, W. L. Gore & Associates, Organisation performance.

Paper type – Research dissertation

Sarah Hudson is a creative professional with extensive experience in design development, manufacturing and project management. During her career she has worked for brands such as the G-Plan Cabinets, The Morris Furniture Group and currently Ercol furniture. Sarah has a successful track record in academic, design and operational roles, demonstrated in numerous achievements and awards. Sarah is a member of the steering committee for the MBA Summer School, was invited by Oxford Brookes University to be the Graduate Speaker at the 2019 graduation ceremony and has recently volunteered for the NHS.