Linking Social Support at Workplace with Engagement and Retention Behaviour of Generation Y Employees

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Abstract—*Social support at work is defined as the degree to which individuals perceive that their well-being is valued and supported by workplace sources. Support can be classified according to support sources (e.g. one's colleagues or supervisor) and support types, including instrumental, emotional, informational, and appraisal support (House, 1981). Numerous studies have validated workplace social support as an important antecedent of employee engagement as it provides psychological safety to the employees. Studies also show engagement acting as a mediating variable between interpersonal job resources (characterized by the supervisor and organizational support) and turnover intentions. However, such studies has not been pursued explicitly in the context of Generation Y employees. Generation Y is defined as those born between 1980 – 2000 and is the newest and the largest generation entering the workforce. This study focuses on measuring the engagement and retention intention of generation Y employees in Indian context predicted by workplace social support. Research methodology would consist of using a survey questionnaire to elicit data from employees in the age group 20 - 30 and data analysis has been done with the help of regression using SPSS. Findings validate that workplace social support is an important dimension (r^2 = 42.22%) that can be harnessed to productively engage this generation and can also reduce their intentions to quit.*

Keywords: *Social support; engagement; retention; generation Y*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) [1] has often been applied to the study of organizations in an effort to better understand the reciprocal relationships that develop between employees and the organization (e.g. Wayne et al., 2002) [2]. This view suggests that when the employer provides employees with fair treatment, and values their contributions and well-being, employees perceive high levels of support and thus feel obligated to reciprocate. These feelings of obligation develop in response to actions by both the organization as well as it agents and can be demonstrated through increased organizational commitment, performance, and extra-role behaviors (Aryee et al., 2002) [3]. At the broadest level, perceived organizational support (POS) has been linked with higher job performance (Erdogan and Enders, 2007 [4]; Witt and Carlson, 2006) [5], organizational citizenship behaviors (Piercy et al., 2006) [6], commitment and reduced turnover

(Loi et al., 2006) [7]. Similarly, employees' satisfaction with their immediate supervisor has been shown to reduce voluntary turnover and improve commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2002) [8]. In addition to the organization and supervisors, employees who receive emotional support and instrumental aid from their coworkers when things get difficult in the workplace reciprocate via job engagement.

While coworkers and supervisors represent valuable but different forms of support to employees, no study to date has included these variables in a single study in an effort to investigate the relative importance of each in engaging and retaining generation Y employees. Given the growth in the literature concerning these two variables and the organizations striving to keep this generation of employees engage at workplace, a reasonable question to ask is which form of support is the most effective to engage this generation and reducing their turnover behaviors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Generation Y

Generation Y or Gen Y could be defined as the generation born between 1981 and 1991 in Indian context, who are now between 20 and 35 years of age. The Indian Gen Y constitutes 25.47% of the world population (Census of India, 2011) [9], but not all are 'employment ready'. It is estimated that by 2020, 50% of the Indian population will be below 25 years of age (SHRM report). The working population of India, as per Census Report 2011 in the age group 15-59 years comprises 56.9% of the entire population, of which almost half comprises youth in the age group 15-24 years (UNESCO definition), this number shall only increase with the population figures making it one of the youngest countries of the world (CRISIL 2010 Skilling Report) [10].

Gen Y has started entering the ranks, infiltrating the traditional workplace with their baggage of digital technology, social media networks and higher expectations/norms towards a flexible work environment. They are increasingly demanding,

wired and virtually connected, questioning traditional practices cum authority, displaying and openly voicing their disagreements and opinions without paying heed to set cultural norms and organizational practices. This is a generation that knows what it wants, in terms of their space, comfort levels or communication channels. They are open and brash about their expectations and expressions, seeking to collaborate and rapidly exchange knowledge/information, networking for acceptance, thus challenging ways traditional organizations functioned. This generation of Indian youngsters is tech-savvy, entrepreneurial, ambitious, optimistic and ready to walk the extra mile for achieving their dreams and goals (Haworth, iDea and Johnson Controls Report 2010) [11].

B. Workplace social support

The concept of workplace social support is derived from the broader social-support literature. It is typically viewed as a global construct (House, 1981) [12] with a range of definitional dimensions that fluctuate in meaning. One of the most widely used and earliest definitions comes from Cobb (1976) [13], who defined social support as an individuals' belief that she is loved, valued, and her well-being is cared about as part of a social network of mutual obligation. Others have viewed social support as involving perceptions that one has access to helping relationships of varying quality or strength, which provide resources such as communication of information, emotional empathy, or tangible assistance (Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999) [14]. It is suggested that both of these core ideas of (a) feeling cared for and appreciated; and (b) having access to direct or indirect help have been used in the social-support literature, often combined in global measures. It is assumed that social support is a critical job resource that makes the role demands for which support is given such as the integration of the work–family interface experienced more positively. Workplace social support is defined as the degree to which individuals perceive that their well-being is valued by workplace sources, such as supervisors and the broader organization in which they are embedded (Eisenberger, Singlhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) [8]; (Ford et al., 2007) [15], and the perception that these sources provide help to support this well-being.

Paper conceptualizes workplace social support as (a) emanating from multiple *sources*, such as supervisors, coworkers and foci of support is "content general". General work support is the degree to which employees perceive that supervisors or employers care about their global well-being on the job through providing positive social interaction or resources. Examples of general support are below.

1) General supervisor support

General supervisor support involves general expressions of concern by the supervisor (i.e., emotional support) or tangible assistance (i.e., instrumental support) that is intended to enhance the well-being of the subordinate (House, 1981) [12]. General supervisor support focuses on support for personal effectiveness at work. Supervisors who foster a supportive work environment typically display concern for employees' needs and feelings, provide positive feedback and encourage them to voice their concerns, develop new skills and solve work-related problems (Deci & Ryan, 1987) [16]. Such supportive actions enhance employee self-determination and interest in their work. Employees who are self-determined experience 'a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's own actions' (Deci et. al., 1989, p. 580) [17]. These individuals are likely to feel safer to engage themselves more fully, try out novel ways of doing things, discuss mistakes and learn from these behaviours when they are in such supportive environments (Edmondson, 1996, 1999) [18,18a].

Supervisory supportiveness of employees' self-determination and congruent perceptions between supervisors and employees have both been linked with enhanced trust overall (Britt, 2003) [19]; Deci et al., 1989) [17]. Five categories of behaviour have been linked with employees' perceptions of managerial trustworthiness: behavioural consistency, behavioural integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication (accuracy, explanations and openness) and demonstration of concern (Whitener et al., 1998) [20]. Behavioural consistency, or predictability, involves behaving in the same manner across time and contexts. Behavioural integrity entails consistency between words and deeds. Sharing of control involves employee participation in decision making. Open communication fosters accurate explanations for managerial actions. Finally, benevolence involves consideration, protecting employees' interests and refraining from exploitation (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) [21]; (McAllister, 1995) [22]. In summary, these trustworthy supervisory behaviours are expected to lead to feelings of psychological safety and a willingness to invest themselves at work.

2) General co-worker support

Interpersonal relations among employees that are supportive and trusting should also foster psychological safety (Kahn, 1990) [23]. The bases for interpersonal trust can be either cognitive or affective (McAllister, 1995) [22]. Cognitive-based trust concerns the reliability and dependability of others. Affective trust is rooted in the emotional relationships between individuals. Individuals who trust each other emotionally generally express concern for the welfare of each other, believe in the 'intrinsic virtue' of such relationships and are willing to make future emotional investments in the relationship (Pennings & Woiceshyn, 1987) [24]. In this research, we were interested in examining how supportive and affective trust-building co-worker relations could lead to greater psychological safety and engagement at work. In a related study, Edmondson (1996) [18] found that quality of relations in work units had an impact on employees' shared

beliefs regarding whether mistakes would be held against them (i.e. psychological safety). Thus, we expected that co-workers who support each other during tough times at work, have mutual respect for one another and value each others' contributions engender trust and heightened perceptions of psychological safety and engagement. Kahn (1990) [23] also proposed that unconscious roles played out in groups influence psychological safety.
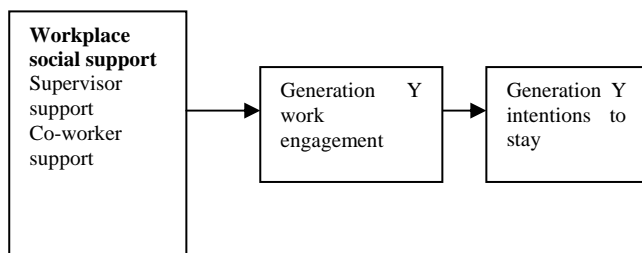

Fig. 1

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the impact of workplace social support on generation Y employee engagement
- To study the impact of generation Y engagement on their intention to remain

This gives the null hypothesis as follows:

- H_01: There is no impact of workplace social support on generation Y work engagement
- H_02: There is no impact of generation Y work engagement on their intention to remain

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct the study measuring the impact of workplace social support on job engagement and on intentions to remain structured questionnaire was used and taken from (Saks, 2006) [25]. Firstly workplace social support attributed with supervisor and co-worker support was entered as independent variable and work engagement as dependent variable. Further work engagement is taken as independent variable to study its impact on intentions to remain taken as dependent variable.

The respondents were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with respect to the various statements that measured the variables.

Simple random sampling was used to elicit the data from select employees between 20 – 30 yrs of age working in executive and middle level management. A total of 500 questionnaires were floated out of which 250 replied back and of them 120 valid responses were selected of employees coinciding specified age range resulting in a 48 percent response rate. The study utilized the sample size formula (104 + k) given by Green (1991) [26] that totals the minimum sample size required with two predictors denoted with k to 106. The sample size considered in this study is well above this number.

5. RESULTS

Regression analysis was performed and it was found that workplace social support was found to be the predictor of generation Y engagement with an adjusted r^2 value of 42.2 per cent, as in Table I. Proportions of variance above 25 per cent are considered substantial (Heiman, 1998) [27]. The r^2 value denotes that the identified workplace social support explain up to 42 per cent of the variance in employee job engagement. The ANOVA, Table II, generated in this test also shows a significant probability value (p = 0.000) thus signifies that workplace social support significantly explain employee job engagement. Considering the p – value shown in the ANOVA table, the null hypothesis H_01 is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Regression analysis also found that generation Y work engagement also impacts their intention to stay in the organization with an adjusted r^2 value of 35.6 percent, as in Table III. The ANOVA, table V generated in this test also shows a significant probability value (p = 0.000) thus signifies that generation Y work engagement significantly explain their intention to stay. Considering the p – value shown in the ANOVA table, the null hypothesis H_02 is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Table 1: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.654a	.427	.422	.96393

a. Predictors: (Constant), socialsupport
b. Dependent Variable: engagement

Table II: ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	81.757	1	81.757	87.989	.000b
Residual	109.641	118	.929		
Total	191.398	119			

a. Dependent Variable: engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), socialsupport

Table III: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.601a	.361	.356	1.01445

a. Predictors: (Constant), engagement

b. Dependent Variable: intentiontoremain

Table IV: ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	68.675	1	68.675	66.733	.000b
Residual	121.435	118	1.029		
Total	190.110	119			

a. Dependent Variable: intentiontoremain

b. Predictors: (Constant), engagement

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There has been a great deal of interest in employee engagement in recent years especially among practitioners and consultants. Although much has made about the importance of employee engagement for organizational performance and business results, there is little empirical evidence to back up these claims. The purpose of this study was to test a model of the antecedents and consequences of work engagement of generation Y employees based on existing models of engagement and Social Exchange Theory (SET). This study found that workplace social support taken as an antecedent factor predict generation Y work engagement, study also indicated that engagement is related to employees' intentions to stay in the organizations as well.

The results of this study suggest that generation Y engagement can be understood in terms of SET. That is, generation Y employees who perceive higher workplace social support are more likely to reciprocate with greater levels of engagement in their work. Engaged employees are also more likely to have a high-quality relationship with their employer leading them to also have more positive intentions to stay.

The results of this study suggest that employee engagement is a meaningful construct that is worthy of future research. There are several avenues to consider. One area would be to investigate other potential predictors of job and organization engagement of generation Y employees. There are other variables that might also be important for both job and organization engagement. For example, human resource practices such as flexible work arrangements, training programs, and incentive compensation might also be important for engagement. Future research could include a broader range of predictors that are linked to particular types of role engagement. Along these lines, future research should attempt to flesh out the types of factors that are most important for engagement in different roles (e.g. job, organization, and group).

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