

Leveraging Employee Experience during Crisis Situation for Higher performance- Special Reference to COVID -19 pandemic

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Abstract

When the crisis hits the organisation, it's the positive employee experience that organisation able to manage matters the most to motivate and retain the workforce.

The world is going through an unprecedented crisis. While businesses are fighting to maintain business continuity yet managing employee experience is also equally critical during these testing times of the COVID -19 pandemic. This situation calls for creative ways to balance the employee experience amidst business constraints. During such turbulence, employees often have to deal with both work from home and work at home which includes: helping with household chores, taking care of children and demands of family members alongside work.

Employee experience plays a vital role in keeping employees happy and in the engagement of employees (Deloitte 2017).

Similarly, according to Psychogios P. (2013), the cumulative effect of employees' experiences will ultimately affect an employee's performance and, therefore, the results for the entire organisation, regardless of whether employees are engaged but the question arises whether the role of employee performance is same when the organisation is sailing through in the difficult times.

This study is an attempt to understand employees experience and its drivers under crisis situation among employees from the hospitality industry in India

This is a cross-sectional study where both primary and secondary data is collected. Primary data is collected from employees at all levels through a self-report questionnaire. Out of 374 respondents 287 clean responses were received.

Prelude

The crisis in the form of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 is playing havoc across the globe. Lockdown imposed in different parts of the world has badly affected the business. According to Gupta, R. & Madgavkar, A. (2020) industries like Airlines, Hospitality, Auto, Construction, Textiles, etc. are badly hit by the prevailing crisis. The saving of lives and livelihood has become a real challenge for the nation.

Many businesses are shut, people have lost their jobs. Those who are in jobs are feeling insecure and finding it difficult to remain productive. Companies are struggling to motivate employees and bring happiness to their lives. Organizations that are fast to react to the situation are trying to give a positive experience to their employees which otherwise they would have given during normal period.

It is not about satisfying your employees but also to retain customers. Studies in the past have already proved that the positive employee experience leads to enhanced customer experience.

This study is an attempt to identify those drivers which generate positive employee experience in the time of crisis.

Employee Experience- A review of literature

Pech and Slade (2006) argued that employee disengagement is increasing and it becomes more important to make workplaces that positively influence the workforce.

Many reports suggest that companies are focussing their HR strategies on employee engagement and a high degree of emphasis on generating a positive employee experience.

According to IBM study on 'The Employee Experience Index' (2017), Employee Experience is a set of perceptions that employees have about their experiences at work in response to their interactions with the organisation.

The study further suggested the Employee Experience Index indicators as:

- Belonging – feeling part of a team, group or organisation
- Purpose – understanding why one's work matters
- Achievement – a sense of accomplishment in the work that is done
- Happiness – the pleasant feeling arising in and around work
- Vigor – the presence of energy, enthusiasm and excitement at work

Lee et. al. (2018) opined measures of employee experience are job satisfaction, esprit de corps, organisational commitment and quality of work life.

According to a study conducted by Accenture, employee experience attracts talent, boosts workforce engagement, productivity and retention. This in turn directly improves a business' financial performance.

Viewed through the lens of social exchange and signalling theories (e.g. Blau, 1964; Casper & Harris, 2008; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) these positive effects occur because employee-friendly workplace practices and benefits such as FWAs (Flexible Work Arrangements) are viewed as resources that signal to workers that they are valued by the organisation.

Blau (1964) in Social exchange theory proposed that the one-party provides a benefit to the other, the other party feels obliged to respond by providing something beneficial in return, creating an exchange relationship between two parties. Measuring perceptions of procedural and interactional justice in the performance appraisal process, therefore, allows us to explore employee experiences of HRM practices that is implemented by line manager. Based on the social exchange theory, these experiences, if positive, will be related to a higher level of organisational commitment.

The construct of quality of work-life has been defined in many ways (Sirgy 2012). These include meaningful work, (Wrzeniewski 2003) affective responses to the work environment (Judge and Klinger 2008), experiences of job uplifts and hassles (Staats et al. 1995) need satisfaction at work and satisfaction in the work-life domain (Eftray and Sirgy 1990).

Employee experience plays a vital role in keeping employees happy and in the engagement of employees (Deloitte 2017)

Fisher (2010) argued that happiness is not a term that has been extensively used in academic research on employee experiences in organisations however this does not mean organisation happiness at work is not an indicator of employee experience.

Singh (2018) opined that customising experiences of employees in organisations, based on their preferences and patterns, are CEEOs — or Chief Employee Experience Officers. With technology playing a big role in human resources and reams of data getting generated, large organisations are rushing to appoint CEEOs to curate experiences for employees at the workplace. CEEOs engage with employees differently, largely advocating their cause.

According to Gallup, the employee experience is the journey an employee takes with the organisation. It includes everything from major milestones and personal relationships to technology use and the physical work environment. It's the big picture that ties together all of the efforts to attract, engage and develop the employees.

According to Deloitte, understanding and improving the employee experience is critical for companies operating in a highly competitive global economy. Providing an engaging experience will help companies succeed in attracting and retaining skilled employees. A strong employee experience also drives a strong customer experience.

According to Psychogios P. (2013), the cumulative effect of employees' experiences will ultimately affect an employee's performance and, therefore, the results for the entire organisation, regardless of whether employees are engaged.

Volini et. al. (2019) opined that organizations are investing in many programs to improve life at work, all focused on improving the day-to-day experience workers have. While there is much that can be done to improve work/life balance, research shows that the most important factor of all is the work itself: making work meaningful and giving people a sense of belonging, trust, and relationship. Organisations should move beyond thinking about the experience at work in terms of perks, rewards, or support, and focus on job fit, job design, and meaning—for all workers across the enterprise.

Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends (2017) report revealed that nearly 80 percent of executives rated employee experience very important (42 percent) or important (38 percent), but only 22 percent reported that their companies were excellent at building a differentiated employee experience.

KennedyFitch, an Executive Search and Management Consulting Firm conducted a global study to understand how companies are approaching the Employee Experience (EX). Over 250 companies worldwide responded to the online survey. Four out of five said EX is very important and nine out of 10 said it would become more important in the next 1-2 years. Only one in 10, however, felt their company had made significant progress developing EX. And many reported that lack of internal EX expertise is a big problem.

The study further found that

1. There is a clear business case and a correlation between EX and business results.
2. Engagement and EX come from two different worlds - they measure quite different things, come from different sources, and have widely different applications.
3. Building an EX-Centric organisation requires a complete transformation in the way of thinking and operating. Most companies are in the early stages of learning what EX is and few understand what is required for implementation

From above it is very clear that soon HR focus will be on developing policies and practices in such a way that it gives a positive experience to its employees which has already started in many companies

Creating a positive experience becomes although more important when there is a crisis such as Covid -19 pandemic but the bigger question here is which factors drive Employee Experience in the crisis situation?

The research in this area is still in the nascent stage and therefore limited literature was available to identify the drivers of employee experience. In fact, during the search of existing literature researchers didn't come across any paper related to employee experience during a crisis.

Employee Experience leading to higher performance

The past studies in this area proposed happiness as the major indicator of positive employee experience. Despite the inconclusive link between workers' happiness and productivity in the workplace, there seems to be a general agreement that happy workers are to be productive workers (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Wright et al., 2004; Zelenski et al., 2008).

Empirically, meta-analytic evidence has found that affective commitment had the strongest correlations with organization-related (e.g., attendance, performance, and organisational citizenship behavior) and employee-related (e.g., stress and work-family conflicts) outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

IBM study on the Employee Experience index (2016) argued that more positive employee experiences are linked to better performance, extra effort at work, and lower turnover intentions.

Globeforce/SHRM Survey (2016) revealed that 46 percent of organisations cite employee retention as a top workforce management challenge. More than one-third (36 percent) of the organisations surveyed see employee engagement as another top challenge, one closely related to turnover. The survey also revealed that a positive employee experience can help employees retain their employees.

From the above literature, it is well-established fact that a better employee experience leads to higher performance.

Drivers of Employee Experience during crisis situation

It is becoming extremely important for employers to identify the drivers of employee experience in the organisations so that an environment can be created where employees are happy, feel attached to the organisations and become highly productive.

According to Ashkenas (2010) virtual meetings solve the problem of 'how to get people together in real-time in a way that they can interact naturally and build robust relationships.'

Shoemaker, M.E.(1999) opined that role clarity is associated with job satisfaction which is one of the measures of employee experience.

Demyen, S. & Papa L I (2016) argued that there is a high level of association between employees' familiarity with the objectives and standards of performance of the company where they work. According to Bloom et al., (2014) that employees choosing to work from home are often more productive than they were in the office

According to an IBM study, a supportive co-worker relationship is also an important driver of positive work experience.

Similarly Eisenberger et. al. (2016) suggested that perceived organisational support (POS), involving the extent to which employees feel the organisation values their work

contributions and cares for their well-being. Organisational and Supervisor support therefore can be an important driver of employee experience.

Erodogan et.al. (2012) suggested the state view of workplace happiness that happiness depends on satisfaction with the environment, and that leadership, career development, job characteristics, and person-environment fit contribute to an understanding of happiness or well-being at work.

According to a study conducted by Deloitte (2017) meaningful work, supportive management, positive work environment, growth opportunity and trust in leadership are the major drivers of employee experience.

Baek-KyooJoo, Insuk Lee, (2017) suggested employees were highly engaged in their work, satisfied with their careers, and felt a greater sense of well-being or workplace happiness in their lives when they had higher POS and PsyCap.

Morgan (2018) argued that technology is an important driver of employee experience. He further added that to create a great technological environment for employees, organisations need to focus on major characteristics, which are abbreviated as ACE which means the availability to everyone, consumer grade technology, and employee needs versus business requirements.

Massoudi and Hamdi (2017) suggested that an organisation's physical environment and its design and layout can affect employee behavior at the workplace. Brill (1992) estimates that improvements in the physical design of the workplace may result in a 5-10 percent increase in employee productivity. He argued that increasing the organisation's physical layout is designed around employee needs in order to maximize productivity and satisfaction.

Sundstrom and Sundstrom (1986) indicated that the physical work environment setting can impact on the level and nature of social interaction between co-workers. The design of open plan offices, for example, and other aspects of the physical layout may determine the kinds of interactions that can take place.

Studies in the past suggested that workplaces where leaders provide clear direction to their employees about where the organization is heading, boast of enhanced employee experience. At the same time, when leaders /managers serve and support the team, employees carry more positive experiences.

Sirota et al. (2005) argued that three factors are critical in producing a happy (which is a major indicator of employee experience) and enthusiastic workforce: equity (respectful and dignified treatment, fairness, security), achievement (pride in the company, empowerment, feedback, job challenge), and camaraderie with teammates.

Jamal and Bakar (2017) opined that during a crisis, a crisis leader should engage in charismatic leadership communication effectively to mitigate the crisis impact and strengthen organisational reputation.

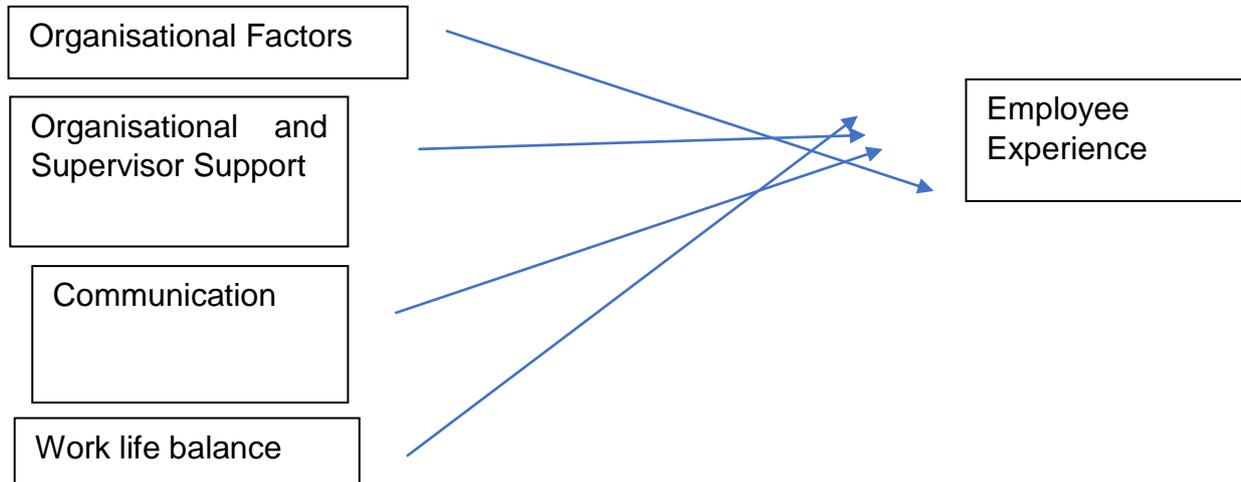
Hick, M (2020) suggested that organisation can help achieve work-life balance in crisis arisen due to Covid- 19 pandemic by speaking openly and honestly about the true extent of the challenges facing the organisation, leading with empathy, and developing a comprehensive remote work plan that includes logistical considerations.

From the past literature and interviews of HR managers, academicians and researchers, this study identified drivers such as role clarity, awareness about strategic objectives, virtual meetings, work from home, communication, supervisor and organisational support, work-life balance, etc. which can lead to employee happiness the most important indicator of employee experience during a crisis.

These drivers are divided into four broad categories

1. Organisational factors which will include employee awareness about strategic objectives, work from home, role clarity, virtual meetings
2. Organisational and Supervisor Support
3. Communication
4. Work-Life Balance

Framework



Specifically, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: High level of Organisational Factors is associated with the high level of Employee Experience

Hypothesis 2: High level of Communication is associated with a high level of Employee Experience

Hypothesis 3: High level of Organisational and Supervisor Support is associated with the high level of Employee Experience

Hypothesis 4: High level of Work-Life Balance is associated with the high level of Employee Experience

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 287 employees working at different levels in the hospitality industry in India. Of these, 287 participants, 164 were men and 123 were women. The sample was selected using the snowball sampling method.

Measures

The anonymous self-report survey included measures of Organisational Factors, Communication, Organisational & Supervisor Support, Work-life Balance and Employee Experience.

Since no standard instrument was available to measure each of these items in crisis, therefore a questionnaire was prepared based on the drivers drawn from literature, expert opinions, etc.

Results

Descriptive Statistics, correlations, and reliabilities

All the measures demonstrated excellent levels of internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha = .927). George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: " $\alpha > .9$ – Excellent, $\alpha > .8$ – Good, $\alpha > .7$ – Acceptable, $\alpha > .6$ – Questionable, $\alpha > .5$ – Poor, and $\alpha < .5$ – Unacceptable"

All the correlations (table below) indicated significant relationships ($p < 0.01$) among the constructs.

		OF	Comm_	Org_support	Work_life	Emp_Exp
OF	Pearson Correlation	1	.712**	.735**	.690**	.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	287	287	287	287	287
Comm_	Pearson Correlation	.712**	1	.738**	.682**	.669**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	287	287	287	287	287
Org_support	Pearson Correlation	.735**	.738**	1	.908**	.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	287	287	287	287	287
Work_life	Pearson Correlation	.690**	.682**	.908**	1	.879**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	287	287	287	287	287
Emp_Exp	Pearson Correlation	.632**	.669**	.845**	.879**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	287	287	287	287	287

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
OF	4.336585	.6120179	287
Comm_	4.211150	.6444066	287
Org_support	3.986643	.8930338	287
Work_life	3.751	1.1488	287
Emp_Exp	4.035	1.0098	287

Hypothesis Testing Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.888 ^a	.789	.786	.4675

a. Predictors: (Constant), OF, Comm_, org_support, Work_life,

This table provides the R and R^2 values. The R -value represents the simple correlation and is 0.888 (the "**R**" Column), which indicates a high degree of correlation. The R^2 value (the "**R Square**" column) indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable, Employee Experience can be explained by the independent variable, Organisational Factors, Communication, Organisational & Supervisor Support and Work-Life Balance. In this case, 78.9% which is very large that means highly correlated. These findings are consistent with the existing literature available in the related fields.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	230.007	4	57.502	263.049	.000 ^b
	Residual	61.644	282	.219		
	Total	291.652	286			

a. Dependent Variable: Emp_Exp

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work_life, Comm_, OF, Org_support

This table indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well. Here, the *p*-value, which is less than 0.05, indicates that, overall, the regression model statistically significantly predicts the outcome variable (i.e., it is a good fit for the data).

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Work_life, Comm_, OF, Org_support ^b		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Emp_Exp

b. All requested variables entered.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.569	.226		2.522	.012
	OF	-.072	.072	-.044	-1.004	.316
	Comm_	.157	.069	.100	2.288	.023
	Org_support	.259	.082	.229	3.158	.002
	Work_life	.556	.058	.632	9.650	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Emp_Exp

Hypothesis 1: Since the *p*-value is more than 0.05, therefore, is no significant relationship between Organisational Factor and Employee Experience Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: *p*-value is less than 0.05, therefore, there is a significant relationship between Communication and Employee Experience Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: *p*-value is less than 0.05, therefore, there is a significant relationship between Organisational & Supervisor Support and Employee Experience Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: *p*-value is less than 0.05, therefore, there is a significant relationship between Work-Life Balance and Employee Experience Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Discussions

Except for Organisational Factors other variables Communication, Organisational & Supervisor Support, and Work-Life Balance significantly affect Employee Experience in crisis situation such as Covid 19 pandemic.

The findings from this study are consistent with the past research done in the related except for Organisational Factors not contributing to employee experience in the crisis situation such as Covid 19 pandemic. The possible reason for organisational factors not

impacting employee experience significantly in the present situation may be because people are confined to their homes and not going to the office.

Communication and organisational & supervisor support came out as a major driver for employee experience during pandemic which is very much understandable by the fact that the present crisis has created an environment of panic and fear. Many are losing jobs others are on the verge of becoming jobless. Therefore, those organisations which are working consistently on these two drivers are able to generate a positive employee experience.

Managerial Implications

In the crisis situation when fear of losing a job is looming, confined at home, can lead to frustration and stress. The outcome of such a situation adversely affects performance. This study can help Organisations to work on factors like communication, work-life balance and extend their full support to employees for a positive employee experience especially in the crisis situation which has arisen out of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Frontline managers should be trained on how to extend the right kind of support to the subordinates, also organisations must exploit all the channels of communication so that employees are regularly updated on the happenings in the organisation. The major indicator of employee experience is happiness which ultimately results in enhanced performance.

Limitations

This research is cross-sectional research and data was collected in the first 45 days of lockdown. In such kind of research, the longitudinal study can give more accurate results.

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