A STUDY ON FACULTY ENGAGEMENT AMONGST COLEGES IN SEMI RURAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT:

Employee engagement is the term which has gained prominence recently. It is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work.

Though earlier, employee engagement was considered important in the corporate world, it is now that a serious thought is given to satisfaction and engagement of people working in the field of higher education. This is so because with increase in number of colleges, coming up of private, autonomous colleges and deemed universities, it is now an industry in itself. The teaching faculty plays a vital role in an education system. Stress is going in for online teaching, in addition to offline teaching. They are not only required to teach but also undertake various administrative activities too. The quality of education will improve provided they become engaged employees.

The present study is taken up by researchers among the faculty members working in higher education in 3 talukas of Jalgaon District coming under Kavayitri Bahinabai Chaudhari North Maharashta University. An online questionnaire was circulated, which were then analysed to understand the think, behave and feel of the teaching staff. A through study of secondary data to understand the topic helped prepare the questionnaire. Through the analysis various suggestions were made which would held the educational institutes in higher education improve the level of employee engagement.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Employee Satisfaction, Higher Education, Teaching Faculty, Work-Life Balance

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualized in 1990 by Kahn, the concept of Employee Engagement has been taking prominence over Employee Satisfaction. Employee Engagement is more complex and challenging goal for an organization as today one witnesses a diverse workforce. The organization and the HR department are all focussing their efforts towards employee engagement. The main intention is to overcome issues of employee turnover, retention of employees, low morale, dissatisfaction among workers, attitude towards work, etc. which arise due to job, their co-workers, their superiors and the organization itself. Many organizations are undertaking surveys to find out the level of employee engagement.

The challenge today is not just hiring qualified and talented people, but fully engaging them, capturing their minds and hearts at each stage of their work lives.

Meaning of Employee Engagement

Though the terms job satisfaction and employee engagement are used inter-changeably with employee engagement, the former refers to only indicates how happy or content your employees are and does not address their level of motivation, involvement, or emotional commitment. For some employees, being satisfied means collecting a pay check while doing as little work as possible. Whereas employee engagement is defined as "the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment." Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work. An engaged employee is well aware

of business scenario, and works with team members to enhance and improve the performance within the job for the benefit of the organization.

Gallup - Engaged employees as those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace.

Aon Hewitt - Employee engagement is "the level of an employee's psychological investment in their organization."

Hence, engaged employee is optimistic, team oriented, goes above and beyond, solution oriented, selfless, shows a passion for learning and passes along credit but accepts blame.

An engaged employee has thus in all cognitive engagement, i.e., focus on work, emotional engagement or connection with the work and physical engagement in the sense that he/she is willing and able to display discretionary behaviour, to go the "extra mile" and work beyond your contract terms

In the current scenario, Indian higher education sector faces certain obstacles and needs reforms. Teaching-Learning aspect is being given importance, autonomous and private colleges are booming, deemed universities are popping up, students are being taught in the traditional classrooms as well on various online platforms, the demands of students are diverse and increasing and they are being thought of as customers. Various administrative activities too are required to be done by teachers. Demands on teaching faculty are increasing. It is a clear sign that the time is ripe for considering a major restructuring of the education system in India and finding modern ways to engage workforce. It is worrying that we are struggling with teacher hopping from one college to another, especially in case of temporary staff and disinterest in colleges and universities; this needs to be immediately resolved. This thought opens the doors of enquiry into the vast domain of employee engagement.

Factors Contributing to Employee Engagement

Over the years, employee engagement has been the subject of numerous research studies. The following factors affect employee engagement.

1. Career Development Opportunities
2. Flexible work timings
3. Fair Pay Structure
4. Adopt a Learning Culture
5. Cultural Diversity
6. Transparency and Honesty
7. Autonomy
8. Inspiration and motivation
9. Communication and transparency
10. Employee Recognition

Statement of Problem

Over the period teaching and research has evolved as prime most responsibilities of the faculties. The common perception was that faculties who were highly involved in teaching engages the students that results in better learning. However, it is not so in reality. It is vital that faculty's work is motivated and in turn motivates the students to enhance the of performance and universities and colleges need to engage the faculties to enhance the student learning process. All this has to be seen from a new perspective. All these require a fresh answer as well as standard model for further study. Fostering teacher's engagement at work is vital as earlier research has shown that teacher's attitudes and motivation levels are transmitted to students.   Hence, an attempt is made to study the faculty engagement among college teachers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Robinson (2006), creating an organizational environment in which positive emotions such as involvement and pride are encouraged results in improved organizational performance, lower employee turnover and better health leads to employee engagement.

Knight (2011) in his paper stated that there are three elements of engagement– cognitive, emotional and physical engagement (by age and gender). To him fostering employee's engagement is a long-term process and requiring time, effort and commitment from the employees and management team. To increase engagement levels, factors which have a positive effect of engagement through every business activity they perform must be encouraged.

Thakur (May 2014) found that there is positive relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction in IT sector or employee engagement effect positively on job satisfaction. This suggested that among the former work motivation can be improved through increasing job authority and accountability. Rewards and sanctions are are considerably linked with job involvement at the clerical staff.

Chandani, Mehta, Mall and Khokhar (April 2016) found out 20 factors affecting employee engagement like career opportunities, leadership, communication, nature of job, organisational politics, pay, treatment, etc to name a few. They concluded that employee engagement results in decline in employees' turnover intentions and increase in innovative work-related behaviour. Continuous training program is the key. Organisations can improve engagement by opportunity thinking, enhancing employee decision making, and commitment, instilling sense of involvement, importance to their opinions, transparency in leadership will lead to high level of employee engagement.

Latasri, O. T. V. and Kavitha, L. (April-June' 2017) studied stress levels which was caused due to work overload, poor infrastructural facilities, conflict with management and peer, student interaction and inadequate salary among the temporary staff. The results showed that male faculty members are experiencing excessive pressure than female faculty members

In terms of students' interaction, male teachers faced excessive pressure than their female counterparts and more so through video conferencing and other visual mode of study. Researchers recommended providing proper communication system and hiring more female faculty members at the female campus. Staff also faces excessive pressure related to Rewards and Recognition. Job demands which interfere with other personal activities, lacking being heard in departmental/institutional decision-making meetings and not having clear criteria for evaluation of research publication and making presentation in conference activities. The recommendations included maintaining a proper work-life balance, involvement of faculty members in in the decision-making process at departmental and college levels, organizing Research and Publication workshop for faculty members positive cohesiveness with colleagues, yoga and meditations, etc.

A lot of studies have been undertaken in general about employee engagement in various jobs but not much in the field of education. Employee engagement in the education sector has been the subject of research studies conducted in European countries and it is high time that similar studies be conducted in India and its states as well. Hence, the present study aims to investigate the dynamics of engagement of teaching workforce employed in higher education sector in Indian state of Maharashtra in relation to semi rural areas. Thus, the study will give an insight into the employees engagement in colleges running undergraduate courses in semi-rural areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Objectives of the Study:
i)   To identify the factors affecting the level of engagement amongst the employees (faculty members).
ii) To measure the level of engagement amongst the employees (faculty members) working in organizations under the study.

Hypothesis of the Study:
H01:   The faculty members are not engaged.
H11:   The faculty members are engaged.
H02   There is no relation between monthly income and overall Faculty Engagement.
H12:   There is relation between monthly income and overall Faculty Engagement.

Research Design:
i)   **Type of Research** – Descriptive type of research method will be utilized in the study.
ii)   **Area of Research** – The present study is taken up by researchers in 3 talukas of Jalgaon District coming under Kavayitri Bahinabai Chaudhari North Maharashtra University.
iii) **Sampling Technique** – Convenient sampling method is used based on the convenience of the respondents. For the purpose of better representation, quota sampling technique will be followed to draw the sample.
iv)   **Sources of Data Collection** –
      a) **Primary data** – The study will be carried out by taking sample teaching staff belonging to different faculties working in higher education in semi-rural areas.
      b) **Secondary data** – It is collected mainly through material available on websites.
iv)   **Sample Size** –   The sample size consists of 150 respondents who were working in colleges providing undergraduate courses – 50 each from Amalner, Bhusawal and Chalisgaon talukas.
v)   **Method of Data Collection –** Data collection for the study was carried out through online survey. Structured questionnaire is used in this research to collect data. All the items are assessed on Likert five-point scale were "1" represents "Strongly Agree" and "5" represents "strongly disagree" including questions related to job, co-workers, seniors and organization. Their cognitive, emotional and physical engagement too was assessed. Few of them will be interviewed too for cross verification and more explanation.
vi)   **Analysis of Data** – Collected data are analyzed with the use of tables and graphs.
vii) **Limitations of the Study** – The study is conducted in semi-rural areas of Jalgaon District of Maharashtra and hence, the results may not be applicable to other areas. Also, since it is convenience sampling there could be bias involved and how truthfully the respondents have answered is not known though cross verification has to be done to the extent possible through a thorough interview of a few respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS

Various questions related to engagement of workers in their work were asked. Such questions related to their job, prospects of advancement, their superiors, co-workers and the organization itself. Though the table included liker scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, for graphical presentation and interpretation. Strongly agree and agree were clubbed and similarly strongly disagree and disagree were added together. The questions related to organization included:

Table No. 1
Responses Related to the Job

S. No.	1. My Job	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i)	The resources (PC, stationery, wifi, power, proper board, etc.) needed to do my job well is readily available	59	21	10	41	19
ii)	I am making progress on important work or initiatives	18	30	19	51	32
iii)	I have introduced new programs and activities in my job	37	54	11	25	23
iv)	I am given freedom for self-governance to make choices about their work	39	58	14	21	18
v)	I attend training programs (OC, RC, FDPs) to do my job well	06	14	00	46	84
vi)	I am expected to do reasonable amount of work	49	57	04	29	11
vii)	I find my job activities personally meaningful	44	52	12	27	15
viii)	I enjoy my job	51	74	00	16	09

Graph No. 1
Responses Related to the Job
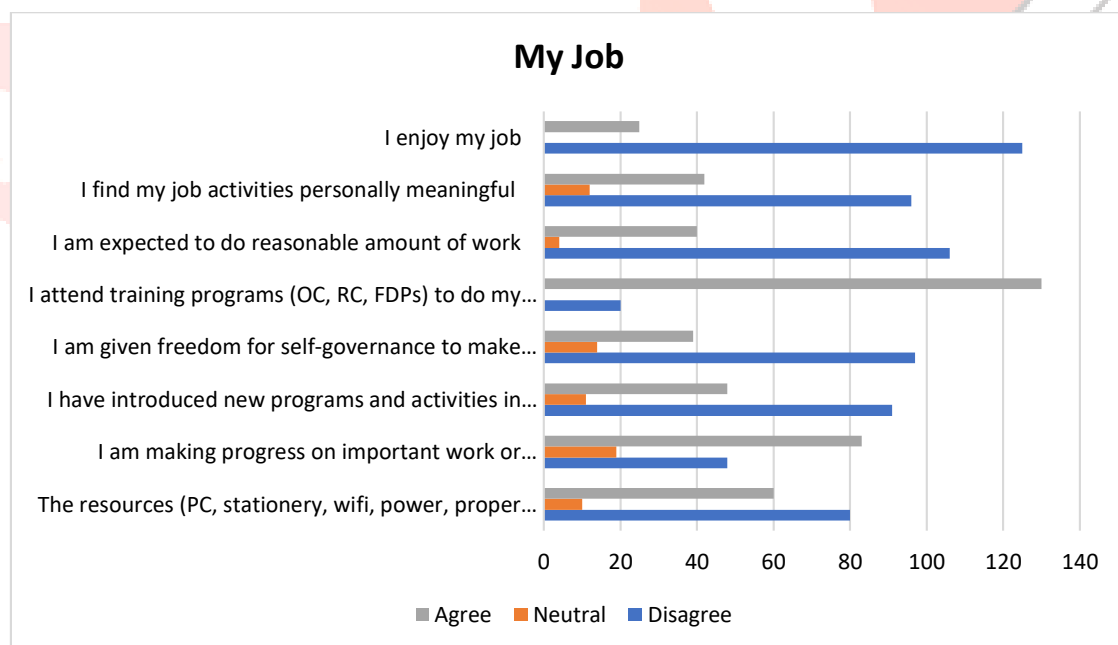
Interpretation:

To the question relating to where there are resources like power, boards, PC, wi-fi connection, stationery etc., to help do the job efficiently, 53.33% (59+21) were of the opinion that they did not have the resources to do their job effectively and on time. A lot of procedural delays were involved. 6.67 % were neutral and 40% did not complain. A few complained about having chalk allergy leading to throat infection or skin infection and also throat infection due to increased volume required for speaking in a large class. This is an occupational hazard.

For question as to whether they were making progress on important work or initiatives, 55.33% agreed that they made progress. The progress here meant that they were given important role to play in the college committees and events. Progress did not mean promotion as it was based on number of years of experience.

The opinion on 'I take introduced new programs and activities in my job', 32% did it and few were neutral and around 61% did not take any initiative.

64.67% stated that there was no freedom given to make choices about their work but 26% agreed to have such freedom. 9.33% were neutral. Few stated that there is micromanagement and no freedom is given to motivate them to take initiative.

Regarding attending training programs like orientation, refresher or short-term courses, approximately 87% consented to attending such programs. Remaining did not attend. The reason for those showing positive response to attending such programs could be compulsion of Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) as required by the teaching faculty for promotion. Those who could not attend, a few said that the Principal does not sanction leave. In fact, at times leave for attending conference, seminars and workshops are not provided, stalling once professional development opportunities.

In case of question as to 'I am expected to do reasonable amount of work', about 71% of the respondents stated that they did not find the work reasonable. The main reason for not finding work reasonable, after probing, was that lot of work relating to administration, research work, NAAC, committee work, catering to the unreasonable demands and needs of the students, etc.

'I find my job activities personally meaningful' was another question asked to which 64% faculty members did not agree to. According to them since around more than a decade, the prime responsibility of teacher of teaching has been diluted due to overburdening of teachers with other responsibilities. Though 28% did still agree to the job activities being personally meaningful.

When asked whether they enjoy their job, 83.33%, i.e., 125 out of 150 asserted that they do not enjoy their job. On asking why, they said that they enjoy teaching, as they chose the profession to teach but other activities they felt were not for teachers as they could not concentrate on quality teaching due to lack of time.

Table No. 2
Responses Related to Co-workers

S. No.	2. My Co-workers	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i)	My co-workers take accountability for results	35	80	11	14	10
ii)	My co-workers treat me with respect	42	63	07	26	12
iii)	My co-workers and myself and help each other	26	46	09	40	29
iv)	My co-workers motivate me to do the best job I can	36	58	16	27	13

Graph No. 2
Responses Related to Co-workers
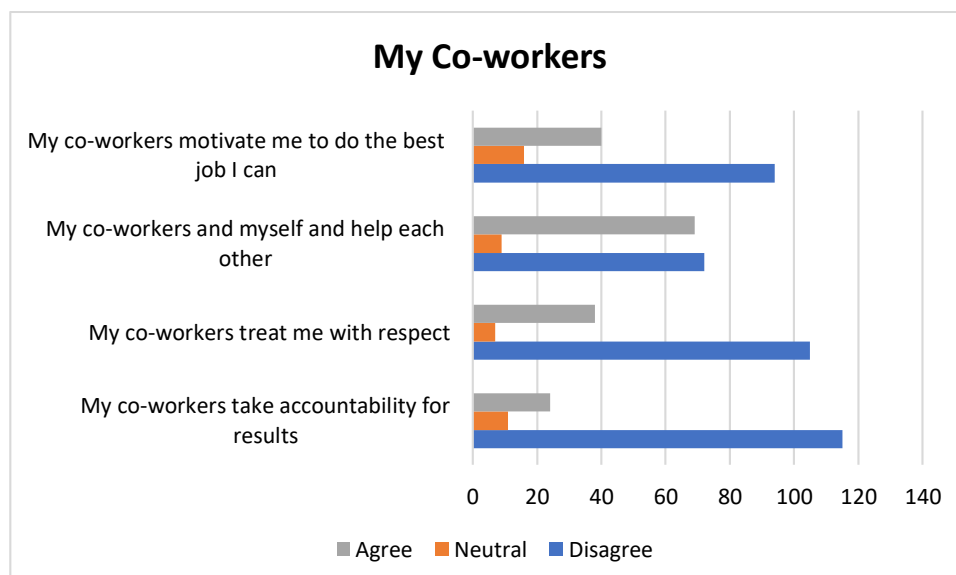
Interpretation:

Nearly 77% of the respondents disagreed that their co-workers take accountability for their jobs. Only 16% agreed and remaining were neutral. A few who disagreed, on being interviewed, stated that most of the time it is blame game and excuses.

Regarding being respected by co-workers, 70% did not agree. According to them each thought of themselves as better or superior to other.

But when asked about whether the respondent himself/herself and co-workers help each other, 48 disagreed and 46 agreed. The response of nearly equal. It could be depend on the type of help offered.

When asked 'My co-workers motivate me to do the best job I can', around 63% disagreed and 27% agreed. Others were neutral. When asked to elaborate, by those who disagreed, they said that jealousy and unnecessary personal rivalry is the reason.

Table No. 3
Responses Related to their Superiors

S. No.	3. My Superior	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i)	My efforts and contributions are recognized by my superior	50	61	03	24	12
ii)	My superior treats people with fairness	36	67	11	22	14
iii)	My superior creates a positive and energizing workplace	30	65	24	19	12
iv)	Ongoing feedback about my performance is provided by my superior	34	66	15	20	15
v)	My superior provides me with proper guidance	38	63	09	24	16
vi)	If I have a suggestion to make, my superior listens to it	18	28	12	51	41
vii)	My superior is supportive, if I have a problem	30	39	07	41	33

Graph No. 3
Responses Related to their Superiors
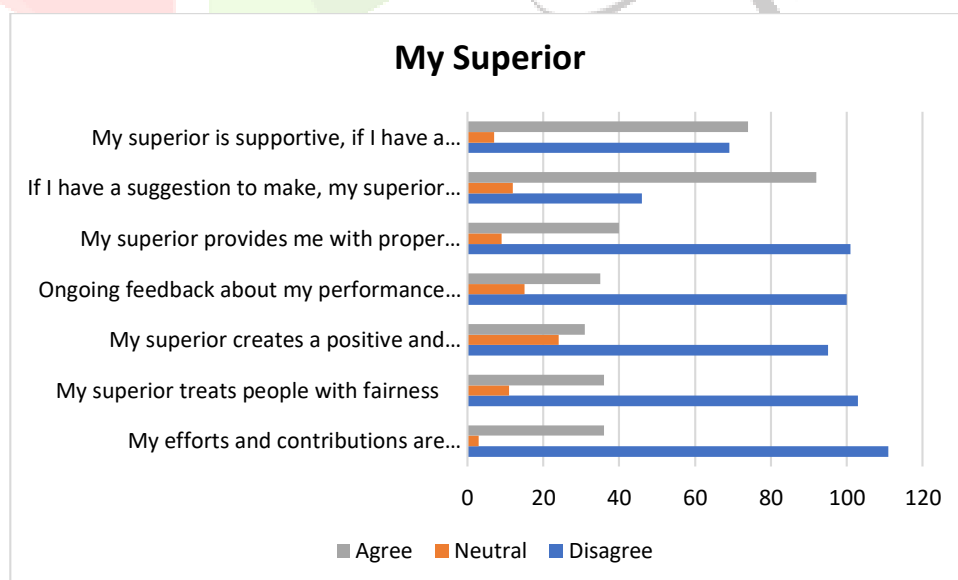
Interpretation:

By the word 'Superior' it meant that for those who were not Head of the Departments they were to speak on their HODs and HODs were to respond on the attributes of the College Principal.

When asked if their superior recognizes their efforts and contributions, 74% did not agree. Only 24% agreed.

Response to superior treats people with fairness, almost 69% disagreed and 24% agreed. Those who did not agree gave reasons like casteism, regionalism, prejudice, etc. for being treated unfairly.

63.33% stated in the negative regarding their superior creating a positive and energizing workplace. 20.67 % felt that their superiors create a positive and energizing workplace. 16% remained neutral.

For ongoing feedback about the respondents' performance being provided by their superior almost 67% stated that no feedback is provided. 10% were neutral and about 23% affirmed that feedback was provided on an ongoing basis. But it was stated that more of negative feedback is given rather than positive.

In the questions 'My superior provides me with proper guidance', around 67% did not agree whereas about 27% agreed and 6% remained neutral.

92 out of 150, i.e., 61.33% stated that their superior listens to their suggestions and just about 31% did not agree. But it was also stated that if the suggestion is good, it is implemented, but the credit is never given to the respondent for it.

'My superior is supportive, if I have a problem', was the last question relating to superior to which around 49 agreed and 46 disagreed. This is just a difference of 3% in opinion. Again, this also could be depending upon the kind of problem.

Table No. 4
Responses Related to General Questions

S. No.	4. In General	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i)	I am paid fairly for the work I do	13	24	03	51	59
ii)	There is no politics in the college	43	57	13	27	10
iii)	My job leaves enough time for myself and my family	38	58	05	30	19
iv)	My job is stressful	42	58	06	29	15
v)	I have a personal connection with the people I work with, my superior, and the community of my workplace	11	25	11	49	54
vi)	I am proud to be a part of the college	07	12	14	52	65

Graph No. 4
Responses Related to General Questions
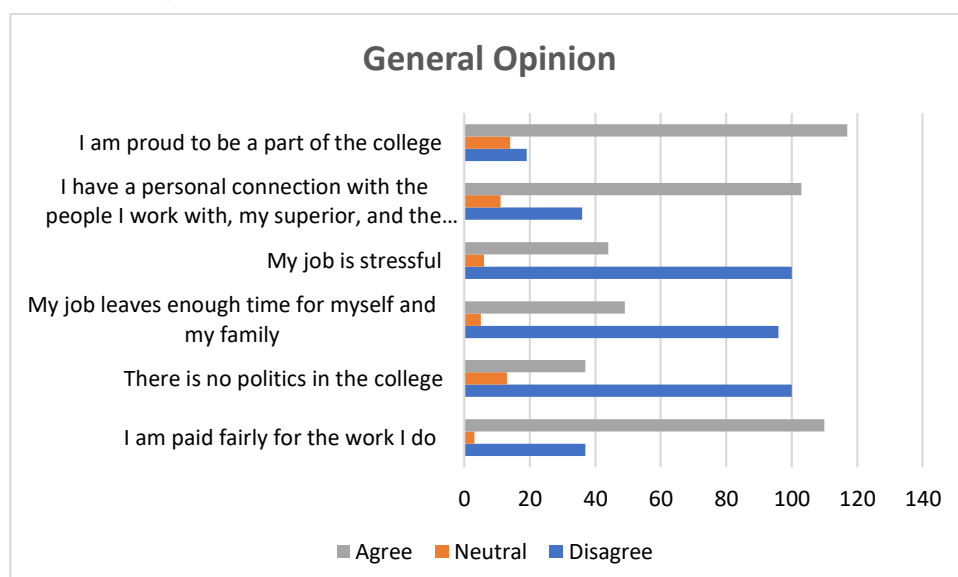
Interpretation:

73.33 % respondents affirmed that they were fairly paid and 24.67% disagreed to it. To those who disagreed when asked were frustrated due to the different kind of work expected from them since last decade. And that could have been the reason for the job not leaving enough time for oneself and his/her family. Others were those who were on a temporary basis who were paid quite less. 64% stated that they do not have time for their family or time to fulfill their other responsibilities of pursue their hobbies. About 33% though did not complain.

67.67%, i.e., 2/3rd of the respondents felt that there is a lot of politics in the college whereas others agreed that there is no politics. Few were neutral.

100 out of 150 respondents, i.e., 66.67% found the job stressful, though 29.33% did not find it so. 4% remained neutral.

To the question relating to personal connection with the people respondents work with including superior, and the community of my workplace, around 69% agreed and 24% disagreed. About 7% were neutral. The reason for those affirming could be that in semi rural towns people know each other.

The last question was whether they were proud to be a part of the college, more than 3/4th , i.e., 78% agreed to be proud to be a part of the college and only almost 13% disagreed. Those who disagreed were having some grudge against management, principal of their HOD. Around 9% remained neutral.

From the above analysis it can be said that faculty members are engaged but not the extent expected due to certain issues. Hence, H01: The faculty members are not engaged is rejected.

It also can be seen that there is no direct relation between monthly income and overall Faculty Engagement and therefore H02 is accepted. This could be that if employees are being involved, have understanding superiors, good co-workers, payment will not deter them from working and being engaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS
1.   Related to the Job:
i)   With number of colleges increasing and government encouraging autonomous college, competition will increase and it won't be favourable to continue with the old bureaucracy and lethargy. Teaching faculty should be provided with adequate resources like power, boards, PC, wi-fi connection, stationery etc., to enable them to work effectively and efficiently. An effort could be made to provide white boards or dustless chalks to staff to prevent or reduce chalk allergies. Even mike system could be provided to those who develop throat infection due to shouting when the class is large.

ii)   Faculty should be encouraged to take more initiatives. In addition to giving important role to play in the college committees and events, they should be appreciated and rewarded on a public platform for their work. Faculty should also be provided freedom to make choices about their work, if it is worthwhile. Employees want to feel valued and respected; they want to know that their work is meaningful, and their ideas are heard. Superiors at times try to micromanage. If teachers are told exactly what to do and how to do it, they won't have the time or motivation to engage with the work. They should realize that all teachers are talented and know their job well. Initiatives must be taken to involve every faculty member in decision making. That will make them feel as a part of the institution.

iii)   It should be made mandatory for the Principal to provide leave to the faculty to attend Orientation, Refresher or Short-term/FDP as per minimum required to attend during a particular period for CAS promotion.   In fact, leave should also be given for attending reasonable number of conferences, seminars and workshops for professional development of their faculty.

iv)   Teaching-learning is the one thing to be given importance. Teachers should be left with sufficient time for reading, taking notes, teaching and doing research. For work relating to administration non-academic person may be appointed. The work of Committees should be shared by students or rather the faculty should be a facilitator or guide for committee work and students should be given to shoulder the responsibility of organizing the programs under various committees, which could be handled by them. The unreasonable demands and needs of the students should not be encouraged by the colleges.   This will also make the job more meaningful and less stressful and will enable the teachers to impart quality education. They would have more time for recreation, family and other interests. To facilitate faculty's research work, the college could organize Research and Publication Workshop with details relating to criteria for evaluation, various good publishers and publication procedures, procedure for research grants and timeframe to submit the research proposal, etc.

2.   Related to Co-workers:
i)   Increase job authority as well as accountability of faculty members. All workers should be made accountability for their jobs. Blaming others and giving excuses should be discouraged.

ii)   Social etiquettes must be taught, and culture of respect and teamwork should be imbibed. A culture wherein respect is valued results in better engaged employees.

3.   Related to Superiors:

i)   A managers' attitude of respect towards the employee and fair treatment of the employees comprehends if a manager would listen to the ideas or suggestions of the employee, or whether makes the employees feel valued or whether they can communicate effectively with the employees. Superiors should be encouraged to treat all equally with fairness. Action should be taken against those treating unfairly. This will also help create a positive and energizing workplace. Various research have shown that fair and equal treatment of the employees' impact engagement levels. Greater amounts of informational justice lead to more behavioural and cognitive engagement towards work with symptoms of greater commitment and motivation, taking pride in work and feeling of excitement for it.

ii)   Superior must recognizes their efforts and contributions. He/she must not only listen to the suggestions and implement the good ones, but also give due credit to the faculty member for suggesting it.

iii) Superior should be supportive to the problems of his subordinates and act as a counsellor, if need be. There should be and environment of free communication between faculty member and his/her superior.

4.   In General:

i)   The complain of less pay was by those who were temporarily appointed by the college but had to sit full time. Either they should be allowed to work at other places after their teaching hours are over or their should be a raise in their salary to the extent possible by the college.

ii)   Employees who worked in a political environment displayed strong negative emotions which in turn could be responsible for hindering their growth along with learning and development. This could directly impact work engagement, which might result in negative job outcomes, lower organizational commitment and greater turnover intentions. Hence attempt must be made to reduce the politics.

iii) To help the teaching staff spend more time with family, the college could organize family get-togethers, invite them when the faculty has achieved something and is being honoured.

iv)   To reduce stress, encourage yoga and meditations for faculty.

CONCLUSION

Employee engagement is an important factor for improving teaching learning and also keeping the faculty more satisfied and committed to their work. Organisations have to take steps to improve engagement by making their job less stressful, leaving them to concentrate on their core job – teaching, involving faculty in decision making, and having a positive work environment culture of care, fairness and concern, transparency from seniors, organizing training programs to build social cohesiveness, support of one's superior, reducing the work overload, etc. to keep their faculty engaged. An attempt must be made to create an 'engagement culture' through communicating the value of engagement in the mission statement and various communications, implementing their engagement action plans, monitoring the progress made in this regard, making adjustments in the strategies and plans as per need, recognising and celebrating progress and results.

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