

Perceptions, Antecedents and Consequents of Employee Engagement Initiatives in Australian Organizations

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This paper presents a research project which was designed to explore employee engagement (EE) initiatives in Australian companies from the perspective of human resource (HR) managers. The research design was quantitative in the form of a self-administered survey instrument which was mailed to 703 HR managers in seven major Australian cities. 205 (29 per cent) usable surveys were returned with almost two-thirds from women. Respondents reported having a good understanding of EE but there was much less endorsement of the value, importance and benefits of EE initiatives. Respondents generally indicated that their organizations were not committed to EE in any demonstrable way. The data highlighted that employee retention was the primary reason organizations embark upon EE initiatives and that the outcomes of initiatives were only tentatively acknowledged by respondents. The research has implications for HR managers, senior management, EE consultants and organizations generally. Much more can be done to raise the profile, importance and benefits of EE initiatives. The originality of this research is that it is the first scholarly study to look at EE initiatives from the perspective of HR managers.

INTRODUCTION

Employee Engagement (EE) is neither particularly contentious nor novel and yet as a practice it continues to preoccupy the interests of management and human resource practitioners. The literature also indicates that EE remains a topical research area for scholars, too. Most fundamentally, discourse persists regarding the authenticity of EE as a divergent paradigm. EE has been questioned by some; its originality challenged. For example; it has been characterized as an emperor in new clothes (Newman *et al.*, 2010) and as an old woman in a new dress (Schohat and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). Yet, for the most part, academicians conceive of EE as a distinctive and inherently worthy construct deserving of further investigation and understanding. The ensuing literature review explores the ways in which employee engagement has been found to add value to organizations.

In its embryonic stage EE was perceived by some as the converse of burnout, able to be measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (Maslach and Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010; 2004). Schaufeli *et al.*, (2002), however, provided evidence that, even though engagement and burnout

correlate negatively, they are not two opposites, but rather two independent states of mind. EE has, over time, also disentangled itself from other organizational behavior concepts for which it may be misconstrued as substitutable for. These include: workaholism (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006; Gorgievski and Bakker, 2010); job satisfaction (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006); job involvement (Jeung, 2011; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006); affective commitment (Vigoda-Gadot *et al.*, 2012) and organizational commitment (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006). By distinguishing itself from these related yet distinct concepts, EE has solidified for itself a unique identity.

It seems apparent that little empirical, scholarly research on EE has been conducted in Australia and no recent studies appear to canvass the topic from the perspective of HR managers. The primary objective of this exploratory study is to address these two shortcomings and explore the antecedents and consequents of EE initiatives in Australian organizations.

This paper is presented in the following order: First; a review of the relevant literature to contextualize EE and highlight the benefits organizations can derive from EE initiatives. The literature review also describes some organizational influences on EE and how environmental factors can positively influence EE in practice. The second section deals with research design. The method adopted to collect data is discussed as is the research process adopted. A justification for the data collection method is provided along with an acknowledgment of the limitations of the chosen method. The third section of the paper presents the findings of the research and provides a discussion of the interpretation and implications of the findings. The paper closes with a conclusion highlighting the opportunities and challenges arising from the implications of the research findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement seems to have been first introduced by Kahn (1990: 693) who defined it as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances”. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined EE as “a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption”. Welch (2011) highlighted that these two definitions share a common focus on the manifestation of engagement: cognitive-absorption, emotional-dedication and physical-vigour. Shuck and Wollard (2010) defined EE as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes”.

While academic and practitioner interest in EE policies and practices has garnered a good deal of attention for a couple of decades now, scholarly research has noticeably gained momentum over the past five or six years (Shuck *et al.*, 2012; Vigoda-Gadot *et al.*, 2012; Wollard and Shuck, 2011; Albrecht, 2010). This is likely due to a significant body of research positively associating EE activities with varied organizational benefits (Shuck and Reio, 2013). Indeed; according to the literature, EE has been positively correlated with an almost endless list of virtues. As Jose and Mampilly (2014) noted recently, employee engagement initiatives promise many and various positive organizational and individual benefits.

Examples of the desirable outcomes EE initiatives can deliver include improving employee productivity (Saks 2006) and job performance (Rana *et al.*, 2014; Rich *et al.*, 2010; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Salanova *et al.*, 2005). Employee engagement has also been found to boost commitment and organizational citizenship behaviours (Saks 2006) as well as contributing to a reduction in employee turnover intentions (Rana *et al.*, 2014; Robison, 2012; Shuck *et al.*, 2011; Saks 2006; Harter *et al.*, 2002; Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Other research has positively associated employee engagement with delivering fewer workplace accidents (Robison, 2012; May *et al.*, 2004) and generating increased levels of customer service delivery and customer attentiveness (Chalofsky, 2010). EE levels have also been linked positively to levels of customer satisfaction and favourable customer perceptions of a company's reputation (Lockwood, 2007).

Further positive outcomes of EE initiatives include findings suggesting that employees who are engaged are more likely to develop positive relationships with internal and external firm stakeholders

(Mishra *et al.*, 2014) and act as ambassadors or advocates for the firm (Chong, 2007; Gronstedt, 2000). Significantly, employees have been found to be more credible promoters of their organizations than corporate advertising or CEO communiqués (Edelman, 2012). Other scholars have concluded that organizations which develop high levels of engagement among their employees outperform their competitors (Shuck and Rose, 2013; Macey and Schneider, 2008) and generate higher revenues (Harter *et al.*, 2010; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009; Czarnowsky, 2008; Wagner and Harter, 2006). These firms, it has been found, also enjoy higher returns on investments (Macey *et al.*, 2009). Finally, EE, it has been contended, has positive implications for employees' private lives (Bakker, *et al.*, 2014), psychological well-being and personal accomplishments (Shuck and Reio, 2013).

Thus, EE has emerged and continues to evolve as an important and valued concept in the fields of business, management, industrial psychology, and human resources development (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). While the literature expounds of engagement virtues, little appears to be known about the antecedents of EE initiatives (Wollard and Shuck, 2011) leaving this as one largely unexplored aspect of EE. The literature does say more about the factors which are likely to help facilitate organizational efforts to increase their employees' engagement. These include: internal communication; transactional and transformational leadership; story-telling; work-group meetings; psychological empowerment; training and career development; organizational justice, and compensation and benefits (financial and non-financial). The ensuing paragraphs explore these facilitating factors.

Internal communication has been identified as positively influencing the success of employee engagement initiatives (Chong, 2007; Welch and Jackson, 2007; Saks 2006). It is argued that to develop EE, internal communication professionals must be involved immediately with new employees by orienting them to the organization, developing their professional skills, soliciting their comments and ideas, and taking time to listen to their concerns (Mishra *et al.*, 2014). When employees do not get information and feedback on their performance, it has been found to constitute a source of stress, which can contribute to disengagement from work (Kumar and Kumar-Sia, 2012).

Leaders who are looking to build engaging climates must be encouraged to develop their emotional intelligence. They should also be attentive to their followers' needs and be willing to respond appropriately (Shuck and Herd, 2012). Accordingly, leaders should use their emotional intelligence to connect with employees and in turn employees then use their perception of a leaders' emotional intelligence skills to make decisions about what kind of leader they are working with and how they can interact with the leader. Transformational leadership is appropriate for focusing on the higher level needs of employees and to affect EE.

It has been suggested that organizational and human resource leaders can use story-telling to engage and align their employees around their strategic planning efforts. Rather than presenting strategic planning information to employees in traditional modes and language, leaders can deliver the same messages in the memorable language and format of stories. This can invite employee to contribute to planning efforts while they are still being crafted; giving employees the means to share and showcase stories consistent with the strategic vision and brand positioning; and developing story champions within the organization and encouraging senior leaders to become lead storytellers (Baker, 2014). In tandem with or in place of storytelling, managers can more creatively use a common workplace activity – work-group meetings, to engage their employees by making their work-group meetings relevant and encouraging employee participation in the meetings where possible. (Allen and Rogelberg, 2013).

Psychological empowerment has been positively and significantly associated with EE since it enhances employee perceptions of competence, impact, and meaning (Jose and Mampilly, 2014). Competence, or self-efficacy, is associated with an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform activities with skill (Jose and Mampilly, 2014). Employee perceptions of their impact are important because they reflect organizational involvement and indicate to employees whether they are making a difference in their organization (Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997). 'Meaning' is the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). When individuals are treated with dignity, respect, and value for their contributions they are more likely to

experience a sense of purpose and belonging which enhances their engagement with their work and organization (Kumar and Kumar- Sia, 2012).

According to Anitha (2014), training and career development is an important factor in influencing the success of EE initiatives. This is because when employees participate in learning and career development programs, their confidence increases in the development areas they are exposed to and this motivates them to be more engaged with their work (Anitha, 2014). Another facilitating factor in employee engagement initiatives is claimed to be organizational justice. Organizations wanting to support their EE initiatives should foster a work environment focusing on organizational justice (Ghosh, Rai and Sinha, 2014). In performance appraisal, for example, it is important for the supervisor to ensure that the outcomes are distributed fairly and equitably; the procedures are explained to employees; and all the rewards or sanctions that follow should be supported with clear explanation and justification in a manner that is perceived as fair by the employee (Gupta and Kumar, 2012).

Financial and non-financial rewards, Anitha (2014) has claimed, represent an indispensable opportunity for organizations to enhance the success of EE initiatives. Applied well, compensation and benefits have been shown to motivate employees to achieve better work outcomes and to encourage employees to focus more on their work and personal professional development. Other means of enhancing engagement program outcomes may include providing employees with self-actualizing work; giving them opportunities to realize their life purpose, values, and goals through work, have a social impact through work, feel personal accomplishment, and believe in their highest career advancement within organization (Fairlie, 2011).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design adopted a quantitative methodology and a questionnaire was developed in the form of a self-administered survey instrument. The survey comprised four sections: Section 1 'Demographic' (*s1D*) solicited basic demographic information from respondents including gender and age; Section 2 'Perceptions' (*s2P*) comprised 10 statements, employing a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree through to 5=strongly disagree), seeking respondents' personal perceptions and reflections regarding EE. Section 3 'Antecedents' (*s3A*) inquired regarding the reasons why respondents' organizations introduced an EE initiative if they did. Respondents had the option to respond in three ways: that they did not know the reason why their organization embarked upon and EE initiative; that there was no specific reason for doing so; that there were specific reasons. If there were specific reasons, respondents were asked to number up to the top 3 reasons from a list of 10 possible reasons. Section 4 'Consequents' (*s4C*) invited respondents whose organization had introduced an EE initiative to rank outcomes of the initiative using a 5-point Likert scale. The objective was to ascertain in financial and non-financial terms the relative value of EE initiatives as perceived by the respondent.

The statements used on the questionnaire were informed by the literature review for this paper and from contemporary practitioner literature sourced in recent editions of the national HR publications of the American Society for Human Resource Management and the Australian Human Resources Institute.

Statements were open-ended and carefully reviewed to ensure they were concise, unambiguous and written in plain English. Explanations of key terms were provided along with the survey itself. The survey was mailed to 703 human resource managers in private sector organizations in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart and Newcastle. The survey was mailed along with an addressed, reply-paid envelope in an attempt to encourage a good response rate. Organizations were identified through various online business directories. Data collection was carried out over November and December 2014. Data were analyzed using Stata®, a statistics software program.

The authors acknowledge that the research approach adopted has limitations. It is less personal and investigative in comparison with focus groups or semi-structured interviews, for example. Therefore, it does not allow for the researcher to establish trust and rapport with participants which other research approaches can accommodate. This may limit the respondents' engagement with the project and might then influence the time they give to considering their responses. The survey did not ascertain the

reasoning behind respondents' opinions and any explanations for their opinions are not known. It is also possible that misinterpretation or differing interpretations of statements on a survey can result in responses which may not be intended or consistent among respondents. Interviews and focus groups are able to clarify the information sought from participants to overcome this. A survey, however, is time efficient, focused, can potentially garner many more responses and is free from the common criticisms of interviewer bias. A survey ensures every respondent is responding to exactly the same question with the same information free from potential influences such as tone, emphasis and volume which can influence respondents participating in face-to-face interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Data

Of the 703 surveys mailed out, 205 (29.1 per cent) usable surveys were returned. Of these, 128 (62.4 per cent) were completed by females and 77 (37.6 per cent) were completed by males. 130 (63.4 per cent) respondents indicated that they were not a member of a recognized HR association and 75 (36.6 per cent) said that they were a member of such an organization. Respondents were asked whether they held a tertiary-level qualification in HR or a tertiary-level qualification with HR as a major and 151 (73.7 per cent) respondents said that they did not hold such a qualification while 54 (26.3 per cent) said that they did. Respondents were represented in all age ranges on the survey with 22 respondents under the age of 30; 55 respondents between 30 and 40 years; 72 respondents aged between 41 and 50 years; 37 respondents aged between 51 and 60 years and 19 respondents were aged over 60 years.

Perceptions

The data indicates that the surveyed HR managers, for the most part, consider themselves to have a very good understanding of EE (75.12 per cent agreed or strongly agreed). However, this was the most positive finding of the study. Responses to the other statements reflect a less than enthusiastic endorsement of EE programs and principles. For example; only 59.51 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EE is an important part of the role of the HR manager. Exactly two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EE principles and practices are important in organizations and two-thirds also agreed that EE initiatives result in positive benefits for organizations. From HR managers, this luke-warm regard for EE programs and principles is perhaps surprising given the prominence of EE in HR circles and the generally very positive profile that EE enjoys.

In response to the statements that sought the HR managers' experiences with EE, the data reflects an even less favorable association with engagement in practice. By way of illustration, only 37.56 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they consciously use engagement practices with the people they manage while just 40 per cent concurred that engagement practices are useful and applicable to all types of jobs. Only one-fifth of respondents said that they believed their manager had used engagement practices to better engage them.

In respect to the respondents' organizations, the data reflected that respondents did not see their organization as especially committed to EE in any demonstrable way. 31.22 per cent of respondents said that their organization had a formal, documented EE strategy in place while just 28.78 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EE was a top ten business priority for their organization. Indeed, only two-thirds of respondents felt that EE initiatives return tangible benefits to organizations.

TABLE 1
PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>CV</i>
I have a very good understanding of what EE is about	1.89	0.92	48.74
I think EE is an important part of the role of the HR Manager	2.27	1.00	44.06
I consciously use EE practices with the people I manage	2.81	1.07	38.29
I believe EE principles and practices are important in organizations	2.14	0.97	45.62
My organization has a formal, documented EE strategy in place	3.02	1.07	35.49
EE is one of my organization's top 10 business priorities	3.12	1.13	36.43
I believe EE results in tangible benefits for an organization	2.20	0.95	43.44
I believe that my manager has used EE practices to better engage me	3.18	0.92	28.90
I believe that our organization generally has a high level of EE	2.49	0.83	33.61
I believe EE practices are useful and applicable to all types of jobs	2.65	0.96	36.31

There were no significant differences between the data provided by male and female respondents in regards to their perceptions of EE with one exception. Women were found to be 20 per cent more likely to use empowerment practices with people they manage compared with men while men were twice as likely to be strongly disinclined to using empowerment practices with the people they manage than were women. The raw numbers for the second observation, however, were just a few. Generally, women were observed to be between 5 and 9 per cent more positively inclined towards EE than were men.

More significant differences were observed in the data when comparing the responses of those who are members of a recognized HR association and those who are not. Those respondents who identified as members of HR associations were more likely to be strongly positively inclined towards EE and far less likely to select the "partly agree; partly disagree option". For example; 49.3 per cent of HR association members strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of EE compared with 37 per cent of non-members. In contrast, 26.1 per cent of non-members and just 9.3 per cent of members selected the "partly agree; partly disagree" option to this statement. The number of HR association members strongly agreeing that EE delivers tangible benefits to organizations was double that of non-members. 20 per cent Association members agreed strongly that they use EE practices with those they manage compared with 8.4 per cent of non-members. It was particularly interesting to note that members of HR associations reported a much stronger organizational commitment to EE than did respondents who were not members of HR associations. In response to the statement 'my organization has a formal, documented EE strategy in place', 44 per cent of association members agreed or strongly agreed contrasted with 23.8 per cent of non-members. In response to the statement 'EE is one of my organization's top ten business priorities', 40 per cent of association members agreed or strongly agreed compared with 22.3 per cent of non-members.

Whether HR managers who happen to be members of HR associations work for organizations more committed to EE or whether these managers are more aware of their organization's people initiatives is not known. It could be the case that association members have higher levels of interest in initiatives like EE or have more knowledge or skills to be able to influence organizational investment in EE. In any case, there does seem to be a positive relationship between appreciation for EE and membership of a HR association. The research similarly found a positive correlation between having a tertiary HR qualification and appreciation for EE. Indeed, this association was even more pronounced with HR qualified respondents typically being two to three times more positively inclined towards EE than those without a tertiary HR qualification. Almost three times as many HR qualified respondents, for example, strongly agreed that EE is an important part of the role of the HR manager than non-HR qualified respondents. 38.8 per cent of HR qualified respondents strongly agree that EE delivers real results to organizations compared with 18.5 per cent of those without a HR qualification.

It should be noted that while EE did not receive high levels of endorsement from respondents', respondents did not strongly question the value and role of engagement either. The number of respondents

claiming partial agreement with the statements was significant; about one-third on average with a low of 20 per cent (statement one) and a high of 45 per cent (statement ten). This may indicate uncertainty, ignorance or apathy or it might signify that the respondents believe the observation made in the statements is contingent upon some variables. Further research would be required to determine this but what can be reasonably deduced is that the role and value of EE practice in the surveyed organizations has not been convincingly established and that considerable opportunity exists to raise the profile of EE.

Antecedents

Of the 205 usable surveys, 50 (24.4 per cent) reported that within the previous three years their organization had not had any kind of formal or informal EE program in place. The remaining 155 (75.6 per cent) reported that their organization had had such a program within the last three years. Of this 155 that acknowledged the existence of an EE initiative, 9 (5.8 per cent) said that they did not know the reason for the introduction of the EE initiative and 10 (6.4 per cent) said that there was no specific reason for the introduction of their organization's EE initiative.

**TABLE 2
PRIMARY REASON FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE**

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Freq. (n=136)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Attract high quality job seekers	8	5.88
Retain desirable employees	32	23.52
Develop employees' work skills / competencies	13	9.55
Increase employee job satisfaction	14	10.28
Encourage higher levels of job-related creativity	17	12.50
Increase employee productivity	15	11.02
Improve organizational financial performance	13	9.55
Deliver better customer/client outcomes	13	9.55
Keep pace with a trend / keep pace with competitors	10	7.35
Make employees more accountable for their work	1	0.73

The 136 respondents who did not select either "don't know" or "no specific reason" concerning why their organization introduced an EE initiative, were asked to indicate, in order of importance, the top three reasons for the introduction of their organization's EE initiative from a list of ten reasons. The findings are represented in the tables 2, 3 and 4.

**TABLE 3
SECONDARY REASON FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE**

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Freq. (n=136)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Attract high quality job seekers	14	10.28
Retain desirable employees	16	11.76
Develop employees' work skills / competencies	19	13.97
Increase employee job satisfaction	18	13.23
Encourage higher levels of job-related creativity	16	11.76
Increase employee productivity	15	11.02
Improve organizational financial performance	10	7.35
Deliver better customer/client outcomes	11	8.08
Keep pace with a trend / keep pace with competitors	10	7.35
Make employees more accountable for their work	7	5.14

TABLE 4
TERTIARY REASON FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Freq. (n=136)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Attract high quality job seekers	11	8.08
Retain desirable employees	21	15.44
Develop employees' work skills / competencies	18	13.23
Increase employee job satisfaction	15	11.02
Encourage higher levels of job-related creativity	15	11.02
Increase employee productivity	12	8.82
Improve organizational financial performance	12	8.82
Deliver better customer/client outcomes	20	14.70
Keep pace with a trend / keep pace with competitors	2	1.47
Make employees more accountable for their work	10	7.35

The data highlight some interesting observations regarding why organizations embark upon EE initiatives. Firstly, it was discovered that there are indeed many quite different reasons why organizations appear to introduce EE initiatives. These reasons range from the somewhat cynical such as increasing employee productivity and keeping up with what other organizations are doing to the altruistic such as increasing employee job satisfaction or encouraging employee creativity through to the practical such as retaining desirable employees or improving the organization's performance. The practical antecedents were the most commonly chosen reasons for commencing EE initiatives while the cynical reasons were the least popular reasons. It was observable, however, that generally most of the reasons respondents had to select from were selected in relatively equal numbers with a couple of noticeable exceptions. Employee retention was by far the most popular reason for embarking on an EE initiative while using EE as a tool to make employees more accountable was the least common reason given by respondents.

TABLE 5
TOTAL FOR ALL REASONS GIVEN FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Freq.</i>
Attract high quality job seekers	33
Retain desirable employees	69
Develop employees' work skills / competencies	50
Increase employee job satisfaction	47
Encourage higher levels of job-related creativity	48
Increase employee productivity	42
Improve organizational financial performance	35
Deliver better customer/client outcomes	44
Keep pace with a trend / keep pace with competitors	22
Make employees more accountable for their work	18

Consequents

Consistent with the findings reported in preceding sections, respondents only tentatively endorsed the value of their organization's EE initiative when asked about the results. The means recorded in the following table reflect concurrence with the statements between general and partial agreement. For the five statements the percentage of respondents either strongly or mostly agreeing averaged 57.35 per cent with an average 15 per cent either mostly or strongly disagreeing with the statements. It was interesting to

observe that only 38.24 per cent of respondents noted any unplanned or unexpected benefits from their EE initiative. This is somewhat contrary to the literature review that highlighted a great many potential benefits often derived from EE initiatives many of which, presumably, would not be planned for or even known to those who may only have moderate knowledge of EE as the research study found to be true of many respondents. It should be noted, though, that this study did not seek to identify how and to what extent EE initiatives are measured. It could be the case that respondents' organizations are not measuring or, not measuring effectively, the outcomes of EE initiatives and therefore may be unaware of the true nature and extent of the returns of their initiative. Irrespective of the extent to which measurement is a factor, it is telling that only 56.18 of respondents felt that the time, effort and money put in to their EE initiative was worth it in terms of the results. A further 31.62 per cent partially agreed that the investment was worth it. Findings of this study such as perceived lack or organizational commitment to EE; ignorance or skepticism of quite a few respondents or the cynical reasons of some for initiating an EE program could account for the overall halfhearted sentiment that EE initiatives are worth the resources they require to be implemented. However, there may well be alternate explanations for the findings and this could be an interesting and valuable topic for further inquiry.

TABLE 6
CONSEQUENTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>CV</i>
Our EE initiative achieved its objectives	2.21	0.82	37.05
Our EE initiative was worth the financial investment	2.47	0.95	38.35
Our EE initiative produced other, unplanned / unexpected benefits	2.72	1.08	39.93
Our EE initiative has improved organizational culture / atmosphere	2.55	1.08	42.35
Our EE initiative was worth the time, effort and planning it required	2.40	0.92	38.67

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted that EE and EE initiatives in contemporary organizations appear to be only moderately valued in terms of their importance, applicability and returns. The esteem in which EE is held is noticeably higher for those who are HR qualified or members of HR associations. The concern is that many HR practitioners do not have, arguably, the appreciation of the value of EE as they lack association membership and relevant qualifications suggesting a knowledge or resource deficit relating to EE. As an exploratory study, this research has raised more questions than it has answered and there is good opportunity for further research as a result of this work. It would be interesting to discover why EE seems to have only received mild approval from the surveyed respondents. It is proffered by these authors that apathy, cynicism or ignorance could be contributing reasons yet more practical reasons may equally offer the explanation. This study has identified that many different reasons compete as antecedents for EE initiatives but more research is required to understand what circumstances influence these choices and whether, for example, industry sector or organization size might associate with particular antecedents. In regards to consequents, again respondents were tentative in their acknowledgment of EE initiatives delivering. These authors suggest that insufficient or inaccurate measurement may account for poor outcomes but it could be the case that ineffective design, implementation or management of EE initiatives may result in less than satisfying outcomes. Again, further research could be directed at exploring this issue to discern better understanding. What can be stated with a reasonable degree of certainty based upon this study's findings is that EE has some way to go to convince HR managers that it is the panacea it is sometimes purported to be. Perhaps more demonstrable organizational commitment to EE in terms of resources and education would raise employee consciousness and garner greater effort on the part of HR managers to push EE initiatives toward delivering on expectations.

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