

# Employee Engagement among Tourism Enterprises of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts

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## ABSTRACT

*Engaged employees devote themselves to organization and are enthusiastically committed to the organization while they are working. These employees are expected to perform in accordance with the interest of the company. It is evident that in comparison with disengaged employees, greater productivity and retention levels and lower absenteeism can be observed among highly engaged employees at organizations. To assess the level of engagement among employees at tourism sector, structured questionnaire has been distributed to employees at various tourism companies of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts of Kerala State, India. Various statements for checking the commitment level and the level of engagement has been stated in the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to rate their levels by indicating their agreement or disagreement with the given statements. The statements were worded simply and it is inferred that those who opt for strongly agree will be highly engaged and those who opt for strongly disagree will be disengaged workforce. The present questionnaire also includes question related to work environment to assess the satisfaction levels of employees on their work environments.*

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, Tourism Enterprises, Kerala Tourism, Tourism Management, Tourism Education, Human Resource Management.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Engaged employees devote themselves to organization and are enthusiastically committed to the organization while they are working. These employees are expected to perform in accordance with the interest of the company. It is evident that in comparison with disengaged employees, greater productivity and retention levels and lower absenteeism can be observed among highly engaged employees at organizations. These set of employees largely contribute to the growth of the organization and are highly motivated. The aim of the study is to identify the level of engagement among employees in the tourism industry. For achieving this, the respondents were asked to denote their agreement or disagreement with the statements in the questionnaire related to commitment. The statements are framed in such a manner that the respondent's agreements with statements denote engagements and disagreements denote disengagements.

Eighteen statements in the questionnaire are about the current working environment to understand they are satisfied with the present working situations. In this study positive answers denoted that most of the employees are happy with the present working condition. However positive response for statements such as "Looking work outside my present job" denoted that the respondents are dissatisfied with the present work environment.

Most of the respondents are highly engaged (71%) and not so optimistic with regards to their colleagues. 33% opined that "Highly engaged" is applicable to their colleagues. Half of the percentage (51%) has a view point as "somewhat engaged and 8% opined, they were not engaged.

The results of the study reveal that the level of engagement is highly associated with the hierarchical position. The level of engagement increases based on hierarchical position. 67% of the frontline employees including supervisors are highly engaged in comparison with 75% of senior managers and that of 83% of owner. This array has been followed in the case of response with regard to description of whole workforce of the organization. A higher percentage of the workforce is considered to be "highly engaged" (Table 1).

**Table 1: Engagement Level with regards to Workforce of Organization (Perception based on hierarchical order)**

	Front Line	Supervisor/ Manager	Senior Manager	Owner
Highly engaged	31%	22%	35%	44%
Somewhat	38%	69%	59%	38%
Disengaged	24%	7%	1%	9%
Not Sure	3%	0%	1%	5%

With regards to level of engagement of colleagues, those who are working on a regular basis, they could remark only 27% of respondents as highly engaged. It was highly evident that the perception on engagement showing optimistic results while considering the seniority level. Owners opined that three quarters of those who are working on a regular basis are highly engaged and while considering the frontline workers, less than a fifth have this feeling. (Table 2)

**Table 2: Opinion of regular colleagues having High Engagement Level (Perception based on Position)**

	Front Line	Supervisor/ Manager	Senior Manager	Owner
< 25%	17%	8%	8%	5%
25% to 45%	20%	25%	12%	15%
50% to 75%	38%	39%	28%	18%
75% Plus	17%	24%	46%	44%
Not Sure	1%	0%	1%	3%

## 2. RESEARCH GAP

Only limited research studies has been touched up on Employee Engagement with regards to tourism enterprises operating in Kerala State, India and henceforth this research study will furnish some valuable insights in this area.

## 3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Employee engagement in tourism enterprises is very crucial to improve the performance of organization. Unengaged employees will not be having motivation to contribute positively to the development of the organization. Unengaged employees will find it very difficult to enjoy their work. It will in turn affect the productivity of employees. In the long run, an organization will be badly affected which will lead to even losing its customer base and thus the profitability.

## 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the Employee Engagement level of Frontline executives of Tourism Enterprises in Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram Districts of Kerala State, India
- To assess the Employee Engagement level of Supervisor/Manager of Tourism Enterprises in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts of Kerala State, India
- To study the Employee Engagement level of Senior Manager of Tourism Enterprises in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts of Kerala State, India
- To evaluate the Employee Engagement level of Owner of Tourism Enterprises in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts of Kerala State, India

## 5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Around the world the importance of employee engagement in the organization has been highly recognized by the HR professionals, industrialists and researches [1]. The meaning of employee engagement has explored by many researchers in various manner. Since the importance of the concept gained acceptance around the globe, its dimensions, conceptualization and measurement methods are drastically developing day by day. However, according to Macey [2] the academic researchers aren't contributing to the development of this concept at par with the global growth of the concept. It is also vital to consider that there lack a universally accepted prominent and definite definition for employee engagement as it is a new concept. Authors of various interests have defined the term employee engagement differently. The term employee engagement and its definition as 'the level of involvement and commitment of the employees towards their organization' was introduced by Kahn in early 90s [3]. Many of the academic researchers have defined employee engagement as the employee's commitment towards their organization and its value and their willingness to support each other [4], [5].

Aswathappa [5] has mentioned, employee engagement is the way in which employees are motivated to achieve organizational aims, by developing the skills such as managerial, behavioral, technical and knowledge levels. In this condition employees are working collaboratively. In one of his study, Saks [6] consider 'employee engagement' as the stretch to which an individual is focused and immersed in their performance roles. It's the optimistic approach

employees possess towards their work and the commitment and motivational effort they deliver into it. For successful execution and improvement for an organization to perform better, 'Employee engagement' is a technique. Engagement environment is all about creating and enhancing the chances for employees to work collaborate with colleagues, managers and organization as a whole. Further if the employees are demonstrating their emotional, cognitive, physical aspects with their job role in the organization, then there are higher chances for reflecting employee engagement[7].

In his study, AL Olivier [8] stated that the engagement among employees can only found where the employees believes their own capabilities and are contributing their best performance in the given job. In addition, it is also viewed as a situation where employees are highly involved and motivated to contribute in all the activities of the organization [9]. Arnold B. Bakker also confirmed this in his study by stating that the motivated employees are able to achieve their targets within the time frame efficiently. He defined the term employee engagement that "it is a psychological state where employees feel a vested interest in the organization's success and perform to a high standard that may exceed the stated requirements of the job" [10]. Moreover, [11] has viewed employee engagement as psychological contract between employees and organization than physical contract. Engaged employees are always enthusiastic about their work. Therefore, the prime duty of the managers is to provide better environment for fostering employee engagement [12].

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **6.1. Research Design**

Descriptive research has been followed in this study.

### **6.2. Sample Design**

#### **6.2.1. Sample Size**

A total of 200 respondents were interviewed and after further data cleaning, reliability and validity checks, 176 respondents are the sample size for this study.

#### **6.2.2. Sampling Strategy**

Judgment sampling method has been adopted for this study.

### **6.3. Data Collection**

For primary data collection, a questionnaire with a set of eighteen questions has been administered to all the levels of employees of different tourism enterprises of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Districts. i.e. Frontline executives (Sales/field executives), Supervisors/ Managers (line managers), Senior Managers and Owners of different tourism enterprises.

## **7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Correlation analysis of the collected data has been furnished below.

### **7.1. Satisfaction with present work environment**

Generally, the study revealed a positive response with regard to the satisfaction with the present work environment. Most of the respondents favorably answered to the questions related to work environment. 95% as well as 87% of the respondents made a positive response towards relationship with peers and supervisors respectively. Response to the question related to 'looking another job outside their present job' (62%) giving an indication that majority of the employees in the tourism industry are satisfied with the present work environment.

In this study, most of the statements got a positive response from the respondents. However there are few statements with negative response as well. Statements related to salary (34%) as well as fair compensation (33%) standing out due to negative response. Not only on salary and compensation but also the statements with regard to the benefits given to the employees has shown a negative response (32%).

In addition to this, present study has shown a potential area for further improvement, training and information sharing. 26% of respondents stated that their managers are not sharing information properly.

Similarly, one third of the respondents stated that there is a lack of sharing information and knowledge openly in the organization. Another issue is in relation with the training. 37% of the respondents felt that in their organization training has given least importance. Notwithstanding this factor, 80% of the respondents are satisfied with the training that they had undergone in relation to their job.

**7.2. Level of engagement among employees in tourism sector**

For getting accurate results on the level of engagement among employees in tourism sector, a list of ten statements had given to the respondents for marking their opinion with each. The respondents were asked to denote their answers ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

The study reveals that 5.7 as the average engagement score for 176 respondents. Out of the total respondents, two third had 6 or above as engagement rating. On an average it was very evident that senior staffs are more engaged than the frontline employees as well as owners. It was also noted that amount of time spending on a job is also reflected upon the level of engagements. Respondents those who spent below six months on a job having lower scores when compared to those who spent more than six months or longer periods on a job. Nevertheless the score related to level of engagement falling down for those who have experience more than 10 years. The number of employees and the annual gross revenue does not have any significant influence upon the average engagement scores.

**Table 3: Work Satisfaction related responses**

Relationship with my manager/superior at my work place is positive	95%
Relationship with my peers at workplace is positive.	95%
My thoughts and ideas are considered at work	83%
The training received with regards to existing job is satisfactory as a whole	81%
Positive organizational approach to foster Communication	80%
Flexibility in my work to make my own decisions related to work	80%
Proper work environment control for me	80%
I am confident that I have acquired the proper training to execute my existing work	80%
Proper information access to conduct my work successfully	77%
I have the flexibility to disagree to my supervisor without any fear	77%
Access to resources to conduct my work efficiently	76%
Proper information sharing has been done by my manager	72%
knowledge and Information are openly shared across my organization	67%
With regards to my existing benefit package, I am satisfied.	66%
I have fair pay for the job I do	65%
In my organization, I have Competent Salary as per tourism industry standards	64%
High preference has been given for training in my Organization	62%
Looking work outside my present job	36%

**7.3. Engagement with regards to work Satisfaction**

In order to identify the problems related to impact of engagement, a comparison with all work related satisfaction statements has been done with the scores of average engagement of those who said “yes” and those who said “no”. This helped to identify those problems which may cause a negative effect towards employee engagement. Surprisingly, items like benefits and pay have little impact towards employee engagement. It is also found out that those employees, who are dissatisfied with regards to their current benefits and pay, exhibited higher scores of average engagement compared to those employees who are satisfied.

Negative employee engagement was noted while the independence of the employee within the workplace was curtailed. The items that will have a negative effect on engagement levels are lack of control and to make decisions, not able to disagree with superior, thoughts and ideas are not considered. This is evident among middle level managers and supervisors. The score related to engagement is 5.8 for those supervisors who consider they have flexibility to take decisions i.e. for those haven’t scored 4.7. If the manager/supervisor doesn’t believe that their thoughts and ideas are considered, then the engagement scores dipped from 5.8 to 4.8.

A Negative effect has been noted down for lack of sharing of information and open communication. This was evident for supervisors and middle level managers in comparison with senior and front line employees. A score of 5.9 has been indicated for those supervisors who think that knowledge and information are openly shared, in comparison with that of the opposite. For them the score is 5.1. Higher average score (5.9) has been noted for those supervisors, whose managers has shown a great job of proper information sharing. The opposite score for this is 4.7.

The entire engagement scores were not affected by training or lack of it. Generally, this is because of how supervisors and employees valued this component of culture representing workplace. There is no negative effect in connection with deficiency of training among frontline employees. Nevertheless for managers and supervisors, the opposite is true. Employee engagement scores for those employees who are not satisfied possess lower scores with regards to engagement. For the item 'High preference has been given for training in my Organization', managers and supervisors gave a low score (4.9) than the higher preference one (6.1).

**Table 4: Position and Length of Service (Average Engagement Score)**

Type of Employee	Score	Employment (Length)	Score
Entire Employees	5.7	<6 months	4.8
Frontline Employees	5.5	6 months - 1 year	6.1
Supervisor	5.6	1 year – under 2 years	5.8
Top Management	6.1	2 years - under 5 years	5.9
Owner	5.7	5 years - under 10 years	6.1
		More than 10 years	5.4

**Table 5: Engagement related Scores & Satisfaction at Work**

Statement Response	Yes	No
Relationship with my manager/superior at my work place is positive	5.69	6.08
Relationship with my peers at workplace is positive.	5.68	6.11
My thoughts and ideas are considered at work	5.77	5.97
The training received with regards to existing job is satisfactory as a whole	5.82	5.80
Positive organizational approach to foster Communication	5.92	5.68
Flexibility in my work to make my own decisions related to work	5.89	5.67
Proper work environment control for me	5.80	5.80
I am confident that I have acquired the proper training to execute my existing work	5.74	6.00
Proper information access to conduct my work successfully effectively.	5.89	5.58
I have the flexibility to disagree to my supervisor without any fear	5.92	5.48
Access to resources to conduct my work efficiently	5.86	5.54
Proper information sharing has been done by my manager	5.93	5.35
knowledge and Information are openly shared across my organization	5.86	5.71
With regards to my existing benefit package, I am satisfied.	5.81	5.86
I have fair pay for the job I do	5.74	5.84
In my organization, I have Competent Salary as per tourism industry standards	5.80	5.86
High preference has been given for training in my Organization	5.83	5.32
Looking work outside my present job	5.80	5.86

**8. CONCLUSION**

Generally the above findings are positive. The average score pertaining to frontline tourism employees is fairly high and on the other hand front line employees are less engaged in comparison with other employees. In the self-reported engagement also the same trend has been noted. Nevertheless the data recommends management at top levels have a tendency to overemphasize to what extent their employees are engaged. There is an assumption that high engagement levels are a representation of entire workforce. In comparison with middle management levels, negative response to the statements related to job satisfaction.

These findings are quite positive overall. While front line workers may be less engaged than other employees, the average engagement score of front line tourism employees was still quite high. This trend was also seen with the self-reported levels of engagement. However, the data also suggests that top levels of management tend to overestimate how engaged their workers are. This may be because they assume that their own very high levels of engagement are reflective of the entire workforce. It is notable that a negative response to one of the job satisfaction statements is much more indicative of lower engagement among those in mid-management positions. This suggests that the HR inducements examined in this study are key factors in maintaining high productivity and reduced turnover and absenteeism amongst supervisors and junior managers. Making sure that supervisors have the autonomy to make decisions, provide input and adequate training is likely to increase their engagement.

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