

Employee Activism: A New Challenge before HR Manager

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Abstract

Employee activism is a collective effort made by the employees to draw the attention of organization towards the social and ethical issues such as global warming, human rights, green marketing etc. For this, employees are taking the help of new technologies and applications such as Instagram, Facebook and so on. This activism is different from traditional protest raised by the employees to increase their salaries, bonus and other benefits with the help of trade union. Today employees are raising their voices without the help of any intermediaries. *In this regard, present study is an effort to throw light on the causes of employee activism, its importance in upcoming global scenario and what challenges it present before hr managers of any institution.*

Introduction

New millennium marks the era of activism. Today, whole world is watching activism in different ways such as media activism, corporate activism, political activism etc. Now it has become a massive tool to enlighten the social, economical and other problems at national and international platform. Actually it is a universal phenomenon which simply refers to direct arbitration into different systems and sub systems of any country to mark changes in them. As far as history of activism is concerned, it is not a new one as one can see its glimpses in different revolts or agitations, whether by people, workers, and slaves etc., from ancient period to modern era. But the word “activism” gain political attention from the year 1920. *At present, there are many forms of activism and one of them is EMPLOYEE ACTIVISM.*

Employee Activism: Meaning and Definition

Employees are the core of any organization; in fact, they are regarded as esteemed substance of any institution. Employees are the only active factors of production who have mind, senses, emotions and ability to judge what is right or wrong, what is good or bad. This ability of employee gives impetus to activism. As every employee wants to work in an organization, which not only provide him consequential job but also co-ordinates with his ethics and identities, absence of this component gives rise to uprising against the employer.

Employee activism simply means the impact of employee’s collective efforts on the management policies that leverage the social- political system. So, it is a tool to deal with the matters which effect

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ethical and social values of employees. In fact, it is a moment for any establishment to bring its beliefs and standards before the real world.

Origin of Employee Activism

In the former time, most companies pay attention towards only external collaborators but not towards the internal allies i.e. the people working within the organization. They are only the decision acceptors whose views towards society, ethics and organization itself are not taken into consideration. This mind-set has forced employees to make realize the employers that they are equally important as them and management must pay heed towards their requirements.

Besides, being a rational and sensitive human, employees are directly affected by the changes in policies and development within the institution. Additionally, employees are more entrusted and verbal with an unparalleled competence to change the scenario. Today, business world has been passing through a period of reconsideration or rethinking where values have undergone a sea change. In this changing synopsis, employees are ready to play an active role in reshaping the work culture. Along with this, due to new legal frame work, organizations are becoming more and more accountable towards their proceedings. This led to upsurge of corporate activism by companies and business leaders, a stand to hike those issues which are of public and social concern such as global warming, green marketing etc.

Advent of new technology such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google etc. provides a massive podium to everyone to speak on all those social, environmental and other dubious matters that have direct or indirect jolt on society, and employees are not exception to it. It ultimately leads to “corporate activism” into “employee activism”. With the help of these scientific know how, employees are sharing their views, applauds, resentments etc. not with one and another but to the whole world easily and sometimes even without revealing their identities. This platform is used by them to present not only their personal issues but also the practices which are against their ethics and values. Some examples of employee activism in the recent time are of - Google workers against the Pentagon contract of using artificial intelligence in drones and cameras ; Microsoft employees agitation for the cancellation of Immigration & Customs Enforcement and Customs & Border Protection project as it violates human rights of people; Amazon employees for global climate change; Facebook employees’ oppose to company’s policy to allow politicians to give wrong presentation through advertisement in social sites etc. One can see that employees of IT companies are pioneer of this activism all over the world.

Objective of the study

- ❖ To know the magnitude of employee activism.
- ❖ To know the impact of employee activism in shaping the relation between employer and employee in the near future.
- ❖ To know up to what extent employee activism will provide platform to employees to raise their voices on controversial matters.
- ❖ To know about the impact of such activism on the health of the organization.

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Importance of the Study

At present, companies are working in a competitive arena and to attract and retain the able and qualified employees, is quite a difficult job. Pressure of competition leads the companies to shift their priorities. Besides, employees are raising their utterance and are ready to play a wider role in corporate realm. Now, workers are straightly confronting their vocation leaders that are clearly visible to the audiences whether employees are in support or in against of employer's policies and actions.

Most frequent cables used by such activists are social media, whistle blowing technique, leaking of company's internal e-mails and records, large scale protest etc. Presently, such type of activism has been seen in technology based industries, in fact, they are the inaugural of it.

The main reason behind it is that most of the employees of these industries are of younger generation, owing to which, they are not only techno savvy, having brilliant new ideas to fascinate entire world but also extrovert towards social changes which makes them entrepreneur of the organization. In the upcoming times, employee activism will results into paradigm shifts in the organizational culture and environment and other significant changes in the company as:-

1. Employee activism draws the attention of employers towards the plight of the employees.
2. It draws attention on how far change in policies impact the employees and their contribution at workplace.
3. It emphasizes to pay attention towards the factors related to leadership, corporate social responsibility, communication pattern, human resource development etc. which are the main area of concern for employees.
4. It leads to focus that in present scenario, employer has to change its hr policies strategically to retain talented employees in the organization for a long run.
5. It makes companies to pay attention towards the values of employee as well development of organizational philosophy.

Research Methodology

Research is an intellectual phenomenon resulted from the inquisitiveness of human mind to explore new facts and figures through controlled inquiry for the establishment of a particular truth and the scientific approach or process required to carry out such exploration is known as its methodology. Thus, research methodology involves series of steps taken by any researcher to find the solution of any problem.

As far as this study is concerned, it is based on secondary data analysis. Secondary data is a data which is collected by someone else for any other purpose. For the present study, such data is collected from websites, journals, articles, magazines etc. of publication of various institutions related to IT, e-commerce and other sectors in order to throw light on present topic.

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Review of Literature

- ❖ James Agarwal, (2020) in his article emphasized that in order to combat employee activism in India, there is a need to evolve a comprehensive policy which incorporates the goals of both employer and employee by hr managers.
- ❖ Kartikay Kashyap, (2019) in his article argued that due to changes in traits of present generation, employee activism will raise upto serious level in near future. In such a situation, it is necessary for any institution to understand the people with whom they are working and reasons of their agitations or activism.
- ❖ Forrest Briscoe and Abhinav Gupta, (2016) in their research paper concluded that social activism influences organizational decision makers. Moreover magnetism of social activists can be felt beyond the organization they targeted. So it is required to understand the nexus of insider activists, partial member activists and their entire influence process.
- ❖ Kamal Karanth, (2019) highlights that criticism of organization by employees have more far flung damage on the image of corporate than by outsiders. Activism shown by employees are more systematic and prolonged rather than the collective pressure exerted by trade unions

Prospect of Employee Activism in India

Among the chaos of global economic upheaval, one word which is recently gear up in the corporate world is activism by the employees. Though unrest and agitation are common features of any labor market but these protests are shown through any union which acts as link between management and workers. Most of these demonstrations are for hiking the existing salaries, to enhance dearness allowances, to provide better working conditions and so on. But now a day, peripheries of employees are not limited to Abraham maslow's hygiene factors. At present employee's agitation is proactive than reactive. They are openly challenging the policies of management on ethical as well as on social grounds and for doing this they are no more depended on trade unions. They are explicitly expressing their views through modern media of communication i.e. social media.

In this regard as far as India is concerned, it is demographically a younger country as Economic survey of India 2014, suggests that working population in India will rise to around 64% of total population by 2021 and large no. of persons will fall under the category of 20-35 years. From the last few decades, I.T. and E- commerce have become important part of every one's life. Internet and mobile have become very important media of communication and exchange of information has increased manifold as no. of people who are using social media in India was 32.6 crores in 2017 which is assumed to rise up to 44.8 crores in 2023. Additionally, there is a change in the work culture all over the world and India is not exception to it. Today, more emphasis is on the quality of work rather than total no. of hours spent in the office. Now, with the help of technology, employees can connect with each other at any time and place; companies' focus on skill development of the people; work at home culture to help the employees to maintain personal and corporate life; retention of talented employees by companies at any cost; gender equality; stress free environment; balanced work-personal life; social and environmental issues etc. have become more important factors for

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employees. So changed value system, new work culture, young age of employees and new technology paves path for employee activism. It is required for the hr manager to deal with this issue more sophisticatedly and tactfully otherwise he may face the following challenges:-

- ❖ In case of employee activism there is always a fear of direct tussle between employer and employee.
- ❖ Employee activism may negatively impact the corporate image and reputation as it may lead to other stakeholders think that organization is not serious about social issues.
- ❖ In case of abeyance of issue by organization, workers may take extreme steps to seek media attention towards their issue.
- ❖ Employee may lose their jobs in this entire process which also affect organization as it losses one of its valuable assets.

So, it is necessary for every hr manager to change his traditional practices of dealing with the people at work place. Instead, he/she should recognize their feelings and concepts regarding any issue. There is a need to understand employee as a whole, a part of any society, its culture, values, tradition etc. impact him and his decisions. In fact corporate leaders should provide them a platform to present their views, notions and concerns over any matter which bothers them.

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