



**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF OFFICE-BASED AND FIELD-  
BASED EMPLOYEES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A SME IN  
TELECOM SECTOR**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Employee engagement is considered as a recipe for organizational success. Engaged employees are enthusiastic and committed to the organization. Some organizations have employees working on the field as well as in office. In such cases it becomes pertinent to measure, compare and understand the difference in engagement levels of the employees. This study aims at establishing the difference in engagement levels among employee segments. It includes 83 employees drawn from both office-based and field-based categories in a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) in telecom sector of India. This diagnostic and predictive study reveals that work, manager, culture and team-related factors drive engagement. It establishes that engagement is an outcome of interplay of these four factors. The paper recommends more customized engagement interventions and initiatives to be planned and introduced for specific employee segments to increase job satisfaction and their contribution to the organization.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Employee Engagement, Field Employees, Office –based Employees.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Employee engagement has gained significant importance in the recent times because businesses are recognizing that enthusiastic and committed employees add more value to their organization. The added value is visible through improved services, customer satisfaction, retention,

profitability and long term relationship. Engaged employees profoundly express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during performances in various roles in the organization. They act as drivers of financial and market success. They give stellar performances by trying to stretch themselves and continuously strive to outperform by setting new standards of excellence. Owing to this, enhancing employee engagement has gained momentum in business organizations across the globe.

Since the traditional approach of serving one organization for the life has vanished from the society, the importance of employee engagement has increased by folds. Employees are more concerned about building their profile and skills that will help them choose from a myriad of career options. In the same manner, the management practices are also changing its course and creating a new environment for the employees to build a long term relationship.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ever since its evolution, numerous definitions can be derived from practice and research. According to Kahn (1990) employees can be engaged on one dimension and not the other. However, the more engaged the employee is on each dimension, the higher the level of employee engagement. Maslach and Leiter (2001) initially defined the engagement construct as the opposite of burnout (i.e., someone who is not experiencing job burnout must be engaged in their job.)

Luthans and Peterson (2002) elaborated on Kahn's work on employee engagement, which provides a convergent theory for Gallup's empirically derived employee engagement. They opined that that to be emotionally engaged is to form meaningful connections with others and to experience empathy for them. In contrast, being cognitively engaged refers to those who are acutely aware of their mission and role in their work environment. Schaufeli (2008) define employee engagement as "a positive fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption". They further state that engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but is "a more persistent and pervasive affective – cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour".

Engaged employees are more profitable, productive, focused, have fun and less likely to leave the company because they are engaged (Gallup Organization, USA, 1999). Employee engagement is closely linked to employee turnover, customer satisfaction, loyalty, productivity, safety and profitability criteria. (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002). Studies on employee engagement (Tower Perrin, USA 2008) linked the same to customer impact and financial results. They suggested that there exists a close relationship between high levels of employee engagement and lower staff turn-over rates, higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. The need to create development and career growth opportunities, appropriate leadership styles and work – life balance were deemed important to attract, retain and engage employees. Engaged employees are not just committed but passionate about their work.

### **ENGAGING FIELD EMPLOYEES**

Remote working and outsourcing of job profiles are the common practices in many organizations in this era. The organization structures are becoming more fluid with non-office-based

employees and virtual teams increasing in numbers. A critical challenge in the face of changing organization structure is to understand how to engage non-office-based employees and to get the most out of them. Employee engagement which has been often correlated with culture, environment, leadership, communication and processes, stands at a loss when it comes to engaging the remote workforce. When celebration in the organization, team building activities and leadership interaction means nothing to the remote employees, the challenge of engaging such employees becomes a humongous task.

The study was done in a MSE in telecom sector. The organization has distributed workforce where nearly 75% of the employees are on the field. The field employees work under the network deployment department covering vast areas for installation of network equipment. They are based in client's office and hence do not have any sense of belongingness with the parent organization. The attrition rate among the field employees has always been on a higher side. Reason for high attrition is not compensation as employees have stated non-compensation reasons in exit interviews.

This study tried to identify the factors which significantly vary in engaging the office-based and field employees. It also involved in identifying the pain areas of field employees and recommending suggestions for alleviating the same.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to measure the level of employee engagement, the methodology followed was to conduct an employee survey. Based on convenient sampling, a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions was administered to a group of 100 employees of which 83 employees responded. Respondents have been drawn from junior, middle and senior level of employees with different tenure in the organization. Questions were formulated after referring to secondary literature and were based on the drivers of engagement. These drivers that were identified were:

- Challenging Work
- Effective Leadership
- Supporting team
- Recognition and appreciation
- Organization's culture
- Communication
- Training

Compensation and career advancement questions were kept out of the purview of this employee engagement survey as the management thought that it would bias the employee's responses and hence defeat the purpose of the survey.

Of the 83 employees who responded to the survey, 40 were office-based and 43 were field based employees. The organization categorizes its employees based on band names given on their respective job descriptions and the roles that they play. The survey was responded by employees across different bands. The maximum respondents however were from the entry level Engineer level.

The questions were answered on a four point likert scale which did not have a neutral answer, thereby forcing the employees to choose one of the options and eliminating the central tendency error.

The responses were then analyzed based on the percentage of people who gave the question with a “Strongly Agree” rating. The trend between the office-based and field employees was brought forward after the analysis. A factor analysis was also conducted on the responses in order to group the responses to the questions within factors which could explain the variance in responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After conducting the survey, the collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques using SPSS 14(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

In order to assess the degree of internal consistency among the questions posed to the employees Cronbach’s Alpha was measured. The test was run on all the 13 questions as variables. The table below displays the results thus obtained.

**TABLE 1: RELIABILITY STATISTICS**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.856	13

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Challenging Work	.844
Decision-making	.842
Performance Review	.853
Manager -Interaction	.838
Manager -Feedback	.845

Team Orientation	.853
Training	.849
Potential -Delivered	.852
Recognition -Received	.844
Work Life - Balance	.846
Open - Culture	.832
Business -Information	.850
Pride	.843

The overall alpha is 0.856, which is very high and indicates strong internal consistency among the questions asked in the employee engagement survey. In general, alpha value of 0.6 is acceptable (Malhotra & Dash, 2010). The “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” is not greater than the overall alpha (.856) for any of the variables and thus all the variables contribute to the overall alpha. Thus, none of the variables were eliminated.

### FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis is a statistical tool used for data reduction and to assess the emergence of factors. It looks for patterns among the variables to discover if an underlying combination of the original variables can summarize the original set. Factor analysis was done on the 83 responses obtained from the employees. Factor analysis is done to seek the underlying unobservable variables that are reflected in the observed variables. It was done to group the questions into factors which had greater correlation among themselves. In the process 4 factors were identified. The factors are shown below.

**TABLE 2: FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Factor No.	Factor Name	Survey Questions
Factor 1	Work-related	Challenging work, Decision Making, Pride, Recognition Received
Factor 2	Culture-related	Work-life balance, Culture, Business Information
Factor 3	Manager-related	Performance Review, Manager Interaction, Manager feedback
Factor 4	Team & Training	Team, Training

The question on potential delivered could not be grouped into any of the above factors and thus was omitted.

The 4 factors together accounted for 63% of the variance present in the responses. Factor 1 accounting for 19%, factor 2 and 3 for 16% and factor 4 for 12%.

### MULTIPLE REGRESSION

In order to determine the causality effect of the factors thus identified with the employee engagement score, regression was carried out. The independent variables were the 4 factors and the dependent variable was the employee engagement score.

The following regression model was generated.

**TABLE 3: DEVELOPMENT OF REGRESSION MODEL**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.120	.787		2.695	.009
	Work Related (WR)	2.162	.071	.393	30.267	.000
	Culture Related (CR)	1.789	.076	.302	23.693	.000
	Manager Related (MR)	2.032	.074	.318	27.364	.000
	Team and Training (TT)	2.101	.092	.251	22.857	.000

a Dependent Variable: EE -Score

Taking the beta and the constant, an employee engagement equation was developed as follows:

$$EE = 2.12 + WR*2.16 + CR*1.79 + MR*2.03 + TT*2.10 \quad (1)$$

The regression equation shows that the change of 1 unit in employee engagement score can be brought about by changing “work related” factor by 2.16, “culture related” factor by 1.79, “manager related” factor by 2.03 and “team and training” factor by 2.1. Also the significance level of all the factors is less than 0.05. This indicates that the factors are significant is affecting the employee engagement scores.

**TABLE 4: R SQUARE**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.993(a)	.987	.985	1.42854

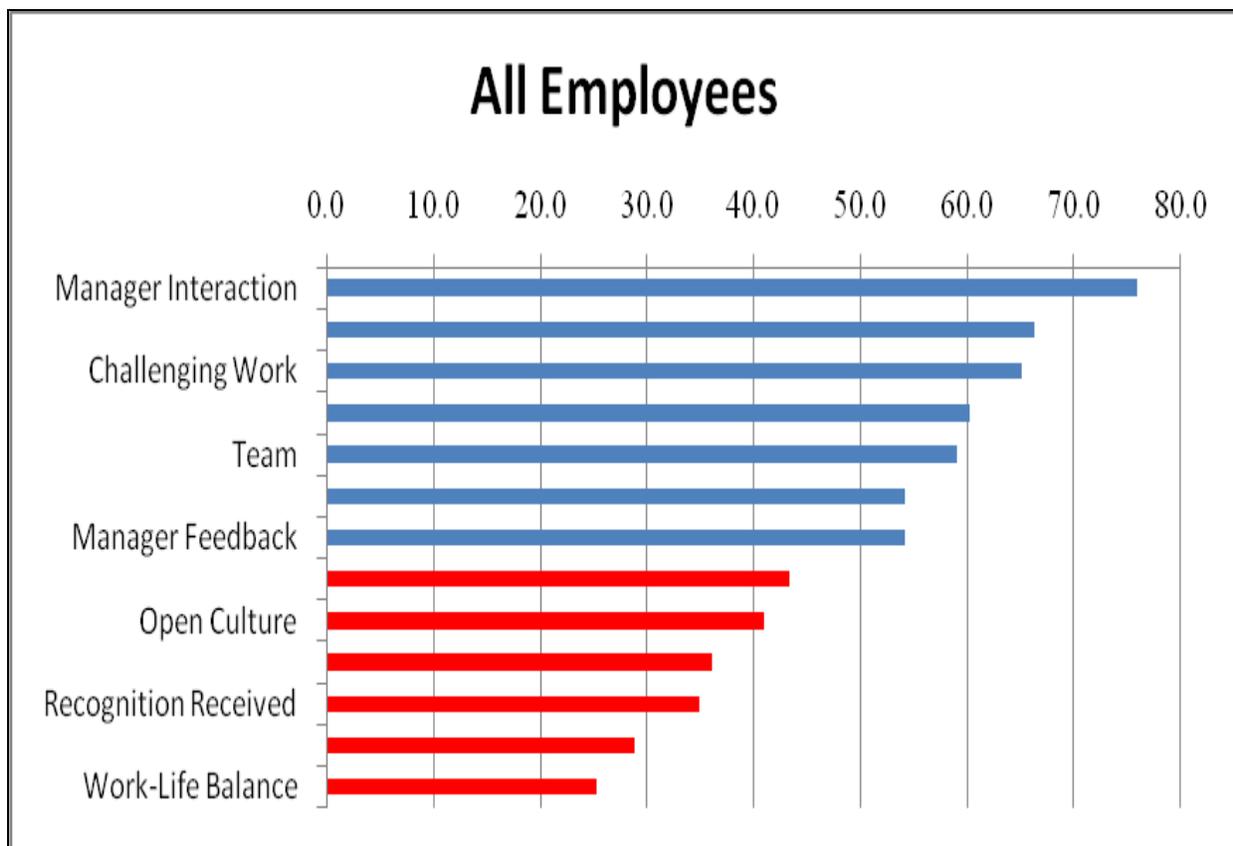
a Predictors: (Constant), Factor4, Factor1, Factor3, Factor2

This model also had a good fit with “R square” value of 0.993.

Thus, the regression model indicated that the most important factor to have a greater employee engagement score was Factor 1 (30.27, t-value) which included the work-related questions. The next factor in the sequence of importance was Factor3 (27.36, t-value) which included the manager-related questions. Factor 2 (23.69, t-value) was identified as the third most important factor for employee engagement which included questions on culture. Finally Factor 4 (22.85, t-value) had the least impact on the employee engagement scores.

The following section shows the percentage of people who rated the questions as “Strongly Agree”.

The response taken from all the employees is given below:

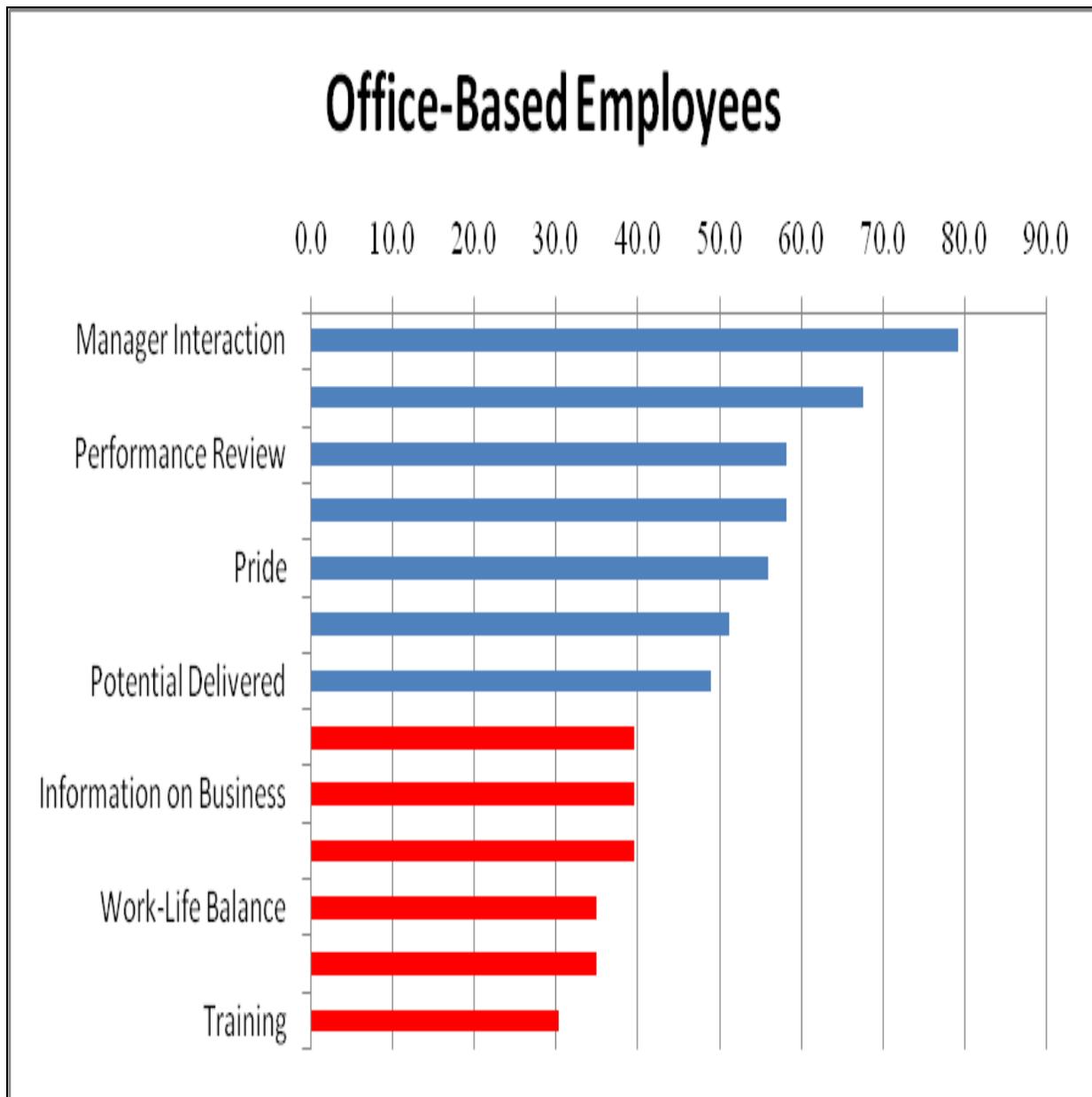
**FIGURE 1: SURVEY RESULTS – ALL EMPLOYEES**

Taking 50 as the minimum level for engagement, it was found that employees did not agree on the questions involving decision making, open culture, information on business, recognition received, training and work-life balance.

The response of all the employees taken together does not give much perspective to the analysis as the distinction among the office-based and field employees is huge in matters of team and leadership interaction.

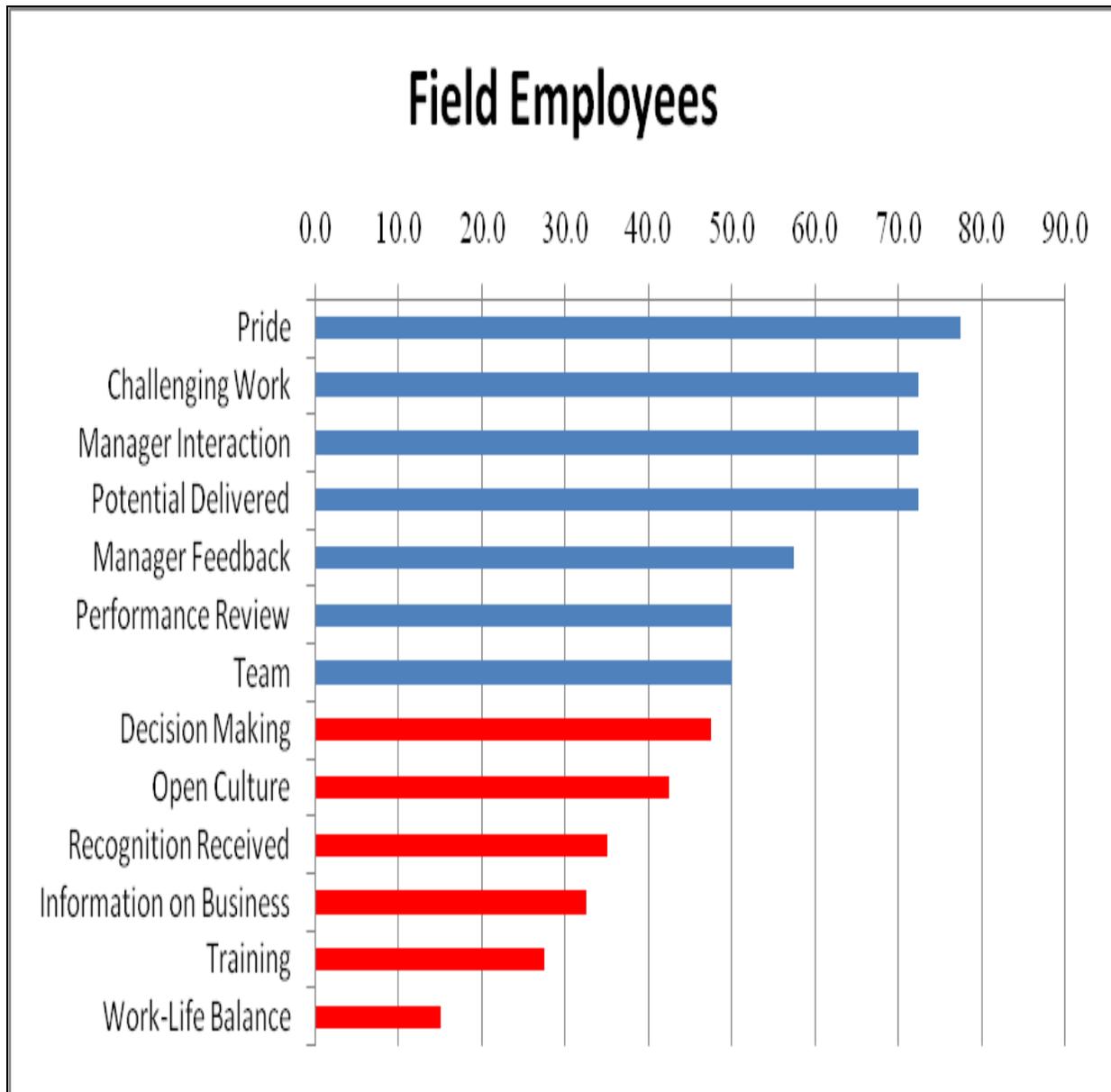
Hence, the responses were divided into office-based and field employees. The result of office-based employees is shown below.

**FIGURE 2: SURVEY RESULT- OFFICE BASED EMPLOYEES**



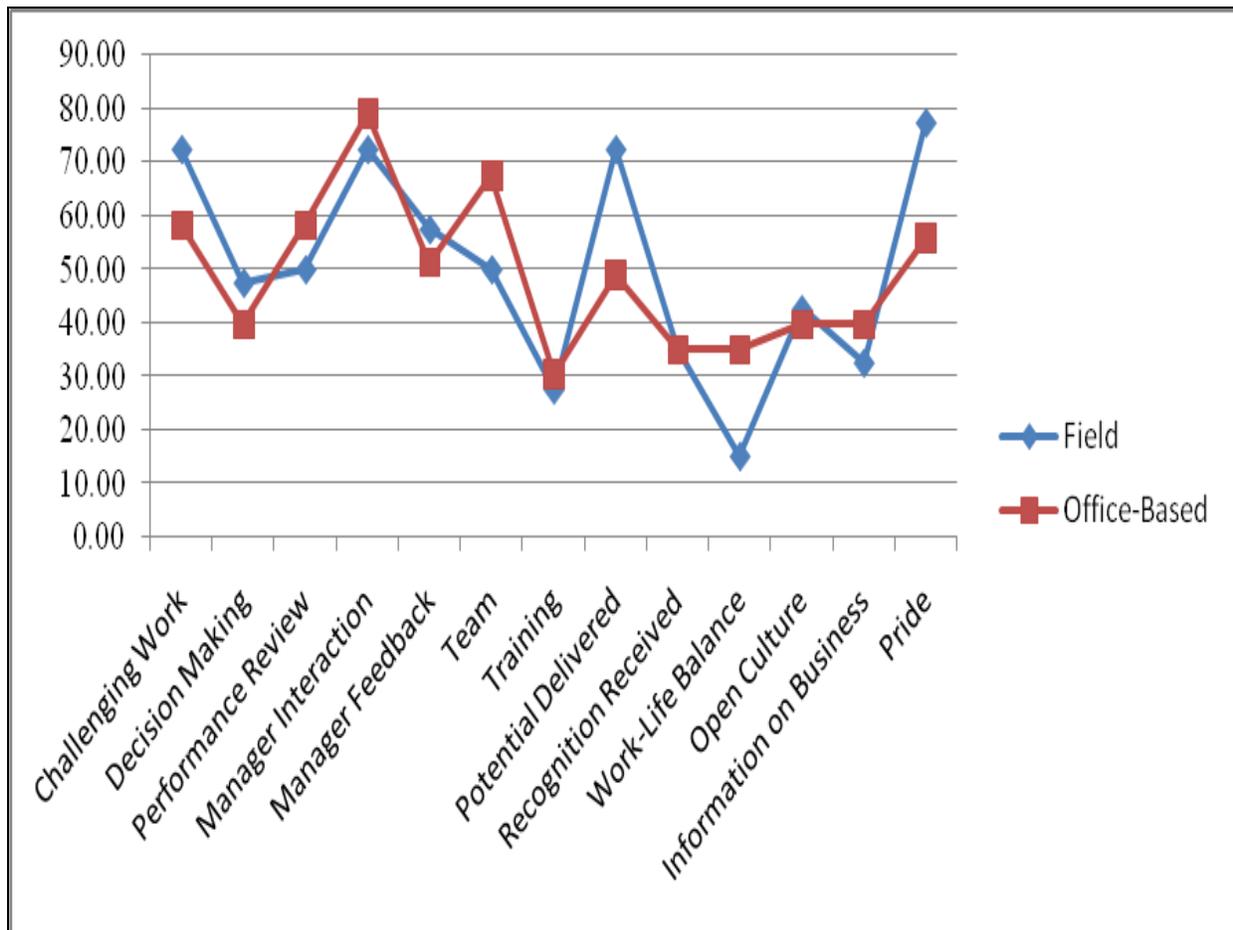
The result of field employees is shown below.

**FIGURE 3: SURVEY RESULTS-FIELD EMPLOYEES**



The employees gave a low rating to question based on training, recognition, work-life balance and culture. This trend was same for both office-based and field employees. The significant difference could be seen in the rating given for performance review and team based questions. This was obvious because of their remote working environment and minimum interaction with their team back at the head office.

A comparative analysis revealed the other significant difference between the sets of employees as shown below.

**FIGURE 4: COMPARATIVE STUDY**

The field employees rated questions on leadership interaction, team and work-life balance below their counterparts at office. On the other hand the field employees scored high on the ability to deliver up to their potential and on the sense of pride that they had working for the organization. This outcome might be a result of more autonomy given to the field employees as there is minimum scope of monitoring them on a regular basis. The same was resounded by higher rating given to the questions on challenging work and decision making capacity. The maximum disparity between the categories of employees was visible in “potential delivered” and “work-life balance”. The least difference was observed in “recognition received” criteria.

### MEASUREMENT AND COMPARISON OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

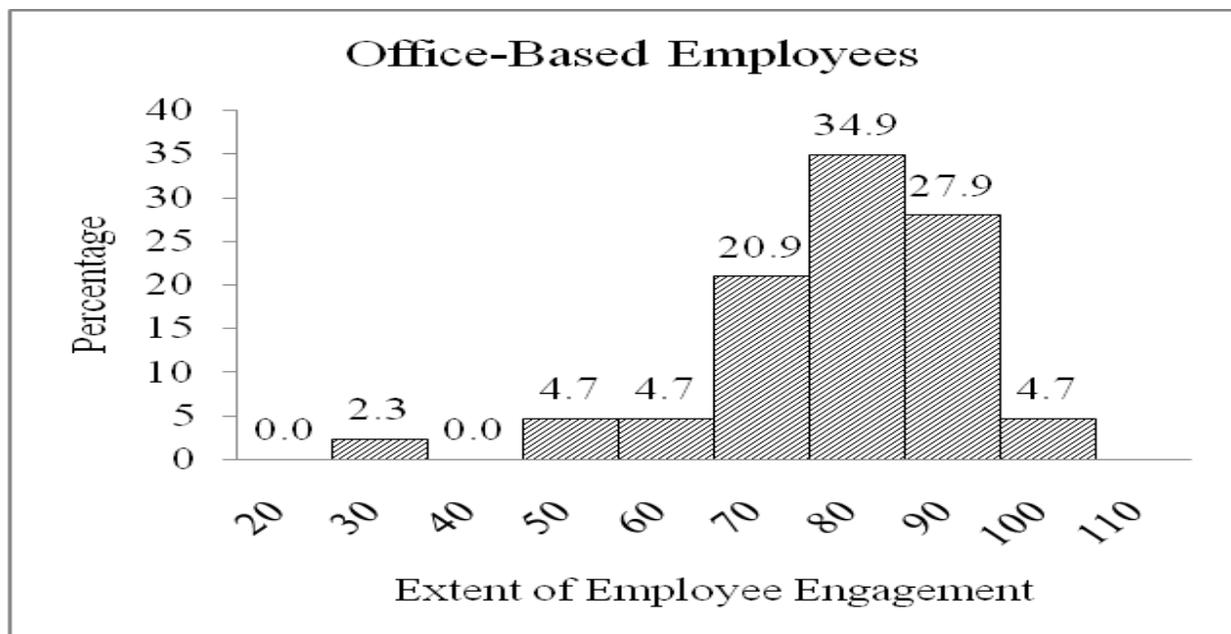
It was prudent to measure the extent of engagement among the employees and to see if there was any difference between the different sets. For this, a score out of 100 was assigned to each employee based on their responses to the various questions. Different weights were not given to the questions as it measured the 7 most important drivers of employee engagement.

The scores were then plotted as a histogram and the following scale was used to analyze the results:

**TABLE 5: INTERPRETATION OF ENGAGEMENT SCORES**

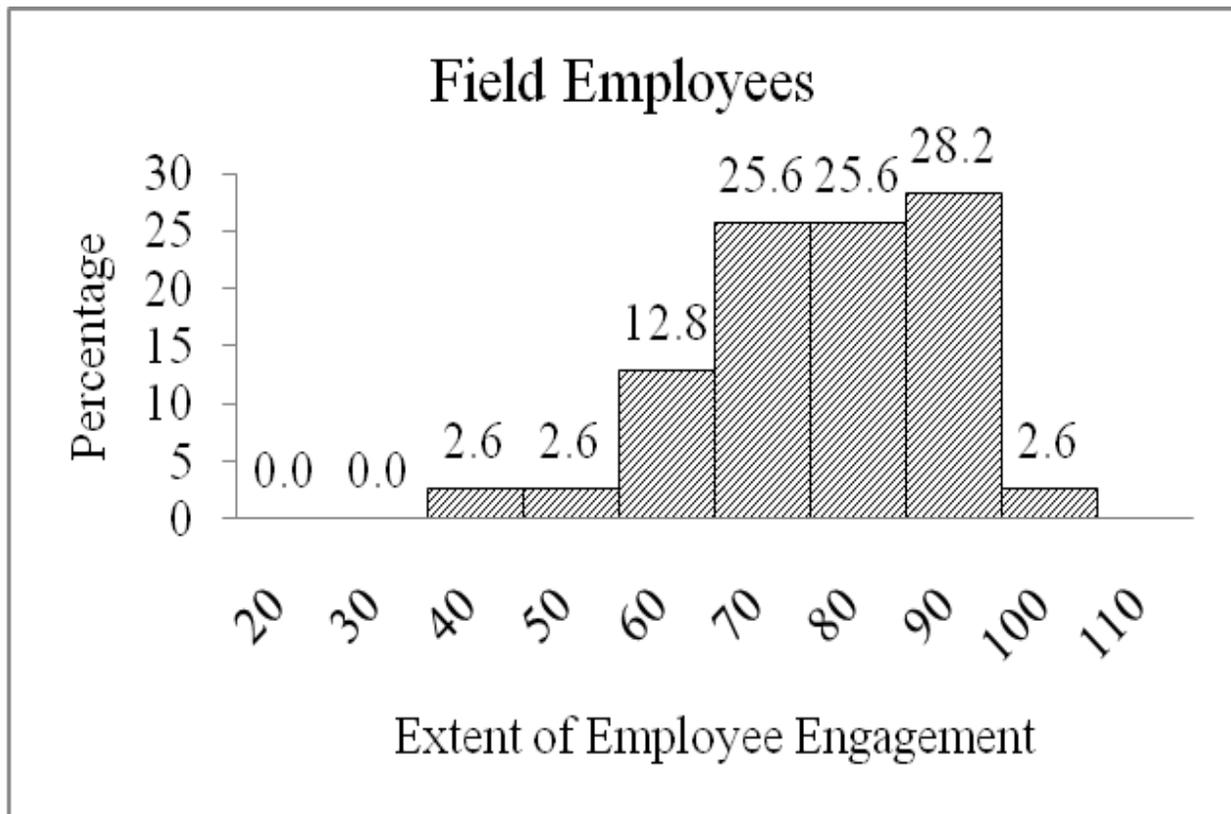
Score	Interpretation of Engagement Scores
<60	Poor
60-70	Bad
70-80	Moderate
80-90	Good
90-100	Excellent

The histogram thus obtained for the office-based employees is shown below.

**FIGURE 5: MEASUREMENT OF EE – OFFICE BASED EMPLOYEES**

The histogram shows that nearly 33% of office-based employees scored less than 80 on employee engagement. One-third of the employees scoring moderate or lesser score was identified as a matter of concern by the organization. It was also noted that 35% of employees scored a “Good” on employee engagement which should be maintained by continuing to engage them by providing a conducive environment for their work.

The analysis for field employees revealed that they were less engaged than the office-based employees. The histogram for the field employees is shown below.

**FIGURE 6: MEASUREMENT OF EE – FIELD EMPLOYEES**

Nearly 44% of field employees scored below 80 on employee engagement. A difference of 10% as compared to the office-based employees was because of their remoteness to the work place and also less interaction with the leaders of the organization.

### MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is useful for the organizations with different employee segments. The study brought forward the disparity in the engagement of field employees vis-a-vis the office-based employees. Factors pertaining to manager interaction, team and work-life balance scored much lower with the field employees than the office-based employees. The factors where field employees scored higher were pride, challenging work and delivery of work to maximum potential. This study indicates that the organization needs to create differential engagement plans for employees based on their nature of work. One-size-fits-all approach is neither feasible nor beneficial for the organization. Customized engagement programs should be introduced for the employees. The proximity to the physical entity of organization plays a major role in keeping the employees engaged and loyal. Innovative engagement practices should be introduced to the field-based employees, considering the fact that their work environment entails unpredictable schedules, demanding working conditions and poor work-life balance. Nevertheless, the needs of office-based employees should not be undermined. The engagement practices should be streamlined at targeting the needs and skill development of specific employees in order to enhance their job satisfaction and contribution to the organization.

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**APPENDIX 1: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Gender: Male Female Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Tenure at organization (in completed months): \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Tick any 1 out of the 4 options.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
My work is challenging and gives me an opportunity to learn new things.				
I feel appropriately involved in making decisions within my work area.				
My manager reviews my performance with me on a one-to-one basis at least once every six months.				
I am comfortable interacting with my manager.				
My manager provides actionable suggestions to improve my work.				
I have a supportive and trustworthy team.				
I receive appropriate training to perform better in my role				
I am able to deliver to my potential every day.				
I receive due appreciation and recognition for doing good work.				
I am happy with my work-life balance.				
My organization promotes an open and transparent culture				
I receive appropriate communication on my organization's business performance and growth prospects.				
I am proud to work for my organization.				