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# ERGONOMICS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*The article discusses the importance of employee engagement for organizational and business performance through the prism of ergonomics. The issues that are discussed in this paper comprise the modest contribution that ergonomics as a discipline has made. The relevance of workplace health and ergonomics work relate with that of participation, safety culture and further implications for participatory ergonomics approaches. Based on recently published conceptual framework that recognises the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of safety culture, the paper highlights the due significance demanded by ergonomics and that which is equally ignored by top management. The paper concludes by considering the much needed empirical survey on this issue in almost all industries and prompt action being taken to implement it. Also, the paper gives a glimpse of various approaches for an empirical study, within an organisation which is noted as important to the success of ergonomics projects.*

**Key words:** ergonomics, safety culture, workplace health, employee safety, employee engagement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

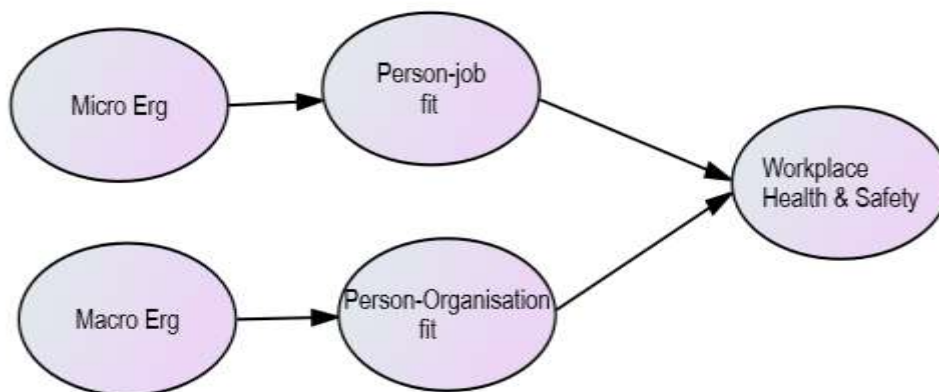
It's been a great challenge for the past few years for companies globally. The expectations of the leaders are high whereas employees harp more on their health and workplace safety. This attention of the employees is greatly reflected in their work engagement. Monika (2012) When employees tend to feel that their future is uncertain or if they do not have a sense of job security, it is quite difficult on their part to get involved and participate with all their mind on the job. Especially when the economy is in the downturn, top management has to cling to employee engagement for higher productivity, retention and ultimately making profits. Studies show that high employee engagement correlates to increased productivity and higher customer services. Employees who are happy with their job and company reciprocate with good behaviours and happier relationships with peers and customers compared with disgruntled ones ( Gallup, 2015)

If we question ourselves that if an employee on an average is safe in his workplace and is naturally engaged in his work, we would have to probe the relationship between employee engagement and ergonomics. Without a proper ergonomics system the tools, machines and equipment brought into the company won't be properly evaluated for user comfort, behavior, physical, psychosocial health, stress, decision-making and workflow. The tools that the company buys may not be the ones which satisfy the above criteria mentioned which results in wasted time and employee frustration. An ergonomics system also becomes a part of the company's culture and therefore, employee's job expectation. The point is that ergonomics can and will lead to greater employee engagement and therefore, increased productivity, satisfaction is the (Tim Bentley et al, 2010)

## 2. ERGONOMICS

The most often overlooked employment environment is ergonomics. Though it sounds as a hefty investment, none can dispute the necessity of this investment. Directly, ergonomics improves productivity, inherent are other benefits too. Originally defined in 1717 by Bernardino Ramazzini, (Marilyn 1994) an Italian physician, the founder of occupational medicine, it is only recently that ergonomics has attracted widespread attention. Derived from the Greek words ergo and nomos meaning "work" and "natural laws", ergonomics literally means the laws of work.

Ergonomics is sometimes bordered and interpreted that of elevating the physical dimensions of workstations. Nevertheless, the discipline is not limited to those job-level considerations of physical task features, sometimes called "microergonomics" or "hardware ergonomics." One standard definition of ergonomics is: "fitting the work to the worker," comprehends not only physical labour demands but also mental demands, the social environment, psychological impact, workplace health and organizational features of the workplace. (Punnett et al, 2013) The various components a worker faces every day is hardware, software, peers who interact to meet the production or customer demands and remain economically viable. Hence, attention to organisational and psychosocial issues forms the basis and is not a luxury to the employee. Ergonomists design work to support human limitations as well as to promote human capabilities, with attention to both the micro-level as well as the macro- or system-level features that define the job and impact the worker. The initial problem to be solved may be framed in terms of worker health and safety or system efficiency.



In history, Ergonomics was considered only as provision of high standards of physically fit environment – a work design which would suit the employee and enable him to perform his daily tasks without much physical strain. It is now termed as micro ergonomics which focusses only on person job fit.

Now – a – days Ergonomics encompasses an array of wellbeing, related to the employee which would enable him to mentally also fit in to the job and perform better. The new entrants are work culture adopted in the organisation, social processes, and relationship with peers etc. These are collectively labelled as Person –Organisation fit.

Only when both the Micro and Macro level Ergonomics demands of an organisation is met, any organisation can boast of offering a workplace which is both healthier and safer. Only such organisations, are able to retain the best talent and withstand in the industry.

### 3. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In the past decade employee engagement has been a sought after topic in management arena and has kindled the interests of many a reader as well s a writer. (Alan et al, 2014) There had been dozens of meta-analyses also in this attractive topic. However, the theory and its practise still needs to be exploited.

The term employee engagement still carries different meanings and its perception differs according to the stake holders. Through decades of literature it lacks a universal definition (Kahn 1990) It ranges from job satisfaction to some, emotional commitment of employees to some harnessing of employees themselves to their work roles to some and physical and emotional cognition to work performances etc to mention a few (Monika Zajkowska ,2012)

While organizations are intense to maximize the input of each individual towards their corporate metrics, individual employees opt to find some purpose and sense of satisfaction in their job. Quite often employee engagement has been defined as an emotional and intellectual commitment to any organization brought in by the employees (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006, Shaw, 2005) or the quantum of unrestricted effort unveiled by employees in their job (Frank et al, 2004) Though it is acknowledged as a multi-faceted construct, (Kahn 1990), Truss et al (2006) define employee engagement simply as ‘passion for work’, a psychological state.

Unless employee engagement can be universally defined and measured, it cannot be managed, nor can it be known if efforts to improve it are working (Ferguson, 2007). Hence we embrace the definition of Robinson et al (2004) who defined engagement as ‘one step up from commitment’, and go by Garber R.P (2007, p. 5 – 6) who has identified 10 employee engagement key factors:

- Commitment
- Attitude
- Alignment Communication
- Communication
- Goals
- Customer focus
- Loyalty
- Involvement
- Ownership
- Citizenship Behaviour

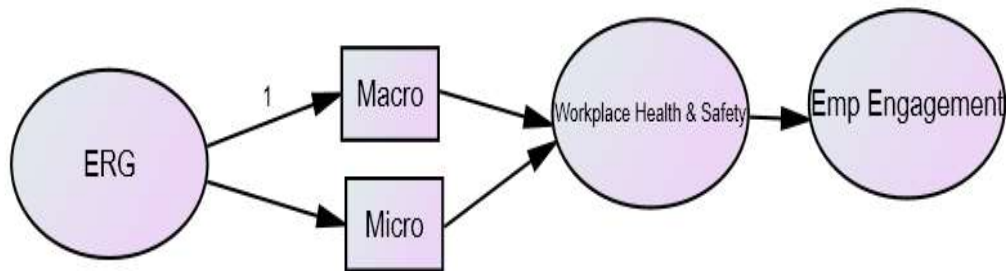
### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the role of Macro ergonomics in employee engagement.
- To evaluate the need for Ergonomics in employee retention profit making.
- To find if workplace health affects Psychosocial needs of employees.
- To analyse is the theory of social exchange holds good for ergonomics and employee engagement relationship.

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Being a conceptual paper the research method, thrusts more on secondary data. The secondary data were sourced through various research repositories evolved for the purpose. The research repositories were systematically studied for the specific topic. Being an inter disciplinary topic finding relevant data was an uphill task.

## 6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



## 7. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

- Macro ergonomics plays a major role in today's work culture to foster employee engagement.
- Ergonomics is crucial to employee retention and making profits.
- Psychosocial needs are well met by good workplace health measures.
- The theory of social exchange holds good when it comes to the influence of ergonomics on employee engagement.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Employee engagement is a necessary condition to allow organizations to exploit their financial potential. Healthy relationships between staff at all levels contribute to the increase engagement, which in turn affects the economic result. Organizations that provide a healthy and safe workplace provide them with ongoing support in all key areas, which can be a background for building of employee engagement model needed to strengthen the relationship. Being also one of the limitations, the study requires an empirical survey which would enable the researchers and industrialists to better understand the implications of Ergonomics.

Also, an empirical survey would reveal the best of both the macro and micro ergonomics so that organisations can concentrate on it better and reap financial profits.

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