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Research Paper

Employee Engagement Among Business Process Outsourcing Industries in a Freeport Zone Amidst the Pandemic

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Abstract

Employee engagement emerged as one of the most important topics for HR managers and practitioners in the industry. This study aims to analyze and assess how various organizations engaged their workers throughout the coronavirus epidemic. The Philippine Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies have shifted remote work set-up to ensure productivity. The researchers focused on 100 purposively selected managers and team leaders of BPO companies in a particular freeport zone in the Philippines. The proponents utilized a descriptive-correlation research design with the help of a modified survey instrument. Statistical analyses used were mean and Pearson-r moment of correlation with the help of SPSS 20. Results show that the respondents gave the study a remark of "sometimes" on their employee engagement. As for the perceived factors affecting employee engagement, career development, leadership, and work-life balance generated a response of "strongly agree" among the respondents, and only rewards and recognition got an "agree" response. Furthermore, the study also found a low to moderate positive association between employee engagement and the perceived factors affecting employee engagement. As concluded, a relationship exists between employee engagement, career development, leadership, work-life balance, and rewards and recognition within the organization. The importance of sustaining employee engagement amid the Covid-19 Pandemic is vital to attain productivity, and outcomes such as increased profit, lower absenteeism, and good health of employees are essential to achieve a win-win situation between the company and its stakeholders.

Keywords *Employee Engagement, Work-Life Balance, Covid-19 Pandemic, Business Process Outsourcing Industries*

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement became one of the most critical priorities for HR managers in firms in the commercial climate during the recent pandemic owing to the lockdown (Chanana & Sangeeta,2020). The epidemic of COVID-19 has had a massive influence on the labor economy. Workers have suffered negative effects as a result of the present shifting job environment's psychological stress and unpredictability. This occurrence has made it impossible for workers to disengage from job obligations, separate work, and personal life, and even face additional psychosocial dangers such as isolation (Chawla et al., 2020; International Labour Organization, 2020). Essential employees have had to deal with various stressful conditions, including greater workloads, longer work hours, and shorter rest intervals.

Furthermore, falling unwell at work and transmitting the virus to family members and others is a serious problem (International Labour Organization, 2020). COVID-19's caused health problems and created a great deal of worry among workers. Furthermore, many firms have begun de-prioritizing employees' psychological needs to mitigate revenue losses due to the lockdown, jeopardizing employee engagement and welfare (Kumar, 2021).

According to an article by Davis (2020), For decades, the Philippines' Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has prospered. Less than 30 years after the government implemented the Special Economic Zone Act, investors are still drawn to the country to outsource their services. These factors and the creation of millions of employments for Filipinos have solidified the

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relevance of the BPO business in the Philippines. Despite its robust basis, the worldwide pandemic's consequences severely impacted the sector, and businesses are being forced to rethink their operations. Despite enormous hurdles, the BPO business continues to expand, with a bright future ahead. Filipinos have outstanding communication abilities and are well-versed in a variety of professions. We provide exceptional voice, non-voice, and back-office support for a variety of sectors, encouraging more businesses to consider outsourcing choices around the country. We also have a thorough grasp of Western culture, which helps us provide efficient and successful services. According to Thompson (2020), the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) business is one of the two main 'legs' of the Philippine economy, providing $26 billion in 2019. Over 1000 companies employ 1.3 million workers in the BPO industry. Workers assist international firms with services such as coordinating travel and insurance coverage, providing customer assistance for technology, and providing telehealth services. During quarantine times, BPO operations have been exempted from the shutdown. However, many employees need help getting to work due to the closure of public transportation. Others need more home internet access to work from home. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the BPO business and the multinational firms that it services. The industry is responsive to change and nimble.

When the lockdown began, BPO operations were faced with figuring out how to keep their operations running. While the epidemic had a significant impact, the industry did not stop for a second. The lockdown has created massive disruption throughout the world, according to Anand (2020), that many individuals isolate themselves in their houses. This article included four tips for boosting employee engagement during the lockdown. Create trustworthy communication channels such as chat platforms, video conferencing, and email. Employees must be appreciated, recognized, and acknowledged during this challenging time. Employees will require time off to make meals, spend time with their children, and accomplish household tasks, so keep matters casual. Businesses should schedule virtual meetings with their staff. COVID-19 is rapidly expanding worldwide, and BPO businesses and third-party service providers need help keeping up with the changing work environment. Because remote working has yet to be extensively explored or applied by BPOs in the past, it remains to be seen how the industry's future will shape up in the coming years.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of employee engagement of employees in the business process outsourcing industries amidst the pandemic.
2. To determine employee engagement practices of business process outsourcing industries during the pandemic.
3. To know if there is a significant relationship between employee engagement and the antecedents such as Career Development, Leadership, Work-Life Balance, Rewards, and Recognition during the pandemic.

This study intends to fill in the gap regarding employee engagement with a particular focus on Business Process Outsourcing industries. Based on the reviewed literature, there is a dearth of information and literature regarding the analysis of employee engagement, especially from the Philippine perspective. The study also intends to enrich the growing local literature on employee engagement in the country and hopefully will contribute to the different perspectives of human resource management and other organizational development pertaining to employee development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

Several studies discussed the context of employee engagement from different perspectives

and concepts. For instance, the idea of encouraging employees to give their best in order to achieve the organization's vision, mission, goals, and values. Productivity in the company is essential at work, but employees' satisfaction and happiness also play a major role in order to increase sales and profit (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) showed three shortcomings of employee engagement research which include demographic characteristics, personality differences, and cross-culture concepts. In addition, Farndale and Murrer (2015) consider the individual's holistic state for the involvement and achievement of the organization's goals. The engagement also entails the individual's connectivity, dedication, and devotion in line with work (Xiao & Duan, 2014; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Other factors like career development, communication, recognition, a conducive working environment, fair pay, transparency, and participative decision-making also contribute to employee engagement (Patro, 2013). In the article of Mishra et al. (2014), they mentioned that employee engagement will always be a challenge for every organization due to the complex and demanding requirements that an organization has. Managers and supervisors alike will be critical and focused on this kind of challenge of employee engagement since their primary concern is to provide an appropriate working environment for them to thrive.

The biggest problem in theoretical literature is discussing the term "engagement" because there is no common definition of employee engagement. The three components that aid in the development of organizational engagement are psychological circumstances of meaningfulness, safety, and availability. According to additional research, when people are engaged, they use and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their role performances.

Employee Engagement Amidst the Pandemic

During the pandemic, the government of every country instigated measures in order to address the different challenges of managing during a crisis. One of the actions was the lockdown due to the significant disruption that the pandemic caused. In the papers of Anand (2020) and Taludkar (2020), the proponents offered essential suggestions to help improve staff engagement, especially those that stayed at home due to self-isolation. These suggestions are intended to help organizations help cope with the abrupt changes and promote resiliency in the workplace while still serving the community. Other factors that played a significant role in employee engagement during the pandemic include communication (Brunswick Group, 2020) in the form of weekly video conferences or calls, safety concerns, and work-from-home arrangements. In addition, Kwon and Kim (2020), in their integrative review of employee engagement, indicated the mixed perception of employee engagement in terms of high demands and high resources. Furthermore, in terms of organizational aspect, many organizations evolved many engagement activities (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). On the other hand, Meiyani and Putral (2019) mentioned three components for employees to engage in activities that involve their knowledge, interest, and performance. Furthermore, ISO 9001-2015 also puts a premium on the concept of employee engagement, wherein motivation, participation, and involvement corroborate each other to increment the labor efficiency of the organization. Stevenson (2019) also mentioned that a happy employee leads to loyalty to his organization, which also leads to engagement and then increased productivity.

Employee Engagement Outcomes

In terms of outcomes for employee engagement, the literature tells us that it has several important roles in the organization. For example, with the advancement of technology, Artificial Intelligence can now help in employee engagement and better job outcomes for the organization (Hughes et al., 2019). It is equally important to note that work engagement significantly varies on the level of attitudinal outcomes (Borst et al., 2020). Bedarkar and Pandita, in 2014, proposed a

model as a result of leadership motivation, communication, and work balance. Jalal (2016) also emphasized the significant influence of staff engagement on their commitment to the workplace. Being engaged in the office means more commitment to the organization. In addition, the team of Garg in 2017 discovered the association between job satisfaction and work engagement. Thus, employee engagement invokes satisfaction to employees significantly. Another previous article also discoursed that employee engagement influences a company's business performance (Saks, 2017). This connection leads to business gain and saves cost and time, especially if a good corporate culture dominates the organization. This environment will lead employees to feel important and, in effect, support the organization. Furthermore, Sievert and Scholz (2017) also added that management confidence in their workers increases employee engagement.

Drivers of Employee Engagement

Career Development

Career development is a significant factor in order for employees to be satisfied as well engaged in their work and line of duty. In a recent study by Lee (2021), skill development mediates the association between internal CSR and engagement. Career development encompasses training which is also an important antecedent factor as per Suomi et al. (2021) study. In a work unit, an organizational commitment to employee well-being relates to better employee engagement, satisfaction, and perception of personal well-being (Wieneke et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there is no relationship when an organization fulfills its promises in connection to career development (Sheehan et al., 2019). As mentioned by Patro (2013), there were also other factors that play a substantial role in employee engagement, such as encouragement, communication, flexible working hours, acknowledgment, transparency, fair pay, involvement in decision-making, and an open work environment. Mondy and Martocchio (2016) also provided a definition for career development which is a formal technique to guarantee that the employees have appropriate credentials and experience and are available upon request at a moment's notice. At the same time, career growth strongly impacts employee engagement, according to the works of Bai and Liu (2018) and Liu et al. (2017).

Leadership

Inspiring people to strive for personal development and mutual achievement is what leadership entails. However, in a meta-analysis study by Li et al. (2021), several leadership styles correlate positively with engagement. In a study by Gemeda and Lee (2020), they conclude that different leadership styles form relationships with employees' work engagement. However, Nikolova et al. (2019) found no direct influence between engaging leadership and employee engagement. Book et al. (2019) also confirmed the same result that leadership has a direct effect on employee engagement. Greenhaus et al. (2010) explained that supportive leaders encourage stronger engagement between a business and its employees. At the same time, reconciliation to opposing demands and management of settling any possible conflicts in order to achieve the greatest possible performance also accentuated leadership. Leaders, according to MacLeod and Clarke (2009), are a critical link in the engagement promotion process because they provide and create a productive work environment that is free of unnecessary obstacles so that staff feels physically and emotionally supported in doing their job. Winning engagement entails delivering challenges in everyday assignments and job experiences, establishing a space for employees to take ownership, providing frequent performance reviews, and allowing them to make decisions (Potoski & Callery, 2018).

Work Life-Balance

Dedication to work is important in business, and so does other essential life commitments and duties. Therefore, a very demanding work or job does not last that long and may succumb after some time in the field. Employees have needs that are vital for their survival, especially those that are included in the hierarchy of needs of humans. The organization must address these needs if they intend to have a lasting and productive relationship with their employees. Saks (2022) indicated in his study that work-life balance is one component of caring HRM practices that will result in a caring organizational environment. Lee's (2021) article also revealed a mediating effect of work-life balance with the relationship between CSR and engagement ad advocative behavior. Also, Gemeda and Lee (2020) revealed that engagement associates with work outcomes positively. In the paper of Akob et al. (2020), they stated that the promotion of a healthy and balanced lifestyle encourages employee engagement. At the same time, laying groundwork and sustainability also encompasses employee engagement. As defined by Armstrong and Taylor (2015), work-life balance is the accomplishment of the expectation of one's employment and other responsibilities. In addition, work-life balance is an organizational policy incorporating workplace flexibility, aid, and staff leaves.

Rewards and Recognition

Recognition, which is a component of incentives, is the offer made by the business to workers in response to their performance and contributions. Employees anticipate this event, which might be critical in fostering employee confidence. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2015), non-financial incentives or recognition, as opposed to monetary kinds of financial benefits, relate to human beings' mental demands to be acknowledged through performance evaluations, congrats, certifications, and career promotions. According to Nguyen and Pham (2020), they are the organization's perspectives on what values should be promoted. In other words, non-monetary benefits may leave an indelible impact on employees and provide reinforcement for the sense that they are valued. Employees' involvement will be increased if they receive adequate acknowledgment from the relevant stakeholders (supervisors, coworkers, team members, and customers). Suomi et al. (2021) also discussed that one of the antecedent factors for employee engagement is reward. Furthermore, there was no association between fulfilling promises relative to financial rewards and intention to leave a profession (Sheehan et al., 2019).

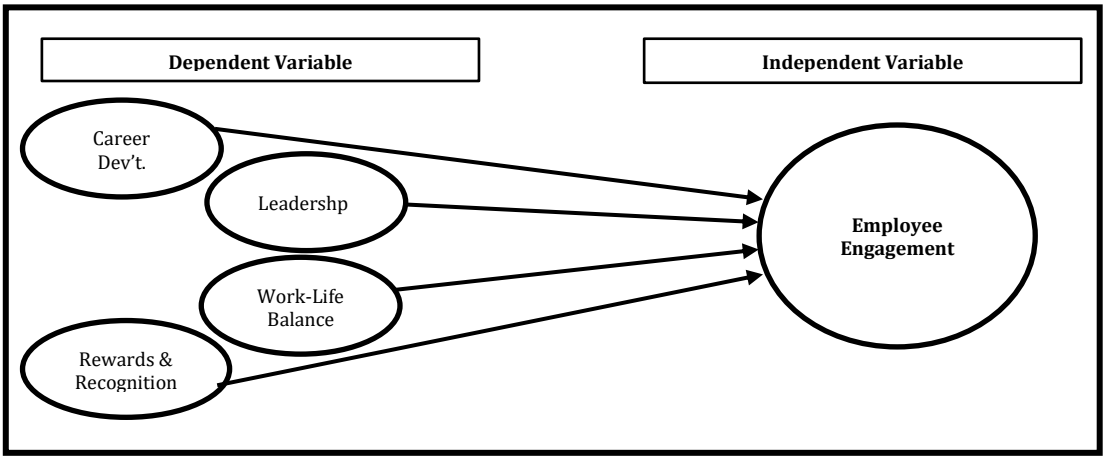

Figure 1. Conceptual/Research Framework

Figure 1 above displays the conceptual framework of the study. The proponents used the Independent Variable (IV)- Dependent Variable (DV) model to explain the context of the current

study. For dependent variables, it contains the perceived factors that may affect employee engagement as follows: career development, leadership, work-life balance, and rewards and recognition. As for the independent variable, the study has employee engagement. The arrow in the middle means that the study assumes there is an association between the four factors mentioned in employee engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The research design adopted in this research was correlational. Quantitative research approaches concentrate on objective measurements, statistical analysis, or the collecting of numerical data. Data is collected using various approaches, such as polls and surveys (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative research can also use diverse ways to interpret past statistical data. This method focuses on obtaining statistical data in order to generalize it across groups of individuals in order to provide specifics on a certain phenomenon (Babbie, 2010).

Respondents

The study used the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique under the non-probability category. This technique is most effective when studying a specific cultural domain with qualified experts. The method's intrinsic bias helps with its efficiency and remains robust even when subjected to random probability sampling. One hundred voluntary participants joined the online data gathering from seven BPO companies in a Freeport Zone (see Table 1 for the distribution).

Eligibility requirements include: a) being a Manager or Team Leader/Supervisor for the firm, b) managing BPO Services for the business, and c) working in a BPO company in the Freeport Zone.

Table 1. List of BPO Firms with American Account -Outbound

BPO Firm	Frequency	Percentage
BPO A	15	15
BPO B	15	15
BPO C	20	20
BPO D	15	15
BPO E	10	10
BPO F	10	10
BPO G	15	15
Total	**100**	**100**

Instrumentation

To collect the requisite primary data, the researchers developed a survey questionnaire. The instrument applied the five-point Likert scale with the matching descriptive ratings for Employee Engagement Scale and Factors Affecting Employee Engagement. Secondary data was collected from existing research findings, journals, books, and the Internet. The records in the Human Resources Department were also considered. Observations made and responses received from the discussions were recorded. The instrument underwent face validation first from four (4) validators (two HR practitioners and two management professors). After considering their comments and suggestions to improve the survey questionnaire, the next step was to do a pilot test. The pilot study's feedback was used to improve the questionnaire and make it more reliable during the trial. The researcher tested the questionnaire's measures with Cronbach's alpha. Reliability is the consistency of the concept metric (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a rule, the Cronbach values of the

items should not be less than 0.7. The overall reliability result of the instrument was 0.746, which is already acceptable and reliable at the same time.

Statistical Analysis

The researchers reviewed the completed questionnaires for completeness and consistency before being processed. After that, the data analyst performed descriptive and inferential analysis. The data analyst also used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.0 to conduct all data analyses. In concluding the relationship between KPO behaviors and factors impacting them, researchers used measures of central tendency (mean) and inferential statistics (Correlation). The strength and direction of a linear link between two variables can be measured using Pearson correlation coefficient analysis. According to Schober et al. (2018), the correlation coefficient has a range from -1 to +1, where 0 means no linear association. Suresh and Raju (2022) also introduced that Pearson's r is basically a normalized measurement of covariance wherein the value is between -1 and +1.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general purpose of this study is to examine the employee engagement of BPO respondents and the perceived factors that may affect employee engagement. The study also intended to see the relationships between the two variables mentioned. The following tables below indicate the results of the online survey.

Table 2. Employee Engagement of the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1) I get excited about going to work even amid the pandemic.	4.21	Sometimes
2) I am often so involved in my work that the day goes by very quickly amidst the pandemic.	4.06	Sometimes
3) I am inspired to meet my goals at work amidst the pandemic.	4.38	Frequently
4) I willingly accept challenges amidst the pandemic.	4.36	Sometimes
5) I am determined to give my best effort at work each day amidst the pandemic.	3.29	Neutral
Overall Mean	**4.06**	**Sometimes**

Legend: 5.00-4.20=Frequently; 4.19-3.40=Sometimes; 3.39-2.60=Neutral; 2.59-1.80=Rarely; 1.79-1.00=Never

Presented in Table 2 was the result of the mean calculation for employee engagement in the BPO sector. Item 3 generated the highest mean score, representing a Likert interpretation of "frequently." On the other hand, item 5 displayed the lowest mean with a corresponding interpretation of "neutral." The overall results shown in Table 2 defined the level of Employee Engagement in the BPO sector as 4.06 mean with a Likert interpretation of "sometimes." Thus, a manifestation of Employee Engagement level is prevalent among the supervisor or managers of the BPO Sector. This result suggests that while the pandemic had an impact on their work, the respondents are still motivated and willing to take on new challenges. The results of this survey can be used to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in employee engagement, particularly amidst the pandemic.

Table 3. Perceived Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Terms of Career Development

Statements	Mean	Interpretation

1)	Employees' opinions and ideas count within the company	4.00	Agree
2)	There are chances to improve skills and knowledge in the company	4.37	Strongly Agree
3)	Opportunities to grow are present in the company.	4.06	Agree
4)	Employees' opinions and ideas count within the company.	4.38	Strongly Agree
5)	There is open sharing of information and ideas in the company	4.33	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mean	**4.21**	**Strongly Agree**

Legend: 5.00-4.20=Strongly Agree; 4.19-3.40=Agree; 3.39-2.60=Moderately Agree; 2.59-1.80=Disagree; 1.79-1.00=Strongly Disagree

Table 3 displays the result of mean computation for the perceived factors affecting the engagement of employees in terms of career development. Statement 4 generated the highest mean score, translating to a "strongly agree" interpretation on the Likert scale. However, statement 1 produced the lowest mean score, which only corresponds to an interpretation of "agree" in the scale. The overall mean score result was 4.21, with an interpretation of "strongly agree." The result only implies that when it comes to career development, the organization where the respondents work observed the essential aspects of promoting development for their constituents. The result also suggests that the company has a positive culture that fosters employee engagement and encourages growth and development. In relation, the study of Mondy and Martocchio (2016) explicitly stated that career development is a formal approach organizations use to ensure that people with the right qualifications and experience are available when needed. The results of this survey can be used to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in an organization's approach to employee engagement and career development.

Table 4. Perceived Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Terms of Leadership

	Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1.	My superior encourages my development in the company.	4.00	Agree
2.	My superior provides timely feedback that allows me to improve my company's performance.	4.37	Strongly Agree
3.	My superior gives me a fair review at work.	4.10	Agree
4.	My supervisor is always available to answer my questions/queries, or concerns in the company, even amid the pandemic.	4.38	Strongly Agree
5.	My supervisor engages in clear communication even amid the pandemic.	4.33	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mean	**4.24**	**Strongly Agree**

Legend: 5.00-4.20=Strongly Agree; 4.19-3.40=Agree; 3.39-2.60=Moderately Agree; 2.59-1.80=Disagree; 1.79-1.00=Strongly Disagree

The result of mean calculation for the perceived factors affecting employee engagement in terms of leadership. As gleaned from the presentation, statement 4 obtained the highest mean score, corresponding to an interpretation of "strongly agree." On the other hand, the first statement generated the lowest mean score, translating to a descriptive interpretation of only "agree" in the scale. To sum up, the overall mean score shown in Table 10 was 4.24, which conforms to a descriptive interpretation of "strongly agree." The result again implies that the respondents were quite critical regarding leadership experience and implementation in their respective organizations. Furthermore, the result also proposes that the company has a positive culture that

values the input of its employees and encourages open communication and feedback. According to MacLeod and Clarke (2009), leaders are a critical link in the engagement advancement method by imparting purpose clarity, understanding subordinates' efforts and accomplishments, handling them as individuals, and establishing a productive work environment free of unwarranted barriers so that they can feel physically and emotionally guided in doing their job. The results of this study can be used to identify areas of strength and improvement in the organization's approach to leadership.

Table 5. Perceived Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Terms of Work-Life Balance

	Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1.	I have an excellent work-life balance.	4.38	Strongly Agree
2.	Pride in working with the organization is present due to work and life balance.	4.33	Strongly Agree
3.	Independence and responsibility are defined in the workplace.	4.60	Strongly Agree
4.	Respect and recognition at work are present.	4.50	Strongly Agree
5.	The company provides employees with work-life balance policies to ensure a healthy, stress-free environment.	4.33	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mean	**4.43**	**Strongly Agree**

Legend: 5.00-4.20=Strongly Agree; 4.19-3.40=Agree; 3.39-2.60=Moderately Agree; 2.59-1.80=Disagree; 1.79-1.00=Strongly Disagree

Table 5 depicts the mean distribution result for the perceived factors affecting employee engagement regarding work-life balance. One can decipher that statement 2 disclosed the highest mean with a score of 4.60, corresponding to an interpretation of strongly agree. On the other hand, statements 2 and 5 displayed the lowest mean scores, which translates to a descriptive interpretation of "strongly agree" in the Likert scale. Overall, the study obtained a 4.43 mean score for the perceived factors affecting employee engagement regarding work-life balance, corresponding to an interpretation of "strongly agree." The result means that the respondents observed an excellent and appropriate balance of work and life routines implemented by their respective organizations. In addition, the result also implies that the company values the well-being of its employees and recognizes the importance of work-life balance in fostering employee engagement and job satisfaction. According to a related study's findings, balancing work and life is a satisfaction of the desire for inclusion among the time and effort invested in one's employment and other responsibilities in life, according to Armstrong and Taylor (2015). To increase employee engagement, companies must promote their workers' healthy and balanced lifestyles, laying the groundwork for sustainable energy and activities (Akob and colleagues, 2020).

Table 6. Perceived Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Terms of Rewards and Recognition

	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
1.	I am satisfied with the benefits provided by the company amidst the pandemic.	4.12	Agree
2.	I feel valued and appreciated by the company amidst the pandemic.	4.02	Strongly Agree
3.	The company is recognizing my achievements and efforts amidst the pandemic.	4.06	Agree
4.	Recognition and praise for a job well done are present at	4.42	Strongly Agree

	work.		
5.	The company provides rewards objectively as enacted with its policies.	4.33	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mean	**4.19**	**Agree**

Legend: 5.00-4.20=Strongly Agree; 4.19-3.40=Agree; 3.39-2.60=Moderately Agree; 2.59-1.80=Disagree; 1.79-1.00=Strongly Disagree

The study displays the result of the mean calculation for the perceived factors affecting employee engagement in terms of rewards and recognition in Table 6. As shown, the fourth statement generated the highest mean with a score of 4.42, corresponding to an interpretation of "strongly agree." However, the third statement provided the lowest mean with a score of 4.06, translating to a descriptive interpretation of "agree" on the Likert scale. For the overall mean, the table garnered 4.19, coinciding with the " agree " interpretation in the scale. The result implies that the organization where the respondents work provides rewards and recognition among their employees. At the same time, the result also infers that the company values the contributions of its employees and recognizes the importance of acknowledging their efforts. As a result, according to prior research by Nguyen and Pham (2020), workers represent the organization's opinions on what values should be promoted. In addition, non-monetary benefits may leave an indelible impact on employees and provide reinforcement for the sense that they are valued.

Table 7. Correlation Matrix between Employees Engagement and the Perceived Factors Affecting Employee Engagement

Perceived Factors	Pearson-r Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Work-Life Balance	.315*	.000
Leadership	.455*	.000
Career Development	.478*	.000
Rewards and Recognition	.223*	.026

*Note: *p* < .05

Table 7 shows the result of the Pearson-r Moment of Correlation between employee engagement and the perceived factors affecting employee engagement. One can decipher that all of the perceived factors affecting employee engagement produced enough evidence to prove the association with the engagement of employees. The study obtained the following R-values: for work-life balance, r= .315; for leadership, r= .455; for career development, r= .478; and for rewards and recognition, r= .223. All of the probability values of each factor were lower than the alpha significance level of .05. This result only means that a low to moderate positive relationship exists. Therefore, we, at this moment, reject the study's null hypothesis. Overall, the results of this correlation matrix recommend that career development, leadership, and work-life balance are the most significant factors affecting employee engagement, whereas rewards and recognition have a weaker association. These results can help organizations identify areas of focus for enhancing employee engagement and job satisfaction.

According to previous research findings, work-life balance is defined by Armstrong and Taylor (2015) as the fulfillment of the expectation of inclusion between one's employment and other responsibilities in life. It is also an organizational policy that includes employment flexibility, dependent care assistance, and individual leaves. On the other hand, based on Singh's (2020) article, companies constantly assess employee well-being and propose solutions that promote a good work-life balance. Businesses focus on their workers' learning and development during this period. Most firms use webinars and live sessions to teach new skills and online counseling sessions

to help employees be safe and healthy at home. Furthermore, leadership must be more visible during challenging circumstances than at any other time, according to Groove Management Blog (Formato, 2014). Assume that businesses want their staff to be engaged. In that circumstance, leaders must accept responsibility and inspire employees to achieve the company's long-term objectives. Making challenges accessible in daily tasks and job experiences, establishing a specialized area for employees to take ownership of, delivering frequent performance assessments, and soliciting their participation in decision-related concerns are all strategies to increase employee engagement (Potoski & Callery, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results above of the study, the researchers presented the following conclusions:

1. For employee engagement, the study found that the respondents said "sometimes" for the study.
2. For the perceived factors affecting employee engagement, in terms of career development, leadership, and work-life balance, the respondents strongly agree with the provisions of the organization. As for the rewards and recognition, the respondents gave an "agree" response towards it.
3. There was a low to moderate positive association between the employee engagement of the respondents and the perceived factors affecting employee engagement.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

This research still contains several limitations, which can provide further research topics or agenda for future investigators. First, the respondents, the study only focused on BPOs located in just one freeport zone in the country. Future researchers can maximize other BPOs in the country or nearby regions. Second is the variable. Adding another variable affecting employee engagement will be a great area to explore. Third, the research methodology can further explore by incorporating other techniques like exploratory factor analysis or mixed-method research. Moreover, future researchers can also explore another type of organization besides BPOs to compare or associate or even look for other factors that will affect the employee engagement process.

In the Philippine setting, only a meager number of employee engagement studies are explicitly conducted during the crisis or pandemic. Further recommendation for future researchers to explore the areas such as private higher educational institutions, the hospitality industry, and tourism which are industries vastly affected and devastated during the pandemic and necessary to analyze the level of engagement among its personnel to diagnose the implications of lower engagement to such sectors contributing to the Philippine economy.

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