

Role of Effective Leaders' Communication Competencies on Employee Engagement: A Study on the Indian IT-BPM Industry

¹Sandeep Chaudhary, ²Dr. (Prof.) R. C. Sharma, ³Dr. Rishi Manrai

¹Research Scholar, ²Ex-Professor Emeritus & Founder Vice Chancellor, ³ Assistant Professor

¹Amity Business School,

¹Amity University, Gurgaon, India

Abstract :

Purpose– Employee engagement as a result of leaders' communication competencies is examined in the current study. It specifically examines the impact of various independent variables including leaders' communication competencies, the importance given by organizations to communication, and tools-technology enabling leaders to communicate on employee engagement and in turn on organizational goals. The purpose of this study is to create a theoretical understanding of the state of leadership communication and its development with special reference to the Indian IT industry. The intent is that the article can contribute to future research on the development of leaders' communication competence.

Design/methodology/approach- A structured questionnaire with two parts was designed with constructs including the 'Perceived Leadership Communication Competencies Questionnaire' (PLCCQ) and 'Employee Engagement Questionnaire' (EEQ) with a five-point Likert scale to achieve the identified objectives. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a sample of 30 IT Professionals. Reliability statistics were used to evaluate the questionnaire's validity.

Findings– The study was performed using several statistical tools to determine the key leadership communication competencies that influence employee engagement in the IT industry. The key competencies identified included, Facilitating Competency (FC) and Relating Competency (RC). A concise summary of the findings has been created based on the analysis of the study, and a significant conclusion has been reached. The results and any supporting evidence have finally been compared.

Practical implications – A theoretical foundation has been laid which can be utilized for the practice of analyzing and developing leaders' communication competence, this in turn is expected to enhance employee engagement and other organizational success metrics.

Originality/value – The significance of leadership communication, and identification of the key communication competencies of leaders having an impact on employee engagement and organizational goals have been articulated in this research. The leaders can develop their communication competencies and put into practice strategies that would increase employee engagement in their organizations. This could increase the organization's overall effectiveness and possibly lower levels of burnout, absenteeism, and attrition.

Keywords: Leadership communication, Communication Competencies, Communication challenges, Employee Engagement Organizational Goals, Leadership development

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee Engagement (EE) has become a top strategic priority for senior executives of organizations and an important topic for researchers, as it has a lot of practical applications in a business environment. Over the past three decades, several models and theories have been advanced, with numerous attributed outcomes coming from each cycle. Engaged workers demonstrate a variety of behaviors that may be advantageous to their organizations, according to Witemeyer (2013). These behaviors include going above and beyond, praising the company, collaborating, proactive problem-solving, staying late, putting in extra hours, helping coworkers, sharing knowledge, offering creativity, and participating in an organizational dialogue.

According to a narrative that has developed, if employees are engaged at work, they will be more driven and have a higher degree of well-being, which will improve their performance on the job and their relation within teams and departments.

A study in 2021 by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services revealed that 81% of corporate executives firmly believe that highly engaged employees outperform average or lowly engaged workers in terms of performance and productivity. However, just 37% of respondents strongly concur that their organization's current priority is on employee engagement.

As revealed by various surveys, engaged workers "go the additional mile" for their coworkers, their organizations, and themselves, consultancies and research firms contend that employee engagement is closely tied to their business success (Gallup 2018; Willis Towers Watson 2018). Employee involvement has long been viewed as a secondary activity carried out only when necessary. However, with the evolving requirements of both employers and employees in the post-pandemic era, employee engagement's significance has increased dramatically (Jain Adit, 2022)

The IT-BPM industry has become one of India's most significant economic drivers, having a significant impact on the GDP and welfare of the country. The IT-ITES sector made up 8% of India's GDP in 2020, and by 2025, it is expected to account for 10% of India's GDP. National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) reports that the Indian IT sector generated US\$

227 billion in sales in FY22, representing a 15.5% YoY growth. To reach the total direct employment of 5 million people in FY22, the IT industry hired over 450,000 people.

According to the 2022 report by PeopleAsset, an executive search & talent advisory firm, 88.9% of senior leaders from various IT sector companies in India concurred that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on their firms, with the same percentage noting that employee engagement and retention had been particularly hard hit.

The geographical context revealed that across industries in India, communication was among the most significant factor in determining employee engagement. The other factors that followed included rewards and recognition, job satisfaction, mentoring, climate, culture, and job characteristics, stress, relationships with coworkers and supervisors, fair feedback, and job involvement (Kaur 2017).

The lack of engagement is caused by a variety of variables, but leadership is a crucial role in fostering employees' enthusiasm for engagement and productivity (Anand, 2017). Through personalized care, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and motivating inspiration, transformational leaders encourage their teams to perform better (Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson, 2003). Organizations can be more profitable and see higher retention of employees by having leaders who communicate in a way that makes workers feel highly engaged (Adkins, 2010).

A set of limited research has been done particularly on how a leader's communication influences employee engagement, even though studies have been undertaken on how leaders' leadership styles affect employee engagement. Hence, to fill this gap, the present study aims to develop a 'leaders' communication competencies' framework that enables leaders to drive the strategy by aligning and engaging employees effectively in line with the organizational goals.

Also, the study focuses on empirically analyzing the impact of various dimensions of leadership communication competencies on employee engagement with special reference to the Indian IT industry. The results of this study will help organizations by giving executives greater tools to increase employee engagement by changing their communication style to better suit their teams' needs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the suggested issue of employee engagement contains numerous empirical investigations. Kahn (1990), an ethnographer, was the first to describe engagement as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work duties." Work engagement, according to Kahn, entails three things: individuals who are physically involved, alert cognitively, and empathically attached to coworkers. According to Rothbard (2001), engagement is a psychological condition made up of two components: absorption and attention. Absorption refers to "becoming engaged in a role and...to the intensity of one's emphasis on a role." According to the definition of work engagement that is most frequently employed (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010), it is characterized by vigor, dedication, and immersion (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Dedication is characterized as a sense of purpose, inspiration, pride, and excitement. Vigor is associated with strong energy levels and mental toughness. Finally, absorption is characterized by being contentedly absorbed in the work, which can be thought of as a ubiquitous flow condition (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The Indian IT-BPM industry is struggling with the talent battle as there is a severe lack of digital capabilities. NASSCOM reported a steep rise in voluntary attrition in the July-September quarter of 2022. Established software companies are likewise losing staff to hyper-scale startups of the next generation. Startups, flush with cash, are luring software professionals with above-market pay, flexible work schedules, and substantial employee stock options (ESOPs). All these fast-paced developments have brought employee engagement to the forefront of the Indian IT industry.

The main objective of this study was to examine how leaders' communication competencies as a factor, in particular, affect employee engagement. Early leadership research saw communication as a supporting element, but a growing corpus of research has come to see communication as essential to the leadership process (Jian & Fairhurst, 2016). It has been asserted that communication is how leadership is exercised (Johansson, Miller, & Hamrin, 2011, 2014; Tengblad, 2006). Communication help leaders in their roles because it is linked to organizational success (Ruck & Welch, 2012, Hamrin, 2016a; Norodom & Hamrefors, 2007). According to Fairhurst (2005); Simonsson (2002); Johansson (2003) communication awareness, acquaintance, attitude, and ability are four crucial personal characteristics that affect how leaders communicate. For leadership, communication is crucial. However, communication experts have not systematically investigated the conditions for effective leadership, and most leadership theories pay little attention to communication (Cohen, 2004, p. 177).

Organizational culture and communication have been recognized as significant drivers of employee engagement by Bhatla (2011) in a study of employee performance in Indian banks. By effectively communicating the organization's principles to all employees, leadership communication helps the company achieve its objectives and wins their support. To ensure workforce engagement, leaders' communication skills are essential (Bindle and Parker 2010; Papalexandris and Galanaki 2009; Bakker et al. 2011, as quoted in Welch 2011). To increase organizational performance, leaders actively seek out employee suggestions by evaluating their requirements and expectations (Adelman, 2012). Honest conversations about organizational difficulties, management choices, and everyday activities aid in building trust among employees. When leaders provide employees with pertinent information, daily tasks become more relevant and increase employee commitment and engagement.

As evident from various research high levels of employee engagement were anticipated to boost commitment and decrease attrition in this context. Because there are few studies about the relationship between leaders' communication competencies and their impact on employee engagement in the IT-BPM industry, this study was undertaken to highlight the extent of that correlation.

III. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

Tabak and Lebron (2017) opined that the ability to persuade others and the desire to practice outstanding communication are the two factors that produce effective and powerful leaders; as a result, this further motivates the team and their manager to attain high standards of leadership. Valackiene (2010) has also argued that the more senior a leader is, the greater the necessity for communication skills with the environment, public relations expertise, image management expertise, and employee relationship management expertise. Therefore, the present study combines the constructs of leadership communication competence with employee engagement for a better understanding of the key communication competencies, especially in the information technology industry.

According to prior literature, CEOs and other senior executives routinely rank effective communication skills among the most critical traits required for organizational success across all industries and nations (Barrett, 2006). Studies on what managers and leaders do at work show that they communicate every day for 79 to 90% of their time (Mintzberg, 1973; Tengblad, 2006).

The communicative leadership proposed by Eriksen (1997), he says that "Communicative Leadership is often characterized by greater openness and engagement with the employees" while discussing communicative leadership in public organizations. Despite the lack of a precise definition, the term "communicative leadership" conjured up ideas like "conversation and feedback," "communication that serves multiple demands," and "coordination and synergy" (Hogstrom et al. 1999). In the original communicative leadership theory proposed by Eriksen et al. (1997) and Hogstrom et al. (1999), they implied that "communicative" leaders are "excellent communicators," as opposed to just communicating, which all leaders and people do all the time. Johansson et al. (2014) defined communicative leadership as "A communicative leader engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved". This term includes behaviors of leaders that are socially built and constituted in speech, which facilitates and influences interactions between leaders and members. They also proposed that the crucial facets of leaders' communication behavior cover four key communication competencies including structuring, facilitating, relating, and representing. Therefore, the present study furthers the work of Johansson et al. (2014) by identifying the key communication competencies that influence employee engagement in the Indian IT-BPM industry.

The present study proposes independent variables like (a) importance given to leadership communication within an organization and (b) usage of communication tools and technologies within an organization along with the other constructs of a leader's communication competencies i.e., structuring competency (SC), facilitating competency (FC), relating competency (RC), and representing (REC), as direct determinants of employee engagement in Information Technology (IT) industry.

Leaders' communication competencies: Leader-employee relationships have been researched as dual relationships that are tied to teams or units. The four well-known leader communication behavior categories, which are often recognized areas of activity and meaning and apply across a variety of organizational situations, have been supported in the literature ((Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Morgeson et al., 2010). Johansson et al. (2014) also proposed the given below set of four communication competencies as most relevant to Leader-employee interactions at the team or unit level. As part of planning and allocating work, a leader needs to proactively create employee assignments and define roles and then communicate effectively with the employee. The 'coach and train' describes the leader's approach to assisting employees in acquiring the abilities they need to be successful in their positions. 'Performance feedback' relates to how frequently, constructively, and promptly, a leader gives an evaluation of employees' work. The leaders' communication ability will be critical to carry out these aspects of the role. The leaders' communication ability to listen without taking offense, exhibit openness to feedback, care about employees' welfare, and resolve interpersonal conflicts is crucial while interacting with employees. The leader's communication ability to represent the unit and his team members in front of higher management to obtain resources, scan the macro & microenvironment for important information relating to work and network with influential people constitutes representing competency.

H1: Structuring Communication Competency positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

H2: Facilitating Competency positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

H3: Relating Competency positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

H4: Representing Competency positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

Importance is given to leadership communication within an organization

Every leader has access to the communication network, which must be leveraged to achieve the stated goals. The leaders interact with all kinds of stakeholders including employees, partners, rivals, govt. bodies or other audiences require the ability to communicate (Slatten, Göran, and Sander, 2011). As a result, the following hypotheses have been put forth:

H5: Importance given to leadership communication within the organization positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

Usage of Communication tools & technologies within an organization

H6: Usage of communication tools and technologies within the organization positively influences employee engagement in IT Industry

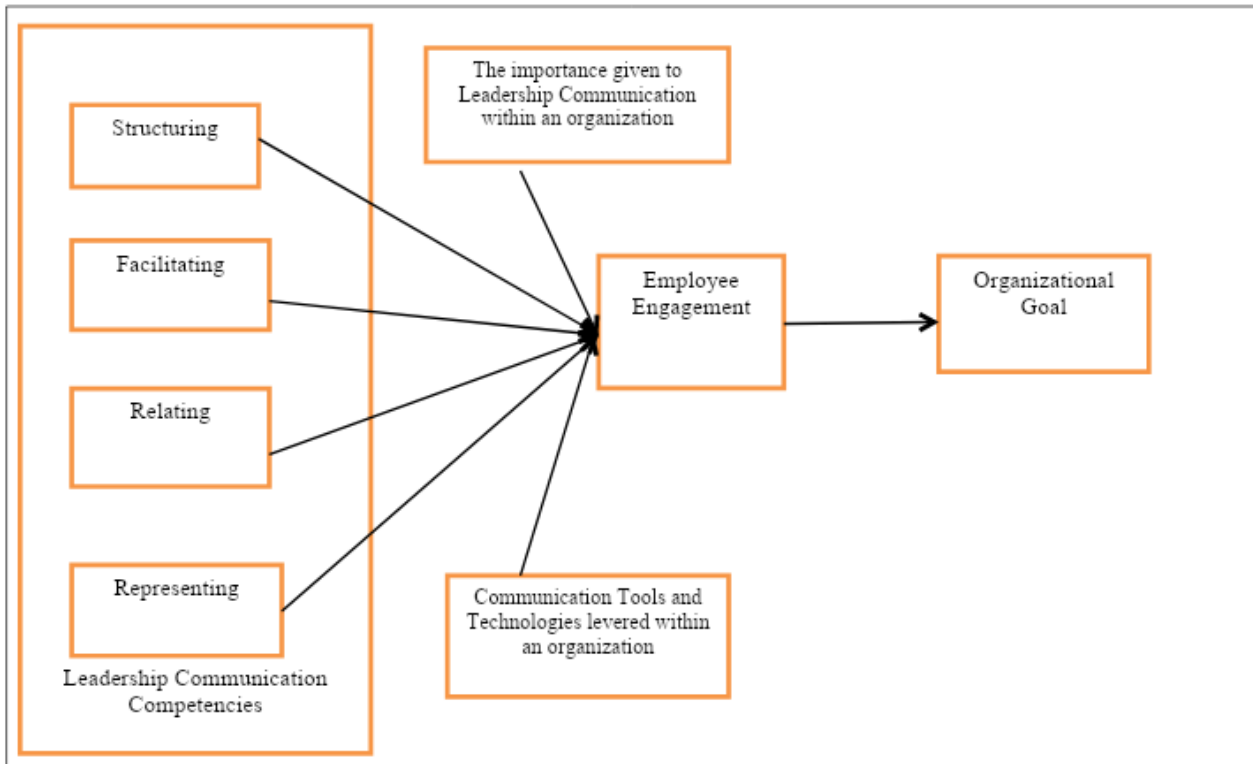


Fig 1: Research Model

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Measurement

To put the theoretical ideas to the test, a survey was carried out involving respondents from the cities like New Delhi-National capital region, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai based on their recognition as IT Hubs of India. For the survey, a structured questionnaire with two parts was designed with constructs of Perceived Leadership Communication Competencies (PLCCQ) ((Van Jaarsveld, Mentz, & Ellis, 2019) and Johansson, C., Miller, V. D., & Hamrin, S. (2014) and perceived Employee Engagement (PEE) (Tiwari, B., & Lenka, U. 2020) were created using constructs and items from the literature.

The survey was written in English, and linguists checked it for content validity. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a sample of 30 IT professionals during March and April of 2021 to pre-test the instrument. The early career IT professionals with less than 10 years of work experience were excluded from the main poll and only mid-level (11-15 years of experience) and senior mid-level (15 years and above of work experience) were the respondents of the pilot testing. The scales' validity and reliability were established by the pilot testing findings. The data from the pilot test were not included in the last round of data gathering to prevent results from being skewed.

Data

The primary objective of this study was to study the relationship between leaders' communication competencies and employee engagement in the Indian IT industry. Two sections make up the questionnaire. The section-A of the survey asked for respondents' names, gender, age, job title, the total number of years of experience, and levels of education. Questions about evaluating leaders' communication competencies and Employee engagement were included in section B. Data collection using self-report measurements raises a serious problem called Common Method Biasness. As a result, the surveys contained the Marker item, which has no connection to the variables being investigated (Malhotra & Dash, 2011). The survey participants received a soft copy of the questionnaire via email and the survey was conducted through Survey Monkey. The data of each participant was kept completely confidential, and anonymity was ensured. Participants gave their informed consent to administer the questionnaire before it was taken part in the survey. The respondents received comprehensive written guidelines for addressing the opening statements. A response rate of 66% was achieved with a total of 476 legitimate replies (including 366 responses from mid-level professionals and 110 responses from senior mid-level managers). Out of all respondents, 77% of them were men and 23% of them were women.

Normality

The skewness-kurtosis approach was used to test the univariate normality for all the variables (Hair, et al., 2010; Byrne, 2010). Using SPSS 17.0, the statistical values of skewness and kurtosis for each variable were calculated. inside their corresponding tiers. As seen in Table 1, all skewness values are lower than their cut-off point of "3," and all kurtosis values fall below their cut-off point of "8." (West et al., 1995; Kline, 2011).

Table 1: Assessment of Normality

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
LCI1	4.0558	0.71118	-0.593	0.602
LCI2	4.0102	0.72040	-0.302	-0.244

LCI3	3.9975	0.73273	-0.308	-0.276
LTT1	3.9213	0.74574	0.091	-1.106
LTT2	3.8807	0.85812	-0.497	-0.299
LTT3	3.8299	0.87604	-0.461	-0.400
ST1	3.8807	0.82486	-0.295	-0.527
ST2	4.1650	0.56685	0.010	-0.130
ST3	3.9213	0.75927	-0.043	-0.860
FC1	3.9112	0.87355	-0.655	-0.094
FC2	3.8985	0.69153	-0.142	-0.256
FC3	3.9340	0.84149	-0.570	-0.129
RT1	3.9797	0.74792	-0.260	-0.447
RT2	3.8629	0.68536	-0.199	-0.057
RT3	3.7766	0.71042	0.009	-0.438
RP1	3.6751	0.85071	-0.321	-0.453
RP2	3.6269	1.09609	-0.152	-1.289
RP3	3.4569	1.02360	0.167	-1.100
EM1	3.5000	1.02699	0.142	-1.131
EM2	3.4645	1.05570	0.159	-1.189
EM3	3.8655	0.85288	-0.258	-0.679
PH1	3.4467	1.00302	0.231	-1.026
PH2	3.4619	1.00118	0.151	-1.042
PH3	3.5102	1.06585	0.163	-1.239
BH1	3.5127	1.03677	0.021	-1.159
BH2	3.4340	1.03228	0.185	-1.113
BH3	3.7208	1.01802	-0.263	-1.050
CG1	3.5990	1.05406	-0.151	-1.178
CG2	3.4569	1.03595	0.199	-1.128
CG3	3.6041	1.09153	-0.073	-1.304
OG1	3.5990	1.09433	-0.079	-1.306
OG2	3.5102	1.04657	0.160	-1.189
OG3	3.4746	1.01921	0.178	-1.094

Structural equation modeling

The acquired data were subsequently examined using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Using a two-stage SEM process, the measurement model was used to gauge the instrument's validity and reliability before the structural model was determined (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Schumacker and Lomax, 2010).

Measurement Model

Construct reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model were all evaluated. To first investigate the measurement model fit and then assess the validity of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the AMOS software (Arbuckle, 2009). To estimate the model's parameters, the study used the maximum-likelihood approach, and all analyses were done using variance-covariance matrices (Hair et al., 2010). reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model were all evaluated. To first investigate the measurement model fit and then assess the validity of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the AMOS software (Arbuckle, 2009). To estimate the model's parameters, the study used the maximum-likelihood approach, and all analyses were done using variance-covariance matrices (Hair et al., 2010)

Construct reliability and validity

According to Hair et al. (2010), Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted can be used to evaluate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (AVE). All of the constructs have Cronbach's alpha values above the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), and the CR values are all within their respective levels of 0.70, as seen in Table 3. (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, all the structures show adequate reliability. Additionally, the AVE values of all the constructs range from 0.726 (CG) to 0.838 (ST), which are above the cut-off value of 0.50 as advised by Hair et al. (2010). This ensures convergent validity for all the constructs (see table 2). Additionally, as shown in Table 3, every construct has a squared root of AVE that is larger than the estimations of their inter-correlation with other similar constructs, demonstrating appropriate discriminant validity.

Table 2: Constructs Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Standardized loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
LCI	LCI1	0.719	0.922	0.943	0.919	0.782
	LCI2	0.762				
	LCI3	0.822				

LTT	LTT1	0.828	0.964	0.966	0.967	0.878
	LTT2	0.892				
	LTT3	0.841				
ST	ST1	0.822	0.932	0.936	0.946	0.838
	ST2	0.827				
	ST3	0.843				
FC	FC1	0.865	0.942	0.944	0.954	0.832
	FC2	0.835				
	FC3	0.785				
RT	RT1	0.693	0.945	0.947	0.956	0.768
	RT2	0.871				
	RT3	0.786				
RP	RP1	0.758	0.943	0.948	0.957	0.736
	RP2	0.767				
	RP3	0.744				
EM	EM1	0.847	0.892	0.897	0.917	0.832
	EM2	0.833				
	EM3	0.835				
PH	PH1	0.793	0.894	0.896	0.934	0.781
	PH2	0.796				
	PH3	0.763				
BH	BH1	0.836	0.833	0.851	0.899	0.794
	BH2	0.765				
	BH3	0.805				
CG	CG1	0.785	0.867	0.867	0.909	0.726
	CG2	0.765				
	CG3	0.823				
OG	OG1	0.894	0.847	0.876	0.954	0.761
	OG2	0.893				
	OG3	0.842				

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	LCI	LTT	ST	FC	RT	RP	EM	PH	BH	CG	OG
LCI	0.782										
LTT	0.175	0.878									
ST	0.049	0.103	0.838								
FC	0.055	0.066	0.755	0.832							
RT	0.029	0.145	0.754	0.783	0.768						
RP	0.064	0.066	0.485	0.538	0.531	0.736					
EM	0.06	0.111	0.9	0.924	0.922	0.235	0.832				
PH	0.452	0.365	0.579	0.412	0.599	0.469	0.515	0.781			
BH	0.543	0.415	0.625	0.518	0.663	0.404	0.506	0.675	0.794		
CG	0.275	0.415	0.584	0.515	0.558	0.357	0.526	0.590	0.581	0.726	
OG	0.253	0.568	0.522	0.471	0.624	0.255	0.373	0.525	0.544	0.453	0.761

Table 4: Path Coefficients

V. DISCUSSION

The main aim of the study is to understand the effect of leadership competencies on employee engagement and organizational goal. The study proposed seven hypotheses. PLS-SEM software was used to study and test the hypothesis. The results of PLS-SEM suggest that all proposed hypothesis of the study is accepted. Among all the different constructs, Facilitating Competency emerged to be the strongest determinant with a coefficient value of 0.523 (p<0.001). 0.509 (p<0.001). This was followed by relating competency 0.382 (p<0.001). The next important factor affecting employee engagement is structuring communication with a beta value of 0.306 (p<0.001). Among the four leadership competencies representing competency with a beta value of 0.277 (p<0.001) was found among the least important. Besides leadership competencies, the importance given to Leadership communication within an organization was found to be an important construct with a beta value of 0.301(p<0.001). Communication tools and technologies with a beta value of 0.297(p<0.001) also proved to be statistically significant. The results of our study are similar to (of Boyatzis, Rochford, and Taylor, (2015) and Buse and Bilimoria, (2017) that also stressed facilitating competency as one of the important factors.

VI. CONCLUSION

The goal of the current study was to examine the relationship between Leaders’ communication competencies and employee engagement, in the Indian context, and that too specifically in Indian IT-PBM sector. Facilitating communication Competencies which includes ‘coach and train’ & ‘performance feedback’ and Relating communication competency which includes listening, openness, conflict resolution are the factors that have emerged as the most significant determinants of Employee Engagement based

on data analysis. The results demonstrate that effective drivers of employee engagement also include importance given to Leadership communication within organization and usage of communication tools & technologies. Therefore, the responsibility for enhancing and implementing strategies for employee engagement rests with the organization, which must establish leadership development framework emphasizing upon the highlighted elements. The study can be carried out in other industries where attrition and absenteeism are major issues. Similar research can be conducted in various fields, including hospitality, infrastructure, retail, education etc to know the employee engagement levels.

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