

Factors that promote engagement in an IT company

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Abstract

Nowadays, it is crucial for organizations to generate strategies that promote engagement in order to reduce turnover and generate improvements in performance, as this directly influences financial indicators of the organizations. Therefore, the objective of this article is to evaluate the preferences of employees through 6 factors that promote engagement in an IT company. As each employee has different personal characteristics, the analysis was conducted by looking at overall data followed by a detailed examination by gender in order to propose adjustments in human resources based in the AHP methodology. The results indicate that there are significant differences regarding gender in the factors of Quality of life, Organization Practices and People. On the other hand, there is consensus among employees on the importance of Opportunities in terms of Training, Career Plan and challenging activities. Identifying such differences creates an opportunity to adjust HR policies.

Key words: Analytic Hierarchy Process, Engagement, Organizational Culture, Performance, Opportunities, Quality of life.

Factores que promueven el engagement en una empresa de TI

Resumen

Hoy en día, es fundamental para las organizaciones generar estrategias que promuevan el engagement para reducir la rotación y generar mejoras en el desempeño, ya que esto influye directamente en los indicadores financieros de las organizaciones. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es evaluar las preferencias de los empleados a través de 6 factores que promueven el engagement en una empresa de TI. Como cada colaborador tiene características personales diferentes, el análisis se llevó a cabo observando datos generales seguidos de un examen detallado por género con el fin de proponer ajustes en los recursos humanos con base en la metodología AHP. Los resultados indican que existen diferencias significativas en cuanto al género en los factores de Calidad de vida, Prácticas Organizacionales y Personas. Por otro lado, existe consenso entre los empleados sobre la importancia de las Oportunidades en cuanto a Capacitación, Plan de Carrera y Actividades Desafiantes. La identificación de tales diferencias crea una oportunidad para ajustar las políticas de recursos humanos.

Palabras claves: Proceso de Jerarquía Analítica, Engagement, Cultura Organizacional, Desempeño, Oportunidades, Calidad de vida.

1 Introduction

In the recent times, companies have realized that their talent is the key to their growth and the only strategic resource that any company really needs. Each organization knows the importance of involving and motivating its employees to perform better in pursuit of meeting both personal and company goals, so that employee motivation has gained more prominence over time (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2013). In the same way, Sange (2015) mentions that one of the main challenges facing companies today is related to the successful management of talent and the level of engagement of employees. So, directors and leaders should focus their energy at the level of closeness, communication and sense of belonging that they generate within work teams. In this way, creating strategies in search of improving engagement will have a significant impact on improving participation and performance in activities and collaborators' tasks, improving service levels and, in turn, customer satisfaction, obtaining improvements in the business as a whole. Organizations are considering their engaged employees as part of their strategic competition to the market; a highly committed employee will constantly exceed expectations through outstanding achievement of their goals and objectives by setting new standards for the organization (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002).

The top-performing companies know that an Employee Engagement strategy, that is linked to bottom-line outcomes, will help them win in the marketplace. Business and corporate houses should rewind their strategies towards shaping the organization culture as well as employee motivation (Evangeline & Gopal Ragavan, 2016). Hewitt (2009) defines "organizational culture" as a set of behaviors, beliefs, values and predominant systems that define an organization. In the same way, he comments that the organizational culture is created and maintained by leadership actions, operating systems and processes that influence the behavior of employees and the organization. It can even be confirmed that the organizational culture plays a notable role in different areas of Human Resources, such as hiring employees, satisfaction and retention. Similarly, Evangeline and Gopal Ragavan (2016) mention that through a friendly corporate culture, it will be possible to generate momentum from the commitment of the collaborators. It is suggested that culture provides innovative motivational practices, good career opportunities, performance management, pay and reputation and communication.

When employees relate to their organization, they give it its full potential to improve the metrics of their personal performance through quality deliveries, in timely and accurate form of the activities that correspond to them in their day to day, which in turn acts as a driver to improve financial performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Deloitte University Press – DUP (2015) also reports that Culture and Engagement are the most important business tasks that companies face around the world. According to Gallup's Global research (Harter, 2018), only 13% of the global workforce is highly engaged and only 12% believe that their organizations are good at driving the desired culture. Considering these figures, the lack of engagement and organizational culture become one of the challenges and, in turn, a threat to HR and senior management, since they must identify the best strategies to provide employees with a place where they want to work.

Employee engagement should not be a one-time exercise, but should be integrated into company culture and day-to-day practice (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2013). According to Sange (2015), it becomes essential to implement strategies that will have a positive effect on creating an engaged workforce. Similarly, Schaufeli (2012) states that employee engagement can be improved through better job design by using the motivating

potential of job resources. Also, job rotation and changing jobs might result in higher engagement levels because it challenges employees, increases their motivation, and stimulates learning and professional development. In the same way, Salanova and Schaufeli (2009) observed that for the evolution and improvement of employee engagement, it will be necessary to focus on improving the quality of life at work, protecting and promoting the safety, health and well-being of workers through work involvement, affective commitment, work continuity, extra-role behavior and job satisfaction. Similarly López and Chinclana (2017) proposes ways to improve worker engagement both with individual strategies applied to the person himself and through the implementation of programs at the organizational level, balancing the demands and resources of the job. In this case, Ngai, Cheung & Yuan (2016) calls for training adequacy which can be a mediating mechanism in the relationships between training variables, work motivation, and work engagement.

Because of the “contagious” nature of the work engagement, leaders have a special role in fostering engagement (Bakker, Van Emmerik & Euwema, 2006). Particularly transformational leadership that provides a clear vision, inspires and motivates, offers intellectual challenges, and shows interest in the needs of the employees, is successful in accomplishing this (Schaufeli, 2012). In this sense, leadership styles are positively correlated with employees’ engagement (Li *et al.*, 2021). So, when managing employees, it is important to understand their personal characteristics as this affects the functionality of human resources strategies. This is especially important when employees are integrated in highly diverse workplace in terms of age and gender, where a correct communication can lead to a higher engagement in a workplace (Trong Tuan, Rowley & Thanh Thao, 2019; Sharma, Goel & Sengupta, 2017). For example, considering organizational attributes, females emphasize attributes that promote relationship-based organizational characteristics (Festing & Schäfer, 2014), have more positive perception about the diversity (Abramovic & Mercer Traavik, 2017), but can be less willing to share ideas with their employers if the working environment is not favorable (Moore *et al.*, 2020). Further, it is also important to cross the employees’ characteristics with specifics of each industry. For example, employees in the IT industry with higher educational qualification tend to be more engaged at work compared to employees with lower educational qualification, as well as males are more engaged than females in the IT industry (Sharma, Goel & Sengupta, 2017).

Organizations must pay attention to the engagement of their employees to increase their motivation, satisfaction and, consequently, to minimize employees’ rotation. All these factors can lead to higher performance of each organization. So, the objective of the article is to explore main factors that promote employees’ engagement in IT company. Finally, as the female and male employees have different needs and preferences, the secondary objective of the article is to analyze whether differences about the main factors between males and females exist.

2 Materials and Methods

Data

This analysis includes responses from an electronic and anonymous survey applied to 80 collaborators who work in a company in the Information Technology industry in which a decrease in engagement had been identified through the application of annual internal surveys, identifying as the lowest category: “Recognition and compensation” and “Quality of life”. Of the 80 collaborators of, 40 are women and 40 are men who work

in the People and Operations areas of the Mexico City and Monterrey offices. The survey included 27 questions in measuring the priority of the factors that influence employee engagement. To assess the importance of each factor the following Likert scale was used: 1 - Not important at all, 2 - Not very important, 3 - Not relevant, 4 - Important, 5 - Very important.

These 27 questions were then classified into six main categories: *Organizational practices*, *Opportunities*, *People*, *Quality of Life*, *Recognition and Compensation*, and *Job*. The *Organization Practices* category (includes: Acceptance, Culture, Organizational communication, Possitive comment and Vision and direction) refers to the methods that the company uses to keep close to its collaborators through communication about the vision and direction that the organization is taking as well as the practices of its cultural platform. In addition, this category considers the positioning towards the outside of the company and whether it is considered a good place to work. On the other hand, the *Opportunities* category considers the challenges of day-to-day activities during the assignment of collaborators, the opportunity to make a career plan within the organization and access to training to improve skills, including as criteria: Career, challenge, Mobility and Training. *People* describes the closeness and involvement that leaders have with collaborators beyond the work aspect, but rather personal considerations as well as openness to listening, receiving feedback and inclusion / welcome to teams (Empaty, Feedback, Integration, Listening and Work proximity).

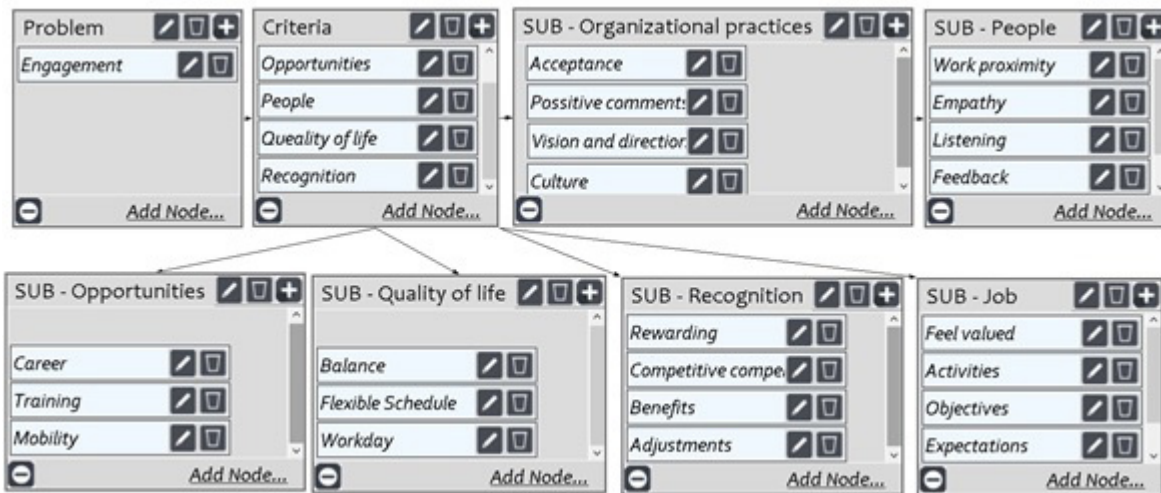


Figure 1: Structure of the AHP model

What the *Quality of Life* category considers is whether the organization generates initiatives that promote health, sport and integration within teams in order to create a life-work balance. In addition, this category involves activities related to identifying whether the collaborators have the necessary resources to carry out their activities on a day-to-day basis and if the offices promote a healthy space; therefore, this criterion includes: Balance, Flex time, Initiatives and Workday. *Recognition and Compensation* (includes: Adjustment, Benefits, Competitive salary and Rewarding) describes whether employees receive recognition of their performance, whether their level of compensation and benefits package is considered competitive with the rest of the market, and whether appropriate compensation level adjustments are received. Finally, the *Job*

category considers the information that collaborators should have in relation to the objectives and scope of their projects, as well as their involvement in the decisions made within their work team considering their opinions. Therefore, this criterion includes: Feel valued, Activities, Objectives, Expectations and Decisions.

The structure of the AHP model is presented in Figure 1. Priorities for all areas and their factors were obtained through the applied questionnaire and standardized employees' preferences on the Saaty scale to ensure consistency of assessment.

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

Analytic Hierarchy Process was developed by Saaty (1977, 1980) and works with both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of preferences. To obtain criteria priorities, pairwise comparisons based on the fundamental verbal/numerical 1-9 scale is required. The number of necessary comparisons for each comparison matrix is $n(n-1)/2$, where n is the number of criteria. Each criterion gains a geometric mean of its comparisons, which are then normalized.

An important requirement is to test consistency of our stated preferences, as human-made decisions can be mutually inconsistent because of the human nature. The most commonly used method for consistency check was developed by Saaty (1977) who proposed a consistency index (CI) related to eigenvalue method. CI is obtained as:

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n - 1} \tag{1}$$

λ_{max} is the maximal eigenvalue of the pairwise comparison matrix. The consistency ratio (CR) is given by:

$$CR = \frac{CI}{RI} \tag{2}$$

RI is the random index shown in Table 1.

n	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	.58	.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

Table 1: AHP - Random indices (Saaty, 1977)

The priorities are considered consistent if the consistency ration is less than 10%. SuperDecisions software is used to count the criteria preferences and to test consistency of the preferences.

3 Results

In the first part, results regarding the general model are presented, whereas, in the second part, results regarding employees' gender are discussed.

General Perspective

Table 2 indicates that the six factors that promote engagement (Organization Practices, Opportunities, Quality of Life, Recognition and compensation and Work) were given the same weight of importance, considering 16.66%. The most important factor promoting engagement for employees is Work-life balance (62.50%),

followed by Competitive Compensation Package (59.92%) and knowledge about the Expectations that are had about the employee’s performance (41.95%) which correspond to the criteria: Quality of life, Recognition and compensation and Job respectively. Within the Organization’s Practices, the most accepted factors are Culture and Organizational Communication with 30.61%, followed by Acceptance along with Vision and direction with 16.83% of priority, while Positive Comments indicate the lowest priority with 5.11%. The inconsistency obtained in the Organization Practices factor was 0.79% (well below the 10% limit). For Opportunities, no major differences are identified between the factors since Career Plan, Challenging Activities and Training show the same importance (31.25%) while the Mobility factor is considered the least valued factor, obtaining 6.25%.

CRITERIA		SUB-CRITERIA				INCONSISTENCY
Organizational Practices	Acceptance	Culture	Organizational communication	Positive comment	Vision and direction	0.79%
16.66%	16.83%	30.61%	30.61%	5.11%	16.83%	
Opportunities	Career	Challenge	Mobility	Training	-	0%
16.66%	31.25%	31.25%	6.25%	31.25%	-	
People	Empathy	Feedback	Integration	Listening	Work proximity	0.29%
16.66%	31.32%	31.32%	9.85%	9.85%	17.63%	
Quality of life	Balance	Flex time	Initiatives	Workday	-	0%
16.66%	62.50%	12.50%	12.50%	12.50%	-	
Recognition and compensation	Adjustment	Benefits	Competitive Salary	Rewarding	-	1.03%
16.66%	10.57%	18.92%	59.92%	10.57%	-	
Job	Activities	Decisions	Expectations	Feel Valued	Objectives	2.72%
16.66%	18.88%	6.32%	41.95%	6.32%	26.52%	

Table 2: Importance of engagement factors, general results

In the case of People, the most accepted factors are Empathy and Feedback with 31.32%, considering Listening as the least important factor with 9.85%. The inconsistency in this factor was 0.29%. In relation to Quality of Life, the most important factor of the whole study is Work-life balance with 62.50% importance, while the other 3 factors that are Flex time, Initiatives and Workday indicate a significant difference of relevance obtaining 12.50% each. For Recognition and Compensation, the Competitive Compensation package is the most important factor with 59.92%, followed by Benefits (18.92%) considering Adjustments and Rewarding as the least important factors (10.57%); the inconsistency of this evaluation was 1.03%. Finally, in the case of Work, the most important factor is Expectations with 41.95%, followed by Objectives and Goals (26.52%), Activities (18.88%); while among the least preferred factors are Participating in Decisions that affect their work and Feeling Valued with 6.32% of importance each. The inconsistency in this factor is 2.72%.

Gender differences

The results posted in the previous section are just an overview of the priority of the factors that promote engagement in an IT company. However, it is also important to differentiate priorities regarding employees’ gender because each employee has its own personal characteristics that affect his/her working priorities

(Kaiser, 2007; Kifle & Hailemariam, 2012; Salgado, Flegl & Fejfarová, 2020). Table 3 presents the results of the analysis for female employees. In a similar way as in the general modality, the same importance value is given to the six factors that promote engagement, considering 16.66% for each one. In Organization Practices, the employees evaluated Organizational Culture as the highest important factor (37.92%), followed by Organizational Communication and Acceptance, which have the same preference of 21.88%, Vision and direction with 12.68% and, finally, as the least important element Positive Comments with 5.61%. Compared with the general model, women partially compensate the lower preference for Organizational Communication (-8.73%) by a higher preference for Organizational Culture (+8.73%).

In Opportunities, women prefer Career, Challenge and Training with 31.25% of importance each, leaving Mobility as the least important element (6.25%) corresponding to the same preference of the general results (Table 2). In relation to People, the most important thing for women is Feedback (44.28%), which is +12.96% more important compared to the general model. Then the importance of Work Proximity (28.88%), followed by Listening (12.28%) and considering as the lowest factors Integration and Empathy (7.27%); in the case of Empathy, compared to the general model, it is -24.05% important. In Quality of Life, the most important thing is Balance between work and personal life and Workday with 36.42% for each one, followed by Flex time (20.63%), considering as the least important aspect the Initiatives that promote quality of life (6.51%). Compared to the general model, women partially offset the lower preference for Work-Life Balance (-26.08%) by a higher preference for Workday (+23.92%).

CRITERIA		SUB-CRITERIA				INCONSISTENCY
Organizational Practices	Acceptance	Culture	Organizational communication	Positive comment	Vision and direction	1.15%
16.66%	21.88%	37.92%	21.88%	5.61%	12.68%	
Opportunities	Career	Challenge	Mobility	Training	-	0%
16.66%	31.25%	31.25%	6.25%	31.25%	-	
People	Empathy	Feedback	Integration	Listening	Work proximity	1.23%
16.66%	7.27%	44.28%	7.27%	12.28%	28.88%	
Quality of life	Balance	Flex time	Initiatives	Workday	-	1.03%
16.66%	36.42%	20.63%	6.51%	36.42%	-	
Recognition and compensation	Adjustment	Benefits	Competitive Salary	Rewarding	-	1.03%
16.66%	18.92%	10.57%	59.92%	10.57%	-	
Job	Activities	Decisions	Expectations	Feel Valued	Objectives	1.15%
16.66%	21.88%	5.61%	37.92%	12.68%	21.88%	

Table 3: Importance of engagement factors, female results

For Recognition and Compensation, the most important as in the general model is the Competitive Compensation Package (59.92%), followed by Adjustments (18.92%) which is 8.35% more important compared to the general model; the lowest importance is Benefits and Reward performance in a timely manner with 10.57%. For Benefits, women rate it as 8.35% less important compared to the general model. Finally, in Job, as in the general model, women give greater importance to knowing the Expectations that the other think about them at work (37.92%), followed by clear objectives and goals and attraction for the activities carried

out with 21.88% each, Feel valued obtained 12.68%, which is 6.36% more important compared to the general model, leaving as a minor element to participate in Decisions that affect their work. The inconsistencies of all evaluations are below the required level of 10%.

Results for the male employees are presented in Table 4. Compared with the results of female employees, in the Organization Practices category, men give greater importance to Organizational Communication (+18.77%) and to the Vision and mission of the company (+12.21%), while Organizational Culture is least important (-23.64%) being one of the elements evaluated less important (14.28%). In Opportunities, results are handled in the same way as those obtained by women. For the People category, male employees prefer to receive Feedback from their leader (37.92%), feel Integrated within their team and Closeness to work from their leader with 21.88% respectively, Feel Heard by the company (12.68%) and Empathy on the part of their leader regarding personal issues (5.61%), compared to women, men give greater importance to Integration + 14.61%. Regarding Quality of Life, men prefer Balance between work and personal life (55.95%), a significant difference compared to women is that male employees give less importance to Flex time (-11.09%) and Workday (-26.88%), while they give greater importance to Initiatives to improve the quality of life (+18.43%). For Recognition and compensation, the Benefits factor that the company offers has a very high preference in this case (31.82%) compared to 10.57% in the case of women. Finally, regarding Job, unlike women, men give a low preference to the Feel Valued factor (importance of 6.17%, difference -6.51%). On the other hand, knowing the Expectations that are had about him at work has a high preference (41.85%) being the most important factor of this criterion.

CRITERIA		SUB-CRITERIA				INCONSISTENCY	
Organizational Practices	Acceptance	Culture	Organizational communication	Positive comment	Vision and direction		
16.66%	14.28%	14.28%	40.65%	5.88%	24.89%	1.26%	
Opportunities	Career	Challenge	Mobility	Training	-		
16.66%	31.25%	31.25%	6.25%	31.25%	-	0%	
People	Empathy	Feedback	Integration	Listening	Work proximity		
16.66%	5.61%	37.92%	21.88%	12.68%	21.88%	1.15%	
Quality of life	Balance	Flex time	Initiatives	Workday	-		
16.66%	55.95%	9.54%	24.94%	9.54%	-	1.62%	
Recognition and compensation	Adjustment	Benefits	Competitive Salary	Rewarding	-		
16.66%	8.89%	31.82%	50.39%	8.89%	-	1.03%	
Job	Activities	Decisions	Expectations	Feel Valued	Objectives		
16.66%	15.99%	9.72%	41.85%	6.17%	26.25%	1.52%	

Table 4: Importance of engagement factors, male results

4 Discussion

As the results revealed, in general terms, the most important factors for engagement are related to Organizational Culture, Training, Career plan, receiving constant Feedback, Work-life Balance, having a Competitive Compensation package and being clear about Expectations of oneself at work. This result confirms the findings of Bersin (2015), who discovered 5 main elements that fit into a complete system of engagement in an organization: Meaningful work (Flex time, Autonomy), Hands-on management (Clear, transparent goals), Positive work environment (Flexible work environment, Culture of recognition), Growth opportunity (Training) and Trust in leadership (Mission and purpose). In many ways, management is the most important capacity that organizations have (Bersin, 2015) since their work is to set goals, support people, train to achieve high performance and provide feedback to continuously improve. Investing in foundational management practices impacts engagement, performance, and retention (USPTO, 2013).

When people have clearly defined goals that are written down and shared freely, everyone feels more comfortable, and more work gets done. Goals create alignment, clarity, and job satisfaction. In the same way, this analysis shows that collaborators having clarity in the objectives and goals of their activities as well as knowing the expectations that the leader has of him/her are important to strengthen engagement with his organization. Too many companies write down annual goals and only look at them at the end of the year, the companies that revisit goals quarterly have threefold greater improvement in performance and retention than those that revisit goals yearly (Sherman, 2011). In a study carried out by Schor (1992) it shows that 68 percent of women would rather have more free time than make more money, in the same way this study revealed that for women respecting Workday and having Flex time are important elements to promote the quality of life of employees, being even more important than being satisfied with the compensation level adjustments received (+17.5%).

On the other hand, building opportunities for a growth is a complex and systemic challenge. First, there must be developmental opportunities, both formal and informal, that let people learn on the job, take developmental assignments, and find support when they need help. This means designing onboarding and transition management programs, developing a culture of support and learning, and giving people time to learn (Bersin, 2015). Organizations cannot directly force employees to be more dedicated or more interested in learning. However, they can create a culture that promotes both (Sahu, Pathardikar & Kumar, 2018). Thus, based on the results obtained in this research, generating a culture of learning and training will bring about a strengthening and improvement in engagement. Most studies show that compensation is an important factor in employee satisfaction and engagement. Research by Oegler and Adair (2019), for example, shows that compensations is among the top five drivers from engagement (but is not number one). Similarly, in this study, the general results indicate an importance of 59.92% to the Competitive total Compensation package.

Engagement strategies should be adjusted based on the preferences that collaborators show depending on each organization. In this case, it can be said that on the Opportunities side, the importance given to training and qualification by both men and women is crucial, likewise it will be necessary to look for initiatives oriented to the life-work balance and review the compensation package in such a way that the one offered is competitive in the market. Understanding the differences between employees can lead to the development of new engagement strategies, add or remove benefits, generate new initiatives and develop human resource policies that meet the needs of employees (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Lyons, Duxbury & Higgins, 2005).

Being able to adapt these engagement strategies within organizations could bring with it a series of advantages, mainly in the increase in job satisfaction levels, the low intention to leave the organization, the improvement in the performance of tasks and health (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Likewise, engaged employees have more proactive behaviors and personal initiatives, as well as higher levels of motivation to learn new things and take on new challenges at work (Salanova *et al.*, 2002).

Limitations of the analysis

The results presented have a few limitations. First, the analysis can be considered as exploratory, since the sample includes a small population compared to the total number of employees. Therefore, for now, the results cannot be generalized across the whole company. Further extended analysis is thus necessary. Similarly, the results cannot be generalized across more IT companies, but should be viewed as an initial overview in the area. Employees outside the IT business may have different perceptions of the factors analyzed. To fully understand the problem situation, the analysis must be expanded to include more results from the operational areas.

5 Conclusions

Within organizations, the balance of power has shifted from employer to employee, forcing leaders to learn how to build an organization that engages employees as responsive, passionate, and creative collaborators in such a way that strategies are generated so that Engagement increases and in turn this is reflected in the success of the organization's financial results. The results of the analysis show that these policies and organizational initiatives in order to promote commitment should be well adjusted to the employee considering their gender. The results revealed that the initiatives and strategies that promote the commitment of an IT company should focus mainly on Growth Opportunities through training and Career Plans, on Organizational Culture, Work-life Balance, Feedback, Package of competitive compensation and in the clarity of the expectations that are had about the activities and functions of each collaborator.

There are similarities between men and women in the Opportunities aspect due to the importance they give to the Career Plan, Training and Interest in Challenging activities. However, significant differences can be observed in terms of Quality of life preferences, mainly in Flex time and Workday; additional to Organizational Culture and Integration within work teams. Being able to provide employees with a company where they feel happy and committed becomes crucial since their permanence will depend on this and once it will be reflected in the results of their day-to-day performance. Although this article can be considered more like an introductory analysis, since the analyzed sample is limited, the results indicate that IT companies can adjust their human resources policies to improve employee engagement. This analysis can be extended by considering a larger sample and evaluating the difference in preferences of the factors that promote commitment by areas of work and generation.

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