To Assess the Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Organizations during a Crisis

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Abstract

Purpose: To identify the steps taken by organizations during the time of crisis concerning Human Capital and understand the impact each of these steps has on the employee engagement for the employees within the organization.

Proposed Design/Methodology/Approach: Post the literature review, qualitative research is conducted through in-depth interviews with the Managers, who were part of the decision-making, in the organizations that went through crisis period (Sample size: 20-30) and a quantitative study is conducted to capture the perspectives of the employees from those organizations (Sample size: 70-100).

Practical/Theoretical Implication: The study results enable organizations to stay cognizant of the pros and cons of the decisions they make in terms of employee engagement, which helps in successfully overcoming the crisis with minimal traction.

Originality/Value: While there are standalone papers on each topic, this paper converges them coherently to study the overall effect from both employee's and the organization's perspectives.

Key-words: Employee Engagement, Human Capital, Manpower Reduction, Crisis, Uncertainty, Qualitative Research.

1. Introduction

With the rapid change in globalization, trade liberalization, competition, and technology, providing customized solution to cater to the consumer and client preferences have become the

contemporary issue that organizations are facing now, which is further bolstered by the changing national and international policies, including foreign trade reforms, foreign direct investments, and other industrial norms. To persevere with this change, many organizations in India have embarked on restructuring as an impulsive response. The consequences of such restructuring include downsizing, reduction in budget, decentralization, and flat organization structure [1].

Traditionally, organizations have opted for cost reduction in times of economic uncertainty, and the major portion of this cost reduction has been targeted towards the employees in the organization. Although many reputed organizations across industries have undergone cost reduction by lay off and widespread pay cuts and it has become a prevalent strategy for organizations to opt for downsizing as a survival instinct, it might leave an impact on the organization in the long-term owing to the threats of "Survival Syndrome." Every organization faces a crisis, but the way it chooses to react and uphold the employee capital shows the strength and viability of the organization and its business.

Human resource planning is a key practice to forecast, assess, and allocate the workforce requirements to meet the changing needs efficiently to tackle the demand-supply imbalance and improve employee utility and productivity. However, this needs a holistic knowledge of the organization's plans, understanding the skill requirements, workforce and skill availability, and skill re-usability. The organizations which plan and execute this step tend to retain the right talent and succeed in the long run.

According to the resource-based view (RBV), organizations that consider their employees a strategic asset in planning their long-term goals tend to gain a competitive advantage in the market. As organizations incorporate employee engagement strategies, employees get motivated to work harder, understand the complex situation that the organization is into, and abide by some of the hard decisions taken in the organization's interest to sustain the turbulence. This connection is mutual, and these employees would later become the key resources that have seen the organization through the crisis period.

Instead of a hard approach like layoff and pay cuts, organizations can implement many soft approaches like pay re-adjustment, reduced learning and development costs, hiring freeze, increased working time flexibility. Numerical flexibility to large-scale redundancies, thereby reducing the costs while keeping the employees intact, as evident from the way organizations have coped with post the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2007-2008 [2].

As the organizations resort to downsizing, the pressure on the surviving employees to deliver quality and high-performance mounts leads to psychological stress leading the employees to violate

rules, exhibit aggression, and cause inter-personal conflict, thereby resulting in destructive deviance. In addition to the prolonged working hours, some client-facing employees tend to face disrespect in the form of stubborn and over-demanding customers resulting in reduced job satisfaction, poor health, and poor work-life balance, which again results in employees exhibiting deviant behaviors. In some cases, this results in frontline deviance. The employee's deviant behavior is directed towards the client, hindering the company-client relationship, which directly affects the productivity of the colleagues and tarnishes the organization's brand, resulting in psychological, social, and financial burden.

The current literature aims to study the factors affecting employee engagement for the organizations in India during a financial or economic crisis and propose certain recommendations based on the observations.

2. Literature Review

In a study by Mishra, S. et al., employee engagement comprises emotional, cognitive, and physical engagements. Emotional engagement constitutes the empathy and bonding created with co-workers to have an emotional connection with others. In cognitive engagement, employees understand the overall mission and their roles and deliverables within their work arrangement. Physical engagement comprises the physical presence, efforts, and participation towards the job completion.

According to a study by Choudhury, S.S. et al., with a positive impact of managerial effectiveness on team management, an organization that is not doing financially well should identify and address employee engagement levels. Engagement of employees can be enhanced even during economic decline subject to collaborative efforts of leadership, human resource managers, and direct managers through identification of appropriate engagement model. To improve employee engagement, thereby the productivity and business viability, organizations can use the Aon Hewitt Engagement model. The model helps in understanding the engagement levels by evaluating through a three-layered scorecard system: manager, head of the department & leadership, which helps arrive at an engagement action plan, which includes designing leadership communication and special organizational development (OD) workshops.

There are two approaches while resolving the financial crisis: hard and soft, suggested by McDonnell, A. et al. The hard approach includes stringent decisions like layoffs, stalling compensation and benefits, hiring freeze and reduced training opportunities, and the soft approach

comprises of employee engagement, motivation, communication and improving utilization. The organizations should identify the adjustable parameters like employee numbers, working hours, hiring rates, compensation disbursement, and promotion rates before arriving at the suitable approach. While the organizations try to adapt to as much as soft approaches possible by looking at employees as more of an asset than a cost, they can also promote innovation. Organizations can also look into a sense making approach wherein the employees are apprised of the situation, thereby garnering their support in understanding their decisions [3].

Downsizing is the strategic decision that many companies across industries resort to proposed by Tiwari, B. et al. While organizations decide to curb their spending, it takes an equal toll on the employees' morale, leading to breach in the employees' psychological contract. When some employees are terminated from the organization, it leaves psychological stress on the surviving employees, which builds a sense of insecurity and the incapability of delivering the assigned work. On this premise, it is evident that the organizations need to consider the survivors as their talented resources capable of handling trembles and giving them a sense of organizational citizenship.

Malik proposed the conservation of resources (COR) theory, P. et al., which explain that when the employees are subjected to psychological stress, it has a deteriorating effect on their well-being and work behavior, thereby increasing the probability of deviant behavior. Deviant behavior is defined as "voluntary behavior that violates significant norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members or both." In such cases, organizations should design and incorporate training that ameliorates hope, optimism, and resilience amongst the employees, thereby generating a positive psychological capital, which reduces undesirable attitudes and behaviors while improving productivity.

Based on the conceptual framework developed by Tiwari, B. et al. stating the employee engagement factors, this research aims to empirically test the framework and also correlate the expected behavior of the employees as perceived by the human resource leaders across industries with that of the perception of the actual employees.

3. Research Methodology

The above heading is empirical research starting with a detailed literature review, which is done to understand the situations an organization goes through during a financial or an economic crisis, focusing on the impact on the organization's human capital. After identifying the factors affecting the employee engagement in such organizations, qualitative research is conducted to

understand the steps undertaken by the organizations during crisis concerning the employees within the organization along with the thought process that went behind taking each of the decisions and the perceived reaction from the employees against the decisions taken including both the set of employees who had been affected directly and those who did not have any impact on them.

For this, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 managers who were a part of the decision-making in driving the change concerning human capital with the below set of questions.

1. What crisis has your organization undergone?
2. What was the impact of the organization's crisis on the organization, and how did it impact its human capital?
3. Was there a need to implement change in the human capital? What was the need to change?
4. What all changes or decisions were considered and taken concerning the human capital?
5. What was the thought process behind each of the steps or decisions taken?
6. What was the impact of these changes on the employees?
7. What was the impact or reaction from the employees as perceived by the management before   implementing the change?
8. How did you support the employees during the crisis, especially when the change was implemented?
9. What are the steps you think should have been taken for an overall smooth experience for the employees?

Through the inputs gained from the in-depth interviews, quantitative research is conducted to capture the employees' perspectives for the decisions taken by their organization. The data for a sample of 81 respondents assuming the roles of entry/junior level management and mid-level management employees was collected with the below set of questions put to them [4].

1. Gender: Male, the Female, prefer not to say
2. Organization:
3. Industry: BFSI, Consulting, Entertainment, FMCG/FMCD, Healthcare, IT, Manufacturing, Pharma, Service, Travel, Others
4. Role: Entry/Junior Level, Mid-management Level, Senior Management Level
5. Has your organization witnessed any crisis period in the last decade?: Yes, No, Not sure
6. What steps/decisions have your organization taken during such crisis times against the employees?

7. (Check-boxes): Layoff, Outsourcing (contract jobs), delayering/flat organization structure, stalling compensation/benefits, hiring freeze, voluntary separation program, over-burden with work, reduced training, no action taken, and others.

8. According to you, rate the below decisions made by your organization into hard or soft decisions on a scale of 1 (Soft Decision) to 5 (Hard Decision), given the organization is operating in a Crisis period.

9. Layoff, Outsourcing (contract jobs), delayering/flat organization structure, stalling compensation/benefits, hiring freeze, voluntary separation program, over-burden with work, reduced training, no action taken.

1. In case of a hard decision taken against you but with proper communication strategy, how likely are you to exhibit the below (Likert scale).

   (a) Associate with the organization in the long-term?

   (b) Please take it as a challenge and keep up the level of productivity

   (c) Motivation to learn a new skill

   (d) Prone to physical and mental illness (anxiety, guilt, and low morale)

   (e) Maintain relationship with supervisor (s)

2. In case you are a Survivor (no hard decision against you), but you have seen it with your peers, how likely is you to exhibit the below: (Likert scale).

   (a) Associate with the organization in the long-term?

   (b) Please take it as a challenge and keep up the level of productivity

   (c) Motivation to learn a new skill

   (d) Prone to physical and mental illness (anxiety, guilt, and low morale)

   (e) Maintain relationship with supervisor (s)

   (f) Help your peers/knowledge sharing

   (g) Take risks while innovating

3. Rank the below as per the importance that must be given to each of them below (1-High importance to 9-least importance).

   (a) Continuous Communication from Supervisor

   (b) Leadership sessions

   (c) Collaboration/Knowledge Sharing

   (d) Mental counseling

(e) Peer recognition

(f) Innovating/Risk-taking

(g) Work flexibility

(h) Developing multi-skill

(i) Employer Branding/Word of mouth

4. Results and Analysis

A total of 81 responses were collected with 56 Male employees, 24 Female employees, and one respondent preferred not to reveal gender-wise. 62 respondents were Entry/Junior level employees, and 19 were Mid-Management level employees.

43 respondents have witnessed their organizations undergo crisis in the last decade, 30 of them did not, and 8 were not sure. These 38 respondents, who have either not seen or were not sure, have given the responses as per their expected behavior or outcome if they encounter such situations [5].

4.1. Hard Vs. Soft Decisions

4.1.1. Layoffs: On a rating scale of 5.

Rating 1: 14.8% of overall respondents, 11.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 11.1% of overall respondents, 8.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 6.2% of overall respondents, 8.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and none of the Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 6.2% of overall respondents, 8.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and none of the Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 61.7% of overall respondents, 64.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 52.6% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5. Perception of the Respondents towards lay off is indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Perception of the Respondents towards Lay-off
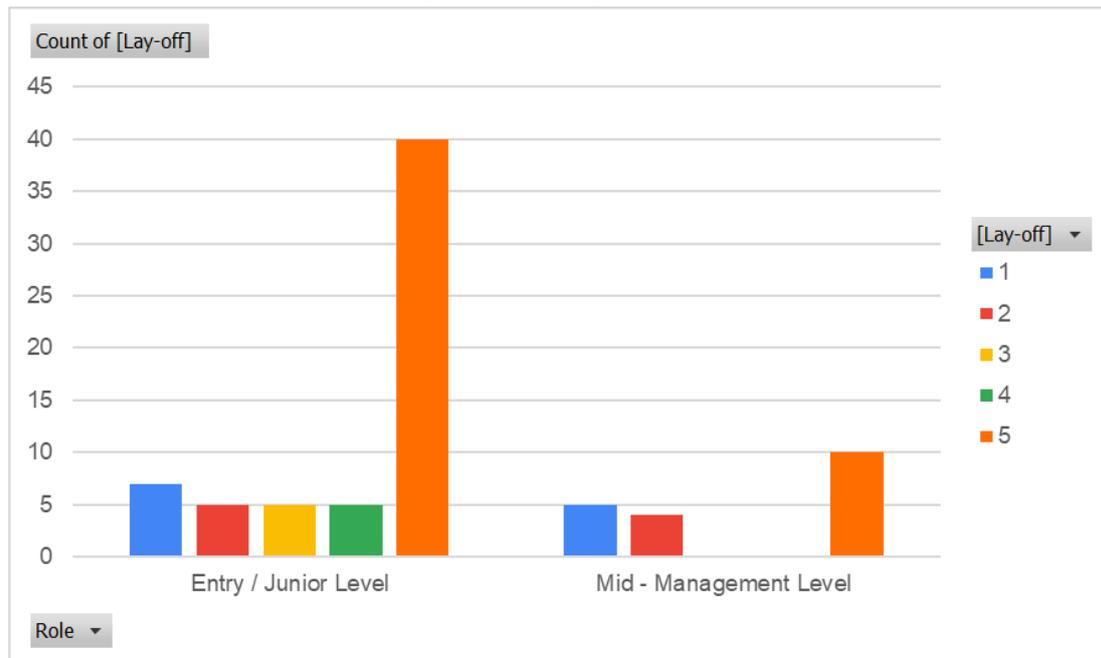
As compared with the Junior/Entry-level employees, Mid-management level employees tend to feel that layoffs are not as hard decisions as they are which is in line with the outcomes of the in-depth interviews wherein it was evident that the mid-management level employees tend to understand the company's situation in a better way. So they feel that layoff is not that a hard decision compared with Entry/Junior level employees [6]. The perception of the respondents towards outsourcing/contract jobs is indicated in Figure 2.

4.1.2. Outsourcing/Contract Jobs: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 21% of overall respondents, 22.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
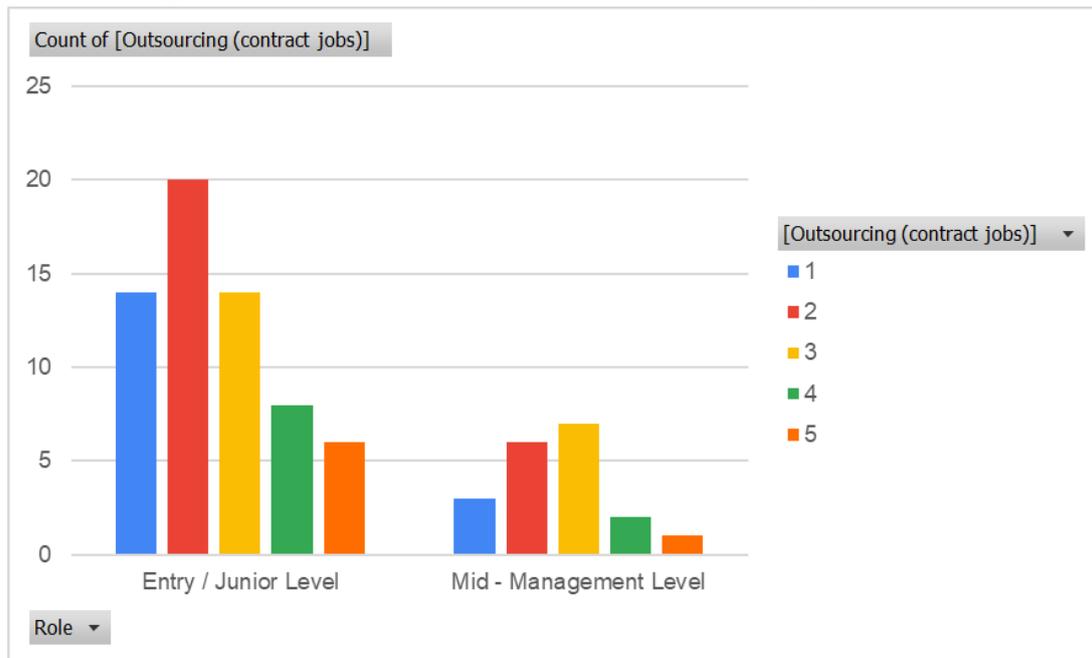
Rating 2: 32.1% of overall respondents, 32.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 31.6% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 25.9% of overall respondents, 22.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 36.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 12.3% of overall respondents, 12.9% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 8.6% of overall respondents, 9.7% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 5.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 2 - Perception of the Respondents towards Outsourcing/Contract Jobs

As shown in Figure 2, this is considered a medium to a soft decision by both Junior and Mid-level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, while having a contract job incurs a certain loss in terms of benefits compared with full-time employment, as it still provides an employment opportunity during such crisis time, employees are satisfied with working on a contract basis [7]. Perception of the Respondents towards Delayering/Flat Organization Structure is represented in Figure 3.

4.1.3. Delayering/Flat Organization Structure: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 23.5% of overall respondents, 29.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
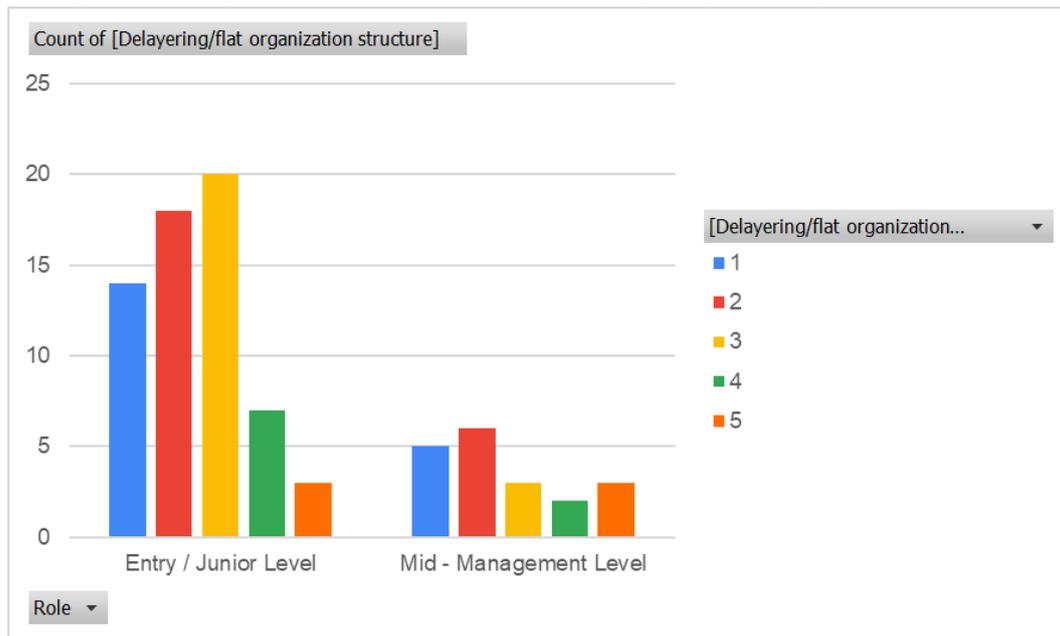
Rating 2: 29.6% of overall respondents, 29% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 31.6% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 28.4% of overall respondents, 32.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 11.1% of overall respondents, 11.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 7.4% of overall respondents, 4.8% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 3 - Perception of the Respondents towards Delayering / Flat Organization Structure

As shown in Figure 3, this is considered a medium to a soft decision by both Junior and Mid-level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, with the delayering of the reporting hierarchy, though there is an added risk in monitoring the productivity and in showing a proper career path to the employees, there is also a chance of enabling employees to share knowledge with the barrier of hierarchy being removed [8].

4.1.4. Stalling Compensation/Benefits: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 16% of overall respondents, 16.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 17.3% of overall respondents, 19.4% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.
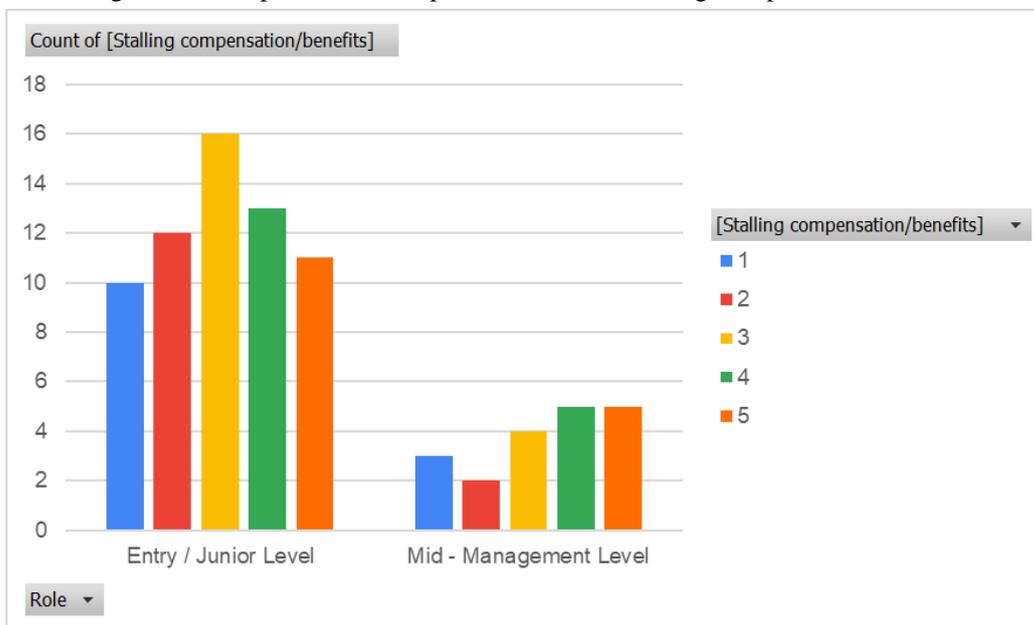
Rating 3: 24.7% of overall respondents, 25.8% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 22.2% of overall respondents, 21% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 0.2% of overall respondents, 17.7% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

As can be seen from Figure 4, this is considered as a medium decision by Entry/Junior level employees, whereas it is considered as a medium to a hard decision by Mid-level employees. In contradiction to the expected outcomes of the in-depth interviews wherein the entry/junior level employees were expected to rate this as a hard decision as their day-to-day needs might get impacted, they perceive it as a medium decision [9].

Figure 4 - Perception of the Respondents towards Stalling Compensation/Benefits

4.1.5. Hiring Freeze: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 28.4% of overall respondents, 29% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
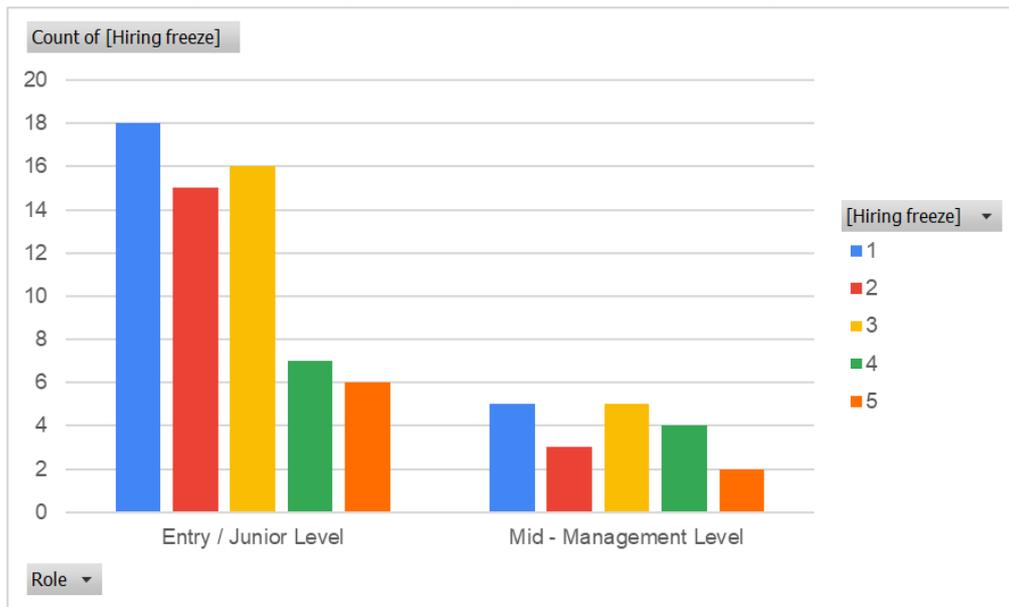
Rating 2: 22.2% of overall respondents, 24.2% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 25.9% of overall respondents, 25.8% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 13.6% of overall respondents, 11.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 9.9% of overall respondents, 9.7% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 5 - Perception of the Respondents towards Hiring Freeze

As can be seen from Figure 5, this is considered as a soft decision by Entry/Junior level employees and as a medium decision by Mid-level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, with no external candidates being recruited into the organization, the existing employees were expected to feel safer as the probability of the laying off decreases, and so, they would consider it a soft decision [10].

4.1.6. Voluntary Separation Program: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 24.7% of overall respondents, 24.2% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
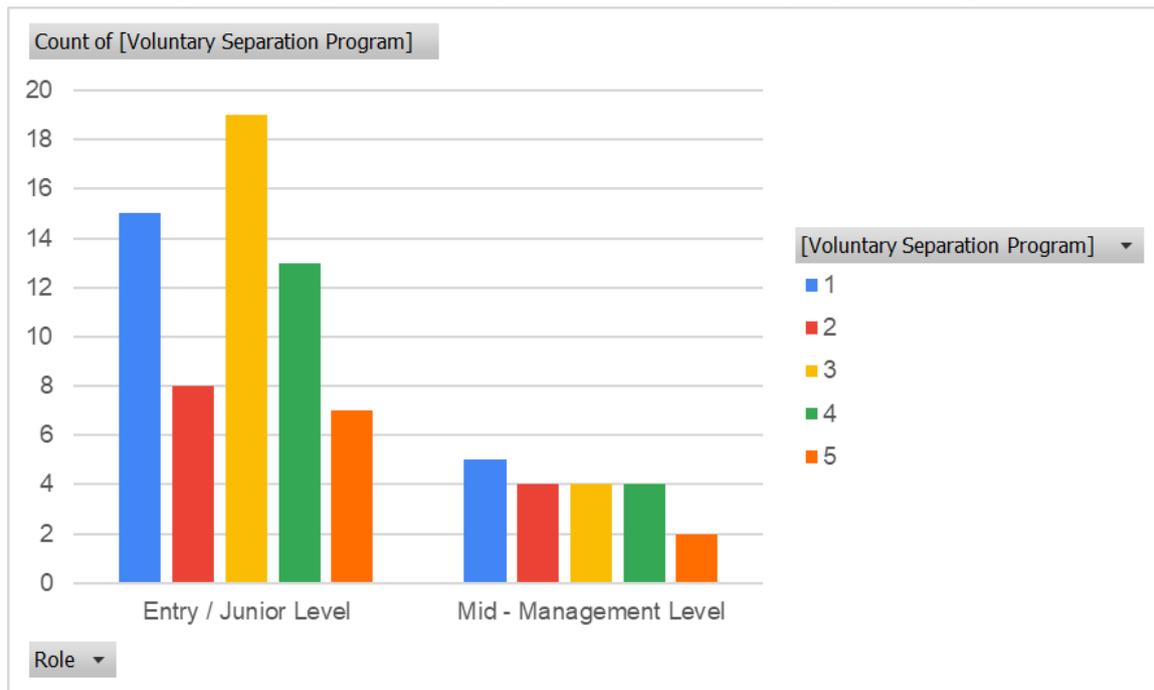
Rating 2: 14.8% of overall respondents, 12.9% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 28.4% of overall respondents, 30.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 21% of overall respondents, 21% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 11.1% of overall respondents, 11.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 6 - Perception of the Respondents towards Voluntary Separation Program

As shown in Figure 6, there is a wide range of perceptions among the respondents within each entry/Junior level and Mid-level employees. With not many organizations using this method, the perception among the employees and the expected perception of the employees by the leadership stand to be a grey area [11].

4.1.7. Over-burden with Work: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 11.1% of overall respondents, 11.3% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
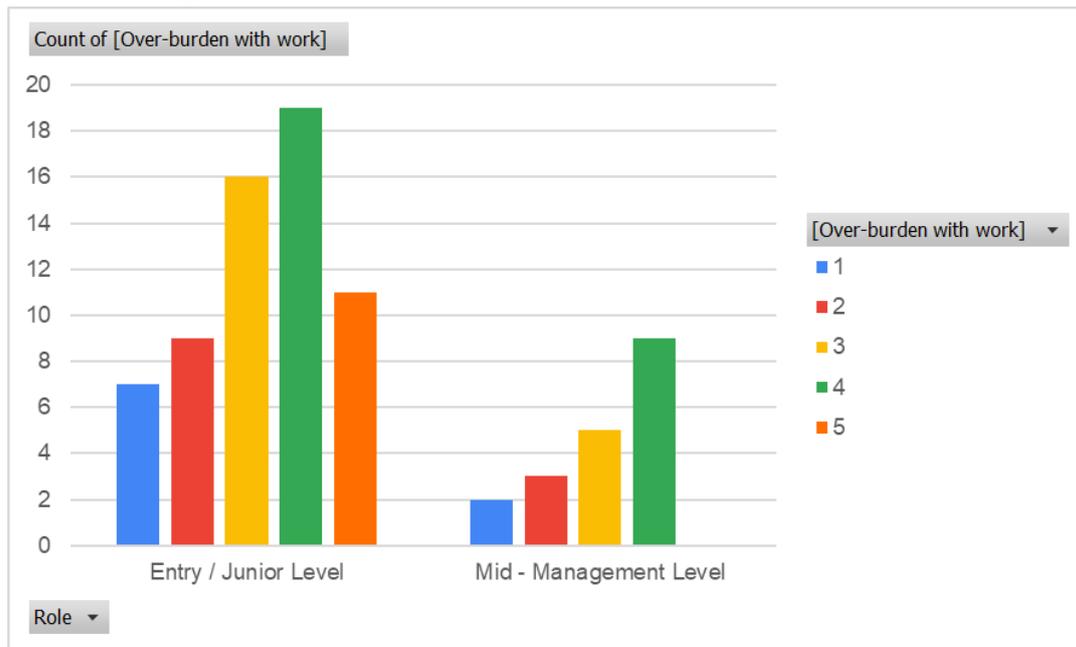
Rating 2: 14.8% of overall respondents, 14.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 25.9% of overall respondents, 25.8% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 34.6% of overall respondents, 30.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 47.4% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 13.6% of overall respondents, 17.7% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and none of the Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 7 - Perception of the respondents towards over-burden with work

As shown in Figure 7, this is considered a medium to a hard decision by both Junior and Mid-level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, to cope with the crisis, employees are expected to work harder, putting the organizational goal ahead of personal goals. Communication forms an integral part of ensuring that the employees are apprised of the situation and make sure that the work is evenly distributed [12].

4.1.8. Reduced Pieces of Training: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 28.4% of overall respondents, 30.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
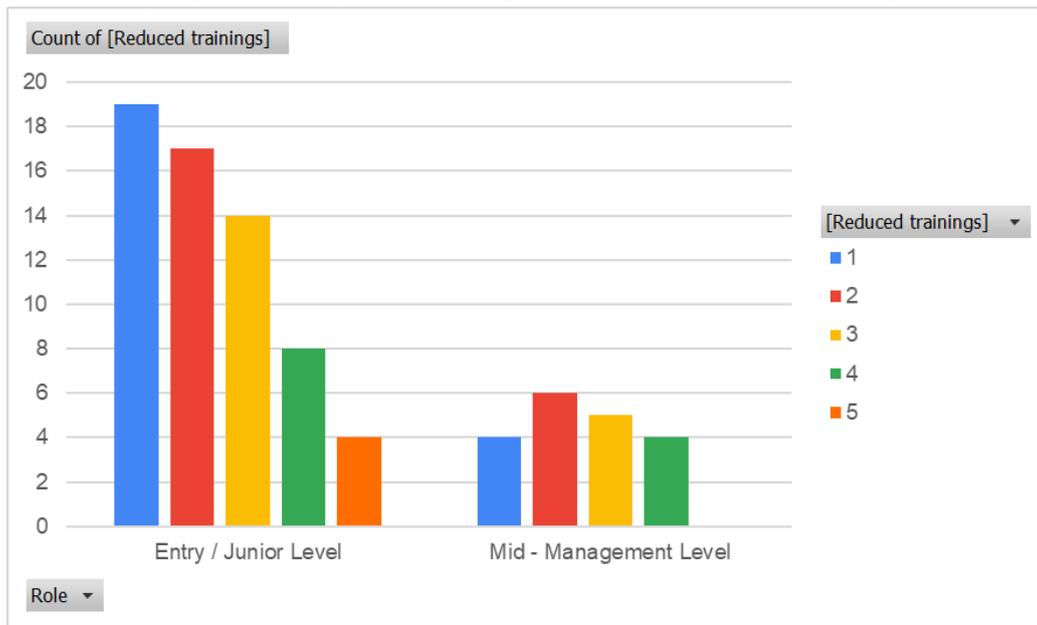
Rating 2: 28.4% of overall respondents, 27.4% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 31.6% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 23.5% of overall respondents, 22.6% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 14.8% of overall respondents, 12.9% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 4.9% of overall respondents, 6.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and none of the Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 8 - Perception of the Respondents towards Reduced Training

As can be seen from Figure 8, this is considered as a soft decision by the Entry/Junior level, whereas considered as a medium-to-soft decision by Mid-level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, the organization's investment capacity reduces, thereby reducing the investment in training the employees. While the core training to ensure that the employees stay abreast of the talent requirements is maintained, the investment towards external training would get impacted [13].

4.1.9. No Action is Taken: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 42% of overall respondents, 45.2% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 31.6% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 13.6% of overall respondents, 14.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 27.2% of overall respondents, 27.4% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 6.2% of overall respondents, 4.8% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 11.1% of overall respondents, 8.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

As shown in Figure 9, this is considered a medium to a soft decision by the Entry/Junior level employees. As per the in-depth interviews, with no action taken by the organization in curbing the crisis, proper communication has to be given out by the organization stating its plan. In the absence of such communication, employees tend to get excited, not knowing the organization's plans.

Figure 9 - Perception of the Respondents towards no Action taken
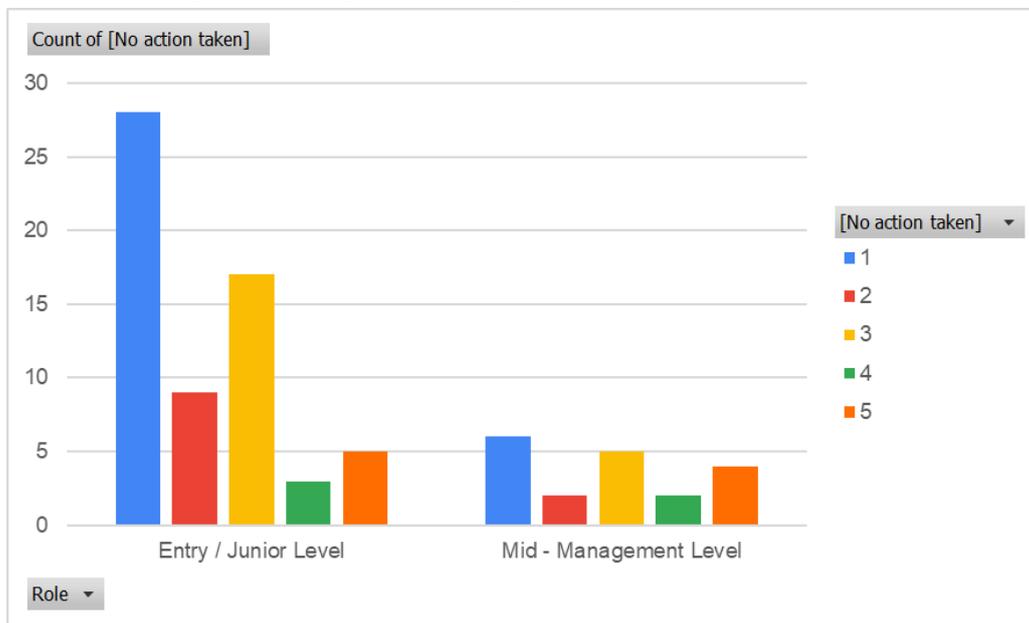
4.2. Employee Reaction to Hard Decisions

4.2.1. Association with the Organization in the Long-term: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 7.4% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 14.8% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 17.3% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 19.8% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 2.
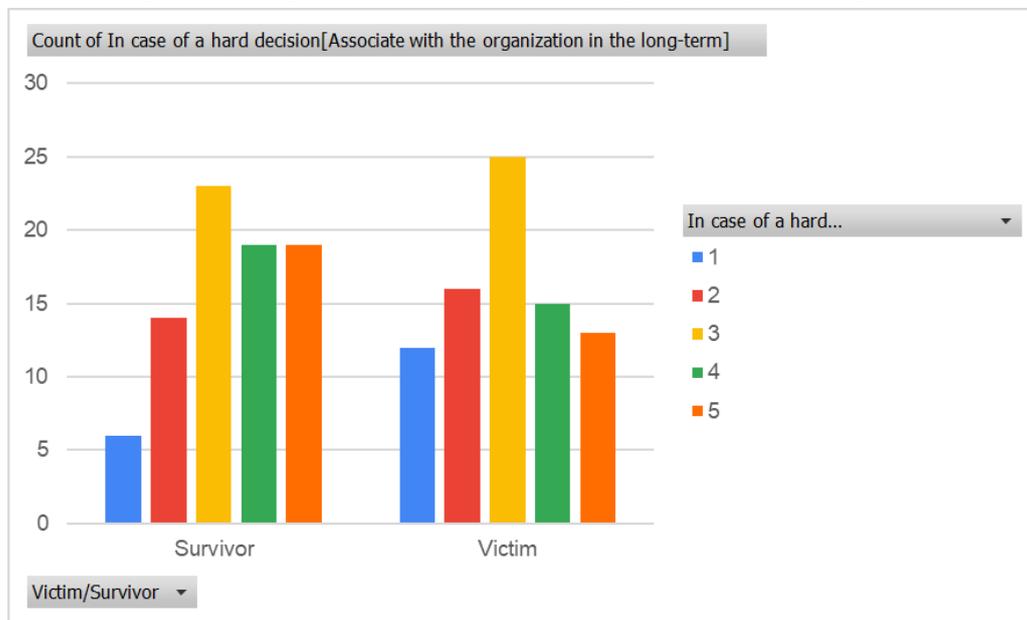
Rating 3: 28.4% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 30.9% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 23.5% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 18.5% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 23.5% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 16% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 5.

As shown in Figure 10, the survivor employees are slightly likely to continue in the organization, whereas the Victim employees are in the moderate zone. As per the in-depth interviews, while the survivors are identified as potential talent, they are likely to continue in the long-term, whereas the victims must be supported to retain them [14].

Figure 10 - Responses to Associate with the Organization in the Long-term

4.2.2. Take it as a Challenge and keep up the Level of Productivity: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 3.7% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 16% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 1.
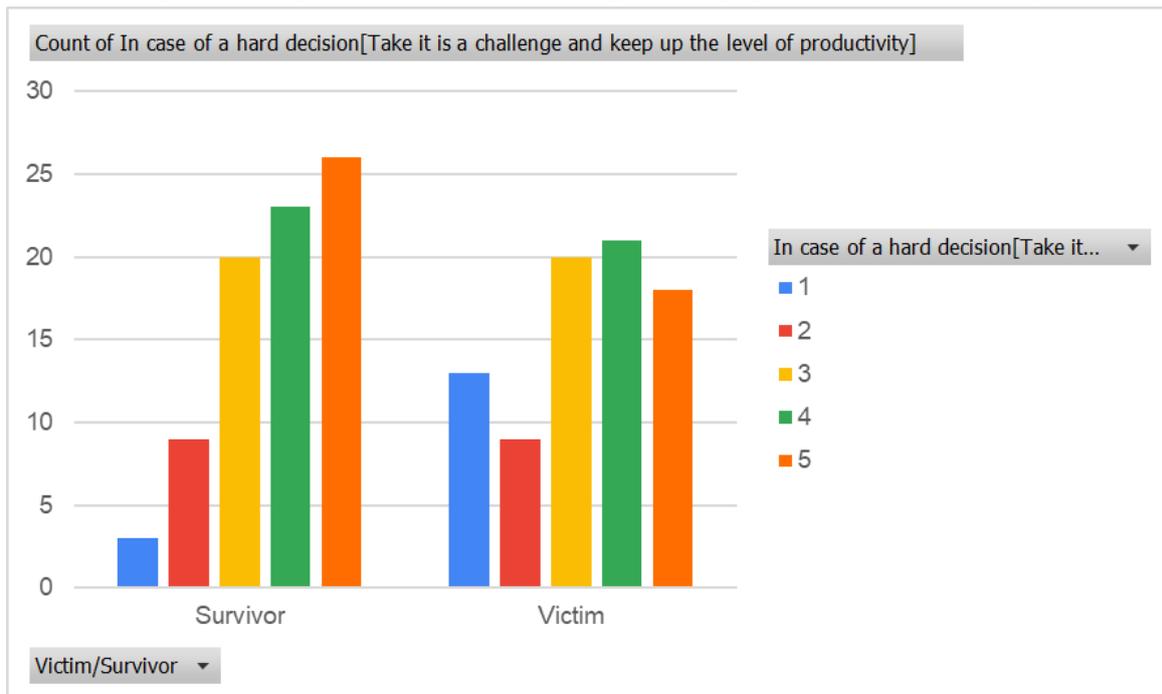
Rating 2: 11.1% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 11.1% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 24.7% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 24.7% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 28.4% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 25.9% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 32.1% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 22.2% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 5.

Figure 11 - Responses to take it is a Challenge and keep up the Level of Productivity

As can be seen from Figure 11, the survivor employees are most likely. In contrast, the Victim employees are slightly likely to take the situation as a challenge and keep up the productivity, which is in line with the expected perception for both survivors and victim employees with the outcome of the in-depth interviews conducted, wherein the motivation for victims was expected to be less in comparison with that of the Survivors owing to the hard decision taken against them

4.2.3. Motivation to Learn a New Skill: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 3.7% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 3.7% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 7.4% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 13.6% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 14.8% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 24.7% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 30.9% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 27.2% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 43.2% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 30.9% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 5.

Figure 12 - Responses to Motivation to Learn New Skill

As can be seen from Figure 12, both the survivor and the victim employees are most likely to take the situation as a motivation to learn a new skill, which is in line with the expected perception for both survivors and victim employees with the outcome of the in-depth interviews conducted, wherein the motivation for all the employees in the organization towards training and re-skilling would be higher to make sure that they stay abreast of the latest skills promoting their chance of survival [15].

4.2.4. Prone to Physical and Mental Illness (Anxiety, Guilt, and Low Morale): On a rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 16% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 11.1% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 1.
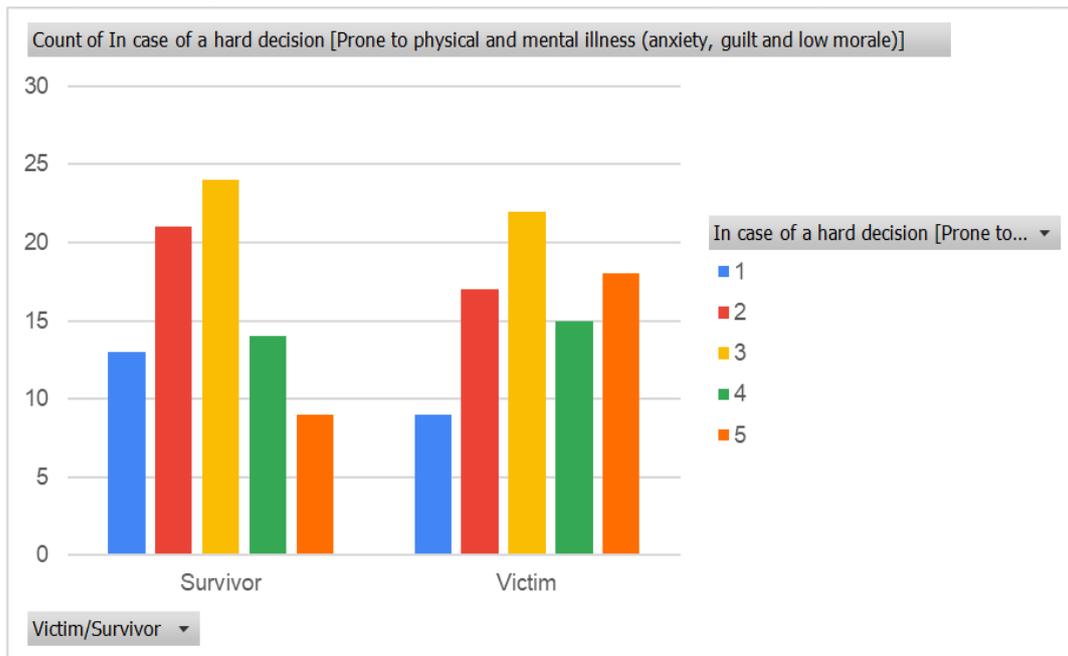
Rating 2: 25.9% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 21% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 29.6% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 27.2% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 17.3% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 18.5% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 11.1% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 22.2% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 5.

Figure 13 - Responses to prone to physical and mental illness (anxiety, guilt and low morale)

As shown in Figure 13, the survivor employees are slightly less prone, whereas the victim employees are slightly more prone to physical and mental illness. As per the in-depth interviews, while all the employees within the organization undergo stress and excitement due to the crisis, the impact is expected to be more for the victim employees due to their decision taken against them.

4.2.5. Maintain Relationship with Supervisor: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 6.2% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 13.6% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 8.6% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 9.9% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 18.5% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 35.8% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 40.7% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 12.3% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 25.9% of the respondents with the role of Survivors and 28.4% of the respondents with the role of Victims gave a rating of 5.

As shown in Figure 14, both the survivor and the victim are slightly more likely to maintain the relationship with their supervisor. As per the in-depth interviews, both the employee and the

supervisor for all the employees in the organization should understand the situation and set expectations with each other, and work towards the expectations.

Figure 14 - Responses to Maintain Relationship with Supervisor
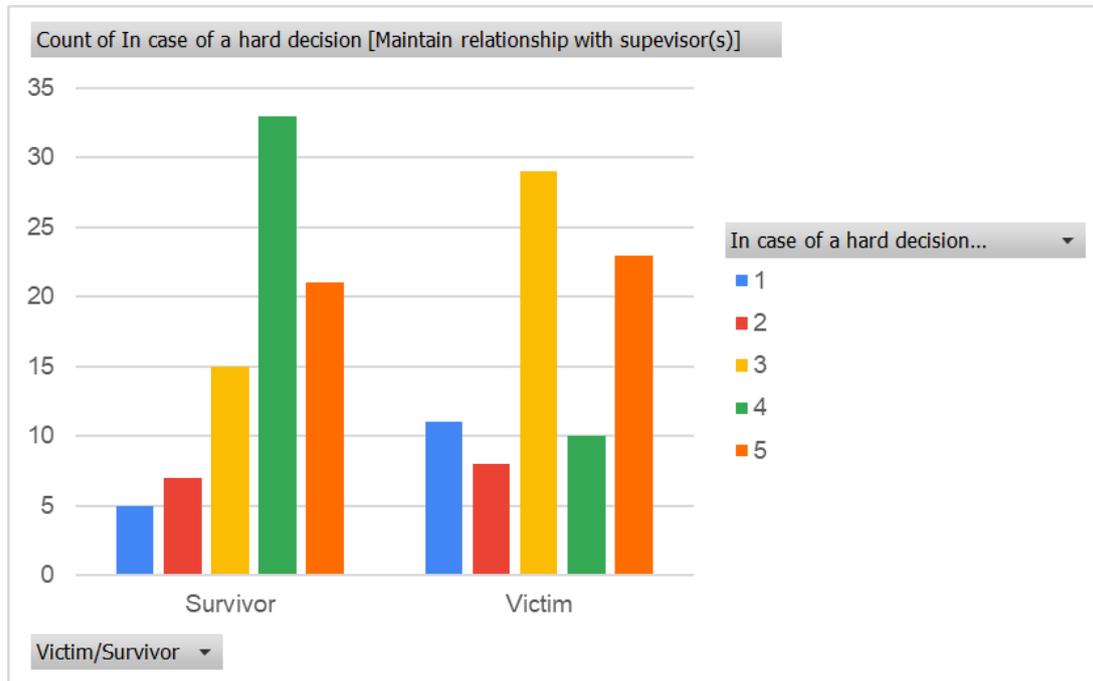
4.2.6. Help your Peers/Knowledge Sharing: on a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 8.6% of overall respondents, 6.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.
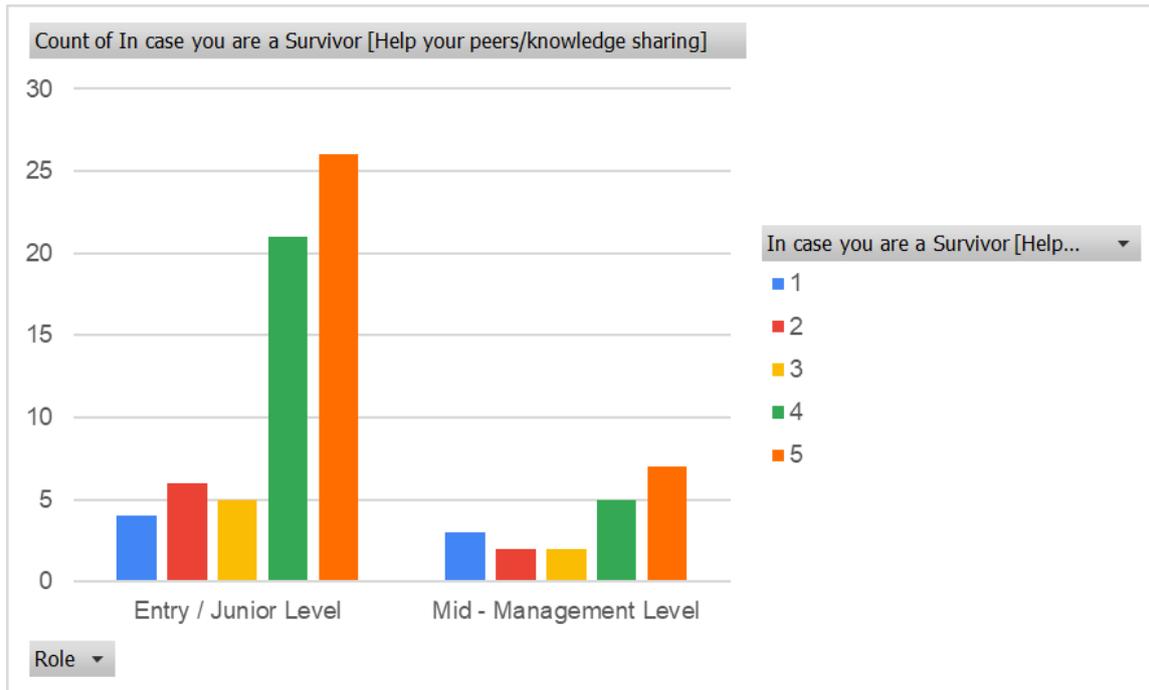
Rating 2: 9.9% of overall respondents, 9.7% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 8.6% of overall respondents, 8.1% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 32.1% of overall respondents, 33.9% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 40.7% of overall respondents, 41.9% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 36.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 15 - Responses to Help your Peers/Knowledge Sharing

As shown in Figure 15, both the Entry/Junior level and the Mid-Management level employees are most likely to help their peers or share knowledge. As per the in-depth interviews, this is one of the most important factors wherein the employees help each other out, and the organization must make sure that there is a free flow of knowledge across teams and businesses to help each other out with the previous knowledge or experience.

4.2.7. Take Risks while Innovating: On a Rating Scale of 5

Rating 1: 11.1% of overall respondents, 6.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 1.

Rating 2: 14.8% of overall respondents, 14.5% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 15.8% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 2.

Rating 3: 25.9% of overall respondents, 27.4% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 21.1% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 3.

Rating 4: 27.2% of overall respondents, 27.4% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 26.3% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 4.

Rating 5: 21% of overall respondents, 24.2% of Entry/Junior Level respondents, and 10.5% of Mid-level Management respondents gave a rating of 5.

Figure 16 - Responses to take Risks While Innovating
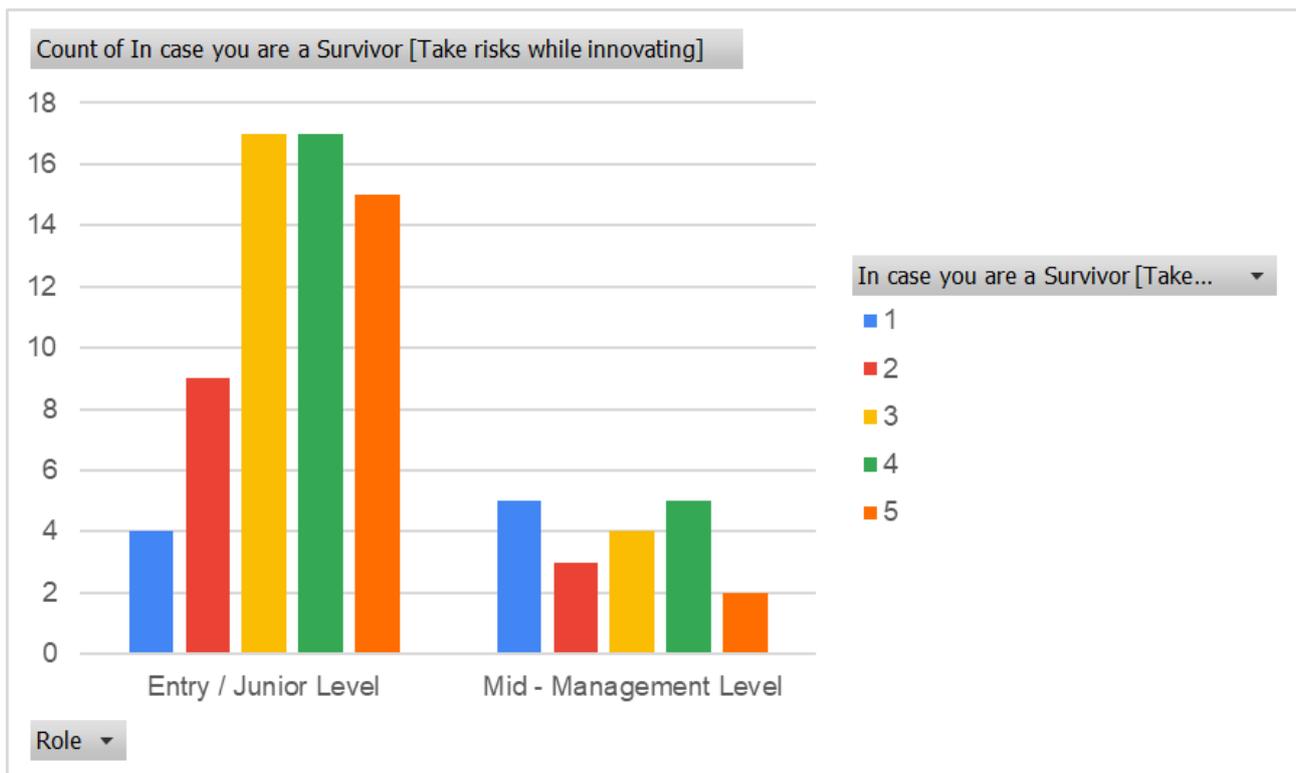
As shown in Figure 16, both the Entry/Junior level and the Mid-Management level employees are slightly more likely to take risks while innovating. As per the in-depth interviews, with the crisis and the uncertainty among the employees on the organization's plans concerning human capital, employees tend to take fewer risks while innovating than in normal situations.

5. Overall Employee Engagement Factors

5.1. Entry/Junior Level Employees

As can be seen in Figure 17, the Entry/Junior level employees have given the highest importance to continuous communication from supervisor followed by collaboration/knowledge sharing, mental counseling, peer recognition, innovating/risk-taking, leadership sessions, developing multi-skills, work flexibility, and employer branding/word of mouth in the same order during a crisis.

Figure 17 - Responses of Entry/Junior Level Employees towards various Decisions
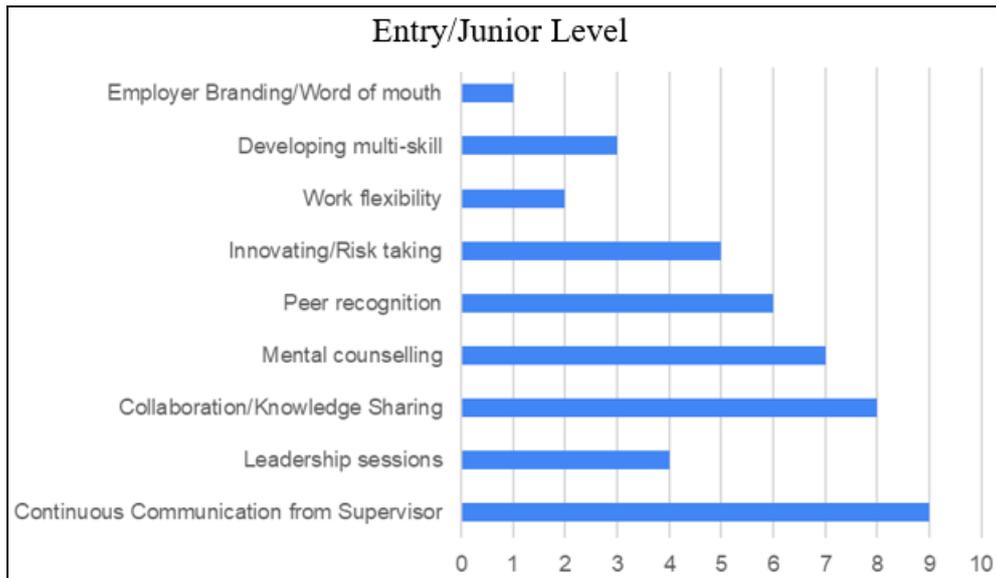
5.2. Mid-Management Level

As can be seen in Figure 18, the Mid-Management level employees have given highest importance to work flexibility followed by leadership sessions, collaboration/knowledge sharing, developing multi-skills, innovating/risk-taking, mental counseling, peer recognition, continuous communication from supervisor and employer branding/word of mouth in the same order during a crisis.

Figure 18 - Responses of mid-management level employees towards various decisions

5.3. Overall Employees

As can be seen in Figure 19, overall, employees have given the highest importance to continuous communication from supervisor followed by collaboration/knowledge sharing, mental counseling, leadership sessions, peer recognition, innovating/risk-taking, work flexibility, developing multi-skills, and employer branding/word of mouth in the same order during a crisis [16].

Figure 19 - Responses of overall employees towards various decisions

5. Discussions

The study aims to enable organizations to stay cognizant of the pros and cons of the decisions they make concerning human capital and its impact on employee engagement for the employees within the organization. Through this study, the organizations would be able to make the decisions concerning the human capital with minimal traction on the productivity of the employees along with gaining the confidence of the employees during the crisis they are into through cognitive engagement, wherein employees understand the overall mission as well as their roles and deliverables within their work environment. Engagement of employees can be enhanced even during economic decline subject to collaborative efforts of leadership, human resource managers, and direct managers through identification of appropriate engagement model. As per the findings of this research paper, with

proper employee engagement strategy being implemented, employees are more likely to take the crisis as a challenge, keep up the level of productivity, get motivated to learn new skills, maintain relationships with supervisors, and help the peers through knowledge sharing.

With the COVID-19 pandemic at large, affecting almost half of the global population, there has been a significant impact on the organizations across industries trying to cope with the crisis, survive the business's turbulence, and maintain the relationship and communication with the employees. While some organizations were forced to adapt to the change or a new normal created due to the pandemic, the other organizations, owing to their experience and resources, can maintain the day-to-day business functioning.

In order to sustain a crisis such as this pandemic, along with maintaining the brand value of the organization and retaining the employees, organizations started looking out for ways to keep the employee engagement levels intact by understanding the changing work patterns, impact of the decisions taken by the organization on the employees and their reaction to the change and importance of uninterrupted communication with the employees and stakeholders. With the pandemic's impact on the personal life of the employees, organizations are also trying to find ways to cater to the personal well-being of the employees and the society at large. While the employees are likely to undergo physical and mental stress, continuous communication from the supervisors followed by collaboration/knowledge sharing and mental counseling was identified as the key factors influencing employee engagement.

McDonnell, A. et al., there are two approaches while resolving the financial crisis: hard and soft. As the findings from this research suggest, organizations should avoid taking hard decisions as perceived by the employees like layoff, stalling compensation/benefits, and over-burden with work. However, they should rather concentrate on the soft decisions like delayering/flat organization structure, hiring freeze, and reduced training, thereby reducing the costs while keeping the employees intact, as evident from the way organizations have coped with post the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2007-2008.

To measure the effectiveness of the employee engagement interventions of the organization, the management should understand the employees' expectations under specific situations by creating necessary use cases. Organizations can also look into a sense making approach wherein the employees are apprised of the situation, thereby garnering their support in understanding their decisions [17].

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations across industries have different goals in the short term and the long term depending on the business objective, and there are equally different and unique ways of achieving the target, but the one common entity that helps set the targets, drive and achieve is the human capital of the organization. Over the last decade, organizations have started concentrating on the human capital in order to attract the right talent by increasing the brand value of the organization, that can help achieve its targets, to understand the human resource metrics such as attrition and ways to curb it, and to improve the employee engagement to make sure that the employees stay motivated, efficient and productive. Organizations also understand the importance of engaging the employees, specifically during a crisis, to sustain the business and maintain the brand value in the market.

During a crisis, while the organization's focus is to maintain the employee engagement levels, it is inevitable for the organizations to intervene with organizational changes to sustain the turbulence. In such cases, as the findings from this research suggest, organizations should try to avoid taking hard decisions as perceived by the employees like layoff, stalling compensation/benefits, and over-burden with work, but should rather concentrate on the soft decisions like delayering/flat organization structure, hiring freeze and reduced training. As per the findings, with a proper employee engagement strategy being implemented, employees are more likely to take the crisis as a challenge, keep up the level of productivity, get motivated to learn new skills, maintain relationships with supervisors, and help the peers through knowledge sharing. While the employees are likely to undergo physical and mental stress, continuous communication from the supervisors followed by collaboration/knowledge sharing and mental counseling was identified as the key factors influencing employee engagement.

7. Limitations

While the scope of this research paper was to study the steps or decisions taken by the organizations during a crisis, the reason behind each of the decisions taken, and the perception of the employees that are changing, the quantitative research conducted on the employees did not include the situations under which the organizations had to take such decisions. In contrast, it is most likely that the employees working in an organization tend to know the organization's situation.

In this study, only the factors derived from the qualitative research done through in-depth interviews of the managers involved in decision-making were considered for further analysis with the employees' perception, whereas more such factors could be derived by choosing bigger sample size.

The roles considered in this study were restricted to entry/junior level and mid-management level employees, whereas many organizations have different hierarchies and reporting structures. Further analysis could be done by properly defining the hierarchy of categories and understand the expectations from each of them.

The study was conducted across industries and the findings thus obtained are not industry-specific, whereas different industries have different ways of working. However, the central focus, i.e., the human resource, is constant; further study can be conducted specifically for each industry by having a deep understanding of the industry's functionality and constraints.

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