



THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON WORK ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

An increased interest in work engagement has emerged in recent years. Within this field, a number of crucial questions remain unanswered. Relatively little is known about the influence of gender on work engagement. Results obtained from different studies show inconsistent outcomes therefore it is still needed to examine them. In many organizations last different stereotypes about men and women. For instance, women are more sensitive and empathic, and men are more competitive and goal-oriented. There is still inconsistency among studies and no clear answer to the question “Does gender influence work engagement?”. Most studies have focused on work engagement in general, but few studies have investigated the impact of demographic factors such as gender, age, education, or years of employment. There were found various results in different sectors and countries, therefore it is important to pay attention also to these factors. Talking about gender, especially the role of women in different cultures may significantly influence work engagement which should be taken into consideration. This research explores the link between work engagement and gender in retail. The survey was distributed to 3467 participants, of whom 73,1 % (N=2535) participants completed a questionnaire and the data were used in this research. The data collected were quantitative. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions that respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree). The questions in the questionnaire are based on a literature review and well-known surveys: Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) and Gallup Q12 and other questions that focus on engagement in the team, the role of the manager, work itself and the last one focused on the company vision. The result yielded no statistically significant relationships between gender and work engagement. Our findings can be compared to the results of earlier studies that there is no statistically significant difference in work engagement between men and women. On the other hand, some studies argue that there is a difference in work engagement based on gender, either little or in some cases significant. This research has several implications for theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it complements research about demographic factors, in this case, gender, and its influence on work engagement in retail. HRD needs to create a strategy to increase their employees' engagement, but in retail not necessary based on gender differences. This research required addressing several limitations. Firstly, the findings are not generalizable beyond retail. The research was conducted only in one country. Future research will have to confirm whether there are any differences between other sectors and other countries. Among side findings, this research revealed the highest and lowest-rated questions, which need to be further examined in future research.

KEY WORDS: work engagement, gender, demographic factors, employees, retail.

Introduction

Work engagement has received a lot of research attention. Numerous studies have investigated different factors influencing work engagement, but the role of gender has been slightly overshadowed. Therefore, it deserves more research attention. Despite that few studies have investigated the impact of gender on work engagement, there is scant evidence from retail. Organizations, especially human resources, are challenged to improve the understanding of work engagement and different strategies to handle it (Baran and Sypniewska, 2020).

It is crucial to explore deeper gender neutrality in work engagement. Many stereotypes and characteristics about men and women are still present in organizations. Gender roles that stress gender stereotypes point to different behaviors in daily interactions. It is important to understand how individuals embody gender identity (Bohuslava et al., 2018). The literature does not exactly explain the issue of gender inequality in the workplace along with the individual's identification with an organization and their work engagement and awareness of organizational support (Mascarenhas, Galvão and Marques, 2022). The interpretation of gender differences needs to be done in connection with engagement since women and men have other ways of thinking and behaving in the workplace (Woudstra, 2016).

This research's main goal is to better understand the relationship between work engagement and gender in retail. This paper provides an overview of issues relating to gender and work engagement. It is divided into these parts: The first part reviews the existing literature on work engagement and the influence of gender on work engagement. The next part presents the methodology of the research, followed by the results and the last part is dedicated to the limitations of the research and conclusion.

Literature Review

Many scholars focused on work engagement, its implications, advantages, and some also on disadvantages, and factors, which influence work engagement. However, there is less research focusing on demographic factors, such as age, gender or years of experience. On the other hand, gender has been recognized as a moderator in various studies. Some studies confirmed that women pay more attention to interpersonal relationships than men, moreover, women tend to be more emotionally and socially oriented, while men tend to be more task-oriented, competitive and assertive (Tian, Pu and Ren, 2021; Ling and Nasurdin, 2016). It is assumed that work engagement is gender-neutral (Banihani and Syed, 2017), what indicates that the differences in work engagement are assignable to individual characteristics and therefore the women and men can be equivalently engaged (Tshilongamulenzhe and Takawira, 2015). Bahini et al.

(2013) also stated that it is easier to increase the engagement level of men than women. Thome (2013) supported this notion.

The social role theory pointed out how gender identities can influence cognition and behavior, individuals have the tendency to regulate their behavior based on their gender identity (Tian, Pu and Ren, 2021). Research focusing on gender differences in work engagement provides inconsistent and inconclusive findings. Numerous studies found no significant difference in the level of engagement based on gender (Sharma and Rajput, 2021). Schaufeli et al. (2006) also found no significant difference in relations between gender and work engagement in their study conducted in 10 countries. However, it was found that women from South Africa and Spain are more engaged than men. Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017) also did not find any significant differences in work engagement in relation to gender among business-level executives in India. Other studies also confirmed that there is no significant difference between men and women in the context of work engagement (eg. Reissova et al., 2017; George and Joseph, 2014, Sharma, Goel and Sengupta, 2017) or according to Mastenbroek et al. (2014) there appear to be small gender differences.

On the other hand, there are some studies showing that the level of engagement of women is higher in contrast to men (Avery et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Modroño, 2022). Contrary to these findings, Tartari and Salter (2015) found that men are more engaged than women. The same finding confirmed the study conducted by Ling and Nasurdin (2016) and another study by Topchyan and Woehler (2021). As well as Hanggarawati and Kismono (2022) argued in their study, conducted in government organization, a significantly higher work engagement by men.

Furthermore, the level of engagement also depends on the individuals' perception of the benefits received from engagement. These differences in the level of engagement can be caused by disparities in roles, in the family as well as in the workplace (Liu et al., 2017). It is expected that women are more responsible for the family, some studies appear to support the notion that women are more concerned with the emotional aspects of their jobs and draw attention to intrinsic motivators (Mascarenhas, Galvão and Marques, 2022). The work of Fiksenbaum

(2014) demonstrates that female managers tend to prefer their family rather than their career which can cause a conflict between work and family and have a negative effect on the work engagement of the employees. However, according to Adkins and Miller (2016), female managers are better than male managers at engaging the workers thanks to their capability to build relationships, set expectations, boost a positive environment in a team or provide opportunities for their career development.

Methodology

This research examines the relationship between work engagement and gender in retail. This paper was conducted as a part of larger organizational research. The survey's subject is identifying the influence of gender on work engagement in the workplace and provides the answer to the research question "Does gender influence work engagement?" The survey was conducted in April – May 2021 among retail workers in Austria. It was based on Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), Gallup Q12 and other questions that focus on engagement in the team, the role of the manager, work itself and the last one focused on company vision. The first seven questions are from the Gallup Q12 work engagement survey, that cover different areas such as work performance/feedback, own perception of appreciation development, tools/equipment and opportunities to do what they do best. The next four questions are chosen from UWES, highlighting dedication to examine the state of commitment and vigor to examine the level of energy. The survey included a variety of questions, all based on the literature review. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions that respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree).

The survey was distributed to 3467 participants, of whom 73,1 % (N=2535) participants completed a questionnaire and the data were used in this research. The data collected were quantitative.

Results

Our findings can be compared to the results of earlier studies that there is no statistically significant difference in work engagement between men and women. The percentages in Table 1 represent the responses obtained from men and women from the questionnaire.

Table 1 Results in %

Source of question		Survey question	Gender	
Gallup Q12	UWES-9		Male	Female
At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day		At company, I have the opportunity to do what I do best	66,6	67,3
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.		I have the right tools and equipment to do my job	78,5	77,5
There is someone at work who encourages my development.		My manager supports my development	78,3	76,3
I know what is expected of me at work.		I know what my manager expects of me	88,5	88,8
In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.		I am regularly given useful performance feedback by my manager	68,8	66,9
The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.		I feel my work is appreciated at company	79,2	78,9
The last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.		At company, I have good opportunities to develop my competences	75,5	76,3
	I am enthusiastic about my job	I enjoy my work	86,0	87,3
	I find my work that I do full of meaning	I feel I contribute meaningfully through my work	90,5	90,4
	I am proud on the work what I do	I am proud of the work I do	87,1	87,5
	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	My work energises me	73,7	71,8
		I have the freedom to make decisions at work	74,8	73,5
		I enjoy taking on new responsibilities	88,4	87,4
		My colleagues and I collaborate well	93,8	92,4
		My team's goals are clear	87,7	83,6
		My manager makes time for me	84,4	84,4
		My manager behaves in line with our values	82,9	83,2
		My manager holds me accountable for my performance	89,3	88,9
		My manager shares important information with me	81,3	80,7
		I am inspired by the vision of company	84,2	88,2

Source: own

A number of studies confirm these findings. Specifically, Tshilongamulenzhe and Takawira (2015) examined the influence of gender on work engagement

among 154 university employees in South Africa and found no significant relationship between gender and work engagement. Similarly, the study among colleges teachers in India confirmed no significant difference in gender

(Sharma and Rajput, 2021). The study carried out by Hartman and Barber (2019) supported the same finding in their study completed by 153 respondents, which confirmed no significant difference based on gender. Moreover, according to them, it remains unclear what role has an organization role on work engagement. Banihani and Syed (2017) provided a suggestion about gender inequality and indicate that there are some limits to women’s experience of work engagement, such as family responsibilities. Drawing on their study, work engagement may be gendered. For instance, in a division of labor and opportunities to get a more meaningful job, cultural expectations of women, women seen as less valuable or competent. This finding is congruent with the work of Mascarenhas, Galvão and Marques (2022), who found a large effect of identification with the organization on work engagement among women, it means that women need to

be closely connected to their organization to be more engaged. Furthermore, they claimed that women’s engagement is more influenced by organizational support than men’s. Taken altogether, the data presented in their study provide evidence that employees’ behavior differs according to their intellectual and psychic capacities, other demographic factors such as age, gender, and other factors identified with their personal experience. Another interesting finding obtained from research conducted by Tian, Pu and Ren (2021) argue that workplace loneliness can decrease work engagement for both genders, however stronger for women.

Fig. 1 shows the similarity in responses between men and women, which confirms the result of the research conducted and reveals no significant difference in work engagement based on gender.

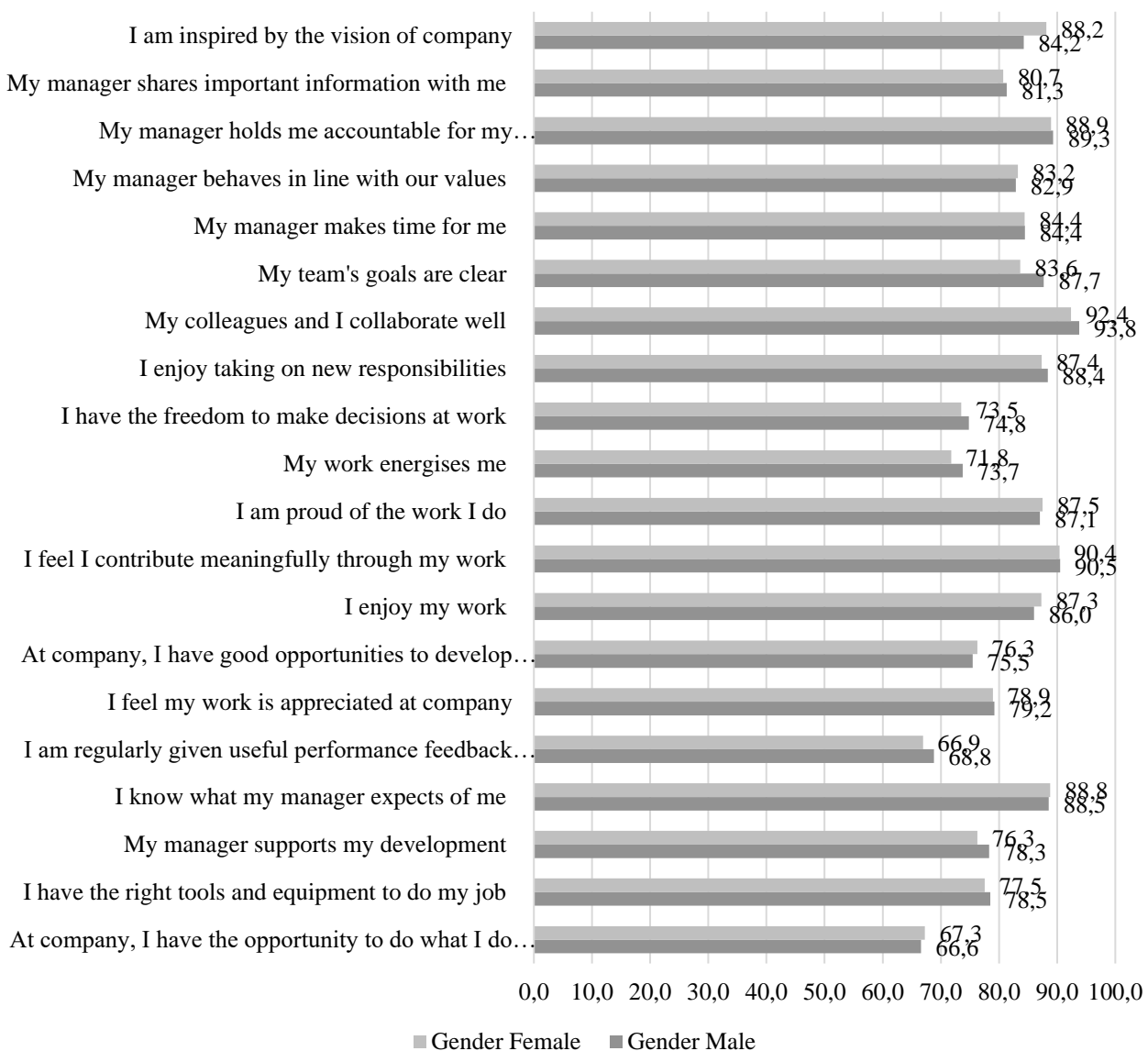


Fig. 1. Graphic illustration of the results

From the graphic illustration, it is visible that the responses among women and men are very similar. The average result by men is 82 % and by women 81.6 %, which means both genders are almost equally engaged.

On the other hand, several findings of this research warrant further discussion, an interesting side finding was the lowest and highest-rated questions. Among men and women, the lowest-rated question was “At company, I

have the opportunity to do what I do best". A possible interpretation of this finding is that the potential of employees is not fully used in the workplace. Overall, it can have various reasons such as poor leadership not being interested in the ability of individuals in their team, or there are not such tasks in their role, so they can do their best. The second lowest-rated question was "I am regularly given useful performance feedback by my manager". Again, a possible reason is obviously the manager of the individual, but it remains questionable why it is so, here we can also interpret that one of the reasons may be time or lack of time, other priorities, or another reason that would need to be examined.

On the other hand, there were the same highest-rated questions among men and women. The first one is "My colleagues and I collaborate well" which may be explained as a positive atmosphere in the team. And the second highest-rated question was "I feel I contribute meaningfully through my work". It would be interesting to explore what is behind this question, but obviously, the employees see their contribution which may increase their level of work engagement.

Conclusion

The research aimed to assess the influence of gender on work engagement. Some previous studies have supported the results of this research that there is no significant difference in gender in relation to work engagement. As mentioned before, the average answer by both genders is about 82 % and both genders are equally engaged based on the survey questions. Therefore, this research does not reveal any new conclusions and confirms that there is not a significant difference in work engagement based on gender. On the other hand, there is still inconsistency on whether gender has an impact on work engagement based on other studies.

Among side findings were found the highest and lowest-rated questions (same for both genders) about the opportunity to do the best at the company, receiving performance feedback (as the lowest-rated) and own contribution at work and collaboration with colleagues (as the highest-rated), which may need more attention and could be examined deeper in future research.

This research has also implications for theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it complements research about demographic factors, in this case, gender, and its influence on work engagement in retail. The present research advances our knowledge in understanding the influence of gender on work engagement. HRD needs to create a strategy how to increase the engagement of their employees, but in retail not necessary based on gender differences. It is important to include the management team of the company in creating this kind of strategy to invite them to be "on board" and thus easier communicate to their teams, and their employees, if they participate and may co-create a strategy on work engagement.

This research required addressing several limitations. The findings are not generalizable beyond retail. The research was conducted only in one country. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic could influence the results of this research compared to prior studies. In addition, this

research used its own developed questionnaire based on UWES-9, Gallup Q12, and other questions, further research should retest the validity of this questionnaire for another sector and/or country. Future research will have to confirm whether there are any differences if this kind of research with similar instruments is used in other sectors, for instance, gastronomy, hotel or bank industry. It would be also interesting to compare other countries in a future study.

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