

Gender and Work Engagement: A Study of Academic Staff in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of gender differences on the work engagement level of the academicians in higher education institutions. The impact is examined through an empirical study involving 123 academic staff members from three universities (University of Kashmir, Central University of Kashmir and Islamic university of science and technology) of Kashmir region, using the independent samples test. The results reveal that the work engagement level of female academicians is significantly better than that of the male academicians in the sample institutions.

Keywords: Work engagement; Gender; Academic staff

Introduction

The organisational performance of service organisations like higher education institutions depends primarily upon the performance of their individual employees. In higher education institutions, the performance of academic staff determines the quality of academic services offered by the institution and is the pivot around which all the educational activities, such as curriculum, evaluation etc., rotate. Therefore, to have an energetic, dedicated and focussed academic staff becomes extremely crucial for a higher educational institution to be effective and productive.

Work engagement leads to improved employee productivity because engaged employees are energized and passionate about the work they do and with passion comes excitement, enthusiasm and productivity [1]. Engaged employees are willing and able to contribute to the success of the company and are, therefore, real assets to an organization [2]. Higher education institutions therefore, need to strive to enhance work engagement of their academic staff because engagement leads to better employee performance and overall organisational productivity.

Owing to its importance, the concept of work engagement is now being extensively researched. However, very few research studies have empirically examined the impact of individual characteristics such as gender of the employees on their level of work engagement. Researchers tend to adopt a blanket approach to the evaluation of the work engagement levels of male and female employees and thereby ignore the influence of gender differences on the said concept. The present study focuses on gender of employees as individual-level variable which is made salient in organizational settings and thus produces distinct experiences for different gender in the organizations. This study, therefore, is an attempt to fill the gap in this field and provide a new perspective to the findings of previous studies on the subject of work engagement.

Literature Review

Schaufeli et al. [3] define employee work engagement as a positive fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. They further state that engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but is a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour. Harter et al., [4] define employee work engagement as the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work. Hewitt [5] defines employee work engagement as the employees desire to speak positively about the organization,

desire to be a member of the organization and tendency to go beyond the expected for the organization. Wellins and Concelman [6] suggest that work engagement is the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance. This coveted energy is an amalgam of commitment, loyalty, productivity an ownership. They further added that it includes feelings and attitudes employees have towards their jobs and their organization. Robinson et al. [7] define engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. They further add that organization must develop and nurture engagement which is a two way relationship between employer and employee.

Employee work engagement refers to the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employee in their jobs [8]. Macey and Schneider [9] looked at engagement attitudinally and behaviourally. They distinguished three broad conceptualizations of employee work engagement, namely state, trait, and behavioural engagement. Sarkar [10] opined that employee work engagement is a barometer that determines the association of a person with the organization.

Common to all these definitions is the idea that employee work engagement is a desirable state, having an organizational purpose. It connotes involvement, commitment, passion, dedication and enthusiasm at work.

Gender and Work Engagement

According to Rothbard [11], there are a number of differences between men and women in terms of how engagement in one role is related to engagement in another role. Specifically, while men experience enrichment from work to family, women experience depletion from work to family. Conversely, while women experience enrichment from family to work, men do not experience linkages from family to work. Gender differences, therefore will influence the level

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Received March 29, 2018; Accepted June 06, 2018; Published June 14, 2018

Citation: Gulzar S, Teli MR (2018) Gender and Work Engagement: A Study of Academic Staff in Higher Education. Arabian J Bus Manag Review 8: 346.

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of work engagement among male and female employees. Gallup's US research found that women tend to find more fulfilment in their jobs and as a result of which are more engaged than men [12]. However, a contrasting finding was reported by a 2006 cross national study, conducted by Schaufeli et al. [13] who surveyed 14,521 employees and found that engagement did not differ significantly between genders. Based on this discussion, we propose our study hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Gender influences the level of employee work engagement.

Research Design and Methodology

The sample

The sample of the study consisted of the respondents from three universities of Kashmir province i.e. University of Kashmir, Central University of Kashmir and Islamic university of science and technology. The elements included professors, associate professors and assistant professors of the aforementioned universities. The selection of sample was governed by the principles of judgemental sampling.

A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to the potential respondents chosen from 3 sample Universities (50 questionnaires in each University), out of which 123 usable responses were received, for a final response rate of 82%.

Data collection tool

Employee work engagement in this research is measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. [3]. This measure is a three-factor scale consisting of seventeen items aiming to measure the three constituting aspects of work engagement i.e., vigour, dedication and absorption. All seventeen items are scored on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always).

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (α) values were used to test the reliability of all the constructs so as to obtain a dependable picture of internal consistency of the measuring instrument. The results of reliability test, given in Table 1, reveal that for all the constructs, alpha (α) values are above the threshold level of 0.7, indicating a good internal consistency.

Results and Discussions

Respondent demographic profile

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' gender. Out of the total 123 respondents, 63 were male (51.21%) and 60 were female (48.78%). An attempt was made by the researcher to have an equal number of male and female respondents in the final sample.

S. No.	Construct	Alpha (α)
1.	Vigor	0.74
2.	Dedication	0.78
3.	Absorption	0.83
4.	Work engagement	0.81

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha values.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	63	51.21
Female	60	48.78

Table 2: Demographic profile of the respondents.

Gender and work engagement

Descriptive and group wise mean scores are presented in Table 3. Mean scores of the female academic members of the sample universities for the three dimensions of work engagement as well as for overall work engagement is slightly higher than the reported mean scores of respondent male academic members. It, therefore, can be said that female academic members/respondents have a higher level of work engagement than their male counterparts.

Further, independent sample test was utilized to ascertain whether the difference in the mean scores of the respondent male and the female employees of the sample universities with respect to work engagement is statistically significant or merely an outcome of a random variation. The results indicate that the perceptual differences of employees are statistically significant when the differences are evaluated on the basis of gender as the p value is less than 0.05 (Table 4), indicating that the female employees are more engaged in their work as compared to the male employees of the sample universities.

Construct	Gender	Mean	Std. deviation
Vigor	Male	4.25	0.255
	Female	4.31	0.244
Dedication	Male	4.10	0.268
	Female	4.14	0.274
Absorption	Male	4.17	0.280
	Female	4.25	0.269
Work engagement	Male	4.17	0.281
	Female	4.23	0.289

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of work engagement (N=123; Male 63; Female 60).

Construct	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means			
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Vigor	0.550	0.459	-1.132	121	0.259	-0.04242
Dedication	1.162	0.282	-1.867	121	0.063	-0.07064
Absorption	1.631	0.203	-1.143	121	0.254	-0.04541
Work engagement	0.016	0.901	-1.998	121	0.047*	-0.05282

*p<0.05

Table 4: Independent samples test (gender).

Conclusions and Implications

In view of the findings obtained in the present study, which has been detailed above, it is quite safe to conclude that the academic staff of the three sample universities under study has reported a fair level of engagement with respect to their work. Further, on basis of the results obtained in the present study through independent samples test, it is quite safe to conclude female academic members have reported higher engagement with their respective work as compared to the male faculty members and the differences in level of work engagement between the two genders is statistically significant. Therefore hypothesis: Gender influences the level of employee work engagement can be safely accepted.

The implication of the research for the HR practitioners is that in order to develop and engage employees, a much more flexible approach is to be adopted. An approach that takes into account the gender differences that exist among the employees and is flexible enough to satisfy the needs and priorities of different groups of employees.

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