

Gender Differences in Employee Engagement

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Abstract

Employee engagement is an important factor for all employers who want to build a stable, innovate company that can increase its market share and prosper. Employees who show high engagement are one of the basic prerequisites for such success. A number of previous studies have looked into the issue of engagement, however, they did not focus on gender differences. Some recent studies have provided multivalent conclusions in this respect. The main objective of this article is to identify whether there are statistically significant gender differences. These differences are identified in all basic areas of engagement i.e. atmosphere in the workplace, satisfaction with management and potential staff turnover. The sample set comprised 315 automotive employees working in blue-collar positions. The results were established and verified using the Mann-Whitney U Test, Friedman's ANOVA, Kendall's coefficient of concordance and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (paired difference test).

Comprehensive analysis showed that no crucial, statistically significant gender differences could be identified. However, it was found that women are more loyal to their employer than men, who tend to be more self-confident and independent. Nonetheless, the attitudes of men and women were found to be the same when it comes to engagement.

Keywords: employee engagement, atmosphere in the workplace, gender differences, potential staff turnover, satisfaction with management.

Introduction

At present, the majority of economically advanced countries are enjoying a period of economic growth and falling unemployment. As a result, many employers are facing a shortage of personnel. Employers understand the importance of human resources for the continued development of businesses and organisations and for maintaining competitiveness. Under the circumstances, it is proving difficult for them to find new staff for job vacancies. Hence, their desire to retain existing employees. Within this context, emphasis is placed not only on their motivation, but also on their level of engagement

because employers believe that engaged employees will help reduce the rate of staff turnover.

This trend is apparent across different industries and countries. For example, Mañas-Rodríguez et al. (2016) analysed the psychometric features of the Spanish equivalent of engagement in the academic environment. Yeh (2014) studied the issue of engagement and satisfaction among employees in Taiwanese airlines. Mohan and Nailini (2016) identified factors which influence employee engagement in hospitals. These factors, from the employees' point of view, included: recognition (Receives recognition for a job performed); job security (Feels secure about the job); concern from management in employees (Believes that management is interested in their employees); pride in their employer (Feels a sense of pride); intention to leave (Does not have any intention to leave for another organisation); and willingness to recommend to others (Proud to tell others about the job).

Although the questions in the questionnaire survey for this research focused particularly on how employees feel at work, how they assess the attitude of their superiors, as well as their loyalty, the inclusion of the issue of job security by other authors is interesting. Yuan and Tetrick (2015), who point out the relationship between performance, job security and engagement, conducted their research in a coal mining company in China. Huang, et al. (2016) suggest that the atmosphere of security relates to satisfaction at work, as well as employee engagement. In their study, they explain this relationship using a social exchange theory. The fact that job satisfaction and employee engagement are completely separate issues has been proven by a number of authors in the past. Alarcon and Lyons (2011), tested models using hierarchical regression. The results showed that the issues have different relationships with individual areas of a person's working life and that job satisfaction and engagement are two independent variables. One of the latest studies conducted by Janine and Crystal (2017) proved there is a relationship between reward, trust and employee engagement. They came to the conclusion that salaries can no longer be the sole motivating factor for organizations if they want to retain talented employees.

Employee engagement is quite rightly given extensive attention because it is crucial for the effectiveness of organisations (increase in productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction and growth in sales/turnover). Engagement is reliably linked with the performance of an organisation (Roberts 2013). Yalabik et al. (2017) similarly found relationships between engagement, satisfaction and performance. However, they paid little attention to prospective gender differences in individual aspects of engagement. The objective of this article is therefore to identify these differences, if any.

Many organisations want to measure engagement, including job satisfaction and pride in being part of the organisation. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has established that good working conditions, relationships with colleagues and line managers, as well as the financial stability of an organisation are factors which play an important role (Cohen 2014). Kwon, Farndale and Park (2016) state that engagement at work is influenced by factors on three levels: national culture (macro level); atmosphere

in the organisation (inter-stage); and quality of relationships between employees and superiors (micro level). Cahill et al. (2015) investigated how job satisfaction, employee engagement and satisfaction with work-life balance are influenced by macroeconomic changes. They established that all the monitored factors are influenced by macroeconomic conditions. Apparently, employee engagement is a crucial factor which influences the performance of companies, however, it can also be a particular indicator of macroeconomic changes.

Materials and Methods

As the research studies above show, employee engagement is a complex issue which is made up of a lot of different attributes. Pursuant to the aforementioned findings, three variables were selected for testing: satisfaction with management; atmosphere in the workplace; and potential staff turnover. In spite of the fact that employee engagement issues has been given extensive attention, past research has often overlooked potential differences between the genders. Some partial findings have produced rather unclear and inexplicit conclusions (Mendiratta 2016; Shukla, Adhikari and Singh 2015; Yadav 2016; and others). The objective of this research was therefore to identify whether there are differences between men and women with regards to the selected variables.

The survey sample consisted of 315 blue-collar employees (of which 207 were men and 108 women) working on production lines in four different automotive companies. The questionnaire contained the 15 questions shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire questions

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Would you leave the company if you were given a comparable offer by another employer?2. Are you currently looking for a new job?3. Are you recognised for good performance?4. Is your superior executive interested in you as a human being?5. Does your superior encourage your development?6. Do you have a say at work?7. Have you considered leaving the company in the last 6 months?8. Are your colleagues willing to perform well?9. Do you have a good friend at work?10. Did you have an opportunity to learn something last year?11. Are you happy with the current employee benefits?12. Do the employee benefits meet your needs?13. Are you happy with the atmosphere among your peers?14. Does the company where you work have a good image?15. Do you find the level of staff turnover excessive?

Source: Authors

Respondents used a scale of 1 - 5 to answer the individual questions i.e. from complete dissatisfaction up to complete satisfaction, or according to the rate of agreement i.e. from definitely not to definitely yes. For questions 1, 2, 6 and 15 the scale was reversed because

Yes responses reflected a negative assessment. The scores for the individual questions (attributes) were subsequently matched to the appropriate variable:

- Satisfaction with management
- Atmosphere in the workplace
- Potential staff turnover

Since each variable did not include the same number of questions (attributes) and therefore responses (scores), the responses for each group (male or female) were represented by the score obtained as the arithmetic mean of the scores of the responses to the individual questions.

The following tests were used for the statistical processing: Mann-Whitney U Test; Friedman’s ANOVA; Kendall’s coefficient of concordance; and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Data were processed in the SW Statistica and SPSS.

Results

The survey focused on whether the assessment of the monitored variables differs in relation to gender.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney Test for the monitored variables according to gender

Variables	U	Z	p-value
Satisfaction with management	10,689.00	0.636670	0.524340
Atmosphere in the workplace	10,454.50	0.942298	0.346041
Potential staff turnover	10,092.50	1.414099	0.157334

Source: Authors

The Mann-Whitney Test did not show any differences between men and women. Hence, it cannot be stated that women assess the variables differently from men. Both groups (i.e. women and men) were subsequently analysed in more detail. Friedman’s ANOVA and Kendall’s coefficient of concordance were applied to the survey results to determine whether the medians of the three monitored variables match or not. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4 (women) and Tables 5 and 6 (men).

Table 3. Concordance of medians for the monitored variables for “women”. Friedman’s ANOVA (N = 108, sv = 2) = 12.33838; p-value = 0.00209

Variables	Average ranking	Sum of ranking	Average	Standard deviation
Satisfaction with management	1.856481	200.5000	3.438889	0.959540
Atmosphere in the workplace	2.263889	244.5000	3.666667	0.758133
Potential staff turnover	1.879630	203.000	3.476852	0.845997

Source: Authors

The ascertained results for the monitored variables indicate that the medians show no concordance. Gender therefore has no influence on the assessment in these three variables. The concordance coefficient with a value of 0.05712 is very small. Paired variables were also tested to establish which variables show the greatest statistical differences. Table 4 shows that there is apparently a statistically significant difference between the variables - satisfaction with management and atmosphere in the workplace and atmosphere in the workplace and potential staff turnover.

Table 4. Wilcoxon test of paired variables for "women"

Paired variables	Number of valid	T	Z	p-value
Satisfaction with management & Atmosphere in the workplace	96	1,415.000	3.336386	0.000849
Satisfaction with management & Potential staff turnover	101	2,470.500	0.355702	0.722064
Atmosphere in the workplace & Potential staff turnover	97	1,625.500	2.70224	0.006887

Source: Authors

The data in Table 4 indicate that women evaluate atmosphere in the workplace statistically significantly better than the other two variables. No statistically significant difference was found between the other two variables, namely potential staff turnover and satisfaction with management.

The same analysis was carried out in the group of "men" as well.

The group of "men" also featured differences in the assessment medians for the three monitored variables, as proved by Friedman's ANOVA. Kendall's concordance coefficient of 0.0392 is low.

Table 5. Concordance of medians for the monitored variables for "men". Friedman's ANOVA (N = 207, sv = 2) = 12.80267; p-value = 0.00166

Variables	Average ranking	Sum of ranking	Average	Standard deviation
Satisfaction with management	1.900966	393.5000	3.385507	0.876667
Atmosphere in the workplace	2.193237	454.0000	3.579710	0.7769391
Potential staff turnover	1.905797	394.5000	3.344605	0.861737

Source: Authors

Men show similar results to women. Men evaluate atmosphere in the workplace statistically significantly better than potential staff turnover and satisfaction with management. Once again, no statistically significant difference was found between the two other variables.

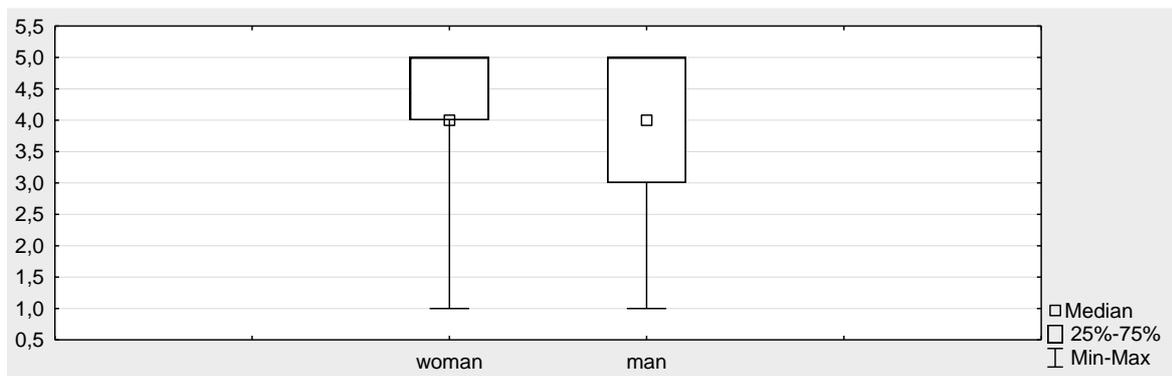
Table 6. Wilcoxon test of paired variables for "men"

Paired variables	Number of valid	T	Z	p-value
Satisfaction with management & Atmosphere in the workplace	185	5,975.000	3.602625	0.000315
Satisfaction with management & Potential fluctuation	190	8,443.000	0.829364	0.406899
Atmosphere in the workplace & Potential fluctuation	181	5,497.500	3.878920	0.000105

Source: Authors

Since the overall analyses of the monitored variables do not suggest any significant differences between the genders, a more detailed analysis was conducted of the individual attributes. The differing assessment by both groups (i.e. men and women) is clear from the boxplot for the question: Are you currently looking for a new job?

Figure 1. Boxplot – differences between medians according to gender



Source: Authors

The Mann-Whitney U Test examined for each question (attribute) whether the responses to the individual questions depended on gender. The test statistics and p-values are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 shows that the responses of men and women only differed with regards to the question: Are you currently looking for a new job? These results could lead to the conclusion that the current working attitudes of men and women to the engagement of front line employees no longer differs. The view of the employer is also seen similarly by both genders. The only demonstrable difference is that women appear to be "more loyal" to their employer. Men are more self-confident and show greater independence.

Table 7. Testing of gender differences with regards to employee engagement

Items	U	Z	p-value
Would you leave the company if you were given a comparable offer by another employer?	10,835.50	0.445734	0.655789
Are you currently looking for a new job?	9,216.50	2.555804	0.010595
Are you recognised for good performance?	9,891.50	1.676066	0.093726
Is your superior interested in you as a human being?	10,528.50	0.845853	0.397636
Does your superior encourage your development?	10,729.50	0.583886	0.559297
Do you have a say at work?	10,412.00	-0.997689	0.318431
Have you considered leaving the company in the last 6 months?	9,890.00	1.678021	0.093344
Are your colleagues willing to perform well?	11,167.00	0.013685	0.989081
Do you have a good friend at work?	10,034.50	1.489691	0.136306
Has anyone spoken about your advancement in the last 6 months?	10,849.00	-0.428140	0.668550
Did you have an opportunity to learn something last year?	11,001.50	0.229384	0.818571
Are you happy with the current employee benefits?	11,088.50	-0.115995	0.907656
Do the employee benefits meet your needs?	10,885.50	0.380569	0.703524
Are you happy with the atmosphere among your peers?	10,696.50	0.626895	0.530728
Does the company where you work enjoy a good image?	10,622.50	0.723341	0.469471
Do you find the level of staff turnover excessive?	10,823.50	0.461374	0.644530

Source: Authors

Discussion

The objective of this article was to establish whether there are differences in employee engagement between men and women. So far, this area of research has provided inconsistent conclusions. For example, Mendiratta (2016) investigated gender preferences in employee satisfaction in pharmaceutical companies. He concluded that remuneration - size of the wage and/or additional benefits - is more important to men, whereas equal opportunities in the workplace and freedom to perform their job are more important to women. However, job satisfaction constitutes only part of the more complex issue of employee engagement. Shukla, Adhikari and Singh (2015) examined the total rate of employee engagement. They established that women show significantly higher engagement than men. Their survey was carried out in only one company (Indian Internet Company) and the research sample group was relatively small (90 respondents). Yadav (2016) tested the engagement of academic staff in India. The survey results did not prove any relationship exists between engagement and gender.

Mache et al. (2016) conducted an extensive survey among physicians. The research did not directly focus on employee engagement, but on the relationship between job satisfaction, stress and conflict. They established significant gender differences in the level of stress, conflict and perception of work load. These factors consequently influence job satisfaction. Beattie and Griffin (2014) found that stress in the workplace can be significantly reduced with the help of increased support from superior managers. This aspect is considered by employees in terms of the assessment of the variable "satisfaction with management". More studies emphasise the importance of management support (Lee and Ok 2015).

One of the positive consequences of employee engagement is the lower rate of staff turnover, which is appreciated by employers. Within this context, the research that forms the basis of this article made an important finding i.e. that women are more loyal to their employer and do not look for a new employer as often as men. Similar issues were researched by Bacea and Bordean (2016). They investigated the most important factors which influence the willingness of employees to stay in a company. They concluded that work environment, fair remuneration, meaningful work tasks and jobs and positive encouragement from peers play an important role.

Dash and Muthyala (2016) investigated the level of engagement in Indian IT companies. Their conclusion was that critical areas of engagement were the assessment and development of performance, encouragement from a manager and effective leadership. Encouragement from a manager was more appreciated by women than men, particularly in providing feedback. Satisfaction with management (i.e. giving recognition and rewards, providing feedback) forms an integral part in building employee engagement. A high rate of engagement consequently increases employee retention (Richman et al. 2008) i.e. if total employee engagement is measured, potential staff turnover will be low. The retention of employees is also influenced by the match between their career wishes and the fulfilment thereof, opportunities for self-development and work-life balance (Coetzee & Stoltz 2015). It would therefore be advisable to include these factors in the comprehensive measurement of employee engagement.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is currently prioritised by employers in all advanced countries of the world as it helps increase company performance, launch innovations, provide personnel stability, and eliminates staff turnover. The objective of this survey was to identify whether there are significant gender differences in front line employees working in the automotive industry in terms of the individual aspects of engagement. It was established using statistical methods (Mann-Whitney U Test, Friedman's ANOVA, Kendall's coefficient of concordance, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test) that no statistically significant differences between the genders could be established for any of the monitored variables i.e. satisfaction with management, atmosphere in the workplace and potential staff turnover.

However, a detailed analysis of the individual attributes of employee engagement established that women do not consider leaving their job as often as men. Hence, they show greater loyalty to their employer. Nonetheless, it was proved that there were no significant gender differences related to employee engagement in blue-collar occupations in the automotive industry.

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