
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYEES AS WORK ENGAGEMENT PREDICTORS: CASE STUDY OF SERBIA

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the correlation between employee engagement, observed through the dimensions of energy, commitment and absorption, with the general demographic characteristics of employees. The sample was suitable and consisted of 826 employees in 16 different organizations in the Republic of Serbia. The results indicate that respondents' general geographical characteristics are only partial predictors of work engagement. The results obtained have an applicative value, because on the basis of them it is possible to conceptualize managerial and organizational measures for establishing desirable measures that would contribute to work engagement.

Keywords

Work engagement, Organization, Employees, Demographic characteristics.

JEL Classification

J00, L00

Introduction

Work engagement is a segment of organizational behavior that can identify a number of significant indicators of successful work behavior such as motivation, commitment, responsibility, interest and others. Different researches have suggested a positive link between employee engagement and organizational performance, such as: employee retention, productivity, profitability, consumer loyalty, and security. The main motive for this research is the position and role of employees in organizations in Serbia, where employees usually do not represent the intrinsic value of the organization, and their human and relational capital is

not used in a way that would contribute to the quality of the organization's business and the quality of life of employees.

Contemporary business planning for the future takes into account the age differences between employees, their characteristics and preferences. Past research has shown that differences between Generation X (born in the period 1965-1980) and Generation Y (born in the period 1981-1994) have been identified with regard to technology, collaboration, work ethic issues and socialization. In the context of technology, Generation X follows trends, such as music at work, high-speed computers, new types of phones, and motivates Generation Y, which look up to Generation X. In the context of collaboration, Generation X limits personal meetings and offers alternatives such as conference calls, videos, e-mails, and web conferences, while Generation Y favors social networks in encouraging team collaboration and knowledge sharing.

In the context of work ethics, Generation X offers the flexibility to work and work from home, and Generation Y accepts new rules such as productivity rather than hours worked on the job. In the context of socialization, Generation X is not exactly pushed to participate in social activities, while the career goals of Generation Y seem to be focused on maximizing social networking (Luthans, 2011). Certainly, differences in work engagement exist and are significant too, especially in cultures that are changing so slowly and whose development is still in its infancy. The contribution of the research can be seen through the improvement of human resources management by establishing desirable internal communication rules and procedures that would allow employees to have clearer behavioral patterns and facilitate integration into the European business value flows.

Review of the scientific literature

Kahn (1990) defines work engagement as the ability to use the personal enthusiasm of employees in their work roles, as simultaneous employment and a kind of projection of a person's preferred style of behavior in work, as well as personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and activity in the performance of a given work roles. By combining cognitive, emotional and conative influences on employees, it is possible to contribute to work engagement. Cognitive interventions help employees understand what they need to know to do their jobs as efficiently as possible. Emotional interventions help employees connect their thoughts and emotions. When people understand the cause of their behavior, they may struggle to let go of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and apathy. Conventional interventions help employees transition from thinking to action. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) point out that employees form their opinions about an organization's relationship to them through policies, strategies, and procedures.

Employee work engagement can also be defined as a measure of emotional and intellectual commitment of employees to their organization and success (Hewitt Associates, 2009). By this definition, employees with higher levels of engagement will contribute more to a high-performance organization. Schaufeli and his colleagues (Schaufeli et al., 2002) defined it as a positive fulfillment of a working state of mind characterized by strength, commitment and absorption. Numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between employee engagement and greater work performance (Bertoncelj, 2010; Dinu, 2016; Cirkvenčič et al., 2017; Shkoler and Tziner, 2020). Several elements of organizational communication influence the improvement of employee engagement. Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) found that managerial role was the key to engaging employees in the organization.

Higher levels of work engagement are also associated with higher levels of employee satisfaction, their loyalty, higher productivity, lower fluctuation, less absenteeism, presentism (presence with fear of losing their job), fewer accidents at work, and better quality of work performed. Work engagement is positively related to job characteristics such as resources, motivators or incentives, as the form of social support of co-workers and superiors,

performance feedback, mentoring, job autonomy, task diversity and training goals (Salanova et al., 2001; 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2003).

Schaufeli and Baker (2010) have proposed a model that considers work engagement as a psychological condition that mediates between the impact of work and personal characteristics on organizational outcomes. Using four independent samples, two of them also showed that work engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and intentions to become involved (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). In addition, various longitudinal studies have shown that high levels of work engagement over time lead to greater organizational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2008; Boyd et al., 2011), more personal initiative and more innovative behavior at the team level (Hakanen et al. 2008), less reported sick leave (Schaufeli et al., 2009), and a better played role at work (Bakker and Bal, 2010).

Possible consequences of work engagement relate to positive attitudes toward work and toward the organization and positive organizational behavior such as personal initiative and motivation to learn (Sonnentag, 2003) and proactive behavior (Salanova et al., 2003). Finally, work engagement again seems to be positively correlated with work performance. For example, a study involving about a hundred Spanish hotels and restaurants found that the level of employee engagement positively affected the service climate in those hotels and restaurants, which in turn predicted both off-staff behavior and customer satisfaction (Salanova et al., 2003).

Research methodology

Research problem

The main problem of the research is to understand the connection and correlation of work engagement with the general demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Research hypotheses

Two general hypotheses have been defined based on the research questions and objectives of the research:

H1 - There is a correlation between work engagement and general demographic characteristics of employees in the surveyed organizations.

H2 - There is a difference in the observed variables with respect to the general demographic characteristics of respondents from different organizations.

Objectives of the research

The goals of the research are to define:

- relations between work engagement and general demographic characteristics of employees;
- difference between respondents with respect to general demographic characteristics;
- and review the possible practical implications of the results obtained.

Research instrument

The survey questionnaire consists of questions related to the general geographical status of the respondents and the UWES questionnaire for measuring employment engagement.

The Employment Measurement Questionnaire is “The Utrecht Work Engagement Questionnaire“ (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003), which consists of 17 statements in the form of a seven-point Likert-type attitude scale. Work engagement is measured across three dimensions: Energy, Commitment and Absorption. The reliability of the scale observed unidimensional is high (Cronbach's alpha is .948).

Sample of respondents

The sample consisted of 826 respondents (52% male, 48% female), from 16 organizations belonging to manufacturing and service companies observed by type of business activity, and by legal form organizations were public and private ownership. Four enterprises are production-private, four belong to the IT sector of private property services, four are private and in services, and four belong to state-owned public enterprises “(table no. 1)”.

Table no. 1 Structure of the respondents’ sample

		Frequency	Percentage %
Age group	25 and less	83	10.0%
	26-35	379	45.9%
	36-45	217	26.3%
	46-60	126	15.3%
	60 and more	21	2.5%
Educational background	Primary school	4	0.5%
	High School	223	27.0%
	Higher education	107	13.0%
	A university degree	492	59.6%
Length of service in the current company	5 years and less	449	54.4%
	6-10	189	22.9%
	11-20	120	14.5%
	21-30	40	4.8%
	31 and more	28	3.4%
Type of business activities	Manufacturing	327	39.6%
	Service	499	60.4%
Legal form of the organization	Public ownership	250	30.3%
	Private ownership	576	69.7%

The survey was conducted by a questionnaire, in a personal contact with respondents with the permission of direct executives in organizations, during breaks or at the end of working hours.

Research results

Descriptive analysis of the results revealed the values of the dimensions of Work Engagement used in research “(table no. 2)”. The degree of demonstration of the measured variables shown in Table 2 displays that the average values of the examined variables differ. The highest expression was displayed through the work engagement dimension Absorption (M = 5.19).

Table no. 2 Descriptive indicators for the variables used (N=826)

	M	SD	Me	Min	Max	Normality measures			
						Z _{Sk}	Z _K	K-S ^a	p
Work engagement	4.91	1.16	5.00	1.38	7	-.48	-5.71	.06	.00
Energy	4.47	1.45	4.67	1	7	-3.72	-2.08	.07	.00
Absorption	5.19	1.04	5.33	1	7	-6.69	2.95	.06	.00
Commitment	4.97	1.42	5.00	1	7	-8.25	0.19	.10	.00

Legend:

a. Lilliefors correction of significance

Me- the median, Sk- skunes, K- kurtosis, K-S – Kolmogorov Smirnov statistik

Differences regarding the general demographic characteristics of the respondents

When it comes to educational background, the results show that more educated people have a statistically higher rating of Work Engagement, Energy, Absorption, Commitment. Persons with more seniority have statistically lower scores on all variables (Work engagement, Energy, Absorption, Commitment) “(table no. 3)”.

Table no. 3 Correlation between examined and general demographic variables determined by the Spearman correlation (N=826)

		Age group	Educational background	Years of service
Work engagement	r	.005	.185**	-.117**
	p	.895	.000	.001
Energy	r	.024	.139**	-.079*
	p	.491	.000	.023
Absorption	r	-.005	.184**	-.133**
	p	.894	.000	.000
Commitment	r	-.008	.158**	-.108**
	p	.813	.000	.002

Legend

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 (2-way level).

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 (2-way) level.

Gender differences were examined using the t-test for independent samples and it was found that there were no statistically significant differences. Descriptive indicators in the form of differences in arithmetic means showed that men gave more answers on all the variables examined except for Absorption. The significance of this variable for female gender can be attributed to gender roles and differences in the nature of two genders “(table no. 4)”.

Table no. 4 Review of results of gender differences analysis using t-test for independent samples (N_M=430, N_F=396)

	Leven test		t-test for independent samples				M	SD
	F	P	t	df	P			
Work engagement	.39	.53	.22	824	.83	Male	4.92	1.14
						Female	4.90	1.17
Energy	1.86	.17	1.08	824	.28	Male	4.52	1.41
						Female	4.41	1.50
Absorption	.02	.88	-.76	824	.45	Male	5.16	1.06
						Female	5.22	1.03
Commitment	.43	.51	.40	824	.69	Male	4.99	1.38
						Female	4.95	1.45

Conclusions

The general demographic characteristics of the respondents proved to be to some extent important for explaining the work engagement concept because the results indicated that more educated persons statistically rated Work Engagement (and the dimensions Energy, Absorption and Commitment) more than those with lower education. The result in itself is interesting because it opens up some other problems that were not the subject of this research. Indicators that employees with a higher level of education are more likely to have higher scores on almost all variables can indicate that employees with a college degree have jobs that require more work engagement.

Persons with more years of service and seniority have statistically lower scores on all variables (Work Engagement, Energy, Absorption and Commitment). With these results, the second hypothesis is partially confirmed. This result is also very important for further analysis, it is especially interesting whether declaring the significance of the measured variables is also related to the work results, or whether it is related to older employees in Serbia who are not considered a significant resource in organizations. Younger employees responds are somewhat expected, because they are early in their careers and need more engagement, are more motivated and interested in the results.

There are at least four reasons why engaged workers do better than non-engaged workers. Engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy and enthusiasm; better health; they create their own business and personal resources and transfer their engagement to others (Schaufeli and Van Rhenen, 2006; Roblek et al., 2020), and this may be why they are more productive. Happy people are more sensitive to job opportunities, more helpful to others, more confident and optimistic (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001). On the other hand, when it comes to non-engaged workers, the causes for non-engagement could be different: the inability of employees to influence decision-making, unavailability of management, lack of commitment to the company, interpersonal relationships, evaluation by management, etc.

Differences between age and other general demographic characteristics are important for the conception of working teams, specific work tasks and policies of the organization that would contribute to the best possible work outcomes of individuals and groups of employees.

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