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POLISH EMPLOYEES. SEX VS. EMPLOYEES' ENGAGEMENT- A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON RESEARCH RESULTS¹

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The determination of employees' engagement attracts significant interest on the part of both management theoreticians and practitioners. The present paper constitutes an attempt at the verification of differences in the level of work engagement and work commitment between men and women. In order to achieve the objective, a study encompassing 2076 employed (47,4 % of whom consisted of women) was designed.

Key words: employees' engagement, work engagement, work commitment, sex.

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СТАТЬ І ЗААНГАЖОВАНІСТЬ ПРАЦІВНИКА: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ НА ОСНОВІ РЕЗУЛЬТАТІВ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ ПОЛЬСЬКИХ ПРАЦІВНИКІВ

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Можливість визначення рівня заангажованості працівників викликає велике зацікавлення серед теоретиків і практиків управління. Зроблено спробу перевірити погляди щодо відмінностей на рівнях work engagement (участі у роботі) і work commitment (зобов'язань у роботі) між чоловіками і жінками. Для досягнення цієї мети було проведено дослідження, в якому взяли участь 2076 працівників (в тому числі 47,4 % жінок).

Ключові слова: участь у роботі, зобов'язання у роботі, стать.

Problem statement

Due to cultural, demographic, social, and economic changes, organisations are faced with new challenges. They become increasingly diversified, and predicting employees' behaviour is hampered. Optimal application of workforce requires a diversified approach towards various employee groups, and a simultaneous development of acceptance and understanding of the need for such an approach. This, in turn, contributed to the emergence of diversity management in HR management.

Diversity management refers primarily to the development of awareness and acceptance of socio-demographic differences in work environment, and undertaking actions enabling the exploitation of these differences to the benefit of the organisation (1,2). Diversity management is based on the belief of

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necessity (but also the possibility) of creating a work environment favourable to all employees, enabling all their skills and abilities to be applied, and all their needs satisfied. Three dimensions of diversity can be determined: 1) internal dimension (race, ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation), 2) external dimension (educational background, geographic location, parental and marital status), 3) organisational dimension (seniority, position, sector, etc.). Each of the dimensions determines visible, and inconspicuous differences among people. The present paper focuses on differences resulting from sex, i.e. from the primary dimension.

Early (pre-1990) studies regarding employees' differences, men vs. women, focused on the discrimination of women at a workplace. Researchers primarily indicated the fact that women were perceived as less efficient than men (e.g. 3), and their earnings were lower than those of men's (e.g. 4). The fact that women as a group, were perceived stereotypically, which contributed to them being discriminated against, was acknowledged. Such widespread discrimination has led to them becoming less committed to organisations than men (5). The review of subsequent (post-2000) studies on sexual diversity indicates that researchers adopted more diversified theoretical contexts, which resulted in a more positive perception of women's situation at a workplace (6). For example, it was determined that sexual diversification of team members increases efficiency in relation to sexually homogenous teams (7). The fact that research results pertaining to the influence of sexual diversity upon group processes, teams' efficiency or behaviour of individuals are significantly diversified, is noteworthy and justifies further studies in this area.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The literature of the subject features numerous definitions of employees' engagement. These include: work engagement, work commitment (in Polish studies frequently translated as organisational commitment), work involvement, job involvement, and employee engagement. Moreover, additional, independent constructs emerge which define the level of work engagement and work commitment (see 8).

Work engagement was initially operationalised in contrast of occupational burnout (9). However, research proved that work engagement constitutes an independent construct negatively correlated with the burnout, but one which cannot be considered its countertype (9, 10). Work engagement is defined as a positive frame of mind which offers satisfaction and is associated with work (8). Three components of the engagement were identified: *vigour*- understood and measured as the level of energy and mental resilience at work, *dedication*- devotion to work resulting from pride with one's own work and identification with it, and *absorption* manifesting in focus on work and difficulties with becoming detached from it. Significant consequences, to both the organisation and the individual, result from work engagement. The relationship between the level of work engagement and performance has been well established (11). Committed employees are more innovative (11) and contribute to the organisation achieving improved financial results (12). Work engagement is also "contagious", and spreads rapidly among employees (13).

Commitment to the organisation is a concept applied by researchers most frequently in order to describe the involvement in the organisation's work. The premise pertaining to a psychological bond emerging between the employee and organisation serves as the basis of the concept (14). Allen and Mayer (14) claim that employees remain in the organisation due to their: (1) desire to remain (*affective commitment*), (2) belief that the cost of leaving the organisation would be too high (*continuance commitment*), (3) sense of a moral obligation to maintain employment (*normative commitment*).

„*Affective commitment*” denotes employees' emotional attachment to the organisation. A high level of such commitment results in employees' identification with the organisation and their devotion to issues associated with it (14). „*Continuance commitment*” is of instrumental character. It originates from the belief that costs of leaving the organisation would be too high, and/or alternative forms of employment do not exist. „*Normative commitment*” is associated with the sense of a moral obligation to maintain employment. It is manifested in loyalty towards the organisation.

Employee engagement is determined by numerous factors. According to Robinson (15, 16), individual differences play a significant part in determining the level of employees' potential engagement. The process of perception, which impacts individual behaviours by assigning meaning and reacting to phenomena, trends, processes occurring in the surrounding environment, seems a key one in this respect.

The process is based upon biological, social, and psychological resources of an individual. Diversification of the individual resources entails the emergence of differences in perception. The diverse level of engagement is a visible consequence of the differences.

Objectives

The objective of the present paper is to determine whether differences in the level of work engagement and work commitment between men and women exist. Results of the hitherto studies are inconclusive in this respect. Some of the studies indicate the lack of differences between men and women as regards the engagement (e.g. 16). Other researchers claim that women are more engaged in work than men (e.g. 17). In order to determine whether sex has impact upon the level of engagement, a study encompassing 2076 respondents was designed.

Two hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis I. There exist statistically significant differences between men and women with regards to both engagement and commitment.

Hypothesis II. A higher level of work commitment and work engagement will be manifested by women.

Materials

The present paper focuses on work engagement and work commitment. The concepts of Schaufeli and Bakker (work engagement), and Mayer and Allen (work commitment) constituted the theoretical basis for the study, whose results will be presented in the paper. Work engagement was evaluated by means of UWES Questionnaire-Utrecht Work Engagement Scale in the 9-item version (18). An adapted Polish version of Mayer and Allen scale was applied in order to evaluate work commitment (19). In both cases, a five-point Likert-type scale was applied.

The study encompassed a purposefully selected respondent group- the professionally active, employed in large or medium companies (57 Polish organisations), specialists in various areas of the organisations' operations. In total 2076 respondents were evaluated. The sample consisted of 985 women (47,4 %) and 1020 men (49,1 %), In 71 cases (3,4 %), answers regarding respondents' sex were incomplete.

The contingency analysis of respondents' replies to the individual items in work engagement and work commitment scales allows the following conclusions to be formulated:

1. Women are more work engaged than men. This is manifested in them becoming immersed in work to the point of forgetting about the world outside it (43,2 % of women, and 34,2 % of men expressed their positive attitude towards the statement). Satisfaction with intensive work was expressed by approx. 75 % of women (74,9 %) and 65 % of men. The least significant difference (3,1pp) was observed as regards the assessment of the swiftness of time-flow while working between men and women.

2. Men identify with problems of organisations employing them more than women do (47,2 % of men, and 41,7 % of women expressed their positive attitude towards the statement). Emotional attachment to the organisation is declared by 61,5 % of men and 59 % of women.

Average scores for men and women as regards work engagement and work commitment dimensions are presented below.

Discrepancies between average scores for work engagement span from 0,07 for dedication to 0,57 for absorption. Women obtained higher scores in vigour and absorption. As regards work commitment, differences between men and women span from 0,04 for normative commitment to 0,24 for affective commitment. In every dimension of work commitment, men obtained higher scores.

The T-test for independent samples was conducted in order to verify the hypotheses. In work engagement, discrepancies in average scores for absorption and affective commitment dimensions proved to be statistically significant. The average score of women in work engagement- absorption is statistically higher than that of men. A reverse situation may be observed in case of affective commitment- men scored statistically higher than women. The comparison of outcome variables: work engagement and work commitment for men and women constituted a next step in the analysis of the study's results. The t-test analysis indicated that the average score of work commitment for men is statistically higher than for women ($t(1999) = -2,048, p < 0,05$). This proves that the hypotheses cannot be acknowledged.

Average scores for men and women as regards work engagement and work commitment

Sex	N	M	SD	
Work engagement – vigour	Female	983	11,26	2,19211
	Male	1016	11,15	2,14693
Work engagement – dedication	Female	984	11,58	2,45049
	Male	1017	11,65	2,41798
Work engagement – absorption	Female	984	11,31	2,18809
	Male	1016	10,88	2,02372
Affective commitment	Female	981	6,73	1,99179
	Male	1016	6,96	2,01136
Continuance commitment	Female	984	3,21	1,26574
	Male	1015	3,31	1,27146
Normative commitment	Female	984	8,23	1,63990
	Male	1017	8,27	1,59022

Conclusions

Studies of directions for development of HRM indicate the necessity of introducing solutions encompassing differences among employees. The necessity arises from demographic, social and cultural changes emerging in organisations. Employees' functioning will be motivated by alterations in family models ensuing from fundamental changes in fertility and marital patterns, growing employment of women (the 21st century has become known as "the age of women"), and societies' ageing processes. The employee of the future is perceived as individualistic, significantly less anchored in familial duties, focused on self-fulfilment, increasingly representing professional groups considered as less attractive/ demanding, the so-called defavourised groups (20). As Jamka states (20): "...for HRM, it poses a requirement of non-discrimination and individualisation of activities as regards personal functions. The superior objective of the optimal application of workforce requires a diversified approach towards various employee groups, and a simultaneous development of acceptance and understanding of the need for such an approach..." Hence, the growing interest in diversity management. The literature of the subject features demands for embracing the integrational model of diversity management (21). The key role here is played by prevention of discrimination, creation of equal opportunities, emergence of conditions for integration based upon knowledge of human resources' diversification in organisations.

The present study was to constitute a basis for determining whether differences between men and women occur with regards to work engagement and work commitment. The review of Polish statistical data indicates that there exist significant differences in how men and women are treated. The difference seems to be acknowledged by the following factors: lower professional activity of women, lower employability of women, higher unemployment rate among women, unequal earnings between men and women², few women occupying executive and board positions in companies. In relation to such an objective situation of women on the labour market, it would seem that their engagement and commitment would be higher than men's, due to their underlying motivation for maintaining their current occupation and proving their "utility" to organisations. However, research results do not confirm such claims. Women's work engagement does not significantly diverge from that of men's, and their work commitment is much lower. This seems to follow Jaupi and Llaci's observations (22), who indicate that among demographic variables, only sex had little influence upon the evaluated employees' engagement. The lower level of work commitment in women requires an interpretation. According to the author of the present paper, it results from wide-spread discrimination of women in organisations manifested in diversification of earnings of men and women occupying the same or equivalent positions, differences in the scope of duties, and a larger share of men occupying executive positions. It seems that the true nature of the lower work commitment stems from these issues.

² According to Eurostat, the discrepancy in the hourly wage for men and women amounts to 6,4%, which places Poland 3rd among the EU member states.

Prospect for further research

From the point of view of management practice, the knowledge of employees' engagement seems critical. In order to meet the expectations of the market, researchers conduct studies focusing on determining sources of employees' engagement. The type of research presented in the current paper ought to be continued for other variables which may potentially impact upon the level of engagement and commitment. As far as differences between sexes are concerned, other variables, such as age, seniority, selected personality features, are worth further enquiry.

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