

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract

Work engagement is quite important for the organizational functioning as it related to dedication and commitment to the workplace. A number of personal and organizational factors are linked to engagement and the understanding of their relations is quite important in finding which employees might need a boost in engagement and how that can be done. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to reveal the demographic differences in work engagement among employees in the private education sector in the Republic of North Macedonia. The research was done on a convenient sample of 130 employees from seven different private education organizations (four universities and three high schools). The engagement was measured using Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The data shows that men show higher levels of work engagement than women especially when it comes to the vigour they put into work. The results also show that the youngest employees show lowest levels of work engagement. The paper discusses the implications and suggests areas for future exploration of the work engagement in the country.

Keywords: *work engagement, private education, gender differences, age differences, UWES*

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Introduction

The existence of companies today is contingent upon having employees who are creative, energetic, active, and those who use their full of capacity for the benefit of the company. All of these characteristics (with one word) mean ‘engagement’ to the workplace (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). Work engagement is a concept related to positive psychology and is connected with mental health or mental well-being rather than mental illness and treatments. Due to this, engagement signifies positivity in the workplace, and connected with this, employees show a higher level of dedication and enjoyment (Baker & Demerouti, 2007). Studying the concept of work engagement is even more important in educational settings as education relies on the teaching staff, their characteristics and their workplace behaviour (Mercer et al., 2010). Studies (Torp et.al, 2018) have found academics have higher workloads and a higher level of work-family conflict. Also, according to Bilge (2006), academics can experience a great level of burnout. Therefore, studying the positive aspects of workplace behaviour and variables is important in promoting more positive workplaces in the sector. This is even more important for private educational institutions that compete on the open market. Referring to this a study in the Republic of North Macedonia found that they face a number of obstacles and some are related to the quality and motivation of the teaching staff (Azizi et al., 2013). The issue is even more important having in mind that the educational sector in the country is undergoing transformation with more and more private educational institutions being opened (Pajaziti, 2012). Some of them tend to provide better training programs for employees, supervisor help, and less authoritative leadership that can be linked with work engagement (Azizi et al., 2013). Therefore, it becomes important to understand the work engagement in the sector. As such the current study provides insight into the level of work engagement among employees in private educational institutions in the country and studies the demographic differences.

Work engagement: antecedents and outcomes

The concept of work engagement was first defined by Kahn (1990) as: “harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Work engagement means positive physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement to work (Kahn, 1990). Maslach and Leiter (1997) argued that work engagement is the opposite definition of burnout. Schaufeli et al. (2002) disagreed with the idea and defined work engagement as: “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour,

dedication, and absorption” (p. 74), thus accentuating the positive nature of work engagement for both the employees and the companies.

Work engagement has mostly been explored as outcome variable in the workplaces. However, some empirical research concluded that work engagement has positive outcomes for the workplaces and employees’ personal lives (Halbesleben, 2010). The most important outcome of work engagement is job performance (Burke, et.al, 2013; Schaufeli 2012). The reason for this is that engaged employees are healthier, have more enthusiasm and they share their engagement with their colleagues as well (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). According to Schaufeli (2012) engaged employees show a high level of positive emotions (happiness, delight) that are associated with learning new skills. They also show lower absence and better physical and mental health. Work engagement meets employees’ personal needs and they become motivated and dedicated. Also, it was found that work engagement is negatively correlated with turnovers which mean employees usually do not have the desire to quit their jobs. Additionally, Burke, et.al (2013) concluded that engaged employees have less family-work conflict than non-engaged employees. Engaged employees use their full set of skills, not only for productivity but also for problem-solving, developing creativity, interpersonal communication, and other strategies. The workplace for engaged employees is fun and positive place not just for the engaged employees but to everybody around them (Taris, Schaufeli & Shimazu, 2010).

Employee engagement increases when the job is more valuable for employees (Sinclair, 2021). Management and human resources departments play a huge role in work engagement because if they provide efficient social support, supervisor support, performance feedback, adult-learning environment, and other facilities, workers’ enjoyment, productivity, and performance level increase (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). Hence, the job demands-resources theory, proposes that employees’ job performance is related to both personal characteristics and job characteristics (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Dimensions of work engagement

According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), there are three dimensions of work engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption.

Vigour is connected with a high energy level and strong mental health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In addition, vigour is important for work engagement because it refers to workers’ positive emotions and feelings which lead them to experience emotional energy, cognitive peace, and physical strength. Vigour is connected with motivation, job performance, and organizational effectiveness

(Shirom, 2010). It is also the opposite concept of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Meanwhile, dedication refers to strong involvement that brings enthusiasm, a feeling of significance, and challenge (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Dedication means commitment, passion, loyalty, and inspiration. Engaged employees are enthused about the workplace, they feel valued and feel that they have all the opportunities in the workplace to show their creativeness (Robinson, 2017). Dedication is also known as the opposite of cynicism (a concept of burnout) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Lastly, preoccupation is a state of being occupied and fully concentrated on the work and work activities. Engaged employees cannot detach from work, and for them, time passes immediately (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Absorption is significantly connected with attention and intrinsic motivation, because external awards do not satisfy engaged employees. Additionally, absorption is known as the opposite of detachment or withdrawal (Robinson, 2017).

Gender and work engagement

Workplaces are interested more in critical thinking, rationality, aggressiveness, and other personal characteristics that are usually linked with males. It is accepted that job performance is increased by these characteristics; thus, job evaluations are usually created around traditional values and beliefs. Work engagement sometimes might be deceptive, because those employees who have personal responsibilities (e.g., having a family) might not compete in the gendered workplaces. Due to these assumptions, Banihani, Lewis & Syed (2013) argued that it might be easier for males to show higher levels of work engagement than females due to the nature of the gendered workplaces and personal responsibilities outside the job places. Similarly, Kong (2009) asserted that there are gender differences in work engagement and males show higher vigour and absorption than females. Contrary to this, Tshilongamulenzhe & Takawira (2015) concluded that there are no gender differences in work engagement and work engagement level is not connected with gender. However, in the academic sector, a study by Gulzar & Teli (2018) indicates that females in academia are more engaged than males. Based on the previous studies the expectation is that males will show higher levels of work engagement in this study as well.

Age and work engagement

According to Kim & Kang (2016), age is positively correlated with emotional regulation, which means older employees have a higher tendency to control

their emotional state. Age is also positively connected with career identity, so, these two elements bring work resources by getting older. These resources teach the employees to operate the work demands, and thus, enhance the work engagement. Due to this connection, it was found that older employees are more engaged than younger employees. Also, according to Haley (2012) and Douglas and Roberts (2020), older employees are more dedicated to their work. Nevertheless, Sarkisian et al. (2011), concluded that there is no significant correlation between work engagement and age group. Based on the previous findings the study expected to find differences in work engagement between the age groups with older employees being more engaged than younger employees.

Work experience and work engagement

New graduate employees have higher levels of emotional exhaustion that is connected with a higher level of burnout; which is an opposite concept of work engagement. Also, this exhaustion can affect inexperienced employees' effectiveness which lowers vigour and dedication. Bjarnadottir (2011) found that practiced employees had more work effectiveness that was impacted by work engagement. In addition, it was found that more years of nursing professional experience was correlated with higher work engagement (Bamford, Wong & Laschinger, 2012). Also, a study by Sharma, Goel & Sengupta (2017) concluded that work engagement is strongly and positively correlated with work/professional experience. However, one study specifically done on teacher population did not find a link between length of work experience and engagement (Topchyan & Woehler, 2020). Therefore, in light of the findings of the majority of previous studies, the study also expects to find differences based on work experience with more experienced employees showing higher levels of engagement.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

This research is conducted using a sample of employees from private education sector in North Macedonia, including three private high schools and four private universities. The participants received the questionnaire in printed form or as Google form and the research took part between January and March 2022. In both versions the information about the research was the same. The data was analysed using SPSS version 20.

The sample consists of 130 participants. The demographic profile is given in Table 1. As can be seen majority of the participants were female (63.8%) and a

majority of them work at universities (68.5%). When it comes to age, most of the participants were between 25-34 years old (43,8%), and least numerous groups were participants over 55 years old (4,6%). Majority of them had between 1 and 5 years work experience (36.9%) followed by those with over 10 years of experience (23.8%).

Table 1.

Demographic data

Gender	Male	47 (36.2%)
	Female	83 (63.8%)
Age	18-24	13 (10%)
	25-34	57 (43.8%)
	35-44	42 (32.3%)
	45-54	12 (9.2%)
	Over 55	6 (4.6%)
	Work experience in the sector	Less than a year
	1-5 years	48 (36.9%)
	6-10 years	27 (20.8%)
	More than 10 years	31 (23.8%)
Sector of employment	High school	41 (31.5%)
	University	89 (68.5%)

Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part provided demographic data and the second part utilized the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to measure work engagement. This scale is constructed by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003), and the validity and reliability of the scale are approved also by Wickramasinghe, Dissanayake & Abeywardena (2018) with a test-retest reliability assessment. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) includes seventeen statements that measure vigour, absorption, and dedication dimensions of work engagement. Vigour and absorption scales have six items each and the other five items measure dedication. There is no reverse coding in any scale. The instrument utilizes Likert type answers with seven possible answers ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The original language of the scale is Dutch; however, it is translated into eleven different languages like German, Chinese, Portuguese, French, English, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian, Spanish, Greek, and Russian. In this research, the English version (with seventeen statements) of the scale was

used. The participants filled the questionnaire in English as that is the version that has been previously tested for clarity of the translation.

The instrument has good psychometric properties, such as good factor's structure (acceptable fit scores for the three-factor structure), acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha between .81 and .95 for the three sub scales depending on the language used) and good construct validity (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). However, the internal consistency in this study has been tested using Cronbach Alpha. As can be seen in Table 2 all scales have acceptable levels of reliability coefficients of over 0.7 for each scale and item-total correlation of over 0.4 for each item of the respective scale (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 2.
Reliability of UWES

Overall engagement	Vigour	Dedication	Absorption
0.93	0.84	0.86	0.85

Results

To have an overview of the data the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3 for total engagement as well as the three dimensions: vigour, absorption and dedication. What can be seen is that the participants show high levels of engagement. The one sample t-test for all variables show that the mean difference between the obtained scores and the theoretically expected scores are statistically significant

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics of overall work engagement and its dimensions

	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Work Engagement	130	8	102	73.75	15.69	10.36	129	.000
Vigour	130	2	36	25.12	5.91	7.95	129	.000
Absorption	130	3	36	24.72	6.21	6.82	129	.000
Dedication	130	3	30	23.92	4.79	15.3	129	.000

In order to understand whether there are any gender differences in work engagement an independent sample t-test was used. The results of the test are shown in Table 4. The results show that there are differences between the genders with males reporting higher overall work engagement than women. The score for the males ($M = 77.4$, $SD = 13.6$) is statistically significantly different ($t(128) = 5.72$, $p = .00$) than the score for female ($M = 71.7$, $SD = 16.47$). There is

also statistically significant difference when it comes to the reported vigour. The score for males ($M = 27$, $SD = 5.03$) shows statistically significant difference ($t(128) = 2.92$, $p = .006$) than the score for females ($M = 24.06$, $SD = 6.12$). There is no statistically significant difference between the reported levels of absorption and dedication between the males and females.

Table 4.
T-test for work engagement and gender

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Work engagement	Equal variances assumed	10.36	128	.045	5.72
Vigour	Equal variances assumed	7.95	128	.006	2.92
Absorption	Equal variances assumed	6.82	128	.165	1.58
Dedication	Equal variances assumed	15.31	128	.163	1.22

To understand the differences between work engagement of employees in different age groups, one-way ANOVA (Table 5) was used with Tuckey HSD post-hoc test for multiple comparison between the groups. The study found a statistically significant difference in work engagement between different age groups ($F(4,125) = 2,67$, $p = .04$). The post-hoc comparison showed statistically significant difference ($p = .05$) between the employees aged 35 to 44 ($M = 74.83$) and those aged 18 to 24 ($M = 65.92$). There were no statistically significant differences between the other age groups.

Table 5.
One-way ANOVA for work engagement and age

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2497.988	4	624.497	2.670	.035
Within Groups	29240.135	125	233.921		
Total	31738.123	129			

To understand the differences between different ages in relation to the three dimensions of work engagement a series of one-way ANOVA tests were used shown in Table 6. As can be seen the only statistically significant difference is

found for the dimension absorption ($F(4,125) = 2.437, p = .05$) and there were no statistically significant differences for the other two dimensions based on employees' age. Therefore, post-hoc Tuckey HSD test was done for the dimension absorption. The only statistically significant difference ($p = .03$) was found between the age group 35-44 ($M = 26.57$) and the age group 18-24 ($M = 20.92$). There were no statistically significant differences between the other age groups.

Table 6.
Dimensions of work engagement and age

		<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Vigour	Between Groups	317.424	4	79.356	2.372	.056
	Within Groups	4181.845	125	33.455		
	Total	4499.269	129			
Absorption	Between Groups	360.041	4	90.010	2.437	.050
	Within Groups	4616.428	125	36.931		
	Total	4976.469	129			
Dedication	Between Groups	205.266	4	51.316	2.334	.059
	Within Groups	2747.965	125	21.984		
	Total	2953.231	129			

To understand the differences between the employees with different work experience an independent one-way ANOVA was done. The results presented in Table 7 reveal that there are no statistically significant differences between the reported work engagement levels between employees with different length of work experience ($F(3,126) = .124, p = .95$).

Table 7.
Independent one-way ANOVA for work experience

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	93.545	3	31.182	.124	.946
Within Groups	31644.578	126	251.147		
Total	31738.123	129			

Discussion and conclusion

Work engagement seems to be an important variable in the organizational settings as it is connected to a number of positive organizational outcomes (Schaufeli, 2012). The engagement is connected to many organizational and individual variables and studying their relation with engagement can contribute not only to understanding which type of employees are more engaged, but also where

interventions are needed and what type of interventions are needed. This issue is even more important in countries such as the Republic of North Macedonia where such research is sparse. Some previous studies (Kazandzieva & Blazevska Stoilkovska, 2018) have been done in the ICT, but the issue of engagement in educational institutions remains largely unexplored.

The current study generally found high reported levels of work engagement among employees in private educational institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia. This finding is encouraging as high levels of engagement suggest that employees value their work and feel motivated, dedicated and satisfied with their jobs and the work that they do at their respective organizations.

The results of the research show that there is a significant difference related to work engagement based on gender. The study found that men have higher level of overall work engagement than women. The result is similar to Banihani, Lewis, and Syed (2013), and Kong (2009). The reasons for such findings can be multifactorial, but it can be assumed that women who have to balance their professional and private engagement more, reaching higher levels of work engagement might be difficult. There was also, a significant difference in vigour based on gender, with men showing higher level of vigour which is again in line with previous studies (Kong, 2009). This means men might have higher level of energy, higher mental and physical resistance, as well as lower emotional exhaustion or burnout, and physical tiredness. This might support the assumption that due to personal responsibilities of female employees which leads them to have cognitive and physical fatigue, they might show lower level of energy in workplaces than men.

The study also found a significant difference in work engagement based on age in line with the expectations and in line with the findings of previous studies (Douglas & Roberts, 2020; Haley, 2012; Kim & Kang, 2016). The lowest levels of work engagement were found among the youngest employees and that difference in overall engagement was significantly different from the 35-44year old workers. For the youngest employees, the work might be emotionally exhausting and their career identity might not be developed as well as among older employees (Kim & Kang, 2016) which might explain their lower engagement levels. The results also show that there is a significant difference between level of absorption based on age. The younger employees might be less concentrated in their work, and time passes slower for them. They might feel more detached from their work than older employees.

Lastly, according to the results the assumption that more experienced employees show higher level of work engagement than less experienced employees is not supported because there is no significant difference between work engage-

ment and work experience. It can be concluded that work engagement does not vary by the length of professional experience and this finding is in line with some of the previous studies (Topchyan & Woehler, 2020). The reason of this might be initiate by the nature of the workplaces and organizational variables like colleague and leader support, human resources' training programs, and other positive aspects related to work engagement. This is in line with some previous studies (Kazandzieva & Blazevska Stoilkovska, 2018) that show that the elements of the work itself, the organizational variables as well as some individual variables are predictors of work engagement.

The limitations of the current research stem from the research approach and the sample. Namely the questionnaire was administered on English which limited the sample only to those employees who are quite competent in using English. This approach although chosen to ensure that a standardized translation of the questionnaire is used might mean that some questions were not adapted to the population of the study. In addition, the sample was convenient one using only 7 private educational institutions which might not represent the whole population. However, as this is one of the first studies of this kind in the country, the results can serve as a starting point for future interventions and research.

As conclusion for supporting the employees to increase their level of engagement it will be valuable if private educational institutions provide better support for female employees mostly related to providing better support for work-life balance to increase their engagement levels. In addition, better support needs to be provided to younger employees. They might need more support in starting their careers to enable smoother transition between their education and their career.

Future research should extend and build on the current study as well as explore additional variables. In the future studies should try to utilize larger samples that might be representative as well and include employees from state educational institutions as well. The future studies should also focus on exploring other personal and organizational variables to better understand the factors related to engagement and provide better basis for interventions targeting the engagement of employees.

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ДЕМОГРАФСКИ РАЗЛИКИ ВО РАБОТНАТА АНГАЖИРАНОСТ НА ВРАБОТЕНИТЕ ВО ПРИВАТНИТЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИ ИНСТИТУЦИИ ВО РЕПУБЛИКА СЕВЕРНА МАКЕДОНИЈА

Ана Томовска Мисоска
Хатиџе Мучи

Кратка содржина

Ангажираноста на работното место е многу важен аспект на организациското функционирање заради поврзаноста со посветеноста кон работното место. Бројни индивидуални и организациски фактори се поврзани со ангажираноста и со разбирањето на таквите врски и тоа е особено важно во откривање на вработените на кои им треба поттикнување на ангажираноста како и начините на кои тоа може да се постигне. Токму затоа ова истражување се фокусира на откривањето на демографските разлики во ангажираноста на вработените во приватниот образовен сектор во Република Северна Македонија. Истражувањето вклучува пригоден примерок од 130 вработени од седум приватни образовни институции (четири универзитети и три средни училишта). Ангажираноста е мерена со помош на Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Наодите укажуваат на повисоко ниво на ангажираност кај мажите отколку кај жените особено кога станува збор за вложената енергија. Резултатите исто така укажуваат на најниско ниво на ангажираност кај најмладите вработени. Трудот ги дискутира импликациите и сугерира области кои треба соодветно да се истражат во врска со ангажираноста на вработените во земјата.

Клучни зборови: *работна ангажираност, приватно образование, родови разлики, возрастни разлики, UWES*