

Demographic Factors towards Employee Engagement of Lecturers in the State Universities of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Employee engagement is one of the key determinants fostering high levels of employee performance, as constantly shown in a number of studies. University lecturers are playing a vital role in shaping the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the most intelligent young generation in the country. Accordingly, analyzing whether there are influences of demographic factors for determining the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers was the primary purpose of the present research. Three hundred and eighty-eight government university lecturers were selected as prescribed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) using stratified sampling method with representation of all the government universities in Sri Lanka. Findings showed that there are no differences of employee engagement among four groups of educational qualification and two types of genders. Findings further elaborated that the level of employee engagement is different in terms of four types of age groups.

Keywords: Demographic Factors, Employee Engagement, Lecturers

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has been defined as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances" by Kahn (1990). Employee engagement is one of the key determinants fostering high levels of employee performance, as constantly shown in a number of studies (Mone and London, 2010). Employees with high level of engagement are vital assets to the

organization within competitive business scenario. Every organization should select employees with having high level of employee engagement as they are likely to be able to work effectively for being excellent within their role and engagement directly linked with job satisfaction, employee commitment, turnover intention and organizational citizenship behavior (Saks, 2006).

Highly engaged employees are found more committed and motivated than others. High employee engagement makes an individual the sense of worth

his/her existence in the organization and this will lead to increase the organizational performance as well. Increasing job performance is an undesirable outcome of employee engagement (Judge, Bono & Thoresen, 2003).

1.1 Research Problem

University lecturers are playing a vital role in shaping the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the most intelligent young generation in the country. If the lecturers are more engaged and committed to perform their responsibilities that will lead to increase the quality of both teaching and learning processes. When considering the Sri Lankan context, there are 15 government universities and around 4900 lecturers are working in Sri Lanka according to the University Statistics published by University Grant Commission at the end of 2016.

Through personal observations and having discussions with the heads of the departments and deans, the researcher found that government university lecturers have not engaged evenly to their works. But the working conditions, compensation and rules and regulations are not significantly different in each university. However, the composition of demographic profiles of the government university lecturers such as age, gender and educational level were found to be different. Accordingly, researcher tends to analysis whether there is an influence from demographic factors for determining the level of employee engagement.

Piyasena and Kottawatta (2018) have studies that the impact of employee engagement on the level of commitment of non-academic staff members instate universities of Sri Lanka due to the problem of different levels of engagements of the non-academic staff members. However, similar study has not been conducted regarding the level of employee engagement of the academic staff members in state universities of Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, present research was designed to analyze whether there are influences of demographic factors for determining the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers. Findings of the present research will be benefitted to planners, educational policy makers and administrators in Sri Lankan higher education sector.

1.2 Objectives

Primary purpose of present study was analyzing the association between demographic factors (age, gender and educational qualification) and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. Basic objectives of the present research can be listed as follow.

1. To determine the association between age and employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka
2. To determine the association between gender and employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka
3. To determine the association between educational qualification and employee engagement of

government university lecturers in Sri Lanka

1.3 Hypotheses

Following three hypotheses were used to test the empirical data which are collected on the present research.

1. Alternative Hypothesis 1 (H₁ 1): There is an association between type of gender and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.
2. Alternative Hypothesis 2 (H₁ 2): There is an association between different ages and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.
3. Alternative Hypothesis 3 (H₁ 3): There is an association between educational qualification and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.

1.4 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement topic was emerged as an attractive concept over the past two decades. Employee engagement has been defined by Maslach and Leiter (1997) a concept characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy. According to Vance (2006), the definition of employee engagement varies across different researchers, consultancies, and organizations. In his study, engagement has been defined as "the extent of employees' commitment, work effort, and desire to stay in an organization".

Further, Kahn (1990) has been explained that psychological

conditions of employee engagement can be divided into three elements as meaningfulness (sense of experiencing return on investment of self in role performance), safety (sense of being capable to portray without worry of negative consequences to self-image, status or career) and availability (sense of ability to contribute physical, emotional and psychological resources in role performance).

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) employee engagement comprised with three sub dimensions called vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high level of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties, dedication refers to being involved in one's work, finding meaning in one's work, being challenged, and experiencing sense of enthusiasm, inspiration and pride and absorption refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)

On the other hand, employee disengagement is the opposite side of the employee engagement. Employee disengagement refers to the harmonized withdrawal of an individual during role performance which characterized by a lack of connections between physical, cognitive, and emotional with his job in an organization (Kahn, 1990).

However, Gallup (2002) has been identified three types of people in

organizations based on the level of employee engagement. They are engaged employees, not engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees. Engaged employees are giving continuous efforts and dedication to give excellent service. Not engaged employees attempt to fulfill the basic given tasks rather than the goals of the organization. Actively disengaged employees are most dangerous employees as they are not performing their duties as well as demotivating the performance of other employees ultimately reducing the performance of entire organization. In order to reduce employee disengagement leaders should create a value system, bridge the gap between expectations and realities and eliminate organizational politics (Rao ,2017).

Engaged employees are creating numerous benefits to the organizations. Highly engaged workforce causes to increase employee retention, employee loyalty, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational performance, productivity, and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, it helps to reduce employee turnover. Eventually, it paves the way to improve shareholders' value of the organization (Rao ,2017).

Moreover, employee engagement is a sustainable source of creating competitive advantage for the organizations (Macey, Schneider, Barbara & Young, 2009). People is one factor that cannot be duplicated or imitated by the competitors and is considered the most valuable asset if managed and engaged properly

(Anitha, 2014). Employee engagement has been found positively correlated with significant job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as negatively correlated with turnover intentions (Saks, 2006). Not only that but also employee engagement has been found positively correlated with employee health and well-being as well. Accordingly, employee engagement causes to reduce the level of employee work related anxiety, depression and stress (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011).

2. METHODS

2.1 Sampling

The present research was used stratified sampling method for selecting the sample as there is a heterogeneous population taken into account in the present research. The population of the present research comprised with total number of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. Total population comprised with different strata levels such as 15 government universities as well as different educational qualification categories of lecturers (Bachelor Degree with Post Graduate Diplomas, Master Degree & MPhil and Doctoral Degree).

The sample of the present research has been designed considering the different strata levels of the population. According to the Morgan's table produced by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) in order to determine the sample size for a finite population, 357 has been given as the appropriate

sample size for the population of 5,000. Even though the population of the present research was 4,900, researcher has decided to select 400 as the sample in order to increase the generalization of the findings as well as for allowing invalid and incomplete questionnaires which can be given by the respondents. Accordingly, following equation has been utilized to calculate the sample size of each category proportionately.

Sample size = (Population of each category / 4900) × 400

Even though 400 questionnaires were distributed only 388 completed questionnaires were received. Accordingly, actual sample size of the present research is 388 government university lecturers.

A questionnaire with two sections was applied to collect primary data of the present research. Section one was designed to collect information regarding gender, age and educational qualification of the respondents. Section two consisted with measures of employee engagement. Level of employee engagement measured through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) comprised 17 items to measure three subscales of employee engagement; vigor, dedication and absorption. Out of 17 items included in the questionnaire, six items designed to measure vigor, five items measuring dedication and six items measuring absorption. According to Saeed, Yousafzai & Engelen (2014) reliability value obtained for this scale was $\alpha=0.74$.

Secondary data for the present research has been collected from the University Statistics – 2016 published by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka.

2.2 Methods of Data Analysis

The data gathered from 388 respondents of the present research were analysed from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. In order to determine whether there are significant differences of employee engagement with gender independent samples t-test was performed. Accordingly, Alternative Hypothesis 1 ($H_1 1$): There is an association between type of gender and the level of employee engagement of Government University lecturers in Sri Lanka were tested using independent samples t-tests.

In order to determine whether there are significant differences of employee engagement among different age categories and different levels of education one – way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted. Accordingly, Alternative Hypothesis 2 ($H_1 2$): There is an association between different ages and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka and Alternative Hypothesis 3 ($H_1 3$): There is an association between educational qualification and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka were tested using one – way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Results of Alternative Hypothesis 1 (H₁ 1)

In order to test alternative hypothesis 1 (H₁ 1): There is an association between type of gender and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka, an independent samples t-test was performed. It was tested whether there is a significant difference of employee engagement among male and female lecturers. The results of the statistical analysis presented in Table 1.

Table 1. T-test for Gender and Employee Engagement

Variable	Groups	n	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Employee Engagement	Male	126	2.23	0.590
	Female	262		

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Results of the t-test indicated that test is not significant, $t(388) = 2.23$, $p > 0.05$. Accordingly, hypothesis 1 is rejected and it was revealed that there is no significant difference of employee engagement among male and female government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.

3.2 Results of Alternative Hypothesis 2 (H₁ 2)

In order to test alternative hypothesis 2 (H₁ 2): There is an association between different ages and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri

Lanka, one – way ANOVA test was performed. It was tested whether there is a significant difference of employee engagement among the lecturers in different age groups. The results of the statistical analysis presented in Table 2.

Findings provided the evidence to accept hypothesis 2. Accordingly, lecturers' employee engagement is different among four age groups, $F(3, 388) = 6.27$, $p < 0.05$. In other word age have an impact on employee engagement of lecturers. Findings further proved that lecturers above 60 ages are more engaged than other three categories of ages which are below to 60 ages. Post Hoc test revealed that the mean values of the employee engagement in different age levels indicated that the level of employee engagement has been increased gradually when increasing the age of the lecturers.

Table 2. ANOVA test for Ages and Employee Engagement

Variable	Age Groups	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Employee Engagement	21 - 30	17	214.7	6.27	.002
	31 - 40	11	6		
	41 - 50	1	224.2		
	51 - 60	13	3		
	Above 60	4	227.3		
		12	5		
		0	228.9		
	6	8			
			232.57		

Source: Survey Data, 2017

3.3 Results of Alternative Hypothesis 3 (H₁ 3)

In order to test alternative hypothesis 3 (H₁ 3): There is an association between educational qualification and the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka, one – way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. It was tested whether there is a significant difference of employee engagement among the lecturers with having different educational qualification. The results of the statistical analysis presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA test for Level of Education Qualification and Employee Engagement

Variable	Level of education	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Employee Engagement	Bachelor Degree & PGD	52	209.32	5.38	0.160
	Master & MPhil	147	207.29		
	Doctoral Degree	109	206.71		

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Findings provided the evidence to reject alternative hypothesis 3. Accordingly, lecturers' employee engagement is not significantly different among different educational qualifications.

4. DISCUSSION

Findings of the testing for association between gender and employee engagement were revealed that there is no significant difference of employee engagement among male and female government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.

However, according to the findings of the study conducted in order to analyse the factors affecting to employee engagement of the lecturers, Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa (2009) revealed that the most important factor for influencing employee engagement as age (being older) and second important factor is gender. Same research further, found that older female academics are showing more engaged behavior in order to be recognized as valuable human capital to the universities after fulfilling their basic roles in the family. Female academics are turn to be devoted employee as well as uplift their career development. The reason for the contradictory findings might be cultural, social environmental factors of the country the research was carried out. It is because the females in Sri Lankan culture have to play dual role in their daily life. Females have the total responsibility to fulfil all the household activities and taking care the children and older parents in the family. In Sri Lankan culture, females are considered as the responsible persons for the well- being of the children and the whole family.

Therefore, Sri Lankan females have to scarify their time, energy and efforts to the family rather than their career obligations.

Accordingly, mechanisms for creating conducive education environment, should be provided for all the lecturers without considering their gender as gender is not a determinant of employee engagement.

Based on the findings of testing the association between age and employee engagement, it was found that teachers' employee engagement is different among five age groups and lecturers in above 60 age group are more engaged than others and lecturers who are 21-30 age group are less engaged than others. Accordingly, age is a determinant factor of employee engagement of the government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. It was revealed that when the lecturers getting older, level of engagement for the profession is increasing and the intention to leave the organization is low. The reason might be it is difficult to find alternative job opportunities in the similar profession when getting older in a developing country like Sri Lanka. There are limited opportunities available for government university lecturers to joint to the private universities, due to few well established private universities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, lecturers may more engage with the prevailing job when they are getting older. On the other hand, findings have been proved that the level of engagement of young government university lecturers in Sri Lanka is lower than others. The reason may be the young lecturers can find lot of alternative opportunities and scholarships in local as well as foreign universities. Accordingly, it is necessary to increase the level of commitment of young lecturers through various motivational methods such as proving regular training and development opportunities and providing more attractive reward system and increments and incentives based on the performance of the lecturers in order to retain them within

the government universities to create better service to the country.

Similarly, according to the findings of the study conducted in order to analyse the factors affecting to employee engagement of the lecturers, Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa (2009) revealed that the most important factor for influencing employee engagement as age (being older). It is also in lined with the studies carried by Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2011).

Findings of the alternative hypothesis 3, was revealed that teachers' employee engagement is not significantly different among different educational levels. In other word levels of education have not an influence in determining employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka.

Findings of the present research showed that the level of employee engagement among young lecturers is lower than the older lecturers. In addition to that problem, currently, Sri Lanka is experiencing the brain drain of young lecturers as they are attracting to the job opportunities and scholarships at foreign universities with fascinating working environments and attractive remuneration packages. Therefore, it is necessary to use different mechanisms in order to increase the level of employee engagement of young government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. When considering the factors affecting to employee engagement, Anitha (2014) has identified seven basic determinants which are determining the level of employee engagement in an

organization. Those factors are work environment, leadership, team & co-workers, training & career development, compensation, organizational policies and work place well-being. Among them, work environment, leadership, training & career development and compensation are the significant determinants of employee engagement (Anitha, 2014).

Accordingly, it is recommended to create open, supportive and motivating working environment for the lecturers in order to physically and emotionally attract them to the organization to provide better service. Because of the best working environment comprised with both physically and emotionally safe environment motivating employees to provide engaged works (Holbeche & Springett, 2003). Moreover, a supportive working environment provide opportunities to the employee to practice innovative methods without fear of the consequences even though it is failed (Kahn, 1990). Inspiring leadership and attractive compensation package also identified as the significant factors affecting to employee engagement (Anitha, 2014).

Therefore, it is necessary to create working environment with stimulating culture, good working teams, inspiring leaders, attractive physical surroundings with required physical resources such as computers, printers, scanners, related equipment, foods and beverages within the working place at the universities. Furthermore, it is recommended to leaders of the university lecturers such as heads of the departments, deans and vice chancellors to conduct unbiased

performance appraisals, appreciate the lecturers' additional and innovative efforts, communicating the remarkable accomplishments of the lecturers to others, provide required information and resources to gain effective output and encourage them to maintain work life balance.

When considering the current compensation package of the government university lecturers in Sri Lanka any financial reward is not paying to the government university lecturers based on the level of performance, skills, innovative efforts or extraordinary contributions for the betterment of the higher education sector. Therefore, it is recommended to introduce incentives based on the level of performance and additional efforts in order to create engaged lecturers within the government university sector in Sri Lanka. Because of the lecturers with having high level of employee engagement will be able to provide a quality service for the students and work effectively with co-workers, administrators and general public with minimizing organizational conflicts.

Accordingly, the decision makers, planners and policy makers of the government higher education sector should consider implementing the findings of this study because it may assist for enhancing the level of employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. Finally, the results of the study add knowledge to the existing literature and therefore act as a catalyst for future studies aimed at investigating the factors affecting to and determine the level of employee engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

Present research was focused to study the association between demographic factors and employee engagement of government university lecturers in Sri Lanka. Findings of the present research will be added to the literature on the level of employee engagement of the lecturers in state universities of Sri Lanka. This research can be further expanded into other categories of government employees in Sri Lanka because it is obvious that most of the government organizations in Sri Lanka are suffering with disengaged employees and seeking solutions for increasing employee engagement. Present research has been measured the level of employee engagement under the same working conditions. Therefore, further research can be conducted to determine the association between demographic factors and employee engagement under the different working conditions and situations such as job stress, job satisfaction and motivation.

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