

Impact of Employee Meaningfulness of Work on Employee Engagement: Study of Non-executive Level Employees in Private Banks in Gampaha District, Sri Lanka

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among between authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The present study focused on exploring the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement with special reference to non-executive level employees of private banks in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka.

Study Design: This is quantitative study which used deductive approach. Purpose of the study to explain the behaviour of meaningfulness of work and employee engagement. The study used survey strategy and conducted in a non-contrived setting (natural environment).

Place and Duration of the Study: The data were collected from non-executive level employees of private banks in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka in May 2021.

Methodology: Data were collected from 167 non-executive level employees through a standard questionnaire and distributed via google forms and printed questionnaires. The researcher analyzed data through Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), and simple regression analysis to test the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement.

Results: The findings of this research study revealed that employee meaningfulness of work

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positively impacts employee engagement among non-executive level employees in private banks. Further, the study findings contribute to the knowledge of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behaviour, and it adds value to the Sri Lankan research knowledge.

Conclusion: The study contributes to the knowledge of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior. This study is helpful for identifying the reasons to take actions for enhancing engagement among employees, especially with the meaningfulness of work.

Keywords: Employee engagement; employee meaningfulness of work; non-executive level employees.

1. INTRODUCTION

People spend nearly one-third of the day at work, that made work to possess an important place in human life [1] and are the powerful energetic fuel in an organization. Hence, employee engagement is a critical factor that affects competitive advantage [2]. A business that has engaged employees often leads to high productivity & profitability through reducing turnover [3,4].

Less engagement of employees is a globally expanded problem and still unresolved issue from the past. Disengaged employees could be directly tied to the loss of business revenue. Baker [5] stated that organizations of the United States used US\$450 to US\$550 billion per year for poor performance. Considering foreign countries, observed that only 13% of employees are working as fully engaged with their role, 63% are working as not engaged, and the other 24% are fully disengaged around the world among 142 countries [6]. Another survey revealed that actively disengaged employees exceeded 70% of the workforce [7].

Lack of meaningfulness has been identified as a factor of psychological employee disengagement. Jacobs [4] found psychological meaningfulness to be the strongest predictor of engagement among the psychological conditions (Predicting 37% of the variance in work engagement). According to Bailey and Andrian [8] the research into meaningfulness of work is relatively new. Meaningfulness of work has identified as an aspect that influences significant work outcomes such as work engagement, job satisfaction, motivation and stress reduction [9].

With the current economic downturn in Sri Lanka due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most businesses are going into a crisis. Employee Disengagement is a significant issue in Sri Lankan context as well. Jayarathne and Shermila [10] highlighted those domestic organizations and multinationals

that operate in Sri Lanka are keen on improving employee engagement by practicing high-performing work practices. Similarly, Indian banking sector retention becomes an inevitable problem, and an engaged workforce is a strategy that can be adopted [11]. The current study investigates the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement with special reference to non-executive level employees in private banks in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employee Engagement

Schaufeli et al [12] defined work engagement as "a constructive, satisfying, state of mind characterized by enthusiasm, dedication and absorption". Work engagement is acknowledged as the business initiative associated with organizational success.

Engagement is the state of mind and dynamism devoted to that action and achievement [13]. Similarly, engagement is defined as a constructive and pleased state of mind, categorized by enthusiasm, dedication, and captivation, commonly realized to produce higher levels of energy and a strong link to work [14]. Further personal engagement as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles and people employee and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance in engagement [15].

Engagement includes three main dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption [12]. The vigorous person can be identified as the full of energetic person and mentally resilient when working and the kind of person who can work even when there are challenges and try to put total effort into their work. A dedicated person involves their work intensively. They are

significant, enthusiastic, inspired, proud and ready to face challenges. A person who has absorption is always highly concentrated on work, and they don't feel how the time passes, and they face difficulty during it is time to finish the job. Employees' attention, mindfulness, caution, devotion to their work roles considered as the cognitive aspect of engagement [15]. Further, it was found that employees who engaged are deep with the energy, highly enthusiastic and fully absorbed for the job assigned by dedicating their intellectual, emotional and physical resources [10,16].

Moreover, employee engagement is a desirable condition with an organizational purpose and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy [17]. Disengaged employees separate themselves from work roles cognitively and emotionally is harmful to any organization and considered as an outbreak to the business enterprises [18]. Lengthy episodes of distraction, rapid task saturation, a slow tempo of activity, poor decision making, too many days away from work and lack of interest in work as symptoms displayed by disengaged employees [19].

The study of Jayarathne and Shermila [10] argued that actively disengaged employees are emotionally detached from their organizations, which make them less productive and tend to increase absenteeism, where it ultimately affects business growth and profitability. Therefore, this disengagement problem is a substantial negative factor that has damaged economies all over the world. Further, Allam [18] provide a distinct argument by stating that disengaged employees often negatively influence the morale of the employees and do not listen to genuine performance feedback and constantly exhibit low confidence and negative behaviours such as; aggressiveness, fighting, physical assault, threatening, abusive, and unethical witticisms at the workplace. Besides, disengaged employees experience more health problems than engaged employees, like headaches, stomach problems and cardiovascular disorders.

Ten engagement strategies have been identified as "tablets" believed in curing employee disengagement diseases. They are effective recruitment, leadership commitment, two-way communication, career development and advancement opportunities, appropriate resources, appropriate training, robust feedback system, incentives and recognition, strong work

culture, and top performers' focus [20]. As mentioned in the study of Venkatesh and Lissy [11], identified critical drivers of employee engagement; employee relations, total rewards, career opportunities, quality of work-life, Human Resource practices and the work itself. Another study highlighted that employee engagement level could enhance through inculcating trust and confidence in leadership existing in the organization [17]. Many researchers have explored several predictors of engagement, including co-worker support, support from leaders, core self-evaluations, and job resources, while meaningfulness and safety significantly influence.

2.2 Meaningfulness of Work

Describing the concept of 'meaning' constitutes various viewpoints. According to Baklaieva [2] study, meaning is when a person finds what is seeking in his/her life and feels significant and purposeful. The meaningfulness of life can be divided as the meaningfulness of work [21] and psychological meaningfulness [22]. When people felt worthwhile, beneficial and valuable, they experienced meaningfulness [15]. Further, it was found that psychological meaningfulness relates to a perceived value of work purpose, which built by personal morals and standards [23].

There are three core dimensions of meaningfulness of work. They are skill variety, task identity and task significance. Skill variety is the degree to which a job requires the worker to perform the work activities which challenge skills and abilities. Task identity is the degree to which the job requires completing a whole and identifiable piece of work. Task significance is the degree to which the job has a substantial and perceivable impact on other people's lives, whether in the immediate organization or the world at large [24].

As mentioned in the study of Pratt and Ashforth [25], meaning can be achieved from two sources. They are intrinsic characteristics of work (meaningfulness of work) and work surrounding (meaningfulness at work). Demographic changes, globalization and technological developments have influenced the perceptions and behaviour of the employees on their jobs [1]. When considering the outcomes of meaningful work, there is a positive relationship between various cognitive, emotional, behavioural and economic benefits and meaningfulness of work. According to Keles and Findikli [1], initiated job

performances, efficiencies, values, proficiency feelings, organizational trust and organizational devotion levels of employees are also enhanced when the perception of meaning enhanced. Meaningful work influences salient work outcomes like work engagement [26], Job satisfaction, motivation and stress reduction [27]. Deficiency in the meaningfulness of work results in hostility and disengagement at the workplace. Dimitrov [28] described sources of meaningfulness in the workplace are work itself, pride in the product, social environment, the self and spirituality at work and becoming a humane organization. Meaningfulness of work leads to low turnover intention. Participation, age, gender and tenure, Job satisfaction and work itself have affected the meaning of work [24].

Baklaieva [2] introduced three precursors of meaningfulness. They are craft, moral & compensation. As stated in the study of Dimitrov [28] the researcher followed a heuristic model of meaningful work concept based on internal, external environment and individual experiential aspects of work and life context. There are three levels in this model include conditional variables, central meaningfulness of work variables and consequences. Vuori, San and Kira [29] discussed meaningfulness making techniques. They are cognitively emphasizing positive work qualities in one's mind, developing skills and knowledge & influencing work content. Bailey and Madden [8] revealed unexpected features of meaningful work such as self-transcendent, poignant, episodic, reflective and personal. Nurses in Canada, who lacked meaningfulness of work, were more likely to burnout [2].

Content and process theories of motivation has emphasized that satisfaction and meaningfulness of work relate together. Furthermore, the Attraction selection-Attrition Model and self-verification theory proved that psychological meaningfulness of work has a stronger relationship with intention to quit than with such constructs as job satisfaction and commitment.

2.3 Meaningfulness of Work and Employee Engagement

Numerous studies have tried to explore the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement. However, the findings are controversial. Some scholars have emphasized that work engagement plays an antecedent role in meaningfulness. Further it is argued that employee engagement is a

consequence of meaningfulness. Considerable numbers of studies performed to analyze work engagement and meaningfulness of work [30,31,26,29]. A limited number of studies initiated the relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement [15,12,22].

Meaningfulness has been recognized as one of the necessary psychological conditions for engagement [15]. May et al. [26] gave empirical support for the nexus between meaningfulness and employee engagement. According to the study of Geldenhuys, Laba and venter [32], they found that there is a relationship between psychological meaningfulness, work engagement and organizational commitment. Experiences of meaningfulness and meaning of work result in positive work-related outcomes [26,22,33]. Two determinants that relate the development of psychological meaningfulness and work engagement are work beliefs [33] and work role fit [15,26]. Baklaieva [2] has observed that work engagement can result in an employee seeing their work as meaningful.

Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi [34] found the mediating effect of meaningfulness of work between work engagement and transformational leadership. Previous studies have explored that meaningfulness of work is not directly related to work engagement [33] while some other studies found that there is a direct relationship between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement [26,22]. The impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement is not clear and consistent in extant literature. Hence, the following hypothesis was developed to be tested in the present study and depicted in Fig. 1.

H1: There is an impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement.

3. METHOD

3.1 Procedure and Participants

The research study was conducted among non-executive employees in four private banks in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka. Data was collected using both Google forms and printed questionnaires. 171 responses out of 250 distributed questionnaires were received. Four questionnaires were discarded for having missing values, and the response rate is 66.8%.

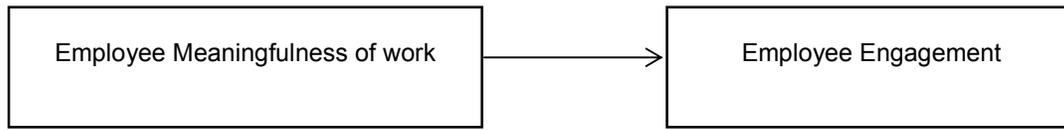


Fig.1. Conceptual framework

Table 1. Respondent's profile

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	65	38.9%
Female	102	61.1%
Age		
20 - 30 years	94	56.3%
31 - 40 years	50	29.9%
41 - 50 years	22	13.2%
Over 51 years	1	0.6%
Bank		
Hatton National Bank	40	24%
Union Bank	26	15.6%
Commercial Bank	57	34.1%
Sampath Bank	44	26.3%
Working Experience		
Less than 1 year	40	24%
1 - 2 years	50	29.9%
2 - 3 years	28	16.8%
More than 3 years	49	29.3%
Education Level		
G.C.E.A/L	41	24.6%
Diploma	54	32.3%
Degree	68	40.%
Other	4	2.4%
Section		
Cashier	38	22.8%
Savings Accounts and FD	46	27.5%
Current Accounts	19	11.4%
Loans	29	17.4%
Recovery	20	12%
Pawning	14	8.4%
Other	1	0.6%

Source: Survey data (2021)

Table 1 illustrate the frequency distribution of the respondents of the sample. The sample represented 39% of male employees and 61% of female employees. The majority (56%) of employees are between 20 – 30 age category where 0.6% employees are in over 51 age categories. 34% are from commercial banks, representing the majority of the sample and 16% of the sample is in Union bank, representing the minority of the sample. The majority (30%) of the sample has 1-2 years of experience, and only 29% of the sample has more than three years of experience. 17% of the sample is having 2-3

years of experience. 40% of the sample has a degree while 25% of the sample has a General Certification of Education (Advanced Level) qualification.

3.2 Measures

Employee engagement was measured using 7 point – likert scale, which Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova, [35] developed, consisting of 17 items, including three sub scales: vigour, absorption, and dedication. Employee meaningfulness of work measure consists of 6 items on 5 point –

likert scale developed by May, Gilson and Harter [26].

4. RESULTS

Collected data were analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 26.0 version. Validity and reliability of the scales, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure the suitability of the data for hypothesis testing.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and correlation for the main constructs in the conceptual model. According to Table 2, mean values for employee meaningfulness of work and employee engagement are respectively 4.0749 and 5.4435, while the standard deviation values are respectively 0.532 and 0.073. The Skewness and Kurtosis of the distribution of employee meaningfulness are respectively -1.423 and 3.109 while the Skewness and Kurtosis of the distribution of employee engagement are -0.772 and 0.540 and (respectively < 3 and <10), normal distribution is ensured [35]. As the significant

value (0.000) is smaller than desired level of significance (0.01) at 99% confidence level, the found correlation coefficient (0.673) is statistically significant. Hence, employee engagement is positively related to employee meaningfulness of work.

4.2 Validity and Reliability

To ensure sampling adequacy and internal consistency of constructs, validity and reliability were checked.

Table 3 shows the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), Bartlett's test and the Cronbach's Alpha values. KMO value of employee meaningfulness of work and employee engagement are respectively 0.869 and 0.929, are greater than 0.7. Furthermore, the sig. values of the variables are also less than 0.05. Hence, Construct validity is ensured.

Furthermore, reliability for employee engagement and employee meaningfulness of work is respectively 0.946 and 0.901. The results indicate that sufficient Cronbach's Alpha values exist among the variables which are greater than 0.7 and reliability of the constructs ensured.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	EMOW
EMOW	4.0749	0.53223	-1.423	3.109	
EE	5.4435	0.07302	-0.772	0.540	.673**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed). SD – Standard Deviation, EMOW – Employee meaningfulness of work, EE - Employee Engagement, Source: Survey Data (2021)

Table 3. Validity and reliability analysis

Variable	KMO and Bartlett's Test		Cronbach's Alpha (α)
	KMO	Bartlett's Chi-Square	
EMOW	0.869	590.785	0.901
EE	0.929	2024.742	0.946

EMOW – Employee meaningfulness of work, EE - Employee Engagement, Source: Survey Data (2021)

Table 4. Simple linear regression for EMOW and employee engagement

Path	B	β	T	R2	Adj. R2	F	
EMOW	EE	0.922	0.673	11.691	0.453	0.450	136.689

EMOW – Employee meaningfulness of work, EE - Employee Engagement, Source: Survey Data (2021)

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

To test hypothesis of this study, the researcher used a simple linear regression test. As shown in Table 4, regression analysis specifies that employee meaningfulness of work explains 45% of the variance in employee engagement, which is significant ($\beta = 0.673$, $p < 0.001$). Accordingly, there is a positive impact (45.3%) of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement. As per the result of simple regression analysis between the two variables, the study Hypothesis (H1: There is an impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement) is accepted.

4.4 Discussion of Results

The objective of the study was to investigate the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement with reference to non-executive level employees in private banks in Gamapaha district, Sri Lanka. Interpreted results prove that there is a significant positive impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement. According to the study of Baklaieva [2] there is a strong positive relationship between meaningfulness of work and engagement. Geldenhuys et al. [32] established a direct relationship between the concepts, saying that meaningfulness of work predicts engagement. Moreover, based on Sung [35] research study, meaningfulness of work was significantly related to employee engagement (Beta value = 0.74, $p < 0.001$). Hence, the current study's finding is consistent with the previous research, which is empirically confirmed.

4.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Researchers

The sample of this study was related to non-executive level employees of private banks in Sri Lanka. Hence, future researchers can test the conceptual model of this study for other industries/sectors. Furthermore, future researchers can conduct a longitudinal study to do an in-depth analysis regarding the problem and validate the present study's findings. Moreover, it can add dimensions to employee meaningfulness of work such as skill variety, task identity, and task significance and test the current study's conceptual model to identify the dimensional impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study focused on investigating the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement in the banking sector, which is almost fully dependent on employee motivation and is not efficient without having active members. According to this study findings, it is concluded that there is a positive impact between employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement of non-executive level employees in private banks. The study contributes to the knowledge of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, several academic works were conducted to find the impact of employee meaningfulness of work on employee engagement. The findings add value to the Sri Lanka research knowledge. This study is helpful for identifying the reasons to take actions for enhancing engagement among employees, especially with the meaningfulness of work. Employees who see their work as meaningful are desirable workers. Employee engagement is also one that organizations should pay attention to, considering its strong, positive relationship with organizational citizenship behaviour [4]. Employee disengagement becomes a critical problem due to the corona pandemic effects, which should be addressed immediately. Hence, organizations should pay attention to enhancing the meaningfulness of work and should take necessary actions to improve employee engagement.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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