

## Employee Engagement and Individual Differences: A Study in Indian Context

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### ABSTRACT:

The employee engagement has emerged as a pivotal business driver for organizational success. High level of engagement in domestic and global firms is supposed to have multiple enriching effects on an organization. Studies have highlighted the importance of both organizational and individual factors in ensuring highly engaged employees. The present paper explores the individual differs across four parameters as gender, age, experience and educational experience. Significant variations are observed across employees of various age, experience and qualifications. The implications and mechanisms to utilize diversity of work force have also been discussed. Further paper provides in depth analysis of eight constructs of employee engagement through applying suitable statistical tools. Individual characteristics based difference has also been studied for these eight constructs- work environment leadership and direction, relationship with immediate seniors and co-workers, compensation program, job security and career development, policies and work procedures of the company, work life balance and psychological well being of the employee.

**Keywords:** *Performance, Employee engagement, Working environment, Compensation, Job security, Career development, Work life balance*

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### INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations want their employees to be strategic, proactive, initiators, energetic and effectively engaged with their work and organization. The concept of Employee Engagement at work has seen increased interest in the new era with the growth in the number of practitioners, theories and writings and stressing the value of being engaged about one's job, and how organization can benefit from having engaged workers. Employee engagement is the connection people feel to their work and to their organization that results in higher levels of performance, productivity, commitment and loyalty. Thus employee engagement has emerged as a pivotal business driver for organizational

success. High level of engagement in domestic and global firms is supposed to have multiple enriching effects on an organisation. It promotes retention of talent, fosters customer loyalty and improves organizational performance and stakeholder value. Employee engagement is a complex concept and is influenced by many factors like workplace culture, organizational communication and managerial styles to trust and respect, leadership and company reputation. Here individual factors like personality, gender, age, perception etc also plays major role in driving employee loyalty.

In this era of globalisation, every organisation comprises of work place spreading

over different culture, different personality, diverse age and experience, multiple aspirations and needs. Thus today's organisation requires different access to training and career opportunities, work/life balance and empowerment to foster a culture of engagement. HR leads the way by designing measure and by evaluating proactive workplace policies and practices that could help in attracting and retaining talent with skills and competencies necessary for growth and sustainability. Highly engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of performance, commitment and loyalty in comparison with disengaged employees. As all organizations strongly focus on performance, employee engagement has become a popular topic. The present study tends to focus on individual or personal determinants of employee engagement in Indian organisations, so that these factors could be mastered to develop a loyal and committed team.

#### **Literature Review**

##### **Employee Engagement and Individual Differences**

A large volume of previous studies are available that shows the linkage between engagement level with individual differences. Researchers have claimed that employee engagement is dependent on both organisational and individual factors. Different studies have included diverse independent variables of organisational and individual significance. Scholars like Miles (2001) and Harter et al. (2003) claimed that employee engagement is something that is dependent upon various aspects in the workplace. While few others like Harter et al. (2002) and Goddard (1999) asserted that engagement is resultant of individual factors. Elaborating individual factors determinant of employee engagement Ferguson (2007) stated that individual differences may not be trivial and could have significant effects on employee engagement. Kahn (1990) argued that psychological differences may have a decisive impact on individuals' capability to engage or disengage in their role performance. Individual experience, age etc. may shape an employee's ability and willingness to be involved and committed at work. People get engage differently at work place depending upon their experiences of psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability in specific situations.

Moreover, Robinson (2006) it is argued that individual differences play a vital role in determining an employee's potential level of engagement. He explained that the process of perception is the key factor that commands the individual behaviour. And perception is defined by a number of independent individual variables like age, experience, education etc. Perception is defined by the way in which individuals make sense of their environment. Further perceptual process involves interpretation and responding to the events and people around them. According to Robinson (2006) individual employee or person categorises the raw data and makes sense of these input situations as per their own unique and personal biological, social and psychological framework of mind and exposure. Biological framework includes gender, inherited traits, habits etc. Psychological frame is reflected by one's personality, past experiences, knowledge, expectations and current needs, priorities and interests. Thus the author gave immense importance to individual characteristic as determining factors of employee engagement.

Gender differences have also been found to determine level of one's engagement with one's work place. Male employee is supposed to experience enrichment from work to family while on the other part female employees is found to experience depletion from work to family. Further women workers experience enrichment from family to work, men workers experience no links from family to work (Rothbard, 1999). There is conflicting views regarding which one (male or female) is more engaged with the organisation. Gallup's US research found that women tend to find more fulfilment in their jobs and as a result of which fairer sex is more engaged than men (Johnson 2004). Same researcher did not find any significant difference in employee engagement level when research is conducted among Thai employees. Kapoor and Anthony (2013) concluded that male employees of manufacturing are relatively highly engaged with workplace than female employees of same sector. Service sector hailed with higher female engagement than male employees. In this background the present paper tends to find out gender based engagement variations in Indian organisations.

Further other individual variables have also been studied for variations. Gallup's research observed a significant difference between employees who are single and those who are married. It was found that married employees have a higher level of engagement than the employees who are single. This reflects that employee settled in both professional and personal life tends to be more engaged with the work. Truss et al. (2006) elaborated that the differences in health and personal values might have an impact on employee engagement level. There are differences in value as some people 'work to live', while others 'live to work'. Differences of skills, ability and dispositional variables are also expected to impact levels of employee engagement.

Another personal factor like employees' experience with the present organisation is also supposed to impact employees' engagement. It has also been found that the longer employees stay with an organization, the less engaged they become (Ferguson, 2007; Truss et al., 2006). In other words the experience and engagement are found to have inverse relationship with each other. The finding highlights the importance of engagement and also the need of ensuring employees are engaged in the long term in what they do. The findings of the 2006 CIPD survey on engagement confirm this also (Truss et al., 2006). The findings emphasise the importance of continually advancing the understanding of engagement in the workplace. Swaminathan and Ananth (2011) also supported difference based on experience of the employee. But according to Perrin (2003) worker engagement is a continuous process that never ends and an organisation needs to provide meaningful and emotionally enriching work experience to their worker for maintenance of high employee engagement. And thus experience or stay of employee has no bearing on engagement of workforce.

Age of the employees is also considered as an important paradigm of individual difference and hence employee engagement. Milner et al. (2011) explored employee engagement in five groups of employees categorised on the basis of age. The study examined differences in employee engagement among groups as: emerging adults (less than 24 yrs), settling-in adults (25-39), prime-working years (40-54),

approaching retirement (55-65), and retirement eligible (66 and older). They found that employee engagement keeps on increasing with age of the employee. Overall, the retirement eligible group reported the highest average engagement while the emerging adults reported the lowest average engagement. Constructs of employee engagement differs with age. Supervisor support and recognition, schedule satisfaction (flexibility and autonomy in one's work schedule), and job clarity were significant predictors of employee engagement for all age groups. Specifically, supervisor support and recognition had the largest effect on employee engagement for the two older groups, approaching retirement and retirement-eligible. While career development and promotions was also a significant predictor of engagement, for all age groups except the retirement-eligible folks. This job quality factor was most important for engagement among the two youngest groups of employees, the emerging and the settling-in adults. But on contrary to Milner et al. (2011), Swaminathan and Ananth (2009) concluded that no correlation exists between age of the employees and employee engagement. On the same note Wilson (2009) also opined that there is no significant difference in engagement level among employees of different ages.

Similar sort of conflicts views are obtained when employee engagement is studied in relation with educational qualifications of the employees. A class of scholars negated any correlation between the two while other class echoed the definite association between the two. Swaminathan and Ananth (2011) stated that a graduate employee is equally engaged with the organisation as an employee with Post graduate or any other professional degree. But survey conducted by Dale Carnegie Training found graduate employees to be most engaged followed by post graduate and under graduate being least engaged.

In summary, the literature review suggests that despite the existence of common determinant of engagement, different individuals are influenced by different factors. Thus it could be said that literature in the field of individual differences is split. Some suggest that individual differences like age, gender or experience shape up employee engagement while other refutes the same. Thus present study will have four

hypotheses to adjudge the individual differences based on age, gender, experience and educational qualifications of the employees. Further keeping all these and all other allied factors in view, the present study has been carried out with objectives and methodology mentioned hereunder.

### Objective and Hypotheses

The prime objective of the present research has been to explore the employee engagement from the lenses of individual differences. The incidental objectives of the present research were as under:

- ✓ To examine gender, age, experience and educational qualification based individual drivers of employee engagement.
- ✓ To give deep insight into eight constructs of employee engagement for individual variations.
- ✓ Four hypotheses have been used to explore the variations in engagement of the employees. The hypotheses are
  - ✓ **Hypothesis: 1**
  - ✓ H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no difference in the engagement level of male and female employees.
  - ✓ H1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Engagement level of male and female employees differs significantly.
- ✓ **Hypothesis: 2**
- ✓ H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no difference in the engagement level when studied on the basis of experience of the employees.
- ✓ H1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Engagement level differs significantly with experience.
- ✓ **Hypothesis: 3**
- ✓ H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no difference in the engagement level of employees of various age groups.
- ✓ H1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Engagement level of employees of various age groups differ significantly.
- ✓ **Hypothesis: 4**
- ✓ H0 (Null Hypothesis): Employees

engagement remains same for employees with different educational qualifications.

- ✓ H1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Engagement level of differently qualified employees differs significantly.

### RESEARCH METHOD

The present study is based upon exploratory-cum-descriptive research design and has used primary data. For data collection, a structured questionnaire comprising of seventy two statements categorized into eight major factors has been taken. The questionnaire is derived on the basis of previous studies and discussion with academicians and corporate practitioners. The main constructs of employee engagement are work environment (McCashland, 1999; Miles, 2001; Harter et al., 2002), leadership and direction (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008), relationship with immediate seniors and co-workers (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004), compensation program (Kahn, 1990; Saks and Rotman, 2006), job security and career development (Kahn, 1990; Paradise, 2008), policies and work procedures of the company (Woodruffe, 2005; Pitt-Catsoupes and Matz-Costa, 2008; Pollitt, 2008; Devi, 2009) work life balance (McKay et al., 2007), and psychological well being of the employee (Perrin, 2003; Richmen, 2006). The eight constructs have total seventy two statements to access engagement level on a seven point rating scale that ranges from Strongly agree (7), Agree (6), Slightly agree (5), Neutral (4), Slightly disagree (3), Disagree (2) to Strongly disagree (1). Further random sampling has been used to collect data from Indian industries. In order to have a diverse and representative sample ten different industries- five each from manufacturing and service- have been taken. The industries mainly include banking, insurance, BPO, educational institutes, automobile, steel, fertilizers and electronic equipment etc, Sample size taken for study is 400.

Employees were taken from all three levels i.e. top, middle and lower level. For analysis purpose, it has been strictly supervised that an array of manufacturing, service, private, public, Indian and foreign companies are approached.

Further while administering questionnaire to employees, it has been ensured that data comes from all category like male, female, highly experienced to less experienced one, aged personnel to fresh recruits etc. Reliability of data is checked using Cronbach's alpha which is calculated through SPSS. It measures the internal consistency and its value comes out to be 0.84. George and Malley (2006) stated that closer the value to 1, greater is the internal consistency. Thus data comes out to be reliable.

Data collected has been tabulated and variations have been depicted graphically. Further all eight constructs of employee engagement and hypothesis have been subjected to ANOVA to explore individual differences.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of individual differences is of utmost importance as it helps to categorize different sets of employee together. Now these categorized groups could be subjected to different treatment depending on their needs and aspirations. Here also employees are categorized on the basis of gender, age, qualification and experience. A brief description of gender based engagement is given herewith.

Table 1 explains the differences among male and female employees. Overall engagement of male employees (mean=2.87) is slightly higher than that of female employees (mean=2.85). But corresponding F value and significance value states that the differences are not significant. Here first hypothesis is accepted and hence male

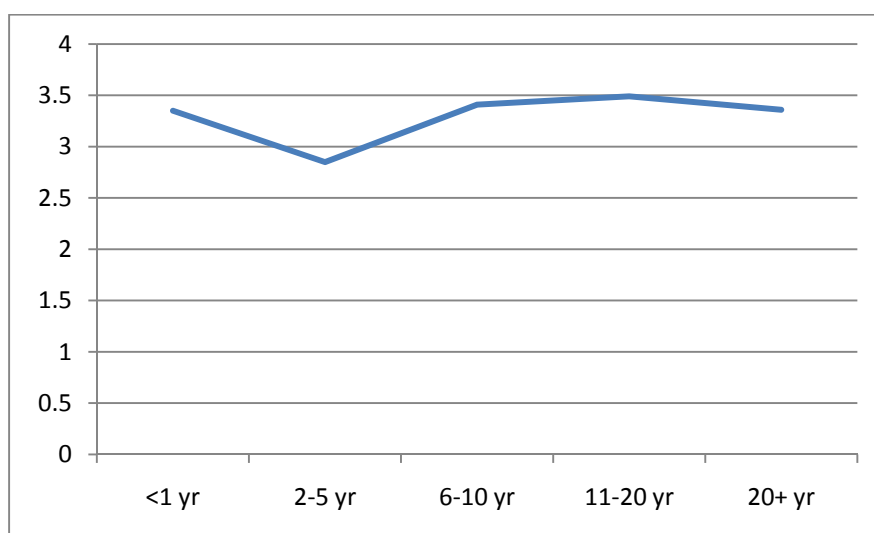
and female employee comes out to be equally engaged. Wilson (2009) also concluded the same result of differences being insignificant. The results are also similar to that of Schaufeli et al. (2006) and Yildirim (2008). The result however contradicts with Sprang et al. (2007) who concluded that female employees face more burnout and hence are less engaged than their male counterparts. But the present study highlights deeper dimensions of gender based differences. Although variation is insignificant but still, it exists. The table suggests that the differences may be due to variations among the constructs of the employee engagement. Gender based differences are significant for three constructs i.e. Job security and career development, Work-life balance and Workplace wellbeing. And for all three constructs mean value of engagement score is higher for male employees than that of female employees. It means that women are significantly less engaged in terms of these three variables. It highlights the problem faced by fairer sex at the work place in the form of glass ceiling, stereotyping (related with career development), physical and mental abuses, and inadequate feminine working environment (related with workplace wellbeing). Women employees also find it difficult to manage both home and work. Here researcher suggests resolving of the above discussed issues to maintain equilibrium in the organization. Next table tends to highlight implications of experience on employee engagement with the firm.

Table 1: Gender based description of all eight variables of employee engagement

Variables of Employee Engagement	Gender (Mean)		Test for variation	
	Male	Female	F-value	Sig.*
Working Environment	2.24	2.30	0.240	0.626
Leadership and Direction	2.58	2.58	0.000	0.989
Relation with Immediate Manager and Coworkers	2.40	2.28	0.476	0.492
Compensation Program	3.41	3.34	0.048	0.828
Job Security and Career Development	3.80	2.93	3.286	0.044
Policies and Conditions of Services	3.12	3.02	0.232	0.631
Work Life balance	3.85	2.63	4.008	0.036
Work Place Wellbeing	3.98	3.06	4.386	0.004
Overall Employee Engagement	2.87	2.85	0.071	0.916

**Table 2: Experience based description of all eight variables of employee engagement**

Variables of Employee Engagement	Experience (Years)					Variations	
	<1	2-5	6-10	11-20	20+	F	Sig.
Working Environment	3.21	3.10	3.18	3.15	3.02	0.06	0.78
Leadership and Direction	3.44	3.01	3.27	3.40	3.50	0.11	0.63
Relation with Manager and Coworkers	3.30	2.86	2.70	2.88	2.90	0.37	0.60
Compensation Program	2.81	3.02	3.19	3.47	3.20	5.2	0.000
Job Security and Career Development	3.80	3.54	3.42	3.72	3.46	3.6	0.031
Policies and Conditions of Services	3.13	3.11	3.40	3.06	3.24	.27	0.580
Work Life balance	3.74	3.31	3.03	2.88	2.41	2.7	0.044
Work Place Wellbeing	2.93	2.54	2.95	3.24	3.17	4.8	0.018
Overall Employee Engagement	3.38	2.85	3.41	3.49	3.36	4.3	0.002



**Figure 1: Experience based variations in employee engagement**

Table 2 tends to test hypothesis no 4 i.e. variation on the basis of experience of the employees. Significance value of overall employee engagement comes out to be 0.002 (less than 0.05), thus null hypothesis is rejected and subsequently alternate hypothesis is accepted. It means experience is found to play a significant role in determining employee engagement. Further figure 1 depicts that employee engagement tends to decrease in short run with increase in experience. Engagement again starts to decline after an experience of

twenty years before peaking in a category of 11-20 year. The findings have definite implications for the modern workplaces. Employee engagement cannot be taken granted and management is required to enforce policies that promote engagement even for most experienced employees. Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina (2002) also stated that engagement decreases over the period of time. However the results are inconsistent with that of Wilson (2006), Buhler (2006) and Yildirim (2008).

Eight constructs of employee engagement are also subjected to ANOVA to explore individual variations in great depth. It is found that out of eight four constructs vary significantly with employees' stay with an organization. Compensation program, Job security and career development, Work life balance and Workplace wellbeing tends to have lesser influence on employee's engagement with increasing experience. The result hints towards complacency factor with job security and high compensation after spending an appreciable time with the company. With time an employee becomes habitual to manage work and personal life effectively. And also with kids growing older, an employee is longer fascinated with facilities of better work life balance. The findings are complementary with Maslow's need hierarchy as most of these constructs point towards lower level of needs like physiological, safety or social. Here researcher advices to implement policies that promote empowerment or self realization of the experienced employees. The organization might need different set of practices to enforce engagement for employees with different experiences.

Table 3 manages to test hypothesis no 4. Significance value of last column (Overall employee engagement) is lesser than critical

value with 95% level of significance. It states that null hypothesis is rejected and hence alternate hypothesis is rejected. It means age of the employees also have a significant bearing on employee engagement. Figure 2 depicts that engagement remains almost steady for first two age groups. Engagement peaks for the age group of 35-45 years before it decrease in next group. The findings are approximately similar to that of variations based on employee experience. However result contradicts with that of Swaminathan and Ananth (2009) but is in accordance with that of Robertson (2009). An organization is required to manage age diversity to develop a team of highly and equally engaged employees. Research would also suggest certain measure to accommodate age variations in the firm. Robinson (2007) stated that engagement must be considered as two-way proposition, thus age differences must be appreciated in communication and other means of interaction. A young and seasoned employee cannot sail in the same boat. Different needs and expectation of people of different age commands different treatment. A company must show its commitment for employee welfare and for wellbeing of outer world too (Corporate Social Responsibility) (Levinson, 2007). It helps to actively engage elder workers of the firm.

Table 3: Age based description of all eight variables of employee engagement

Variables of Employee Engagement	Age (Years)				Variations	
	<25	26-35	36-45	45+	F	Sig.
Working Environment	2.76	2.83	2.83	2.81	0.790	0.059
Leadership and Direction	2.97	3.07	3.15	3.24	4.02	0.041
Relation with Manager and Coworkers	3.01	2.86	2.94	2.90	0.521	0.099
Compensation Program	2.74	3.11	2.85	2.64	3.96	0.021
Job Security and Career Development	3.40	3.21	3.10	3.27	4.40	0.004
Policies and Conditions of Services	2.87	2.85	3.06	3.19	0.652	0.078
Work Life balance	3.05	3.07	2.84	2.71	5.11	0.001
Work Place Wellbeing	3.40	3.21	3.14	3.23	3.99	0.049
Overall Employee Engagement	2.94	2.97	3.05	2.92	3.60	0.031

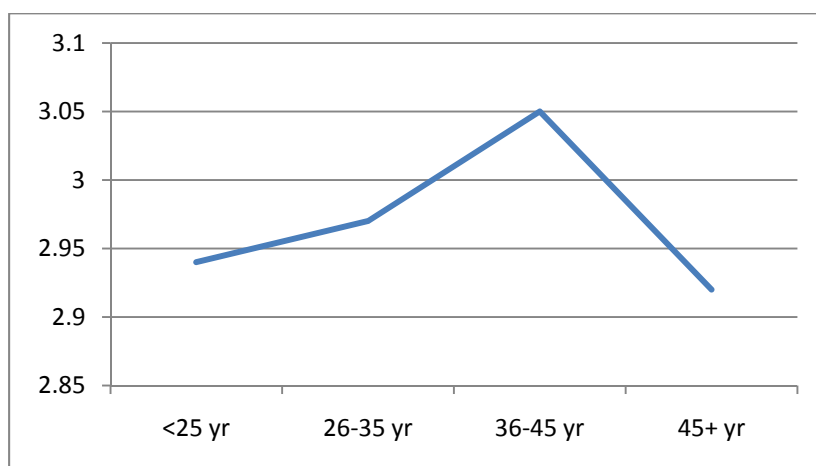


Figure 2: Age based variations in employee engagement

Table 4: Educational qualification based description of eight variables of engagement

Variables of Employee Engagement	Degree			Variations	
	UG	G	PG	F	Sig.
Working Environment	2.84	3.10	3.05	5.31	0.000
Leadership and Direction	2.67	2.81	2.88	0.882	0.065
Relation with Manager and Coworkers	2.90	2.58	2.47	4.69	0.002
Compensation Program	2.89	2.90	2.54	5.08	0.010
Job Security and Career Development	3.25	3.15	3.12	3.75	0.027
Policies and Conditions of Services	2.67	2.91	3.24	0.650	0.084
Work Life balance	3.31	3.28	3.23	0.893	0.078
Work Place Wellbeing	3.22	3.13	3.12	0.584	0.054
Overall Employee Engagement	3.04	3.12	3.04	3.97	0.049

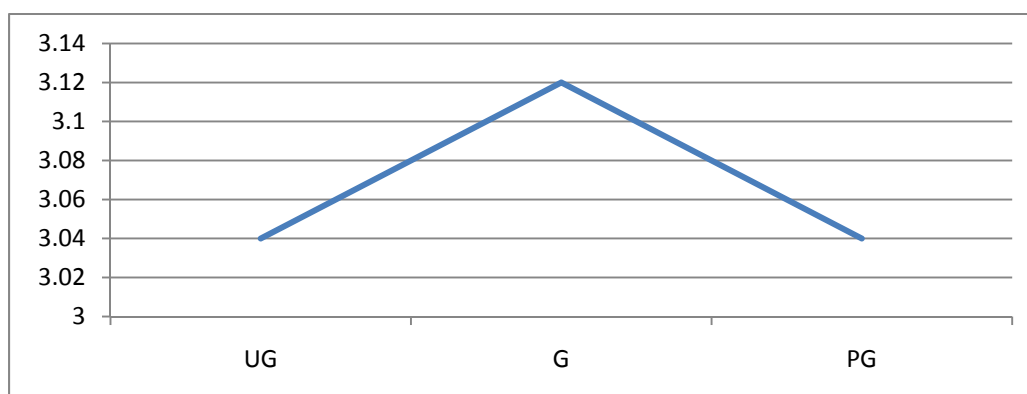


Figure 3: Educational qualifications based variations in employee engagement



Five constructs out of eight shows significant differences with age of the employees. Four constructs are same as found significant in table related to experience of the employees. The added factor is leadership and direction. Further engagement level of employees has been studied from the perspective of educational qualifications of the employee.

Hypothesis 4 is tested through table 4, and again null hypothesis is rejected and subsequently alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus educational qualifications of the employees also found to have significant impact on employee engagement. The findings are in accordance with different aptitude, vision and capabilities of employees with different level of academic achievements. The results are similar to that of white paper by Dale Carneigh but on contrary to that of Swaminnathan and Ananath (2009). Figure 3 depicts that employee engagement is maximum for graduate employees. While it reduces as a graduate becomes post graduate.

Again all eight constructs of engagement level are studied for variations. Five out of eight constructs shows significant differences. Naturally employees with higher qualification would demand higher level of compensation and career development opportunities. Thus a HR practitioner is advised to acknowledge these aspects in Human Resource Accounting and off course in Human Resource information System. Highly qualified personnel would seek better working environment and workplace wellbeing than desired by relatively less educated ones. These factors could be considered to draft appropriate policies to decrease alienation of highly qualified employees.

## CONCLUSION

A wide spectrum of researches on employee engagement provides a good combination of theoretical and practical insight into various tenants of individual differences. But still the concept remains inconclusive with few scholars supporting the difference and few others negating the differences. The present study provides a good explanation of variation in engagement level based on gender, age, experience and qualification of the employees in Indian settings. Practitioners have been

suggested with various mechanisms to deal with differences based on individual variables. The findings and suggestions have significant bearing for both organizations and for employees also. On one hand organizations would be able to develop loyalty and longevity among employees and on other hands employees' needs and aspirations could be catered in better way. The present study goes one step ahead to existing studies in two ways. Firstly questionnaire inscribes as many as eight different constructs of the engagement. Here factors given by a number of experts have been combined together a present a comprehensive and holistic picture of employee engagement. Secondly the present paper is not only explores the significance of the variations for overall employee engagement but individual constructs are also subjected to statistical introspection. It provides in depth and adequate explanation for differences. For inference, although gender based differences have been found insignificant but still few constructs are found to have significant differences. Now an organization can accommodate these factors to have equally engaged male and female employees. Depending upon present study future researcher could devote their time and energy on elaborating differences based on individual constructs. One can explore how and why career development factor varies among genders. What could be its implications and how it could be minimized? Further other modes of individual differences like income, personality type, background (Urban-Rural) could also be given serious thoughts in this regards.

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