

Examining the Influence of Employee Activation on Gender Differences in Employee Engagement

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This study analyzes survey data from over 500 U.S. employees to investigate how key workplace determinants uniquely relate to engagement for men and women, to address gaps in research examining potential gender variations in the drivers of discretionary effort at work. Traditional predictors like fulfillment of basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth were examined alongside the emerging construct of “worker activation,” reflecting empowering organizational cultures that motivate extra effort, which is hypothesized to significantly predict engagement across genders when incorporated into engagement models. Analyses include descriptive tests, regression models evaluated separately by gender, and assessments of activation variable impacts between genders, with findings revealing modest yet significant male-female disparities in average engagement levels, the multi-dimensional nature of engagement determinants across genders, and activation’s cross-cutting importance in predicting engagement, validating refined conceptualization and offering implications for optimally designing inclusive strategies to inspire discretionary commitment and employee engagement.

Keywords: employee engagement, worker activation, gender

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has emerged as a key factor influencing organizational success. Heightened engagement predicts lower turnover, higher productivity and sales, fewer safety incidents, and other benefits (Harter et al., 2009). Understanding what breeds discretionary effort in the workplace remains a priority. However, employee experiences and engagement dynamics likely differ depending on personal attributes. Exploring potential variations across demographic groups can yield valuable insights.

Specifically, examining gender differences in the predictors of engagement warrants attention. Previous research has found engagement levels sometimes diverge between males and females (Harter et al., 2009). However, the literature provides limited consensus on whether determinants precisely parallel or take divergent forms between genders. Clarifying these dynamics could inform customized yet equitable strategies for engaging diverse workforces optimally.

The current study aims to contribute new knowledge in this regard. It analyzes survey data from over 500 U.S. employees to investigate how key workplace factors relate to engagement separately for men and women. Specifically, the research evaluates the relative influence of traditional predictors like basic needs

fulfillment alongside evolving constructs like “worker activation.” Activation reflects discretionary commitments nurtured through empowering organizational cultures (Westover & Andrade, 2024). The study seeks to advance comprehension of potential parallels and variances in what inspires male and female workers’ discretionary effort. Understanding its role regarding gender could offer organizations strategic direction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement encompasses various aspects of workers’ mental states and behaviors. It reflects individuals’ physical, cognitive, and emotional expressions as they interact in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees bring their authentic selves to work and invest in their roles at work. They have a positive perspective regarding work tasks (Christian et al., 2011). They are attached to their work roles (e.g., features of their jobs) and their organizations (e.g., the context and organizational structure where engagement occurs) (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is associated with *vigor*, or energy and resilience on the job and a willingness to invest effort and persist; with *dedication*, characterized by attaching significance to one’s job, exhibiting enthusiasm and pride, and enjoying challenge; as well as with *absorption* or immersion in work tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Worker engagement is considered an enduring trait of an energetic state of mind related to work performance (Bailey et al., 2015; Lysaght & O’Halloran, 2020; Parker & Griffin, 2011). Others view it as dynamic, calling attention to antecedents that affect it at moments in time such as during a task (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2009; Khan, 1990) as well as those impacting it day-by-day such as emotional responses to social interactions (Boccoli et al., 2022). Recent frameworks have integrated various engagement models to create multi-dimensional representations that account for both psychological and behavioral aspects of engagement (Davis et al., 2023) as well as endogenous and exogenous antecedents (Boccoli et al., 2022), expanding on those in previous studies (e.g., personal resources, job characteristics, organizational factors, and social context) (Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)

Positive relationships have been found between engagement and life satisfaction, role and job performance, and negative relationships with burnout and counterproductive performance (Bailey et al., 2015). High engagement is associated with individual work outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, and performance, as well as with organizational outcomes, including profitability, productivity, customer allegiance, and reduced turnover (Bakker, 2011; Cudriene & Diskiene, 2020; Richman, 2006; Saks, 2006). Worker engagement fosters open-mindedness, or receptiveness to new information regarding tasks and a willingness to act, which enhances performance (Reijseger et al., 2017). Outcomes can be categorized as organizational (e.g., in-role and extra-role performance, organizational commitment, reduced intention to quit, and reduced turnover intention) as well as individual (job satisfaction, private life satisfaction, engagement and influencing others) (Boccoli et al., 2022).

Resilience, job resources and job design, effective leadership, perceived organizational support, team engagement, training, and professional development have positive effects on engagement (Bailey et al., 2015) as do employee activation determinants, such as worker engagement, meaning and purpose, a sense of encouragement and belonging, leadership efficacy, and career meaning and commitment (Andrade & Westover, 2024). Understanding the determinants and outcomes of worker engagement and how to create a supportive culture is critical to employee growth, health, and well-being. Improving engagement improves performance (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009), which improves organizations. However, differences in how engagement is experienced by men and women in the workplace and how organizations can encourage its development to account for gender differences must be further examined.

Gender Gaps in Employee Engagement

A global survey found that women are more engaged in the workplace than men except for those in senior leadership positions (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024). Women are committed to their roles, enthusiastic about work, and have a positive impact on their organizations. They report higher levels of engagement than men as project managers, managers, and as individual contributors in the workplace.

However, as senior leaders, they are less engaged than their male counterparts. This gap may be explained by psychological factors, specifically isolation, a lack of emotional support, and the absence of close relationships that tend to characterize senior-level positions. This can lead to women staying in senior roles for less time than men (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024).

Occupational self-efficacy is another factor related to work engagement, specifically, women's career aspirations. One study found that men do not have higher occupational self-efficacy or work engagement than women but have higher career aspirations (Hartman & Barber, 2020). Women may be underrepresented in senior leadership positions, not due to beliefs related to their abilities but due to a lack of encouragement, development, and advancement opportunities. Women with low or moderate levels of occupational self-efficacy, in particular, need coaching, mentoring, and career-path guidance. Men tend to engage in advancement behaviors even when lacking requisite knowledge and skill whereas women seek competence prior to seeking higher-level roles. Even though they believe themselves capable, they may not act on these beliefs. This contributes to the decisions they make about their careers even if they have high levels of occupational self-efficacy.

Gender engagement levels may differ depending on context. No differences were found between men's and women's work engagement for university employees in South Africa (Mulaudzi & Takawira, 2015); however, male IT workers in India were more found to be more engaged than their female co-workers (Sharma et al., 2017). Other sources show that men experience more engagement, commitment, well-being, and inclusion than women (Nobes, 2023; Zoe Talent Solutions, 2024), and that women are recognized less often (Nobes, 2023). These factors can lead to lower retention.

Basic need fulfillment such as flexible work arrangements that do not negatively affect compensation or advancement is one way to address the disparities between women and men in engaging in leadership roles and the length of time women remain in these roles (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024). Providing leadership opportunities, mentorship, senior-level women's networking groups, listening, training on the use of inclusive language and negotiation also help women stay engaged and succeed in high-level leadership positions (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024). These strategies acknowledge individual contributions and encourage growth. Ensuring that leaders and managers are engaged with teams and forming relationships within these teams and the workplace in general can help counter the isolation women may experience in top-level leadership positions.

Although flexible work arrangements are associated with high work engagement (Nagata, et al., 2021, Miglioretti et al., 2021), however, the frequency of telework can limit the development of supportive work relationships and well-being (Chung et al., 2021; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021). For women, remote work can lead to issues of work-life balance, as they need to manage both work responsibilities and home care, and lessen job quality (Elbaz et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Modroño, 2021; Rožman et al., 2021). A diverse organizational climate reduces coworker and manager conflict and increases job engagement for women (Sliter et al., 2014).

Gallup's Q12 questionnaire (Harter et al., 2009) examines the employee engagement elements associated with employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth. Various elements within these categories have been shown to encourage engagement and performance, such as the working environment, leadership, teamwork, and peer support (Mughal, 2020); social interaction, exchange, and recognition (Boccoli et al., 2021), effective communication of policies and practices to ensure understanding (Alfes et al., 2021); meaningful work that provides employees with skill and task variety (Albrecht et al., 2021); and ethical leadership, which encourages knowledge-sharing and enhances job performance and organizational commitment (Serang et al., 2024). However, gender differences in these studies were not identified.

Caregiving from managers creates an environment where employees care for each other and their organizations; when care is withdrawn, employees suffer physically and emotionally (Kahn, 1993; Saks, 2022). A model of caring human resource management practices, consisting of job design, training and development, flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, participative decision making, health and safety, career development, and health and wellness programs, is posited to increase worker engagement (Saks, 2022). The model is derived from a compilation of previous research identifying antecedents of

employee engagement such as autonomy, feedback, development, workplace climate, rewards and recognition, support, job variety, and work role fit (Crawford et al., 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). However, it has not been examined in terms of efficacy across genders. Determinants of employee engagement, consisting of endogenous (personal resources, positive emotions, recovery and respite activities, and personal engagement) and exogenous factors (job characteristics, social relations, and organizational resources, also based on a literature review (Boccoli et al., 2022) presents opportunities to determine those most salient to male and female workers.

The opportunity to express one's opinions and share one's expertise determines employee engagement (Davis & Van der Heijden, 2023; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Purcell, 2014; Rees et al., 2013). Involvement recognizes employees and helps them feel respected and contribute (Kahn, 1990; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). Involving employees in decision making is motivating and establishes strong relationships between employees and leaders, creating trust (Rees et al., 2013) and longevity within a company (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2021). As indicated, women in senior leadership positions may lack comradery and friends at work and feel isolated (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024). Both upwards and downward involvement could help address this. People-oriented management practices, characterized by teamwork, cooperation, trust, respect, support, appreciation, and delegation positively impact active participation and employee engagement across the three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020). Once again, however, gender differences were not delineated.

The current study, based on a web-based survey exploring the shifting nature of the workplace, seeks to understand the relationship between basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth determinants on employee engagement and specifically to identify gender gaps. As indicated in this review, although research on employee engagement is extensive, frameworks and categorizations of determinants have not been examined to determine the degree to which they apply across genders.

HYPOTHESES

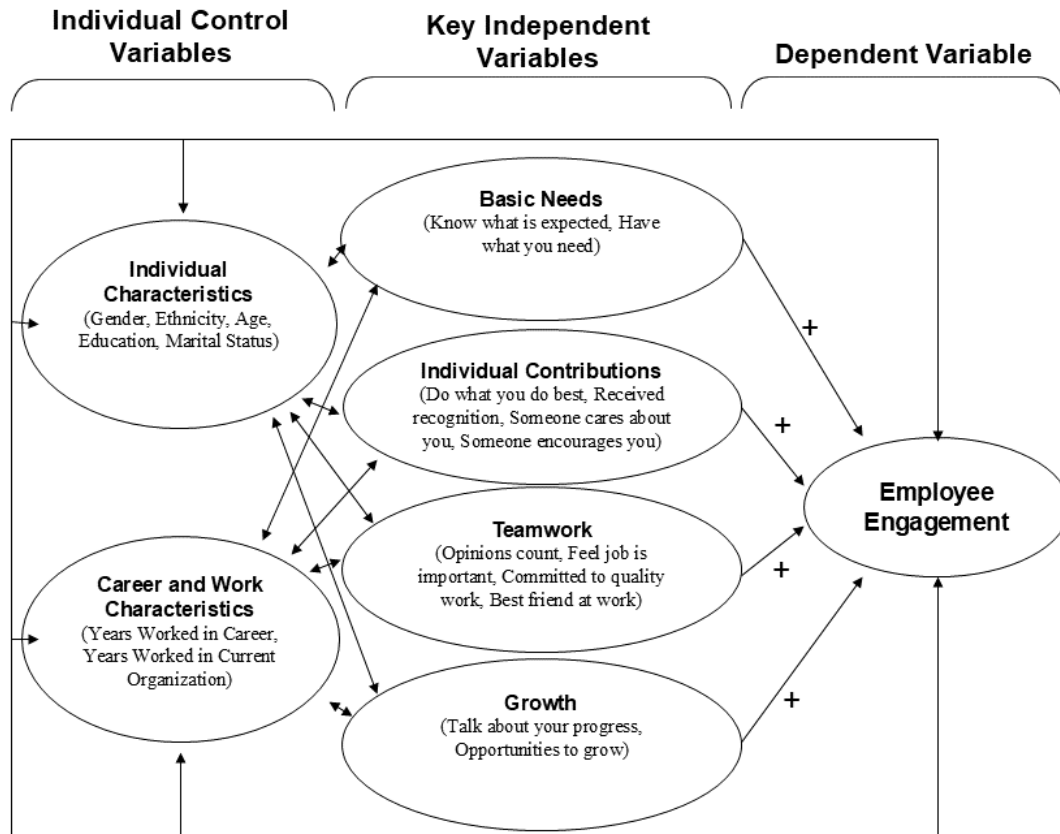
The literature on gender differences in employee engagement indicates mixed findings. Research on basic needs is limited but women with caregiving roles may need additional support regarding resources and schedule flexibility. Individual determinants such as recognition and caring in the workplace appear salient for all workers, although women appear to receive less recognition. Teamwork factors such as involvement and voice have not been examined to any extent for gender differences but women do value relationships and feel isolated when these are lacking. Growth aspects such as mentorship and career advancement support appear more salient for women than men. Leveraging insights from the literature, and accounting for limitations in previous research, we propose the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Male and female workers will report similar levels of employee engagement.
- **Hypothesis 2a:** Basic needs and individual contributions variables will predict employee engagement for male and female workers.
- **Hypothesis 2b:** Basic needs determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers.
- **Hypothesis 2c:** Individual determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for male workers.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Teamwork determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers than male workers.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Growth determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for male workers than female workers.
- **Hypothesis 5:** Worker activation determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers than male workers.

RESEARCH MODEL AND DESIGN

Modeled, in part, after Gallup’s Q12 questionnaire (Harter et al., 2009) and the work of Westover and Andrade (2024), we developed a web-based survey to explore the shifting nature of the workplace. The survey included a range of questions related to employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, growth, and activation variables. The survey was administered during winter 2024 using a stratified random sampling method across the United States, resulting in 566 completed surveys.

**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH MODEL**



Operationalization of Variables

We operationalized the study variables according to the approach of Harter et al. (2009) and added new survey questions, which allowed us to introduce additional variables in the analysis. See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
STUDY VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENTS

Variable	Item
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Employee engagement	“Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job?” (1) not at all engaged to (10) extremely engaged
<i>Worker Engagement</i>	
Know what is expected	“Do you know what is expected of you at work?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Have what you need	“Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Do what you do best	“I Have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Received recognition	“In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?”(1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Someone cares about you	“Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Someone encourages you	“Is there someone at work who encourages your development?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Opinions count	“At work, do your opinions seem to count?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Feel job is important	“Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Committed to quality work	“Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Best friend at work	“Do you have a best friend at work?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Talk about your progress	“In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Opportunities to grow	“In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Understanding of Meaning and Purpose</i>	
Meaningful work	“I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
Purposeful work	“I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Sense of Belonging</i>	
	“I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be.” (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree
<i>Leadership Efficacy</i>	
	“I see myself as a leader.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	
	“I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.” (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree
<i>Controls</i>	
	Dummy variables for race, ethnicity, education level, marital status, and state of residence; Continuous variables for birth year, full-time years worked in career, and years worked in current organization.

Statistical Methodology

We used a multi-step approach to analyze respondents' work experience data as well as their employee engagement responses. First, we conducted bivariate and descriptive analyses of worker engagement and activation variables by gender, as well as for the full sample. Next, we tested for statistically significant differences in employee engagement between genders (Hypothesis 1) using t-test analyses. We then examined gender-specific OLS and ordered probit regression models to evaluate the relative contribution of employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth to employee engagement for each gender (Hypotheses 2-3). Finally, we tested for statistically significant differences between genders in the impact worker activation determinants on employee engagement (Hypotheses 4-5) using moderation analyses.

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

More than 550 individuals (n=566) participated in the stratified random sample, representing areas across the United States, including Utah. All participants were employed, full-time or part-time, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic when the study was conducted. As shown in Table 2, males comprised 46.11% (n=261) of the sample, while females accounted for 53.89% (n=305). Respondents also provided demographic details regarding their race and ethnicity. As depicted in Tables 3 and 4, the racial breakdown was as follows: 67.67% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian, 19.96% identified as Black or African American, 9.72% identified as Asian, just over 1% identified as Native American or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and less than 2% reported their race as "other." When asked about ethnicity, the data demonstrated that 88.34% of respondents were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, whereas 11.66% identified as such.

As seen in Table 5, over 44% (n=249) of respondents had attained some college or less education, while under 56% (n=314) held a college degree or higher level of educational attainment. Table 6 shows that 62.7% of the sample reported being married or cohabitating, while 36.59% identified as single (with just 4 respondents preferring not to disclose their relationship status). As shown in Table 7, 1977 was the average birth year of participants. On average, respondents had worked full-time for 20.57 years throughout their career. Further, participants had spent an average of 13.94 years working for their current organization.

TABLE 2
GENDER OF RESPONDENT

	Freq.	Percent
Female	305	53.89
Male	261	46.11
Total	566	100

TABLE 3
RACE OF RESPONDENT

	Freq.	Percent
White	383	67.67
Black or African-American	113	19.96
Asian	55	9.72
Native American or Alaska Native	2	0.35
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	4	0.71
Other	9	1.59
Total	566	100

**TABLE 4
ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	66	11.66
Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	500	88.34
Total	566	100

**TABLE 5
EDUCATION LEVEL OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Less than high school	6	1.07
High school diploma	96	17.05
Some college, but no degree	147	26.11
Bachelor's degree	192	34.1
Master's degree	97	17.23
Doctoral degree	25	4.44
Total	563	100

**TABLE 6
MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENT**

	Freq.	Percent
Married or cohabitating	353	62.7
Single	206	36.59
Prefer not to say	4	0.71
Total	563	100

**TABLE 7
OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENT**

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Birth year	1977.34	13.99
Full-time years worked in career	20.57	13.92
Years worked in current organization	13.94	86.29

Descriptive Results

Table 8 displays the mean scores for employee engagement, employee activation variables, and other key study measures by gender, along with significant differences where present. A statistically significant gender difference was found for employee engagement, with males reporting higher average engagement levels than females. Therefore, hypothesis 1, which predicted no difference in engagement between males and females, is not supported. Additionally, several other variables exhibited significant gender differences. Specifically, males had significantly higher mean scores than females on numerous study variables. Females did not have statistically significant higher average scores on employee engagement or activation variables. Previous research has been inconsistent in determining gender differences, although men have been found to have higher levels consistent with the findings in the current study (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024; Nobes, 2023; Sharma et al., 2017; Zoe Talent Solutions, 2024).

TABLE 8
VARIABLE MEANS AND TEST OF DIFFERENCES BY GENDER

Dependent Variable	Females		Male		All		T Statistic & p-value for sig. diff		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	p-value	df
Employee Engagement	7.70	2.21	8.19	1.74	7.93	2.02	-2.861**	0.002	563
Employee Engagement Questions									
Do you know what is expected of you at work?	4.64	0.69	4.60	0.66	4.62	0.67	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?	4.40	0.84	4.30	0.84	4.36	0.84	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?	4.16	0.94	4.28	0.89	4.22	0.92	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?	3.47	1.42	3.75	1.31	3.60	1.38	-2.399**	0.008	563
Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?	4.04	1.09	4.22	0.94	4.12	1.03	-2.035*	0.021	563
Is there someone at work who encourages your development?	3.84	1.19	3.94	1.14	3.89	1.17	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
At work, do your opinions seem to count?	3.80	1.21	4.10	1.07	3.94	1.15	-3.033***	0.001	563
Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?	3.89	1.13	4.11	0.97	3.99	1.07	-2.374**	0.009	563
Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?	3.90	1.04	4.20	0.88	4.04	0.98	-3.695***	0.000	563
Do you have a best friend at work?	3.30	1.55	3.49	1.35	3.39	1.46	-1.581*	0.05	563
In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?	3.53	1.39	3.72	1.27	3.61	1.34	-1.685*	0.046	563
In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?	3.77	1.27	4.02	1.07	3.89	1.19	-2.462**	0.007	563
Employee Activation Questions									
I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.	4.02	1.07	4.06	1.01	4.04	1.04	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.	3.87	1.20	4.04	0.99	3.95	1.11	-1.850*	0.032	563
I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be.	4.91	1.80	5.32	1.54	5.10	1.70	-2.860**	0.002	562
I see myself as a leader.	3.85	1.62	4.08	1.44	3.96	1.54	-1.781*	0.038	563
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.	4.93	1.88	5.30	1.73	5.10	1.82	-2.404**	0.008	562

Regression Results

Following the approach of Harter et al. (2009), we examined the association between employee engagement and the independent variables across multiple regression analyses. The first model (Table 9) examined the influence of employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, growth, and control variables on employee engagement, by gender. In the second model (Table 10), we examined those same areas' joint influence of all control and independent variables on employee engagement, but we added a series of "employee activation" variables for each gender and for the total sample. Once these "worker activation" variables were added to the second model, many of the variables in the first model fell out of significance. Therefore, the last model (Table 11) focuses on the most impactful engagement and activation variables and represents what we consider "the best" model.

Table 9 shows variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable. For women, "do what you do best," "someone cares about you", "feel job is important," and "opportunities to grow" are each statistically significant variables in predicting employee engagement. For men, "know what is expected", "feel job is important," "best friend at work," and "opportunities to grow," are each statistically significant variables in predicting worker employee engagement. Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.458) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.499) OLS regression models, meaning the model accounted for just under 46% of the variation in employee engagement for women and just under 50% of the variation in employee engagement for men.

In Table 10, there is variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable. For women, only "do what you do best," and "someone cares about you," remained significant from the original model, with all the worker activation variables being significant but "meaningful work." For men, "know what is expected", "feel job is important," and "best friend at work," remained significant from the original model, with all of the worker activation variables being significant but "meaningful work" and "leadership efficacy." Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.537) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.583) OLS regression models, meaning the model accounted for just under 54% of the variation in employee engagement for women and just over 58% of the variation in employee engagement for men.

Finally, we took the most impactful engagement and activation variables from the last model, combined with our control variables, to create our best fit model. As seen in Table 11, while we see variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable, every worker engagement and activation variable in the overall model was statistically significant. For women, "do what you do best," and "someone cares about you" were statistically significant worker engagement variables, while all of the

worker activation variables were statistically significant. For men, “know what is expected”, “feel job is important,” and “best friend at work,” were statistically significant worker engagement variables, while all worker activation variables were statistically significant except “leadership efficacy.” Additionally, there were variations in *adjusted r-squared* values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.544) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.582) OLS regression models, meaning the model accounted for over 54% of the variation in employee engagement for women and over 58% of the variation in employee engagement for men.

TABLE 9
MODEL 1 - OLD EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION
RESULTS BY GENDER

	Female	Male	All
Employee Engagement Questions			
Do you know what is expected of you at work?	0.059	0.238***	0.117**
Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?	0.026	0.075	0.039
At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?	0.163**	-0.026	0.088*
In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?	-0.037	0.031	-0.006
Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?	0.232***	0.041	0.141**
Is there someone at work who encourages your development?	0.021	-0.055	0.008
At work, do your opinions seem to count?	-0.014	0.093	0.021
Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?	0.2568***	0.241***	0.245***
Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?	-0.013	0.076	0.027
Do you have a best friend at work?	0.077	0.159**	0.120***
In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?	-0.043	0.011	-0.022
In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?	0.136*	0.129*	0.144**
Controls			
Race	-0.044	0.036	-0.014
Gender	--	--	0.043
Ethnicity	0.056	-0.007	0.025
State of Residence	-0.025	0.046	0.010
Birth Year	-0.261***	-0.107	-0.203***
Education Level	-0.063	-0.029	-0.057*
Marital Status	0.060	-0.068	0.004
Years Worked in Career	-0.176*	-0.019	-0.107*
Years Worked in Current Organization	0.057	0.085*	*0.061
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	0.458	0.4999	0.469
F	13.64***	13.99***	24.56***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 10
MODEL 2 - NEW EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARIDIZED OLS REGRESSION
RESULTS, BY GENDER

	Female	Male	All
Employee Engagement Questions			
Do you know what is expected of you at work?	0.069	0.206***	0.111***
Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?	0.064	-0.017	0.027
At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?	0.104*	-0.022	0.056
In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?	-0.037	-0.037	-0.030
Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?	0.173**	-0.029	0.090*
Is there someone at work who encourages your development?	0.007	-0.088	-0.018
At work, do your opinions seem to count?	-0.043	0.055	-0.011
Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?	0.082	0.1101*	0.090*
Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?	-0.024	-0.024	-0.010
Do you have a best friend at work?	0.020	0.090*	0.060*
In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?	-0.042	0.098	0.013
In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?	0.056	0.098	0.074
Employee Activation Questions			
I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.	0.045	0.075	0.066
I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.	0.167**	0.192**	0.176***
I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be.	0.155*	0.192**	0.156***
I see myself as a leader.	0.080*	0.055	0.067*
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.	0.146*	0.140*	0.137***
Controls			
Race	-0.050	0.042	-0.012
Gender	--	--	0.042
Ethnicity	0.047	-0.043	0.011
State of Residence	-0.030	0.008	-0.006
Birth Year	-0.233***	-0.100	-0.176***
Education Level	-0.059	-0.028	-0.055*
Marital Status	0.093*	-0.007	0.043
Years Worked in Career	-0.175**	-0.018	-0.108*
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	0.537	0.583	0.551
F	15.47***	16.14***	28.48***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 11
MODEL 3 - FINAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION
RESULTS, BY GENDER

	Female	Male	All
Employee Engagement Questions			
Do you know what is expected of you at work?	0.077	0.209***	0.116***
At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?	0.128*	0.002	0.074*
Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?	0.160**	-0.012	0.091*
Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?	0.089	0.143*	0.108**
Do you have a best friend at work?	0.015	0.113**	0.062*
Employee Activation Questions			
I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.	0.207***	0.231***	0.216***
I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be.	0.134*	0.201**	0.166***
I see myself as a leader.	0.075*	0.061	0.068*
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.	0.147**	0.126*	0.142***
Controls			
Race	-0.043	0.040	-0.012
Gender	--	--	0.035
Ethnicity	0.047	-0.047	0.008
State of Residence	-0.036	0.017	-0.010
Birth Year	-0.236***	-0.092	-0.174*
Education Level	-0.057	-0.022	-0.056*
Marital Status	0.085*	-0.022	0.038
Years Worked in Career	-0.164**	-0.035	-0.107*
N	300	261	561
Adjusted R-Squared	0.544	0.582	0.553
F	23.28***	23.63***	41.70***

Note: Beta values; Significance levels: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Revisiting Hypotheses

Based on the results presented previously, we can reevaluate each of the original hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1 proposed that male and female workers would report similar levels of employee engagement. However, Table 8 shows a statistically significant difference in engagement levels between males and females, with males reporting higher average engagement. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is not supported.
- Hypothesis 2a predicted that basic needs and individual contribution variables would predict engagement for both males and females. This hypothesis is partially supported, as Tables 9-11 show variation in predictiveness of variables for each gender.
- Hypothesis 2b proposed that basic needs would be more salient for females, while Hypothesis 2c proposed individual determinants would be more salient for males. The regression results do not clearly support either of these, as the significant predictors varied for each gender across the models.
- Hypothesis 3 predicted teamwork would be more salient for females, but the regression results do not show consistent support for this.
- Hypothesis 4 proposed growth would be more salient for males, but again the regression results varied in significant predictors between genders and do not strongly support this.
- Finally, Hypothesis 5 predicted activation variables would be more salient for females. The full model in Table 11 does show all activation variables as significant for both gender, providing strong support for this hypothesis.

In summary, Hypothesis 1 is not supported, while the degree of support for the other hypotheses varies based on the regression results, with some partial support. Only hypothesis 5 was confirmed by the study findings.

A Revised Employee Engagement Model

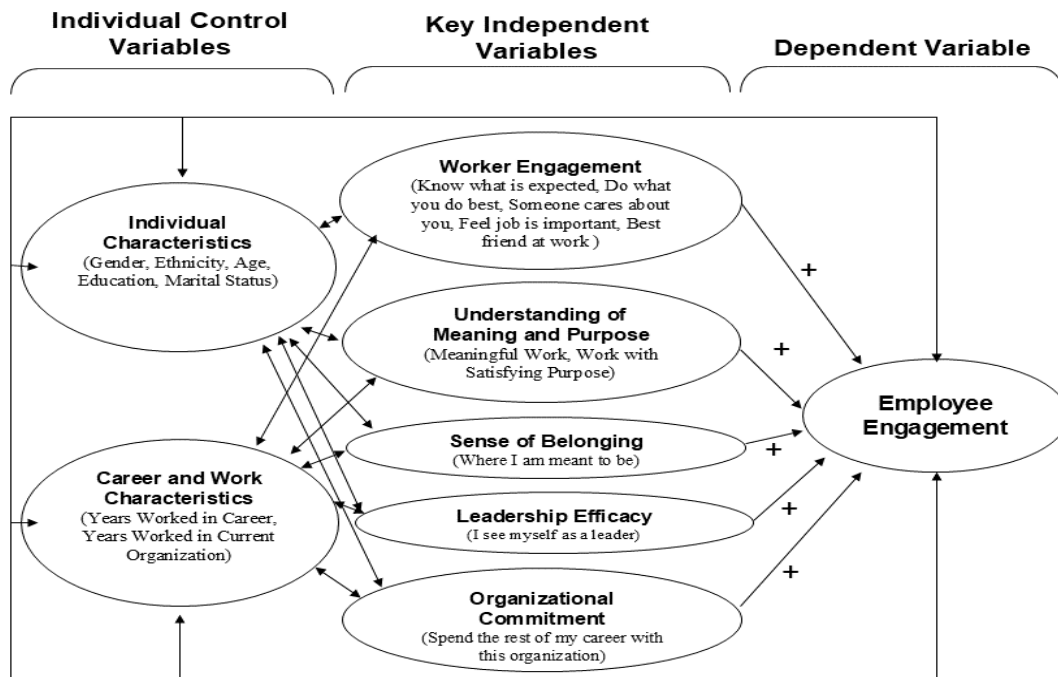
The initial research model presented in Figure 1 (and the corresponding hypotheses) only partially captured the complex relationship between employee engagement, gender, and key workplace determinants revealed through this study. While traditional factors like workers' basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, growth retain relevance, the prominent influence of worker activation constructs substantiated updating the conceptual framework.

The updated research model in Figure 2 incorporates learnings from this study. Significantly, the revised framework positions the worker activation factors of purposeful work, sense of belonging, leadership efficacy, and organizational commitment as key influencers of employee engagement rather than separate supplementary predictors. By conceptualizing worker activation as multidimensional, consisting of purposeful work, sense of belonging, leadership efficacy, and organizational commitment, the model offers a more robust perspective for comprehending employee engagement in constantly evolving work settings. This revised view recognizes worker activation's core role in driving engagement, rather than treating it as separate or ancillary.

By positioning worker activation as the model's core, the updated framework incorporates research showing that employee engagement is influenced more by discretionary commitment built through inclusive, empowering corporate cultures rather than solely by basic expectations. The revised model further recognizes the cross-gender importance of activation in inspiring discretionary effort to maximize well-being and business results. It acknowledges that cultivating activation can motivate extra effort across all demographics to achieve optimal outcomes for both individuals and the organization.

The revised research model gives insight that can guide future theory development and the ongoing study of employee engagement. Employee engagement may be fluid rather than a fixed state and depend on particular contexts. It is shaped not just by individual attributes but also workplace experiences that can be strategically designed to adapt to shifting norms in organizations and society. This perspective presents new avenues for maximizing diverse and flourishing workforces. By tailoring efforts to cultivate high activation among all employees, organizations can make targeted investments through customized approaches.

**FIGURE 2
REVISED RESEARCH MODEL**



DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide several important insights into the dynamics of employee engagement across gender. First, they reveal that contrary to our initial hypothesis, male and female employees do in fact report different levels of engagement, with males reporting higher average engagement. This finding suggests that despite increasing gender equality in the workplace, some gender differences in engagement persist. It may reflect implicit or unconscious biases that still advantage males. However, the study also shows that both genders' engagement can be positively influenced through strong worker activation.

In examining the predictors of engagement separately for males and females, we found some support for expecting different salient factors by gender as hypothesized, but the impact of variables was not consistently differentiated. Basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork and growth variables all seemed to play a role for both genders, though the most impactful specific predictors varied in the regression models. This indicates engagement is multi-dimensional for all employees, not driven solely by any single factor. It suggests organizations should aim to meet a range of needs for both male and female workers to maximize their engagement.

Most notably, the results provided strong evidence that worker activation is core to employee engagement overall and equally influential for both genders. Incorporating measures of purpose, belonging, leadership efficacy and organizational commitment robustly predicted engagement for males and females. This aligns with recent engagement research emphasizing the importance of gaining employees' discretionary effort through an inclusive culture that empowers them. It validates revising our model to position activation as central to engagement rather than ancillary.

Overall, the findings point to both commonalities and nuances in what engenders male and female workers. They highlight that cultivating high activation through empowering organizational culture and work experiences can inspire discretionary effort and engagement across demographic groups. Customized efforts may still be needed to optimize diverse and flourishing workforces to appeal to the full spectrum of individual preferences and needs. But focusing on nurturing strong activation appears key to mobilizing commitment and engagement from all.

For organizations, this suggests prioritizing initiatives that strengthen workers' sense of meaningful purpose, social belonging, development opportunities, and loyalty. It also implies the need for ongoing assessment of policies and practices to ensure continued progress on promoting inclusion and equity. For employees, the results underscore taking advantage of growth opportunities to find fulfilling roles through leadership responsibilities or other leadership efficacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND WORKERS

This study's findings provide useful insights for optimizing employee engagement at both the organizational and individual level. According to this study, organizations can take several important steps to boost employee engagement. First and foremost, companies must foster a strong culture of employee activation. This involves clearly communicating the organization's overarching purpose and goals to ensure employees feel they contribute meaningful value through their roles. Help workers see how their specific duties fit into and advance broader objectives. Organizations should also promote a strong sense of belonging among all employee demographics. Create opportunities for social interaction and support networks to form between colleagues. Be attentive to inclusion and ensure diverse groups feel they are a part of the inclusive work culture.

Organizations must also provide growth and development opportunities so employees are constantly advancing their skills and capabilities. Support various avenues of leadership development even for non-managerial roles in order to increase feelings of leadership efficacy. Furthermore, recognize all workers' formal and informal contributions to demonstrate that their opinions and unique talents are valued. Offer varied means of recognition so all feel appreciated for their efforts. Assess workplace policies, practices, and manager behaviors on a regular basis as well to ensure continued progress on equity and inclusion.

Tailor employee engagement initiatives and communications to different preferences while maintaining a core message of activating all workers.

Individual employees should seek ways to develop themselves through on-the-job challenges, training programs, mentoring relationships, or considering lateral career moves over time. Employees can explore leadership responsibilities wherever possible, such as guiding projects or initiatives, as leadership appears in many forms beyond formal management roles. Forming supportive relationships with colleagues is also important to enhance sense of belonging at work and overall job satisfaction. Communicating professional goals, development needs, and most rewarding work with managers can also optimize role fit and contributions. Employees should take initiative to better comprehend their organization's purpose and direction to strengthen personal activation. Expressing respectful opinions and getting involved builds influence and ensures unique voices are represented in the workplace. Maintaining work-life balance and focus on overall well-being, not just recognition, can sustain high work engagement long-term.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This initial study only focused on gender differences in engagement determinants. Future research could examine interactions between gender and other identity factors like race, age, parental status, disability status, and sexual orientation. Considering multiple identities would provide deeper insight into engagement dynamics.

A limitation of this research was its cross-sectional design. Longitudinal studies tracking how engagement levels and predictors change over time, especially during organizational or economic transition periods, would offer more context. This could help disentangle causal relationships. Additionally, future studies should seek to validate the updated engagement model in diverse industry and cultural settings. The model's generalizability needs further testing to establish its practical utility for organizations globally.

Additional research approaches might also include:

- Comparative analyses investigating engagement predictors between occupations, generations, and regional/national contexts can shed light on universal factors versus those contingent on specific situations. This would refine engagement theories.
- Qualitative exploration of employee experiences would complement quantitative findings. Interviews and focus groups could provide richer understanding of how cultural and structural workplace elements affect discretion and commitment.
- Experimental research manipulating elements of organizational culture like inclusion, empowerment and growth support can offer causal insights. Such designed studies could help identify high-leverage engagement drivers.
- Future studies can evaluate engagement outcomes at multiple levels - individual, team, customer/client, and organizational. Assessing impacts on diverse metrics like performance, retention, well-being would strengthen the case for proactively managing engagement.

By pursuing such avenues, future research can more deeply probe the shifting, context-dependent nature of employee engagement experienced differently by diverse groups. Continued investigation of this evolving topic can help organizations globally optimally engage and empower diverse, flourishing workforces for mutual benefit in shifting times and can also help generate insightful knowledge for energizing organizations and workforces through customized yet inclusive approaches. The pathways outlined here represent promising next steps for advancing understanding.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to provide new insights into the dynamics of employee engagement across gender through examining the relative influence of key determinants. Overall, the study yielded several meaningful findings with practical implications. While confirming prevailing engagement models retain salience, findings substantiated revising frameworks to position worker activation as central rather than ancillary.

Reinforcing activation universally appeared key to inspiring discretionary commitment and engagement from all.

While initially predicting similarity, results revealed modest yet statistically significant differences in reported engagement levels between male and female workers. However, cultivating strong activation showed promise for positively influencing both genders' engagement. Examining determinants separately by gender provided some support for expecting certain predictors to differentially impact males versus females as hypothesized. Yet engagement also exhibited multi-dimensionality for all, influenced by a range of needs.

Notably, measures of purpose, belonging, leadership efficacy, and organizational commitment robustly predicted engagement across genders when incorporated in full models. This validates recent emphasis on discretionary efforts built through empowering, inclusive cultures. It corroborates reframing activation as core to comprehending engagement amid evolving work. Recognizing its cross-cutting importance for maximizing well-being and business results offers guidance for energizing diverse workforces.

Findings highlight both commonalities and individual nuances in engaging male and female workers. Overall, they point to cultivating high activation through strategic organizational experiences and equitable policies as a shared pathway for commitment, regardless of attributes. At the same time, customized yet inclusive approaches may appeal optimally to the spectrum of human needs and preferences.

Continued exploration of employee engagement dynamics differentiated by characteristics like parenthood, ethnicity and ability status can deepen understanding. Similarly, a longitudinal examination of predictive factors over time and across industries/cultures would enhance practical relevance. Ultimately, sustainably inspiring discretionary effort merits ongoing strategic focus as work constantly changes.

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