# Exploring Geographic Influences on the Engagement Divide Between Male and Female Employees

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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 within and outside of Utah. The aim is to address gaps in research examining potential gender variations and geographic influences on 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. Analyses included descriptive tests, gender-specific regression models, 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 also varied across genders and geographies. Activation was also found to significantly predict engagement across genders, validating its cross-cutting importance in conceptualization and offering implications for optimally designing inclusive strategies to inspire discretionary commitment and employee engagement both within and outside of Utah.*

*Keywords: employee engagement, employee activation, gender, geographic influences*

## 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 the dynamics shaping engagement likely differ depending on personal attribute. Exploring potential contextual variations across demographic groups and geographic regions can yield valuable insights.

Specifically, examining gender differences and geographic influences 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 are parallel or divergent between genders and locations. Clarifying these dynamics could inform customized yet equitable strategies for engaging diverse workforces optimally in different regions.

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 within and outside of Utah. 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 managerial understanding of potential parallels and variances in what inspires male and female workers' discretionary effort within different geographic contexts. Understanding its role regarding gender and location could offer organizations strategic direction for employee engagement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement comprises individuals' physical, cognitive, and emotional attributes at work (Kahn, 1990). Specific aspects include vigor (energy, resilience, persistence), dedication (commitment, task significance, enthusiasm, pride), and absorption (task immersion) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees invest in their work and organizations (Saks, 2006); view their jobs positively (Christian et al., 2011), and exhibit energy in their performance (Bailey et al., 2015; Lysaght & O'Halloran, 2020; Parker & Griffin, 2011). Employee engagement can change while completing a task (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2009; Khan, 1990) and during social interactions (Boccoli et al., 2022). Frameworks account for psychological and behavioral (Davis et al., 2023) and endogenous and exogenous factors (Boccoli et al., 2022), with the latter based on research showing the impact of individual resources, job features, organizational aspects, and social setting (Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Benefits of employee engagement include job and life satisfaction, positive interactions (Bailey et al., 2015; Boccoli et al., 2022), role and job performance, decreased counterproductive behavior (Bailey et al., 2015), open-mindedness (Reijseger et al., 2017), profitability, productivity, customer loyalty, and reduced turnover (Bailey et al., 2015; Bakker, 2011; Cudriene & Diskiene, 2020; Richman, 2006; Saks, 2006). Organizations can improve employee engagement and performance through job design and resource provision, leadership, perceived organizational support, teamwork, training, and development (Bailey et al., 2015; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). Emerging models identifying worker activation determinants such as engagement, meaning and purpose, encouragement and belonging, leadership efficacy, and meaning and commitment illustrate how organizations can create cultures of growth, wellness, and well-being (Andrade & Westover, 2024).

### Gender Gaps in Employee Engagement

Research findings on gender-employee engagement are inconsistent. Men report greater engagement, commitment, well-being, inclusion, and recognition (Nobes, 2023; Zoe Talent Solutions, 2024). Globally, women are more engaged than men except senior leadership, possibly due to isolation, leading to shorter longevity (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024). Men have stronger career aspirations than women though not more occupational self-efficacy (Hartman & Barber, 2020). This may account for the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership. While women believe in their abilities, they may need more encouragement, development, and advancement opportunities than men. The gap between men and women leaving their jobs is increasing and for every women prompted to middle management, two senior women leaders exit (Cardazone et al., 2022; Field et al., 2023; Sull & Sull, 2023). Employee engagement for South African university employees do not differ by gender (Mulaudzi & Takawira, 2015), but male Indian IT workers are more engaged (Sharma et al., 2017), illustrating the relevance of culture and industry.

Strategies to address the gender gap have mixed outcomes. Flexible work arrangements can improve gender equality and engagement (Field et al., 2023; Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024; Nagata,et al., 2021, Miglioretti et al., 2021), but may have a negative effect on women who fulfill domestic responsibilities while working at home (Elbaz et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Modroño, 2021; Rožman et al., 2021) although some research indicates that both men and women enjoy a better work-life balance and increased productivity from hybrid/remote work (Field et al., 2023). Working at home can decrease collaboration, personal

connections, relationships, and well-being (Chung et al., 2021; Field et al., 2023; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021). Similar to women's experiences in senior leadership, this may lead to feelings of isolation. However, women who work from home experience fewer microagressions and greater psychosocial safety (Field et al., 2023). A diverse organizational climate decreases coworker and manager conflict for women (Sliter et al., 2014) as does networking, mentoring, and leader involvement (Frumar & Truscott-Smith, 2024).

While many studies have identified engagement determinants, few have examined related gender differences. Determinants include work environment, leadership, teamwork, and peer support (Mughal, 2020); social interaction, exchange, and recognition (Boccoli et al., 2021), communication (Alfes et al., 2021); involvement and participative decision-making (Davis & Van der Heijden, 2023; Kahn, 1990; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2021; Purcell, 2014; Rees et al., 2013); meaningful work (Albrecht et al., 2021); caring human resource practices (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020; Saks, 2022); ethical leadership (Serang et al., 2024); basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth (Harter et al., 2009); and autonomy, feedback, development, climate, rewards, recognition, support, task variety, and work-role fit (Crawford et al., 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). While commonalities across these studies can be identified, specifics regarding what drives workplace engagement for women needs examination.

**Gender Gaps in Employee Engagement Inside and Outside of Utah**

As this study examines employee engagement determinants for U.S. workers within and outside the state of Utah, the following contextual information may be helpful.

- Utah women participate in the labor force at higher levels than nationally – 62.5% compared to 58.8% (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- Utah women hold more part-time positions than women nationally – 36.4% compared to 28.7% (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- Utah women are less likely to work full-time year-round than women nationally – 38.5% vs. 41.8% (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- More Utah men work full-time and year-round than Utah women – 87.5 % compared to 75% (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- Workforce participation for Utah women is below the national average between the ages of 25-54 (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- 39.6% of Utah women work in jobs requiring 4-year degrees (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- Utah women earn 73.5% of what men earn (Henderson & Addison, 2024).
- Nationally, women have more graduate degrees than men (13% vs. 12.4%); in Utah the rate is 9.3% to 14.1% (Blackburn et al., 2024).
- U.S. women participate in unpaid work an average of 4.92 hours per day compared to 3.79 hours per day for men. Utah women spend 5.55 hours per day doing unpaid work, compared to 3.22 hours for Utah men (Utah Women & Leadership Project, 2024b).
- Utah does not have an equal pay law and has generous exemptions for its wage anti-discrimination law.

Reasons for the gender gap as a whole and differences between Utah women and women nationally may be accounted for by several factors. One of these is cultural norms and expectations. Women lag behind men in workforce participation globally due to unwritten rules that govern gender norms such as expectations for who cares for children, who works, who works full time, who earns the highest salary, and where it is appropriate to work (Cislaghi et al., 2022). Full-time work may be challenging for women with domestic roles although research shows benefits in human and political rights, health, and well- being (Roxo et al. 2020, Solé-Auró et al., 2018; Sudkämper et al., 2020; Taukobong et al., 2016). Gender differences in social behavior are due to societal-determined roles such as women taking a domestic/nurturer role and men an employment/provider role (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). These roles persist and result in social expectations that create external sanctions, impact women's preferences, and result in occupational segregation (Hanek & Garcia, 2022; Eagly et al., 2020).

Although the under-representation of women in some fields, notably STEM, is a concern, initiatives to increase women's participation in these sectors may be misaligned (Ryan, 2022). Women may be less engaged in traditional male roles and choose to leave due to lack of fit or identification with the profession (Peters et al., 2012; Saucerman & Vasquez, 2014), and particularly, experiences with discrimination and lowered expectations of success in their fields (Meeussen et al., 2022). Rather than focusing on attracting women to male-dominated professions, organizations need to examine their cultures to eliminate discriminatory practices and lack of role models (Casad et al., 2018; Field et al., 2023). In particular, unconscious gender bias, an invisible barrier inherent in workplace structures and practices that favor men, result in microaggressions and lack of engagement (Ely et al., 2011; Field et al., 2023). Women themselves may hold these biases (Madsen & Andrade, 2018). In spite of increased participation of women in male-dominated roles, discrimination in terms of salary and advancement persist (Begeny et al., 2020). Those who think bias does not occur drive its occurrence.

Certainly, country contexts as well as regional contexts within countries impact women's career aspirations and work experiences. Top barriers for women and girls in Utah, identified by male and female survey respondents, include lack of recognition, gender expectations, religious expectations, balancing career and home, and work-related inequities (Utah Women & Leadership Project, 2024b). The issues identified in this review impact employee engagement for women in a variety of contexts but may be more exacerbated in places with cultures practicing traditional gender roles tied to religious beliefs, such as Utah.

## HYPOTHESES

The literature on gender differences and geographic influences in employee engagement indicates mixed findings. Research on how basic needs, individual determinants, teamwork factors, and growth aspects impact engagement for men and women within different locations is limited. For example, women with caregiving roles in some regions may need additional support in terms of resources and schedule flexibility to be engaged. Individual determinants such as recognition and caring in the workplace appear salient for all workers in many areas, although women in some locations appear to receive less recognition. Teamwork factors such as involvement and voice have not been comprehensively examined for potential gender differences or geographic variations. Still, women do often value relationships and feel isolated when these are lacking depending on location. Growth aspects like mentorship and career advancement support appear to be more salient engagement predictors for women versus men in certain geographic regions.

Leveraging insights from previous engagement research while accounting for limitations regarding gender, geography, and understudied areas, we propose the following hypotheses to examine potential variations in the drivers of discretionary effort for men and women within and outside of Utah:

***Hypothesis #1****: Male and female workers will report similar levels of employee engagement, both inside and outside of Utah.*

***Hypothesis #2a:*** *Basic needs and individual contributions variables will similarly predict employee engagement for male and female workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

***Hypothesis #2b****: Basic needs determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

***Hypothesis #2c:*** *Individual determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for male workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

***Hypothesis #3:*** *Teamwork determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers than male workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

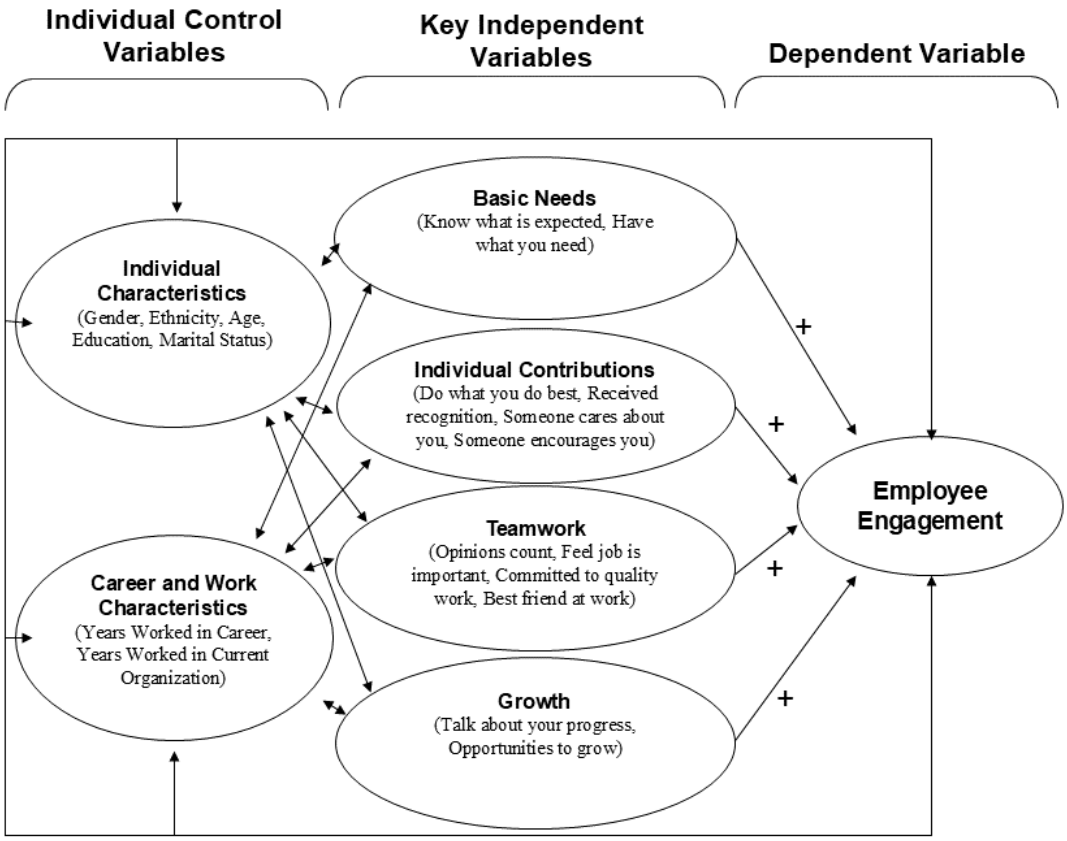
***Hypothesis #4:*** *Growth determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for male workers than female workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

***Hypothesis #5:*** *Worker activation determinants will be more salient in predicting employee engagement for female workers than male workers, both inside and outside of Utah.*

## RESEARCH MODEL AND DESIGN

Drawing inspiration from Gallup's Q12 employee engagement survey (Harter et al., 2009) as well as the research of Westover and Andrade (2024), we created an online questionnaire to examine how the modern workplace is evolving. The survey included questions related to employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork dynamics, growth opportunities, and employee activation variables. The questionnaire was distributed in the spring of 2024 utilizing a stratified random sampling approach across the United States, culminating in 566 finished responses.

**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 |
|---|---|
| *Dependent Variable* | |
| Employee engagement | "Overall, how engaged are you in your (main) job?" (1) not at all engaged to (10) extremely engaged |
| *Worker Engagement* | |
| 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 |
| *Understanding of Meaning and Purpose* | |
| 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 |
| *Sense of Belonging* | "I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be." (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree |
| *Leadership Efficacy* | "I see myself as a leader." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree |
| *Organizational Commitment* | "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization." (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree |
| *Controls* | 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 employed a multi-stage approach to analyze the work experience data of respondents as well as their responses regarding employee engagement. First, we conducted preliminary and descriptive analyses of worker engagement and activation variables by gender and location, as well as for the full sample. Next, we tested for statistically significant differences in employee engagement between genders and location (Hypothesis 1) using t-test analyses. We then examined gender-specific OLS and ordered probit regression models by location to evaluate the relative contribution of employee basic needs, individual contributions, teamwork, and growth to employee engagement for each gender (Hypotheses 2-3). Finally, using moderation analyses, we tested for statistically significant differences between genders by location in the impact of worker activation determinants on employee engagement (Hypotheses 4-5).

## RESULTS

**Participant Demographics**

A total of 566 individuals participated in the stratified random sample, representing different areas of the United States, including Utah. All participants were employed either full-time or part-time both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic period when the study took place. 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 about their race and ethnicity. As seen in Tables 3 and 4, racially 67.67% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian, 19.96% as Black or African American, 9.72% as Asian, just over 1% 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, 88.34% of respondents were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, whereas 11.66% identified as such.

As displayed in Table 5, over 44% (n=249) of respondents had attained some college education or less, while under 56% (n=314) held a college degree or higher. 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, the average birth year of participants was 1977. 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. While this is the case for males both inside and outside of Utah, the divide between men and women is much more dramatic outside of Utah. Therefore, hypothesis 1, which predicted no difference in engagement between males and females inside and outside of Utah, is partially supported. Additionally, several other variables exhibited significant gender differences. Specifically, males had significantly higher mean scores compared to females on numerous study variables. Additionally, as is the case with employee engagement, the gender divide in mean scores of other study variables is often more pronounced outside of Utah. 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, 2023Sharma et al., 2017; Zoe Talent Solutions, 2024).

**TABLE 8**
**VARIABLE MEANS AND TEST OF DIFFERENCES, BY GENDER AND LOCATION**

| | Utah | | | | Outside of Utah | | | | All | | | | All | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Females | | Male | | Females | | Male | | Females | | Male | | T Statistic & p-value for sig. diff | | |
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | *t* | p-value | df |
| **Dependent Variable** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Employee Engagement | 7.78 | 2.02 | 7.99 | 1.73 | 7.66 | 2.31 | 8.30 | 1.74 | 7.70 | 2.21 | 8.19 | 1.74 | -2.861** | 0.002 | 563 |
| **Employee Engagement Questions** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Do you know what is expected of you at work? | 4.61 | 0.65 | 4.61 | 0.61 | 4.66 | 0.71 | 4.59 | 0.69 | 4.64 | 0.69 | 4.60 | 0.66 | *n.s.* | *n.s.* | *n.s.* |
| Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right? | 4.36 | 0.83 | 4.21 | 0.93 | 4.43 | 0.85 | 4.35 | 0.78 | 4.40 | 0.84 | 4.30 | 0.84 | *n.s.* | *n.s.* | *n.s.* |
| At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? | 4.04 | 0.97 | 4.22 | 0.92 | 4.24 | 0.91 | 4.31 | 0.87 | 4.16 | 0.94 | 4.28 | 0.89 | *n.s.* | *n.s.* | *n.s.* |
| In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work? | 3.39 | 1.50 | 3.53 | 1.37 | 3.52 | 1.38 | 3.87 | 1.25 | 3.47 | 1.42 | 3.75 | 1.31 | -2.399** | 0.008 | 563 |
| Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? | 4.12 | 0.98 | 4.30 | 0.89 | 4.00 | 1.15 | 4.17 | 0.97 | 4.04 | 1.09 | 4.22 | 0.94 | -2.035* | 0.021 | 563 |
| Is there someone at work who encourages your development? | 3.76 | 1.24 | 3.85 | 1.25 | 3.89 | 1.17 | 3.99 | 1.08 | 3.84 | 1.19 | 3.94 | 1.14 | *n.s.* | *n.s.* | *n.s.* |
| At work, do your opinions seem to count? | 3.74 | 1.25 | 3.97 | 1.20 | 3.84 | 1.19 | 4.17 | 0.99 | 3.80 | 1.21 | 4.10 | 1.07 | -3.033*** | 0.001 | 563 |
| Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important? | 3.86 | 1.14 | 4.15 | 1.05 | 3.92 | 1.13 | 4.08 | 0.93 | 3.89 | 1.13 | 4.11 | 0.97 | -2.374** | 0.009 | 563 |
| Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work? | 3.87 | 0.97 | 4.17 | 0.91 | 3.92 | 1.07 | 4.22 | 0.87 | 3.90 | 1.04 | 4.20 | 0.88 | -3.695*** | 0.000 | 563 |
| Do you have a best friend at work? | 3.35 | 1.49 | 3.44 | 1.38 | 3.27 | 1.58 | 3.53 | 1.34 | 3.30 | 1.55 | 3.49 | 1.35 | -1.581* | 0.05 | 563 |
| In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress? | 3.61 | 1.40 | 3.62 | 1.30 | 3.48 | 1.39 | 3.77 | 1.26 | 3.53 | 1.39 | 3.72 | 1.27 | -1.685* | 0.046 | 563 |
| In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow? | 3.82 | 1.29 | 4.01 | 1.12 | 3.75 | 1.27 | 4.02 | 1.05 | 3.77 | 1.27 | 4.02 | 1.07 | -2.462** | 0.007 | 563 |
| **Employee Activation Questions** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful. | 4.05 | 1.05 | 3.95 | 1.15 | 4.00 | 1.08 | 4.13 | 0.91 | 4.02 | 1.07 | 4.06 | 1.01 | *n.s.* | *n.s.* | *n.s.* |
| I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose. | 3.91 | 1.11 | 4.00 | 1.11 | 3.84 | 1.25 | 4.06 | 0.92 | 3.87 | 1.20 | 4.04 | 0.99 | -1.850* | 0.032 | 563 |
| I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be. | 4.86 | 1.82 | 5.16 | 1.62 | 4.94 | 1.80 | 5.41 | 1.49 | 4.91 | 1.80 | 5.32 | 1.54 | -2.860** | 0.002 | 562 |
| I see myself as a leader. | 3.71 | 1.63 | 3.68 | 1.55 | 3.93 | 1.62 | 4.31 | 1.33 | 3.85 | 1.62 | 4.08 | 1.44 | -1.781* | 0.038 | 563 |
| I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. | 4.82 | 1.96 | 5.14 | 1.89 | 5.00 | 1.84 | 5.40 | 1.64 | 4.93 | 1.88 | 5.30 | 1.73 | -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 and location. 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, by location, 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 to be "the best" model.

In Table 9, there is variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable across each model. For women in Utah, "do what you do best," "someone cares about you", "feel job is important," "committed to quality work," and "best friend at work," are each statistically significant variables in predicting employee engagement. For men in Utah, only "what is needed" and "committed to quality work," are each statistically significant variables in predicting worker employee engagement. For women outside of Utah, "someone cares about you," and "feel job is important" are each statistically significant variables in predicting employee engagement. For men outside of Utah, only "know what is expected", "feel job is important," "best friend at work," and "opportunity 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 overall, 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 Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.512) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.477) mean the model is more predictive for women than men in Utah. Outside of Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.436) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.544), meaning the model is much more predictive for men than women outside of Utah.

In Table 10, there is variation in standardized beta coefficient statistical significance for each variable across each model. For women in Utah, "work with a purpose" and educational level are the only statistically significant variables in predicting employee engagement. For men in Utah, only "know what is expected" is statistically significant in predicting worker employee engagement. For women outside of Utah, "someone cares about you," "feel job is important," "work with a purpose," and "organizational commitment" are each statistically significant variables in predicting employee engagement (as well as the marital status and length of career control variables). For men outside of Utah, only "know what is expected," "feel job is important," "best friend at work," "work with a purpose," "where meant to be," and "organizational commitment" 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 = 0.554) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.558) OLS regression models overall, meaning the model accounted for just over 55% of the variation in employee engagement for women and just under 56% of the variation in employee engagement for men. In Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.566) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.545) mean the model is slightly more predictive for women than men in Utah. Outside of Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.538) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.594), meaning the model is much more predictive for men than women outside of Utah.

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 in Utah "do what you do best," "someone cares about you," and "work with purpose" were statistically significant. For men in Utah, "know what is expected", "work with purpose," and "where meant to be," were statistically significant. For

women outside of Utah “someone cares about you,” “where meant to be,” and “organizational commitment” were statistically significant. For men outside of Utah, “know what is expected”, “feel job is important,” “best friend at work,” “work with purpose,” and “where meant to be” were statistically significant.

Additionally, there were variations in adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.554) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.582) OLS regression models overall, meaning the model accounted for just over 55% of the variation in employee engagement for women and just over 58% of the variation in employee engagement for men. In Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.575) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.559) mean the model is more predictive for women than men in Utah. Outside of Utah, adjusted r-squared values for the female (adjusted r-squared = 0.545) and male (adjusted r-squared = 0.598), meaning the model is much more predictive for men than women outside of Utah.

**TABLE 9**
**MODEL 1 - ORIGINAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION RESULTS, BY GENDER AND LOCATION**

| | Utah | | Outside of Utah | | All | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| **Employee Engagement Questions** | | | | | | |
| Do you know what is expected of you at work? | 0.086 | 0.155 | 0.037 | 0.273*** | 0.059 | 0.238*** |
| Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right? | 0.126 | 0.244* | 0.012 | 0.023 | 0.026 | 0.075 |
| At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? | 0.191* | -0.167 | 0.123 | 0.084 | 0.163** | -0.026 |
| In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work? | 0.081 | 0.137 | -0.068 | -0.048 | -0.037 | 0.031 |
| Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? | 0.203* | 0.159 | 0.218** | -0.014 | 0.232*** | 0.041 |
| Is there someone at work who encourages your development? | -0.058 | -0.144 | 0.034 | 0.039 | 0.021 | -0.055 |
| At work, do your opinions seem to count? | -0.101 | 0.132 | 0.021 | 0.039 | -0.014 | 0.093 |
| Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important? | 0.311** | 0.059 | 0.246*** | 0.291*** | 0.2568*** | 0.241*** |
| Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work? | -0.178* | 0.316** | 0.050 | -0.020 | -0.013 | 0.076 |
| Do you have a best friend at work? | 0.150* | 0.131 | 0.058 | 0.215*** | 0.077 | 0.159** |
| In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress? | -0.100 | -0.061 | -0.038 | 0.002 | -0.043 | 0.011 |
| In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow? | 0.239 | -0.001 | 0.097 | 0.184* | 0.136* | 0.129* |
| **Controls** | | | | | | |
| Race | 0.047 | 0.128 | -0.037 | 0.001 | -0.044 | 0.036 |
| Ethnicity | 0.035 | -0.023 | 0.049 | 0.025 | 0.056 | -0.007 |
| State of Residence | -0.175 | 0.115 | -0.134 | -0.030 | -0.025 | 0.046 |
| Birth Year | 0.035 | -0.150 | -0.072 | -0.012 | -0.261*** | -0.107 |
| Education Level | 0.160 | -0.035 | 0.039 | -0.036 | -0.063 | -0.029 |
| Marital Status | -0.068 | 0.224* | -0.248** | -0.078 | 0.060 | -0.068 |
| Years Worked in Career | 0.075 | 0.015 | 0.135* | 0.112* | -0.176* | -0.019 |
| Years Worked in Current Organization | 0.085 | -0.231 | -0.204* | -0.026 | 0.057 | 0.085* |
| N | 111 | 94 | 189 | 167 | 300 | 261 |
| ***Adjusted R-Squared*** | **0.512** | **0.477** | **0.436** | **0.544** | **0.458** | **0.500** |
| F | 6.77*** | 5.23*** | 8.28*** | 10.91*** | 13.64*** | 13.99*** |

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

**TABLE 10**
**MODEL 2 - REVISED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION RESULTS, BY GENDER AND LOCATION**

| | Utah | | Outside of Utah | | All | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| **Employee Engagement Questions** | | | | | | |
| Do you know what is expected of you at work? | 0.068 | 0.201* | 0.087 | 0.210*** | 0.127* | 0.106** |
| Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right? | 0.087 | 0.097 | 0.068 | -0.053 | 0.078 | 0.003 |
| At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? | 0.153 | -0.147 | 0.045 | 0.058 | 0.064 | 0.048 |
| In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work? | 0.017 | 0.062 | -0.027 | -0.089 | 0.026 | -0.045 |
| Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? | 0.163 | 0.012 | 0.139* | -0.065 | 0.057 | 0.076 |
| Is there someone at work who encourages your development? | 0.004 | -0.194 | 0.000 | -0.004 | -0.090 | 0.019 |
| At work, do your opinions seem to count? | 0.054 | 0.050 | -0.063 | 0.065 | 0.040 | -0.012 |
| Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important? | 0.078 | -0.008 | 0.126 | 0.155* | 0.019 | 0.134* |
| Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work? | -0.148 | 0.138 | -0.042 | -0.091 | -0.014 | -0.036 |
| Do you have a best friend at work? | 0.102 | 0.043 | -0.015 | 0.146* | 0.082 | 0.048 |
| In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress? | -0.074 | 0.022 | -0.058 | 0.083 | -0.002 | 0.006 |
| In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow? | 0.129 | 0.111 | 0.072 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.077 |
| **Employee Activation Questions** | | | | | | |
| I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful. | 0.202 | 0.204 | -0.032 | -0.016 | 0.280** | -0.026 |
| I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose. | 0.240* | 0.025 | 0.098 | 0.222** | 0.110 | 0.152** |
| I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be. | -0.073 | 0.214 | 0.295*** | 0.183* | 0.032 | 0.236*** |
| I see myself as a leader. | 0.072 | 0.048 | 0.071 | 0.032 | 0.075 | 0.052 |
| I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. | -0.021 | 0.153 | 0.222*** | 0.147* | 0.090 | 0.168*** |
| **Controls** | | | | | | |
| Race | 0.002 | 0.089 | -0.035 | 0.009 | 0.022 | -0.028 |
| Ethnicity | -0.004 | -0.064 | 0.051 | -0.009 | -0.030 | 0.028 |
| State of Residence | -0.165 | 0.048 | -0.178 | -0.003 | -0.015 | -0.087 |
| Birth Year | 0.012 | -0.061 | -0.078 | -0.023 | -0.029 | -0.053 |
| Education Level | 0.179* | 0.043 | 0.055 | -0.018 | 0.094 | 0.021 |
| Marital Status | -0.077 | 0.148 | -0.247** | -0.041 | 0.032 | -0.149** |
| Years Worked in Career | 0.046 | -0.148 | -0.181* | -0.069 | -0.066 | -0.153* |
| N | 111 | 94 | 189 | 167 | 205 | 356 |
| ***Adjusted R-Squared*** | **0.566** | **0.545** | **0.538** | **0.5943** | **0.554** | **0.558** |
| F | 6.99*** | 5.64*** | 10.13*** | 11.13*** | 11.13*** | 18.93*** |

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

**TABLE 11**
**MODEL 3 - BEST EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION RESULTS, BY GENDER AND LOCATION**

| | Utah | | Outside of Utah | | All | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| **Employee Engagement Questions** | | | | | | |
| Do you know what is expected of you at work? | 0.048 | 0.268** | 0.098 | 0.207*** | 0.077 | 0.209*** |
| At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? | 0.211** | -0.045 | 0.068 | 0.046 | 0.128* | 0.002 |
| Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? | 0.184* | 0.010 | 0.136* | -0.061 | 0.160** | -0.012 |
| Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important? | 0.128 | 0.031 | 0.098 | 0.198** | 0.089 | 0.143* |
| Do you have a best friend at work? | 0.091 | -0.018 | -0.025 | 0.187*** | 0.015 | 0.113** |
| **Employee Activation Questions** | | | | | | |
| I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose. | 0.372*** | 0.214* | 0.116 | 0.211** | 0.207*** | 0.231*** |
| I believe that my work group is where I am meant to be. | -0.074 | 0.264* | 0.239*** | 0.161* | 0.134* | 0.201** |
| I see myself as a leader. | 0.092 | 0.033 | 0.068 | 0.041 | 0.075* | 0.061 |
| I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. | 0.035 | 0.180 | 0.216*** | 0.109 | 0.147** | 0.126* |
| **Controls** | | | | | | |
| Race | -0.018 | 0.042 | -0.030 | 0.006 | -0.043 | 0.040 |
| Ethnicity | 0.007 | -0.133 | 0.051 | 0.001 | 0.047 | -0.047 |
| Birth Year | -0.127 | -0.048 | -0.318*** | -0.079 | -0.236*** | -0.092 |
| Education Level | 0.018 | -0.004 | -0.086'4 | -0.031 | -0.057 | -0.022 |
| Marital Status | 0.160* | 0.041 | 0.047 | -0.035 | 0.085* | -0.022 |
| Years Worked in Career | -0.108 | 0.161 | -0.220** | -0.098 | -0.164** | -0.035 |
| N | 111 | 94 | 189 | 167 | 300 | 261 |
| ***Adjusted R-Squared*** | **0.575** | **0.559** | **0.545** | **0.598** | **0.544** | **0.582** |
| F | 10.94*** | 8.87*** | 16.04*** | 17.46*** | 23.28*** | 23.63*** |

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

**Revisting Hypotheses**

The study findings allow for reexamining the original hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1 proposed similar engagement levels between genders. While males reported higher levels of employee engagement than females both in an out of Utah, that divide was much more pronounced outside of Utah. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is not supported.
- Hypothesis 2a predicted basic needs and contributions would predict engagement for both genders, inside and outside of Utah. This received partial support as regression models found variation in significant predictors for both males and females, inside and outside of Utah.
- Hypotheses 2b and 2c specified what would be most salient for each gender. Results did not clearly validate either, with significant predictors differing across models for males and females, both inside and outside of Utah.
- Hypothesis 3 suggested teamwork would impact females more strongly but regression results lacked consistency across models, for both males and females, both inside and outside of Utah.
- Similarly for Hypothesis 4, growth was hypothesized to matter more for males but significant determinants again varied between genders, both inside and outside of Utah.
- Finally, Hypothesis 5 proposed activation factors would be more influential for females. However, there was variation in how activations variables predicted engagement in the full model for both genders, inside and outside of Utah.

In summary, there was only partial support for any of the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was not supported while partial confirmation existed for Hypothesis 2a. The relative importance predicted for genders in Hypotheses 2b-4 regarding needs, contributions, teamwork and growth was not consistently validated based on regression results, which demonstrated variability in significant predictors between models. Overall, most hypotheses received only partial or no validation from the empirical findings.

**A Revised Employee Engagement Model**

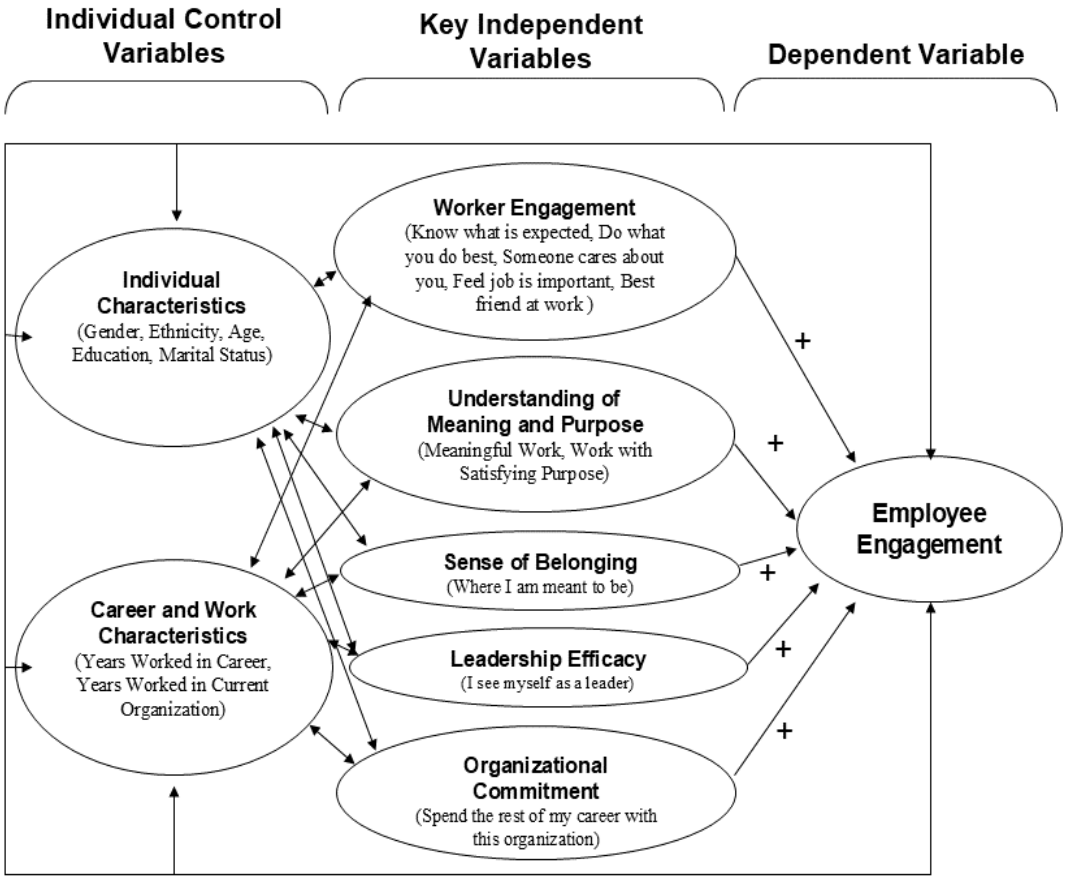
The initial conceptual framework presented in Figure 1, along with its associated hypotheses, only partially captured the complex relationships uncovered by this study between employee engagement, gender, and key workplace factors. At the same time, traditional determinants like fulfilling workers' basic needs, enabling individual contributions and teamwork, and providing growth opportunities maintained relevance, the prominent influence of the worker activation constructs validated updating the conceptualization.

The revised conceptual framework in Figure 2 incorporates lessons learned from this study. Significantly, it positions the worker activation dimensions of purposeful work, sense of belonging, leadership efficacy, and organizational commitment as core influencers of employee engagement, rather than separate supplementary predictors. By conceptualizing worker activation as multidimensional, consisting of these factors, the updated model provides a more robust perspective for comprehending employee engagement in constantly changing work settings. This refined view recognizes worker activation's central role in driving engagement rather than considering it separate or ancillary.

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

The revised conceptual framework provides insight that can guide future theory development and ongoing study of employee engagement. Rather than a fixed state, engagement may depend on specific contexts and be shaped by individual attributes and strategically designed workplace experiences that adapt to evolving organizational and societal norms. This perspective presents new avenues for maximizing diverse and thriving workforces through customized approaches tailored to nurturing high activation among all employees.

**FIGURE 2**
**REVISED RESEARCH MODEL**




## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study offer several important implications for research and practice regarding employee engagement. First, they highlight the value of examining engagement through a gender and geographic lens. The results revealed some differences in predictors of engagement between males and females as well as those within and outside of Utah. This suggests engagement is influenced by individual traits and social and environmental contexts. Considering these factors provides a more holistic view of engagement.

Second, the study validated the importance of conceptualizing employee engagement comprehensively through frameworks like the revised model presented here. Incorporating evolving constructs like worker activation provided deeper insight into what breeds discretionary effort. Positioning activation at the core recognized its cross-cutting influence, showcasing the need for engagement research to adapt to shifting workplace dynamics. The multidimensional nature of activation also demonstrates engagement is influenced by complex, interdependent relationships versus isolated determinants.

Third, the results carry practical implications regarding strategies to optimize engagement. Tailored yet inclusive approaches can be devised by comprehending similarities and divergences in what inspires males, females, and those in different locations. A focus on cultivating high activation through empowering, purpose-driven cultures appears especially impactful for motivating discretionary commitment across diverse workforces. Moving forward, more geographic and situational testing of factors like activation can yield further customized best practices.

Finally, the study highlights opportunities for continuing engagement research. Further examination of gender and other social identities could deepen understanding of relevant determinants and motivators. In addition, longitudinal studies exploring how engagement levels and antecedents may change over time or differ situationally would add nuance. Continued refinement of comprehensive theoretical frameworks is also warranted to capture the richness and complexity surrounding this crucial construct.

In conclusion, this study enhances comprehension of employee engagement and Its antecedents in meaningful ways through a gender and geographic lens. It also emphasizes the importance of conceptual frameworks considering evolving workplace dynamics for maximizing discretionary commitment across diverse populations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND WORKERS

This study provides important insights for how both organizations and individual workers can approach employee engagement moving forward. For organizations, one of the key takeaways is that a one-size-fits-all strategy to engagement is inadequate. Managers must recognize that the drivers of engagement may differ depending on an employee's gender, cultural background, geographic location, or other aspects of their identity and lived experiences. Rather than applying blanket initiatives, companies need to gain a nuanced understanding of the unique contexts and needs within their diverse workforces.

Engagement efforts should then be tailored accordingly. For example, the research highlighted some differences in what motivated engagement between male and female employees. Truly optimizing engagement may require customized approaches for each gender that address their distinct experiences and priorities. A similar tailored strategy may be warranted when considering variances across cultures or geographic regions. Gathering direct insights from employees representing different demographic groups will be imperative for co-creating equitable yet targeted engagement plans.

Above all, the study emphasized the importance of cultivating high "worker activation" through inclusive, empowering organizational cultures. Rather than focusing solely on basic expectations, leadership must prioritize discretionary commitment by fostering a strong sense of purpose, belongingness, leadership efficacy, and organizational allegiance. This involves providing meaningful work that allows employees to contribute their skills in a collaborative, supportive team environment with growth opportunities.

When activation is strong, employees are willingly motivated to exercise discretionary effort to benefit themselves and the organization. Therefore, cultivating high activation through a co-created vision and respect for diverse voices should be the core aim of leadership. Managers must lead through empathy, problem-solving partnerships rather than directives, and development of all talent.

For individual workers, the research underscores taking an active role in one's own engagement. This involves honest self-reflection on personal drivers of discretionary motivation as well as candid communication with organizational leadership. It means continually pursuing purpose, growth, and ways to maximize positive impact through contributions and potential leadership. Workers should also build rapport across differences to foster true inclusion and understanding of varied perspectives and provide respectful feedback on engagement initiatives over time as workplace dynamics evolve.

Through open-minded collaboration focused on worker activation, organizations and their members can ensure sustained discretionary commitment to attain optimal outcomes for all. Understanding and engaging diversity will be key to long-term business success and individual well-being.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study opens several exciting avenues for continued exploration into employee engagement. One natural progression would be expanding the diversity of samples examined. While insightful for an initial investigation, the current study only scratched the surface regarding cultural and demographic representation.

Future research could cast a wider net to include more varied groups. Analyzing intersections between different social identities, such as considering engagement through the lens of gender combined with race, age, job role and so on, may uncover additional nuances not yet seen. Truly comprehending engagement demands understanding the experiences of as many facets of the workforce population as possible.

In addition, measuring quantitative and qualitative engagement factors over longer periods could significantly add to our understanding. Where this study provided a snapshot in time, longitudinal designs investigating how determinants may evolve situationally or change as careers and lives progress would offer profoundly useful perspective. Qualitative methodologies could also augment quantitative findings by providing richer contextual insight.

Comparing engagement dynamics between different organizational and industry settings presents another area ripe for exploration. Distinct environmental factors within particular company or sector cultures may exert unique influences that prior research has not detected. This could lead to the development of even more situationally customized frameworks and strategies.

Isolating and testing the sub-dimensions that comprise constructs like worker activation also holds promise. Peeling back factors such as leadership efficacy and organizational commitment to examine their independent effects, for example across gender or location, could refine theory. More nuanced conceptual models might then guide increasingly targeted engagement initiatives.

Furthermore, experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies could help determine cause-and-effect issues more definitively than correlation alone allows. The implications would be profound if cultivation of activation truly enhances engagement levels and produces intended benefits over longitudinal periods.

Lastly, collaboration with international partners could begin to investigate engagement on a cross-cultural scale. While the current study provided initial insights, adapting methodologies for other regions and societies worldwide may help establish the generalizability or boundaries of existing theories. Pushing boundaries in this way could be transformative for creating a shared global understanding of optimizing discretionary workforce motivation.

Continued empirical advances will no doubt strengthen comprehension of employee engagement as an adaptive, diverse phenomenon. There is great potential to further illuminate this crucial topic through innovative research designs and broadening inclusive representation. Doing so can only deepen insights to promote individual and organizational prosperity.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to advance understanding of employee engagement by examining discretionary effort predictors across gender and geographic contexts. Several important findings emerged by analyzing survey responses from over 500 U.S. employees both within and outside of Utah. Modest yet meaningful differences were observed in average engagement levels and key determinants between male and female respondents. Traditional factors like basic needs fulfillment alongside evolving constructs uniquely shaped engagement depending on gender.

Notably, this research validated cultivating high worker activation as paramount for motivating discretionary commitment across diverse populations. Conceptualizing activation as a multidimensional construct consisting of purpose, belonging, leadership efficacy and organizational allegiance provided critical insight. Positioning it at the core of a revised theoretical framework recognized activation's primary influence, particularly for addressing gaps in gender-inclusive engagement strategies.

Practical implications point to the importance of comprehending employee experiences through tailored yet equitable lenses that consider social and environmental attributes. Engagement optimization demands initiatives co-created by directly gathering perspectives representing differences. Strategies must focus on discretionary commitment built through empowering cultures centered on worker activation.

This study advances knowledge and underscores significant avenues for future research. Continued scholarship exploring engagement through broader, more diverse sampling can only deepen contextual understanding over time. Advancing comprehensive yet situationally sensitive theories through mixed

methodological designs offers profound potential to reveal engagement's richness. By embracing inclusive, strengths-based approaches that authentically engage all populations as creative partners, organizations and their members can establish sustainable prosperity grounded in discretionary workforce motivation. Recognizing both similarities and variances in what inspires effort across differences lays the foundation for maximizing individual wellbeing, business success and equitable societies through employment.

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