

# **Gender match of Supervisor-subordinate dyad and subordinate's job engagement**

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## **Abstract**

This research tests the potential differences in subordinate's engagement based on variations in the gender match of the supervisor – subordinate dyad. A quantitative study is performed with the data of 234 respondents. Results reports a significant variation in subordinate's engagement based on gender match of supervisor-subordinate dyad. The outcomes unveiled a significant positive association between subordinate's engagement and gender match of supervisor-subordinate dyad. Engagement factor grows in greater when the gender of supervisor-subordinator dyad mismatches. This effect is substantial for gender composition of male supervisor and female employee. The theoretical implication of the study underpin the significant association between employee engagement and gender match of supervisor-subordinator dyad. Thus, the practical implications of the study suggest practitioners to reinvestigate any attempt to increase workforce diversity, in terms of gender. Placing the right gender match is utmost importance to harness the engagement rather attempting to homogenise or diversify the work force.



**Keywords:** Gender, Employee engagement, Sri Lanka

## 01. Introduction

Gender differences have long been a focal topic in organizational behaviour research. With the increased work place diversity, a number of recent investigations have demonstrated the critical importance of this construct. One area of particular interest is the role that employee engagement plays in individual- and business-level outcomes. As to Finn (1989), engagement can be seen as a broader concept than job satisfaction. One area in the topic of employee engagement that has slightly studied is the effect of demographic variation on employees' engagement. With the demographic changes that have occurred in global workforce over the last several years, particularly with respect to gender, an examination of these potential effects is necessary in order to fully understand the dynamics at work. By this study, the researcher aimed at testing the potential differences in the employee engagement based upon variations in the gender composition at the workplace.

## 02. Literature Review

### 2.1. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a first-order tool that aid gaining a competitive advantage by an organization. Baumruk (2004) emphasized the importance of people factor for an organization as one which cannot be duplicated or imitated by the competitors. It is considered the most valuable asset if managed and engaged properly. The employee engagement is considered to be the most powerful factor to measure a company's vigour (Baumruk, 2004). Katz and Kahn

(1966) have referred to the concept of engagement in their work related to organisational effectiveness. Finn's (1989) categorized engagement as a multidimensional construct, including compliant/noncompliant behaviours (i.e., willingness) and initiative-taking behaviours (i.e., desire). However, at present employee engagement is found to be fundamental for the development of an innovative and co-operative work environment leading to performance and effectiveness. In 1990, Kahn introduced the concept of employee engagement, in his seminal paper on 'personal engagement' with work, where he defined the engagement as, "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Here Kahn characterized engagement as consisting of physical, cognitive, and emotional components. Kahn added that three psychological engagement conditions are necessary for an employee to be rightly engaged: 1). meaningfulness (work elements), 2). Safety (social elements, including management style, process, and organisational norms) and 3). Availability (individual distractions). His definition of personal role engagement has been operationalized in the form of quantitative personal engagement scales developed by May et al. (2004 n=4), Rich et al. (2010 n=3), Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011 n=1) and Soane et al. (2012 n=3). Moreover, job engagement is defines as an activated positive state of mind directed towards work tasks. Here notation of engagement founded as the opposite of burnout (Shuck, 2011).

As such, the dimensions of engagement appear to be broader than the concept of job satisfaction. While satisfaction is often correlates to positive job performance, employee engagement is a direct antecedent of satisfaction. Thus, only engaged employees would contribute for an optimal satisfaction-outcome relationship.

The 'Utrecht Group' defined engagement as: 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind' and proposed that an engaged employee has a strong sense of vigor towards, dedication to, and absorption in work activities' (Schaufeli et al. 2002). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) has been developed that includes the three constituting dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Originally, the UWES included 24 items, but after psychometric evaluation, 7 unsound items were eliminated so that three scales, totalling 17 items, remained (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002): Vigor (VI, 6 items), Dedication (DE, 5 items), and Absorption (AB, 6 items) scales. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al. 2002) was found to be the most widely adopted measure (n=148) and has been validated for use in several languages; 42 studies used the full 17-item version; 90 used the 9-item version and the remainder between 5-16 items; one item was a qualitative paper (Bakibinga et al. 2012). Saks (2006) defined engagement as 'a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. That are associated with individual role performance', distinguishing between job engagement and organizational engagement. Six papers used this measure; three used both job and organization engagement scales, two used the job scale only and one the organization scale only. Selmer et al. (2013) argued that engagement could be examined at the work group level and proposed a measure of work group engagement. In another approach, the engagement was considered to be a composite attitudinal and behavioural construct. Swanberg et al. (2011) adopted the Utrecht definition of engagement but operationalized through measures of cognitive and emotional engagement as well as behavioural engagement. This exceeds the boundaries of engagement construct originally proposed by Utrecht group. Additionally, engagement was viewed as a management practice, both 'doing engagement' and being engaged (Truss et al., 2014). Another popular description that appears is by the Gallup organisation's Buckingham and

Coffman (1999) who commented about engagement “the right people in the right roles with the right managers drive employee engagement.” They also argued that a fully engaged employee is one who could answer “yes” to all 12 questions on Gallup’s workplace questionnaire. Despite the popularity of Kahn’s three dimension model on employee engagement, UWES scale treated to be having a multi-dimensional view of “work engagement” was adopted within 86% of studies (Bailey et al., 2015). Consequently, this study too operationalized “employee engagement” based on short version of UWES scale with 9 items namely; Vigor (VI, 3 items), Dedication (DE, 3 items), and Absorption (AB, 3 items) scales (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002).

Student engagement found to be correlates to academic performance (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). Harter (2000) in a meta-analysis reported a significant positive association among employee engagement and business-level performance. In another meta-analysis where 36 organizations were participated, a strong correlation between satisfaction and engagement was revealed (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). In the light of the positive association between job satisfaction and intent to remain with one’s organization, a stronger positive relationship would be assumed between engagement and intent to stay (Koch & Steers, 1978). An examination of the correlations between the three dimensions of burnout – exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy – and work engagement, burnout and engagement found to be negatively correlated (Maslach, Leiter & Jackson, 1986). Moreover, engagement correlated weakly and positive with age (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). Engagement scores of male and female found different (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). They too noted the occupational group based variances in engagement. In many other studies, employee engagement has been tested along with several other concepts such employee motivation, firm

performance, supervisor support, & turnover intention....etc while the same was not tested in the context of gender compositions.

## 02.2 Gender effect on Engagement

One area in the topic of employee engagement that has not been extensively studied is the effect of demographic variation on one's engagement. With the demographic changes that have occurred in the global workforce over the last several years, particularly with respect to gender composition, an investigation of these potential effects is necessary in order to fully understand the dynamics at work.

There are several logical reasons to suspect that the gender composition of a workforce might affect the level of and effect of engagement on individual and organizational outcomes. First, engagement was found to be varied based on gender group (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The male dominance over the workplace had diluted now. With the improved liberation of women, their role has been transformed into a more complex and dynamic one. Greater women representation is evidenced in all the sectors at diverse capacities. These sectors range from care taking to space administration. Hence, the women participation for every aspect of an organization is experienced, especially for decision making.

One gender group frequently views other party in disparate way. Likewise they view the workplace in diverse patterns. For instance, males in general tend to be unwinding of their jobs where as female are likely to be more serious and responsible. Males and females differently acknowledge the support of co-workers. Higher job satisfaction and a desire to reciprocate depend on the extent to which one believes he or she is adequately supported by co-workers

(Dignam, Barrera, & West, 2006). Female employees often perceive that they are not adequately supported by their co-workers, especially males (Dixon *et al.*, 2002). Males argue that the feeling of immaturity and other feministic features of females might undermine the outcome expectations. Thus, the perceived co-worker support becomes a key determinant of employee engagement. Similarly, employees' engagement would affect by the perceived support of his/her supervisor as well. Based on the supervisor's gender, employee may generate a sense of emotional support. Employees of one gender group may comfortable of dealing with similar gender groups while the opposite is also possible.

Collectively, if male/female perceive that they receive less social support from their co-workers/ supervisors at work that this difference could account for discrepancies in engagement and job satisfaction. This study attempted to determine if there is gender effect on employees' engagement based on the gender composition of supervisor and employee. Accordingly the study assumes;

*H1: Subordinate's employee engagement significantly correlates with gender match of supervisor-subordinator dyad*

*H2: Subordinate's employee engagement significantly varies based on gender match of supervisor-subordinator dyad*

### **03. Methods**

The research design is quantitative by its nature. The participants were employed individuals from both private and public sector organizations of Sri Lanka. The sample consists of 234

participants where there were 176 females and 58 male employees. The Supervisor-Subordinate gender composition (dyad) was coded “1” if the gender of the respondent and his/her supervisor’s gender is matched, and “2” if the two genders differ (For instance, Male\_Male & Female\_Female = 1, Male\_Female & Female\_Male = 2). Each respondent belongs to one of four gender combinations based on his/her supervisor’s gender and his/her gender respectively. They were Male\_Male (32), Male-Female (47), Female-Male (26), and Female-Female (129). The survey instrument consisted of two parts; first part with two items for gender composition, second for the engagement which is based on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) of 9 items. The responses of the engagement items were ranked using a five-point scale (5 – Very high, 4 – high, 3 – moderate, 2 – low, and 1- very low). The respondent’s gender and his/her supervisor’s gender were obtained by rest of the two items of the instrument. Reliability for the overall engagement measure was .88. The correlation analysis and Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) were performed on data to derive the results.

#### 04. Findings and discussion

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables under investigation.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

Engagement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Male_Male	32	2.84	1.081	.191	2.45	3.23	1	5

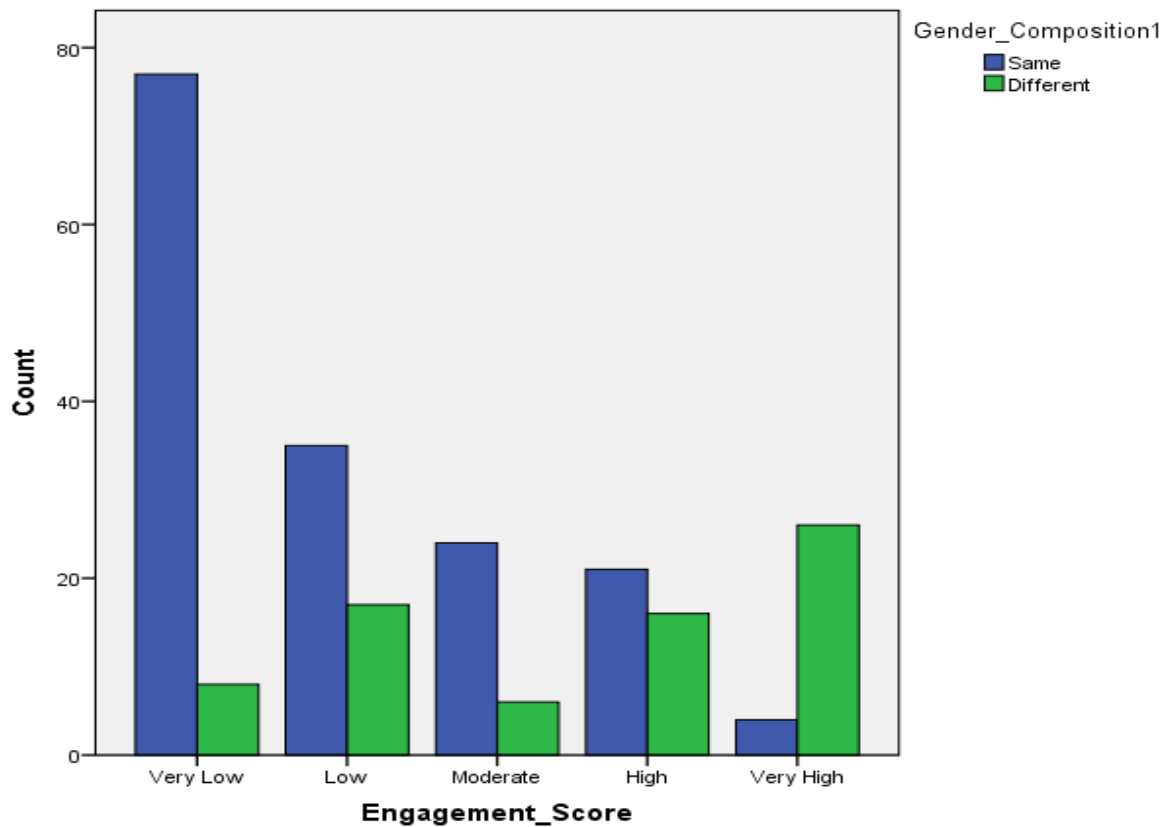


Male_Female	47	4.21	.907	.132	3.95	4.48	2	5
Female_Male	26	4.15	.967	.190	3.76	4.54	1	5
Female_Female	129	2.78	1.033	.091	2.60	2.96	1	5
Total	234	3.23	1.195	.078	3.07	3.38	1	5

Source: Survey Data

Means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum of variables are presented in Table 1. The average engagement score of an employee is 3.23 with 1.195 of dispersion. The engagement score of groups in which there is a different gender composition is relatively higher than the groups of same gender composition. For instance, engagement of Male\_Female group (4.21) and Female\_Male group (4.15) are quite above the average engagement of all respondents. In contrast, the mean engagement of groups with same gender composition (Male\_Male = 2.84 and Female\_Female = 2.78) are lower than the average engagement of the sample (3.23). Importantly, the standard deviations of groups with different gender compositions are also less than same gender composition groups. It demonstrates the consistent pattern of engagement by the elements of different gender composition groups.

The variation of the engagement based on gender composition can be graphically demonstrated as follows.

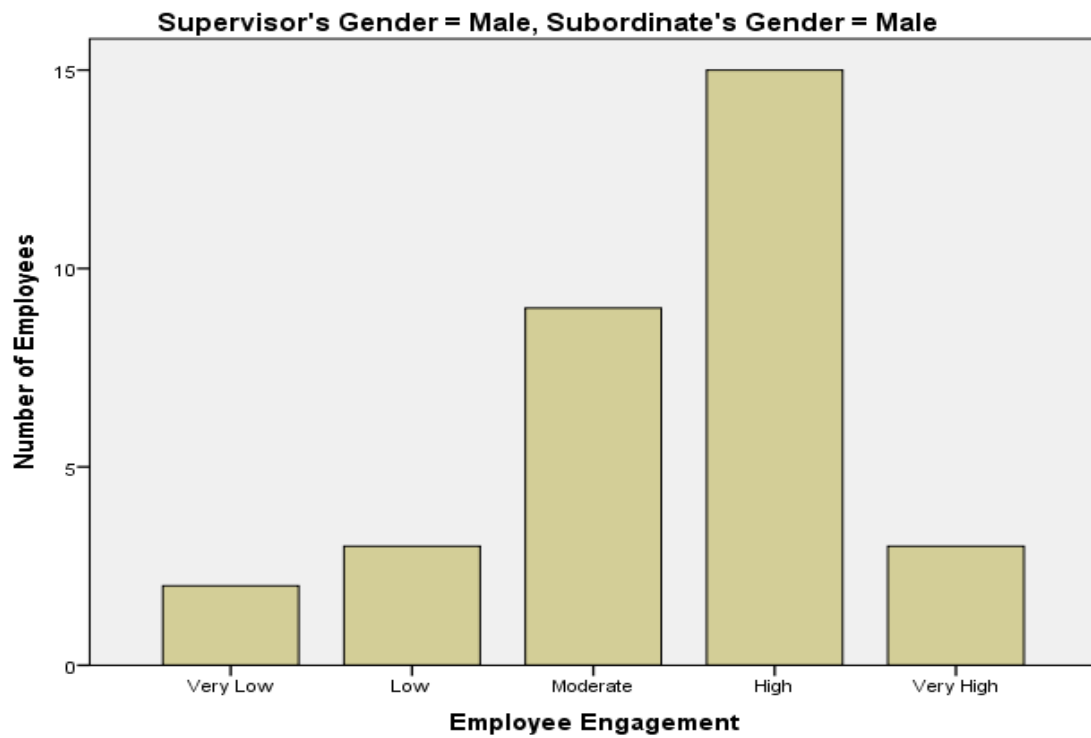


**Figure 1: Gender match (supervisor- subordinate dyad) and engagement score of subordinate**

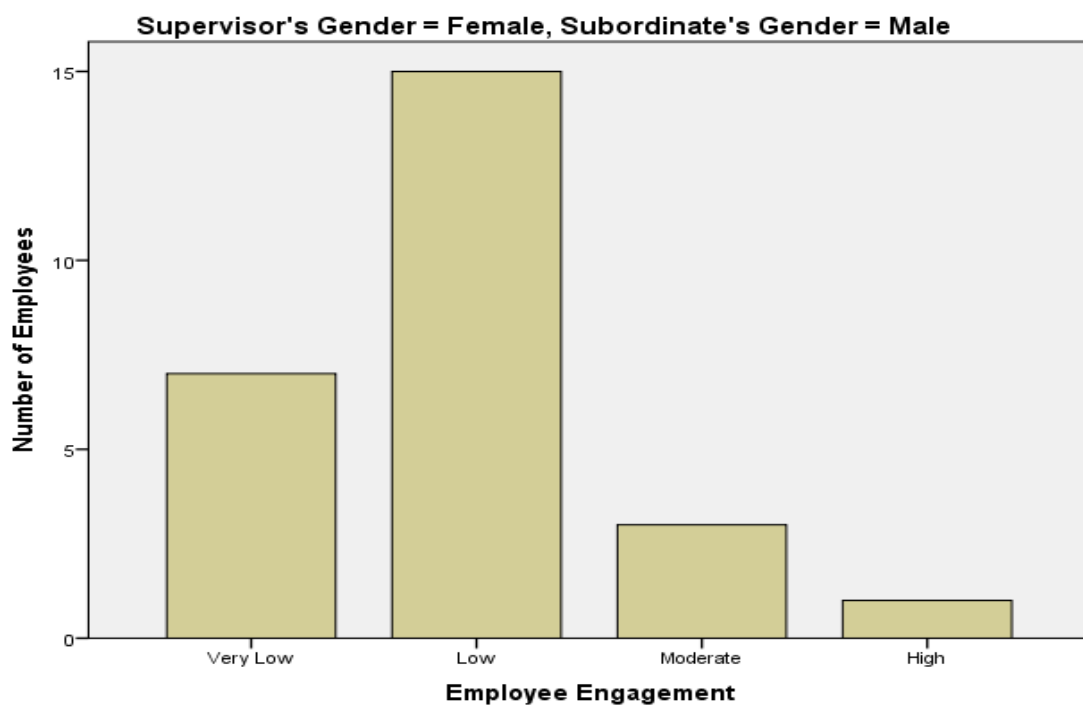
Source: Survey Data

Figure 1 graphically presents the strong positive association between gender composition and engagement of employees. Engagement score is very low for many employees whose gender matched with their supervisors' gender. Consequently, many employees with opposing gender to that of their supervisors recorded a very high level of engagement score.

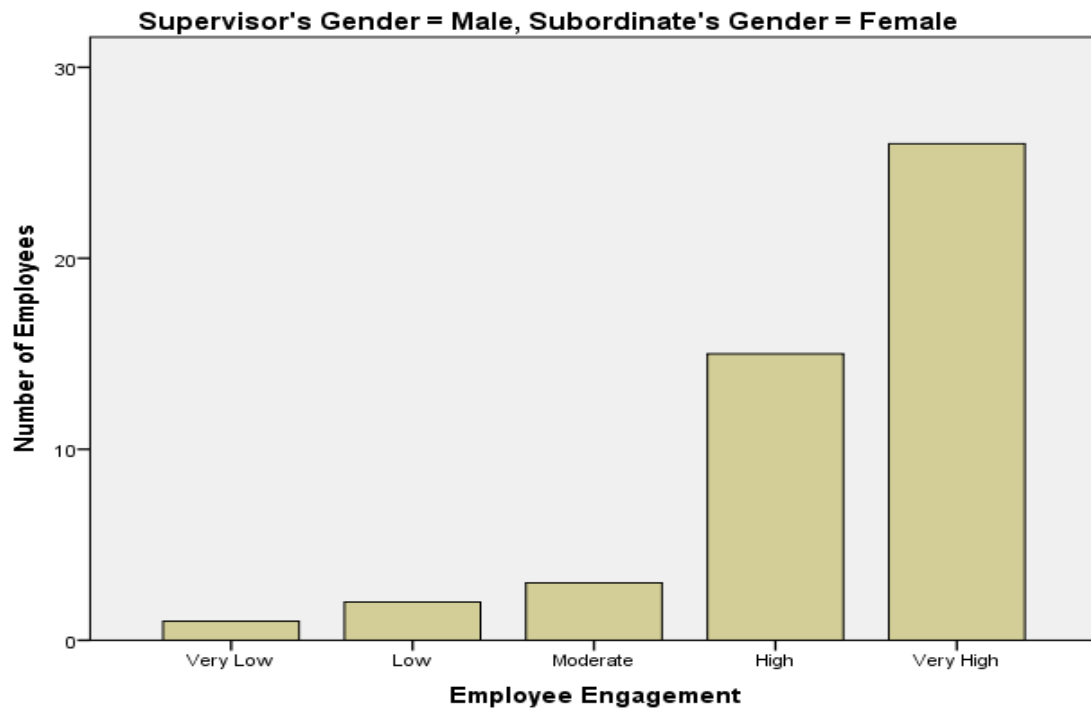
Figure 2 (a), (b), (c) & (d) illustrate the influence of four different gender combinations on employees' engagement.



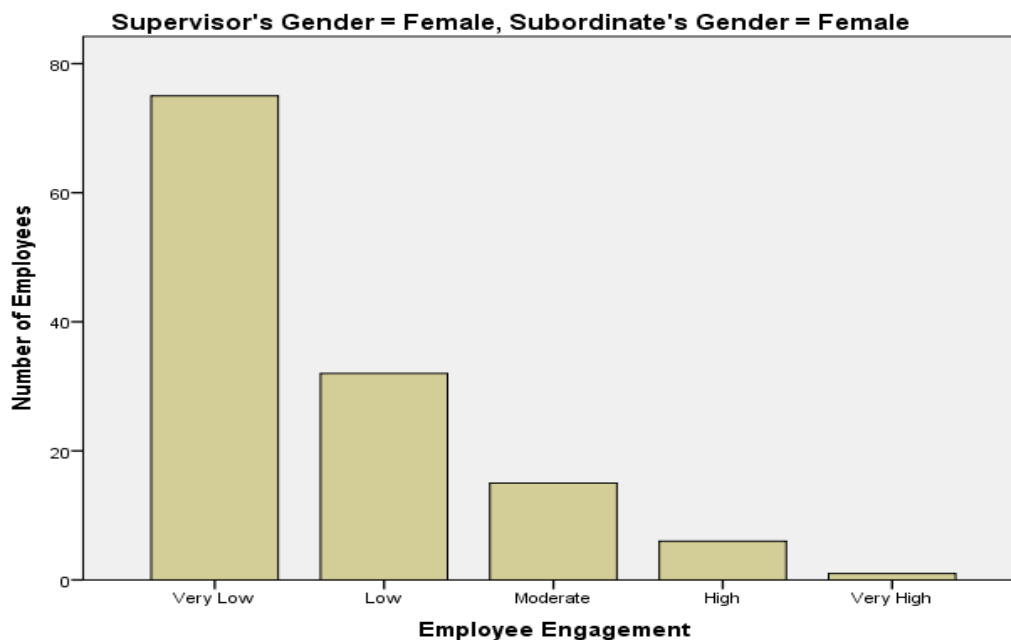
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

**Figure 2: Gender match of supervisor – Subordinate dyad and employee engagement**

Source: Survey Data

Based on the illustration [figure 2 (c)] male-female gender combination generates highest engagement level. But this might be subject to the other direct influencers of engagement such as personal traits, skills, & task specific factors... etc. As such the reverse gender combination of the above, female-male [figure 2 (b)] could support only for a lower level of engagement even though it is a “different” gender composition. However it is noteworthy to observe even “same” gender combination works well in generating higher engagement level provided that supervisors are males [refer male-male combination – figure 2 (a)]. In contrast to that, female supervisors seem to be lacked by their ability to influence the subordinates’ engagement under either “same” or “different” gender composition [refer female-female – figure 2 (d) & female-male gender combinations – figure 2 (b)].

**Table 2: Results of correlation analysis**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Correlation coefficient</b>	<b>Significance Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Engagement & Gender Composition	234	0.558	0.00

Source: Survey Data

As seen in the table 2, there is a positive correlation between gender composition and employee engagement (0.558). The association between two variables is statistically significant (p value = 0.000 < 0.05). The strength of the relationship is positive and strong (Vaus, 2002). Accordingly engagement of employees’ increases as the gender composition of subordinate - supervisor dyad differs. People tend to work well as they are coupled with opposite sex working

partners. Thus, the H1 is accept in which a significant relationship between employee engagement and gender composition was assumed.

As reported by Tartari & Slter (2015), the engagement of male and female found to differ in the context of academic and industry collaboration. The gender differences in academic engagement reported to associate with gender identity and gendered social meanings associated with different behaviours (Heyder, Latsch & Hannover, 2014). Schaufeli & Bakker in their early study found a significant difference between two different gender groups (2004). Banihani (2013) in his conceptual paper disclosed that the engagement is a gendered concept. This specific finding of the study too emphasized the above facts where gender is significantly and positively correlated with engagement. However, the researcher here has tested the gender composition of supervisor-subordinate dyad rather testing the gender of the employee as a unilateral influencer of engagement. This is based on the rationale that the engagement of an employee is a communal product of both supervisor and subordinate. For instance, studies by Gallup, Towers & Perrin, and others stress several key drivers of employee engagement, one of the most important of which is the supervisory influence in terms of quality of supervision and support employees receive from their immediate supervisor (Burke, 2010). Gallup put it as, "Supervisors who cultivate positive, caring relationships with agents generate high levels of engagement". This evident that the engagement of employees matters supervisory, thus obviously their gender too. Hence, this particular piece of finding appear to conform the existing pattern of the relationship among the variables.

**Table 3: Results of ANOVA**

Engagement

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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Between Groups	99.039	3	33.013	32.455	.000
Within Groups	233.956	230	1.017		
Total	332.996	233			

Source: Survey Data

The table 3 depicted the results of ANOVA. As per the results, a flawless variation in the engagement is shown among the groups. The gender compositions of groups under the investigation were Male\_Male, Female\_Female, Male\_Female, and Female\_Male. The variation in the engagement between these groups is found to be statistically significant ( $F = 32.455 (3), p = 0.000$ ). The post-hoc analysis is performed to detect the specific groups those engagement are vary. The results are shown by the table 4.

**Table 4: Results of Post-Hoc Analysis**

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: Engagement

(I) Gender_Composition_4	(J) Gender_Composition_4	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	Male_Female	-1.369*	.231	.000	-1.97	-.77
	Male_Male					
	Female_Male	-1.310*	.266	.000	-2.00	-.62
	Female_Female	.069	.199	.986	-.45	.58
	Male_Male	1.369*	.231	.000	.77	1.97
	Male_Female					
	Female_Male					
	Female_Female	1.438*	.172	.000	.99	1.88
	Male_Male	1.310*	.266	.000	.62	2.00
	Male_Female	-.059	.247	.995	-.70	.58

		<b>Female_Female</b>	<b>1.379*</b>	<b>.217</b>	<b>.000</b>	.82	1.94
		Male_Male	-.069	.199	.986	-.58	.45
	<b>Female_Female</b>	<b>Male_Female</b>	<b>-1.438*</b>	<b>.172</b>	<b>.000</b>	-1.88	-.99
		<b>Female_Male</b>	<b>-1.379*</b>	<b>.217</b>	<b>.000</b>	-1.94	-.82
		Male_Female	-1.369*	.232	.000	-2.00	-.74
	Male_Male	Female_Male	-1.310*	.269	.000	-2.04	-.58
		Female_Female	.069	.212	1.000	-.51	.65
		Male_Male	1.369*	.232	.000	.74	2.00
	Male_Female	Female_Male	.059	.231	1.000	-.57	.69
Dunnett		Female_Female	1.438*	.161	.000	1.01	1.87
T3		Male_Male	1.310*	.269	.000	.58	2.04
	Female_Male	Male_Female	-.059	.231	1.000	-.69	.57
		Female_Female	1.379*	.210	.000	.80	1.96
		Male_Male	-.069	.212	1.000	-.65	.51
	Female_Female	Male_Female	-1.438*	.161	.000	-1.87	-1.01
		Female_Male	-1.379*	.210	.000	-1.96	-.80

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results exhibited by the table evident the existence of significant variance among four gender composition groups in terms of subordinates' engagement. Both Turkey's and Dennett's post-hoc tests of variances were performed to ensure the accuracy and both tests produced the identical results. As such the engagement of subordinates in Male-Female and Female-Male gender composition groups demonstration a significant variance in relation to the engagement of Female-Female and Male-Male groups. Importantly such variances is not recorded between Male-Male group and Female- Female group. It indicates the gender



composition's (gender match of supervisor- subordinate dyad) influential capacity to vary the subordinates' engagement. Thus, the H2, in which gender match of supervisor-subordinator dyad is predicted to be varying the subordinate's employee engagement is accepted.

In general, there have been much done on supervisor-subordinate relationship and its influence several other individual and organizational outcomes such as performance, productivity, job satisfaction, sociological contract breach, and workplace conflict...etc. Specifically the age (Hair et al, 2009), personality (Welsh, 2005), ethnicity (Avey, West, & Crossley, 2007) and mentoring (Orlando, et al, 2009) were tested in connection with supervisor-subordinates dyad. Importantly, gender of supervisor –subordinate dyad too were addressed in relation with tight control and attitude (Johansson, Wennblom, 2017), discrimination and exclusionary treatment (Schaffer, & Riordan, 2013), supervisor's anger (Glomb, & Hulin, 1997), and cross-evaluation and rewards (Gupta, Jenkins, & Beehr, 1983). However the gender match of supervisor-subordinate dyad is hardly addresses along with the engagement of subordinate. Henceforth, the result of this study believed to be retain greater originality in the context of supervisor-subordinate relationship at work.

The heterogeneousness of workplaces of all the industries is increasing, especially by gender groups. Today some jobs those were traditionally believed to be either feministic or masculine are accepted by both sex equally. With the critical shift in demographic, economic and social challengers, it is become mandatory for everyone to accept any form of employment besides their gender. For instance number of female pilots, astronauts has significantly increased compared to past. Additionally, dual –career families are in demand. Collectively in any form of organization we found highly heterogeneous workgroup particularly by gender.

## 05. Conclusion

This exploratory investigation provides some interesting insights on employee engagement. One implication is that the benefits of a highly engaged workplace are reaffirmed. However, these effects are altered when we take into account the gender composition of the supervisor-employee dyad. As indicated in Figure 1, highly engaged members represent “different” gender composition while for same-gender composition; this situation is reversed at low levels of engagement. It is noteworthy that the Sri Lankan workplaces as same as the globe, are becoming continuously more heterogeneous with respect to many demographic factors, gender being one among them. With the demographic diversity of the typical workplace predicted to only increase in the foreseeable future, the likelihood of growing numbers of heterogeneous dyads seems apparent. Thus, the negative effects outlined pose a potential detriment for both individual employees and their employing organizations. It is suggested that companies address this issue, if not for moral and ethical reasons of protecting employee psychological health, then for the practical “bottom line” motivation of controlling turnover costs.

If many of these gender effects are based on individual perception, though, one might ask how a company can have any impact on those dynamics. Constructing purely homogeneous gender composition is economically unfavourable, practically impossible, as well as ethically and (probably) legally unsound. However, there are other structural interventions that could lead to more positive outcomes. Organizations could conceivably enhance the potential for more comprehensive employee engagement by incorporating measures of openness to diversity (or openness to new experiences, in the “Big 5” taxonomy) in their selection procedures. Workplace heterogeneity can be practised through several means. For instance orientation, team work, work scheduling, & work assignment can be effectively utilize to promote and suppress the negative outcomes of workplace diversity (Hobman et al.,

2003). In conclusion, the study holds the theoretical implication on the significant association between employee engagement and gender match of supervisor-subordinate dyad. Moreover, a significant variation between similar and dissimilar gendered groups with respect to engagement. Thus, the practical implications of the study suggest practitioners to reinvestigate any attempt to increase workforce diversity, in terms of gender. Placing the right gender composition is utmost importance to harness the engagement rather attempting to homogenise or diversify the work force. Future studies are proposed in testing the moderating effect of gender composition in to the relationship between employee engagement and employee / organizational performance. Further, future studies can be directed to testing the effect of other demographic factors (i.e. religion, geographic location) and other individual difference on supervisor-subordinate union.

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