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Study on Employee Engagement Among Employees of Different Sectors During the Pandemic of Coronavirus

Abha Rani Singh^{a*}, Sanjay Srivastava^b, Anindita Chatterjee Rao^c

^a Ph.D. Scholar, Faculty of Management Studies, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana, India, ^b Professor, Vice Chancellor MRIIRS, and Managing Director MREI, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana, India, ^c Professor, OB-HR, Faculty of Management Studies, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana, India.

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*Corresponding Author:
abharanisinh1@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to assess the level of engagement, with their work among the employees working in various sectors during the pandemic.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A critical review of existing literature in journals, books, and websites has been done. The u-Trecht scale conceived by Schaufeli & Bakker, (2004) has been used for assessing the engagement level. Samples have been drawn from different sectors like government, private, and public sector undertakings.

Findings: The study suggests that there has not been a major difference in the level of engagement while working from home. Only two aberrations were found- Women employees reported less dedication than their male counterparts and employees having experience of more than 15 years, worked more vigorously than their colleagues with less experience.

Research Limitations: These findings need to be further studied to have more clarity in this regard.

Managerial Implications: In the post-pandemic times, the overwhelming majority of employees have voted for their preference for the hybrid mode of working. The study shows that the level of engagement while working from home is similar to what employees were having at their workplace, This could help management in the formulation of policies related to working from home and offer it as an option for the employees.

Original Value: The present study is based on real-time data and will be able to provide a framework for policy formulation concerning working from home or a hybrid mode of working.

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Introduction

Covid 19 has put us in a very strange situation where there are daily encounters with existential questions, for which there are no assuring answers. Since the time, when the first case was reported from Wuhan China, on 31st December 2019 and the World Health Organization declared it as a public health emergency of international concern, we have come a long way-weeks after weeks, months after months, and for more than a year, series of successive waves of the pandemic have appeared and have disrupted the lives of people in general. Despite the invention of different vaccines and dedicated vaccination programs all over the world, no scientists can forecast when this ordeal is going to end, which has so far affected a population of around 1,86,41,011 and has resulted in the death of 40,31,725 patients. Talking about engagement with one's work in this unprecedented situation sounds a bit of an aberration, but we all know that life goes on and one has to work for their livelihood to survive. Moreover, employee engagement refers to working in a place with a positive environment which results in an enhanced engagement level at work. In the present scenario, employees are working from home and do not have a background in a positive work environment. Instead, they are now supposed to stay at home, with all the household chores including looking after their kids who are also attending online classes from home. The home has become an extension of the office. In an environment that is full of negativity, despair, and hopelessness, it is an effort to assess whether this scenario has resulted in less engagement with work while working from home.

Literature Review

Despite the novelty of the situation and unpredictable future, society responded to the pandemic in an organized way. People were working day and night to provide essential services and health facilities and were also working on the vaccine to fight the disease. Educational institutions also rose to the occasion by providing online access to pedagogy. Though there are not too many studies available on the level of engagement among employees during the pandemic, few efforts are worth reviewing.

[Dhanesh & Picherit-Duthler \(2021\)](#) mentioned in their study that approximately 6.1 million youth

lost their jobs as per the CMIE survey, in March 2020. The unemployment rate reached 8.7% and the GDP rate was adversely affected. There was an overall decrease in the global growth rate from 2.9% to 2.4%. This shows the grim economic scenario due to the total lockdown. On one hand, there was a struggle to ensure uninterrupted essential service on the other hand people were losing their job. Certainly, the pressure was high.

[Chanana & Sangeeta \(2021\)](#) has discussed different initiatives taken by various organizations to motivate their employees during the pandemic. Mostly these initiatives were related to providing platforms for upskilling them, which certainly helped in improving engagement.

[Aditama & Riyanto \(2020\)](#) studied the daily life of employees, full of anxiety and frustration due to the hardships brought on by the pandemic. They are of the view that in case these feelings remain unaddressed by the organization it can lead to poor work quality and loss of productivity.

[Sharma & Sharma \(2021\)](#) have stated that every organization needs to explore ways to motivate their employees, in case they want to remain in the competition. A stress-free environment should be provided for better results. Some kind of assessment is required to be made about the emotional patterns of employees and respond accordingly.

[Pass & Ridgway \(2022\)](#) in their study discussed the challenges faced by organizations in the remote working scenario and keeping employees engaged. He suggested that organizations should include employees in future goals and reinforce skills related to resilience to make the going, flexibility and inclusivity need to be the baseline for HR policies and employees should be provided with more autonomy.

[Kahn \(1990\)](#) have reported worsening psychosocial behavior among employees while working from home. Employees experienced stress, anxiety, insecurity, isolation, and a sense of loss.

Research Gap

Apart from the above-discussed papers and journals, many more journals are available. Most of them have been written from the perspective of organizations and HR departments- how to handle this precarious situation on multiple fronts.

Employees need to be taken care of not only economically but socially and psychologically as well. Employees' perspectives have not been explored similarly. The present study is an effort to understand the level of engagement among employees from their perspective and to what extent gender and experience play their role.

Conceptual Framework

Before we move further to study the status of employee engagement in these troubled times, it would be imperative to discuss the existing understanding of the concept of employee engagement among the various scholars who have studied the concept in detail with empirical evidence to back their constructs.

"Employee engagement is the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals" ().

Nowadays the concept of employee engagement is gaining importance for both managers and academicians. It would not be an exaggeration we refer to it as one of the key concepts of human resource management. It was not considered an academic construct in recent times until [Kahn \(1990\)](#) gave an operational definition to the term and popularized it in the field of academics and management. He defined employee engagement as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance". These people are aware of their objectives and their roles in their work environment and they have the required resources for the disposal of their work along with a sense of fulfillment in what they do.

Employee engagement has been the buzzword in recent times as far as the study of management is concerned and is considered one of the most important factors in leading an organization towards increased productivity, satisfied customers, and happy employees, which results in a positive working environment. The concept of employee engagement has been defined extensively by different researchers and scholars as per their understanding based on their studies and experiences.

[Kahn \(1990\)](#) in his study about employee engagement talks about the concept as a mental construct,

which can be defined as the passion for work on a physical, cognitive, and emotional level.

[Kahn \(1990\)](#) model was further used by [May et al. \(2004\)](#) came to the conclusion that finding meaningfulness in the work, a sense of safety, and the availability of a relevant physical environment affect employee engagement positively.

In another paper, [Harter et al. \(2002\)](#) defined employee engagement as one's enthusiasm and involvement in his/her work. [Saks \(2006\)](#) took it further by observing that employee engagement comprises engagement at two levels- job engagement and organizational engagement and increases productivity.

As explained by [Robertson-smith & Markwick \(2009\)](#) employee engagement is the core factor for success. It leads to record production, lessens absenteeism, improves service quality, creates satisfied customer networks, and increases overall commitment; ultimately leading to improved business results. Surely, there exists a positive correlation between engagement among employees and business improvement. It can be termed as the main force in attaining success by any organization, despite the adverse conditions of the existing economy.

[Batt \(2002\)](#) after studying a national representative sample of call centers and applying multivariate analysis, concluded that organizations that focus on a higher level of skills among employees, ensure participation of employees in policymaking, and provide different kinds of human resource incentives, had higher sales growth rate and lower attrition rates.

[Kompaso & Sridevi \(2010\)](#) have discussed in their research that the existing level of employee engagement can be an indicator of organizational performance in the desired direction. This points out that there exists a correlation between employer and employee in case we study it in the context of job satisfaction, employee commitment, and organizational behavior. Their research indicates the close link between employee engagement and achievement of organizational outcomes. Engaged employees result in higher employee retention and a further reduction in turnover. It motivates employees to stay in the organization and lessens the idea of an intention to leave. It also results in increased

productivity, profitability, and enhanced customer satisfaction.

[Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot \(2017\)](#) have differentiated employee engagement from psychological empowerment or contract. According to them, engagement has some sort of incremental value towards performance. In short, engagement has more impact on performance than other similar psychological constructs.

[Aditama, J. & Riyanto \(2020\)](#) define employee engagement as an essence inside the employees that all organizations want to develop to the maximum extent so that they can perform with maximum efficiency.

[Oktanofa et al. \(2020\)](#) after his study, concluded that employee engagement is directly related to a high level of recognition, rewards, and work-life balance. In case these predictors are taken care of by the organization, the engagement level would improve, resulting in enhanced performance and reduced turnover

Through the overall discussion about the concept of employee engagement, we can conclude by saying that without the involvement of employees in the everyday functioning of the organization with total commitment, no organization can dream of making it big.

With the devastation caused by the coronavirus, safeguarding one's life becomes the priority but at the same time, earning our livelihood is another concern that requires equal attention. The dilemma continues with the news of the increasing number of infections and resultant deaths. At times, even if their near and dear ones are getting infected and are suffering, employees are reporting to their work and giving their best. Due to the pandemic, a majority of employees are working from home and trying to achieve the tasks and targets assigned to them along with infections, either in their immediate families or in the extended family with occasional news of the death of someone close to them. This leaves employees with emotional trauma and economic hardships. In many cases, employees have started to have psychological ramifications such as stress, depression, and suicidal tendencies. In such a scenario, it is very difficult to concentrate on one's

work and have a sense of engagement. The very thought of thinking of employee engagement in such times looks absurd and sadistic. But at the same time, it is impossible to visualize that medical professionals, law and order personnel, or even the various delivery boys, helping in sustaining the economy, would be working without any engagement or less engagement. These are some basic examples, in reality, all the employees are required to work with the maximum possible level of engagement to run the economy and save it from the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic. This study is an effort to measure the level of engagement among employees working in different sectors in these troubled times.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of engagement among employees in their work, at this time of ongoing pandemic while working from home.
2. To examine the level of engagement among men and women employees.
3. To examine the level of engagement based on work experience.

Methodology

For studying the level of engagement various frameworks are available, however, for the current study, the concept developed by [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#) has been used. They are of the view that employee engagement surveys done by various consultant organizations have tried to prove that there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and the company's profitability. However, these surveys do not provide psychometric data. Since the concept of engagement is directly correlated with one's state of mind, [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#) tried to redefine the concept of employee engagement and preferred the nomenclature of work engagement instead of the former one.

As per [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#) work engagement means a state of mind that is related to our work has a positive and fulfilling connotation and can be measured in terms of vigor, dedication, and absorption. They came out with a scale called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the UWES scale. This scale uses three different scales related to vigor, dedication, and absorption for assessing the

level of engagement among employees in a given organization. The best part about this scale is that it can assess engagement at both individual and group levels. Before moving further, it would be beneficial to discuss what [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#) meant by the terms vigor, dedication, and absorption. As per them a very high level of energy, persistence in the face of adversity, Inclination to put extra effort into their work, and psychological resilience are some of the attributes of vigor. Whereas, dedication depicts how much an employee finds himself engaged towards one's work, up to what extent he finds his work meaningful and does he own a sense of pride in his work. In the UWES scale absorption shows the level of concentration in one's work where the employee loses sense of time. The questionnaire includes seventeen responses on a scale of 0= never to 6= always under the three categories of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

instrument is being reproduced as under:

Research Hypothesis

1. Work engagement level is at the same level while working from home, instead of working from offices.
2. Work engagement level is the same among the men and women employees.
3. Work engagement level is the same based on work experience.

Sample: The employees across India, working from home are the population. The purposive sampling method has been used for the selection of samples for the study. A total of 125 questionnaires were sent through a Google form. Out of which 115 duly filled responses were received back.

Table 1: Norm scores for the UWES-15 (N= 9679)

	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Total Score
Very low	≤ 2.17	≤ 1.60	≤ 1.60	≤ 1.93
Low	2.18 – 3.20	1.61 – 3.00	1.61 – 2.75	1.94 – 3.06
Average	3.21 – 4.80	3.01 – 4.90	2.76 – 4.40	3.07 – 4.66
High	4.81 – 5.60	4.91 – 5.79	4.41 – 5.35	4.67 – 5.53
Very high	≥ 5.61	≥ 5.80	≥ 5.36	≥ 5.54
M	3.99	3.81	3.56	3.82
SD	1.08	1.31	1.10	1.10
SE	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Range	0.00 – 6.00	0.00 – 6.00	0.00 – 6.00	0.00 – 6.00

Source: [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#)

The objective of this study is to measure the work engagement among the employees belonging to the government, public, and private sectors, during the first and second waves of the coronavirus epidemic. A total lockdown happened and barring a few essential services, the whole workforce in the country was working from home. This happened for the first time in history at such a mass level. To what extent this affected their level of engagement towards their work is an important area of study. This was measured with the help of a three-dimension approach as discussed above. The

Apart from graphical representation, an independent t-test method has been used for the analysis of data.

Discussion

For finding out the level of engagement among employees, working in various sectors, during the period of the pandemic, relevant data were collected and analyzed. Among all the respondents 53% are between the age group of 36-50, 35% are between the age group of 51 and above and 35.7% are between 21-35 (Figure 2).

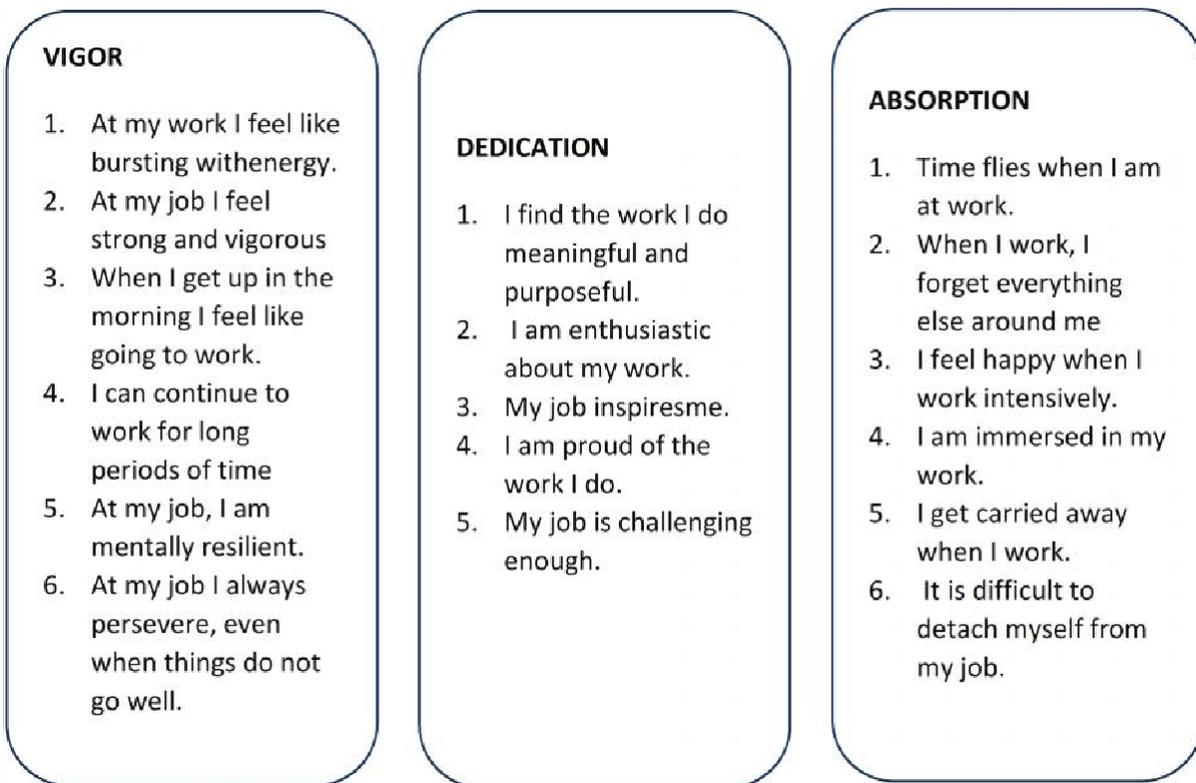


Figure 1: (The UWES Questionnaire)

Source: [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#)

Age

115 responses

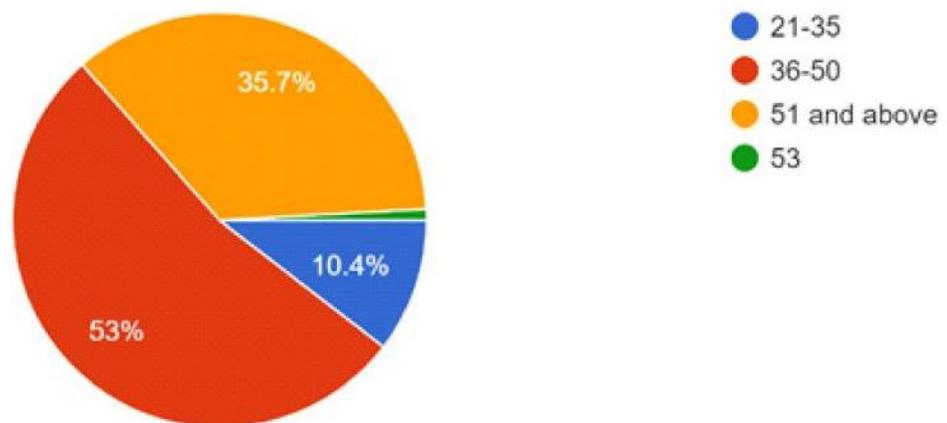


Figure 2

Out of 115 respondents, 67.8% are males and 32.2% are females. (Figure 3)

Out of 115 respondents, 84.3% are government employees, 9.6% are from the private sector and

Gender

115 responses

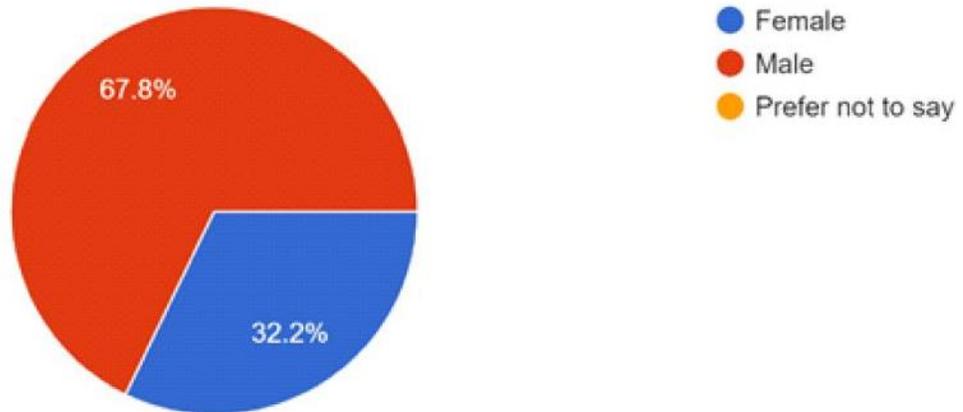


Figure 3

To find out the level of engagement among employees about different years of work experience data was collected and studied. Among the respondents employees having work experience of more than 25 years are 36.5%, employees having experience of 15 to 25 years are 33.9%, employees having experience of 6 to 15 years are 24.3% and experience of fewer than 5 years are 5.3% (Figure 4).

the remaining 6.1% are from public sector undertakings (Figure 5).

Descriptive statistics shown in Table 2 include the number of questionnaires, and the mean and standard deviations of the constructs. The total number of samples considered is 115.

For testing the above-mentioned hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was carried out and

Duration of Total Work Experience

115 responses

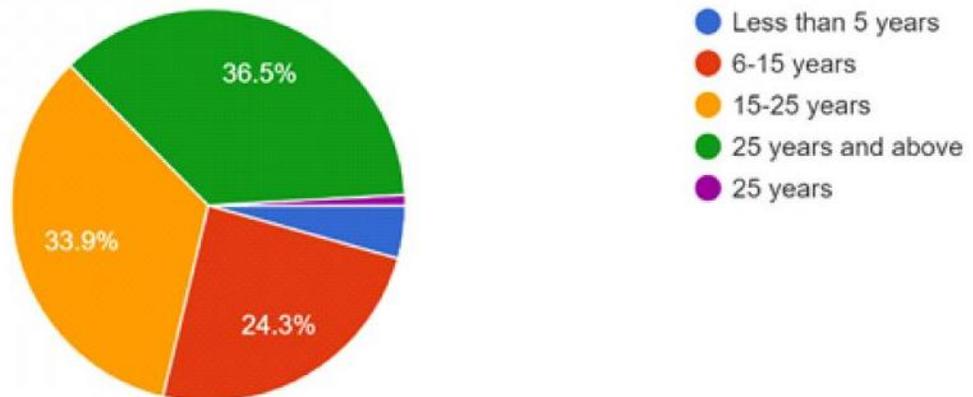


Figure 4

Working in
115 responses

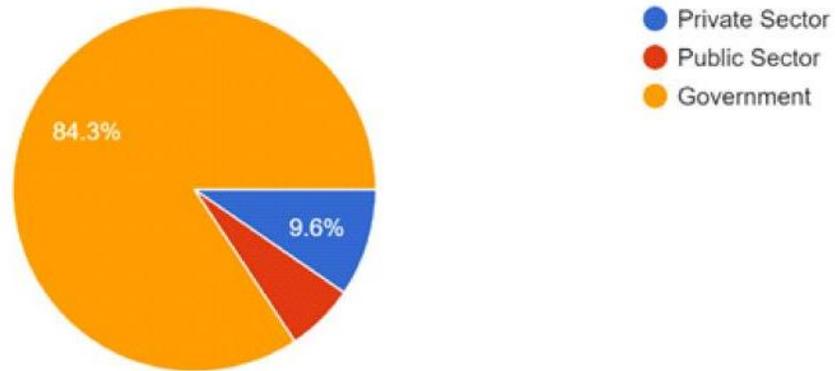


Figure 5

Table 2: Comparison based on Gender

Constructs	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vigor	115	3.8116	0.81276
Dedication	115	4.2174	0.85699
Absorption	115	4.0365	0.76208
Engagement	115	4.2759	0.75734
Valid N	115		

certain insights were noticed. While comparing the level of engagement among the employees based on gender, it was found that both male and female employees are equally engaged in their work as far as the construct of vigor and absorption are concerned. However, it is indicated that for dedication a significant difference was found between males and females (t-value-2.1, significance value-0.035)

When we compare the two genders based on vigor, we find that both genders have scored similar and there is no significant difference.

When we study the findings related to dedication toward work, we notice that the p-value is slightly less among females, depicting less dedication.

In the comparison of data between the two genders,

Table 3: Comparison based on Gender on Vigour

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Female	37	3.6892	0.88903	-1.114	0.268
Male	78	3.8697	0.77322	-1.059	0.294

Table 4: Comparison based on Gender on Dedication

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Female	37	3.9730	1.04367	-2.139	0.035*
Male	78	4.3333	0.73195	-1.891	0.064

*Significant at 95% confidence level.

Table 5: Comparison based on Gender in Absorption

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Female	37	3.8757	0.83180	-1.569	0.119
Male	78	4.1128	0.87635	-1.490	0.141

no significant difference has been noticed. Both men and women have been equally absorbed in their work.

A study of data related to work experience shows that there is a significant difference in the p-value among employees with more than 15 years of work

Table 6: Overall Comparison based on Gender

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Female	37	4.0919	0.88685	-1.813	0.073
Male	78	4.3632	0.67635	-1.648	0.105

Based on these results it is indicated that both genders have an equal level of engagement in vigour and absorption but men are more dedicated to their, as their t-value is -1.691 compared to women as their score is -2.139. On the rest of the parameters, their t- t-value is almost similar.

experience and less than 15 years of work experience. Employees with more than 15 years of experience were found to be more engaged with their work.

The level of engagement among employees having a different duration of work experience was also examined using a t-test. Overall data can be presented as under:

Data related to dedication towards one's work was compared and it was noted that on account of dedication, there is no significant difference between employees having more than 15 years of experience and employees with less experience.

Table 7: Comparison based on Work Experience

Work Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vigour- less than 15, more than 15	3382	3.56063.9126	0.86885.77168
Dedication- less than 15, more than 15	3382	4.11524.2585	0.93009.82820
Absorption- less than 15, more than 15	3382	3.83034.1195	0.76994.74758
Total work engagement- less than 15, more than 15	3382	4.07274.3577	0.81961.71989

Table 8: Comparison based on Work Experience on Vigor

	Work Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Vigour	Less than 15	33	3.5606	0.86885	-2.133	0.035*
	More than 15	82	3.9126	0.77168	-2.028	0.048

**Significant at 95% confidence level*

Table 9: Comparison based on Work Experience on Dedication

	Work Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Dedication	Less than 15 years	33	4.1152	0.93009	-0.810	0.419
	More than 15 years	82	4.2585	0.82820	-0.771	0.444

Table 10: Comparison based on Work Experience on Absorption

	Work Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Absorption	Less than 15 years	33	3.8303	0.76994	-1.861	0.065
	More than 15 years	82	4.1195	0.74758	-1.837	0.071

Table 11: Comparison based on Overall Work Experiences

	Work Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Total Work Engagement	Less than 15 years	33	4.0727	0.81961	-1.845	0.068
	More than 15 years	82	4.3577	0.71989	-1.745	0.087

A comparison of data on absorption shows no significant difference among employees based on work experience. All employees were found to be equally absorbed in their work.

While going through the results of data analysis for examining the level of engagement among employees having less than 15 years of work experience and more than 15 years of experience, the result showed significance for vigor at the workplace (t-value 2.13, significance value 0.035). This shows that employees having more than 15 years of experience have a significantly higher level of vigor than people with fewer years of experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

With these challenging and unpredictable times of the pandemic, carrying on with one’s daily life in an ordinary manner is a challenging task. At the same time, it is impossible to stop working to earn your income. Therefore, people started working from home for their livelihood, which was considered a fancy item of discussion among employees. Most of them used to discard it as something that may be possible for people working in the software sector, advertising, or some assignment that requires high-end technology backup. It was certainly not possible for an ordinary employee to slog in his office while handling their daily chores along with problems related to commuting. With the spread of the coronavirus, circumstances changed suddenly and people were forced to work from home along with whatever rudimentary technological support, was available at their homes.

To understand this total shift in working mode and its outcome in terms of one’s engagement with

his/her work, questionnaires were sent to employees working in different organizations with different job profiles. An instrument created by [Schaufeli & Bakker \(2004\)](#) was used to measure the level of engagement, which consisted of a total of 17 questions under the subsections of vigor, dedication, and absorption. It is seen from the analysis of data that there is not much difference in the level of engagement with their work among these employees. However, it was noticed that women showed a little less dedication towards their work while working from home. This issue needs to be studied further to understand this difference. What could be the cause of distraction- household chores, small kids taking care of sick and elderly, or some other reason, needs to be analyzed further. This study would throw light on formulation policies related to working from home in the future. Due to uncertainty about the end of the pandemic and related complexities, working from home will continue to be an option for employers and employees. Moreover, it also appears to be economical in the sense that employers are going to save their resources related to office expenses and employees are going to save their money and time as there will be less commuting involved.

[Dhameja et al., \(2021\)](#) have also talked about the positive results, appreciations, acknowledgments, and changes in work culture resulting from WFH.

Another major insight, which came out of this study is that the employees having work experience of more than 15 years were found to be more engaged with their work than employees having less experience. To explain this finding further and possible reasons in this regard, more investigation is needed in this area.

In conclusion, we can say that this sudden shift of workplace from office to home has been a game-changer incident as far as both employer and employees are concerned. Data shows that in the future working from home can become a mainstream mode of working. Further research in this area will help in making it more convenient and productive for everyone as discussed earlier.

Suggestions

The findings of the study can be used for further research in the direction of making work from home smooth and productive. Since in the coming days it is going to be the major trend, more studies are required in this area. So far the government has never tried to implement this concept of working from home, in light of this study, it can be used on a wider scale for the benefit of employees, who find it difficult to commute. Policies can be formulated in this regard and useless wastage of time and resources can be avoided in the future.

[Sharma & Sharma \(2021\)](#) have observed that working from home can become productive only in the case where organizations make their employees comfortable and secure, do not insist on regular office protocols, and make technical assistance accessible in case of requirements.

Many other studies have been conducted about employee engagement in this pandemic situation, [Dhanesh & Picherit-Duthler \(2021\)](#) has emphasised the importance of communication in a remote working scenario. According to them, two-way communication is one of the major factors which affects engagement.

Infrastructural and training facilities may be provided to the employees so that they can make effective use of the convenience of working from home. So far the employees have given their best in this time of crisis, which can be made out from the outcomes of the research. The level of engagement is almost the same. Therefore, further assistance needs to be provided so that their work becomes smoother and the desired level of productivity is achieved. This will make the transition from this crisis to normal working conditions in a desirable and less disruptive manner.

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