International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
Volume 14, Issue 8, 2020

Supervisor Role Mediated by Meaningful Work Facilitates Employee Engagement of Female Workers: Evidence from the Banking Sector in Pakistan

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Employee engagement has been a topic of significant interest for researchers for over 20 years now. However, engagement of female employees in particular is an area which still requires considerable investigation. The present study attempts to analyse how a supervisor role, when mediated by meaningful work, is significant in harnessing the engagement of female employees in particular in the Pakistani corporate environment. A comprehensive survey of 250 female employees within the banking sector was conducted through purposive convenience sampling, and smart PLS was used for data analysis. Drawing conclusions from our examination, it is revealed that with partial mediation from meaningful work, a supervisor role is positively related with encouraging engagement amongst working women in banks. However, this study only accommodates data from the banking industry. It would be beneficial to provide grounds for further research, extended to other sectors as well.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement, Working Women, Supervisor Role, Meaningful Work.*

Background to the Study

Cultivating positive employee engagement is a topic of serious deliberation in the fields of organisational behaviour and human resource management. Ariani (2013), defines employee engagement as a commitment of an employee towards its organisations and its policies. Employee engagement nurtures the motivation in an employee to sincerely strive for the betterment of the organisation he/she serves. Turner, P. (2020), establishes that employee engagement allows for the possibilities of increased productivity and serves as a significant contributor to team efficacy, ultimately becoming the prospective source of overall organisational effectiveness and a precursor of competitive advantage.

Organisations that are sensitive to their employees' needs are always inclined towards learning what their employees want out of their jobs and what inputs they are happy to contribute in-addition and apart from their usual job descriptions. Earlier researchers are all of the opinion that engaged employees are motivated employees generally exhibiting enhanced job performance levels. (Kahn, 1990; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011).

While significant research has been undertaken on engagement, there is a limited array of discussions on the impact of organisational communication, career development, supervisor role and meaningful work on harnessing employee engagement.

Management researchers have attributed organisational communication as an integral part in the nurturing of employee engagement. Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings. (2015), are of the view that a supervisor's efforts towards internal communication harnesses positive employee attitude, increases working efficiency, reduces contrition, develops organisational goodwill and increases financial gains. However, despite increased efforts in increasing employee engagement, the number of engaged employees has reduced over the years.

Likewise, Lemon (2020), investigated that meaningful work springs forth of engagement experiences that employees have over the course of employment and this is highly facilitated by formal organisational communication practices. Supervisors who encourage formal dialogues, face-to-face communication, active listening and employee-centric interpersonal communication play a highly crucial role in creating meaningful employee engagement experiences.

Bakker & Albrecht. (2018), refer to career development as an employees' gradual access to job resources which help an employee towards achieving professional goals, reducing work pressures, and opportunities for personal growth and advancements. Such resources are comprised of physical, social, and psychological factors that are aimed towards empowering employees and

nourishing social support for a better work-life balance. This is consistent with the earlier works of Bakker & Demerouti. (2017), whose Job-Demands Resource (JDR) theory serves as the basis of job performance and career growth through work-engagement. A supervisor's role can serve as a catalyst for career development of employees at workplaces.

Orth & Volmer, (2017) argue that employees who are afforded the opportunities for varying experiences and work adventurisms by their supervisors, tend to be more creative and are more likely to be innovative and exhibit entrepreneurial gist.

Moreover, earlier studies done by Jose & Mampilly (2015) and Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian (2001) all opine the view that a supportive supervisor encourages healthier attitude and behaviours amongst employees and vice versa. The more employees develop trust in their supervisors, the more likely they are to be more energised, satisfied and committed to organisational goals. Jin & McDonald (2017) examined that employee engagement is increased when employees perceive their supervisor to be supportive; however, this enhanced engagement is mediated by learning opportunities facilitated by those supervisors. When employees deem that they get to learn from their supervisors they tend to exhibit increased levels of employee engagement.

Johnson & Jiang (2017), explored that meaningful work fosters work engagement leading to work-to-life enrichment. It is corroborated by evidence from past research (Michaelson, 2005; Grant, 2007, Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012) that advocates that meaningful work plays a very important role in life-enrichment. It fosters a positive sense of life and to a greater extent makes life worth living.

Even though substantial studies have been conducted on engagement, not much work has been done to investigate the impact of organisational communication, career development, supervisor role and meaningful work on harnessing employee engagement amongst working women in the banking sector. Thus, the present study attempts to examine the role of organisational communication, career development and supervisor role on employee engagement mediated by meaningful work.

Saks (2006) and Lewis et.al, (2011) have argued that sustaining skilled employees is an art that is duly facilitated through sophisticated levels of employee engagement. The mechanism for employee engagement guarantees affective commitment, increases employee retention and cultivates an enhanced sense of loyalty towards the organisation.

Lewis, Donaldson-Feilder, & Tharani, (2014), suggest that organisational commitment is accordingly influenced by employee engagement. It helps in reducing turnover, fosters loyalty, boosts productivity and satisficing within organisational setup, which in-turn improves customer

satisfaction as well. This is consistent with Schaufeli et al. (2008), as they too advocate that engaged employees are more satisfied with their work settings and are likely to attain superior levels of well-being.

The Towers Watson Workforce Survey (2012) links employee engagement with three dimensions, i.e. engagement within the company needs to happen at 1. Rational, 2. Emotional, 3. Motivational levels. The rational or thinking dimension calls for positive contemplation on part of the employee to develop a mindset of constantly deliberating upon one's potential roles and responsibilities within the company. The emotional or feeling dimension deals with the amount of passion an employee exhibits in performing his/her job at the company. Whereas the motivational or acting dimension judge's an employee's willingness to work, going out of the way for the betterment of the company if needed, and performance at the optimum level while carrying out his/her job roles.

Macey & Schneider (2008) attribute employee engagement with being vital, enthusiastic, energised, dedicated and proud in the relationship with the company. Erickson (2005) argues that being satisfied and loyal is not enough for harnessing employee engagement but employees who are passionate, affectionate and willing to go the extra-mile for the company can truly be labelled as engaged employees.

Scholars such as Kahn (1990); Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova (2006); Saks (2006); Macey & Schneider (2008); Bakker & Leiter (2010); Shuck & Wollard (2010); Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot (2017); Bakker & Albrecht (2018); and Mone & London (2018) have all advocated the importance of employee engagement within the domains of organisational behaviour and human resource development and have attributed employee engagement to be antecedent to fruitful consequences and a measurement of best practices for organisational development. Gebauer & Lowman (2008), and Czarnowsky (2008) propounded that managerial training and adequate opportunities for employee learning also serve to be precursors of increased employee engagement.

Fairlie (2010), defines meaningful work to be a job or workplace feature that serves as a facilitator for the attainment or sustenance of varying dimensions of meaning for an employee. Meaningful work is not a freshly generated term, but rather has its roots in Maslow's (1965) hierarchy of needs and ERG Theory of Alderfer (1989). They describe meaningful work as the ones that lead to self-actualisation. McGregor (1960) connotes meaningful work to be something that allows for the possibilities to express superior imaginative excursions, creativity and originality. Hackman & Oldham (1975) characterise meaningful work to anything that adds personal value and serves to be a crucial component of one's job characteristics.

Earlier researchers such as King & Napa (1998); Schultheiss, & Grässmann (1998); Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith (1999); Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser (2001); Schaufeli et al., (2006); Keyes (2007); Kotter-Grühn, Wiest, Zurek, & Scheibe (2009); McKnight & Kashdan (2009); Davis, Smith, & Marsden (2009); Demirtas, Hannah, Gok, Arslan & Capar (2017); and Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep (2018) acknowledge the significance of meaningful work to employee engagement. They have all verified that when employees develop a sense of meaningfulness from their work, they tend to be more engaged with their job descriptions. Engagement is affectionately driven, and so interesting work and social usefulness play an important role in building affective commitment which ultimately enhances employee engagement. However, Sauter (2002); Highhouse, Zickar, & Yankelevich (2010); Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance (2010); and Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz & Soane (2017) have established that meaningful work has eroded in the modern times, and the changing nature of work does not satisfy the ethical needs of the employee, thus contributing ominously towards reduced levels of engagement.

Martela & Pessi (2018), while directly linking meaningful work to employee engagement, argue that meaningful work serves as a crucial dimension at the workplace for an employee's self-realisation. Self and identity are generated when employees feel that the work they do serves a consequential purpose. Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep (2018), argue that meaningful work develops positive perceptions related to job role and responsibilities and increases self-worth, value and purposefulness. A productive and dedicated workforce is the outcome of meaningful work.

Asik-Dizdar & Esen (2016) critically evaluated the importance of sense-making out of work done and that when employees are not alienated from the work they do, a sense of ownership is created, their wellbeing is enhanced and performance levels rise. Fostering work engagement necessitates that supervisors make sure that the work they a lot to their sub-ordinates is made meaningful for them.

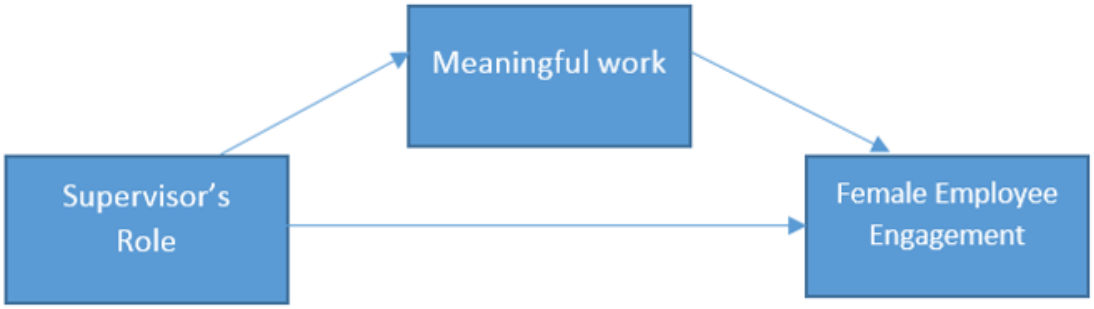
Supervisors, as discussed by Kahn (1990); Maslach et al, (2001); May et al. (2004); Saks (2006); Jenaro, Flores, Begoňa, Cruz, & Cruz (2010); Biggs, Brough, & Barbour (2014); and Orth & Volmer (2017), play a significant role is creating meaningfulness for the work the employees do. Manager's behaviour, if not appropriate, can lead to disengagement. However, supportive supervisors have a substantial impact on employee engagement and proves to be a valuable factor for increased involvement, passion and work satisfaction for the employees. Supervisors who are able to develop the quality of working, allocate suitable job roles and provide intrinsic rewards, can highly influence employee engagement.

From the literature discussed above, it can be discerned that meaningful work has a significant impact on the engagement levels of employees. Likewise, supervisor support also plays a crucial role in creating employee engagement. However, employee engagement, particularly of female workers, is an area which requires substantial research. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate how a supervisor's role is particularly significant in harnessing employee engagement of working women of the banking industry in Pakistan.

The **following hypotheses have been set up for the study.**

- H1: Supervisor's role effects on meaningful work.
- H2: Meaningful work effects on female employee engagement (FEE)
- H3: Supervisor's role effects on female employee engagement.
- H4: Meaningful work mediates the relationship between supervisor's role and FEE.

Figure A: The hypothesized model



Methodology and Data Analysis

The data for this research is collected from female employees of banking sector in Pakistan. The data was collected from primary sources and *purposive convenience sampling* technique is used in this study keeping in view the limited access to resources and time constraints. A self-developed questionnaire was sent to 300 female employees of different banks in Pakistan.

The assessments in this research were executed by Partial Least Square (PLS) method. PLS method provides comprehensive analysis regarding variables and items used in the scale (Hair, Sarstedt & Ringle, (2012).

Survey Findings

The survey questionnaires were returned from 300 female employees from different banks of Pakistan. Only 250 questionnaires were completely filled out and 50 questionnaires were excluded from study as those were found to be incomplete.

Measurement Model Analysis

Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, (2017) recommend checking construct reliability and validity through factor loading, composite reliability, Cronbach alpha, average variance extracted, convergent validity and discriminant validity for the internal consistency of measurement model. Factor loading values should ideally be above 0.7 (Hair, Black W., Babin, Anderson and Tatham, (2006). All factor loading of construct items are above from the value of 0.7 in this study. Brakeman & Gottman (1986) suggested Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 or above for constructs reliability and for convergent validity minimum average variance extracted values of 0.5 and composite reliability values of 0.7 are proposed by Fornell & Larcker (1981).

All values of reliability and convergent validity shown in Table 1 below meet the minimum criteria and fulfill the internal consistency requirement of measurement model. For probing, latent constructs have no issue of collinearity Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt (2015) Heterotrait-monotrait HTMT method is used to test discriminant validity for the threshold of 0.85 or below. Table 2 of discriminant validity shows that all the values are under 0.85 and there is no problem of collinearity among latent constructs.

Table: 1 Summary of Reliability and Validity of Measurement Model

	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Female Employee Engagement		0.930	0.940	0.613
FE1	0.837			
FE10	0.789			
FE2	0.779			
FE3	0.786			
FE4	0.790			
FE5	0.794			
FE6	0.732			
FE7	0.790			
FE8	0.769			
FE9	0.755			
Meaningful Work		0.909	0.930	0.689
MW1	0.899			
MW2	0.790			
MW3	0.821			
MW4	0.835			
MW5	0.821			

MW6	0.809			
Supervisor's Role		0.915	0.930	0.595
SR1	0.747			
SR2	0.713			
SR3	0.763			
SR4	0.750			
SR5	0.853			
SR6	0.819			
SR7	0.751			
SR8	0.780			
SR9	0.758			

Table: 2 Discriminant Validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	FE	MW	SR
FE			
MW	0.756		
SR	0.812	0.617	

Structural Model Fit Analysis

The value of R Square (coefficient of determination) is mostly used to test the structural model for fitness as it tells the expecting potency of the model. For a good model, the value of R Square of endogenous latent variables should be more than 0.26 (Chuan, 2018). In this study the R Square values for female employee engagement and meaningful work are 0.676 (67%) and 0.323 (32%) correspondingly which is acceptable for the fitness of structural model. Moreover, SRMR standardised root mean square residual value is also considered for the fitness of structural model. The acceptable value of SRMR suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999) is less than 0.08 which depicts the variation concerning the correlation of model implied and observed matrix. The SRMR value for the model of this study is 0.054 which shows a good fit. Henceforth the results of structural model and measurement model validate that the model of the study is reasonable to run PLS.

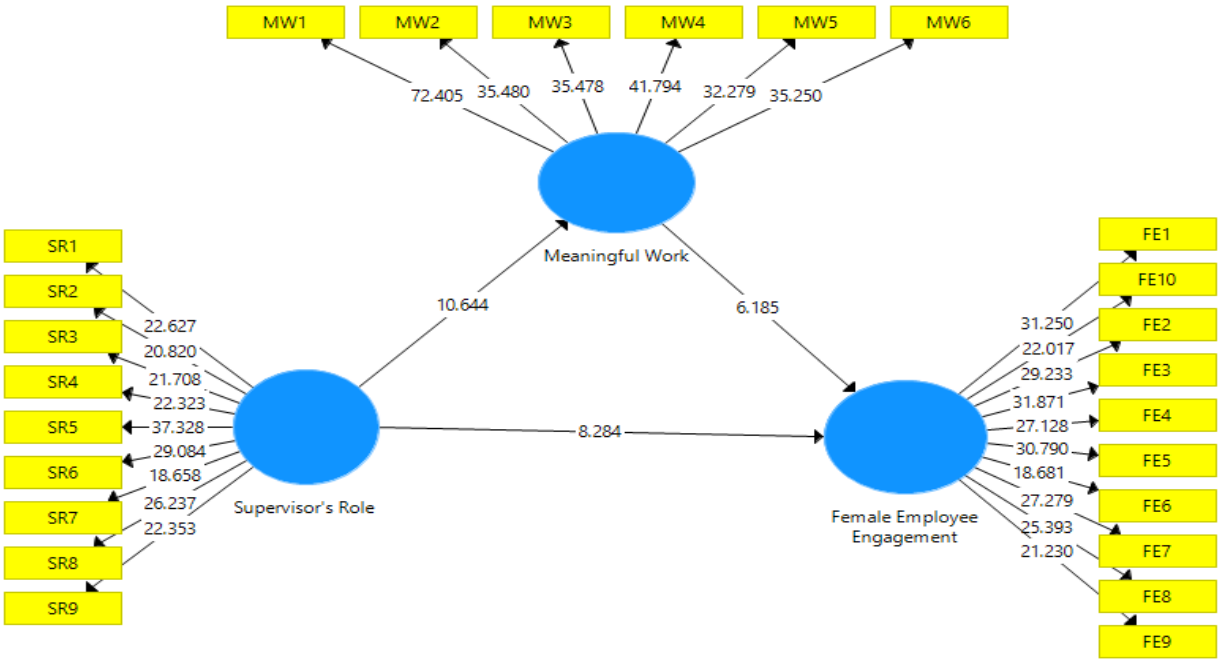
Table: 3 Summary of PLS analysis (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

	T Statistics	P Values
SR -> MW	10.644	0.000
SR -> FE	8.284	0.000
MW-> FE	6.185	0.000
SR -> MW -> FE	5.255	0.000

Table: 4 Hypotheses Assessment Summary (Chuan, 2018)

Hypothesis	Results
H1: Supervisor's role effects on meaningful work.	**Supported**
H2: Meaningful work effects on female employee engagement.	**Supported**
H3: Supervisor's role effects on female employee engagement.	**Supported**
H4: Meaningful work mediates the relationship between supervisor's role and female employee engagement.	**Supported**

Figure 1 Path coefficients and significant values of Model (Chuan, 2018)



Conclusion and Discussion

This study extends the input in a body of information in human resource management and female employee engagement by investigating the association of CD, MW and OC on it for maximisation of engagement level for better productivity and performance of organisations in Pakistan. The current study was based on the sample of female employees working in the banking sector of Pakistan.

The findings of the study reveal that a supervisor's role positively relates with female employee engagement and this relationship is partially mediated by meaningful work. This research indicates that the challenges of globalisation and increased work force diversity demands a balance of work and environment with proper satisfaction levels to make females fully engaged in their work places for better output. Bloom et al (2013) states that the facial appearance of a person's work surroundings can directly impact the productivity of a worker and the organisation.

So, it is evident that female employee engagement not only seeks monitary rewards to enhance their performance and productivity at work but they also demand care and a supportive supervisor at work. Orth & Volmer (2017) argue that employees who are afforded the opportunities for varying experiences and work adventurisms by their supervisors tend to be more creative and are more likely to be innovative and exhibit entrepreneurial gist.

A faithful and compassionate supervisor is hypothesised to impact employee engagement of adherents by enhancing their involvement, gratification and excitement for job (Schneider et al., 2009). Moreover, in this study the importance of meaningful work cannot be ignored in enhancing female employee engagement as Fairlie (2011) also conspicuously pointed out the importance of meaningful work in envisaging work engagement.

In this study the partial mediation between a supervisor's role and female employee engagement by meaningful work endorses the notion of Pradhan and Pradhan (2016) where they suggested that meaningful work mediates the association between transformational leadership and several employee's outcomes at work.

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