

THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP: LEVERAGING GENDER AND AGENTIC QUALITIES FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract. *This research examines the influence of agentic characteristics on employee engagement, filling an essential void in leadership studies. The study utilized the Hayes model and regression methods to evaluate the connections between leadership characteristics and employee results, considering variations related to gender. The results indicate an impact of agentic qualities on employee engagement. The research highlights gender as a moderating element that affect these relationships, demonstrating the intricacy of leadership dynamics in different contexts. This study adds to the area of organizational behavior by emphasizing the significance of incorporating agentic characteristics into leadership training initiatives, which ultimately improve workplace settings.*

Keywords Agentic Characteristics, Employee Engagement, Leadership Dynamics, Gender Differences, Regression

INTRODUCTION

Studies in organizational behavior have recognized the importance of personal characteristics, especially for leaders. This “trait perspective” highlights a set of inherent tendencies (like personality traits) that are directly linked to effectiveness. Consequently, developing these traits becomes a crucial way for individuals, particularly managers, to influence organizational outcomes. Agency and communion are two fundamental, broad trait dimensions that can be assessed in oneself and others. They offer a simplified yet powerful framework for analyzing reported personal characteristics in work settings and beyond.

Female leaders were met with resistance when they tried to lead in an agentic manner, because the masculine leadership style was seen as violating the traditional gender roles and norms (Eagly & Carli, 2007). While agentic traits have historically linked to men, leadership styles are not always gender specific. If we look at the existing gender stereotype content, there are in fact many agentic traits (e.g. Independent, competent) which are important for leadership are also deemed as desirable in women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Agentic actions are predominantly influenced by differences in social roles at work. In terms of agentic behaviours, gender disparities were not seen. When interacting with supervisees, both men and women are more agentic and with supervisors, they are less agentic. Dyadic gender composition at work primarily influences communal behaviours. Agentic behaviors are influenced by social roles that represent assigned social authority (Moskowitz et al., 1994).

Our study focuses on investigating the relationship between leaders’ agentic traits, and the resultant impact on employee engagement. Agency can also be defined as personality characteristics in which an individual focuses on the self (Gonzalez et al., 2012), and this is done through self-confidence, self-assertiveness, and self-direction and is linked with individualistic thinking (Woike, 1994). And thus people with these characteristics achieve life fulfilment through their accomplishment and a sense of independence (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Helgeson, 1994; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Agency is also referred to as “masculinity”, “instrumentality” or “competence”.

Gender also influences the relationship between leader qualities, leadership styles, and employee outcomes. Gender stereotypes can influence how leaders are perceived and assessed, potentially affecting the efficacy of their leadership approaches. For example, female leaders may have more hurdles in adopting agentic behaviors, whereas male leaders are expected to demonstrate more agentic features. So, we aim to study the effect of agentic and communal traits on employee engagement and how the gender of the leader influences the same. For this we have used regression and Anova to find whether there is any relationship between agentic and communal traits on employee engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agentic Traits

The sexual division of labour and gender hierarchy are the two main social organizational features from which the

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stereotypical beliefs that women are primarily communal, and men are primarily agentic arise. Men adopt patterns of assertive and initiating behaviors, that can be termed as agentic, when accommodating to their roles as providers (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). So as per this theory, as long as the role men and women play are the same and the gender hierarchy is not obvious, men and women should behave similarly. When there is a clear gender hierarchy, as in marriage or other close relationship, the gender differences consistent with gender stereotypes would be expected.

Traits such as ambition, decisiveness and assertiveness are usually associated with men. People also think that these traits are more beneficial to men than women when aiming for leadership positions. Badura et al. (2018) developed a Gender-Agency/Communion-Participation (GAP) model from social role theory and conducted a study of gender relationship with agency, communion and participation and leadership emergence and it was revealed from the studies that men were higher on agentic traits when compared to women and men are more active in group discussions, with participation positively associated with agentic traits. An analysis by Scott and Brown (2006) showed that Leadership emergence, effectiveness, evaluation, and style all differ as per gender, especially when the leadership position is defined to be clearly masculine (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992).

There is an assumed association between leadership and males, because historically males have been in positions of power and leadership roles and thus “people generally associate agentic traits with effective leadership possibly because of the long history of male leadership dominance, making it difficult to differentiate leader associations from male associations” (Eagly, 2007). Consequently, “The activation of gender-related beliefs by cues influences individuals to perceive women as communal but lacking in agency, and men as agentic but lacking in communality” (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Female leaders were met with resistance when they tried to lead in an agentic manner, because the masculine leadership style was seen as violating the traditional gender roles and norms (Eagly & Carli, 2007). While agentic traits have historically linked to men, leadership styles are not always gender specific. If we look at the existing gender stereotype content, there are in fact many agentic traits (e.g. Independent, competent) which are important for leadership are also deemed as desirable in women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Employee Engagement

Being able to handle the pressures and demands of one’s job, together with having a high level of energy when it comes

to work, are characteristics of work engagement. Three sub-constructs of work engagement were found by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004): vigor, devotion, and absorption. According to Kahn (1990) and Geldenhuys, Laba and Venter (2014), vigor is linked to a physical connection, dedication to an emotional connection, and absorption to a cognitive connection, all of which are tied to one’s work.

By comparing burnout as the negative side of a scale and work engagement as the positive side, Maslach and Leiter (1997) expanded on this idea. They said that work engagement would be positioned on the positive side of the pole and would correspond to more involvement, energy levels, and efficiency toward one’s work, whereas burnout would be placed on the negative pole and associated with weariness, decreasing efficiency, and increasing cynicism.

The UWES-9, also known as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) as a tool for measuring work engagement. The UWES-9 allows respondents to rate their degree of work engagement using nine questions and a 7-point Likert scale. It is a commonly used scale to assess the concept of engagement at work.

According to Wójcik-Karpacz (2018), work engagement is positively correlated with an employee’s effectiveness at work and with better business outcomes including higher productivity and financial success. As a result, a business should always be searching for methods to increase worker engagement. Other benefits of work engagement include raising a worker’s emotional investment in their position, which in turn encouraged greater engagement, initiative, and accountability for their outputs (de Oliveira & da Costa Rocha, 2017). Additional research revealed that higher levels of work engagement resulted in lower levels of absenteeism and turnover as well as higher levels of job satisfaction (Kim, Kolb & Kim, 2012; Strom, Sears & Kelly, 2014; Geldenhuys, Laba & Venter, 2014).

According to Coetzee and Veldman (2016), a manager’s credibility, behavior, and dependability as well as the relationships that workers had at work, their drive for success and autonomy, and, lastly, whether or not they felt cared for, all had an impact on how absorbed an employee was in their work. Because agentic leadership attributes include influence, status, and a drive to succeed and be autonomous, it may be inferred that the manager’s credibility and the employees’ desire for autonomy and achievement are linked to an agentic leadership style (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012).

While communal leadership approaches from an emotional standpoint, absorption is the cognitive aspect of work participation (Kahn, 1990; Geldenhuys, Laba & Venter, 2014; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Rosette, Mueller & Lebel, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

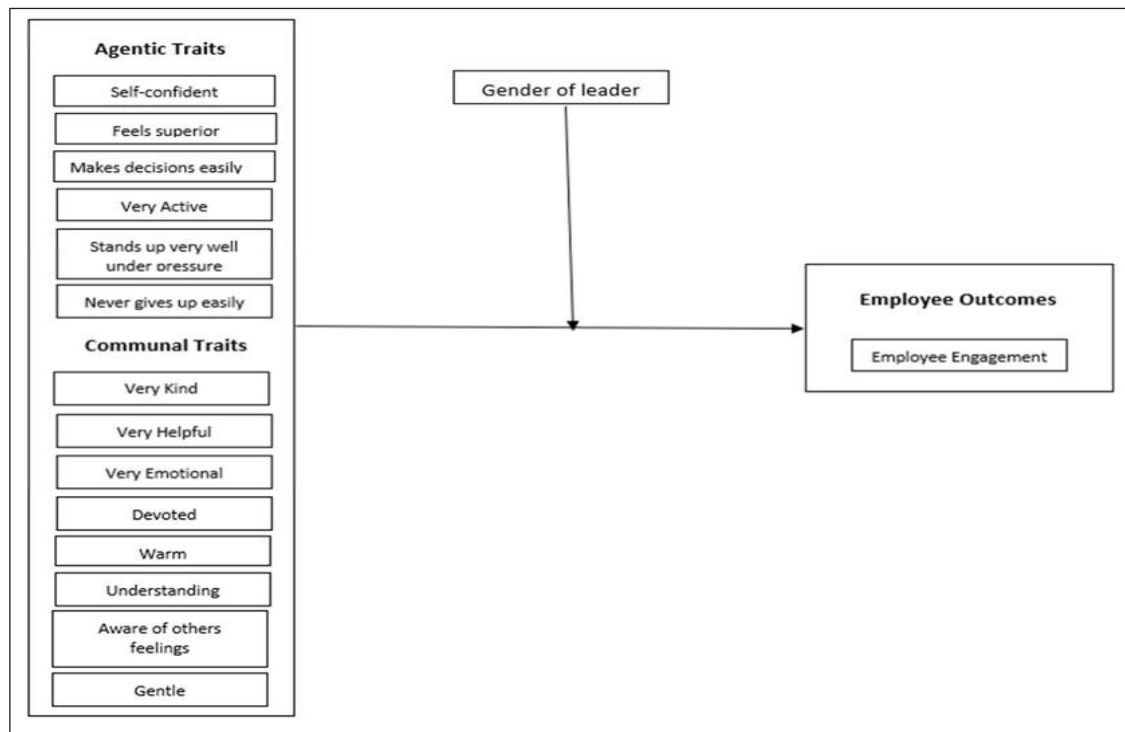


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Problem Statement

The gap in the current literature highlights the need to examine how leaders, who exemplify agentic leadership styles, affect employee engagement of their employees. This is important because it is an opportunity to increase employee engagement which is still at a low level and enhance women's representation in different leadership positions.

Existing research has not adequately addressed whether there exists a link between leadership styles of leaders and consequent effects on employee welfare. In this regard, we would like to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how these variables are interrelated. Most notably, it will establish whether managers engaging in agentic or communal leadership style cause more effectual worker satisfaction and engagement.

To address this objective, the study will explore how leadership styles (agentic v/s communal) among managers relate to employee engagement for establishing positive work environment that aid in employee engagement.

In this study, gender of the respondents and organizational culture will be considered. By doing so, this research contributes significantly towards understanding the intricacies between employee outcomes thus offering insights regarding how leaders can enhance their impact on engagement within their respective organizations.

Data Collection

A systematic, self-administered questionnaire with two sections was used to collect data in order to obtain detailed information. Part 1 concentrated on demographic data, such as age, gender, marital status, and educational background and Part 2 used established scales to evaluate important variables relevant to the characteristics and attributes of leaders. We were able to evaluate the Basic Psychological Needs Assessment at Work (BPNSW) for Engagement, Agentic Traits, and Communal Traits. This framework guarantees thorough and trustworthy data collection for further analysis.

Sample Size

The respondents were purposively selected in form of 600 employees from different sections of the organization. The purpose of such focus groups is to obtain relevant and worthwhile information from people who are accustomed to functioning within the boundaries of the. The variety in the sample permits a comprehensive appreciation of employee perceptions of the employees' engagement in the organization in light of dominant agentic and communal aspects of the leaders/managers, thus benefiting both HR and other organizational management.

DATA SPECIFICATION

Table 1: Descriptives of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Count	Percentage
Age	20-30 years	471	78.76%
	31-40 years	119	19.90%
	41-50 years	8	1.34%
	Above 50 years	0	0.00%
Marital Status	Single	258	43.14%
	Married	340	56.86%
Educational Qualification	School	34	5.69%
	Graduate	338	56.52%
	Post Graduate	212	35.45%
	Others	14	2.34%
Work Experience	Less than 3 years	372	62.21%
	3.1 - 6 years	174	29.10%
	6.1 - 9 years	33	5.52%
	Above 9 years	19	3.18%
Designation	Lower level	193	32.27%
	Middle Level	375	62.71%
	Upper Level	30	5.02%
Personal Income	Below 20,000	166	27.76%
	20,001 - 40,000	355	59.36%
	40,001 - 60,000	50	8.36%
	Above 60,000	27	4.52%
Family Income	Less than 0.5	130	21.74%
	0.5 - 1.0	168	28.09%
	1.01 - 1.50	90	15.05%
	1.51 - 2.0	37	6.19%
	Above 2.0	173	28.93%
Dependants	None	13	2.17%
	One	161	26.92%
	Two	311	52.01%
	Three	82	13.71%
	Four and above	31	5.18%
Hours Working	Less than 8 hours	146	24.41%
	9 hours	217	36.29%
	10 hours	161	26.92%
	Above 10 hours	74	12.37%

- *Age*: The majority of respondents (78.76%) fall in the 20-30 years age range, suggesting a predominantly young demographic.
- *Marital Status*: More than half of the respondents are married (56.86%), indicating a significant proportion may have family responsibilities.
- *Educational Qualification*: Most respondents are graduates (56.52%), indicating a well-educated group.
- *Work Experience*: A majority (62.21%) have less than 3 years of work experience, suggesting many are in the early stages of their careers.
- *Designation*: The majority of respondents (62.71%) are at the middle level, which might imply an experienced yet not senior-dominated workforce.

- *Personal Income:* Over half (59.36%) earn between 20,001 and 40,000, indicating a mid-range income level for the group.
- *Family Income:* Income levels are fairly distributed, with the largest group (28.93%) earning above 2.0, reflecting varied family financial backgrounds.
- *Dependants:* Most respondents (52.01%) have two dependents, suggesting family support responsibilities.
- *Hours Working:* A significant portion of respondents (36.29%) report working 9 hours, which could affect their work-life balance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regression (Employee Engagement)

Table 2: Regression (Employee Engagement)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.141 ^a	0.02	0.018	0.7394

a. Predictors (Constant), agentic

Table 3: Coefficients^a

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	2.585	0.109		23.809	<.001
	Agentic	0.145	0.046	0.141	3.188	0.002

a. Dependent Variable: empeng.

Interpretation

The regression model as shown in Table 2 shows that agentic qualities significantly predict employee engagement (p-value = 0.002, below the normal threshold of 0.05). This shows that the link between agentic characteristics and employee engagement is statistically significant.

The analysis found a substantial positive association between agentic qualities and employee engagement, accounting for 2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.02$). The standardized beta value of 0.141 suggests that agentic attributes have a minor but significant positive effect on employee engagement. This emphasizes the relevance of agentic traits in increasing employee engagement, albeit other factors certainly contribute to engagement beyond the scope of this study.

Factor Analysis (Agentic and Employee Engagement)

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
Agentic Traits4	0.761	
Agentic Traits3	0.724	
Agentic Traits7	0.707	
Agentic Traits2	0.658	
Agentic Traits6	0.631	

	Component	
	1	2
Agentic Traits5	0.625	
Agentic Traits1	0.576	
ded 2		0.93
ded 1		0.883
vig 1		0.828
ded 3		0.58
vig 2		0.486
vig 3		0.465
abs 3		0.826
abs 1		0.798
abs 2		0.581

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Table 5: KMO and Barlett's Test Output

Keiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.78
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2635.153
	df	120
	Sig.	<.001

Interpretation

The factor analysis results as shown in Table 4 show that the two components derived from the agentic attributes and employee engagement measures are both reliable and valid. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy score of 0.78 indicates that the sample size is acceptable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), as mentioned in Table 5 indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and factor analysis is needed.

The rotated component matrix reveals that the first component predominantly relies on agentic qualities, while the second component relies on employee involvement. This shows that the two conceptions are separate and can be measured accurately.

Hayes Output (empeng, gender and agentic)

Model: 1

Y: empeng

X: agentic

M: Gender

Outcome Variable: empeng

Table 6: Model Summary

R	R-Sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.1998	0.0399	0.5313	6.8753	3	496	0.0002

Table 7: Model

	Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.3393	0.3784	6.1815	0	1.5958	3.0828
agentic	0.1062	0.1602	0.6632	0.5075	1.2085	0.4209
gender	0.1595	0.2229	0.7154	0.4747	1.2785	0.5974
Int_1	0.0229	0.0939	0.2435	0.8077	1.1617	0.2074

Product terms key:

Int_1 : agentic x Gender

Table 8: Test(s) of highest Order Unconditional Interaction(s):

	R2-Chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	0.0001	0.0593	1.0000	496.0000	0.8077

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95.0000

Interpretation

The R-squared value as shown in Table 6 indicates that the model can explain variance in employee engagement, taking into account the primary impacts of agentic qualities and gender, as well as their interaction. The Hayes model showed a significant interaction between agentic qualities and gender on employee engagement ($p < .001$). This shows that the connection between agentic qualities and involvement varies according to gender.

While agentic skills significantly influence employee engagement overall, the intensity of this link differs by gender. The Hayes model results show that agentic qualities are positively associated with employee engagement. However, gender moderates this association. The significant interaction effect implies that the impact of agentic qualities on engagement varies by gender.

CONCLUSION

Researching the link between agentic trait and employee-engagement is reasonably important for deepening the knowledge of workplace relationships and complexities.

The regression results reveal that employees' engagement is positively associated with the development of agentic traits better than their communal counterparts, which implies that integrating effective social practices at work can greatly improve overall satisfaction and engagement among employees.

For employee engagement, organizations will need to focus on the building of leadership and workplace programs, which could promote agentic traits in an employee such as independence and assertiveness and goal orientation. Agentic traits result in having more positive influences on engagement than communal ones. Implement training programs that focus on developing better decision-making and problem-solving skills in both employees and leaders, thus increasing proactive behavior. Enable the workforce to become ownership and contributory forces further by growing these habits.

Regular engagement surveys must be taken to learn the effectiveness of these types of initiatives and areas needed to be worked upon for improvement. They provide wonderful insight into the way agency behavior affects the satisfaction or engagement levels that can enable shaping better strategies.

RECOMMENDATION

For employee engagement, organizations will need to focus on the building of leadership and workplace programs, which could promote agentic traits in an employee such as independence and assertiveness and goal orientation. Agentic traits result in having more positive influences on engagement than communal ones. Implement training programs that focus on developing better decision-making and problem-solving skills in both employees and leaders, thus increasing proactive behavior. Enable the workforce to become ownership and contributory forces further by growing these habits.

Regular engagement surveys must be taken to learn the effectiveness of these types of initiatives and areas needed to be worked upon for improvement. They provide wonderful insight into the way agency behavior affects the satisfaction or engagement levels that can enable shaping better strategies.

Mentorship programs can also be very effective. By matching employees with experienced leaders who demonstrate agentic traits, learning occurs through the guidance and real-life examples. In addition, support for work-life balance initiatives ensures that employees have the energy and mental space to display agentic behaviors successfully.

Organizations can build a more engaged, motivated, and

productive workforce by creating an environment where agentic traits are nurtured and valued.

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