

**IMPACT OF AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLE ON EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT OF NON-MANAGERIAL EMPLOYEES IN THE APPAREL
INDUSTRY (WITH THE SPECIAL REFERENCES TO KURUNEGALA DISTRICT)**

W.S.N. Thiwanka^{1,*} and S.M.D.N. Jayawardane²

^{1,2}Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka

*Corresponding Author (email: bm2018372@mgt.rjt.ac.lk)

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is crucial for an organization's success and competitive advantage. Research shows that leadership styles significantly influence employee engagement, with immediate supervisors significantly affecting engagement. The autocratic leadership style, which uses unilateralism and oppresses team members, is a significant factor in employee engagement. The study investigates the impact of autocratic leadership on employee engagement, particularly in the face of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The research aims to direct administration to employee engagement and create knowledge related to the growth of Sri Lanka's apparel industry (Ram & Prabhakar, 2011).

Employee engagement is crucial for individual and economic performance, customer service results, and employee retention. A global workforce survey by Towers Watson (2012) revealed that 35% of employees globally were highly engaged, while only 13% were actively involved in their occupations. Correspondingly, in 2017, 38% of workers in Sri Lanka were employed, 54% were disengaged, and 8% were actively disengaged (Gallup, 2013). Low employee engagement is a significant issue in South Asia, with little academic and empirical research. Autocratic leadership characteristics have been found to impact employee engagement, with some arguing for a negative correlation and others for some positive benefits. However, the impact of autocratic leadership styles on non-managerial employees in the apparel industry, particularly in the Kurunegala District, has not been adequately covered in scholarly literature. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the impact of the autocratic leadership style on employee engagement of non-managerial employees in the apparel industry, with particular references to the Kurunegala District.

Many instances in the literature highlight the relationship between autocratic leadership style and employee engagement. According to Guo et al. (2018), the behavior of an autocratic leader increases the feeling of fear in the employee. This leads to a decline in employee engagement. So, there is a negative relationship between autocratic leadership and employee engagement (Guo et al., 2018).

Working procedures are quite rigorous under autocratic leadership. These actions alienate subordinates from leaders and foster mistrust, which lowers employee engagement, and there is a negative relationship between autocratic leadership and employee engagement (Cheng & Wang, 2015).

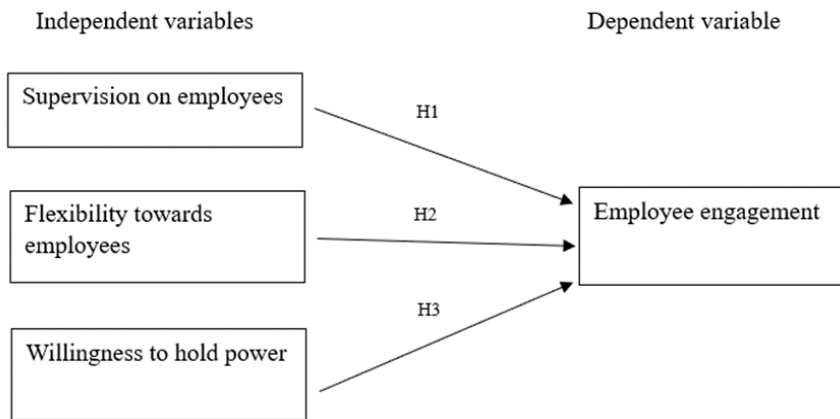
An autocratic leadership style aims to control and manipulate information to retain the advantage of power distance and to establish and uphold a positive reputation (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Autocratic leaders tend to maintain more power. These actions do not promote higher levels of employee engagement. So, there is a negative relationship between autocratic leadership and employee engagement (Chen et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the category of exploratory research. A questionnaire was distributed to identify how the characteristics of the autocratic leadership style affect the engagement of non-managerial employees in the apparel industry. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was created to make it simple for respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement.

The target population is non-managerial employees working in selected apparel institutes in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. The researcher has focused on non-managerial workers in Sri Lanka's garment sector, as there are more than 10,000 employees in registered apparel companies related to the Kurunegala district. The probability sampling technique has been used for the research, with a sample of 370 randomly selected employees being studied based on the number of employees 10000 according to the Morgan chart estimate.

Figure 1
Conceptualization of Variables



Research Hypothesis

H₁: Supervision of employees significantly impacts the employee engagement of non managerial employees in the apparel industry.

H₂: Flexibility towards employees significantly impacts the employee engagement of non managerial employees in the apparel industry.

H₃: Willingness to hold power significantly impacts the employee engagement of non-managerial employees in the apparel industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Analysis - The independent variables Supervision of employees have a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.965, flexibility towards employees has a value of 0.946, and willingness to hold power has a value of 0.956. Also, the dependent variable, employee engagement, shows a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.991. Thus, it is clear that it shows a stable and consistent relationship.

According to the findings of descriptive analysis, there is no significant difference between the mean value of the variables. The highest mean value is represented by supervision of employees (3.4524), and the lowest is represented by employee engagement (2.8827). The mean values of the variable flexibility towards employees and willingness to hold power are respectively 3.3216 and 3.2739. The three independent variables show a negative skewness value and employee engagement shows a positive value. Accordingly, the independent variables represent an unfavorable relationship with the dependent variable of employee engagement.

Findings of the regression results, the coefficient for employee supervision shows it hurts employee engagement (β , -0.330, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the regression coefficient of flexibility toward employees shows a negative correlation between it and employee engagement (β -0.829, $p < 0.01$). The willingness to hold power has a negative relationship with employee engagement, according to the regression coefficient (β -0.350, $p < 0.01$).

Correlation Analysis - The relationship between employee engagement and supervision of employees is revealed to have a correlation coefficient of -.806 which is significant ($p < 0.05$). To conclude, there is a negative and significant association between employee engagement and supervision of employees. The correlation coefficient for the relationship between employee engagement and flexibility toward employees is -.861 ($p < 0.05$). In order to conclude that employee engagement and flexibility toward employees are negatively and significantly related. Last, the correlation coefficient between employee engagement and willingness to hold power is -.836 which is significant ($p < 0.05$). So, it is possible to conclude that employee engagement and the willingness to hold power are negatively and significantly related.

The following table provides an overview of all the correlation analysis and simple regression analysis findings for each hypothesis. Each hypothesis's regression analysis results have a 0.001 and 0.000 significant value.

Table 1

Hypothesis Testing

| Variable | Coefficient | β | Sig. | Hypo. Supported or not |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|------------------------|
| Supervision of employees | -0.806** | -0.330 | 0.001 | Supported |
| Flexibility toward employees | -0.861** | 0.096 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Willingness to hold power | -0.836** | 0.107 | 0.001 | Supported |
| Adj.R ² = 0.749 | | | | |
| F Value = 367.244 | | | | |
| Sig.F = 0.000 | | | | |

The correlational and simple regression analysis findings showed that all the hypotheses were accepted.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The main purpose of conducting this research was to investigate the impact of the autocratic leadership style on employee engagement in apparel organizations in the Kurunegala district. Accordingly, here, some of the main behavior patterns of a leader have been studied from the profile of the autocratic leader. According to correlation analysis, there is a significant negative relationship between the supervision of employees and employee engagement. It is

apparent in the study that the autocratic leader has strict supervision over the employee. Also, it has been investigated that the autocratic leader has less flexibility toward the employee. Accordingly, a significant negative relationship exists between flexibility towards employees and employee engagement. Moreover, it has become clear that autocratic leaders like to keep more power. According to the analysis, it shows that there is a significant and negative relationship between willingness to hold power and employee engagement.

Accordingly, the researcher has identified these factors as the main factors affecting the employee engagement of non-managerial employees in apparel organizations in the Kurunegala district. Further from the relationships of these variables, there is a significant and negative relationship between autocratic leadership style and employee engagement. Considering the study's findings, the current study concludes that non-managerial employees have negatively related engagement due to autocratic leadership. Currently, the garment sector is doing an excellent service to the Sri Lankan economy and facing many challenges. Here, the leadership style has an important role, and much attention has been given to it. Accordingly, it is clear from the research results that if the autocratic leadership style is chosen as a solution, that decision should be looked at with great attention.

Keywords: Autocratic leadership, employee engagement, flexibility towards employees, supervision of employees, willingness to hold power.

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