EMPOWERING REMOTE EMPLOYEES: THE DISTINCTIVE ROLES OF SPONSORSHIP AND MENTORSHIP IN ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

In today's increasingly remote work environment, employee engagement is critical for maintaining organizational performance and competitive advantage. This study investigates the influence of sponsorship on remote employee engagement while considering the effects of gender, education, and mentorship. Utilizing a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, data were collected through an online survey of 434 remote workers residing in the United States. The Enhanced Engagement Nurtured by Determination, Efficacy, and Exchange Dimensions (EENDEED) instrument was used to measure engagement, while the Mentoring Function Questionnaire assessed mentorship and sponsorship constructs. The study's findings reveal that mentorship and sponsorship significantly enhance employee engagement. Specifically, mentorship accounted for 37% of the variance in engagement, and sponsorship contributed an additional 4% beyond the effects of gender and education. These results underscore the critical role of sponsorship in fostering employee engagement, highlighting its unique impact compared to mentorship. The study also demonstrates the importance of gender and education in shaping engagement, with female employees and those with higher education levels reporting higher engagement. While acknowledging limitations such as cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, this research provides valuable insights for organizations aiming to support their remote workforce. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of mentorship and sponsorship, include more diverse samples, and examine additional factors influencing engagement. By leveraging mentorship and sponsorship, organizations can create a supportive environment promoting professional growth, career advancement, and employee engagement.

Keywords: Engagement, Remote Employee Engagement, Mentorship, Sponsorship, EENDEED

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Introduction

Remote work has emerged as a predominant mode of operation for organizations globally. As enterprises adapt to this shift, understanding the determinants of employee engagement becomes paramount. Employee engagement, a critical factor in organizational performance and competitive advantage, is influenced by a myriad of variables, including gender, education, and mentorship. However, the role of sponsorship in augmenting remote employee engagement remains underexplored.

Mentorship and sponsorship are widely recognized as essential components of career development. While mentorship typically aims to provide career advice and support, sponsorship is oriented toward career advancement and is considered more transactional in nature (Balthazar et al., 2021). Mentoring and sponsorship facilitate professional growth, contributing to greater career satisfaction, mastery, and success (Creta & Gross, 2020). It is crucial to distinguish sponsorship from mentorship and to acknowledge the unique understanding and initiation it requires.

Background

The rise of remote work, driven by technological advancements and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has heightened the importance of employee engagement for maintaining organizational performance and competitive advantage (Charalampous et al., 2019). This shift has also intensified the challenges in establishing and maintaining effective mentorship and sponsorship relationships. Diverse populations, including women and people of color, have specific mentorship and sponsorship needs that must be addressed to ensure their career success Cabrera-Muffly (2021). van Esch et al. (2022) highlight organizations' need to recognize and support these unique requirements in remote work settings. The presence of mentorship and sponsorship is particularly vital for the career success of all employees.

Remote employees face unique obstacles in developing and sustaining professional relationships. Key aspects of relationship building, such as facial expressions and vocal intonations, may be diminished, potentially prolonging the establishment of trust and rapport (Markey, 2014; Morris, 2020). Variables such as work location, gender, education, sponsorship, and mentorship interplay to influence employee engagement. Organizational leaders and human capital professionals are keen to understand and address these challenges to maintain organizational stability. The interplay of sponsorship and remote employee engagement remains an area of limited understanding, often eluding those responsible for organizational success.

This study quantitatively examined the relationship between sponsorship and remote employee engagement, accounting for the influences of gender, education, and mentorship. Specifically, it examined whether sponsorship exerts an additional effect on engagement after controlling for these variables. The study reviewed the constructs of employee engagement, mentorship, sponsorship, gender, and education level, followed by the methodology, results, limitations, discussion, and conclusions.

Gap and Business Problem

As organizations increasingly embrace remote work, understanding the factors that influence employee engagement becomes critical for sustaining organizational performance and competitive advantage. This study explores the

impact of sponsorship on remote employee engagement, a topic that remains underexplored in existing literature. Sponsorship, defined as the active support and advocacy provided by senior individuals to promote career advancement, has shown potential in enhancing employee engagement. However, it is essential to distinguish the effects of sponsorship from those of gender, education, and mentorship.

Literature Review

Employee Engagement

A pertinent question in the current context is how sponsorship and mentorship of remote workers and the level of remote worker engagement fared during the COVID-19 era. Was the application of sponsorship and mentorship for remote workers comparable to that for traditional workers during this historic period? This study addressed these questions. Both general employee engagement and remote worker engagement face challenges in a work environment profoundly altered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, employee engagement has been assessed for office workers. However, the current hybrid workplace necessitates special attention to remote workers.

Lartey (2021) defined employee engagement as:

> a two-way relationship between an organization and a worker in which the organization provides the worker with the environment and conditions to be successful through good leadership and management, and the worker provides the organization with a positive and self-motivated performance leading to the achievement of the organizational mission, vision, purpose, and goals (p. 137).

This definition explains engagement as a reciprocal relationship between an organization and its employees, where the organization provides an environment conducive to success through effective leadership and management, and employees reciprocate with positive, motivated performance, thereby contributing to the achievement of organizational goals. Similarly, Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) described employee engagement as a multifaceted construct encompassing cognition, emotions, and behaviors and a unitary construct characterized by a positive state of mind, dedicated willingness, and the opposite of burnout.

These definitions emphasize that employee engagement is a holistic and dynamic interaction between the organization and its workforce. Organizations can cultivate a motivated and dedicated workforce by fostering an environment that supports employees' professional and personal well-being. This, in turn, enhances overall organizational performance and helps achieve strategic objectives (Stein et al., 2021). The interconnected nature of leadership, management practices, and employee attitudes underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to nurturing engagement in traditional and remote work settings.

A 2014 Harvard Business Review study by Markey (2014) reported that 71% of respondents worldwide believed employee engagement is closely tied to organizational success. Harter et al. (2002) found that low employee engagement levels led to a 32% drop in operating income and an 11% decline in earnings per share. This data can eventually be linked to customer satisfaction as well. Consequently, employee engagement is a key factor for organizational success. Stein et al. (2021) reported that engaged employees perform better, experience less burnout, and remain with organizations longer. Given the rise in employee resignations and increasing competition for talent, it is imperative for organizations to focus on employee engagement now and in the future.

Recent data from Gallup paints a more concerning picture. Gallup's 2024 report reveals that employee engagement has reached a 10-year low, with only 31% of U.S. employees feeling engaged at work, down from 36% in 2020 (Harter, 2025; Kuchno, 2025). The decline is attributed to unclear job expectations, lack of managerial support, and insufficient opportunities for professional development, exacerbated by the pandemic-induced shift to remote work. Despite the past emphasis on engagement's positive impact on performance, burnout prevention, and employee retention, the current state of engagement calls for renewed strategies to address these challenges. The contrasting views underscore the evolving nature of the workplace and the need for organizations to adapt to maintain high levels of employee engagement in a rapidly changing environment. Consequently, organizations that implement targeted strategies to improve clarity in job roles, enhance managerial support, and provide development opportunities will experience higher levels of employee engagement, improved performance, and greater employee retention.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual (the mentor) provides guidance, support, and advice to a less experienced individual (the mentee) to foster their professional and personal growth (Grier, 2023, Appendix D). It can be conceptualized through various interaction-based exchanges, encompassing a range of definitions. Jackson (2019) posited that mentoring includes coaching, sponsoring, presenting challenging assignments, and providing exposure and visibility, all facilitating mentee learning and career advancement. Lawrence (2017) expanded on this by defining mentorship as a psychosocial function that involves role modeling, friendship, acceptance, and affirmation. Balthazar et al. (2021) described mentoring as "the act of sharing one's wisdom by providing an opinion or advice based on personal and professional experience" (p. 41).

Mentorship holds considerable benefits across various industries. Ayyala et al. (2019) highlighted that mentorship significantly impacts mentees in terms of personal development, academic career pathways, and research productivity while enhancing career satisfaction. According to Hayes and Mahfouz (2020), mentoring is particularly valuable in educational leadership, where it helps novice principals acquire the skills and confidence needed to manage schools effectively. The mentor-mentee relationship is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and a commitment to the mentee's development.

Mentorship can take various forms, including formal mentoring programs established by organizations and informal mentoring relationships that develop naturally. Leavitt (2011) highlighted that effective mentoring involves unique traits and behaviors from mentors, productive relationship structures, and tangible developmental outcomes for the mentee and the organization. This process benefits the mentee by enhancing their skills and knowledge and contributes to the mentor's professional growth and the organization's overall success.

Mentorship is instrumental in fostering a positive organizational culture, as noted by Memon et al. (2015), who observed that most mentoring programs in large organizations aim to promote psychological and professional development among employees. These programs are designed to nurture mentees and enhance the overall perception of organizational culture. Moreover, mentorship has increased organizational commitment and promoted positive internal citizenship and behavior (Helms et al., 2016).

Arthur (1985) analyzed Kram's (1983) seminal work, widely acknowledged as foundational to contemporary mentoring studies. Kram (1983) delineates four developmental phases in the mentor-mentee relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. For a successful mentoring relationship, clear communication and role expectations between mentor and mentee are essential (Farah et al., 2020; Vasquez & Pandya, 2020). The initiation phase, lasting 6 to 12 months, is informal, allowing the mentor and mentee to establish their relationship independently without external mediation (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). During this phase, the parties identify shared goals and values, laying the foundation for trust as the relationship develops.

The cultivation phase spans 2 to 5 years and involves various career and psychosocial functions. During this period, the relationship deepens as the mentor provides challenging assignments, coaching, exposure, and sponsorship (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). This phase often increases intimacy, including sponsorship, counseling, and friendship. As the interpersonal bond strengthens, psychosocial functions such as trust and mutuality emerge, shaping the relationship (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015).

The cultivation phase eventually transitions into the separation phase, where the mentor and mentee begin to assert their independence. This phase is followed by redefinition, where the relationship is transformed into a more equal partnership (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). Throughout these phases, the mentor and mentee navigate the evolving dynamics of their relationship, uncovering the intrinsic value and tested realities of their interactions (Kram, 1983).

The separation phase typically signifies the discontinuation of the mentor-mentee relationship due to organizational or psychological changes affecting either party (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). A healthy and amicable separation necessitates open communication regarding the details of the relationship's dissolution. Various factors may lead to the end of a mentor-mentee relationship, including:

- the completion of the assignment.

- the mentee reaching their learning capacity.

- the mentee achieving their outlined learning goals.

- the mentee opting to work independently.

- the mentor determining that the mentee is ready to function independently.

- the mentee reevaluating their goals and finding the mentor no longer aligns with them (Memon et al., 2015),

- the mentor or mentee leaving the organization or becoming unavailable.

Following the separation phase, the mentor and mentee enter the redefinition phase, which involves terminating or significantly altering the nature of the relationship (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). According to Memon et al. (2015), if the mentor-mentee relationship was naturally formed and evolved over time, it is more likely to be redefined into a long-lasting friendship. Notably, sponsoring is integral to Kram's (1988) definition of mentoring, encompassing various career functions that fall under the mentorship umbrella.

By acknowledging these stages and the potential for redefinition, organizations can better support the evolving needs of mentors and mentees, fostering enduring professional relationships that contribute to overall success.

Since 2015, the concept of mentorship has expanded to include diverse mentoring, electronic mentoring, and peer mentoring, among other types. Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) argued that mentoring relationships are evolving to meet the demands of modern work environments, emphasizing the importance of adapting mentoring practices to support continuous learning and development. By fostering a culture of mentorship, organizations can create a supportive environment that promotes employee engagement, leadership development, and long-term success.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship in a professional context refers to a relationship where a senior individual (the sponsor) actively advocates for and supports the career advancement of a less experienced individual (the protégé) by providing opportunities, visibility, and resources (Alpaio, 2024). Within the context of this study, sponsorship is defined as a strategic relationship wherein a sponsor, possessing influence and power within an organization, actively supports the career advancement of a high-potential protégé by leveraging their networks and resources (Ayyala et al., 2019, p. 95). Sponsorship fundamentally focuses on facilitating career progression through the exertion of the sponsor's authority and connections. According to Hewlett (2013), a sponsor commits to investing time in the protégé's career aspirations, aiding them in gaining visibility and access within an elite network of influential decision-makers. Ayyala et al. (2019) further emphasize that sponsorship is dedicated to career advancement, rooted in power dynamics, and centered on executing specific opportunities that yield benefits for the sponsor, the protégé, and, frequently, the institution itself (p. 98).

The role of a sponsor is crucial in helping protégés navigate organizational politics and gain access to critical networks and opportunities. This active advocacy can significantly impact the protégé's career trajectory by providing high-visibility projects, introducing influential leaders, and recommending promotions or new roles. Research by Harvard Business Review highlights that sponsorship is often a natural progression from a mentoring relationship, where trust and mutual respect have already been established (Omadeke, 2021).

Sponsors wield considerable influence by actively advocating for their protégés to a broader audience. They can demonstrate their support in various impactful ways. According to Chow (2021), these methods can be encapsulated in the ABCDs of sponsorship: amplifying, boosting, connecting, and defending. Amplifying involves promoting the protégé's accomplishments to enhance their visibility (Chow, 2021, p. 3). Boosting entails the sponsor implicitly vouching for the protégé's future success by risking their reputation, such as through writing recommendation letters (Chow, 2021, p. 4). Connecting refers to leveraging the sponsor's esteemed relationships to introduce the protégé to influential groups or individuals for consideration (Chow, 2021, p. 4). Defending involves countering negative perceptions of the protégé. Notably, all these actions occur in the absence of the protégé (Chow, 2021, p. 5).

Comparing Mentorship and Sponsorship

Mentorship and sponsorship, while integral to professional development, serve distinct roles and offer unique benefits in the career advancement of individuals. Mentorship is primarily a developmental relationship where a mentor provides guidance, advice, and support to a mentee. The relationship is often characterized by mutual trust, respect, and a commitment to the mentee's growth. Mentors help mentees navigate their careers by sharing knowledge, offering encouragement, and providing psychosocial support comprised of role modeling, friendship, and acceptance (Lawrence, 2017). Mentorship is a multifaceted construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, aiming to foster the mentee's personal and professional development (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019).

In contrast, sponsorship is a strategic relationship wherein a sponsor, typically a senior individual with influence and power, actively advocates for the protégé's career advancement. Unlike mentors, sponsors promote the protégé by leveraging their networks and resources to create opportunities. Sponsors amplify the protégé's accomplishments, boost their visibility, connect them with key stakeholders (Hewlett, 2013), and defend them against negative perceptions (Chow, 2021). Sponsorship is often transactional and focused on career advancement, with the sponsor's advocacy leading to tangible career benefits for the protégé (Ayyala et al., 2019).

Understanding the differences between sponsorship and mentorship is essential for employees and leaders to ensure that the appropriate type of support or relationship is experienced. Collectively, sponsorship and mentorship can be critically important for employees at all stages of their careers. They offer ways to connect or reconnect employees within an organization. Leaders may mistakenly believe they are sponsoring someone when they are merely mentoring or think they are providing sufficient sponsorship while only offering support. As Hilsabeck (2018) notes, "mentoring relationships often entail sponsorship and vice versa such that the two constructs may be considered part of a continuum" (p. 284). While mentorship is valuable, sponsorship is crucial for career success (Michel, 2012).

Mentorship has been established as a human resource practice and an individual strategy for career success (Knouse, 2001; O'Reilly, 2001). A mentor can illustrate some similarities to a sponsor; however, the mentor-protégé or mentee relationship is structured differently. Unlike sponsorship, the mentor-mentee relationship can be bi-directional, where both individuals learn from each other. Additionally, a mentee can have multiple mentors and vice versa. Research suggests that mentees may receive greater benefits when the mentor actively initiates the relationship (Scandura & Williams, 2001). The mentor-mentee relationship is dynamic, developing through frequent interactions, with the duration of each stage varying (Kram, 1983; Memon et al., 2015). The key distinction between sponsorship and mentorship lies in the sponsor's influence and power, compared to the mentor's focus on providing guidance, advice, feedback, and training. Both relationships are critical in fostering a supportive and engaging organizational culture.

In summary, while mentorship and sponsorship are distinct in their roles and impact, both are essential for professional development and career advancement. Mentorship focuses on personal growth and skill development, providing a supportive relationship that benefits the mentor and mentee. Sponsorship, on the other hand, is crucial for career progression, with the sponsor using their influence to create opportunities and advocate for the protégé. By fostering both relationships, organizations can cultivate a highly engaged, capable, and motivated workforce, driving long-term success.

The Gender Gap

Gender disparities persist across various professional fields, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of their impact on employee engagement, sponsorship, and mentorship. Despite historically low representation in many professional roles, the participation of women in these positions has increased at an unprecedented rate (Parker, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2020). According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), women accounted for 51.8% of all workers in management, professional, and related occupations in 2019. However, the trajectory of women's professional advancement has been shaped by numerous structural and social barriers. Parker (2015) identified several contributing factors to the historically lower representation of women in top professions, including legislative restrictions in the 1960s and 1970s, a preference for traditionally female-dominated semi-professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work, and career orientation differences compared to men. Additionally, women often face career delays due to family obligations, including raising children and supporting a spouse's education or career advancement.

A more in-depth examination of gender gaps may reveal further occupational segregation along gender lines. Chow (2021) emphasized the importance of distinguishing between sponsorship and mentorship to ensure that women and members of historically marginalized communities (HMCs) receive comprehensive support in their professional development. Singh and Vanka (2020) highlighted that one of the primary challenges organizations encounter in fostering diversity and inclusion is the persistent leadership gender gap. While mentorship and career advancement programs for women and underrepresented individuals in medicine (UIM) have gained increased attention, the availability of faculty mentors remains inadequate (Ayyala et al., 2019). In the field of dermatology, Lin et al. (2021) found that gendered experiences in both personal and professional contexts influence the type of guidance and advice individuals receive, further shaping career trajectories.

Despite efforts to bridge gender gaps, progress remains slow. The World Economic Forum (2020) projected that closing the economic disparity between men and women would require more than two centuries, emphasizing the persistent nature of these challenges. Gender disparities also have direct implications for employee engagement. Employees who perceive themselves as undervalued, unfairly treated, or subject to discrimination often experience lower morale, reduced productivity, and diminished motivation. Folkman (2017) found that bold leadership is a valued trait, yet employee engagement among direct reports differed by gender, with lower engagement levels observed among women than men. Furthermore, Breza et al. (2017) reported that perceptions of unfair pay practices correlate with lower worker productivity and attendance, reinforcing the broader implications of gender inequities on workforce dynamics.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated gender disparities in the workplace, altering professional environments and increasing challenges for women. Truscott-Smith et al. (2022) reported in Gallup Workplace that women experienced greater job losses than men, heightened stress levels, increased pressures as working mothers, and higher rates of burnout. Regardless of whether the root causes stem from systemic discrimination, perception, or a lack of awareness, the adverse effects of gender disparities on professional engagement and advancement remain significant. Addressing these inequities requires a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between workplace dynamics, gender biases, and support mechanisms such as sponsorship and mentorship.

Chow (2021) emphasized that it is crucial to distinguish between sponsorship and mentorship to ensure comprehensive support for women and members of historically marginalized communities (HMCs) in their careers. Singh and Vanka (2020) found that a significant challenge for organizations lies in the leadership gender gap within leadership, diversity, and inclusion contexts. While there is increasing awareness of the importance of mentorship and career advancement, particularly for women and those underrepresented in medicine (UIM), available faculty may be insufficient (Ayyala et al., 2019). Lin et al. (2021) highlighted that different genders experience' unique challenges in personal and professional contexts, which can influence the guidance and advice offered.

Several factors contribute to the detrimental impact of gender gaps on employee engagement. Employees who feel undervalued, unfairly treated, and discriminated against often exhibit low morale, productivity, and motivation. Folkman's (2017) research indicates that while bold leadership is a valued trait, employee engagement among direct reports varies between women and men, with engagement levels notably lower for women. Breza et al. (2017) found that perceptions of unfair pay practices correlate with reduced worker output and attendance. Low attendance and productivity further diminish employee engagement. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender gaps as workplace dynamics have drastically changed. Recent findings by Truscott-Smith et al. (2022) in Gallup Workplace reveal that women experienced greater job losses, higher overall stress, increased pressures on working mothers, and a more significant rise in work burnout compared to men. Regardless of the underlying cause—whether perception, awareness, or systemic issues—the impact of discrimination on women remains profound.

Education Levels

Education plays a pivotal role in career and professional development, often serving as a critical qualifier for various employment opportunities. As Ali and Jalal (2018) observed, higher education is essential for the success of thousands of individuals in the workforce (p. 80). Education facilitates career growth for both men and women, although research by Yabiku and Schlabach (2008) indicates that women's educational attainment trends have historically lagged behind men's. Despite this disparity, higher education remains a key determinant for the working class, significantly influencing one's social and economic status (Ali & Jalal, 2018).

Moreover, higher education institutions are evolving to prepare learners for the demands of the modern workforce. Pages and Stampini (2007) argued that higher education is increasingly focused on supporting students' career

aspirations, offering opportunities for progressive employment, and providing training that aligns with the needs of the working world. This shift underscores the importance of education in achieving personal career goals and adapting to the ever-changing job market.

When combined with sponsorship and mentorship, education can profoundly impact an individual's career trajectory. Sponsorship and mentorship provide proteges and mentees with the necessary guidance, resources, and networks to navigate their professional paths effectively. These relationships help individuals understand their roles, set and achieve their goals, and ultimately become valuable societal contributors. The synergy between education, sponsorship, and mentorship is thus crucial in fostering well-rounded, successful professionals.

Research Technique Overview

Design

This quantitative, nonexperimental study employed a correlation design to analyze the relationships between gender, education, mentorship, sponsorship, and the engagement of remote employees. The study aimed to identify whether differences in sponsorship could predict engagement after accounting for gender, education, and mentorship. Data were collected through an online survey questionnaire completed by randomly selected employees who work remotely. This approach enabled the examination of potential correlations between the variables without manipulating any conditions, thus preserving the natural working environments of the respondents.

Research Question and Hypotheses

> **RQ 1:** To what extent does sponsorship contribute to increased employee engagement when controlling for gender, education, and mentorship?

This question addresses the need to understand whether sponsorship can uniquely influence employee engagement beyond the established effects of gender, education, and mentorship. By investigating this relationship, the study provided insights into how sponsorship can enhance employee engagement in remote work settings. The findings are particularly relevant for organizational leaders, human resource professionals, and policymakers seeking to develop strategies that foster a more engaged and productive remote workforce.

To answer this research question, the following hypotheses were proposed:

> **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** Sponsorship does not contribute to increased employee engagement after accounting for gender, education, and mentorship.

> **Alternative Hypothesis (H_A):** There is a statistically significant relationship between sponsorship and employee engagement after accounting for gender, education, and mentorship.

By addressing these hypotheses, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how sponsorship can be leveraged to improve remote employee engagement and contribute to organizational success.

Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire used two instruments to measure mentorship and sponsorship, and engagement. The mentorship and sponsorship constructs were assessed using role modeling and career mentoring questions from the Mentoring Function Questionnaire (Hebl et al., 2012). This instrument, featuring a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95, demonstrated high reliability, exceeding the acceptable minimum of 0.70 (Taber, 2018). It is worth noting that some studies consider a reliability score of 0.60 or above as acceptable (van Griethuijsen et al., 2014).

To measure virtual employee engagement, the Enhanced Engagement Nurtured by Determination, Efficacy, and Exchange Dimensions (EENDEED) instrument was employed. This nine-item engagement tool, developed by Lartey and Randall (2022), was specifically designed to assess remote employee engagement. The EENDEED instrument demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.82, confirming its reliability.

Psychometric Analysis of the EENDEED Instrument

Structure and Content. The EENDEED instrument is a specialized tool designed to measure employee engagement, particularly for remote workers. Developed by Franklin M. Lartey and Phillip M. Randall in 2022, EENDEED is grounded in three theoretical frameworks: self-determination, self-efficacy, and social exchange

(Lartey & Randall, 2022). The instrument comprises nine items that assess two key dimensions of engagement: Performance and Self-Reliance. Performance reflects employees' dedication and effort toward their work, while Self-Reliance captures their confidence and autonomy in completing tasks.

Reliability. The reliability of the EENDEED instrument has been demonstrated through high internal consistency. In the initial validation study, the instrument demonstrated strong reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.82. This score surpasses the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, ensuring that the instrument consistently measures the constructs of engagement across different samples and contexts.

Validity. The EENDEED instrument has undergone rigorous validation to establish its psychometric properties. The construct validity of the instrument was confirmed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA and CFA), which supported the two-factor structure comprising Performance and Self-Reliance. Content validity was ensured by incorporating theoretical foundations and expert reviews during the development process. Criterion validity was demonstrated through significant correlations with established engagement measures, indicating that the EENDEED instrument accurately captures the construct of employee engagement. Additionally, face validity was confirmed as participants and experts found the items to be relevant and representative of engagement.

Application and Usefulness. The EENDEED instrument has been effectively used in various research studies to explore the determinants and outcomes of remote employee engagement. For example, a study by Lartey (2022) utilized EENDEED to investigate the influence of a sense of belonging at work and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on remote employee engagement. The findings confirmed the instrument's robustness in capturing engagement among remote workers, highlighting its practical relevance and applicability in real-world settings.

In another study, Saurage-Altenloh, Tate, et al. (2023) investigated the impact of remote work on employee engagement and their intentions to stay or leave during the pandemic. Using the EENDEED instrument, the study measured remote employee engagement and found a strong positive relationship between engagement and the intent to stay. The study also provided the first known empirical evidence of a phenomenon known as "The Great Resignation," confirming that even highly engaged employees intended to leave due to the companies' position on remote work. The EENDEED instrument demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.84 and confirmed validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

In a separate study, Saurage-Altenloh, Lartey, et al. (2023) examined the influence of organizational leadership culture on employee engagement using EENDEED. Data from 325 remote workers in the United States were analyzed through multiple regression. The study's findings highlighted the significant role of EENDEED in measuring remote employee engagement. It confirmed a statistically significant relationship between leadership culture and engagement levels. Specifically, a mentoring-based leadership culture emerged as the most impactful, producing highly engaged employees. Both risk-taking and coordinating cultures also positively influenced engagement, while a result-oriented culture showed no significant effect. Thus, EENDEED effectively captured the nuances of engagement influenced by different leadership cultures, providing valuable insights for organizations aiming to foster a supportive and engaging work environment.

Finally, Randall and Lartey (2024) examined factors affecting employee engagement in the Communications department of a Fortune 500 Financial Service Company using a quantitative, correlational, and explanatory design. Data were collected from 98 employees via the EENDEED survey, which measured engagement based on social exchange, self-determination, and self-efficacy theories. The study found that age and length of service did not significantly influence engagement, but geographic co-location with supervisors did. Career planning emerged as the lowest-scoring variable among the EENDEED measures, indicating an area needing improvement. Overall, the company's employees were more engaged compared to the previous populations studied. The findings offered actionable insights for management to maintain and enhance employee engagement.

Items of the ENDEED Instrument. The nine items for EENDEED are statements answered using the five-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly agree. Of the nine items in the scale, the first six represent the construct of PERFORMANCE, and the last three represent the construct of SELF-RELIANCE. The instrument is presented as follows:

1.   At work, my choices express my "true self"

2.   I look forward to sitting down at my computer to write to others or do my daily work

3. I use a lot of expressive symbols in my communication messages, such as :-) or ;) for "smile", lol for "laugh", etc.

4. I am satisfied with the recognition I receive from my supervisor

5. At my job, I am doing what really interests me

6. I had a career-planning discussion with my manager

7. I have control over the quality of my work

8. I successfully complete difficult tasks and projects

9. I show concern for and interest in the person I am conversing with, in my communication messages

The EENDEED instrument is a reliable and valid tool for measuring employee engagement, particularly in remote work environments. Its strong psychometric properties, grounded theoretical foundations, and practical applicability make it an invaluable resource for researchers and practitioners aiming to enhance employee engagement and organizational outcomes.

Study Sample

The study targeted remote workers residing in the United States. Data were collected via an online survey platform, with 434 participants responding to the survey. The sample included 191 males (44%) and 243 females (56%), reflecting a diverse representation of the remote working population. Detailed demographic information, including the breakdown by gender and education level, is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. The random selection process ensured a representative sample of remote workers within the US, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings.

By employing a comprehensive and robust methodology, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the role of sponsorship in remote employee engagement while accounting for the effects of gender, education, and mentorship.

Table 1

Participants by Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	191	44%
Female	243	56%
Total	434	100%

Table 2

Participants by Education Level

	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 12 or GED (high school graduate)	115	26.5%
Some college or technical school	152	35.0%
Bachelor's degree	134	30.9%
Postgraduate degree or higher	33	7.6%
Total	434	100.0

Data Collection

Data were collected with the combined instruments via an online survey process using Ironwood Insights Group, LLC's data collection field service during the latter portion of 2023.

Data Analysis

Power Analysis

Power analysis was conducted using GPower 3.1.7 to determine the appropriate sample size required for this study (Faul et al., 2007). An a priori power analysis employing F-tests and the "Linear multiple regression with R² deviation from zero" method was performed with the following parameters: an effect size of 0.15, an α error probability of 0.05, a power level of 0.80, and four predictors. This analysis indicated that a minimum sample size of 85 participants was needed to achieve 80% statistical power. Furthermore, a post-hoc power analysis was carried out with the same α error probability (0.05), the actual sample size ($N = 434$), an effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), and two predictors. The results revealed a statistical power of 0.99, thus confirming the adequacy of the sample size for conducting hierarchical regression analysis. These power analyses ensure the robustness of the study and its capacity to detect significant relationships between the variables.

Reliability and Validity of the Survey Instrument

The reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha statistic, which produced a score of 0.94. This high-reliability score far exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Taber (2018), ensuring consistent measurement of the constructs without the need for variable elimination. Additionally, previous validation studies confirmed the instrument's construct, content, criterion, and face validity. Such rigorous validation processes enhance the credibility of the findings derived from this instrument.

Assumptions of Multiple Regression

Scale of the Dependent Variables

The dependent variable, EENDEED, representing the employee engagement score, was measured on a continuous scale. It is calculated as the sum of all items in the EENDEED instrument. Each item was scored between 1 and 5; because there are 9 items, the minimum engagement score would be 5 and the maximum 45.

Number of Independent Variables and Ratio of Cases to Independent Variables.

The dataset comprised 434 cases and four independent variables (GENDER, EDUCATION, MENTORSHIP, and SPONSORSHIP), resulting in a ratio of 108.5 cases per independent variable. This exceeds the minimum recommended ratio of $50 + 8*n = 82$, as Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggested, indicating an adequate sample size for reliable regression estimates.

Independence of Observations.

The independence of observations was examined using the Durbin-Watson test, which yielded a value of 1.606. This falls within the accepted range of 1.5 to 2.5, confirming that the assumption of independence of errors was met.

Linear Relationships

The linear relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables was checked using scatterplots and partial regression plots. The normality of the residuals was supported by the rectangular pattern of ZPRED against ZRESID and the P-P plot and histogram of standardized residuals, with skewness and kurtosis values within the -1 to +1 range.

Homoscedasticity

To ensure the assumption of homoscedasticity, which is the constancy of residual variances across all levels of the independent variables, a scatterplot of studentized residuals against unstandardized predicted values was examined. The visual inspection revealed a random scatter of points without any discernible patterns, such as funnel or bow-tie shapes, indicating that the residuals had constant variance. This observation confirms that the data meets the assumption of homoscedasticity, thereby ensuring that the estimates of the regression coefficients remain unbiased and efficient. Any violation of this assumption would have necessitated transformations or the use of robust standard errors to correct for heteroscedasticity. However, in this case, the assumption was successfully met, supporting the validity and reliability of the regression analysis results.

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. A series of linear regressions were performed, with each variable alternately serving as the dependent variable, a technique suggested by Field (2013) as well as Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). All tolerance values exceeded 0.2, and all VIF values were below 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. Bivariate analysis revealed no concerning correlations among the independent variables, thus satisfying the assumption of multicollinearity and singularity.

Outliers, Leverage Points, Influential Points

The dataset was free of missing values. Univariate outliers were identified via standardized scores (z-scores). Three cases of univariate outliers with z-scores outside the -3.29 to +3.29 range recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) were removed, resulting in a sample size of 431 cases. Multivariate outliers were identified and removed using the Mahalanobis distance. The final dataset comprised 420 cases. After these adjustments, no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points were detected.

Residuals (Errors) Approximately Normally Distributed

To validate the assumption that the residuals (errors) were approximately normally distributed, several diagnostic plots and tests were employed using SPSS version 21. The normality of the residuals was confirmed, ensuring the validity of the statistical tests applied to the regression coefficients. First, a histogram of the residuals with a superimposed normal curve was examined, showing a bell-shaped curve that indicated the residuals were symmetrically distributed around the mean. Second, a normal P-P Plot of the standardized residuals was generated. In this plot, the observed cumulative probability of a given residual value was plotted against the expected cumulative probability if the distribution were normal, with points lying approximately along a straight line, confirming normality. Additionally, a normal Q-Q Plot of the studentized residuals was created, comparing the quantiles of the observed residuals against the quantiles of a normal distribution. The points closely followed the diagonal line, further confirming the normality of the residuals. The skewness and kurtosis values were also examined and fell within the acceptable range of -1 to +1, providing additional evidence of normality. The assumption was successfully validated by confirming the normality of the residuals through these diagnostic methods. This ensures the reliability of the regression coefficients and the validity of the hypothesis tests performed in the multiple regression analysis.

Results

A three-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether sponsorship of remote employees could predict engagement beyond the effects of gender, education, and mentorship. In the first step, the control variables GENDER and EDU were included in the model. The second step added mentorship (MENTOR) as another control variable, and the final step introduced sponsorship (SPONSOR) as a predictor variable. The dependent variable, engagement, was measured using the Enhanced Engagement Nurtured by Determination, Efficacy, and Exchange Dimensions (EENDEED) and represented by the variable ENGAGEMENT.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis results are detailed in Table 3, which outlines the model achieved at each step. Table 4 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each model, and Table 5 provides the coefficients for the variables in the respective models. These tables were instrumental in interpreting the regression models.

In Step 1, where GENDER and EDU were the only variables considered, the variance explained by these independent variables (R^2) was .03, which was statistically significant ($F(2, 417) = 6.34$, p < .05). Both variables were significant predictors in the model. GENDER, coded dichotomously with males as 0 and females as 1, positively affected engagement ($\beta = .114$, $p < .05$), indicating that females appeared more engaged than males. Education (EDU) also positively influenced engagement ($\beta = .126$, $p < .05$), suggesting that higher education levels are associated with increased engagement.

In Step 2, the model remained significant ($F(3, 416) = 81.12$, $p < .05$), with the variance explained increasing to $R^2 = .37$. This indicated that adding mentorship to the model accounted for 37% of the variance in remote employee engagement. This finding aligns with previous research, showing that mentorship enhances employee engagement (Ghosh et al., 2018; Mylona et al., 2016; Sange & Srivasatava, 2012). Mentorship significantly impacted engagement ($\beta = .58$, $p < .05$), with GENDER and EDU maintaining their significance. The change in variance explained (ΔR^2) was .34, which was also significant.

The final model in Step 3 was significant ($F(4, 415) = 71.28$, $p < .05$), with the variance explained increasing to $R^2 = .41$. This model, which included GENDER, EDU, MENTOR, and SPONSOR, accounted for 41% of the variance in remote employee engagement. Sponsorship positively and significantly impacted engagement ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$). GENDER, EDU, and MENTOR continued to be significant predictors with positive contributions. The change in variance explained (ΔR^2) was .04, which was statistically significant. These findings confirm that sponsorship significantly predicts remote employee engagement after controlling for gender, education, and mentorship. Consequently, the null hypothesis suggesting that sponsorship does not contribute to increased employee engagement after accounting for gender, education, and mentorship was rejected. As a result, just like mentorship, sponsorship positively increased employee engagement, even after controlling for the effects of gender, education, and mentorship.

Table 3

Model Summary - Results of the Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Dependent Variable Engagement

| Model | R | R^2 | Adj. R^2 | Std. Error | Change Statistics | | | | | Durbin-Watson |
					$R^2\Delta$	FΔ	df1	df2	Sig. FΔ	
1	.172[a]	.030	.025	.69841	.030	6.338	2	417	.002	
2	.608[b]	.369	.365	.56379	.340	223.906	1	416	.000	
3	.638[c]	.407	.402	.54714	.038	26.704	1	415	.000	1.736

a. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU
b. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU, MENTOR
c. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU, MENTOR, SPONSOR

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Dependent Variable Engagement

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.183	2	3.091	6.338	.002[a]
	Residual	203.400	417	.488		
	Total	209.583	419			
2	Regression	77.354	3	25.785	81.119	.000[b]
	Residual	132.229	416	.318		
	Total	209.583	419			
3	Regression	85.348	4	21.337	71.275	.000[c]
	Residual	124.235	415	.299		
	Total	209.583	419			

a. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU
b. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU, MENTOR
c. Predictors: (Constant), GENDER, EDU, MENTOR, SPONSOR

Table 5

Coefficients of Each Variable in the Respective Models for Dependent Variable Engagement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	*t*	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	3.506	.096		36.620	.000		
EDU	.097	.037	.126	2.620	.009	1.000	1.000
GENDER	.162	.069	.114	2.366	.018	1.000	1.000
2 (Constant)	1.926	.131		14.720	.000		
EDU	.075	.030	.098	2.505	.013	.997	1.003
GENDER	.167	.055	.118	3.020	.003	1.000	1.000
MENTOR	.457	.031	.583	14.963	.000	.998	1.002
3 (Constant)	1.848	.128		14.446	.000		
EDU	.063	.029	.082	2.158	.031	.991	1.009
GENDER	.176	.054	.124	3.281	.001	.999	1.001
MENTOR	.255	.049	.326	5.207	.000	.365	2.742
SPONSOR	.234	.045	.324	5.168	.000	.363	2.758

Discussion

The present study examined the role of sponsorship in predicting remote employee engagement while controlling for the effects of gender, education, and mentorship. The findings revealed that sponsorship significantly contributes to employee engagement, even after accounting for these other variables. This underscores the importance of sponsorship as a distinct and valuable mechanism for enhancing engagement among remote workers.

Our results align with existing literature that highlights the pivotal role of mentorship in promoting employee engagement (Ghosh et al., 2018; Mylona et al., 2016; Sange & Srivasatava, 2012). Mentorship was found to significantly enhance engagement, explaining 37% of the variance in the engagement of remote employees. This supports the notion that mentorship provides essential guidance, support, and role modeling, which are critical for employee professional development and engagement (Deloitte, 2018).

Sponsorship, which accounted for an additional 4% of the variance in employee engagement, emerged as a crucial factor. Sponsorship's positive and significant impact on engagement (β = .32, p < .05) highlights its role in career advancement and visibility. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that sponsorship can provide employees with critical opportunities, exposure, and advocacy, thereby fostering higher levels of engagement (Ayyala et al., 2019; Chow, 2021). The distinction between mentorship and sponsorship is crucial for organizational leaders and employees, as understanding the unique contributions of each can enhance the support provided to employees at various career stages (Deloitte, 2021).

The hierarchical regression analysis also indicated that gender and education significantly predict engagement. Female employees reported higher levels of engagement compared to their male counterparts (β = .07, p < .05), and higher education levels were associated with increased engagement (β = .04, p < .05). These findings suggest that diversity and educational attainment play important roles in shaping employee engagement. Organizations should consider these factors when designing strategies to foster engagement among their remote workforce.

Practical Applications and Implications

Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of employee engagement and the critical role of sponsorship in enhancing engagement among remote workers. By fostering mentorship and sponsorship, organizations can create a supportive environment promoting professional growth, career advancement, and engagement.

Limitations and Ideas for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of sponsorship in predicting remote employee engagement, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal

inferences about the relationships between the variables. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of sponsorship and mentorship on employee engagement (Cole & Maxwell, 2003).

Secondly, the sample was limited to remote workers residing in the United States, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of remote employees globally. Future studies should consider including a more diverse and international sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their levels of engagement, sponsorship, or mentorship experiences. Triangulating data sources, such as incorporating supervisor ratings or objective performance metrics, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs studied.

Additionally, the study focused on sponsorship as a key predictor of engagement but did not account for other potential influences, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, or individual personality traits. Future research should explore the interaction of these variables with sponsorship and mentorship to provide a more nuanced understanding of their impact on employee engagement.

Overall, further research is needed to explore the complexities of sponsorship in various organizational settings, their long-term impacts on employee engagement, and the potential moderating factors that influence these relationships. By addressing these limitations, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the dynamics of employee engagement in the modern workplace.

Conclusion

This study provides important insights into the significant role of sponsorship in predicting remote employee engagement, even after controlling for the effects of gender, education, and mentorship. The findings demonstrate that mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for enhancing engagement among remote workers. Mentorship significantly contributes to employee engagement by providing guidance, support, and role modeling, which are vital for professional development. On the other hand, sponsorship emerged as a powerful predictor of engagement, emphasizing the importance of active advocacy, career advancement, and visibility in fostering higher levels of engagement.

By identifying the unique contributions of mentorship and sponsorship, this study underscores the need for organizations to cultivate both types of relationships to support their remote workforce effectively. The positive impact of education and gender on engagement further highlights the importance of diversity and educational attainment in shaping employee experiences. Organizations should consider these factors when designing strategies to enhance engagement among remote employees.

Despite the study's limitations, including its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, the robust methodological approach and comprehensive analysis provide a solid foundation for understanding the dynamics of remote employee engagement. Future research should build on these findings by exploring the longitudinal effects of mentorship and sponsorship, incorporating diverse samples, and examining additional factors that influence engagement.

Supportive environments that promote professional growth, career advancement, and overall engagement can be fostered by creating mentorship and sponsorship relationships. Through leveraging these insights, organizations can enhance the engagement and performance of their remote workforce, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and resilience in an evolving work landscape.

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