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## Better leadership, higher work engagement?

### Comparative study on Finnish and Russian private sector employees

#### Abstract

**Purpose:** This article focuses on the relationship between leadership and work engagement in Finnish and Russian private sector organizations. The research aims of the study were to analyze how Finland and Russia differ 1) in the level of work engagement; 2) in the level of satisfaction with leadership and 3) in specific components of leadership as most important antecedents for work engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The empirical analysis of this study is based on survey data collected in Finland and Russia. The analysis focuses on 1570 Finnish and 490 Russian private sector, full-time employees with permanent contracts, who have no managerial responsibilities. The data are analyzed using descriptive methods and binary logistic regression analysis.

**Findings:** The results show, first, that both satisfaction of leadership and work engagement are higher in Finland than in Russia. Second, work engagement in Finland is facilitated by nearly all components of leadership – both materialistic- and relationship-based – while in Russia work engagement is predicted by rewarding good performers and such relationship-based practices as feedback, delegating responsibility, discussing work matters, and building trust. Contrary to our hypothesis, such materialistic-based components as providing equal treatment turned out to be insignificant for work engagement in Russia.

**Practical implications:** Organizations should invest in leadership quality to enhance work engagement and thus, to get a competitive advantage.

**Originality/value:** This study adds to the limited comparative research on work engagement and its predictors.

Key words: work engagement, leadership, trust, employee voice, feedback.

## Introduction

Work engagement, defined as a persistent, positive, affective-emotional state of fulfillment with one's job (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006), is one of the most important dimensions of employee well-being. It has positive outcomes for both employees and organizations (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), and it thus plays an increasingly important role in global competition. Work engagement is connected to the effectiveness of the work (Rich et al., 2010; Kahn, 1990), lower turnover intention (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and employee proactivity (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008). It is also a predictor of the financial success of the organization (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Harter et al., 2002; Wefald and Downey, 2009). Therefore, it may give organizations a competitive advantage, so organizations should be aware of the antecedents of engagement. Work engagement is especially needed in private sector companies since, due to competitive pressures, working in business organizations is more demanding in terms of workers' job skills, workload, task and extra-role performance, compared to public sector.

In this study, the job demands-resources model (JD-R model) is used as a background theory for the analysis of the connection between good leadership and work engagement. Specifically, we explore the relationship of the different dimensions of leadership with engagement. Work engagement and its antecedents may be culturally contingent (Brough et al., 2013; Farndale and Murrer, 2015), and therefore, our paper is aimed to further extend research on cultural variation in the levels and antecedents of work engagement.

There is a considerable number of studies that demonstrated strong positive connection between different work-related resources and work engagement (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). "Good" leadership is one of the key elements of work resources. A leader can provide his/her followers with both support and incentives to development. Although much research has been investigating the connection between leadership and work engagement, our literature analysis revealed that these studies focused primarily on leadership and its styles (e.g., transactional, transformational, authoritarian, supportive etc.) as general subordinates' perceptions of their supervisors (e.g., Saks, 2006). Much less empirical studies (e.g., Allen and Rogelberg, 2013) used facet-based approach revealing what a leader *actually does*, and what concrete leader's actions contribute most to subordinates' work engagement. As it was recently mentioned by Blomme et al. (2015), the literature on this issue is scarce. Meanwhile, exploring certain facets of leadership in

facilitating work engagement seems to be very promising since it shifts focus from a leader's personality to the quality of management in a workgroup or in organization as a whole.

Thus the aim of this study is threefold. First, we contribute to the literature by examining the levels of work engagement in different cultural and socio-economic contexts, specifically, in the underexplored contexts of Russia and Finland. Second, we check the level of satisfaction with leadership behaviours of employees' immediate supervisors. Third, our study aims at investigating which specific components of leadership better predict work engagement in these two countries.

### **Work engagement and its facilitators in Finnish and Russian contexts**

For a long time, work life studies concentrated mostly on the negative aspects of work, but in the last decades, the positive work-related feelings, attitudes and behaviors have gained more attention (Luthans and Avolio, 2009). Among these "positive" constructs, work engagement has thus become a very popular field of study. Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind (Bakker et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). It was originally described by Kahn (1990, p. 694) as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles. Being engaged in their role performances, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally. In turn, Kahn's theorizing on work engagement has its roots in sociological perspectives of structural functionalism (Merton, 1957) and especially of symbolic interactionism, namely in Erving Goffman's works on people's attachment to and detachment from their roles (Goffman, 1959; 1961a; 1961b). Kahn extrapolated Merton's and Goffman's ideas on individuals' social roles to organizational life. Work engagement is seen as opposing to employees' robotics, burnout, or detachment (Bakker et al., 2006; Goffman, 1961a; Hochschild, 1983; Kahn, 1990; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Rich et al., 2010).

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma and Bakker (2002) have characterized work engagement as a combination of vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor is characterized by a high energy level and mental resilience. It also includes a willingness to invest effort in one's work. Dedication describes the sense of significance of work, as well as enthusiasm towards, and pride in, work. Absorption refers to deep concentration on work, sometimes so deeply that the time seems to go by quickly, and the employee finds it difficult to detach from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Work engagement is not the same as an experience of flow at work (Csikzentmihalyi, 1997); the former is more stable and longer lasting. However, one of the dimensions of engagement, namely absorption, comes close to flow, or a state where the employee is fully focused and absorbed in her/his work (Schaufeli et al., 2002.) Work engagement is also empirically separable from organizational commitment and work involvement, although they all refer to a positive attachment to work (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006). The theoretical definition of organizational commitment reflects the assumption that the employee is willing to continue working as a member of the organization towards achieving the shared values and objectives of the organization. (Cohen, 2007; Mowday et al., 1979). Furthermore, job involvement refers to a situation where the employee finds his/her job motivating and challenging and is committed to the work in general, and also to the specific job, as well as the organization (Brown, 1996).

It is important to note that both level and antecedents of employees' work engagement, as other organizational behavior (OB) phenomena, may be highly context-specific. We understand context as opportunities and constraints existing in the environment external to an individual. "Context often operates in such a way as to provide constraints on or opportunities for behavior and attitudes in organizational settings" (Johns, 2001, p. 32). These contextual variables may shape meaning of OB phenomena; restrict their variation; affect their occurrence and functional relationships between variables (Johns, 2006). The influence of contextual variables often runs from higher to lower levels, or from larger to smaller units, e.g., organizational strategies and practices may form a context for the attitudes and actions of individual organizational members (Johns, 2001).

Since employee expectations, behaviors and attitudes are shaped by national norms, traditions, values, economic realities, social and political events in a given country, we especially need considering societal, or macro-level, context in order to understand the level and antecedents of employees' work engagement as well as their satisfaction with leadership. The effects of location that include economic conditions, social class composition, and national culture, provide so-called "omnibus context" for OB phenomena (Johns 2006), i.e. influence a broad range of features at the same time.

Surprisingly, cross-cultural studies on work engagement, namely, its level and antecedents in different countries, are scarce up to now. Existing research on work engagement has been focused more on methodological developments (e.g. Brough et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2006) or on work engagement as a mediator between other behavioral or attitudinal variables (e.g., Salanova and

Schaufeli, 2008). Comparative studies directly aimed at analyzing work engagement antecedents were limited to either Western or Asian national contexts (e.g., Farndale and Murrer, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017). Recent analysis based on the 6th European Working Conditions Survey suggests that the level of work engagement is higher “in well-governed countries with a strong democracy, which are high in integrity, and low in corruption and gender inequality... [and] in individualistic countries with less power distance and uncertainty avoidance” (Schaufeli, 2017. P. 1). To our knowledge, none of above-mentioned studies included Russia – a country which historical and work context is unique for understanding generalizability or national contingency of work engagement.

This study has the rare comparative settings of Finland and Russia. These countries are neighbors with a long-standing economic and trade partnership, but they have significantly different business and working cultures. Finland’s level of work life quality is high in comparison with other European countries, similar to other Nordic countries as well (Parent-Thirion et al., 2007). According to the 2018 World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2018) and the 6th European Working Conditions Survey (Schaufeli, 2017), Finland, together with other Nordic nations, falls into the happiest countries in the world. In turn, Russian work life, especially leadership styles, have modernized slowly (Kets de Vries et al., 2004; Puffer and McCarthy, 2011), despite the fact that this country has a great deal of economic power. In Russia, the power distance (PD) —“the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 307)—is very high, and organizations are still very hierarchical and authoritarian; Russian employees’ participation in decision-making is still low (Gimpelson and Kapeliushnikov, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2008). According to the World Values Survey, Finland is among countries with the highest scores of “self-expression” values while Russians are adhered to “survival”, or materialistic, values (World Values..., 2017). Research found material well-being to be valued higher by Russians than other Europeans (Magun & Rudnev, 2012) and wage satisfaction to be the most important in retaining employees in Russia (Balabanova et al., 2016). Finland, representing highly developed democracy and economy based on Protestant labour ethics, is highly committed to merit-based employment relationships while in Russian domestic companies employees’ loyalty and obedience are often more important than their professional competencies (Efendiev et al., 2009). These differences of working contexts make the comparison and its results interesting, because it is important for both countries to know the antecedents of engagement to improve them, as well as the situation of the other country, their business partner.

Work engagement has been widely studied in Finland over the past decade (e.g. Hakanen et al., 2006; Hakanen et al., 2008a; Hakanen et al., 2008b; Mauno et al., 2005 and 2007; Mustosmäki et al., 2013). There are also some comparative studies of work engagement in European nations, which include Finland. The latter, together with Sweden and the Netherlands, was acknowledged to have a higher level of work engagement compared to five other European countries (namely Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Portugal and the UK) (Taipale et al., 2011). More recent analysis indicates that Finland's mean level of work engagement corresponds to the average European level (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 5).

In Russia, work engagement is often mentioned as highly desirable in business organizations. For example, it is, alongside with adaptability and excessive workloads, a very important condition for managers' career success (Efendiev et al., 2011). Despite this, research on the manifestations and antecedents of work engagement in Russia is still represented only by small-scale exploratory studies (e.g. Khazagerova, 2014; Nesterova, 2014; Sistonon, 2016). To our knowledge, there are no studies comparing the levels of work engagement in Russia with other nations.

### **Job resources as facilitators of work engagement**

A number of studies have investigated individual-, group- and organization-level antecedents of work engagement in the past decades. Since the present study was conducted in two societies with different social and economic background, we focus on job resources that reflect main differences in working conditions between Russia and Finland and thus might have a considerable explanatory power for our understanding of the cross-cultural differences in work engagement.

The job demands-resources model (JD-R model) has its roots in Karasek's job demand-control (JD-C) model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorel, 1990) of explaining worker well-being and stress. Compared to Karasek's concept, the JD-R includes more dimensions of both job demands and resources. It describes the effects of the two characteristics of work across all types of occupations – demands and resources – on personal, social, or organizational outcomes (Schieman, 2013). Job demands are defined as 'those physical, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs', and job resources are 'those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands

and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development' (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501).

Although JD-R can be regarded as more problem- than theory-driven concept, it integrates theoretical contributions from industrial sociology, cognitive and personality psychology. From sociological perspective, this model is relevant since we understand emotions and behaviours at work as socially embedded and job stress as a social problem. It considers social situation at workplace together with personal strengths and weaknesses. Interacting with each other, social and personal factors result in employee emotional and behavioral responses. "Managerial" concerns of these responses include work-related outcomes such as in- or extra-role behavior, turnover, absenteeism or productivity (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008) while sociologists focus on more distant results such as workers' health, work-life balance, well-being, life chances, or workplace inequalities (Schieman et al., 2009; Schieman, 2013; Henz and Mills, 2015). JD-R perspective can provide more general understanding of how work-related experiences are transferred to employees' off-job situation, specifically contributing the idea on a reciprocal effect between job characteristics and personality (Kohn and Schooler, 1982). The idea of the balance between job demands and resources can also be traced to the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) which postulates social relationships as an exchange of inputs and outputs, "costs" and "gains". Being applied to employment relationships, SET proposes that employees 'reciprocate the treatment they receive from their employers' (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2003, p. 213). Being provided with sufficient resources that are proportional to job requirements, employees perceive their exchanges with employers as equitable, and this results, e.g., in higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Birtch et al., 2016).

The JD-R model states that job demands are related to the exhaustion component of burnout, and that job resources are related to engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Since being introduced by Demerouti et al. (2001), the JD-R model has gained considerable attention, and has been used in great numbers of studies on work engagement (e.g., Hakanen et al., 2006; Mauno et al., 2007; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014).

In the JD-R model, there are no specific, fixed job demands or resources. The idea of the model is that any resource may affect employee health and well-being, which makes it very versatile (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). It means that job resources are closely connected to the quality of work life in

general, and the latter is higher in Finland in comparison to other European countries (Hartikainen et al., 2010; Parent-Thirion et al., 2007).

There is convincing evidence that job resources predict work engagement in a Finnish context. Autonomy and social support, from both colleagues and superiors, are important elements to increase work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2008a; Taipale et al., 2011). In the study of Mustosmäki et al. (2013) comparing call centers to other service sector work, autonomy and social support were strong predictors of engagement. In a two-year longitudinal study, work engagement was found to be stable during the study period, and job control and organization-based self-esteem, seen as a job resource, were amongst the strongest predictors of work engagement (Mauno et al., 2007).

To our knowledge, there are almost no studies applying JD-R model to research on work engagement in the Russian context. According to Nesterova (2014), special professional education, tenure, holding a managerial position, perceived employability and job satisfaction can be predictors of work engagement of Russian employees. Job resources, such as meaningful work, autonomy and identification with one's career, have been found to predict work engagement in Russia as well. Conversely, job demands, such as role conflicts, personal conflicts in the workplace, and poor working conditions, decreased work engagement. Other authors indicate that new ways of promoting engagement in Russia have been suggested: Russian firms should improve the quality of their management and leadership, promote a culture of trust and integrity, provide more opportunities for older workers and continuously measure progress (Khazagerova, 2014). Recent mixed-method case study evidence from a Finland-based multinational corporation in Russia suggests that work engagement is enhanced by defining clear tasks and roles, enabling employees to take a more active role in the organization of their work, providing them with helpful feedback, developmental opportunities and sufficient training (Sistonen 2016).

Basing on the empirical evidence that 1) Finland, unlike Russia, is an individualistic low-power distance country with highly developed economy and democracy which are associated with higher work engagement, and that 2) job resources that facilitate work engagement are generally higher in Finland than in Russia we propose the following Hypothesis 1:

***H1: The level of work engagement is higher in Finland than in Russia.***

## Leadership and work engagement: cultural context

Leadership is highly important for the organizations' competitiveness and for employee well-being. It is one of the key components of job resources since leaders' support can counterbalance pressures and complexities at work and thus help employees cope with the job demands in general (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Taipale et al., 2011). First-line supervisors are believed to be especially important for building engagement (Frank et al., 2004; Hakanen et al., 2006).

While leadership in Finnish organizations have developed towards socially responsible, supportive and innovation-oriented styles (Seeck, 2008), this is not the case of Russian culture and economy. The Soviet Union collapsed 25 years ago, but economists still characterize the institutional framework of the Russian economy and society as very rigid and hindering to development. 'Soviet heritage' is still manifested in the excessive size of the government and quasi-government (state-owned corporations) sectors of the economy removes a significant portion of the economy from the scope of market mechanisms (Gurvich, 2016). The share of small- and medium-size enterprises is lower than in most other European countries, and the state still puts administrative pressure on firms (Gimpelson and Kapeliushnikov, 2011). There is also a high concentration of property in the large informal sector (Akindinova et al., 2016). Some authors describe the Russian economy as being in a deep recession with likely prospects of long-term stagnation, and these trends are accompanied by its isolationist foreign and trade policies (Gimpelson and Kapeliushnikov, 2016).

Russia is characterized by high power distance, whereas PD in Finland is low (Hofstede, 2016; Hofstede Centre, 2017). High PD relates to inequality, and has been shown to correlate with levels of income inequality, corruption, political freedom and the human development index (Taras et al., 2012). In Russian organizations, high PD results in a more prominent hierarchy in work life, such as centralized decision-making and 'one-man management' (Melin, 1996), in which managers have a lot of power and are very authoritarian, directive and control-oriented (Dixon et al., 2014; Fey and Denison, 2003; McCarthy and Puffer, 2013; Puffer and McCarthy, 2011).

Nevertheless, there are studies arguing that the "Russian management style" is heterogeneous, and there is explicit movement towards its becoming more Western-orientated. A new generation of Russian managers who are open to change and new knowledge and have work experience in cooperation with foreign partners are coming to the fore (Astakhova et al., 2010; Balabanova et al., 2015; Kobernyuk et al., 2014; Kovesnikov et al., 2012). These competences of the "new generation"

of Russian managers who have minimal exposure to practices of the Soviet period seem to be in high demand. Despite the negative institutional conditions mentioned above, Russia's labor market processes are generally similar to other medium-income countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in changing its structure from "industrial" to "post-industrial". It is manifested by increasing the supply of skilled labor (e.g., rapid IT expansion), shrinking low-skilled manufacturing jobs and reducing employment in the agriculture sector. These trends are moving the Russian industrial and occupational employment structures towards those observed in developed countries (Akindinova et al., 2016; Gimpelson and Kapeliushnikov, 2016).

A growing number of well-educated white-collar workers, as well as the expansion of skilled and well-paid employment in Russia (Akindinova et al., 2016) stimulate demand for efficient human resource management practices that would meet workers' expectations and maximize their intellectual and creative potential. Particularly, this provides the case for the search of factors and management practices that would enhance employee work engagement.

There are a considerable number of studies showing that good leadership is positively connected to work engagement, and a good leader enhances both motivation and engagement (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007, p. 394). Good leadership occurs when leaders have clear expectations, are fair and recognize good performance. Good leadership has a positive effect on work engagement by engendering a sense of attachment to the job (Kahn, 1990; Macey and Schneider, 2008). Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) suggest that transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1993) is the most suitable leadership style for fostering engagement, and transformational leaders are, for example, inspiring, good at listening to employees needs and encourage creativity. Wang et al. (2017) suggest that transformational leadership creates work engagement through employee positive affect.

However, most of these studies examine "leadership styles" as general subordinates' perceptions of their supervisors. Although based on well validated, widely recognized instruments, these measures of leadership styles are rather emotionally charged and tell us more about subordinates' feelings and perceptions of their leaders than about day-to-day management practices. In order to capture them, we need so called facet-based approach revealing what leaders *actually do*, and what concrete leaders' actions contribute most to subordinates' work engagement. Among these studies, Frank et al. (2004), Hakanen et al. (2006), Mustosmäki et al. (2013), Rai et al. (2017), Saks (2006), Taipale et al. (2011) indicated that social support from superiors was one of the most important preconditions for work engagement. Findings of other studies suggest that employee work engagement is positively

influenced by cultivating trust (Lin, 2010; Rees et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2014), providing feedback (Aguinis et al., 2012; Bezuijen et al., 2009; Menguc et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2009) and employee empowerment (Peters et al., 2014). A number of studies demonstrated that encouraging direct forms of individual employee voice, e.g., through workgroup meetings, also provide psychological conditions for engagement (Allen and Rogelberg, 2013; Kwon et al., 2016; Rees et al., 2013).

In order to understand which specific factors of leadership contribute most to the high level of engagement we need to consider the cross-cultural variation of work-related values in Finland and Russia. There is general evidence that since wages are considerably lower and work-based social security system is less developed in Russia compared to developed economies Russian employees are more likely to focus on meeting their lower-level needs than their Western counterparts (Balabanova et al., 2016). In contrast, Finland, being among world's most prosperous countries, is characterized by highly developed system of human rights protection, high quality social security and educational systems which are directed to developing competences and skills required in a knowledge economy and emphasize the importance of the social elements of work.

These differences in socio-economic contexts lead us to a proposition that Russian and Finnish employees may react differently to specific leadership practices. Therefore, different components of leadership should be significant in facilitating work engagement. Thus we examined Hypotheses 2a and 2b:

*H2a: In Finland, satisfactions with development- and relationship-based components of leadership are the strongest predictors of work engagement.*

*H2b: in Russia, satisfactions with components of leadership directed to tangible, materialistic-based rewards are the strongest predictors of work engagement.*

## Research design

The empirical analysis of this study is based on survey data collected in Finland and Russia. These data include the Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey and the Russian Quality of Work Life Survey. The analysis focuses on private sector, full-time employees with permanent contracts who have no managerial responsibilities themselves. The data are analyzed using descriptive methods and binary logistic regression analysis.

## *Data and methods*

This study uses a combination of data from the two surveys, namely the Finnish and Russian Quality of Work Life Surveys (QWLS). The QWLS was conducted by Statistics Finland, and it provides a representative population-based sample of Finnish employees. The data have been collected every four years since 1977, and in this study, the data from the latest wave in 2013 is used. The survey was conducted via face-to-face and telephone interviews. A total of 4,876 interviews were collected in 2013 (Sutela and Lehto, 2014). For this particular study, only private sector workers with full-time, permanent contracts, with no managerial responsibilities, were included into the analysis (N=1570).

The second data is the Russian QWLS which partially follows the general research design of the Finnish QWLS. Therefore, the variables used in this study are similar, and thus, comparable. A professional polling firm collected the Russian data in 2014 via standardized face-to-face interviews in Moscow, Omsk and Nizhny, Novgorod, also using a population-based sampling technique. This was the first time this survey was conducted in Russia and combined with Finnish data, which provides this study with a unique setting.

The Russian survey was focused only on private sector, full-time employees. The quota sampling design of the Russian data was developed in order to provide the same proportions of respondents' distribution by industries as the Finnish sub-sample of private sector employees in 2013. Out of a total Russian sample (N=780), respondents without managerial responsibilities were analyzed (N=490).

In the Finnish subsample, 42% of the respondents are women, whereas in the Russian data, 60% are women. The mean age in the Finnish data is 43 years, whereas in the Russian data, it is 40 years. Both data have respondents from a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, trade, construction, healthcare and social services, transport and communications, teaching, finances, insurance and real estate and other industries (including legal, personal, printing, security, travel services, etc.). This variety of industries means that this study may reveal some interesting results of the employees in both countries in general, but the aim is not to make any industry-specific analysis.

## Measures

The questionnaire was administered in Finnish in Finland and in Russian in Russia. The original version of the questionnaire was first developed in Finnish. Its official translation into English is available on the Finnish QWLS web-page ([http://www.stat.fi/meta/til/tyoolot\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/meta/til/tyoolot_en.html)). The questionnaire was, first, translated from English to Russian by a native Russian speaker, second, back-translated to English by another native Russian speaker and, third, the items were reviewed by the authors to see if the back-translated items match their original meanings.

The scale for *work engagement* consisted of three items adopted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006): (1) I feel strong and energetic in my work, (2) I am enthusiastic about my work and (3) I feel satisfied when I am deep in my work. The short version of the UWES comprises nine questions, and the three most central variables, which can be found in the data in the same format as in the original questionnaire, were chosen for this study. These three items matched the three areas of engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption and showed the highest factor loadings for 3 components of engagement in previous studies (e.g. Hakanen et al., 2006; Nesterova, 2014). Cronbach's alpha for these items was 0.777 in the Finnish subsample and 0.842 in the Russian subsample; thus, the summated scale constructed from these items can be considered reliable. The original scale for these three items included in the summated scale ranged from 1 to 4, where 1 signified 'completely true' and 4 'not true at all'.

In order to perform a regression analysis described below, the measures of work engagement and of satisfaction with leadership were recoded into dummy variables. Since a linear regression supposes the normal distribution of the dependent variable (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001, p. 517) and work engagement was not normally distributed in both subsamples, a logistic regression analysis was a more suitable option in this study. Thus the general strategy in our data analysis was aimed to distinguish groups of respondents who were (1) highly engaged and (2) highly satisfied with their leaders. A dummy variable for work engagement was made, and in the dummy, 1 meant 'engaged' and 0 meant 'not engaged'. Only those who answered 'completely true' to all the questions were included in the engaged group.

*Satisfaction with leadership* was measured with 13 items listed in table 1. The question was formulated as follows: "Below are listed some statements concerning your immediate superior. Please reply by indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with each one". It comprised a 5-point

scale with the response categories from (1) “Totally agree” to (5) “Totally disagree”. These 13 variables for measuring satisfaction on leadership have been part of Finnish Quality of Work Life Surveys for several years. There is also a question “In general, how satisfied are you with your superior's leadership?” but it is important to analyze the satisfaction in more detail than by just one general question. The reliability of the combination of the questions was measured by Cronbach’s alpha and all the combinations reached sufficient levels. **(see Table 1.)**

The original 5-point Likert-scale items measuring satisfaction with leadership were first recoded into a 3-point scale and then summated as shown in table 1. Those who answered ‘totally agree’ for all the items in the summated scale were considered ‘totally satisfied’, while the rest form the ‘quite’ or ‘not satisfied’ class. In so doing, we considered the possible problem of differences in response style between Russia and Finland. As far as we know from the literature (e.g. Harzing, 2006), neither Russia no Finland do not show clear tendency towards extreme response styles. Thus we think that relying on extreme response categories provide comparable results in both subsamples.

The *personal background* variables in this study were gender and age. Age was analysed in two classes: under 40 years and 40 years or over. The age variable in this study was divided into 40-year-olds and over as workers in order to follow the average age of respondents in the data used. The mean age in the Finnish data used in this study is 43 years, whereas in the Russian data, it is 40 years. According to Statistics, the average age of Finnish salary earners working in private sector is 43 years (Official Statistics of Finland 2014).

## **Analysis and results**

Both descriptive analysis and regressions were performed in the Finnish and the Russian subsamples separately in order to focus more effectively on the special characteristics of work engagement in each country. In so doing we followed studies with similar design (e.g., Salanova and Schaufeli 2008) where the analysis was made in each of the two countries investigated (namely, Spain and the Netherlands) separately.

### *Descriptive analysis*

First, descriptive analysis was performed. As figure 1 shows, the level of work engagement is higher in Finland compared to Russia. This difference is statistically significant ( $P=0,000$ ). Almost one-third of Finnish employees are highly engaged, whereas under one-fifth of Russian employees feel the same. Majority on both countries are quite highly engaged (Finland 62%, Russia 51%). The difference is clear in the other end of the scale: 8% of Russian employees are poorly engaged, whereas only 1% of Finnish employees feel the same about their jobs. These findings indicate that the Hypothesis 1 – “Work engagement is higher in Finland than in Russia” – was supported. **(See Figure 1.)**

As we can see from the figure 2, Finnish employees are more satisfied with their supervisors' actions than Russian employees in all measures. First, regarding satisfaction with support and encouragement, almost one-quarter of the Finnish employees are totally satisfied with their leaders' actions, whereas only 5% of the Russian employees agree ( $P= 0,000$ ). Finnish employees are also more satisfied with their superiors' actions on inspiring the employees and encouragement for self-development, such as studying and developing in their work. Thus, this difference is not as great as in support and reward-measure ( $P=0,017$ ). Again, Finnish employees are more satisfied than Russians with equitable treatment of employees ( $P=0,000$ ).

Furthermore, Finnish employees are more satisfied with the trust and openness of their superiors. Up to one-quarter of Finnish employees are totally satisfied with their superiors' actions on trusting her/his subordinates and discussing the workplace openly. Almost one-fifth of Russian employees feel the same ( $P= 0,000$ ). Moreover, about two-thirds of Finnish employees see their relationships with their superiors as conflict-free, while only half of Russians agree. Interestingly, one-third of Russians feel that their relationship includes a lot of conflicts ( $P= 0,000$ ). The only item Russian employees are more satisfied with than their Finnish counterparts is their superiors' ability to organize work, including knowing the tasks of the employees, delegating responsibilities and giving feedback. Almost a quarter of Russians are totally satisfied with their superiors' organization, while 21% of Finnish employees feel the same ( $P= 0,000$ ). **(See figure 2.)**

The comparison of the levels of satisfaction in both countries shows that the Finnish employees are more satisfied on 5 out of 6 dimensions of leadership. The biggest difference between the countries lies in satisfaction with support and rewards. Over one-fifth of Finnish employees are totally satisfied on their superiors' actions in supporting their employees and rewarding good work performances,

whereas only 5% of Russians feel the same. Table 2 presents correlations of the variables. (See table 2.)

We can see that work engagement (WE) positively and significantly correlates with all satisfaction with leadership variables, except for the correlation between WE and the absence of conflicts in the Russian subsample. It suggests that general satisfaction with supervisor behavior positively relates to WE. While personal background variables do not show significant pair correlations with WE in Russian subsample, Finnish women seem to be higher engaged than Finnish men.

### *Regression analysis*

Hypotheses 2a and 2b on the relative importance of different components of leadership for work engagement were tested using two separate binary logistic regression analyses in the Finnish and Russian subsamples. The results are presented in table 3. The goodness of fit of the regression models was evaluated using Hosmer-Lemeshow statistics, where a good model produced a nonsignificant chi-squared test result ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Tabachnick & Fidell 2001, 535, 539). Both datasets reached this level: value for Russian model was 0,413 and Finnish model 0,398. (See table 3.)

The results of the Russian data show that among the components of leadership, only the superior's support and rewards, ability to organize work and to give feedback, as well as the ability to provide trust and information, are statistically significant for work engagement of employees. According to the Finnish data, 4 out of 6 components of leadership (inspiration & encouragement; organization & feedback; trust & information; absence of conflicts) are statistically significant for engagement. Among these four items, the strongest predictor for work engagement is having no conflicts with superiors; however, the ability to inspire and encourage employees is almost as strong. Trust and sharing information with employees is the third strongest indicator, and work organization followed closely behind. Equality and support were not statistically significant. In Finland, female gender positively predicts engagement while in Russia it had no significance. Age was insignificant for engagement both in Finland and in Russia.

At the same time, our results do not provide support for Hypothesis 2a – *“In Finland, satisfactions with development- and relationship-based components of leadership are the strongest predictors of work engagement (H2a)”* – and partially support Hypothesis 2b – *“In Russia, satisfactions with components of leadership directed to tangible, materialistic-based rewards are the strongest*

*predictors of work engagement” (H2b)*. We can see from table 2 that work engagement in Finland is facilitated by nearly all components of leadership – both materialistic- and relationship-based. In the Russian subsample, work engagement is predicted not only by a materialistic-based component as rewarding good performers but also by such relationship-based practices of a leader as feedback, delegating responsibility, discussing work matters, and building trust. Contrary to *Hypothesis 2b*, providing equal treatment turned out to be insignificant for engagement.

## Discussion

The current study researched the (a) cross-cultural variations in the level of work engagement; (b) components of leadership as predictors of subordinates’ engagement. Our results show that the Job Demands–Resources model is relevant in analyzing work engagement in both Finnish and Russian contexts. The current study addresses several gaps in the literature.

First, the main contribution of our study to the literature is that it responds the call on considering the context in organizational research (Johns, 2001; 2006). While most research is focused on meso-level contextual variables (such as organizational structure, culture, or climate) (e.g., Akhtar et al., 2016; Johns, 2001; Wei et al., 2015) in examining person-situation interactions, we contribute to understanding general levels of work engagement and satisfaction with leadership of Russian employees compared to their Finnish counterparts thus going beyond the Anglo-Saxon and Asian research contexts dominating in the literature. We revealed that work engagement among Finnish private sector employees is higher than in Russia, and this difference is explained by the fact that job resources, and the quality of work life in general, are considerably higher in Finland than in Russia. These findings are in line with previous studies on the relationships between job resources and engagement (e.g., Hakanen et al., 2006; Mauno et al., 2007; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Finnish employees are more satisfied on 5 out of 6 dimensions of leadership, including supporting and rewarding, equality, trust and information, inspiration and encouragement and having no conflicts with the superior. However, Russian employees are a bit more satisfied than Finnish employees with their superiors’ ability to organize work and give feedback, which refers to knowing his/her subordinates tasks, delegating responsibilities sensibly and giving feedback.

Second, we fill the general gap in the knowledge regarding antecedents of work engagement in the crosscultural perspective, particularly in the countries which differ in their societal power distance,

the importance of materialistic values as well as in management systems and practices. Our analysis showed that the components of leadership that predict work engagement are only partially the same in Russia and Finland.

In both countries, “Organization & feedback” as well as “Trust & information” lead to high work engagement. As noted above, these elements include building trust, awareness of subordinates’ tasks, giving feedback, delegating responsibility and discussing and speaking openly about work matters. Trust creates a positive organizational climate and demonstrates that workers are valued in the organization, while ongoing constructive feedback helps to improve performance, reduces role ambiguity and conflict and generally contributes to effective communications. A supervisor, who behaves as an open, confidential and encouraging leader, provides positive role models thus contributing to “positive emotional contagion” in work teams which, in turn, transfers to work engagement (Bakker et al., 2006).

A strong point of our findings is the importance of the direct forms of individual employee voice. These organizational resources are still underexplored antecedents of work engagement. Meanwhile, upward influence, or voicing concerns and opinions, is a significant job resource. A participative organizational climate reflects trust, dialog, openness, and effective communications that may provide employees a safe environment that encourages them to explore their opinions, and thus experience ‘meaningfulness’, ‘safety’ and availability’ at work, i.e. work engagement as it was conceptualized by Kahn (1990). In this sense, work engagement is seen as a ‘result of the intention-enactment-experience mechanism of employee voice practices’ (Nishii and Wright, 2008; cited by Kwon et al., 2016).

Indeed, Russian employees lack the sense of their worthiness in organizations, unlike Finnish employees, who are often highly autonomous in their work (Hartikainen et al., 2010; Parent-Thirion et al., 2007). In Russia, societal power distance is considerably higher compared to Finland (Taras et al., 2012). Russian managers are rather authoritarian, directive and control-oriented (Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). They do not tend to involve their subordinates in decision-making, and employees do not have a direct impact on their working environment (Balabanova and Efendiev, 2015; Barton and Barton, 2011). About one-third of all Russian employees at non-managerial positions, according to this survey, feel themselves powerless ‘cogs in a machine’ that could be easily replaced. But all these do not mean that Russians accept the passive role they are given. Authoritarian management practices probably worked well in industrial-type labor relations, but, as mentioned above, Russia is

moving towards a post-industrial and knowledge-based labor market structure, and thus the values of greater autonomy, self-esteem and self-realization are becoming more and more prominent among Russian employees. While work engagement in Finland seems just to be one of positive work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, engagement in Russia is not a mere function of overall job satisfaction. Since work engagement implies proactive behavior and personal initiative (Kahn, 1990; Macey and Schneider, 2008), in high power distance cultures, general positive organizational environment is not enough to promote employee work engagement. Special efforts, such as involvement of subordinates in decision-making, are needed.

In addition to two elements of leadership mentioned above, high work engagement in Finland is predicted by the superiors' ability to inspire and encourage the employees and by the absence of conflicts between superiors and employees. These two components are the most important for engagement in the Finnish subsample (the highest beta-coefficients in table 2), but they are not significant for Russians' engagement. The fact that only 3 of 6 leadership components are significant for increasing employee engagement in Russian data suggests that, although Finnish workers' engagement seems to be promoted by the positive psychological states that result from general satisfaction with their leaders, Russians react differently on different aspects of their superiors' behavior. In Russia, for example, satisfaction with the components of relationship-oriented or 'paternalistic' leadership, such as avoiding conflicts, is more important for general employee well-being, organizational commitment and intention to stay with an employer (Balabanova et al., 2016).

We also found that neither in Finland nor in Russia, providing equality is significant for engagement. Evidently, equality contributes to a positive environment at work, general employee well-being and in-role performance but it does not mean that it would automatically lead to greater work engagement as a readiness to proactive extra-role behavior. Moreover, it is notable that Russians, in general, are not so much concerned with the issues of age- or gender-based discrimination at workplaces (Gogoleva et al., 2017). It does not mean that such discrimination does not exist, rather, it means that it is not articulated as a problem and, as it is taken for granted, it is insignificant not only for engagement, but for other work-related attitudes and perceptions as well.

Third, we contribute to integrating sociological and organizational studies perspectives in analyzing work engagement. We believe that our approach overcomes the longstanding tendency of divide between sociology of work and management research. Over the last decades, organizational sociologists shifted from academic departments to professional schools focusing on applied – more

problem- that theory-driven – research (Scott, 2004, p. 16). While organizational studies are typically orientated to ‘useful’ knowledge thus doing “research for management”, sociologists have been limited them to descriptive “research on management” (Parker, 2015, p. 172), without clear practical implications except, e.g., measures to enhance equality or improve positions of vulnerable groups of employees. To our view, the tradition to oppose business is one of the reasons of the current crisis of sociological knowledge. We believe that one way to overcome this crisis is shifting focus from ‘inequalities of capitalism’ to sociological perspectives on human behavior at workplace and understanding positive relationships between employee well-being, leadership and organizational performance. In this context, work engagement that stems from positive leadership behaviors is an important social effect of employment relations. It improves the quality of life of employees and society members not only in terms of equality, tangible rewards, or work-life balance but through enhancing positive emotions at workplace, enjoying work as well.

### **Practical implications**

The results of this study have important implications for organizations. Our findings show that good leadership is positively connected to work engagement and suggest some behaviors and processes that managers can follow in order to create, maintain and enhance employee work engagement. It is clear that organizations should invest in leadership quality to enhance work engagement, and therefore, to get a competitive advantage. Taking important roles leaders play in promoting engagement of their followers into account, we would agree with Blomme et al. (2015) that the level of work engagement may well be indicative of the effectiveness of a manager’s leadership style. Finnish organizations should also develop further the leadership practices. Finnish employees seem to be happy about personal interaction with their superiors, but as far as organizing the work and giving feedback, there is still work to do in Finland, as well as in Russia.

The fact that Russians react differently to various aspects of leadership suggests that it is necessary to instate certain leadership styles depending on concrete managerial tasks. For example, if the primary task is to retain employees and provide high levels of organizational commitment, a superior should be supportive and pay plenty of attention to reward processes.

As for increasing employee work engagement in Russia, it is not sufficient to be a ‘good leader’ in general but, rather, a manager should develop communication techniques and be able to listen to his/her subordinates, as well as have the ability to demonstrate professional competency. This is

especially important taking into consideration current transformations in the Russian labor structure. Although a transactional leadership style seems to remain the norm in Russian business organizations, growing proportions of highly skilled, white-collar workers expect higher levels of trust, greater autonomy and empowerment from their employers.

In order to facilitate their subordinates' tasks and contextual performance, managers should be responsive to these needs. Instead of relying on paternalistic support or 'inspirational motivation', Russian managers seem to get better results through clear task-setting and establishing an effective communication system of regular and open communications in order to demonstrate that employees are trusted, valued, and their opinions—both positive and negative—are considered.

Our study advances understanding of the importance of 'culturally congruent' practices in enhancing work engagement. A leader's empowering behaviors, such as keeping open communications and delegating responsibility, seem to be incongruent with low trust (Fukuyama, 1995) and the high power distance cultural context Russia is characterized by. This leads to an idea that in order to facilitate positive employee attitudes, 'positive deviance' may be more efficient than culturally congruent practices. Our findings support the theoretical proposition of Kwon et al. (2016) that a participative organizational climate in high power distance cultures is even more important for work engagement than in low power distance cultures.

In terms of practices, the above implies that superiors' ability to delegate authority, encourage open communication with employees, keep workers informed and provide explanations to decisions made would enhance work engagement. All in all, managers are strongly recommended to cultivate a participative organizational culture. It can be done through special training programs for managers and organizational programs that address employees' needs and concerns (e.g. surveys, focus groups or crowdsourcing platforms). As for providing constructive feedback in order to promote work engagement, we would especially recommend adopting a so-called strengths-based approach which 'focuses on what employees do well and encourages the continued and further use of these strengths' (Aguinis et al., 2012).

Since trust turns out to be an important precondition for an employee to be engaged, managers should pay attention to practices that promote fair treatment of employees. Instead of justification of management decisions that have already been made, employee surveys should be focused on employees' needs, concerns and even complaints. These surveys should encourage employees to

indicate organizational problems that they would probably be reluctant to voice in verbal upward communications. Together with following principles of ethical management, fair treatment would help to create a climate of trust and psychological safety that is crucial for work engagement.

### **Limitations of the study and directions for future research**

Our study has a number of limitations, which we see as opportunities for future research. These limitations concern data and methodological choices made. First, the Russian sample may not be totally representative of the population since is relatively small, and the city-area-centered. This limitation did not allow performing the comparative analysis of different professional sectors and professions. Second, because of the cross-sectional design of the current study, we cannot provide information about the stability of the relationships between job resources and work engagement. Third, we relied on single source self-reported measures thus making our study prone to common method bias. For future research, longitudinal studies would be necessary, but there are no suitable data available as of yet. Fourth, our measures of work engagement were restricted to three items. We had to follow general research design of the nation-wide Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey that did not allow us including more measures into the questionnaire. Fifth, departing from the idea that cultural and socioeconomic context works as a “shaper of meaning” (Johns, 2006) it would be very informative to conduct a qualitative research on work engagement in these two countries in order to provide a comprehensive understanding on the nature of work engagement in two cultural contexts. Although the fact that combining quantitative and qualitative methods provides much more convincing empirical evidence on social phenomena is often mentioned both by Western (Judge et al., 2001; Bakker, Demerouti, 2008) and Russian (Balabanova, 2002) scholars, studies on work engagement using mixed methods research design are still rare. Nevertheless, the strength of this study is the unique data that enable the comparison of different components of leadership as work engagement predictors. Cross-national studies on work engagement are still rare, and comparisons between Finland and Russia have just begun. The differences between Finnish and Russian working life and work engagement should be studied further and within different sectors of work.

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Table 1. Variables

Job resources	Items	Original scale	Alpha
Satisfaction with leadership	My superior....		
Support & rewards	1) supports and encourages me 2) rewards good work performances	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	Finland 0,83 Russia 0,70
Inspiration & encouragement for development in work	1) is inspiring 2) encourages the employees to study and develop in their work	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	Finland 0,73 Russia 0,73
Equality	1) treats ageing employees equitably 2) treats women and men equitably	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	Finland 0,75 Russia 0,87
Organization & feedback	1) knows my tasks very well 2) gives sufficient feedback about how well I have succeeded in my work 3) delegates responsibility sensibly to the subordinates	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	Finland 0,73 Russia 0,78
Trust & information	1) discusses a lot with us 2) speaks openly about everything concerning the workplace 3) trusts his/her employees	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	Finland 0,77 Russia 0,79
Conflicts	There are lot of conflicts between me and my superior	1= totally agree...5= totally disagree	(reversed)

Figure 1. Work engagement in Finland and Russia

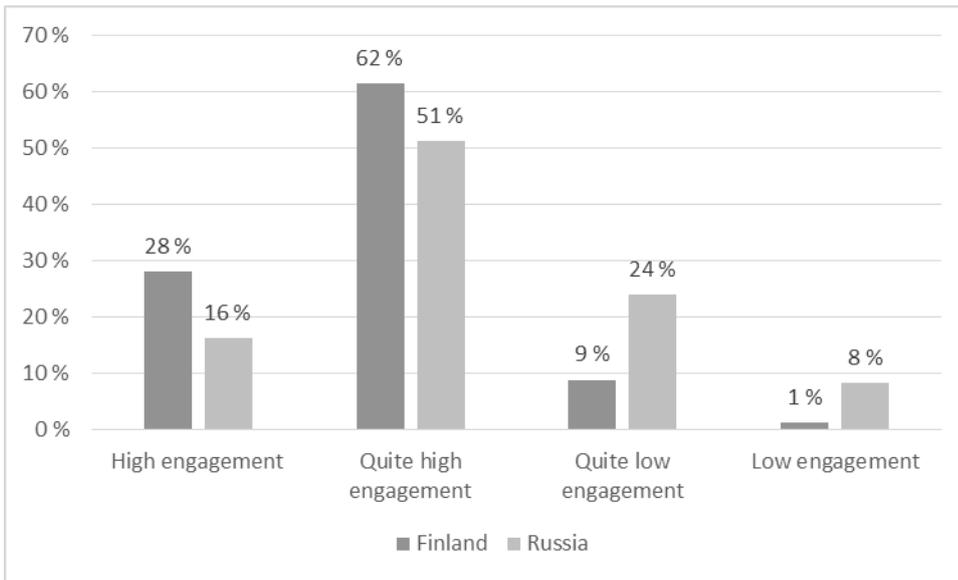


Figure 2. Satisfaction with leadership in Finland and Russia.

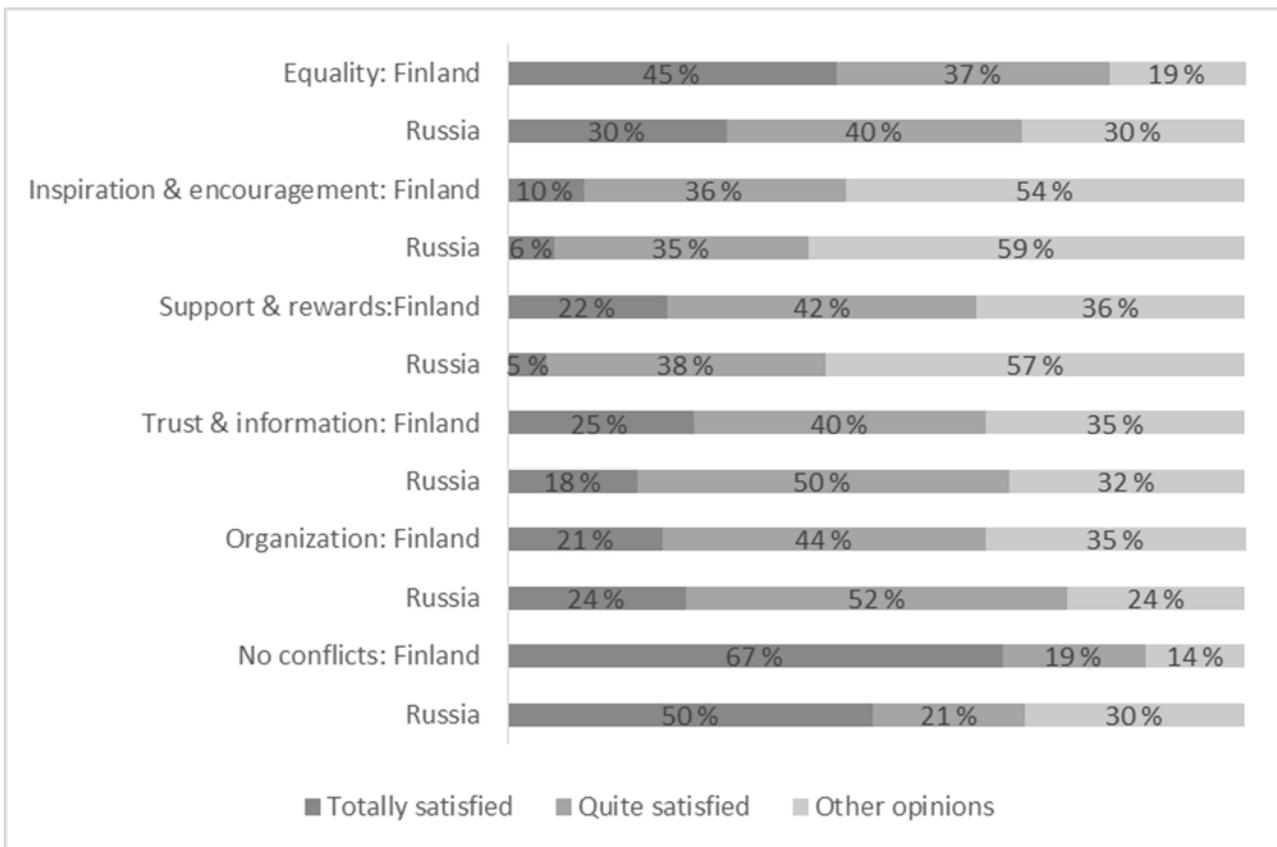


Table 2. Correlations

Russia									
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Work engagement	1								
2. Support	0,408**	1							
3. Inspiration	0,378**	0,312**	1						
4. Equality	0,224**	0,184**	0,197**	1					
5. Organization	0,313**	0,248**	0,263**	0,401**	1				
6. Trust	0,289**	0,250**	0,343**	0,391**	0,489**	1			
7. No conflicts	0,082	0,122**	0,085	0,337**	0,330**	0,295**	1		
8. Male gender	0,084	0,047	0,043	0,048	0,157**	0,103*	0,102*	1	
9. Age under 40	-0,022	-0,034	0,062	-0,063	0,050	0,016	-0,049	0,072	1
Finland									
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Work engagement	1								
2. Support	,336**	1							
3. Inspiration	,363**	0,460**	1						
4. Equality	,225**	0,354**	0,295**	1					
5. Organization	,366**	0,510**	0,386**	0,414**	1				
6. Trust	,362**	0,496**	0,386**	0,377**	0,458**	1			
7. No conflicts	0,161**	0,395**	0,260**	0,139**	-0,249**	0,313**	1		
8. Male gender	-0,075**	-0,053*	-0,093**	-0,023	0,023	-0,014	-0,038	1	
9. Age under 40	-0,002	0,055*	0,022	0,105**	0,043	0,082**	0,045	0,062*	1
Note: *, **Correlations are significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively (two-tailed)									

Table 3. Logistic regression results: the effect of leadership components on High work engagement

Variables	Russia	Finland
Support & rewards	2,544**	1,123
Inspiration & encouragement	1,732	1,949*
Equality	1,345	1,163
Organization & feedback	2,180*	1,491*
Trust & information	2,119*	1,511*
No conflicts	1,104	2,000***
Male gender	0,947	0,647**
Age under 40	0,587	1,245
Nagelkerke Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.176	0.143
Notes:		
a Coefficients are odds ratios. Values <1 indicate negative and >1 indicate positive association.		
*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)		
Values in table are standardized β coefficients.		