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Testing the Effects of Employee Engagement, Work Environment, and Organizational Learning on Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

Organizational commitment is one of the most widely researched topics in the field of organizational behaviour. The main objective of this study is to test the effects of work engagement, organizational learning, and work environment on organizational commitment in higher education sector. To achieve this objective, the data was collected using an online survey from 242 employees at public universities in northern Malaysia. The collected data was analysed using SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings indicated that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. It was also found that work environment has a significant positive impact on organizational commitment. Finally, the outcomes of this study confirmed that organizational learning has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. These findings provide useful insights and suggestions for the management in higher educational institutions to learn developing organizational commitment among their employees by adopting effective human resource practices that could ultimately lead organizational competitiveness and increased performance.

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Keywords: Education sector; organizational commitment; organizational learning; work engagement; work environment.

Introduction

The historical research shows that a number of scholars have been interested in understanding the nature, predictors, and consequences of employee commitment towards an organization. Organizational commitment is very important because when it is built, it would lead to various favourable organizational outcomes. According to Chughtai and Zafar (2006), fostering organizational commitment among employees is very essential, because employees who are highly committed toward their organizations are likely to stay longer, have better performance, and they tend to be highly involved at workplace. Moreover, committed employees show their loyalty and become productive individuals in their organizations (Dey, Kumar, & Kumar, 2014). As a result, such employees show

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positive attitude towards organizational goals and values and are likely to develop positive work behaviour. Therefore, employee commitment is linked with several desirable behavioural outcomes such as employee retention, presence, performance, quality of work, and personal sacrifice for the best interest of the organization to make it successful (London, 1983; Randall, 1990).

Organizational commitment is regarded as a significant issue, particularly to the management of organizations. This is because organizational commitment is linked with job satisfaction and both are directly associated with organizational profitability and superior competitiveness (Abdullah & Ramay, 2012). Certain scholars also confirmed that organizational commitment had a direct effect on employees' performance and thus, it is viewed as an issue of importance (Jaramillo, Mulki & Marshall, 2005; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnysky, 2002; Siders, George & Dharwadkar, 2001). In the previous research, it is evident that there are several factors that affect organizational commitment. However, this study is carried out to test the impact of factors like employee engagement, organizational learning, and work environment on organizational commitment among employees working in Malaysian education sector.

In Malaysian context, building organizational commitment among employee has become very important for various universities to enhance their competitiveness. By looking at literature on organizational commitment, it shows that there exists a gap with regard to the studies that examined this variable in higher education sector of Malaysia. That is, most of the previous researches on organizational commitment were conducted by industrial organizational and occupational psychologists (Mueller, Wallace & Price, 1992). According to Chughtai and Zafar (2006), there is a limited research on organizational commitment that focused on educational context. Thus, by examining the factors that affect organizational commitment among university staff, this study is designed to provide beneficial suggestions to the management in higher educational institutions to formulate the strategies that could help them to attract and retain their employees on the long term.

Literature Review

2.1 Organizational commitment

Building organizational commitment is undoubtedly very important for all organizations, because employees are the main sources for continued success and performance. Organizational commitment has been defined previously as a psychological attitude that attaches an employee to an organization in a manner that reduces his or her turnover intention (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The most widely accepted definition for organizational commitment was proposed by Mowday, Porter, and Steer, (1982, p. 27) as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization and can be characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organization". The authors added that commitment is revealed through an employee's willingness to work effectively in an organization and his intention to keep the relation without intending to switch to others (Mowday et al., 1982).

The importance of organizational commitment has been documented in the literature. For instance, organizations seem to be interested in to have highly committed employees, because it is commonly accepted that organizational commitment could lead to various organizational outcomes such as lower level of turnover, increased motivation, improved organization citizenship behaviour, and continuous organizational support (Kwon & Banks, 2004). Additionally, employees' commitment is an indicator of greater loyalty and increased productivity (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). Committed employees also work harder to achieve organizational goals and they tend to accept its values positively (Buchanan, 1974). In this context, it can be said that several desirable behavioural outcomes can be linked with employee commitment such as higher employee retention, engagement, productivity, work quality, and willingness to make sacrifice for the purpose of enhancing organizational image and performance (London, 1983; Randall, 1990).

Based on the above discussion, it can be said that organizational commitment still holds a significant theme in literature and is valued by my researchers and practitioners as it has positive implications on organizational success. In other words, organizational commitment is the key factor in determining organizational competitiveness which enhances the motivation, and engagement of employees (Azeem, 2010). Organizational commitment also has a strong association with employee behaviour and performance. If an employee feels committed to an organization, the chances of his or her absenteeism and turnover will be lower (Igbaria & Greenhaus, 1992). Therefore, it is very

important to examine employee commitment frequently in an attempt to overcome any issue that may rise any time and ensure that employees develop positive work attitude that is necessary to overall organizational performance.

2.2 Employee engagement

Employee engagement is one of the important concept in organizational behaviour and it has received a significant attention in academic research. Saks (2006) referred employee engagement to “the extent to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of his/her roles” (p. 600). Moreover, employee engagement is regarded as a type of positive and satisfying work related attitude that is characterized by three dimensions, namely vigor, absorption, and dedication (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Engaged employees are expected to feel these characteristics emotionally, physically, and cognitively (Khan, 1990). Men (2015) defined employee engagement as “the level of involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence an individual has with a brand over time... a person’s participation with a brand, regardless of channel, where they call the shots” (p. 5). Further, Catlette and Hadden (2001) thought about employee engagement as the positive, affective psychological work-related behaviour that inspires employees to enthusiastically express and prepare themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically to do their work tasks.

According to Harter et al. (2002), employee engagement is very important to achieve useful business performance outcomes for different organizations. The authors demonstrated that it is necessary that organizations engage their employees, as it has been found that organizations with an engaged employees have higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, more productive, more profitable than those of less engaged employees (Harter et al., 2002). Ortiz, Lau and Qin (2013) also urged to nurture the concept of employee engagement as disengagement decreases the enthusiasm and commitment of employees to their organizations. Consequently, low levels of engagement levels have a negative effect on employee commitment and retention. Siddhanta et al. (2010) indicated that a well-performing organization comes from its ability to ensure healthy, motivated and committed workforce through engagement.

Previous studies reported that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013; Geldenhuys, Laba, & Venter, 2014; Imam & Shafique, 2014; Khalid & Khalid, 2015; Shoko & Zinyemba, 2014). Engaged employees put greater efforts to work hard, are likely to go beyond their required and expected amount of work tasks (Lockwood, 2007). Moreover, engaged employees tend to feel that their work environments and organizational cultures in fact positively influence their physical and psychological well-being at the workplace (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). The previous research of Schaufeli (2012) also confirmed that work engagement affects the level of organizational commitment among employees. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Employee engagement has positive effective on organizational commitment.

2.3 Work environment

Work environment is a key factor that affects employee’s satisfaction and commitment toward an organization. Work environment refers to the atmosphere of an organization where employees do their works. According to Danish, Ramzan, and Ahmad (2013), work environment is related to the climate of a particular organization where its employees do their duties. Undoubtedly, facilitative and safe work environment can attract the employees as their needs are likely to be satisfied. To succeed, organizations should design their work environments in a way that they can increase the level of employees’ commitment and motivation that ultimately would lead to favourable outcomes. For instance, a good working environment is one that comprises all the factors about a job such as: the facilities to do the work tasks, comfortable workplace, safety, and absence of noise. Khuong and Le Vu (2014) demonstrated that employees who feel comfortable about their working environment are likely to work more effectively and enjoy the working process as compared to those who feel uncomfortable. Therefore, managers should improve the aspects of work environment to ensure the welfare of their employees.

Previous literature shows that work environment can be evaluated in terms of several aspects. Moos, (1994) suggested that work environment comprises factors such as: involvement; team cohesion; supervisor’s support; task orientation; work pressure; autonomy; clarity; innovation, physical comfort, and managerial control. Similarly, Aneela (2012) conducted a meta-analysis review and found that various elements were noted in literature for

describing the work environment. The elements included psychological climate, working conditions, organizational culture, and organizational climate. Further, James and James (1989, p.739) identified several dimensions to measure work environment and they include: “job challenge, job autonomy, leader consideration and support, leader work facilitation, work group cooperation, workgroup esprit, role ambiguity, fairness and equity of reward system”. Hence, work environment can be measured in terms of any factor that affects an employee’s behaviour in his or her organization.

A number of studies found that work environment had significant positive effect on organizational commitment (Abdullah & Ramay, 2012; Khuong & Le Vu, 2014; Vanaki & Vagharseyyedin, 2009). Pitaloka and Paramita (2014) found that a conducive work environment had positive effect on job satisfaction and organization commitment. Consequently, job satisfaction and organizational commitment become the sources for positive organizational citizenship behaviour and encourage employee to work harder for achieving organization goals. Haggins (2011) also confirmed that work environment played an important role in influencing organizational commitment. In line with Giffords (2009), work environment is one of the key contributors to organizational commitment. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H2: Work environment has positive effect on organizational commitment.

2.4 Organizational learning

In today's unpredictable world, organizational learning is regarded as the best recommendation to enhance organizational performance. According to Bate and Khasawneh (2005), organizational learning is a phenomenon that “support the acquisition of information, the distribution and sharing of learning, and that reinforce and support continuous learning and its application to organizational improvement” (p. 99). Furthermore, Salarian, Baharmpour, and Habibi (2015) described organizational learning as a set of organizational activities that include knowledge acquisition, sharing information, interpreting information, which have conscious or unconscious influences on positive organizational culture. Overall, organizational learning is defined in terms of process and behaviour, and thus, a learning organization is perceived as a supportive entity.

Mehrabi, Jadidi, Haery, and Alemzadeh (2013) revealed that learning represents the most important competitive advantage for any organization. Organizational learning reinforces the ability of an organization to promote and apply the necessary knowledge to adapt with external environment conditions (Loon Hoe & McShane, 2010: 364). Moreover organizational learning is highly associated with organizational performance. In other words, a lack of emphasis on organizational learning decreases organizational performance and then organizations may lose their efficiency and effectiveness which would make it hard to recover (Usefi, Nazari, & Zargar, 2013). The main characteristic of a learning organization can be seen in the ability of its employees to search for or make opportunities to learn from any beneficial resource, and then use such information to add value to the organization by exchanging it into organizational knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). According to Ahmad and Marinah (2013), becoming a learning organization and enhancing training programs are some of the vital factors that are necessary to develop learning, enhance knowledge management, improve individual and organizational performance, and sustain a competitive advantage.

Past studies indicated that organizational learning had a significant positive effect on organizational commitment (Hsu, 2009; Rose, Kumar, & Pak, 2011; Salarian, Baharmpour, & Habibi, 2015; Usefi et al., 2013). Ahmad and Marinah (2013) also found that learning organization and organizational commitment were highly correlated. Furthermore, Wang (2007) confirmed that creating and encouraging organizational learning culture is a fundamental mechanism to nurture employee’s job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and to ensure a healthy and stable workforce on the long term. This means that organizational learning can enhance the levels of organizational commitment among employees and it can yield to positive work outcomes. Based on the discussion made above, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Organizational learning has positive effect on organizational commitment.

Methodology

This study examines the effects of employee engagement, work environment, and organizational learning on organizational commitment in higher education sector. This study followed the quantitative approach for designing

the methodology and data collection. To collect the data, an online survey was administered to 870 employees (administrative and academic) at public universities in northern Malaysia. The collected data was then analysed using SPSS 19 and structural equation modelling (SEM) on AMOS. SEM is used because previous literature regarded it as a powerful statistical technique for generating more accurate and reliable findings. Besides, SEM has recently emerged as a new generation tool to analyse the data and it has received a high attention from several scholars, particularly for studies that contain intervening variables.

The designed instrument for collecting the data of this study consists of three main sections. Section A comprises questions that focus on demographic profile of participants such as gender, age, educational qualifications, and work experience. Section B includes the questions related to measuring organizational commitment and work engagement. To measure, organizational commitment five items were adapted from Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). The items were chosen because they had an acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha that is more than 0.70. Moreover, employee engagement was measured using a five items scale which was adapted from Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). Last section included the questions to measure organizational learning and work environment. The measurement scale of organizational learning was taken from Joo and Park (2010). Finally, the measurement scale of work environment was taken from the literature with reference to the study of McGuire and McLaren (2009). All the selected items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". In the following section, the analysis of results for the collected data is presented.

Analysis of Results

The descriptive statistics of respondents indicated that males accounted for 26.9% of total response while females represented 73.1%. It was also found that 2.9% of those respondents fall in the age group of 18 to 25 years, 50% were 26 and 35 years, 40.5% between 36 and 45, whereas 6.6% were 46 or above. Moreover, the demographic results indicated that 5% had less than one year of working experience at their current institutions, 9.5% had an experience between 1 and 2 years, 16.5% had a working experience between 2 and 5 years, while 69% of the respondents had a working experience for more than 5 years. Finally, it is clear from the table that 36 of the respondents had diploma certificate, 79 had bachelor degree, 74 had master degree, 51 acquire doctoral degree, while 2 had other certificates.

Following the descriptive statistics of respondents was to ensure the normality of data using SPSS and AMOS. As the normality was achieved for the data, the items were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The results showed that the values of Cronbach's alpha are acceptable as they range from 0.83 to 0.88; employee engagement (0.882), work environment (0.837), organizational learning (0.881), and organizational commitment (0.860). This means that the Cronbach's alpha values of all constructs exceeded 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Additionally, composite reliability was calculated to further confirm the reliability of measures using Microsoft Excel and it is found that the all constructs have acceptable reliability. Thus, it can be said that all constructs have an acceptable reliability. Another test which is called confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. This procedure was done using AMOS, and it was found that the factor loadings of all items are above 0.50. Hence, it can be said that the validity of constructs is supported.

After normalizing the data and conducting confirmatory factor analysis, the structural model was then drawn using AMOS software. In this stage, several criterions were considered for assessing the structural model and making sure that it fits the data well. As shown in the below Figure, the fit criterion for the structural model achieved the recommended values as suggested by Hair et al. (2010); the value of Chi-square is equal to 505.993. Other fit indices ($df = 246$, $GFI = 0.856$, $AGFI = 0.824$, $TLI = 0.897$, $CFI = 0.908$, and $RMSEA = 0.066$) were also included to give further support for Chi-square and fulfil the assumptions of model fit. Based on these results, it can be said that the structural model achieved adequate fit for the data.

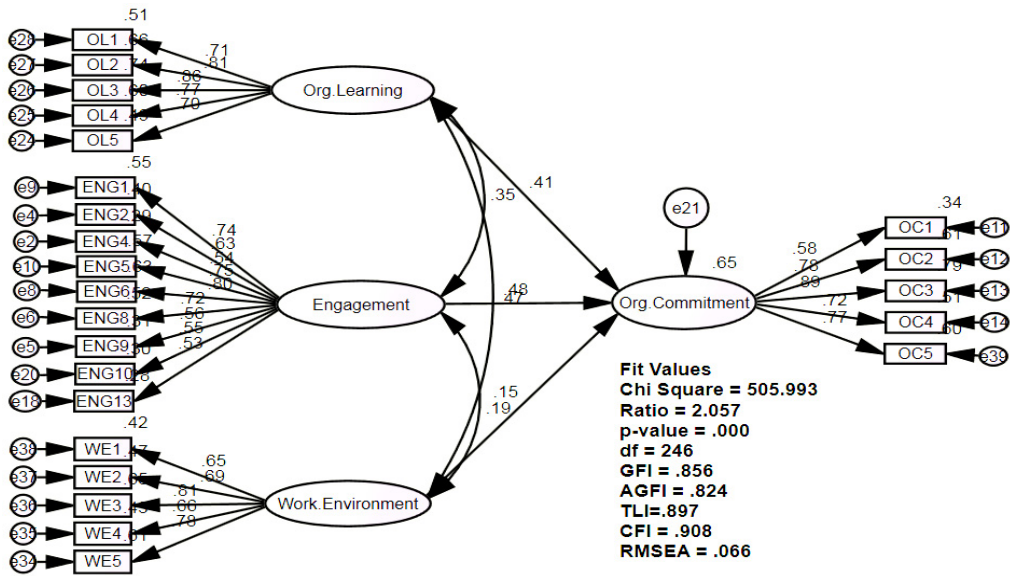


Fig. 1. Structural Model

To test the hypotheses which were presented in the literature review section, the regression output from structural model were used. As shown in Table 3, the findings indicate that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.475$, $t\text{-value} = 6.215$, $p < 0.05$), hence, H1 is accepted. Moreover, the effect of organizational learning on organizational commitment is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.415$, $t\text{-value} = 5.344$, $p < 0.05$), consequently, H2 is supported. Finally, the findings indicate that work environment has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.152$, $t\text{-value} = 2.452$, $p < 0.05$), thus, H3 is supported. Overall, employee engagement, work environment, and organizational learning explain 65% of total variance in organizational commitment.

Table 1. Research Findings

	Hypothesized Effect	Std. Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision
H1:	Employee engagement has positive effect on organizational commitment.	0.475	0.064	6.215	***	Supported
H2:	Work environment has positive effect on organizational commitment.	0.415	0.053	5.344	***	Supported
H3:	Organizational learning has positive effect on organizational commitment.	0.152	0.042	2.452	0.014	Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effects of employee engagement, work environment, and organizational learning on organizational commitment among academic and administrative staff in education sector. The findings indicated that employee engagement has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment and it is similar with certain previous studies which found employee engagement as an important determinant of organizational commitment (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2006; Saks, 2006). This finding suggests that the more employees are engaged at workplace, their commitment toward the organization or institution will be high. A possible explanation for this result could be that an employee who show positive work related behaviour through engagement is likely to develop exhibit greater organization commitment due to the high

passion and courage for achievement (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The finding of this study also received further support from Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who reported that engaged employees tend to develop favourable commitment towards their organizations.

Additionally, the findings of this paper demonstrated that work environment has a significant positive impact on organizational commitment and it is in line with previous researches (Abdullah & Ramay, 2012; Khuong & Le Vu, 2014; Vanaki & Vagharseyyedin, 2009). This means that the work environment is a very important factor that can affect job satisfaction and commitment among employee at higher educational institutions. Therefore, the practical implication from this result suggests that the management in higher educational institutions should be aware about the importance of designing a conducive learning environment in creating organizational commitment among their employees. For example, providing recreational facilities and maintaining a green and clean environment could play an important role in influencing the behaviour of employees. Moreover, the relationships between co-workers and the management should be established on the basis of respect and knowledge sharing. The layout of workplace and organizational culture are also very important to enhance organizational commitment.

Moreover, the findings indicated that organizational learning has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. A greater support was reported in a number of previous studies which found that organizational learning was one of the key factors that affect organizational commitment (Hsu, 2009; Rose, Kumar, & Pak, 2011; Salarian, Baharpour, & Habibi, 2015; Usefi et al., 2013). The results suggest that organizational learning culture can be considered as one of the key factors in predicting employee commitment toward the organization. Therefore, it is very important to focus on organizational learning and ensure a continuous learning culture among the workforce using training programs, knowledge sharing, and work team behaviour. Such activities would help organizations to deal with the issues of organizational commitment and enhance their competitiveness. The outcomes of organizational learning also represent the key for organizational performance and increased success.

This study has some limitations which would offer opportunities for future researches. For example, the sample was selected based on a non-probability sampling method which may not be totally representative of the population. Future research may also re-test the factors used in this study with a larger sample size in order to make the outcomes generalizable to larger number of population. Moreover, the study has not included individuals outside the educational sector and also outside the boundaries of Malaysia. Therefore, futures research can be conducted to overcome the limitations outlined above by broadening the investigation to other contexts and countries to obtain a wider generalization of the study. Finally, this study used a survey method for data collection. Thus, it would be interesting to replicate this study using a longitudinal design and in-depth interviews.

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Appendix A: Measurement Scale of Final Constructs

Code	Construct/ Item	Factor Loading
Employee Engagement (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.882)		
ENG1	At this institution, I feel energetic to do my work.	0.74
ENG2	At this institution, I feel strong and capable to do my work.	0.63
ENG4	I can continue working for very long period at a time.	0.54
ENG5	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	0.75
ENG6	I am enthusiastic about my job.	0.80
ENG8	I am proud on the work that I do.	0.72
ENG9	To me, my job is challenging.	0.56
ENG10	Time flies when I'm working.	0.55
ENG13	I have a lot of work to do everyday	0.53
Work Environment (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.837)		
WE1	I am satisfied with the space allocated for me to do my work.	0.65
WE2	My workplace is very clean.	0.69
WE3	There is adequate space between me and my nearest colleague.	0.81
WE4	My work environment is quiet.	0.66
WE5	Overall, my work environment is pleasant and visually appealing.	0.78
Organizational Learning (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.881)		
OL1	Our institution creates continuous learning opportunities.	0.71
OL2	Our institution encourages knowledge sharing among the staff	0.81
OL3	The leader of our institution supports learning at the individual, team, and organization levels.	0.86
OL4	Our institution establishes systems to capture and share learning.	0.77
OL5	Our institution connects the staff to the environment through various programs.	0.70
Organizational Commitment (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.860)		
OC1	I am willing to put high efforts in order to help this institution be successful.	0.58
OC2	I talk positively about this institution to others.	0.78
OC3	I am proud to tell others that I am part of this institution.	0.89
OC4	I really care about the status of this institution.	0.72
OC5	For me, this is one of the best institutions for which to work.	0.77