Penerbit Akademia Baru

Journal of Advanced Research Design
ISSN (online): 2289-7984 | Vol. 14, No. 1. Pages 10-19, 2015

Do You Enjoy Your Work? An Antecedent to Employee Engagement

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Abstract – *Employee engagement has been receiving much attention in organizations because of its contribution in helping the employees to perform better thus facilitate organizations to grow. This paper investigates the effects of flow experience on employee engagement level. The research employs quantitative approach via survey method. Questionnaires were distributed to a total of 306 academics in a research university in Malaysia. Multiple regression analysis found that employee engagement is influenced by factors such as employees' enjoyment, total control, concentration. Our investigation suggests acceptance to humour at workplace enable work or task become more pleasing and fun. Indeed comfortable workplace such as providing ergonomic chairs, proper office lighting can increase concentration in work. Academics need to be given chances to express their opinions and make sure what they voiced out taken seriously.*

Keywords: Employee engagement; Flow experience

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the context of employment agreement, employees would direct themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively throughout the task accomplishment, and can be distinguished as a combination of obligation to the organization and its values [15]. Engaged employees are more productive, as they can be more competitive, customer-focused, and less tempted to leave. Wagner and Harter [31] stated employees that have been engaged usually demonstrated 27% less physical absenteeism than their colleagues. Once engaged, employees' enthusiasm would go slightly higher, resulting in a 20% increase in individual improvement of performance [30]. Furthermore, engaged employees are found to have less industrial accidents on the job [31], thus significantly reducing the employee compensation claims and related legal charges.

Since 1980s, the concept of loyalty and engagement has emerged as employers expected the employees to be loyal towards the organization, and in exchange, the employees were offered job security [32] and rewards. Employee engagement has gained popularity in the past thirty years [1]. Many scholars agreed that employee engagement is the combination of many positive constructs at workplace [3][17][18]. Therefore, organizational and managerial support must be carried out in order to engage the employees.

Saks [24] stated that, the strength of the organization really depends on the advantages of employee engagement. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes [12] clarified that employee engagement

Journal of Advanced Research Design
ISSN (online): 2289-7984 | Vol. 14, No. 1. Pages 10-19, 2015

must start within individuals, then the organization. Employees whose have an enthusiasm for work usually are the employees who have bonded to the organization. They seem to have control and concentration on their work-related matters. Engage employees are also able to identify organizational goals and emotionally ready to contribute to the mission of agencies through emotional and personal efforts [33]. It indicates that employee engagement could provide benefits to individuals and organizations as it influence every employee to perform the duties and fulfil their responsibilities appropriately.

1.1 Theoretical Foundation on Employee Engagement

A strong theoretical rationale intended to clarify employee engagement can be discovered in Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET theorized that responsibilities and commitment are produced throughout a chain of exchanges among parties who are in a state of mutual interdependence [13]. Cropanzano and Mitchell [5] reported that reliance, loyalty, and mutual obligation evolve as the parties tolerate several rules of exchange. Such rules are likely to include reciprocity rules, with the intention that the actions of one party may result to a reaction by the other party. This is consistent with Saks [24] explanations of employee engagement as a cooperative connection involving the employer and employee. For example, employees will decide to participate themselves as a reaction to the resources they obtain from their organization. Accordingly, SET provides a theoretical basis to clarify the level in which employees engaged at work. When the organization ineffectively tries to give ideal resources, employees are more probable to disengage themselves [5]. Therefore, organization and employees must understand that engagement is a two-way proposition. Employee engagement is a mutual agreement involving organization and the employees; the organization is legally responsible for designing a meaningful work environment, while employees have duties for contributing to an engaging workplace [23].

Schaufeli et al. [26], as well as Schaufeli and Bakker [25] defined employee engagement as positive, pleasing and work-related influenced by one's state of mind that can be characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour can be described as high levels of energy and mental flexibility while being totally focused is described as working with dedication and deeply engrossed, absorped, determined and happily engage in one's work [25]. Based on this point of view, when organizations offer support and resources, employees will in return definitely report high levels of engagement by being highly dedicated in their job, fully absorbed and vigorously involved in organization activities [24].

Maslach et al. [19] explained employee engagement as the positive polar of workplace burnout and there are six aspects of work-life that result in engagement and burnout, namely workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness, and values. They argued that employee engagement is linked to feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, sustainable workload, supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. For example, Maslach et al. [19] have as well recommended as low emphasis on rewards and recognition system can cause workplace burnout, proper recognition and reward system is important to gain employee engagement. Extrinsic rewards, such as pay are one of the key concern for most employees in accepting a job because unreasonable pay can be a strong de-motivating factor. Nevertheless, when employees have settled down in a job, extrinsic rewards become less significant, as daily motivation is more strongly determined by intrinsic rewards [21].

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1.2 The Application of Flow Experience Theory in Employee Engagement

Four decades ago, the flow experience was a contribution made to positive psychology by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [7]. While interviewing certain professionals and amateur dancers, chess players, rock climbers, surgeons, and many others who would express a deep devotion to their preferred activity, Csikszentmihalyi reported that nearly everyone mentioned "being in the midst of a flow," or, "flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is a little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future" [7]. A flow experience occurs when people are engaged in their chosen activity, including work, housework or hobbies and describe is as "the most enjoyable part of life," [8].

Csikszentmihalyi [7][8] stated that flow experience is a related construct to engagement in organizational behaviour. Flow experience is the state in which there is little distinction between the self and environment. Macey and Schneider [18] point out that engage employees are open to new challenges, persist in challenging tasks, and be ready to engage, factors that contribute to arriving at and maintaining a state of flow. Flow experience is a state of most favourable experience [26] characterized by total concentration, a loss of sense of time, and the enjoyment of an activity for its own sake [6]. In order to make sure an employee is having flow experience, that particular employee must have clear goals, immediate feedback, balance between challenges and skills, action and awareness are merged, distractions are excluded from consciousness, there is no worry of failure, self-consciousness disappears, the sense of time becomes distorted, and the activity becomes autotelic [9].

Flow is obviously associated to engagement, as both experiences are characterized by enjoyment, total control, intrinsic motivation, deep satisfaction, and a wholehearted sense of concentration [6]. Apart from that, Ghani and Deshpande [10] emphasized the total concentration and enjoyment that people feel during the flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura [6] also explained that individuals in flow are fully focused on what they are doing; enjoyed the experience, and doing it with full attention. Koufaris [16] directly stated that flow is related to enjoyment and mentioned that flow is the psychological state of engagement.

This paper attempts to investigate the effect of flow experience (enjoyment, total control and concentration) on engagement level among academics in a research university in Malaysia. In a research university setting, academics are the anchors to lead university achieve their goal through research and innovation. High-quality researchers developed throughout a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience [14]. In order to sustain, engagement level among academics is a successor.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This is cross-sectional study using questionnaires for data collection. Participants consist of academics from 12 faculties. The selection of faculties was based on three main streamline: engineering, social sciences and science and technology. A total number of 306 questionnaires were distributed randomly according to streamlines.

For this research, employee engagement is measured using questions derived from the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) as published in Buckingham and Coffman [2]. GWA is related to this study focus, which is to determine the level of employee engagement, as actively

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disengaged, not engaged, or actively engaged. On the other hand, the flow experience is conceptualized as an optimal psychological state described as the experience of intrinsically enthusiastic people, those who are attached in a work-related activity chosen for its own sake. In this paper, flow experience consists of three components, namely, enjoyment, total control, and concentration. The items used to measure each of the components are adapted and modified from Ghani et al. [11] as published in Koufaris [16]. It consisted of 12 items (4 enjoyment, 4 control, 4 concentration) and measures using five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree). Respondents selected from a five point scale that was coded as binary variables; (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree). The total amount for each learning scores were calculated. The questionnaire was pretested to assess the reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire was distributed through email to the targeted respondents. Descriptive analysis such as frequency, percentage and mean were used to explain the level of engagement. For the effect of flow experience on employee engagement, the multiple regression is adopted to analyze the data.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondents Profile

The response rate was 78 Of the 306 respondents, the tabulation of data receives almost equal distribution, which is 49.3% for male and 50.7% for female. For age group, the highest number of respondents are within 30-39 years old (115, 37.6%) followed by 20-29 years old (86, 28.1%) age group. Respondents in this study are mainly from those who have above 10 years length of service (109, 35.6%), whereby the least group is two years and/or below (4, 1.3%). Most of the respondents are PhD holders (237, 37.5%), while the rest are Master holders (69, 22.5%). Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the highest responses are from the field of engineering (138, 45.1%), followed by science and technology (111, 36.3%) and lastly social science field (57, 18.6%).

3.1 The Level of Employee Engagement

In general, the engagement among respondents is at the medium (μ=2.75, SD=0.43) level. As shown in Table 2, from 306 respondents, there are no actively disengaged level shown. Almost one-third of the academicians are not engaged (f=97). They have a medium score for employee engagement. However, the majority of the employees, 209 academicians are actively engaged in their work (f=209).

Since the questionnaires used to measure engagement levels do not have distinct construct, this section discusses the details according to each item in the employee engagement section. Item number 2 received the lowest mean (μ=2.14, SD=0.54). This result shows that respondents do not have the materials and equipment they need to do their work right. Item number 4 (μ=2.62, SD=0.32) and item number 11 (μ=3.63, SD=0.55) are recorded to have the second and third lowest score. However, for the highest score, according to item number 8, respondents agreed that the mission or purpose of the university makes they feel that their job is important (μ=3.03, SD=0.43). The second highest score goes to item number 12 (μ=3.98, SD=0.43), which indicates that the academicians are given opportunities to learn and grow at work.

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Table 1: Respondents profile

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (N=306)	Male	151	49.3
	Female	155	50.7
Age Group (N=306)	20 - 29	86	28.1
	30 - 39	115	37.6
	40 - 49	58	19.0
	50 and above	47	15.4
Length of Service (N=306)	≤ 2	4	1.3
	3 -5	79	25.8
	6 - 8	37	12.1
	8 - 10	77	25.2
	> 10	109	35.6
Level of Education (N=306)	Master	69	22.5
	PhD	237	37.5
Academic Field (N=306)	Engineering	138	45.1
	Science and Technology	111	36.3
	Social Science	57	18.6

Table 2: The engagement level based on category

Employee Engagement Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Low (actively disengaged)	0	0
Medium (not engaged)	97	31.7
High (actively engaged)	209	68.3

It is interesting to highlight that that materials and equipments are needed to make the job safe, comfortable, and productive [21]. For example, computers and related electronic resources have turned out to play a central role in education. According to the literature, SET proposed that when the organization failed to give ideal resources, the probability of employees disengaging themselves is higher [5]. Perhaps, by giving enough resources to the academicians, such as good internet connection, up-to-date laptop/computer software, troublesome-free copier, and user friendly access databases can help academicians to be more engaged in their work.

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Table 3: The level of employee engagement based on item

	Employee Engagement		SD	D	LA	A	SA	Mean (n=306)	SD
1	I know what is expected of me in doing work.	f %	3 1	91 29.7	168 55.2	43 14.1	0 0	2.91	0.30
2	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	f %	143 46.7	94 30.7	23 7.5	11 3.6	35 11.4	2.14	0.54
3	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	f %	9 2.9	87 28.4	158 51.6	52 17.0	0 0	2.82	0.37
4	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	f %	12 3.9	115 37.6	154 50.3	25 8.2	0 0	2.62	0.32
5	My superior or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.	f %	12 3.9	111 36.3	134 43.8	47 15.4	2 0.7	2.68	0.43
6	There is someone at work who encourages my development.	f %	22 7.2	83 27.1	139 45.4	60 19.6	2 0.7	2.65	0.50
7	At work, my opinions seem to count.	f %	9 2.9	100 32.7	143 46.7	54 17.6	0 0	2.88	0.39
8	The mission/purpose of my university makes me feel my job is important.	f %	11 3.6	73 23.9	144 47.1	78 25.5	0 0	3.03	0.43
9	My fellow colleagues are committed to do quality work.	f %	22 7.2	83 27.1	127 41.5	74 24.2	0 0	2.82	0.51
10	I have a best friend at work.	f %	23 7.5	78 25.5	168 54.9	37 12.1	0 0	2.71	0.40
11	In the last 6 months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	f %	34 11.1	102 33.3	110 35.9	60 19.6	0 0	2.63	0.55
12	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	f %	10 3.3	79 25.8	147 48.0	69 22.5	1 0.3	2.98	0.43
								2.75	0.43

3.2 The Effect of Flow Experience on Employee Engagement

The multiple regressions used in this study is based on a standard, or simultaneous multiple regression since all the predictor variables are entered into the equation simultaneously [20](Pallant, 2007). For each of the independent variable, all the predictor enter into the regression equation at once, and each one is assessed as if it had entered the regression after all other independent variables have been entered [29](Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The result of flow experience predictors and employee engagement regression is shown as follow:

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R= 0.69

R Square= 0.48

Adjusted R Square= 0.47

Figure 1: Model summary of flow experience and employee engagement

Based on Figure 1, R is the multiple correlation coefficients. The R-value is a measure of correlation between the predicted and observed values of the independent variable. According to Stockburger [28], the value R is like any other correlation, of 1.00 means that the independent variables, when taken together have a perfect relationship with the dependent variable. If R= 0.00, would mean there is no relationship at all between independent and dependent variables. Based on the Guilford's Rule of Thumb, a value of 0.69 indicates a moderate correlation, which shows substantial relationship and level of prediction.

R Square (R2) value is also called the coefficient of determination [4]. It is the percentage of the response variable variation that is explained by a linear model. In general, the higher the R2, the better the model fits the data. Adjusted R Square is a modified version of R-squared that has been adjusted for the number of predictors in the model [4]. The adjusted R square of .47 implies that all dimensions together explain 47% of the variance in employee engagement. In other words, 47% of the variance in employee engagement contributed by flow experience (enjoyment, total control, concentration).

The F-ratio in the ANOVA table (see Table 4) assesses whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The table shows that the F value is 92.41 and the significance level is =.00 which is less than $p \leq 0.05$. This indicates that the overall regression model is statistically fit, significance and valid.

Table 4: The flow experience ANOVA table

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	27.1	3	9.03	92.41	0.00
Residual	29.52	302	0.10		
Total	56.62	305			

a. Predictors : (Constant), enjoyment, total control, concentration
b. Dependent variable : Employee Engagement

The equation to predict employee engagement from enjoyment, total control and concentration, is:

Predicted employee engagement = 0.99 - (0.02 x enjoyment) - (0.04 x total control) - (0.05 x concentration).

This is achieved from the following table 5:

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Table 5: The estimate of model coefficient of flow experience and employee engagement

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.99		8.74	0.00
Enjoyment	0.02	0.14	1.94	0.04
Total Control	0.04	0.27	3.82	0.00
Concentration	0.05	0.33	4.13	0.00

Unstandardized coefficients specify how much the dependent variable differs with an independent variable, if other variables are held constant. For example, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for enjoyment is equal to 0.02 (table 5). This reveals that for each one level increase in enjoyment, there is an increase in employee engagement level of 0.02. The "Sig." column also shows that all independent variable coefficients are significantly different to 0, $p < .05$. Therefore:

> A multiple regression was run to predict employee engagement from flow experience factors, namely enjoyment, total control, and concentration. These variables statistically significantly predicted employee engagement, F (3, 302) = 92.41, $p < .05$, $R^2 = 0.48$. All three variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$.

The findings are generally consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's [8] flow theory, which proposes that the combination of enjoyment, total control, and concentration should increase employees' engagement level. It shows that most of the academics enjoy their work. As enjoyment is one of the key factors of employee engagement, Reavis [22] expressed that only if employees enjoy their work, they will probably engage for a long-term. Everybody knows the feeling of taking part in something they are not good at, they will dislike doing it. For employees to engage, they must feel the joy in whatever experience presented to them. During their work, they need to feel that their work is interesting, enjoyable, exciting and fun [16]. When dealing with a task that is boring, monotonous, and unexciting, the task is so mind-numbing that it simply becomes worthless, thus will drain engagement level. Sohn [27] wrote that, the top reason why employees become tedious zombies at work is because they do not have the chance to enjoy their work.

4.0 CONCLUSSION

Employee engagement is not a natural act hence we cannot force employees to be engaged, but good management can inspire them to do so, by creating meaningful organizational environment. Since employee engagement is associated with employees' psychological processes, the personal and also organizational understandings are important. This denotes that organizational practices in university must think through this value.

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