

The relationship between cognitive factors of empowerment and organizational commitment

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Abstract: Building organizational commitment among employees is one of the important factors for ensuring organizational effectiveness. This is because committed employees can lead to favourable organizational outcomes. Based on the review of literature, it is observed that there are limited data on organizational commitment in education sector. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of three factors namely employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on organizational commitment in Malaysian higher education context. To fulfil the stated objective, the data were collected using an online survey from 242 employees at the public universities in northern Malaysia. The collected data were analysed on SPSS and structural equation modelling (SEM). The findings indicated that employee empowerment has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. The effect of teamwork on organizational commitment was also found to be positive and statistically significant. Finally, the findings confirmed that employee training has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. These findings are expected to provide beneficial suggestions for the management in higher education sector to improve organizational commitment among their employees by focusing on employee empowerment, training, and teamwork.

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1. Introduction

The rapidly increasing competition in various markets has urged organizations to focus on their employee and ensure their commitment at workplace. Organizational commitment is considered as one of the foremost important goals of any organization in order to maintain its existence and survival. According to Locke and Latham (1990), highly committed and loyal employees are very important in order to achieve organisational goals. This is because employees with higher degree of commitment toward the organization are perceived to be more productive, harmonious, have better loyalty towards their work, and possess higher responsibility and job satisfaction (Karim & Rehman, 2012). Moreover, employees with strong organisational commitment are likely to develop emotional attachment to their organisations and feel happy with greater aspirations to make meaningful contributions. Sahoo, Behera, and Tripathy (2010) demonstrated that an employee who is committed to his or her job and career has less intention to take leave or quit, tend to feel satisfied about the job, and has higher intrinsic motivation.

In the current and dynamic business environments, various organizations make significant sacrifice to ensure organizational commitment and job satisfaction among their employees for the purpose of maintaining them and improving their productivity. Organizational commitment has been widely accepted to be advantageous for both the organization and its

employees as it can reinforce the feelings of belongingness, security of the job, career development, improved compensation, and higher intrinsic rewards (Azeem & Akhtar, 2014). The key benefits to the organization include improved employee tenure, minimum degree of turnover, low cost of training, higher job satisfaction, attainment of organizational objectives, and optimum product and services quality (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Additionally, employees with greater level organisational commitments are likely to recommend others to their organization and become part of its members (Sahoo et al., 2010). All of these benefits have made organizational commitment worthy of attention.

In past literature, it is obvious that a number of researchers studied organizational commitment and found that it can be affected by different factors such as employee empowerment and teamwork. Employee empowerment is mostly understood by sharing knowledge, improving intellectual capability, and autonomy during decision making (Karim & Rehman, 2012). Wellins, Byham, and Wilson (1991) established that an organization which provides higher levels of empowerment to its employees would have better strengths to ensure its long term survival and face any challenges. Similarly, Rochon (2014) regarded teamwork as a key success factor for employee performance and described it as a group of employees who work together in order to achieve a

certain goal. In other words, teamwork is a collaborative and shared activity that is directed towards accomplishing desired objectives. Previous literature also indicated that organizational commitment can be influenced by employee training. Training was defined as systematic process that aims to help employees enhance their knowledge and skills, and develop positive behavior through learning experience that is expected to help employees achieve greater performance (Buckley & Caple, 2009). According to Jun, Cai, and Shin (2006), training provides various benefits to employees in terms of widening their knowledge, skills, and abilities, becoming more efficient team members, and improving career development.

This study aims to examine the effects of employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on organizational commitment in Malaysian higher education sector. This is because the education industry in the country is considered as one of the key sectors for driving the nation toward achieving its goals in the upcoming years. Moreover, by looking at the literature review on this topic, it shows that the majority of past studies were conducted in western countries and only few scholars focused on higher education industry in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to make a significant contribution with regard to the link between the stated variables. It also aims to provide beneficial suggestions to the management in higher educational institutions based on its findings. The next sections start with literature review, methodology, findings, and then discussion and conclusion are presented.

Literature review

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment was defined in the literature 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” (Mowday et al., 1982, p, 27). Organizational commitment reflects the loyalty of an employee towards his or her organization (Ghorbanhosseini, 2012). It was also described by Meyer and Allen (1997) as the degree of attachment to an organisation and is characterized by valuing the shared benefits held between an employee and his or her organisation. Moreover, Rae (2013) thought about organizational commitment as a desire to maintain the affiliation with an organisation and is reflected through the willingness to exert high level of effort to achieve organisational goals.

Overall, organizational commitment can be defined as the degree to which an employee develops

a feeling of belongingness to his or her organization (Wadhwa & Verghese, 2015). Such feeling is created among the employees through constant involvement in different organizational activities. The continuous participation is usually done by searching for important suggestions from team members, listening to their issues and by increasing their involvement in organizational decision making process to a certain extent. By doing so, employees would feel to be participative and appreciated in the organization. The most commonly known forms of commitment are affective or emotional commitment which emphasize on employee attachment to an organization by accepting its values and having the desire to keep the relationship with it (Dey, Kumar, & Kumar, 2014). There are several dimensions for organizational commitment: loyalty, responsibility, the willingness to continue in the work, and faith toward the organization (Diab & Ajlouni, 2015).

The degree of employee commitment appears through the loyalty and evidence of productivity at workplace (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). Those employees who feel committed to their organizations reveal higher identification to their values and goals. Therefore, a varied array of favourable behavioural outcomes have been associated with employee commitment such as employee retention, daily attendance, significant achievement, quality of work, and individual sacrifice to help an organization in improving its performance (Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977; Randall, 1990). Moreover, highly committed employees are marked by their greater support to the organization in order to reinforce its global success. However, to retain the employees in any organization, managers should provide facilitative and pleasant work environment and support them. It is also the main responsibility of the management to provide training programs about self-monitoring and the skills to improve the personality characteristics of employees through appropriate channels (Danish et al., 2013).

Employee empowerment

Empowerment is a fundamental and important aspect for successful achievement, productivity, and growth in any business (Hunjra, UIHaq, Akbar, & Yousaf, 2011). Employee empowerment is regarded as a motivational practice that aims to increase the performance by increasing the opportunities of participation and involvement in decision making. It is mainly concerned with developing trust, motivation, participating in decision-making, and removing any boundaries between an employee and top management (Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012). Empowerment is the mechanism of giving an employee the authority to make decision and is often allied with the distribution of responsibility from managers to other employees

(Saif & Saleh, 2013). Empowerment was defined earlier as providing an organization's employees with the authority to deal with matters related to their daily job activities (Huxtable, 1994).

The advantages of employee empowerment were reported in the literature. For instance, Jacqueline (2014) stated that empowered employees are likely to develop feelings of motivation that will help them to gain the authority and control and apply the crucial knowledge and skills for dealing with customer needs. As the empowerment programme aims to give power and authority to employees through managers to share the responsibility with them, this will eventually help empowered employees in improving their recognitions and status. Such employees would develop positive thinking and tend to do their best to perform well at the workplace (Wadhwa & Verghese, 2015).

Moreover, Ripley & Ripley (1992) demonstrated that empowerment can increase the motivation of employees in doing the routine work, improves their job satisfaction, enhances their loyalty and productivity, and reduces the turnover intentions among them.

Employee empowerment has widely been recognized as an essential contributor to organizational success and many authors observed its direct effect on employee performance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012). Past studies found that empowerment had a positive effect on job satisfaction (Raza, Mahmood, Owais, & Raza, 2015; Wadhwa & Verghese, 2015) and organizational commitment (Gholami, Soltanahmadi, Pashavi, & Nekouei, 2013; Insan, Astuti, Raharjo, & Hamid, 2013; Kun, Hai-yan, & Lin-li, 2007). Laschinger, Finegan, and Shamian (2002) also demonstrated that developing an environment that improves and encourages the applications of empowerment at workplace will have positive impact on employees' commitment, and this ultimately leads to better organizational effectiveness. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Employee empowerment has positive effect on organizational commitment.

Methodology

Deciding on the research methodology for data collection is very important to ensure the validity of any research. In this study, the main objective is to investigate the effects of employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on organizational commitment in Malaysian higher education sector. The targeted population is comprised of the administrative and academic employees serving at public universities in northern Malaysia. Quantitative

methodology is considered to be the most widely accepted approach for understanding causal relationships. Therefore, the data in this study was obtained from 242 respondents through an online survey. The quantitative approach is in fact the most appropriate strategy to understand the direct and indirect link between multiple factors and examine how they can affect each other. The measurement scales of constructs were taken from a number of previous studies. For example, organizational commitment was measured using a scale consisting of five items adapted from Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). Moreover, employee empowerment was measured using nine items adapted from Men (2010). To measure the construct of teamwork, seven items were taken from the study of Shanahan, Best, Finch, and Sutton (2007). Finally, employee training was measured using six items adapted from Schmidt (2004). The selection of the aforementioned measurement scales refers to the acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha which provide evidence of reliability. A five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" was used to measure the items. The final questionnaire was primarily administered to some experts from certain universities to ensure the face validity by seeking their opinions and suggestions.

Analysis of Results

Out of 870 questionnaires being distributed to the respondents, only 242 responded. The descriptive results revealed that 65 (26.9%) of them are male, and 177 (73.1%) are female. On age profile, 7 (2.9%) of the respondents fall in the age group of 18 to 26 years old, 121 (50%) are categorized in the age group that is between 26 and 35 years. But those whose ages between 36 and 45 years accounted for 40.5% of total response, while 16 (6.6%) were 46 years old or above. The data regarding educational profile showed that 36 (14.9%) of the participants had the highest qualification of diploma, 79 (32.6%) bachelor qualification, 125 (51.7%) acquire postgraduate degree either master or doctorate, and 2 (0.8%) had other certificates. In terms of work experience, the majority had more than five years of service at their current institutions.

To examine the reliability of the developed instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used. In general, the results showed that all the values of Cronbach's alpha for the selected constructs are acceptable as they range from 0.771 to 0.925; employee empowerment (0.771), teamwork (0.925), employee training (0.864), and organizational commitment (0.860). To further ensure the reliability of all constructs, composite reliability was calculated using

Microsoft Excel. Overall, it was found that the values of composite reliability are acceptable (more

than 0.70). By looking at these results, it can be said that the reliability assumptions are fulfilled because all values exceeded the minimum cut-off point of 0.70 as recommended by Pallant (2010).

Additionally, in this study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm construct validity. Conducting CFA is very important in order to ensure that the set of items which are assumed to measure a certain construct are measuring it without mixing with the items of other constructs. Besides, CFA can support convergent validity assumptions and make it possible to deal with any Multicollinearity issues. The execution of CFA was done on structural equation modelling using AMOS 18 through the measurement model which comprises all items. In short, the findings revealed that the CFA was achieved because the values of all factor loadings

were reported between 0.47 and 0.90. This clearly shows that all items achieved the absolute cut-off value as suggested by Hair et al. (2010).

Following the measurement model after achieving satisfactory results of CFA, the next step was to draw the structural model and ensure that it has a good fit for the data. The model presented in Figure 1 reveals that the current structural model which comprises all items achieved a reasonable fit to the data as the Chi-square value is equal to 441.428. Other fit indices were also used to support the Chi-square (df = 183, GFI = 0.850, AGFI = 0.811, TLI = 0.900, CFI = 0.913, and RMSEA = 0.077). Generally, it can be said that model fits the data well. To verify the hypotheses which were presented earlier, regression results were generated from the outputs of structural model.

Table 1. Research Findings

	Hypothesized Effect	Std. Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Support
H1:	Employee empowerment has positive effect on job satisfaction.	0.326	0.224	3.279	0.001	Yes
H2:	Teamwork has positive effect on job satisfaction.	0.559	0.073	2.564	***	Yes
H5:	Employee training has positive effect on job satisfaction.	0.084	0.059	5.621	***	Yes

Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on organizational commitment. To accomplish this objective, the data was collected from employees at higher education institutions in northern Malaysia. The findings indicated that employee empowerment has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment and it is in line with previous researches (Gholami et al., 2013; Insan et al., 2013; Kun et al., 2007). Karimand Rehman (2012) also confirmed that employee empowerment was one of the main factors that lead to organizational commitment. Employee empowerment provides employees the opportunities to feel their values in their organizations, and this can increase their level of commitment and performance (Sahoo et al., 2010). Mullins and Peacock (1991) pointed out that empowered employees feel more motivated and loyal to their organisations. These results indicate that employees should be empowered because it is through empowerment an organisation will develop a strong culture which reflects employee commitment in order to survive, grow, compete, and face any possible challenges that may arise at any time.

The findings also supported the second hypothesis which stated that teamwork has positive

effect on job organizational commitment. This result was supported by a number of scholars (Ghorbanhosseini, 2013; Zincirkiran, Emhan, & Yasar, 2015) who found that teamwork played an important role in enhancing organizational commitment. Benrazavi and Silong (2013) stated that the willingness to work in teams makes an organizational environment more desirable as teamwork culture could lead to favourable commitment. This means that teamwork is one of the significant contributors to organizational commitment. Therefore, it is believed that teamwork activities could create an environment that facilitates knowledge and information exchange where they are necessary to increased job autonomy and higher job satisfaction. As a result, when an employee is satisfied with his or her job, the levels of commitment to the organization will be increased.

Finally, this study found that employee training has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment and it was supported by several previous research works (Bulut, & Culha, 2010; Lamba & Choudhary, 2013; Roehl & Swerdlow, 1999). Training is a useful technique that many organizations use in order to enhance the skills and knowledge of their employees. This is because if the employees are trained well, they will be more efficient in their jobs.

According to Vasudevan (2014), training is one of the main strategies to achieve organizational goals by attracting and retaining employees, and also to effectively manage them. This result provides practical implication for the decision makers in higher educational institutions to focus on providing training programs for their employee to ensure that they have enough skills and knowledge to perform their duties efficiently.

This study has some limitations which would open avenues for future researches. First, the population is limited to only academic and administrative staff working in public universities. Future research can conduct similar studies in different contexts using the variables under consideration for further possibility of generalization. Second, the quantitative methodology was used to conduct this study; therefore, future research may focus on longitudinal data to make the results more robust. Finally, only three variables were considered to examine their effects on organizational commitment. Hence, future research is suggested to test other variables such as leadership style and work specialization.

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