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ENGINEER’S WORK ENGAGEMENT: DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK THROUGH RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

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Abstract: Employee engagement is a relatively new concept in the academic research community even though the concept of employee engagement has been popularly introduced to the public by human resources consultant firms. Academics and practitioners in the field of human resource management tend to agree that the basic concept of employee engagement can help to explain the behaviour of workers in the workplace, but the current definitions and concepts used are vary. Although the concept of employee engagement is an interesting element, the concept itself remains unclear in term of its definition. In fact, the concept of employee engagement as defined by western academician must first be adapted to local Malaysian culture and religion practice. This literature review examines and analyses the critical empirical gaps and conceptual differences in the definition of the concept of employee engagement in order to develop a basic concept of employee engagement that are appropriate for multi-cultural community of engineers in Malaysia.

Keywords: Employee engagement; Human resource management; Productivity; Work environment; Religious; Spirituality

INTRODUCTION
Engineer is considered an important asset in an engineering organization. The lack of talented and highly skilled workforce phenomenon occurs due to various factors such as global economic pressure which forces organizations to implement employee restructuring and results in a talent gap between Generation Y and the "baby boomers" generation (Gordon, 2009). To ensure that an organization does not experience shortage of high-skilled engineers, new methods need to be developed to maintain existing highly skilled workers and at the same time attract new employees with high potentials. One of the methods identified is to strengthen the employee engagement. However, up to this day, researchers still have differing views and have not yet reached the consent point in explaining the concept of employee engagement (Soldati, 2007; Wefald & Downey, 2009) noted that employee engagement is a relatively new concept in the academic research community. Furthermore, the concept of employee engagement defined by the western researchers has to be adapted to Malaysia’s local culture and knowledge, in an effort to provide better prognostication of engineer’s psychological well-being.

OBJECTIVES

This study will examine how the concept of engagement is defined in the academic field and identify duplicate concepts that arise. Furthermore, this study will conclude and summarize on employee engagement concerning social sciences theory applied by academic researchers. The second objective of the study is to discuss religious elements in human resource management. Finally, the study develops a theoretical model of employee engagement in line with the context of engineers in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts of Employee Engagement

Concept of employee engagement is interpreted as a level of mind concerning a positive and satisfying work that can be identified by characteristics of enthusiasm, dedication and absorption or ‘preoccupation’. All these three dimensions are considered to be able to form the most accurate, authentic and comprehensive engagement concept so far (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Kim, Shin, & Swanger, 2009; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, 2010; Taris, Schaufeli, & Shimazu, 2010).

Theoretical Framework of Employee Engagement

Job-Demand Resources Model presented by (Bakker & Demerouti 2017) is the most integrative and comprehensive one. JD-R model also suggests that in the end, employee engagement will produce positive results for the organization such as good job performance.

The JD-R model also assumes that when this motivational resource is low, this situation can lead to burnout or fatigue and depression. Therefore, there is a need for the organisation to ensure that resources related to the workforce are provided for employees to avoid burnout. According to the JD-R model, heavy duty tasks and demands will also lead to burnout conditions. ‘Job resources’ will drive employees, encourage their persistence, and will make them focus on work. The said motivation is the resource that can enhance the effort (energy), dedication (efficacy), and absorption (Schaufeli 2013).

The role of religious element in human resource management in Malaysia
Malaysia's human resource management practices need to be understood in the context of a multiracial-racial Malaysian society where there is a mix of Islamic, Confucian and Western values (Mansor & Ali, 1998). Although Malaysians are multiracial, ritualistic and symbolic, they have similar values such as respect for parents, collective orientation, harmony, concern for dignity and religious orientation (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008).

Culture in Malaysia is generally characterised by traditional values such as collectivism, with emphasis on harmony, respect for hierarchy, reciprocity, loyalty and importance of honour (Abdullah, 2001; Kaur & Metcalfe, 1999; Sloane-White, 2008). The mix of cultural heritage and Islamic teachings needs to be understood, especially by multinational companies operating in Malaysia, as this clearly affects the human resource management system practiced.

PROPOSED MODEL

This research paper proposed a new framework or theoretical model, developed based on the JD-R model conducted by Bakker & Demerouti (2017) to adapt the concept and practice of engagement with the human resource management situation in Malaysia context.

Thus, the new engagement theoretical model is modified from the JD-R model by adding new variables, the role of religiosity as a 'moderator' variable as well as existing variables that contribute to the 'job resources' and 'job demands' constructs.

'Religious' dimension will function as an element that is expected to be the catalyst for 'job resources' and 'job demands' constructs, thus affecting the change in the level of engagement among employees. This is in line with the adaptation of human resource management in Malaysia where most of the employees in Malaysia are predominantly religious such as Muslims, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindus, Christian and others (Mansor and Ali 1998).
According to Rowley and Jackson (2010), religious beliefs or practices of a society are among the key elements in the structure of an organization or local institution or state. The need to incorporate these religion 'moderator' variables is seen as important as the findings from the previous study indicates that human resource management and company practices underestimate and ignore religious element in studying human attitudes.

According to (Zuckerman, 2007), despite the fact that at least 85 percent of people around the world have religious beliefs, and 82 percent of them state that religion plays an important role in their daily lives (Crabtree, 2012), the potential link between religious beliefs, management practices and organizations revenue have been clearly neglected in mainstream management research (Mellahi & Budhwar, 2010).

According to (Gruman & Saks, 2011) and (Devendhiran & Wesley, 2017), workplace spiritual aspect and employee engagement are obviously related and influence one another. This is strengthened by the findings of a study on the relationship between workplace spiritual aspect and job involvement in Thailand, where there was a significant relationship between spiritual aspect in the workplace and job involvement (Petchsawang & McLean, 2017).

A study by (Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2014) involving 835 Australian religious workers supporting the hypothesis that spiritual aspect can increase job involvement and show low fatigue effects, which ultimately were expected to give positive results to the organization. Relating to engineers, religious factors are seen as important factors in catalyzing engineer's work commitments (Farrukh, Wei Ying, & Abdallah Ahmed, 2016), making engineers more ethical at work (Spiekermann-Hoff, Korunovska, & Langheinrich, 2018), and subsequently producing engineering concepts with social responsibility and socially responsible (Bielefeldt & Canney, 2016).
CONCLUSION

Spiritual factor and the local beliefs that are being practiced are important in understanding employees’ attitude and behaviour in an organization. There is a need to understand the history and culture in the local sense of understanding to comprehend the process, philosophy and problem of the national human resource management model.

Considering that Malaysia is a country with people of various religions and races, it is important for an employee engagement research to include local cultures in understanding the practice of employee engagement accurately. There is also a need to conduct a longitudinal study to show the relationship between organizational engagement and performance and to evaluate the outcome and impact of long-term employee engagement practices and religiosity or spirituality.

SELECTIVE REFERENCES


