

The effect of perceived organizational supports towards employee engagement: A study of Malaysia's oil and gas offshore operations

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Keywords

Perceived organizational support, Employee engagement, Oil and Gas, Offshore employee

Abstract

With the rapid growth of business and changes in economic landscape, employee engagement still remains a relevant subject to be discussed in any part of organization. Therefore, this study examines the effects of perceived organizational supports towards employee engagement among the offshore employee in Malaysia. A pilot study was conducted by utilizing online questionnaire via Google Forms were distributed. A number of 40 completed responses were subsequently collected, and data were then analysed using IBM SPSS V25.0. The findings show that perceived organizational supports have positive relationship with employee engagement and emphasized that co-worker support has significant relationship towards employee engagement among offshore employee in Malaysia.

Introduction

In the past few decades, there has been abundance of focus in relation to employee engagement. Countless have claimed that employee engagement is positively related to productivity (Rich et al., 2010), organizational commitment (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Moliner, Martinez-Tur, Ramos, Perio, & Cropanzano, 2008; Rich, 2006), and negatively related to outcomes such as turnover intentions, and burnout (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). At the same time, it has been testified that employee engagement is on the decline and there is a deepening disengagement among employees today (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). It has even been stated that only about 15 percent of employees worldwide are engaged in their job (Gallup, 2018). In Malaysia context, even though the engagement score has improved by 4 percent from 59 percent to 63 percent, it still stands among the lowest as compare to other countries in Asia region (Aon, 2018). In the current business environments, prior research has indicated that when an employee perceives organizational support, it strengthens employees' cognitive and emotional evaluation towards their job and organization (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Ristig, 2009). Perceived organizational support is defined as the employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organizational support was studied from three perspectives i.e. management support, supervisor support and co-workers support (Woo, 2009).

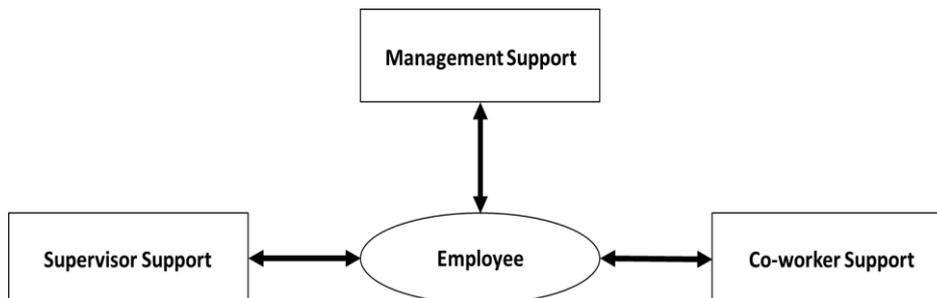


Figure 1: Organizational Support Model

According to Alvi et. al, (2014), employees with high level of organizational support can be more engaged with the tasks provided them to complete and to take part or put their commitment in achieving organizational goals. This study also confirms that perceived organizational support is the strongest predictor of employee engagement. However, according to a research which conducted by Chairuddin et.

al. (2015), perceived organizational support had insignificant influence on employees work engagement and organizational commitment. In addition, there are limited number of researches that have been conducted in the oil and gas industry based on Malaysia context. Therefore, by conducting this study, it will provide a clear perspective with respect to the context of Malaysia especially in offshore environment. Therefore, this exploratory study will examine the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee engagement.

Literature Review

Employee engagement

Engagement has become increasingly recognized as a key research topic in the organizational sciences (Sonnentag, 2011). Employee Engagement was defined as the “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally during role performances” (Khan, 1990). The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees’ beliefs about the organization, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organization and its leaders. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. To achieve this engaged state, Kahn (1990) proposed three antecedents: psychological availability, psychological safety, and psychological meaningfulness (Khan, 1990). Despite of that, employee engagement was defined as the employees’ psychological presence during work role that includes two critical components namely attention and absorption (Rothbard, 2001). Employee engagement is the positive, fulfilling and psychological state of mind that is manifested by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In conceptualizing employee engagement as multi-dimensional construct, it was defined as the extent to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of his/her roles. Employee engagement has been distinguished into two types: job engagement and organizational engagement. Job engagement refers to the extent to which an individual is actually fascinated in the performance of his/her own individual job role. Meanwhile, organizational engagement reflects “the extent to which an individual is psychologically present as a member of an organization” (Saks, 2006).

Perceived Organizational support

Perceived organizational support is defined as the employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to Organizational Support Theory (OST) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), employees develop a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Perceived organizational support had emphasized that in order to meet socio-emotional needs and to assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Such perceived organizational support would increase employees’ felt obligation to help the organization reach its objectives, their commitment to the organization, and their expectation that improved performance would be rewarded (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). According to previous research, perceived organizational support was studied from three perspectives i.e. management support, supervisor support and co-workers/ peer support (Woo, 2009). The term “organizational support” shall not be limited only solely up to the organization but it shall cover its agent as well. Agents performing tasks such as supervisor, co-workers or peer for the organization are itself organization and their action will be actions of organization, as mentioned that wishes and feelings of agent are the feeling and wishes of organization (Levinson, 1965).

Management Support

Management support means support from organization and the most widely used and accepted definition of organizational support was given by Eisenberger et al., (Eisenberger et al., 1986). They define “organizational support” as “employees’ perception about the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being”. Kiewitz, et al., (2009) concluded that organizational support factors are very important to study since when organization fails to meet their obligations

towards their employees, organizations will face a reduction in perceived organizational support level among the employees. Similar conclusion was discussed by Ahmed et al., (2012) and Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, (2005) when they found that incentive encouragements offered by organization form a positive feeling towards the employee about organizational support. Hence, there is substantial association between incentive encouragements and employees' perception towards organizational support. Conclusively it can be derived that employee perception of organizational support is outcome of employee and organization relationship as noted by Eisenberger et al., (1986). This relationship is created and is based on the trade-off between organization and employees. Employees offer their loyalty, commitment, motivation and other outcomes in return of the support that is offered by the organization. With reference to the antecedents of perceived organizational support the basic construct is exchange relation as being describe in Social Exchange Theory (SET). In the words of Blau (1964) exchange relation whether it is social or economic exchange is based on future expectations, but time frame and nature are different. Economic exchange is based on specific time frame and having contractual nature. On the other hand, social exchange is open ended, informal and long-term relation which is based on verbal obligation to "reciprocate" (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). In the words of Ahmed et al., (2012); Woo (2009) and Chou and Robert (2008), perceived organizational support has three constructs i.e. management support, supervisor support and co-workers' support. Therefore, it is predicted that management support will be related to employee engagement (job and organization engagement) as follows;

H₁: Management support will be positively related to job engagement

H₂: Management support will be positively related to organization engagement

Supervisor Support

In any organization, it comprises a combination of people who strive to achieve a common purpose or goal. Employee are requiring interacting with relevant people such as management, supervisor, co-workers and subordinates in order to get things done which among them, supervisors are the party that have more influential to employees. Supervisor serve a bridging role between management and employees (Jokisaari and Nurmi, 2009). These actions performed by supervisors are considered as the actions performed by the organization since supervisors are considered as agents of the organization. In the words of Eisenberger et al., (1986), employees perceive organization like a human being and acts are considered to be the acts of human being. Similarly, agents performing tasks for the organization are itself organization and their actions will be actions of organization, as Levinson (1965), mentioned that wishes and feelings of agents are the feelings and wishes of organization. In the word of Kottke and Sharafinski (1988). It is an evident from literature that, employees received an appraisal from their supervisor or leader or senior which link it to "supervisor support". The term of "supervisor support" is quite consistent with the notion given by Levinson (1965), where he argued that employees view their supervisor in negative or positive sense, and they consider it as a sign of organizational support. If a supervisor is supportive then employee will be having positive perception towards organizational support but if the belief about supervisor is opposite, the corporate image of support will also be negative. This notion is validated by numerous researchers e.g. Eisenberger et al., (2002); Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli (2001). Supervisor can also be called as a leader, because as a leader should be readily available to its followers, a supervisor should be there to help and make employees at how perform their tasks. This notion is also supported by Brown and Duguid (1991) who discussed that leadership, is use of internal capabilities, skills, personality, experience and honesty under the banner of authority vested in and widely accepted by co-workers and followers which supported by Harvey, Royal and Stout (2003), when they discussed that leadership is all about achieving some objectives. Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997) concluded that supervisor support is having great bearing on the employee's perception of organizational support as well. Thus, it can be inferred that employees are in exchange relationship with their supervisor. This study considers this notion and takes management support and supervisor support as part of the constructs of concept in defining perceived organizational support. Therefore, it is predicted that supervisor support will be related to employee engagement (job and organization engagement) as follows;

H₃: Supervisor support will be positively related to job engagement

H₄: Supervisor support will be positively related to organization engagement

Co-worker Support

Based on the argument by Eisenberger et al., (1986), employees perceive an organization a comparable means of a human being and acts are reflected to be the acts of human being. Correspondingly, agents performing tasks for the organization are itself organization and their actions will be actions of organization, as Levinson (1965), mentioned that demands and moods of agents will define the demands and moods of the organization. Care from the management or employees will be reflected as the care from the organization. This agency position is not only given to supervisor or leader, rather employees or co-workers, are also agents of organization, as they are also representative of organization. So, it can be indirectly perceived that organization is having agency relationship with all of its employees. From an employee perspective it can be inferred that there are two types of agents or representative of any organization i.e. supervisor or leader and the other one is co-worker or peer. Therefore, organizational support will include support from organization or management, support from supervisor and support from co-workers or peers. The aforesaid literature is evident that support from co-workers or peers can influence positively employees' perception of support from organization. Therefore, it is predicted that co-worker support will be related to employee engagement (job and organization engagement) as follows;

H₅: Co-worker support will be positively related to job engagement

H₆: Co-worker support will be positively related to organization engagement

Data and Methodology

Data and Procedure

For this purpose of this study, pilot study has been conducted where 40 respondents have been participated in which it has been segregated to respondents by each region within Malaysia namely Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia. The data for this study was collected through online questionnaire and blast to oil and gas operators focal before disseminating the online questionnaire via Google forms to their respective permanent offshore employees. The survey included a cover letter/ consent form that inform participants about the purpose of the study. Participant were asked to complete the survey as part of study on employee engagement and perceived organizational support. Participation was on voluntary basis and participant were informed that their responses would remain confidential. Table I presents the demographic information of respondents.

Demographic Profile	Sabah	Sarawak	Peninsular Malaysia	Total
Gender				
<i>Male</i>	11	11	18	40
<i>Female</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40
Citizenship				
<i>Malaysian</i>	11	11	18	40
<i>Non-Malaysian</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40
Education Level				
<i>Diploma</i>	6	7	8	21
<i>Degree</i>	1	-	-	1
<i>Master</i>	-	-	1	1
<i>PhD</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Others</i>	4	4	9	17
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40
Marital Status				
<i>Single</i>	1	1	2	4
<i>Married</i>	10	10	16	36
<i>Divorce</i>	-	-	-	-

<i>Widow/Widower</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40
Race				
<i>Malay</i>	3	8	15	26
<i>Chinese</i>	-	-	1	1
<i>Indian</i>	-	-	2	2
<i>Bumiputera Sabah</i>	6	-	-	6
<i>Bumiputera Sarawak</i>	-	3	-	3
<i>Others</i>	2	-	-	2
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40
Offshore Working Tenure				
<i>Less than 2 years</i>	-	-	1	1
<i>Between 2 - 5 years</i>	2	3	3	8
<i>More than 5 years</i>	9	8	14	31
<i>Total</i>	11	11	18	40

Table 1: Demographic information on respondents

Theoretical framework

This study will further explore the relationship of each dimensions of perceived organizational support that consist of management support, supervisor support and co-worker support towards employee engagement as shown in Figure II.

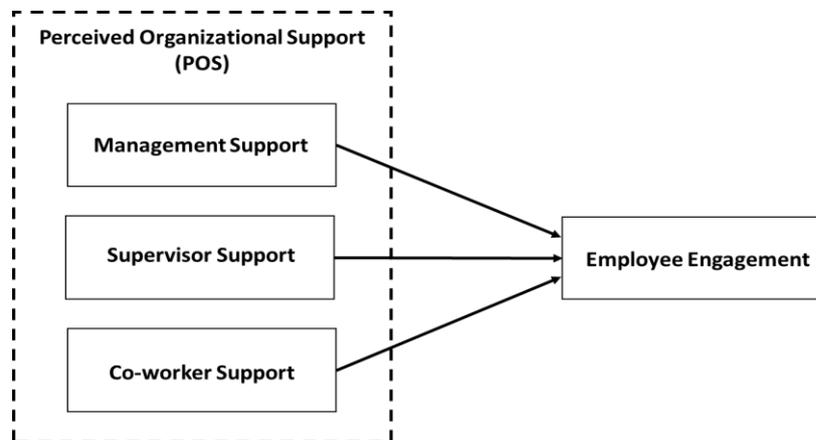


Figure II: Theoretical framework

Estimation procedure

Job engagement

Job engagement was measured using the five-item "Job engagement scale" through adopt Survey of Job engagement (Saks, 2006) e.g., "I really throw myself into my job", "Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time", "This job is all consuming: I am totally into it", "My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job" and "I am highly engaged in this job". Each item was rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher values reflect greater support. The Cronbach values for these scales was 0.82 and 0.773 for our study.

Organization engagement

Organization engagement was measured using the six-item "Organization engagement scale" through adopt Survey of Organization engagement (Saks, 2006) e.g., "Being a member of this organization is very captivating", "One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organization", "I am really not into the goings-on in this organization", "Being a member of this organization make me come alive", "Being a member of this organization is exhilarating for me" and "I am highly engaged in this organization". Each item was rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree,

2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher values reflect greater support. The Cronbach values for these scales was 0.90 and 0.785 for our study.

Management support

Management support was measured using the eight-item "management support scale" through adopt and adapt Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) (Rhoades et al., 2001) by changing "organization" to "management", e.g., from "my organization really cares about my well-being" to "my management really cares about my well-being" and "my organization cares about my opinions" to "my management cares about my opinions", respectively. Each item was rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher values reflect greater support. The Cronbach values for these scales was 0.89 and 0.873 for our study.

Supervisor support

Supervisor support was measured using the four-item "supervisor support scale" through adopting Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) (Rhoades et al., 2001), e.g., "my supervisor cares about my opinions" and "my supervisor strongly considers my goals and values". Each item was rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher values reflect greater support. The Cronbach values for these scales was 0.89 and 0.778 for our study.

Co-worker support

Co-worker support was measured using the five-item "co-worker support scale" through adopting Hammer et al., 2004 survey questions, e.g., "I receive help and support from my co-workers" and "I feel I am accepted in my work group". Each item was rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher values reflect greater support. The Cronbach values for these scales was 0.83 and 0.902 for our study.

Results and Discussion

The analysis with diagnostic checking on normality test using Shapiro-Wilk test. Based on normality test, P-value < 0.05 which indicate that the data was not normal. From the inter-item correlation matrix which shown in Table III, the results show that about 42.7% correlation between job engagement and organization engagement.

	JOB ENGAGEMENT	ORGANIZATION ENGAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT SUPPORT	SUPERVISOR SUPPORT	COWORKER SUPPORT
JOB ENGAGEMENT	1.000	-	-	-	-
ORGANIZATION ENGAGEMENT	.427	1.000	-	-	-
MANAGEMENT SUPPORT	.189	.381	1.000	-	-
SUPERVISOR SUPPORT	.122	.081	.660	1.000	-
COWORKER SUPPORT	.437	.336	.335	.307	1.000

Table III: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

For job engagement, it shows co-worker support has the highest correlation at 43.7% as compared to management support and supervisor support which at 18.9% and 12.2% respectively. Hence, from this result it can be concluded that co-worker support has a strong relationship to job engagement as compare to the management and supervisor support. Despite of that, for organization engagement, as expected, management support has the highest correlation at 38.1% as compared to supervisor support and co-worker support at 8.1% and 33.6% respectively. From this finding as well, the lowest correlations between organization engagement and supervisor support was also being observed at 8.1%. It shows that there was a weak relationship between organization engagement and supervisor support. Hence, from this result it can be concluded that management support has a strong relationship to organization engagement whereas supervisor support has the weakest relationship with organization engagement.

	MANAGEMENT SUPPORT	SUPERVISOR SUPPORT	CO-WORKER SUPPORT
JOB ENGAGEMENT	.830	.933	.057*
ORGANIZATION ENGAGEMENT	.048**	.900	.036**

Note: The value in the parentheses are P-Value indicate significant at 95% (**) and 90% (*)

Table IV: Chi-Square & P-Value

Based on Chi-Square test results as per shown in Table IV, interesting findings were found. The results show that co-worker support has significant relationship towards employee for both job and organization engagement at 90% and 95% confidence level respectively. Besides that, management support has a significant relationship with organization engagement as expected. With the above findings, it can be concluded that the outcome of this study has supported H2, H5 and H6 and the rest of the hypothesis were not supported. This finding emphasizes the importance of co-worker support which it was supported from study conducted by Eva et. al. (2019) which indicate that higher co-worker support can be used to supplement the lack of supervisor support when required.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The employee engagement is a crucial element to ensure employee productivity (Rich et al., 2010) and organization commitment (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009) especially in offshore environment. The findings summarized the important of perceived organizational support as a predictor to employee engagement. It also reveals that co-worker support has a strong relationship to both job and organization engagement as compare to the management and supervisor support. This may due to the fact of offshore operations in nature whereby their co-worker is the one that always be there and close to the employee which to the extent of similar treatment as their second family. Their co-worker or peer will be the one that also be there for them and motivate each other. Although this just a pilot study among offshore employee in oil and gas industry in Malaysia, with this insight, it definitely contribute to the existing literature and provide signal to management in providing a conducive working environment in order to develop good management agent or representative at site through co-worker support which indirectly will increase the level of engagement. This finding also can be adopted to remote or isolation working environment where organization need to assign an employee with co-worker or buddy system instead of alone mission in any situation to maintain satisfactory level of engagement and support required by employee.

Limitation of Study

There are some limitations that have been discovered in this study. Firstly, the data was collected through pilot approach which only consider minimum number of respondents which the findings cannot be generalised yet until the full-blown study being conducted. Secondly, the main focus will be the permanent staff of the operators. Hence, the views from Service Company or contractor that directly work under the operator (e.g. general helper, catering crew, radio operator, crane operator, material coordinator) will not be considered in this study. This approach has been taken due to the fact that different organization has its own organizational cultures which directly translate to the way employees behave. According to an article written by Rick T., (2015), the most important thing about culture is that it's the only sustainable point of difference for any organization since anyone can copy a company's strategy, but nobody can copy their culture. Thirdly, the respondents will be only limited among the technician. This is due to the fact that technician is the lowest rank among permanent staff at offshore. Besides that, researcher also observed area of improvement to apply dual language on the online questionnaire for the full blown exercise to ensure respondent fully understand the question and provide correct feedback since about 42.5% of respondents do not have higher education level which can be translated into their proficiency in understanding questionnaire in English. Lastly, it is proposed future study to evaluate the impacts on new manpower mix according to their generation cohorts which will provide better insight for management to pay more attention.

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