

THE DETERMINANTS OF WORK ENGAGEMENT AND ITS EFFECT ON TURNOVER INTENTION AND DISCRETIONARY EFFORTS: EXAMINING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE (A PILOT STUDY)

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ABSTRACT

A substantial body of research has advocated that work engagement has positive and negative predictors and outcomes. However, little research has been conducted in hotel industry. Therefore, the objective of this study is to present a proposed model linking the determinants of work engagement and its effect on turnover intention and discretionary efforts. Organizational culture has been proposed to be a moderator in the above-mentioned relationship. A review of literature to support the proposed linkage within the Malaysian industry is provided. But, before conducting this real study, a pilot study was conducted to optimize clarity, readability, face validity and reliability of the study variables.

Keywords: Work engagement, face validity, reliability, clarity, readability

INTRODUCTION

Service sector has been a key player in the growth of the Malaysian economy. Statistic showed that service sector contributed as much as 57% to Malaysia's GDP in 2009. By 2020, it has been estimated that service sector would contribute to as much as 70% to Malaysia's GDP. Among the service sector, the tourism industry is relatively important. Tourism industry is the fifth largest industry that plays a significant role in Malaysia economy after oil, gas and energy, financial services, wholesale, retail and palm oil. Tourism industry generated RM36.9 billion to the Malaysia Growth National Income (GNI) in 2009. Since the 1970's, much research has been conducted on burnout, the result of chronic occupational stress marked by emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and lack of work efficacy (Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2005). Research on burnout has been focusing on the negative experiences people have with their works because traditionally psychology has emphasized on the negative states of human beings more than their positive states (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). However, the direction of psychology has shifted in the recent years to pay more attention on the study of human strengths (Maslach et al., 2001). Hence, the concept of burnout is being extended with the study of employees' positive psychological state called work engagement (Maslach et al.). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) define engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. They further state that engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but rather, it is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior (p. 74). In the academic literature, engagement is said to be related to but distinct from other constructs in organizational behavior

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

William Kahn published the first conceptual model of personal engagement in the academic literature in 1990. According to his theory, momentary psychological conditions affect the level of personal presence, or expression of a person preferred self in task behaviors. A person either presents (engages) or withdraws (disengages) their self in a given role (Kahn, 1990). There are three dimensions of personal engagement namely, cognitive, emotional, and physical. Kahn (1990) also defines the antecedents of personal engagement.

Certain psychological conditions are needed for engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn’s (1990, 1992) research was an exploratory effort, and he chose a qualitative approach to data collection using the personal interview method. A review of the engagement literature found that Kahn’s model of personal engagement has been empirically tested in one published study (May et al. 2004) which produced tentative support for the theory. Besides, the theoretical models for different versions of engagement have been proposed in the academic literature, including personal engagement (Kahn, 1990) work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002) employee engagement (Harter et al., 2002) and self-engagement (Britt et al., 2005).

Engagement also has an opposite construct first identified as disengagement by Kahn (1990) and later on in the literature as burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). In the current study, researcher refers to the theoretical underpinnings of work engagement by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Their theory of work engagement defines the construct as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind; a long-term persistent affective-cognitive state (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The features of work engagement theory are summarized in Figure 1.

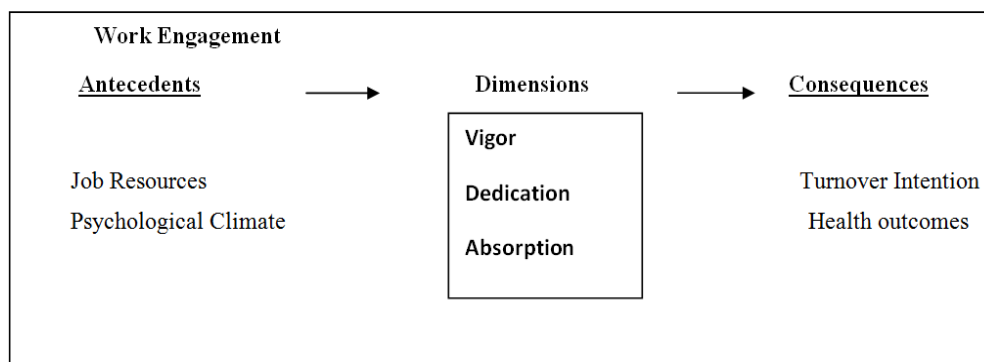


Figure 1. Model of Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002)

The definition and instrument for measuring engagement by Schaufeli et al. (2002) namely, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) has been an appropriate tool for studies on engagement. Various studies on such diverse places as Finland, China, and South Africa have used and validated the UWES (Hakanen et al., 2005; Yi-Wen and Yi-Qun, 2005; Storm and Rothmann, 2003).

The UWES has also been useful for hospitality research (e.g. Kim et al., 2009). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) define engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. *Vigor*, a factor defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006, p. 74). relates to Kahn’s *physical* engagement. Vigorous individuals are willing to invest considerable energy in their work and strongly persist in the face of obstacles. *Dedication* is a set of attitudes encompassing enthusiasm for one’s work, pride, and inspiration (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). This definition of dedication ties the construct to Kahn’s (1990) *emotional* engagement.

Finally, *absorption* means being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006, p. 75). This definition of dedication ties the construct to Kahn's (1990) *cognitive* engagement. So, it seems that the UWES is both the most established and applied scale for measuring work engagement. Building upon the aforementioned framework, the following hypothesized research model of work engagement was presented below.

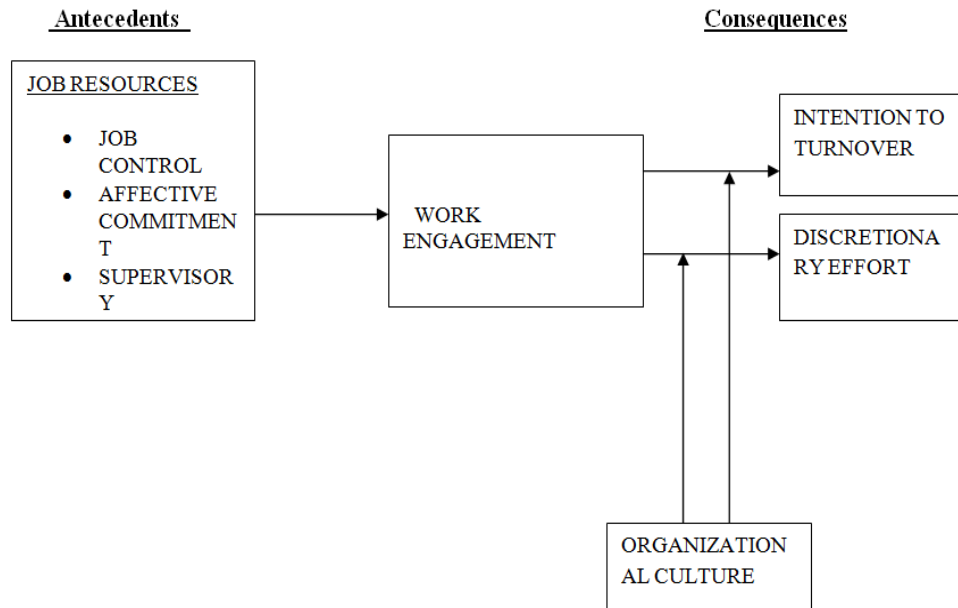


Figure 2. New Research Model of Work Engagement

METHODS

Pilot-Testing

A pilot study among 84 participants was conducted to optimize clarity, readability, and face validity of the study variables. The 84 participants were hotel employees. In addition, think aloud protocols were held with six persons (three participants, one secretary, one marketing executive, and one manager).

Based on the findings, clarity and readability of the items were improved. One main revision was reducing the answer categories from seven to five categories, as participants indicated that the differences between some answer categories were unclear. Another main revision was extending the recall period from one week to one month, to assure that most situations had likely taken place, and including a not applicable answer category for some questions, as many participants indicated that a situation may not have taken place in the past days.

To assess face validity, participants were asked whether they thought the questionnaire actually measured the respective study variables, whether any questions were redundant, and whether any important questions were missing. Most participants indicated that the face validity of all the study variables was good. As a final check, the University College Language Center screened the full questionnaire for readability and correct use of language.

Reliability

To estimate the internal consistency of all scales in the study (Cronbach's alpha)

RESULTS

<i>Study Variables</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Utrecht Work Engagement Scale	0.77
Job Control	0.89
Supervisory Support	0.88
Job Fit	0.79
Affective Commitment	0.83
Turnover Intention	0.82
Discretionary Efforts	0.78
Organizational Culture	0.75

The result yielded internal consistencies higher than 0.75 to support the selected variables. According to Hair et al.,(2003). All the study variables had high and strong internal consistencies.

CONCLUSIONS

The study variables had strong internal consistencies, face validity, applicability and understandability to the participants. Factor analysis could not be conducted in this study due to the lack of participants.

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