



FACULTY OF COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TASK CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYEE OPTIMISM
TOWARDS WORK ENGAGEMENT

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

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**THE RELATIONSHIP OF TASK CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYEE OPTIMISM
TOWARDS WORK ENGAGEMENT**

QUINIE ANAK BELLY

This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Human Resources Development)

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Resources Development
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The project entitled ‘The Relationship of Task Characteristics and Employee Optimism Towards Work Engagement’ was prepared by Quinie anak Belly and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resources Development)

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TASK CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYEE OPTIMISM TOWARDS WORK ENGAGEMENT

QUINIE ANAK BELLY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship of task characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback and optimism) and employee optimism towards work engagement among public sector employee. This study was conducted through quantitative where the data collection was conducted through questionnaires. The population is all the employees in selected government departments in the central region of Sarawak and the sample size was chosen based on convenience sampling technique. A total of respondents participated in the study is 94. The data collection from the respondents was analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0. The results of the finding show that skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback and optimism has a significant relationship with work engagement. However, autonomy did not appear to be associated with work engagement of the employee. This study also found that skill variety is the most dominant factor can influence work engagement among employee in the public sector. As such, the researcher has recommended a focus on the study which can give insight and guidance to the human resource practitioner, organization, and future researches. In this study also, researcher also has discussed about the implications and recommendation to human resource practitioner, organization and future researches.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Task Characteristics, Skill Variety, Task Identity, Task Significance, Autonomy, Feedback, Optimism, Public Sector.

ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN ANTARA CIRI-CIRI TUGAS DAN OPTIMISM PEKERJA TERHADAP KETERLIBATAN DALAM KALANGAN PEKERJA DI SEKTOR AWAM

QUINIE ANAK BELLY

Tujuan utama kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara ciri-ciri tugas (kepelbagaian kemahiran, pengenalpastian tugas, kepentingan tugas, autonomi, dan maklum balas) dan optimism pekerja terhadap keterlibatan dalam kalangan pekerja di sektor awam. Kajian ini dilaksanakan melalui kaedah kuantitatif dimana kaedah pengumpulan data dijalankan melalui kaedah borang soal selidik. Populasi untuk kajian ini adalah terdiri daripada pekerja-pekerja yang berkerja dalam sektor awam yang terpilih dan pemilihan saiz sample pula dilakukan melalui kaedah persampelan “convenience”. Jumlah keseluruhan responden yang terlibat dalam kajian ini adalah 94 orang. Data yang telah dikumpul dari responden akan dianalisis menggunakan “Statistical Package for Social Science” (SPSS) versi 23.0. Keputusan daripada kajian ini telah mendapati kepelbagaian kemahiran, pengenalpastian tugas, kepentingan tugas, maklum balas dan optimisma mempunyai hubungan signifikasi dengan keterlibatan kerja. Walaubagaimanapun, autonomi tidak menunjukkan hubungan dengan keterlibatan kerja dalam kalangan pekerja di sektor awam. Kajian ini juga mendapati kepelbagaian kemahiran merupakan faktor yang paling dominan dalam mempengaruhi keterlibatan kerja. Dalam kajian ini, pengkaji juga telah memberikan cadangan yang boleh diberikan tumpuan sebagai panduan untuk kalangan pembangunan sumber manusia, organisasi dan kajian masa depan.

Kata kunci: Keterlibatan kerja, Ciri-ciri Tugas, Kepelbagaian Kemahiran, Pengenalpastian Tugas, Kepentingan Tugas, Autonomi, Maklum Balas, Optimisma, Sektor awam.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

In this globalization era, we are living in a very competitive and challenging economic environment where the uncertainty and insecurity about the job have given pressure towards the employee. They are exposed to the strain and the pressure of work demands in any position within the organization. So, this situation has an influence on work engagement which may affect the performance of the employees. Furthermore, today's world was defined as a “global network of communication, information, and transportation of people and goods” (p.9, Salanova, Llorens & Schaufeli, 2014). Thus, it make the organization requires an engaged and resilience employee to produce better output (Tauhed et al., 2018). This is because it can help the organization to delivers well and excellence services. So, this aspect is very important for the organization in order to sustain the competitive advantages, keep abreast with the current development and changes, and promoting an innovative work culture. (Krishnan et al., 2014).

According to AON (2018) report stated that the global trends of Malaysian employee engagement increase from 59% in 2017 to 63% in 2018. However, it is still lower than neighbouring country like Indonesia (76%), Philippines (71%), and Thailand (64%). Rapid changes and competitiveness among the millennial make the employees hard to balance their personal life and work. This situation will influence employee engagement at the workplace. AON study shows that the top list drivers of employee engagement in Malaysia are work-life balance and career development. Besides, AON study also has revealed that there is optimism

in the inclusion of the workforce. Two-thirds of people nowadays feel that their working environment has embraces the diversity of the backgrounds and ways of thinking (AON, 2018). So, it showed the understanding about employee characteristics and work design is very important in order to create a resourceful working environment. Vernon Goh, the leader of Engagement Practice at AON Hewitt Malaysia also has explained that to enhance work engagement among the employees, the company in Malaysia need to created work environment that giving the opportunity for employee to develop new skills, discover their own career path and enhance the potential.

1.2 Problem statement

A study by Krishnan et al. (2015) shows that task characteristics such as autonomy, feedback, task significance, social support and self-efficacy have a significance impact towards work engagement among the employee. However, they did not include all of the five task characteristics dimensionality such as autonomy, feedback, task significance, task, identity, and skill variety in their study. Therefore, in this study, researcher intended to investigate the relationship between task characteristics (task characteristic such as autonomy, feedback, task significance, task, identity, and skill variety) and work engagement. This is because that based on the finding of other study, all of five task characteristics have a positive and significant impact towards work engagement among the employee (Prameswari, 2019). Task characteristic is very important because it can help to redesign the job which can cultivate engagement among the employee.

Besides, optimism also has a significance effect towards work engagement. Optimistic people likely to have a positive thinking and attitude towards something they want

to achieve, even they confronted by high challenges situation in their life. (Noraini Othman, Zahiruddin Ghazali, & Sa'ari Ahmad, 2014). A study by Salminen, Makikangas, and Fedlt (2014), showed that optimism can moderate the negative impact of low job resources on work engagement among the Finnish managers. So, in this study, researcher intended to examine the relationship between optimism and work engagement among the public sector employee in this Sarawak context.

Moreover, nowadays, not only private sector needs to compete with other. The public sector also needs to become more competitive and take serious about the development and management of their organization (Zuraina Dato Mansor, et al., 2017). This is very important because it can help them to thrive against the challenges that arise within our country's administration. Besides, it also ensuring the government strategies and programmes carried out meritoriously (Zaki Zakaria, et al., 2018).

1.3 Objective

1.3.1 General objective

This research objective is to identify the relationship of task characteristics (autonomy, task significance, feedback, skill variety and task identity) and employee optimism towards work engagement.

1.3.2 Specific objective

1. To identify the relationship between skill variety and work engagement.

2. To identify the relationship between task identity and work engagement.
3. To identify the relationship between task significance and work engagement.
4. To identify the relationship between autonomy and work engagement.
5. To identify the relationship between feedback and work engagement.
6. To identify the relationship between optimism and work engagement.
7. To identify dominant factor among task characteristics and optimism.

1.3.3 Hypothesis

H1: There is significant relationship between skill variety and work engagement.

H2: There is significant relationship between task identity and work engagement.

H3: There is significant relationship between task significance and work engagement.

H4: There is significant relationship between autonomy and work engagement.

H5: There is significant relationship between feedback and work engagement.

H6: There is significant relationship between optimism and work engagement.

H7: There is dominant factor among task characteristic and optimism.

1.4 Conceptual framework

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between task characteristics and optimism towards work engagement. Figure 1 below show the independent and dependent variables. The task characteristics and optimism are independent variables and the

drivers of work engagement among the employee. The dependent variable for this study is work engagement.

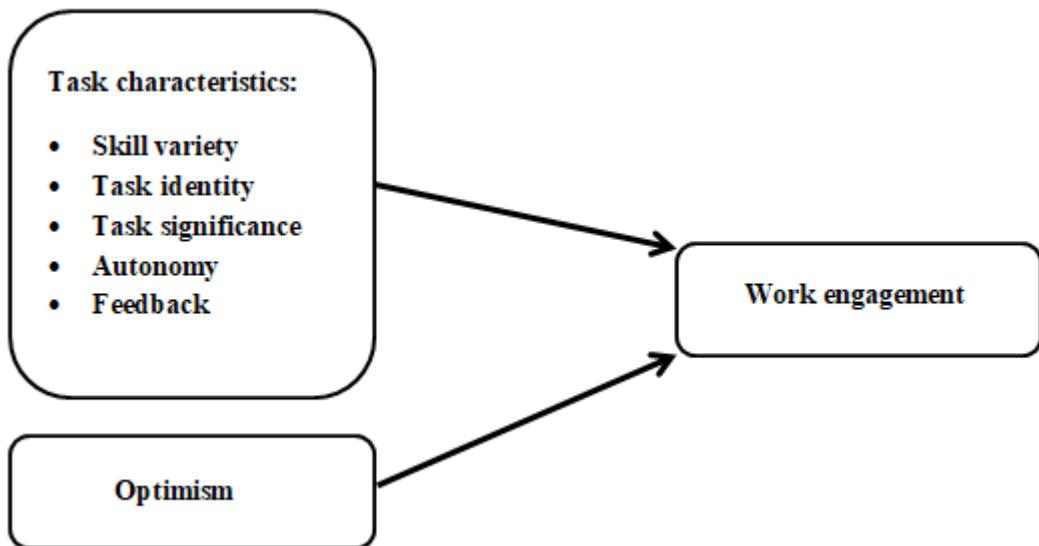


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of study. Adapted from task characteristics by Hackman and Oldham (1980), optimism by Scheier and Carver (1985), and work engagement by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004).

1.5 Definition of term

Table 1

The conceptual and operational definition related to the study

Term	Conceptual definition	Operational Definition
Work Engagement	Work engagement is “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”	Work engagement is about employee positive attitude that will be measured by vigor, dedication, and absorption towards job they really

	(Schaufeli et al., 2002 as cited in Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 209)	want to devote in the aspect of time and energy.
Task Characteristics	<p>Hackman and Oldham (1980) described Task Characteristics as a set of variables that relate the core nature of work with work environment which can lead to high internal work motivation, job satisfaction and high-quality performance (Hussein, 2017).</p>	<p>A task characteristic is a source that can drive employee's motivation and involved with their work. Thus, will be measured by skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill variety is the degree to which the person can use a number of different skills, abilities and talents in their job. • Task identity is the degree to which the person completes their job from the start to the end with an identifiable outcome. • Task significance is about the important of the job. It is the degree to which the employee's work has influence within or outside organization or other employee. • Autonomy is the degree to which

the freedom, independence and discretion has been provided to the person in their job.

- Feedback is how well the employee keep informed regarding their job performances and outcome.

Optimism	Optimism is a person general tendency to expect positive outcomes even in the face of adversity (Scheier & Carver, 1985).	Optimism is about one's positive belief attitude towards something they want to achieve. Thus, will be measured by expectancies of a person about something in their life.
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1.6 Significance of the study

This study has a significant contribution to different aspects in the field of Human Resources Development (HRD) especially for government sector. Firstly, the study of the relationship of task characteristics and employee optimism towards work engagement has a contribution to the body of knowledge. So, this can enhance the understanding about work engagement among the government's servant. This study can help to extend the understanding about task characteristics of the employees. This is because every human is wired differently which is they have a diversity of background, talents, skills, abilities, and knowledge. Therefore, by understanding the task characteristics that consist of five core

characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback, it will help the HRD to reconstruct and redesign their organization through planned change in process and systems such as training and development. Thus, it can help to improve the work engagement and performance of their employees. This is very important because it enables them to enhance the effectiveness of the administration performance such as the service they provides for the society, the implementation of the policy, program and strategies and so on.

Besides, for the optimism, it can help the HRD practitioner to create a positive work experience among the employee. This relates to HRD practitioner who believes that they have a responsibility to make a positive contribution to health and psychology and social welfare of workers in their organization. So, it is very important to inform what organization expectations to the employees so they have clear information about what is needed of them or priorities are. Thus, it can ease the confused, anxiety and distress among the employees. This is because it can affect employees' belief and trust towards something they want to contribute and accomplish in work and life. Therefore, psychological effect is very important in influencing work engagement among the employee which can help the organization to achieve their mission and goals.

Last but not least, the significance of this study in term of organization is it can help them to redesign the task characteristics. This can help them to promote employee's engagement in workforce by understanding the employee characteristics. Besides, it also will enable the organization to create a resourceful working environment and develop training programs that can cultivate positive attitude and mentality among the employees.

1.7 Limitation of study

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample size of this study was only focussing on the employees that working under public sector only. Thus, the study cannot generalize to the other employees and other industries. Next, this study was conducted through quantitative method in which the data will be collected using survey questionnaire. This may affect the collection of data as respondents' responses are often influenced by their interest within the period of the survey conducted. Besides, due to the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) by Malaysian government due to Covid-19, researcher facing several difficulties to conducted the data collection.

1.8 Summary

This chapter has presented the background and problem statement associated with this study. There are seven specific objectives that have set up and followed by the hypothesis. Furthermore, the key terms used in this study were described to enhance the readers' understanding of this report.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study is conducted to identify the relationship of five dimension of task characteristics (autonomy, task significance, feedback, skill variety and task identity) and optimism towards work engagement among the employees in public sector. In this chapter, there are several section has been provided. Firstly, it will be started with the discussion of the issues related to the study. Next, the theory and model that can be applied in study will be presented and explained. Then, a several discussion on related past research findings is done based on literature review by using journal and article according to previous researcher's related study

2.2 Issue related to the study

This section will discuss and explained about the issue related to the study which is work engagement as a whole. Then, follow by task characteristics and optimism.

2.2.1 Work engagement

A study about work engagement has increased over the past two decades (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). This term has comes in variety of definitions. There was a lot of approaches and different conceptualizations have been established to see which an appropriate measure that amply the characteristics of the concept (Thomas, 2009). So, it is necessary to briefly

analysis how the concept developed in order to make clear about its meaning and to drive a more accurate measure (Angus & Robert, 2017).

The Academy of Management Journal article, “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement” work by Khan (1990), the ones who first mentioned about the term of engagement in the performance of job roles. He defined engagement as the “harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” (p. 694). He proposed that the terms of personal engagement and disengagement could be range from very low to very high. According to Khan, a psychological condition of personal engagement was grouped into three major elements which are meaningfulness, safety-sense and availability-sense.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) assumed that engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy which are considered the direct counterpart to the three dimensions of burnout such as exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy. Engaged employees are resilient and have an effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as fully able to handle their job demands. The three dimensions of burnout are measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). According to Maslach and Leiter (1997), low scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and high scores on efficacy are indicative for engagement.

Conversely, Schaufeli et al. (2002) argued with the statement of Maslach and Leiter (1997) that burnout-engagement is impossible to be measures by using Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) only. Then, they created new theories called Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory model of work engagement and developed new instrument based on the definition.