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The Role of Perceived Organizational Support in the Relationship of Organizational Commitment and Employee Engagement: A Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

Though employee engagement topic has become one of the prominent issues among academics and practitioners, unexpectedly, less attention has been paid yet to make it more explicate. Therefore, this study considers both the qualitative and quantitative research on engagement to discover the manifestation of employee engagement and its antecedents. It has sometimes been found that the results of the prior studies are inconsistent and unsystematic. Moreover, there is a confusing and overlapping concept has been found between employee engagement and organizational commitment. In addition, previous studies identified the variability of three components of commitment on employee positive behavior. These considerable inconsistencies in results, thus, let the present study to tackle the research gaps by suggesting a theoretical linkage between three components model of commitment and employee engagement manifested by job and organization engagement. Furthermore, this conceptual paper suggests a moderating role of perceived organizational support to buffer the association between commitment and enjoyment. In addition, it explains the current research framework under the reciprocal norms of social exchange theory and provides direction for further research.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Three Components Model of Commitment, Perceived Organizational Support, Social Exchange Theory.

INTRODUCTION

In recent time, the concept of Employee Engagement has got a significant attention from academics and corporate consultants. Scholars (e.g., Gruman & Saks,

2011; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010) have considered it as the key to make the organization successful and competitive since it has the direct contribution at the bottom line of the organizations. In fact, Kahn (1992) as well as Macey et al. (2009) cited that employee engagement is directly related to performance outcomes. Macey et al. (2009) also asserted that companies can achieve their competitive advantage by ensuring the higher level of engagement among the employees. Contemporary studies (e.g., Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane & Truss, 2008; Richman, 2006) have identified that employee engagement is the key driver of employee performance (Shuck &Wollard, 2010; Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane & Truss, 2008; Richman, 2006). Furthermore, it has also been found that employee engagement has the positive association with financial results (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), return on assets and profitability (Macey et al., 2009), employees' job performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010) and client satisfaction (Salanova et al., 2005). Therefore, it is imperative to give focus on employee engagement to achieve competitive advantage and to improve the level of organizational performance.

However, a higher number of disengaged employees can be found across the world in present times. For instance, Gallup's survey (2012) conducted the survey on 142 countries demonstrated that only 13% employees on average are engaged at work around the world. More specifically, in South Asia, only 10 percent employees are engaged. It indicates that the majority of the employees across the world are disengaged. This increasing number of disengaged employees is the great concern for the organizations as Kahn (1990) suggested that employees, who are not engaged at their work, have lack of motivation and willingness to put discretionary effort during role performance and that will ultimately leads to lower employee productivity. Based on this backdrop of the importance of employee engagement construct that has the positive influence on organizational success and the increasing trend of disengagement employees across the word, the critical issue is that to identify the factors that may help to lead to higher level of engagement. Moreover, though employee engagement has gained a substantial interest in practices, lack of research among academics made a need to call for future research to understand the role of employee engagement. Furthermore, scholars (e.g., Lee & Ok, 2015; Suan & Nasurdin, 2013; Karatepe, 2013; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011) found limited studies conducted to identify the drivers of employee engagement. This current study, therefore, attempts to conceptualize the role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement. The remaining part of this study deals with the discussion of the concept of employee engagement and organizational commitment and developing the propositions.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The concept of employee engagement has begun to appear in the academic literature around two decade ego (Simpson, 2009). Schaufeli et al. (2008) asserted the concept of employee engagement from burnout study as an effort to examine not only employees' level of unwell-being but also to realize the level of well-being of employees. In the existing literature, employee engagement is defined and explained by different individuals and organizations from different perspectives which make it more challenging to find a universal definition of employee engagement. Recently, though the employee engagement construct has drawn a great lead of consideration both in research and practice, different entity use different indicators and scale to measure the construct (Robertson & Cooper, 2010). Hence, we discuss the concept of engagement in a comprehensive way.

At the very early in the academic research, Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement in an article titled as "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work". He defined personal engagement as the "harshening of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance". In contrary, personal disengagement is "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance" (p. 694). According to Kahn (1990), there are three psychological conditions that need to be fulfilled to stimulate the level of engagement among employees during their jobs by improving the contact of employees with their works. These psychological conditions are (i) meaningfulness i.e., how meaningful is it for an employee to bring himself into the performance?, (ii) psychological safety i.e., how safe is it to do so?, and (iii) psychological availability i.e., how available is he to do so? Kahn (1990) further asserted that the level of engagement of employees will be determined by the personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) during role performance i.e. how physically involved in doing their tasks, how cognitively aware and concern and how emotionally attached at job environment. In fact, Kahn (1990) stated that, to know what makes an employee engaged at their jobs, it is very crucial to recognize the different dimensions of meaningfulness (work elements), safety (social elements including management style, process and organizational norms), and availability (distractions) (p. 705). In a word, employee engagement referred to the psychological presence of employees at work (Kahn, 1990).

The study of May et al. (2004) empirically tested Kahn's (1990) conceptual model and identified that all the three dimensions of engagement i.e. physical, cognitive and emotional were important to determine employee engagement. Further, this study demonstrated that employee engagement is the combination of

cognitive and emotional work actions experiences which make individuals to behave during performing a job role (May et al., 2004). Further, Rothbard (2001) extended the work of Kahn's (1990) model and identified two more components such as attention and absorption of engagement and defined engagement as the psychological presence of employees that manifested by attention and absorption during their role work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Saks, 2006).

Another group of researchers giving concentration on burnout concept consider employee engagement as the contrary of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). They found that burnout dimensions i.e. exhaustion and cynicism are the opposite of engagement dimensions i.e. vigor and dedication (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Hence, burnout is treated as the "erosion of engagement with the job" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 416). With this view, Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) defined employee engagement as a helpful, pleasing, job-related position of mind that is characterized by vigor (i.e. energy and mental resilience), dedication (enthusiasm of individuals), and absorption (full concentration of individuals). In other word, they asserted that employee engagement is not a momentary position rather it's a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive condition.

In an attempt to differentiate employee engagement form other constructs, studies (e.g., Christian et al., 2011; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011; Saks, 2006) confirmed that the concept of engagement is different from others like commitment, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior. The major difference of engagement is that it involves the active utilization of cognitive and emotional expressions during one's role performance (Saks, 2006). Hence, highly engaged employees are more likely to involve themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during their role performance (Kahn, 1990). In addition, Saks (2006) identified two types of roles an employee may play within organizations, one is the job role during doing the tasks and another one is the role as a member of that organization. This view is supported by the other prior research (Findley Musgrove et al., 2014; Ghosh et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2014). Saks (2006) stated that considering the two components of engagement is very critical to understand the relationship between employee engagement and its predictors. For instance, Saks (2006) found that a job characteristic was a significant predictor of job engagement rather organization engagement and procedural justice had a significant association with organization engagement than job engagement. Based on the prior studies, the current study intends to take two types of engagement namely job engagement and organization engagement.

Although, Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al., (2001) models identified different psychological situations that are crucial for employee engagement, they did not explained properly that why the level of engagement is varied among individuals. Saks (2006) suggested the norms of social exchange theory (SET) to give a strong

theoretical ground that may explain this varying degree of engagement. More specifically, it is treated as the more accepted and broadly used theory in recent academic research to explain employee engagement (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Under the tenet of SET, it is a reciprocal relationship between two parties through a chain of interactions who are involved in a reciprocal interdependence and felt obliged (Cropanzano & Mictchell, 2005). In other words, individuals involved in all social relationships in order to assess the benefits that they will get by having those relationships (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Saks (2006) clarified this view by showing the reciprocal interdependence between the organizations what supports they provide to their employees and the willingness of employees to ensure better performance towards the organizations. In fact, SET gave a theoretical rationale to explain the phenomena that why employees are likely to engage more or less in their workplace or to remain within the organizations. Andrew and Sofian (2012) argued that employee engagement entailed psychological and emotional relationship between organizations and their employees which could be converted into positive or negative behaviors that individuals are likely to show in their work context.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

In the academic literature, multiple definitions of Organizational Commitment (OC) have been derived by industrial and organizational psychology, but still poorly defined (Aityan and Gupta, 2012). For example, Porter at al. (1974) defined commitment as the employees feeling of obligation which exerts the efforts towards organizational goals. They also stated that OC is the employees' identification with and involvement to the organization which may help them to come with organizational values (Porter et al., 1974). Johnston et al. (1990) conceptualized commitment as a combine function of employees' behavior and attitudes. Scholars defined OC as the behavioral functions that help employees to identify themselves in the organization and help them to realize a strong desire, a need or an obligation to come out with organizational success (George et al., 1993; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Blau & Boal, 1987). Later, Suliman and Iles (2000) suggested four models to conceptualize commitment such as attitudinal model, behavioral model, normative model, and multidimensional model.

According to attitudinal model of Porter et al. (1974), OC is the strength of an employee to identify themselves within an organization which was supported by Mathieu and Zajac (1990). In this view, Mowday et al. (1982) asserted that committed employees will give effort in success of the organization and keep a strong desire to be a member of this organization. On the other hand, behavioral model emphasized on the employees' loyalty to their organization as they invested

time, friendship or pension (Suliman & Iles, 2000). The foundation of behavioral model come from side-bet theory of Becker (1960) identified that employees will retain with the organization if they realize the cost of leaving of that particular organization (Laka-Mathebula, 2004). Consistently, Kanter (1968) defined OC as the profit associated with continued participation of employees and cost related to leave that organization. The normative model conceptualize by Wiener (1982) posited that the OC is the totality of normative pressures to act in a way to meet organizational goals. Further, he stated that employees will be highly committed to their organization if they feel that this is right and moral thing to do. In fact, OC can be achieved by incorporating employee's goals and values with organizational aims (Suliman & Isles, 2000).

The more recent multidimensional model initiated by Meyer and Allen (1991) has recognized that component of commitment is more complex than emotional attachment, perceived cost or moral obligation (Laka-Mathebula, 2004). Early in the 1958, Kelman proposed the multidimensional model consisting compliance, identification and internalization and the attitudinal change as the constructs of commitment which was confirmed by O' Reilly and Chatman (1986). In their study, Meyer and Allen (1991) introduced three component models of commitment to explore all the forms of underlying mind-set to attach with the organization. They identified three types of commitment such as, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment to explain the behavior of employees. This conceptual model is widely accepted and widely used as theoretical framework in several studies (Gunlu et al., 2010; Joolideh & Yeshodhara, 2009).

Affective commitment (AC) defined as the positive emotional behavior to the organization and also has the identity and strong feelings with the organization (Manion, 2004; Laschinger et al., 2000; Meyer & Allen, 1991). In this view, they suggested that affective commitment is predicted by personal characteristics, organizational structure and work experiences while the outcomes include low level of absenteeism and turnover. In another study, Meyer et al. (1993) ascertain that employees with affective commitment want to continue their job with the existing organization not because of only they need an occupation rather they want to (p. 539).

Continuance commitment (CC) is the "knowledge of the costs associated with leaving the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In other words, continuance commitment is the willingness of an employee to remain with the organization because of the "non-transferable" investments such as, retirement, relationship with other employees, etc. (Reichers, 1985).

In addition, normative commitment (NC) termed as a "feeling of obligation to continue employment" (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Randall and Cote (1991) argued that employees feel obligation to their organization if the organization has invested (i.e.

spent time and money in training and development) on them. Scholars also noted that this type of commitment varies from person to person based on their sense of duty and obligation to the work in their organization (Jaros et al., 1993).

It is worth to note that the current study have considered all the three facets of multidimensional model of commitment such as AC, CC and NC. The rationale is being on the basis of findings of previous studies (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014; Suliman and Iles, 2000) identified that different facets of commitment such as AC, CC and NC have different impact on performance (van Dick, 2001; Meyer et al., 2002) In this regard, the present study intends to conceptualize commitment as AC, CC and NC.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Although previous studies ((e.g.,Yalabik, 2013; Shuck et al., 2011; Richardsen et al., 2006) identified the positive relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement, there is a strong debate between these two construct. Academic researchers (i.e. Sharma & Sharma, 2010; Mohapatra & Sharma, 2010) claimed that these constructs are identical while other studies (Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014; Barnes & Collier, 2013; Yalabik, 2013; Shuck et al., 2011) showed a distinctive validity between commitment and engagement. Moreover, studies (e.g., Hansen et al., 2014; Karatepe et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2013; Albrecht, 2012; Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011) also claimed that commitment is the outcome of engagement. However, Yalabik (2013) suggested that organizational commitment is the predictor of engagement since it found as the antecedent of different forms of behavioral outcomes (Zopiatis et al., 2014; Kara et al., 2013) and engagement is such an outcome (Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Woods & Sofat, 2013). Though prior research has already been established that commitment towards the organization should come before engagement, more evidence is still needed on this phenomena (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010).

It has been documented that organizational commitment is the key factor to achieve organizational success (Suliman & Al-Junaibi, 2010; Suliman & Iles, 2000) and organization should understand the way by which they can improve the level of employees' commitment to enhance the employees' on-the-job positive behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Authors also suggested that employees with high AC and CC have strong feelings to stay with the organization (Suliman & Al-Junaibi, 2010). Previous studies (Meyer et al., 2002; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) have focused their concentration on the analysis of AC. For example, studies found that AC has significant association with employees' positive behavior such as organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer et al., 2002; van Dick, 2001), motivation and

productivity (Dello Russo et al., 2013; Vecina, et al., 2013). Similar results have been found for CC and NC. For instance, employees with NC had positive association with organizational citizenship behavior but it is not as significant as for AC (van Dick, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Contrary, CC showed significant association with absenteeism and fluctuation rather organizational citizenship behavior and performance (van Dick, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Furthermore, researchers (e.g., Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014; Yalabik et al., 2013; Barnes & Collier, 2013) also showed a significant positive association between AC and engagement while CC had a weaker relationship with engagement.

However, there is a strong debate about commitment and employee engagement. Though Kahn (1990) stated that employees' commitment to the organization should come before engagement but strong recommendation is still required for further clarification (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010). According to social exchange theory, employees who received higher valued exchanged content from their organization will be more committed by showing positive attitude and feeling obligated to the organization (Blau, 1964), which in turn create higher interest to ensure the success of the organization and make them more engaged to the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005). Thus, this study assumes commitment as the antecedent of engagement and posits a positive association between commitment and engagement.

Proposition I: Affective commitment is positively related to job engagement.

Proposition II: Affective commitment has positive relationship with employee engagement.

Proposition III: Continuance commitment has positive association with job engagement.

Proposition IV: Continuance commitment is positively related to employee engagement.

Proposition V: Normative commitment is positively associated to job engagement.

Proposition VI: Normative commitment is positively related to employee engagement.

MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is defined as the degree of extent to which employees believe that their organization give values to their contribution and have cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2004). In other words, POS is the social exchange relationship between employer and employee. Scholars identified POS as important

construct since it has the positive impact on the quality relationship of management-employee (Wayne et al., 1997), employee engagement (Kinnunen, Feldt, & Makikangas, 2008; Saks, 2006), organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and retention (Eisenberger et al., 2004) and has the negative impact on turnover intentions and deviant behavior (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). More specifically, organizations that give more support and care for their employees, they feel reciprocate and want to show more obligation towards their organization under the norms of SET (Rhoades et al., 2001). Researchers (Saks, 2006) argued that when employees perceived that their organization treated them fairly, they will show strong engagement towards their organization and show negative attitudes towards the deviant behavior (Loi et al., 2006).

Though, current academic research (e.g., Karatepe & Demir, 2014; Karatepe et al., 2014) have given focus on identifying the drivers and mediators of engagement, the effect of availability of organizational resources (i.e. POS) on engagement are in poor consideration (Lee & Ok, 2015). As researcher (i.e. Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2014) has mentioned earlier that employee engagement had the direct impact on performance, it is very crucial to give focus on increasing the level of employee engagement. However, Parker and Griffin (2011) stated that employees with low level of organizational commitment, not essentially always show a low level of behavioral outcomes (i.e. employee engagement) since other organizational resources (i.e. POS) may have the buffering impact on the relationship between antecedents and consequences. Scholars suggested that a moderating variable could play a buffering role to modify the link (Emmerik, Jawahar & Stone, 2005; Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001). More specifically, researchers suggested that elements of organizational resources such as POS may play as a moderator and could have the buffering impact to decrease employees' negative behavior and enhance positive attitudes towards the organization (Alfes et al., 2013; Sawang, 2012). Shantz et al. (2014) identified that high level of work-related positive outcome i.e. employee engagement may exert from a different sources of work-related resources i.e. POS. Though, prior studies (Ahmed, et al., 2015; Caesens, et al., 2014; Sulea et al., 2012) found the positive association between POS and engagement, limited research have focused the moderating role of POS on the relationship between engagement and it's predictors (Lin et al., 2014). In order to enhance the understanding of the relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement, this study, under the SET, thus, theorizes the link between organizational commitment and employee engagement with the moderating role of

Proposition VII: POS moderates the relationship between organizational commitment (AC, CC, NC) and engagement (job and organization).

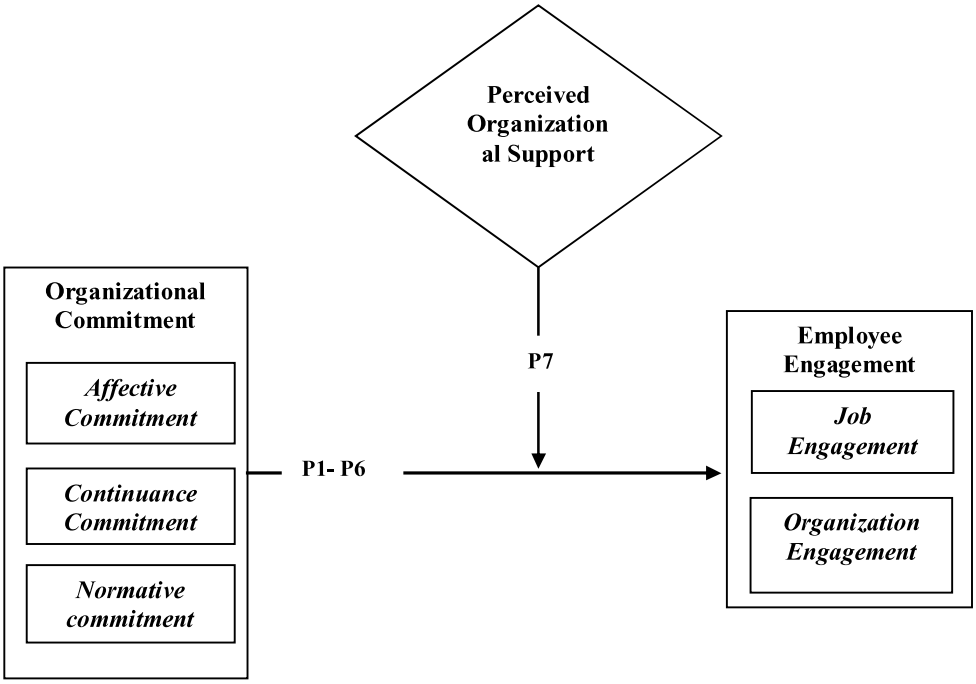

Figure I: Conceptual Model

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This conceptual paper gives an overview of the development of employee engagement concept. This study considers the overlapping concept of employee engagement and organizational commitment. It identifies that scholars (e.g., Findley Musgrove et al., 2014) have started to consider employee engagement at organizational level and job level as well. It defines organization engagement as the dynamic, psychological presence of mind expressed physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance of the employees that links them to their organizations. It suggests job engagement as the work-related position of mind manifested by vigor, absorption and dedication during the role performance of employees in their work context.

This study intends to put employee engagement in the research focal as engagement has the direct impact on employee as well as organizational

performance (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Therefore, employee engagement is a crucial indicator for occupational well-being of employees and organizations at large. Thus, human resource practitioners, academics and consultants should come at the forefront to facilitate employee engagement by considering the both scholarly and practical knowledge expanding around this subject of study. However, it seems that there is no single step or method that may create engaged workforce in the organization. In this uncertain business environment, probably more than any other time in current years, it has become more challenging to engage the employees towards their jobs and organizations. Organizations, who develop passionately committed workforce, not as they will be paid to get committed, but they want to be committed, may lead to a higher level of employee engagement that is the key factor for the organizations to achieve competitive advantage. This paper, thus, theorizes the link between organizational commitment and employee engagement. Further, this article conceptualizes the moderating role of POS on commitment-engagement linkages.

This current study discusses the relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement that call for the future research potential in the academic literature. For example, since this paper considers the outcomes of job resources i.e. different components of organizational commitment as the predictors of engagement, further research may concentrate on the different job resources i.e. HRM practices. In addition, this theoretical framework can be expanded by including the consequences of engagement as the performance measures.

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