



Mediating Effect of Work Engagement in The Link Between Performance Appraisal and Employee Performance: Developing A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

Performance appraisal is considered as the assessment which is been conducted and controlled in an organization through a formal procedure by providing employees with feedbacks on their job performance. This paper is a conceptual one that aim to propose a conceptual framework and establish a link between performance appraisal and employee performance. Within this framework. Conceptually, the paper will propose the possibility of work engagement towards mediating this connection. Studies that examine the effect of performance appraisal on employee performance and the mechanism through which it influences employee performance appears to be scarce. Hence, this paper will develop a study model by suggesting some prepositions that will later be tested empirically within the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the state of Selangor Malaysia.

Keywords: Performance Appraisal, Work Engagement, Employee performance

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INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has played a vital role in ensuring the development of most economies, specifically in the developing countries. Likewise, SMEs, mostly account for several business across the globe (World Bank, 2022). Thus, SMEs, usually represent almost 90% of most of the businesses as well as more than 50% of employment rate in the world (World Bank, 2022). Hence, SMEs has played a vital role towards Malaysian's economic growth and development. It has played an important role in fostering income and employment in the past and also served as the backbone for industrial development in the nation (Tahir et al., 2018).

However, enhancing productivity has been the major concern of several SMEs in across the world and Malaysia in particular. Thus, different organizations insist that human capital are the most crucial in ensuring increased productivity in modern organization (Priem & Butler, 2001). In addition, firms with dynamic human capital possess highly skilled workforce which are often considered as income generators capable of ensuring competitive advantage of modern firms (Priem & Butler, 2001). So, effective management of human resources has become imperative for any organization in the quest for attainment of success. Likewise, workers commitment, human resource quality, as well as their satisfaction on the various activities they do within their organizations have consequences on the firm's productivity (Salman & Ganie, 2020).

Malaysian SMEs like any other firms in the world seeking for sustainable competitive advantage requires an inspired organizational capability through retention of skilled and highly motivated employees (Armstrong, 2010). Hence, effective HRM practices such as; training, compensation, performance appraisal and job design plays an important role in shaping the behaviors of employees in modern firms (Armstrong, 2010). Likewise, ensuring high level of work engagement in an organization is capable of enhancing the level of employee's performance towards the attainment of success (Yao et al., 2022).

Since SMEs has a greater role to play in the economic development of a country, it has become imperative for the exploration of this industry. This study chooses SMEs in Malaysia as the subject matter considering lack of adequate studies that seek to examine the mediating influence of work engagement in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance in Malaysian context.

Problem Statement

The SMEs have been playing the major role towards enhancing economies of most developing countries and also account for majority of businesses worldwide (World Bank, 2022). Thus, the SMEs are said to be knowledge and dynamic as production factory for economic development as well as poverty alleviation in both developed and developing nations of the world. This collective recognition of the SMEs is often justified by its contribution in the aspects of job creation, introduction of several business methods, provision of efficient resource utilization as well as its ability to mobilize domestic savings for the purpose of investment among others (Abdullahi et al., 2015).

Thus, Amegayibor, (2021) posits that performance of employees' amongst SMEs has been slow due to several challenges as highlighted in the literature which includes; demographic factors such as age, sex, education, and tenure. Rahaman et al., (2021) argued that the factors influencing employees' performance amongst SMEs includes working condition, employees' engagement and autonomy. According to Dumaguing, (2022) employee-related factors as well as job-related factors are said to be crucial factors affecting the performance of employees. In addition, Watetu, (2017) suggests that, working condition, management style, job design and employee motivation as the factors influencing the performance of employees in an organization. Arshad & Fatima, (2021) argues that, work-life imbalance, discrimination, lack of cooperation among colleagues, harassment, unbiased evaluations and financial reward are crucial factors influencing the performance of employees amongst SMEs in most of the developing countries.

Consequently, an irresistible 98.5% of the 920,624-business formation in Malaysia are seen to be SMEs. In spite the overwhelming role played by SMEs as the backbone of Malaysian business environment, performance of most of the SMEs in Malaysia remains very low when compared with other peer countries (Kaur, 2024). The Malaysian SMEs have been confronted with serious obstacles concerning growth and sustainability, such as shortage of qualified and well-trained personnel. These challenges often leads to low level of employees' performance and overall productivity amongst the Malaysian SMEs (Kaur, 2024). Thus, the performance of SMEs towards Malaysian GDP has been declining to %37.4 in 2021 when compared with %38.1 in the previous years.

Research Objectives

This paper aim to examine the mediating effect of work engagement on the link between performance appraisal and employee performance within the context of SMEs in the state of Selangor Malaysia. The main objectives are;

- a. To examine the relationship between performance appraisal and employee performance
- b. To examine the relationship between performance appraisal and work engagement
- c. To examine the relationship between work engagement and employee performance
- d. To examine the mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between performance appraisal and employee performance

The Underpinning Theory

Theories are employed by researchers specifically in quantitative studies in order to answer research questions (Cresswell, 2014). The main theory applied in this study is the Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) theory.

Several theories have provided explanations on how organizations can utilize internal resources in attainment of organizational objectives. For instance, administrative and organization theory, resource-based view theory (RBV), ability motivation opportunity (AMO) theory and progressive utilization theory (PROUT). The administrative and organization theory focuses on legalization of exercises in organization. While the RBV emphasized on a pursuit of utilizing organizations resources for a competitive advantage. AMO theory laid emphasis on certain reciprocal features on how HRM describe the relationship with outcome (Paauwe, 2009). Thus, the administrative and organization theory is characterized with major weaknesses, as its concentrates more on the structure of an organization other than the resources (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). The RBV lacks managerial implications and it implies infinite regress (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). Similarly, PROUT theory require practical importance as confirmed by (Maheshvarananda & Branch, 2010). Likewise, AMO theory considers factors that affect individual at organizational level. Hence, AMO theory here stands to be more suitable for this study than the RBV, PROUT, administrative and organization theory due to the fact that it has the potentiality to explain the complex relationship between how individuals are managed and subsequent organizational outcome. Many studies have employed AMO in similar studies and achieve suitable result. For instance, the study conducted by Sani et al., (2023) and Sani & Ibrahim, (2021). Consequently, AMO theory is employed in this study in describing the employees' behavior and subsequent performance towards achieving organizational goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Performance

Employee performance is seen as the success or accomplishment of a particular responsibility which is measured against specified standards of completeness, accuracy, speed and cost. The level of an attainment in which individuals fulfills the cooperate mission of an organization is considered as performance (Cascio, 2006). In this study, employee performance is used as dependent variable.

Work Engagement

Work engagement can be seen as a productive and satisfying work related disposition basically categorized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). However, the three main dimensions of work engagement includes (1) 'vigor' which is defined as high level of mental resilience and energy while performing responsibilities in the organization (2) 'absorption' is considered as completely being focused and largely engaged in another person's responsibilities to an extent time is been taken so fast and one is encountering problems with disengagement from the work (3) 'dedication' which is described as a sense of enthusiasm, pride, significance and challenge (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009). In this study, work engagement is used as mediating variable in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance.

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal as an important key used in providing employees in an organization with incentive to the best personnel in a form of motivation so as to make them feel satisfied with their organization (Joarder & Ashraf, 2012). performance appraisal is defined as the formal performance assessment process taken in by an organization to determine the best performing workers and provide them with feedback on their respective performance (Gravina & Siers, 2011). In this study, performance appraisal is used as independent variable.

Development of Hypotheses

Performance Appraisal and Employee Performance

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effect of performance appraisal and employee performance in different context. For instance, Ugoani, (2020) to investigate the influence of performance appraisal as a component of HRM practices and employee performance using 109 respondents amongst charitable organizations in Nigeria. The result of the investigation revealed that, performance appraisal is positively related to employee performance. Also, Binta et al., (2019) examines the influence of performance appraisal with 1797 participants amongst employees in the federal ministry of education in Nigeria. The outcome of the investigation indicated that, performance appraisal has positive relationship with employee performance. Similarly, Helal, (2022) conducted a study on the influence of performance appraisal on employee performance with 100 participants. The result shows that performance appraisal is positively related to employee performance. Accordingly, this study hypothesized that;

H1: Performance appraisal has significant influence on employee performance

Performance Appraisal and Work Engagement

Studies have been carried out in different context to examine the effect of performance appraisal on work engagement. For example, Aboramadan et al., (2020) in an attempt to explore the mediating effect of work engagement in the link between HRM practices and organizational commitment in Palestinian Universities with 237 employees as respondents, the result also reveals a significant relationship between HRM practices and work engagement. The result suggested that, the presence of effective and fair performance appraisal makes employees reciprocate to their organization by ensuring high level of work engagement. Likewise, Aktar & Pangil, (2018) carried out an investigation on mediating effect of organizational commitment in the connection between HRM practices such as performance appraisal and work engagement in Bangladesh banking sector using 376 employees as respondents, the findings indicated a significant relationship between performance appraisal and work engagement. The findings further reveals that these HRM practices are said to be substantial predictors of work engagement. In spite the significant relationship between these practices and work engagement, the result also suggests that performance appraisal has the highest value (0.99) amongst other practices. This implies that, employees in Bangladesh banking sector believed that effective performance appraisal is one of the most effective pillar which can be utilized in ensuring high level of work engagement in an organization towards attaining strong competitive advantage. Likewise, this study hypothesized that;

H2: Performance Appraisal has significant influence on employee performance

Work Engagement and Employee Performance

Many researches have been conducted to investigate the influence of work engagement on employee performance. For example, Tabasum & Shaikh, (2022) explores the link between work engagement and performance of employees from several banks in Pakistan using 400 employees as sample size. The outcome of the exploration maintains that work engagement is significantly related to employees' performance. Equally, Ismawati et al., (2021) investigated the effect of work engagement on performance of employees using 143 participants from hospital employees in Mali. The result of the investigation shows that work engagement is positively related to employee performance. Again, Hendrik et al., (2021) examines the influence of work engagement on performance of employees using 38 employees as respondents in the study. The outcome of the study suggests that work engagement has significant effect on employee's performance. Moreover, Ismail et al., (2019) conducted a study to investigate the link between work engagement and employee performance in Lebanese firms using 186 respondents as sample size. The result shows that work engagement is significantly related to employee performance. Hence, this study hypothesized that;

H3: Work Engagement has significant influence on employee performance

Work Engagement as Mediator

Numerous researches have been conducted on mediating effect of work engagement in academic literature of different field of study. For instance, Aboramadan et al., (2020) examine the mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between HRM practices and affective commitment using 237 employees from Palestinian universities as sample size. The result indicated a full mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between HRM practices and affective commitment. The study suggest that work engagement plays a crucial role in mediating the link between HRM practices and affective commitment. Again, Emmanuel, (2020) to examine the mediating role of job satisfaction and work engagement in connection among organizational embeddedness and affective commitment in Ghanaian hospitality industry with 274 front line employees as

respondents, the result revealed that work engagement mediate the linkage between organizational embeddedness and employees' affective commitment. Thus, the result highlighted the importance of work engagement as mediating mechanism in explaining the link between organizational embeddedness and affective commitment.

Based on the above-mentioned empirical evidences, it is clear that work engagement was utilized as mediating construct and revealed a positive outcome. The results of several prior researches indicated that work engagement is capable of providing a clear explanation on the linkage between two constructs (dependent and independent variables). Thus, this study hypothesized that;

H4: Work Engagement mediate the relationship between performance appraisal and employee performance.

Research Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, it has been confirmed clearly that significant relationship exist between performance appraisal and employee performance. The literature have also confirmed the significant link between performance appraisal and employee performance. In addition, it has been confirmed that work engagement is capable of explaining the link between the study variables (independent and dependent variables). Hence, findings of the previous studies are been generalized based on several context without taking into consideration the SMEs in Malaysia and the state of Selangor in particular. Studies that tend to examine the mediating effect of work engagement in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance appear to be scanty in the bulk of literature. Thus, Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework which will later be empirically tested;

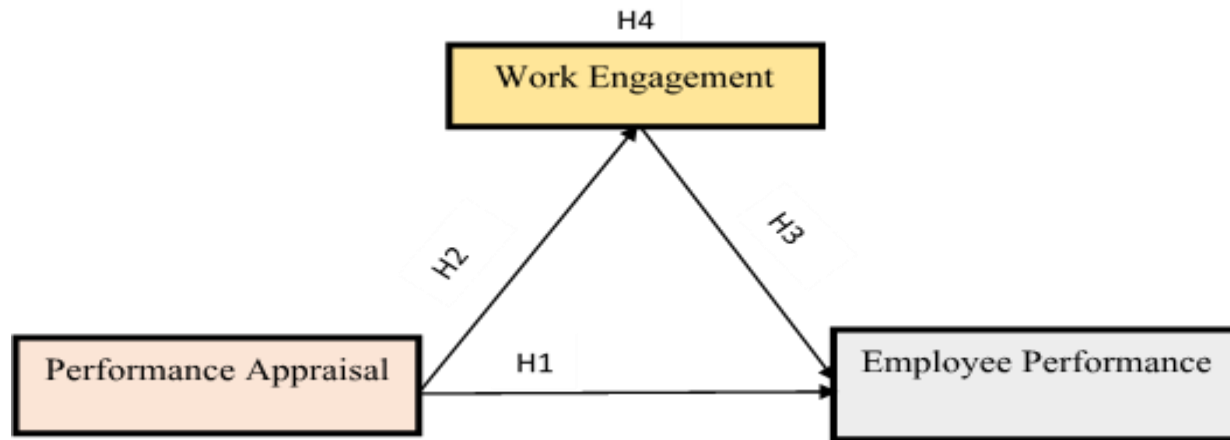


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study intend to apply quantitative method and it is cross-sectional in nature. Data in this study will collected using questionnaire which will be Carefully distributed amongst SMEs in the state of Selangor. Hence, a simple random sampling procedure will be utilized in choosing the respondents from the target population of this study. Again, the respondents will be required to provide their respective demographic information such as gender, marital status, age sex, educational qualification, work experience, and monthly salary before responding to the questionnaire. A total number of 390 questionnaires will be distributed to the respondents by ensuring by ensuring a minimum of 35% response rate to reflect 75% of the entire responses in the study as suggested by Sekaran & Bougie, (2016). This is to ensure a suitable and adequate response rate. Similarly, the instruments intended to use for the purpose of this study includes, the HRM practices instrument (performance appraisal) will be measured using seven (7) items developed by Snell & Dean, (1992). These items consists of performance estimation used by firms such as; the performance appraisal form for the performance assessment purpose, the criteria adopted for the performance assessment, and also the performance evaluation feedback arrangement. While work engagement will be measured using the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) with seventeen (17) items consisting of three dimensions which includes vigor, dedication and absorption developed by Schaufeli & Bakker, (2003). Also, employee performance will be measured based on the short version of individual work performance questionnaire (IWPQ) using eight (8) items developed by Koopmans et al., (2015). The study intend to adapt these items from previous studies in order to suit the current study. In addition, a pretest will be conducted to ensure an appropriate face-to-face and content validity of the study instruments. Consequently, an exploratory factor Analysis (EFA) will also carried out with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) on all the items involved in the current study constructs for so as to ensure reliability of the entire items before embarking on final survey (Shkeer & Awang, 2019). Equally, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in IBM SPSS Amos 24 will be utilized to determine the relationship between the study constructs.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper will adequately provide explanation on the influence of work engagement in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance within the context of SMEs in Malaysia and state of Selangor in particular. SMEs are said to be the major contributors of a country's GDP. Hence, the unique outcome of this research work will meaningfully add value to the bulk of literature in both practical and theoretical aspect. Practically, the research work will be much important to the SMEs and other related enterprises toward providing them with useful guides on how to ensure enhance efficiency and overall productivity of the SMEs in Malaysia and state of Selangor in particular. Again, the outcome of this study will serve as a mechanism to policy makers, HRM expert as well as other related fields. Accordingly, the paper will definitely provide an empirical description on how performance appraisal system can easily address the problem of employee low level performance amongst the Malaysian SMEs and state of Selangor in particular.

Theoretically, research work will be much significant since study that tend to examine the mediating effect of work engagement in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance appear to be scarce in the bulk of literature and most of the previous studies mainly focus on other sectors in several context with little consideration of SMEs in Malaysia and state of Selangor in specifically. The research work will also add value enormously to the increasing number of literature specifically in the field of HRM and other related fields of study. Interestingly, the study will provide an empirical evidence on mediating role of work engagement in the link between performance appraisal and employee performance which is yet to be examine in the existing literature.

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