

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY OF MALAYSIA DURING EMCO

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has been recognized as a prerequisite for business success because it can increase employee satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and enhance employee commitment. It is a dominant and desirable factor influencing the productivity and profitability. As a result, keeping employees engaged has become one of the organizations' primary goals in order to promote retention and commitment. The core objective of the proposed study is to investigate the relationship between the factors of workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development with employee engagement in the agriculture industry of Malaysia. Previous research has not taken into account a holistic model of employee engagement from the perspective addressed in this paper, specifically from the context of the agricultural industry. This study adds to the body of knowledge on employee engagement by determining the statistical relevance of the conceptual framework that can provide organizations with insights into the factors that influence employee engagement. This descriptive quantitative study used a cross-sectional data collection method, with a questionnaire survey distributed to the target population of respondents via online mode. SPSS software analysis tools were used to examine hypotheses and perform a series of analyses to obtain appropriate statistical results. The analysis, found that participative leadership has the strongest relationship with employee engagement, followed by workplace autonomy and career development. The findings provided impetus for organizations to encourage participative leadership in order to enhance employee engagement, particularly in Asia, where many line or performance managers are still traditional in their leadership and management and are less participative. Another recommendation is to give employees more autonomy in order to motivate them to improve their performance and commitment. In terms of career development, the findings were consistent with previous studies both globally and within Malaysia. Future research could focus on other factors that influence employee engagement that were not studied in this paper to provide more insights for employers in Malaysia's agriculture industry from various perspectives.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Agriculture Industry, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The current study's objective is to verify and ascertain the relationship between critical parameters affecting employee engagement, particularly during Malaysia's extended emergency movement control period. The key factors identified were participative leadership, autonomy, and career development, since the first two (2) factors were significant when employees worked from home. On the other hand, career development took a backseat due to constraints imposed during the emergency movement control (EMCO) and constant face-to-face growth and development initiatives were inhibited. As a result, it was necessary to check the effectiveness of these factors on employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture business. Employee engagement as defined by Pandita and Singhal (2017), is the emotional commitment of an employee that encourages them to go the extra mile at work. Additionally, Zondo (2020) discovered that employees that immerse in the successful attainment of organizational goals serve as the force behind organizational success because they are engaged, productive and committed. On the other hand, Adelson, Reio Jr., and Shuck (2017) defined employee engagement as an active, work-related positive psychological state associated with work that encourages engagement. Additionally, the review extended on employee engagement in the three-dimensional behavioural aspect, referring to employees who are actively engaged at work by investing high levels of energy and mental resilience, sense of purpose and work engrossment in their work and given duties (Ricardianto, Ikhsan and Setiawati et. al., 2019). To summarise, employee engagement refers to the positive emotional and intellectual commitment that an employee feels towards the organization that extends beyond job satisfaction and retention (Tadesse, 2019).

Employees are an organization's backbone or and plays critical role in assisting organizations in developing, growing, and prospering (Kadiresan, Wong, Arumigam, Rasu and Theseira, 2019). Employee engagement is a broad subject for analysis and a critical tool for organization to retain the right talent (Jindal, Shaik and Shashank, 2017) though the factors influencing the development and strengthening of employee engagement differs. Companies with engaged employees who are passionate about their work achieve higher productivity, a higher level of customer satisfaction and achieve increased profitability (Jaharuddin and Zainol, 2019).

According to the Qualtrics (2020) Employee Experience Trends Qualtrics (2020) report, global employee engagement is remains low, at 53% despite organizations' extensive efforts to improve employee engagement. According to a study by Zondo (2020) stated that disengaged employees with high absenteeism result in productivity losses in South African automotive assembly organizations. In addition, a banking industry study revealed a need to maintain employee engagement as it is associated with improved work performance and high employee retention rates (Samo, Talreja and Bhatti et. al., 2020). Furthermore, scholars associate employee engagement with employee well-being, improved performance, and reduced turnover (Houssein, Singh and Arumugam 2020; Soliman and Wahba, 2018; Zohra, Zhou and Hanif, 2020). Thus, conducting research on employee engagement is critical because management must be aware of its antecedents and consequences, as well as the numerous problems associated with employee disengagement (Zeidan and Itani, 2020). This is especially true during the EMCO period in Malaysia as the context may result in different research outcomes.

Problem Statement

According to a study conducted by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services on Technology's Make or Break Role in Employee Engagement that polled approximately 400 executives, showed that 92% of respondents indicated that employee engagement is critical to the success of the organization (Pattabhiraman, 2020). Gallup (2020) discovered a significant decline in employee engagement in the United States in 2020, with the overall percentage of

engaged workers standing at 36% and disengaged workers standing at 14%. The data was collected during the Covid19 pandemic lockdown period and thus corresponds to the current research which was conducted while Malaysia was under EMCO. Thus, it will be necessary to ascertain whether the decline in engagement and factors underlining the decline are comparable to those observed in other countries.

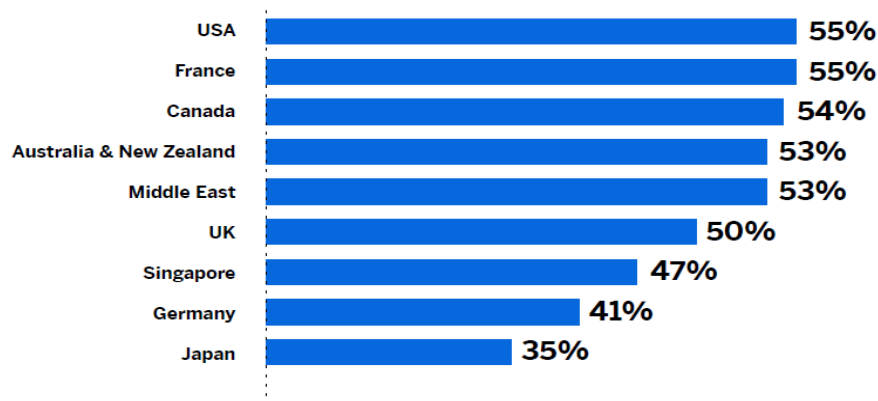


Figure 1. Countries or regions with the highest engagement (Source: Qualtrics (2020))

From Figure 1.1 above, although employee engagement is higher in specific Western countries, Malaysia's level of employee engagement is not even shown, implying that it is likely to be lower than Japan, which has the lowest level of engagement at 35% according to the Qualtrics (2020) study.

Besides the above, a survey conducted by the Institute for Adult Learning Singapore discovered that only 22% of superiors believe the majority of employees go the extra mile at work, while more than 50% believe less than a quarter of employees do (IAL, 2019). Additionally, according to a survey conducted by Achievers (2020) on employees in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium and Netherlands, 35% of respondents were described as extremely engaged at work, while 17% were described as disengaged, with 1 in 10 employees actively seeking new employment. According to the Global Employee Engagement Index 2020's Effortory study, agriculture ranks 34% in employee engagement benchmarks by industry (Pellikaan, 2021). While employee engagement improved in a number of countries and sectors, the agricultural sector, which dominated by Western countries, has a low level of engagement at 34% globally. We were unable to locate specific data for Malaysia's agricultural sector. As a result, the current study is necessary.

In 2019, the agriculture sector contributed 7.1% to Malaysia's GDP, with palm oil accounting for 37.7% of that figure, followed by other agriculture (25.9%), livestock (15.3%), fishing (12%), forestry and logging (6.3%) and rubber (3%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2020). Agriculture contributed RM 27848 million to Malaysia's GDP in the third quarter of 2020, up from RM 24527 million in the second quarter of 2020 (Trading Economics, 2020). Malaysia's transition to a knowledge-based economy has boosted the country's high-quality growth, but these changes have also resulted in labour shortages (World Bank, 2019). According to a study conducted by the Khazanah Research Institute (KRI), the decline in agriculture employment is a result of Malaysia's changing economic structure over time which has resulted in different concentrations of economic activity between states, and agriculture employment productivity growth has historically been low, indicating a precarious employment situation within the industry (Khazanah Research Institute, 2020). According to the World Bank's development database, the percentage of total employment in Malaysia's agriculture industry was highest in 1991 at 22.37% and lowest in 2020 at 10.09% (World Bank, 2020). Based on the Qualtrics (2020) study, "2020 Employee Experience Trends: Malaysia," the average employee engagement rate in Malaysia is 54%, compared to the global average of

53%, indicating that Malaysia ranks marginally higher than the global average. According to Migiro, Moletsane and Tefera (2019), engaged employees who demonstrate a greater sense of ownership and accountability at work contribute to organizational success and result in decreased absenteeism and turnover. As a result, employee engagement is a critical factor for organizations to consider in order to remain competitive in the business world (Zondo, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the key factors that influence employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement, as a multidimensional concept in which engaged employees are able to express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally at work. According to Soni and Mehta (2020) employee engagement is defined as a positive and fulfilling mindset at the workplace, which is characterized by vigour that refers to high energy levels, persistence, and mental strength; dedication that refers to a strong sense of support and loyalty, and lastly absorption that refers to be fully immersed in work. Employee engagement, according to Soliman and Wahba (2018), is a broad concept that encompasses a variety of positive attitudes displayed by employees at work, such as psychological engagement, proactiveness, enthusiasm and initiative, as well as organizational citizenship behaviours related to organizational commitment, involvement in decision-making, and projecting a positive image of the organization.

Employee engagement is promoted by prioritizing a variety of important factors such as communication, planning, contribution, and recognition, which results in positive emotional connection between the employee and the employer (Jindal, Shaikh and Shashank, 2017). Sharma and Bhatt (2019) affirmed too that employee engagement as a construct is multidimensional in nature and employees could get engaged physically, cognitively, or emotionally. As a result, the nature and types of factors influencing employee engagement become more complicated. Consequently, global employee engagement remains low at 55% or less (Qualtrics, 2020).

Awolusi and Blazi (2020) classified employees into three categories based on their level of engagement: engaged employees who work with enthusiasm and have a strong relationship with the organization as well as leading organizational transformations; not-engaged employees who sleepwalk through the workday with no regard for work performance or the organization, and insubordinate employee who intentional refuse to obey the employer's lawful and reasonable instructions and destabilize the work undertaken by the colleagues. Employee engagement is vital to an organization's success because it increases employee satisfaction, lowers employee turnover, inspires greater employee loyalty, increases sales, and profitability (Baqir, Hussain and Wassem et. al., 2020). However, the factors that lead to improved employee engagement vary greatly depending on the context and scenario. Hence, the factors from the context of EMCO in Malaysia will be determined in this study.

Previous studies have shown that a variety of factors can contribute to the increased levels of employee engagement in organization; however, workplace autonomy, leadership styles and career development appear to have a higher influencing power on employee engagement (Mashamba and Govender, 2017; Migiro et. al., 2019; Soliman and Wahba, 2018). These studies however were conducted under normal conditions, not during the Covid19 pandemic situation. It will be interesting to see if such factors will have similar relationships with employee engagement under the EMCO context.

According to Ilyash, Yildirim and Capuk et. al. (2019), workplace autonomy refers to the employee's discretion and freedom of choice at work. As for Cai, Lysova, and Khapova et. al. (2018) workplace autonomy is the extent to which an individual can decide on work methods, processes, and efforts in accomplishing tasks; it is an important factor in predicting employee

creativity and innovation, as well as contributing high levels of employee wellbeing. Workplace autonomy is one of the psychological variables that contributes to employee's performance, thus, employees who have autonomy at work will show better performance (Ilyash et. al., 2019).

Employees with a high degree of workplace autonomy may feel more responsible for work outcomes because they can experience meaningfulness based on a sense of control; however, employees with a low degree of autonomy may experience lower levels of psychological satisfaction, limiting individuals' willingness to engage in desirable innovative behaviour (Cai et. al., 2018). Organizational culture, organizational structure, personality, maturity and competencies of managers and employees, as well as leadership and risk tolerance, all play a significant role in determining whether an organization should adopt workplace autonomy or monitor management practices (Elisa, Michael and Lutz, 2018). According to Clement and Eketu (2019), organizations do benefit from a high level of workplace autonomy as it will improve employee engagement. Workplace autonomy can help employees overcome feelings of pressure and insecurity at work and increase job satisfaction by giving them more control over their work schedule and processes (Ozdemir and Sahin, 2019). Study shows that work autonomy is a positive influence not only on job satisfaction but also on all other components of satisfaction including pay, fringe benefits, promotional prospects, job security and job importance (Janičko and Krčková, 2019). Thus, workplace autonomy will serve as the construct upon which the relationship between employee engagements will be established.

Leadership is the ability to motivate people to collaborate in order to accomplish common goals and encourage employees to perform better; it can also be defined as a person's skills, abilities, and influence over others (Sousa, 2017). Participative leadership is a process in which a leader shares authority with subordinates by involving the employees in decision-making (Usadolo, 2020). A participative leadership style entails the leader meeting with employees to discuss company issues prior to making decisions, as well as the leader modestly inviting employees to participate in problem-solving rather than making autocratic decisions (Lythreatis, Mostafa and Wang, 2017).

While participative leadership is one of the slower decision-making methods, Lythreatis, Mostafa, and Wang (2017), assert that, when decisions are made collectively, the company becomes more harmonious, and employee morale and a sense of support within the organization improve. Participatory leadership has been shown in previous research to increase followers' psychological empowerment, which has positive effect on creativity (Li, Liu and Luo, 2018). Employees who participate in decision-making are more likely to exhibit positive organizational behaviors and attitudes that contribute to employee engagement (Usadolo, 2020). In contrast, poor communication, a hostile work environment, and poor leadership that are autocratic rather than participative can all be significant barriers to employee engagement (Migiro et. al., 2019). Therefore, there is a need to reconsider the influence of leadership on employee engagement which is why this construct is included into the current research study.

Career development is a long-term process that occurs throughout an individual's life during which employees make career choices that influence their career path (Houssein et. al., 2020). Lee and Eissenstat (2018) described the career development process to include internal promotion, improved skills and competencies, and professional development provided by the organization in exchange for performance-enhancing attitudes from the employees. Employees receive intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and recognition as a reward for devoting valuable time and energy to achieving the organization's goals; intrinsic rewards are intangible rewards, whereas extrinsic rewards are tangible rewards such as pay increases, incentives, work-life balance programs, learning opportunities, and job promotions (Subramaniam, Choo and Johari, 2019).

According to Panjaitan, Kosasih and Djogo (2020), career development objective is to match

the needs and goals of both the company and the employees with the available career opportunities. Employees with highly engaged are satisfied with the development opportunities provided by their employers (Tadesse, 2019) to promote and enhance their personal career growth or development. Conversely, employee engagement is lower in organizations that lack development opportunities or do not have a performance development plan in place for employees in the workplace (Soliman and Wahba, 2018). Career development is one of the key reasons why millennials want to change jobs (Mayangdarastri and Khusna, 2020) and such findings permeates globally for the millennials regardless of country or culture. While career development had a greater impact on retention more than engagement, retention may not be possible without employee engagement (Lee and Eissenstat, 2018). Therefore, career development should be included as a potential factor to ascertain its effect on employee engagement as suggested by the current study.

From the review of various literatures above, workplace autonomy, participative leadership and career development are all common constructs associated with employee engagement. However, there were also literature that showed conflicting findings or indirect influence towards employee engagement (Clement and Eketu, 2019; Lee and Eissenstat, 2018) and thus, it is necessary to focus on validating the constructs within a different context.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to verify and ascertain the relationship between employee engagement and the three (3) constructs of workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development in Malaysia's agricultural industry.

RO1: To determine the relationship of workplace autonomy with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.

RO2: To determine the relationship of participative leadership with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.

RO3: To determine the relationship of career development with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive correlation design research is the main methodology used in this study. It collects data for analysis by distributing a questionnaire survey via distribution to the target population of respondents via online methods. The target respondents are Malaysian agricultural industry employees including those in the industry's supply chain. The distribution to the target population respondents is carried out in a purposive manner to ensure only employees from the agricultural industry of Malaysia answer the survey to ensure accuracy, reliability, and credibility in the statistical outcomes.

Prior to the conduct of the measurement on the hypotheses to arrive at the finding, a pilot test serves as a trial run to ensure the data acquired is robust, appropriate, and reliable. In terms of the factor analysis, the data satisfied the respective rules of thumb for KMO Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, factor loading, and Eigenvalue's statistics. The subsequent reliability test, which used internal consistency to determine the Cronbach Alpha, likewise met the stipulated rule of thumb, indicating that the complete data collection for further studies can proceed.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire survey was distributed to 400 employees of the agricultural industry of Malaysia. At the end of the period, a total of 259 responses were received whereby one (1) of the responds had to put aside due to extensive skewness of responses. This results in a 64.5% response rate.

Table 1. Summary of Response rate

Total Distributed	400
Total Received	259
Total Usable	258
No. of Total Spoilt	1
Response Rate	64.5%

Multiple linear regression analysis is used to examine the relationship between the factors (workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development) and employee engagement. It is used to determine the predictive ability of a set of independent variables on a single continuous dependent variable (Sekaran and Bougie, 2018). If the coefficient of determinant, R^2 , is nearer to 1, it indicates that there is goodness of fit of the regression model, whereas if R^2 is nearer to 0, the variation of the dependent variable will not be able to clarify (Saunders et. Al., 2019).

Table 2. Model summary (multiple regression)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.729 ^a	.531	.525	.49409

a. Predictors: (constant), workplace autonomy, participative leadership, career development

Table 1 summaries the model's findings about the elements that influence employee's engagement. The R^2 value of 0.531 in table 1 indicates that the three independent variables employed in this study explained 53.1% of the variance in employee engagement. The remaining variances, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), could be explained by additional factors that have not been considered in the study. As indicated in Table 1, the adjusted R^2 value is 0.525, indicating that the characteristics evaluated as drivers of perceived employee engagement account for 52.5 percent of the respondents' perceived employee engagement. As a result, based on the data in table 1, the study's model can be assumed to be depicting a positive strong relationship between employee engagement and the three independent variables used. The significant differences between variables are compared and evaluated using regression ANOVA. In Regression ANOVA, the p-value must be less than 0.05 to establish a significant relationship between all variables (Hair et. Al., 2018).

Table 3. Regression ANOVA

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	70.150	3	23.383	95.784	.000b
Residual	62.008	254	.244		
Total	132.158	257			

a. Dependent variable: employee engagement

b. Predictors: (constant), workplace autonomy, participative leadership, career development
From table 2, the significant value, P-value = .000 $< \alpha = 0.05$, it indicates that there is a significant correlation between independent variables and the dependent variable. The closer the benchmark value of beta coefficient is to 1, the greater the influencing power towards the dependent variable, hence the higher the value, the better (Saunders et. Al., 2019). In addition, multicollinearity analysis can be used to determine the skewness of data before establishing

hypotheses and it is used as a statistical concept that reveals if the variables are correlated (Kalnins, 2018). Multicollinearity is measured by using Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance (Boru, 2018). According to Hair et. Al. (2018), an acceptable VIF should be between 0.1 and 10, indicating that there is no multicollinearity within the variables.

Table 4. Coefficient and multicollinearity

Model	Coefficients ^a						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	b	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.169	.171		6.857	.000		
Workplace Autonomy	.271	.055	.279	4.930	.000	.576	1.738
Participative Leadership	.265	.050	.330	5.261	.000	.468	2.135
Career Development	.189	.046	.237	4.112	.000	.558	1.793

a. Dependent variable: employee engagement

The beta coefficient values of the independent variables, workplace autonomy, participatory leadership, and career development, are shown in table 3. Its objective is to 7scertain the independent variables' relative weight on employees' perceived employee engagement. Participative leadership has a relatively high weight beta (0.330) as compared to other factors implying high level of influence on employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture industry. Workplace autonomy and career development have relatively weak influence on employee engagement; 0.279 and 0.237, respectively. Therefore, the hypotheses related to workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development, were accepted. Furthermore, as shown in table 3, all variables have a P-value of less than 0.05, indicating that the variables are supported in this model because the variables meet the rule of thumb (Bougie and Sekaran, 2019). The three independent variables namely, workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development were perceived to be the predictors of employee engagement. The VIF values for independent variables are 1.738, 2.135, and 1.793, respectively, according to table 3. If the value is less than 10, it is regarded as acceptable and meets the rule of thumb (Adeniji, Salau and Awe et. Al., 2018). All independent variables have a tolerance value greater than 0.1. As a result, the rule of thumb is met, and the data set has no multicollinearity issues that could skew the results. The results thus showed clear statistical significance where skewness of data and potential multicollinearity did not seem to exist.

Referring to the table 3, the following equation can be formed from the analysis:

y = Employee Engagement in agriculture industry of Malaysia

X1 = Workplace Autonomy

X2 = Participative Leadership

X3 = Career Development

Table 5. Summary of findings

Hypotheses	Result
H1 Workplace autonomy has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.	Accepted
H2 Participative leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.	Accepted
H3 Career development has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.	Accepted

Hypothesis 1: Workplace autonomy has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Malaysia's agriculture industry.

As shown in the findings above, the beta coefficient of workplace autonomy is 0.279, and the P value is 0.000. Hence, the results show a positive coefficient correlation between workplace autonomy and employee engagement in the agriculture industry of Malaysia. This indicates that by increasing a unit of workplace autonomy will increase employee engagement by 0.279. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Participative leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Malaysia's agriculture industry.

According to the above findings, the beta coefficient of participative leadership is 0.330, and the P value is 0.000. Hence, the result indicates that participative leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture industry. This shows that employee engagement will increase by 0.330 when a unit of participative leadership is increased. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Career development has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Malaysia's agriculture industry.

Based on the findings above, the beta coefficient of career development is 0.237, and the p-value is 0.000. As a result, the finding demonstrates a positive coefficient correlation between career development and employee engagement. This indicates that employee engagement will increase by 0.237 when a unit of career development is increased. Hence, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Discussion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research results:

H1: Workplace autonomy has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Malaysia's agriculture industry

Hypothesis 1 accepted that there is a significant positive relationship between workplace autonomy and employee in Malaysia's agriculture industry with a p-value of less than 0.05. The result verified the literature reviews presented earlier that there is a positive relationship between workplace autonomy and employee engagement (Clement and Eketu, 2019; Ilyash et. al., 2019; Tensay and Singh, 2020). Osborne and Mohamad (2017) highlighted the need for workplace autonomy in order to achieve employee engagement, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and flow suggests that engagement can be considered as a psychological need for autonomy. Nguyen and Pham (2020) also found that leaders can increase employee engagement by involving the employees in the decision-making process, task, and scheduling autonomy. In addition, it has been discovered that a higher level of workplace autonomy and self-efficacy has a positive influence in increasing work engagement (Ghani, Kaliappen and Jermisittiparsert, 2019).

Therefore, if employees are given the freedom and opportunity to participate in decision-making, make suggestions, and provide feedback on how the business operates, employees will be more engaged (Tensay and Singh, 2020). The findings corroborated with the assumptions of expectancy theory, which states that when employees perceive workplace autonomy is beneficial as a way to improve self-efficacy, the employees are more likely to achieve it, which in turn increases employee motivation (Mehboob and Othman, 2020). Within the workplace, commonly, when employees have workplace autonomy, the level of engagement is higher as per researcher personal work experiences.

H2: Participative leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.

According to the hypothesis test results, participative leadership has the strongest relationship with employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture industry. As a result, we can accept

Hypothesis 2. The result corroborated previous literature reviews indicating a positive correlation between participative leadership and employee engagement (Soliman and Wahba, 2018; Sousa, 2017; Usadolo, 2020). A participative leadership style can be defined as a positive leadership style in which employees are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making and problem-solving through inspiration, support, and encouragement (Angelis and Anastasopoulou, 2020). Furthermore, in participative management style, leadership has a social impact, resulting in subordinates' voluntary contributions to the company's goals as the involvement and influence of employee voices such as thoughts, comments to improve the organization, stimulate engagement (Drewniak, Drewniak and Posadzińska, 2020). In addition, organizational leaders who facilitate the development of effective participative leadership practices, such as information sharing among employees and two-way communication with the employees can help foster continuous, positive employee workplace behaviors, such as employee engagement (Usadolo, 2020).

While it is often believed that participative leadership facilitates employee engagement (Usadolo, 2020), in reality, there are numerous instances in the workplace where participative leadership is ineffective. In emergency situations requiring decisiveness, due to the urgency of the situation, participative leadership may impede and hinder rather than facilitates effective outcomes (Rana, Ka'ol and Kirubi, 2019). Therefore, though the current research findings theoretically align with previous studies (Carluccio, Buonomo and Benevene et. al., 2019; Holland, Cooper, and Sheehan, 2017), practically, there may be a gap in applicability.

H3: Career development has a positive relationship with employee engagement in the Agriculture industry of Malaysia.

Acceptance of Hypothesis 3 is due to the significant positive relationship between career development and employee engagement in Malaysia's agriculture industry, with a p-value of less than 0.05. The study corroborates the past research evaluations, indicating a positive correlation between career development and employee engagement (Lee and Eissenstat, 2018; Soliman and Wahba, 2018; Tadesse, 2019). According to Tadesse (2019), highly engaged employees are satisfied with their employer's developmental chances. Besides, organizational support for career development, according to Lee and Eissenstat (2018), is positively associated with employees' career satisfaction and engagement. In addition to retaining employees, the challenge for organizations is to fully engage the employees by capturing the employees' thoughts and hearts at different career stages (Tadesse, 2019).

Drewniak and Karaszewski (2020) emphasized the need of increasing employee engagement based on career development aspects, as well as creating conducive environments for learning and developing new competencies. Therefore, management should place a greater emphasis on career path ladder development, which will lead to opportune possibilities for growth and development, hence increasing employee engagement (Nasidi, Sunday and Halim et. al., 2020). Every employee wishes to advance and develop the career in order to progress in the workplace (Nasidi, Waziri and Sunday et. al., 2020) as career development frequently results in better remuneration. The current research findings also fit with the workplace environment whereby talented and high performing employees especially look toward career development as a mean for continuous promotion and progression and thus, feel engaged when it is present. However, there are specific employees who may not value career development because these employees may prefer to remain in the comfort zone. Therefore, although there is clear statistical significance indicating a strong and valid relationship between career development and employee engagement from the current research outcome, in the workplace, there could be gaps because the current research did not segregate the respondents accordingly.

Future Research Direction

Despite the study's empirical contributions, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The

first limitation is related to the study's duration, which is cross sectional in nature. Thus, it is preferable to conduct longitudinal studies in the future to establish sound and robust causality or to use a meta-analysis methodology to strengthen the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of such a single research study as this.

The framework was developed based on the extent of literature review anchored to theoretical underpinning, and the findings also provided support and confirmation of the hypotheses. However, as the sample of the study was drawn from the agriculture industry considered for the present study; results of the study cannot be inferred for the rest of establishments in the country. Therefore, further research is recommended to broaden the scope of the study to include other sectors and functional areas, such as manufacturing or the hospitality industry, to ensure the research model's versatility.

Additionally, the study only examined three key drivers of employee engagement. Additional factors such as organizational culture, interpersonal relationships or reward and recognition can provide more holistic understanding of employees and may enrich the understanding of employee engagement as a business tool that leads to success (Baqir et. al., 2020; Tadesse, 2019).

Finally, the study adopted a quantitative approach, which was deemed appropriate for this study. However, a mixed-method approach, that includes interviews, may complement and refine the quantitative findings because interviews can be more detailed and can provide additional insight into understanding the feelings of employees. This will facilitate the collection of more accurate and extensive information about the relationship between workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development with employee engagement in the agriculture industry of Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to look into the relationship between workplace autonomy, participative leadership, and career development with employee engagement in the agriculture industry of Malaysia. This study uses self-administered questionnaires delivered via online websites as quantitative methods. A total of 258 employees from Malaysia's agriculture sector took part in the survey. According to the findings, participative leadership has the greatest impact on employee engagement, followed by workplace autonomy and career development in the agriculture industry of Malaysia.

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