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Determinants of employee engagement in Oman

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effect of work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship on employee engagement. To test the hypotheses that work environment, leadership, and team and coworker impact employee engagement positively, 50 questionnaires were distributed randomly to employees and 44 were valid. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data by using SPSS version 26. The results showed that work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationships impact employee engagement positively. This study creates awareness towards using work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship to utilize them in future. In addition, it helps managers to improve level of employee engagement, by exploring more organization factors that yields the desired level of organizational performance.

Keywords: Employee engagement, work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

No doubt that, nowadays, environment of the market is changing and evolving. Businesses must innovate to survive (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020) ^[2]. Effective performance of employees yields competitive organization. Organizations that manage performance effectively generally outperform competitors. Employee is the critical factor in work regardless of globalization, Big Data, and the Internet of Things whose have allowed all organizations to grow and expand internationally. As a result, employee is the special factor of the organization that cannot be imitated by competitors (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. Human capital is a pivotal resource of organizations because it makes or breaks the business (Rani & Deepti, 2020) ^[23]. Hardworking employees contribute effectively in developing business because the targeted plans can be tracked easily (Sudjiwanati & Pinastikasari, 2020) ^[28].

To seek high performance in this turbulent market, organization apply means to gain competitive advantage and survive. One of the critical means to increase overall organizational performance is employee engagement. Organization with engaged employees are able to outperform other competitors (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. This study covers the determinants and factors affecting employee performance in Oman context by covering governmental unit; Civil Service Employees Pension Fund (CSEPF).

The CSEPF is a government unit in Oman was established in 1986. It has a juristic personality, financial and administrative independence. It takes care of investing and managing the end-of-service funds and pensions for retired and develop plans for fund's activities (*About Us*, n.d.).

To best of our knowledge, no research focused on the determinants that affect employee engagement in CSEPF. So, the current study will investigate some factors that lead to employee engagement in CSEPF.

1.2. Problem Statement

No doubt that employee engagement is important for organization success. Engaging employee improves employee performance, commitment and productivity of the organization (Loy, 2021) ^[18]. Employee engagement has a crucial role in organizations success. The engaged employee is aware of business context and collaborates hardly with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of organization.

Govender and Bussin (2020) ^[12] stated that engaged employee goes beyond job description and go extra mile without bothering and strive to contribute to organizational success. Engaged employee performs better than others by 20% due to commitment (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. Moreover, the top 25% on an engagement index had a greater return on assets (ROA) and profitability compared to the bottom 25%” (Gruman & Saks, 2011) ^[13]. Engaged employee is more likely to stay with the company for prolonged period. Engaged employee influences fellow workers positively (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12].

According to Gallup (2017) ^[31], 15% of employees in the world are engaged. The rest (85%) are either not engaged (67%) or actively disengaged (18%). Engaged employee loves the job and work hard in the sake of the business. Not engaged employee does not interest in the job, just work for salary. Actively disengaged employee totally does not like the job and may discourage other workers (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. Engagement percent worldwide is very low and, no doubt, will affect employee performance as well as organizational performance negatively. In Middle East area, only 14% of employees are engaged. Most of employees in the Middle East are not engaged (64%) and 22% are actively disengaged (Gallup, 2017) ^[31]. Many Arab countries included in Gallup (2017) ^[31] report of engagement like UAE, KSA, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. All these countries are members in Gulf Countries Council (GCC). Oman was not included in that report, but it is part of the GCC as well as located the Middle East area. GCC have similar culture and strong neighboring relationship. As a result, percent of engagement would be the same in Oman as in GCC which is 14%. This very low percentage of engagement could affect employee performance as well as organizational performance. In addition, a study about employee engagement and productivity in Oman government done by Al-Maamari and Matriano (2019) ^[3] covered Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which is an important unit in Oman government. They found that “most of employees are not engaged” at that ministry and majority of employees feel “not engaged in the ministry overall” (Al-Maamari & Matriano, 2019) ^[3]. This study goes in line with Gallup (2017) ^[31] report of engagement.

Oman government should take steps to increase the level of employee engagement in all ministries and units. Low level of engagement may negatively impact the bottom line, high levels add value (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. Low level of employee engagement could lead to demotivated employee in performing work activities (De Silva & Iddagoda, 2021) ^[11]. As a result, effectiveness and efficiency will be reduced is low (De Silva & Iddagoda, 2021) ^[11]. Overall employee and organizational performance will be affected negatively by a low level of engagement.

1.3. Research Question and Objectives

The main question is: What are the major determinants that affect employee engagement in CSEPF? Based on this question, the study aims to investigate factors affecting employee engagement in CSEPF. Investigating factors leading to employee engagement helps organizations to understand the importance of that term and how to apply it properly in the workplace. Moreover, the emergence of engagement in the work benefits the level of employee performance as well as organizational performance. As a result, engagement leads to achieving goals of the

organization. This study focuses on three factors that are important in employee engagement. They are work environment, leadership, team and coworker. Specifically, objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the effect of work environment on employee engagement.
2. To examine the effect of leadership on employee engagement.
3. To examine the effect of team and coworker on employee engagement.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is to understand how well different factors could lead to produce employee engagement. It could focus on factors affecting employee engagement in government sector to better utilize employee engagement to improve overall organizational and individual employee performance.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study covers the one of Oman government unit, which is Civil Service Employee Pension Fund. There are many branches of this pension fund around Oman. Only HQ will be covered and leave branches for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is well-known and widely used term and defined in different ways in literature (Saks, 2006) ^[24]. Employee engagement was introduced by W. Khan in 1990, who defined employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990) ^[15]. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) ^[32] concluded that work engagement is a work-related, fulfilling, and positive state of mind that is characterized by dedication, vigor, and absorption. Anitha (2014) ^[5] mentioned that employee engagement is a state that enables employee to be committed to his work emotionally and intellectually. According to Hassan *et al.* (2018) ^[33], employee engagement is the commitment level of employee towards his/her organization. Employee engagement is employee willingness to work extra, trust organization, and help organization to succeed (Setiyani *et al.*, 2019) ^[26]. Employee engagement is the level of involvement and commitment employees have with their organization (Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[12]. Employee engagement is defined as “a positive work-based individual psychological state that enables an individual to work with energy and enthusiasm” (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020) ^[2]. All definitions of employee engagement are close to each other and almost have the same idea. Engagement is about immersing employees in the work to achieve goals. As a result, organizations should take care of engagement and understand different levels of engagement.

Employees are engaged differently in their work. There are engaged employees, not engaged employees, disengaged employees. Engaged employees totally love the work and strive to success of the business. Not engaged employees are interested in the job but work for salary. Disengaged employees dislike their job and may discourage other workers (Anitha, 2014; Govender & Bussin, 2020) ^[5, 12]. Besides categorizing level of engagement, organizations

should understand what factors determine employee engagement.

2.2 Determinants of Employee Engagement & Hypotheses Development

Employee engagement can be determined by different factors. According to Saks (2006) [24], there are seven determinants of employee engagement. They are job characteristics, perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, reward and recognition, procedural justice, and distributive justice. Anitha (2014) [5] stated seven determinants of employee engagement. They are work environment, leadership, team and coworker, training and career development, compensation, organizational policies, and workplace wellbeing. Hassan *et al.* (2018) [33] concluded that employee engagement is determined by work environment, organizational treatment, and self-evaluation. Among those different determinants of employee engagement, our study focuses on three important determinants of employee engagement. They are work environment, leadership, and team and coworker.

Work environment focuses on climate where employees perform their assigned tasks and duties. It includes job characteristics, physical setting, and organizational features (Judeh, 2021) [14]. Different scholars have focused on work environment in the literature. Setiyani *et al.* (2019) [26] studied manufacturing and service companies in Indonesia and concluded that work environment has significant influence on employee engagement. Supportive work environment found to have a positive relation to employee engagement in different professions in Pakistan (Saleem *et al.*, 2020) [25]. According to Judeh (2021) [14], conducive work environment leads to engaged employees, impacts staff positively, and motivate them. A suitable work environment is key determinant of employee engagement as it leads to understanding in the workplace. As a result, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Work environment affects employee engagement positively.

Leadership could determine employee engagement level. Leadership is a significant power that leader has on employees (Chiwawa & Wissink, 2021) [10]. In literature, there are different studies on leadership and how it affects employee engagement. Leadership satisfaction was found to impact all of employee engagement, loyalty, and intention to stay in hospitality industry in the USA (Book *et al.*, 2019) [6]. Moreover, in Palestinian ICT sector, transformational leadership style significantly affected employee engagement through mediation role of emotional intelligence (Milhem *et al.*, 2019) [20]. Leadership was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement in hospitality sector in South African context (Chiwawa & Wissink, 2021) [10]. Based on literature, the second hypothesis is formulated as:

H2: Leadership affects employee engagement positively.

Good team and coworker relationship leads to harmony in employee work. Teamwork is a collection of employees working together to achieve a specific goal (Pranitasari, 2019) [22]. Previous research has proved the strong relationship between team and coworker and employee engagement. A study in parastatals in Kenya concluded that

employee engagement is statistically and significantly related to teamwork (Change, 2019) [6]. Moreover, other study covered college lecturers in Indonesia and found that teamwork has positive direct influence on work engagement (Pranitasari, 2019) [22]. Mokhtar *et al.* (2020) [21] found that coworkers support positively related to employee engagement in oil and gas offshore operations sector in Malaysia. As a result, the third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H3: Team and coworker affects employee engagement positively.

Literature has proved that factors like working environment, leadership, and team and co-worker relationship could affect employee engagement in positive and significant manner. In this study, three factors (working environment, leadership, and team and co-worker relationship) are tested as independent variables, whereas employee engagement is the dependent variable. The relationship between variables in this study is discussed through Social Exchange Theory (SET).

3. Social Exchange Theory (SET)

There are different theories that discussed employee engagement in the workplace. SET is one of the eminent theories used to understand workplace behaviour, employee attitude, and motivation (Tate, 2015). SET is built based on reciprocity concept. It means that when organization is caring, fair, and kind to its individuals, they will reciprocate the same behaviour and do their best for achieving organizational success (Memon *et al.*, 2020) [19]. That relationship appeared in existence between employer and employee will shape itself into commitment and loyalty (Memon *et al.*, 2020) [19]. Social exchange is “the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (Tate, 2015). Saks (2006) [24] explained SET as a commitment established due to continuous interactions between parties with reciprocal interdependence. Social exchange involves interactions that yields obligations. That interaction is explained, by SET, as contingent and interdependent actions of another person. Researchers are intrigued by including SET in their research. Tate (2015) studied relationship between employee engagement and performance management and included SET in that research. Moreover, Saks (2006) [24] included SET when he studied employee engagement antecedents and consequences. SET was used in studying OCB (Liaquat & Mehmood, 2017) [34], and in training (Sulistyan, 2020). To sum up, when organization creates good and attractive work environment, appoint great leaders knowing and feeling with staff needs, and encouraging climate of co-working team, these make employees feel obliged to the company and try their best to complete their assigned tasks and repay for that favour.

4. Theoretical Framework

Based on previous literature, SET and hypothesis, figure 1 shows the relationship between the independent variables (three factors) and the dependent variable (employee engagement).

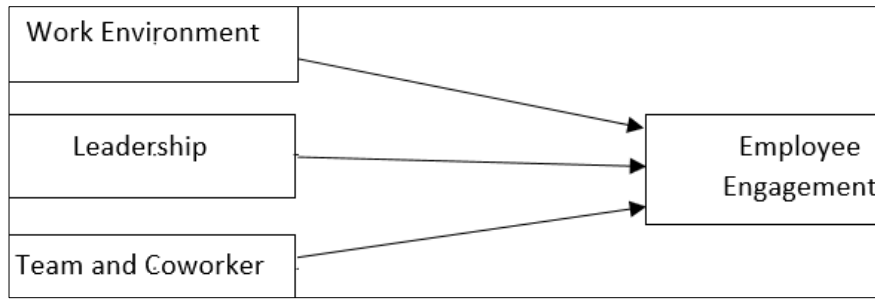


Fig 1: Determinants of Employee Engagement.

5. Research Method

This study investigated the effect of different selected factors that could affect employee engagement. Those factors are work environment, leadership, and team and coworker. This study conducted at Civil Service Employees Pension Fund in Oman. There are 9 branches of this pension fund around Oman. This study covered the head office only and left other branches for future study. There are about 189 employees working in the head office located in the capital area of Oman as per HR department. A simple random sampling technique was applied to collect primary data, whereas secondary data was obtained from related research and articles. According to Teoh *et al.* (2022) [29], “the ideal maximum sample size is about 10% as long as it does not exceed 1000 for the survey”. In this study, the target population is 189 employees, so 19 employees represent 10 percent. To avoid doubt and get the maximum sample size, a survey questionnaire was distributed to 50 employees at Civil Service Employees Pension Fund. All participants in the questionnaire were employees. Supervisors, managers, deputy director general, and director managers are exempted from participating in this study. The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies in the employee engagement field. Work environment

adopted from Bushiri (2014) [7] study of work environment and employee performance in institute of finance management and from KAMANJA (2020) [16] study of work environment and employee engagement. Leadership adopted from study of employee engagement factors in a higher education institution and from Amussah (2020) [4] study of leadership style and employee performance. Team and coworkers adopted from Mokhtar *et al.* (2020) [21] study of employee engagement and coworkers’ support and study (Khawam *et al.*, 2017) [17] about teamwork in workplace. Finally, employee engagement taken from study of Rasool *et al.* (2021) [35] regarding mediating role of wellbeing of employee and organizational support in the relationship between toxic workplace environment and employee engagement and Mokhtar *et al.* (2020) [21]. Five-point Likert scale used to measure items of the survey. This research is a quantitative study with both confirmatory and descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis depicted statistical techniques. Confirmatory analysis investigated research hypotheses to find the influence of independent variables (work environment, leadership, and team and coworker) on the dependent variable (employee engagement). Data analyzed by using SPSS version 26.

Table 1: Determinants of Employee Engagement and Employee Engagement Scale

Work Environment							
S. No.	Items	Abbreviation	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
1	I feel that office building space influences on me to stay in the office and work comfortably	WE1					
2	I think that my relationship with my fellow workers is good	WE2					
3	I have a clear path for career advancement	WE3					
4	I get adequate resources to do my work	WE4					
5	I would refer my friend to apply for a job in this organization.	WE5					
Leadership							
1	My leader explains the business strategy to employees well	LD1					
2	My leaders carry out the organizational values consistently	LD2					
3	My supervisor makes others feel good to be around him/her	LD3					
4	My supervisor is always satisfied when others meet agreed-upon standards	LD4					
5	My supervisor stays out of the way as I do my work	LD5					
Team and Coworker Relationship							
1	I receive help from my coworkers	TC1					
2	I feel I am accepted in my work group	TC2					
3	My coworkers back me up when I need it	TC3					
4	I prefer to do everything alone	TC4					
5	I usually support my teammates or fellow group members.	TC5					
Employee Engagement							
1	I really throw myself into my job and organization engagement.	EE1					
2	I fulfil all responsibilities required by my job.	EE2					
3	I willingly give my time to help others who have work-related problems.	EE3					
4	I always complete the duties specified in my job description.	EE4					
5	I feel that being a member of this organization is very captivating	EE5					

6. Results

6.1 Characteristics of Participants

After distributing 50 questionnaires randomly, 44 questionnaires were valid. The rest were not totally

completed. The following tables summarize participants characteristics.

Table 2: Work Experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-5 years	5	11.4	11.4	11.4
	6-10 years	11	25.0	25.0	36.4
	11-15 years	18	40.9	40.9	77.3
	More than 15 years	10	22.7	22.7	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS v.26

40.9% of respondents had work experience from 11 to 15 years followed by 25% with work experience from 6 to 10

years. It indicated that most employees are in beginning of adventure of work and could continue their way in the job.

Table 3; Educational Qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Diploma	13	29.5	29.5	29.5
	Bachelor Degree	23	52.3	52.3	81.8
	Master	7	15.9	15.9	97.7
	Others	1	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS v.26

Majority of employees had bachelor’s degree, while 29.5% had university diploma and 15.9 got postgraduate. It

indicated that in CSEPF qualification is highly impacted hiring.

Table 4: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	25	56.8	56.8	56.8
	Female	19	43.2	43.2	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS v.26

With respect to gender, male employees were dominants, but still, female employees were highly employed.

results study for exploratory research. For TC variable, item 4 deleted to improve reliability from 0.280 to 0.521. As a result, Cronbach’s alpha, separately, for variables was more than 0.5 and for all variables was 0.737. The instrument is reliable and valid.

6.2 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity tests are summarized in the following table.

Variable	No. of Items	Reliability	Validity
Work Environment (WE)	5	0.524	0.723
Leadership (LD)	5	0.870	0.932
Teamwork and Coworker Relationship (TC)	4	0.521	0.721
Employee Engagement (EE)	5	0.562	0.749
All Variables (WE, LD, TC, EE)	20	0.737	0.858

Source: SPSS v.26

Reliability is measured through Cronbach’s alpha. If Cronbach’s alpha is 0.5 or above, the instrument is indicated as reliable (Cecilia *et al.*, 2019) [8] and good enough (Sidra Nosheen *et al.*, n.d.). Wahyuni *et al.* (2020) [30] added that a moderate reliability of 0.5-0.6 is sufficient to justify the

6.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation is used to test hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that work environment affects employee engagement positively. Correlation is 0.382 (p=0.05), which reflects positive but weak effect of work environment on employee engagement. As a result, the first hypothesis approved. The second hypothesis stated that leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement. Correlation is 0.171 (p=0.05). It is a positive and weak relationship. So, leadership found to affect employee engagement in a positive way. The second hypothesis is approved. Finally, team and coworker relationship were correlated with employee engagement with 0.048 (p=0.05). There was a weak and positive relationship between team and coworker relationship and employee engagement. Third hypothesis was approved.

Table 5: Correlations

		Work Environment	Leadership	Team and Coworker Relationship	Employee Engagement
Work Environment	Pearson Correlation	1	.171	.048	.382*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.267	.757	.010
	N	44	44	44	44
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.171	1	.114	.384*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.267		.461	.010
	N	44	44	44	44
Team and Coworker Relationship	Pearson Correlation	.048	.114	1	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.757	.461		.565
	N	44	44	44	44
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.382*	.384*	.089	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.010	.565	
	N	44	44	44	44

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS v.26

6.4 Simple Linear Regression

The following table shows model summary. Correlation coefficient is 0.502 which represents the correlation between independent variables (WE, LD, TC) and dependent variable (EE). Only 50.2% of employee engagement can be explained by work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship. The rest (49.8%) would be explained by other factors outside this study.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.502 ^a	.252	.196	.42471

a. Predictors: (Constant), Team and Coworker Relationship, Work Environment, Leadership

Source: SPSS v.26

7. Discussion

Based on SPSS analysis, it seems that work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship have a positive effect on employee engagement.

Work environment has a positive effect on employee engagement. This result agrees with previous research that stated a positive relationship between work environment and employee engagement (Judeh, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2020; Setiyani *et al.*, 2019) [14, 25, 26].

According to literature, leadership could determine employee engagement level. Our result shows a positive impact of leadership on employee performance. These results go in the same direction with other studies that proved the same (Book *et al.*, 2019; Chiwawa & Wissink, 2021; Milhem *et al.*, 2019) [6, 10, 20].

Team and coworker relationship leads to harmony in employee engagement. Result of this study confirmed that team and coworker relationship have a positive influence on employee engagement. Different studies have found the same result (Change, 2019; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2020; Pranasari, 2019) [6, 21, 22].

After testing hypotheses, it can be concluded that work environment, leadership, and team and coworker relationship have a positive effect on employee engagement.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that CSEPF management should focus more on employee engagement to improve employee and organizational performance. Also, management of CSEPF

should study factors that may influence employee engagement.

9. Limitation and Future Research

The questionnaire of this study was translated from English to Arabic as all of respondents are Omanis. The translation may not be clear enough and may lead to minor changes in the original meaning of statements. The study covered only one unit in Oman government and therefore the results cannot be generalized. The future research may be conducted on a larger sample including other governmental departments also, to give more reliable results. More research in the Oman and GCC in employee engagement field is required to be conducted.

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