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# Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

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## The influence of employee participation, rewards and recognition, job security, and performance feedback on employee engagement

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### Abstract

The fundamental goal of this research was to develop a model of employee engagement from the perspective of private sector employees in Melaka, Malaysia, which can be added to the body of knowledge. It was carried out to determine the relationships between employee participation, job security, performance feedback, as well as rewards and recognition on employee engagement. This study found that all tested variables are positively related to employee engagement. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the private sector should prioritise efforts that enhance employee participation, provide robust career package and constant feedback. Employees' contributions also need to be adequately recognised at all levels to ensure organisations are able to enhance its performance.

### Keywords:

Employee engagement;  
Employee participation;  
Job security;  
Rewards and recognition;  
Performance feedback

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### 1. Introduction

When employees are favourably occupied in their work or tasks, they are said to be engaged. It has also been claimed that employee engagement is the harnessing of employees on their work tasks in engaging and expressing themselves physically, emotionally, and intellectually throughout their involvement in their job obligations (Saks, 2006). Disengagement, on the other hand, is where employees are not performing effectively and are not putting their all in their tasks, resulting in incomplete assignments, failure in meeting deadlines, or the finished job having no value. Employees tend to draw a line for themselves or a boundary, on the responsibilities that they are capable of doing and to stay inside those bounds (Kahn, 1990). In an early research, employee engagement was entirely focused on the employees with their job scope or features and health, which was commonly regarded as one of the most essential aspects of work engagement (Quiñones et al., 2013). Employee engagement has been found to gradually decrease, and the vast majority of employees, around half of the company's workforce, are not completely engaged or disengaged, resulting in a phrase known as an engagement gap – costing productivity loss by nearly USD 300 billion a year (Saks, 2006).

Employee engagement has emerged as a critical component of improving job performance and organisational excellence. Employee engagement methods are widely recognised as an important component of high-commitment human resource strategies (Cox et al., 2009). However, attaining the greatest and most successful employee engagement initiatives remains a difficult undertaking for most organisations. Saks (2017) has suggested a stage-based process of employee engagement to develop a sound engagement strategy and overcome the engagement barriers. Employee engagement is such an important issue that it touches practically every branch and component of human resource management, where poor approach and mishandling can lead to

employee disengagement, which can lead to mismanagement (Markos and Sandhya, 2010). According to a prior study, a 5% increase in employee engagement activities resulted in a 3% rise in corporate income. Disengaged employees, on the contrary, make minimal contributions to the workplace and, as a result, negatively influence the organisations (Aon Hewitt, 2017).

Many human resource experts have avoided the task of defining employee engagement as a phrase that may be assumed to have a good outcome. According to Haynie et al. (2019), employee engagement is commonly assumed as a distinct idea or only a term to be used in conjunction with other concepts. It shows that past researchers only consider employee engagement as a sub-tool in assessing various possible variables in their research. According to other studies, employee engagement is defined as devotion, which refers to employees being totally focused and giving their all in engaging and in completing or performing the work that was given or assigned to them (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Engaged employees tend to be engrossed in their job or assignment, causing them to lose track of time. By the time they are completely aware of the time, it will be time for them to collect their belongings and return home (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Engaged employees are usually perceived or labelled as workaholics by other co-workers, but it is simply because these engaged employees are too immersed in their job to notice the time or their surroundings at times. Employees that are active and passionate about their jobs would frequently occupy themselves in a large amount of work without experiencing fatigue, preferring to enjoy their work and give it their all (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). In this study, the influence of four factors on employee engagement was examined. The four factors are employee participation, job security, performance feedback, and rewards and recognition.

## **2. Social exchange theory**

Social exchange theory (SET) explains, from a psychological perspective, that employees will be interested and motivated if they are treated properly and equitably (Blau, 1964). According to SET, social interaction occurs as a result of similarities between people or between people and their environments. Hypothetically, employee productivity, and consequently work performance, can be enhanced through better human interactions, specifically between employees and superiors within the organisation. Employees tend to form high-quality relationships depending on who they connect with, how they connect with them, and how well they perceive the contact inside the business (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Employees who have the freedom to express their creativity and innovation via responsibility and authority usually felt empowered (Bellingham, 2003), while open communication to define goals and objectives may also generate higher levels of employee engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015).

Individuals in an organisation are engaged in the quest of future benefits through the sharing of information, expertise, talents, and many other things. When an employee is treated properly by their supervisors, they tend to view the relationship as a social transaction rather than an economic one (Blau, 1964). When an employee adopts a social exchange mindset, they tend to put out more effort in their work and generate better results (Brown et al., 2005) and willing to become more engaged in their work (Albrecht et al., 2015). Moreover, employees tend to be more inclined to consider themselves high in terms of social interchange with their superiors whenever their work experience is infused with ethics and trust. Harmonious interactions between employees and superiors therefore exists when employees increase their engagement as a reciprocal response to what they received from the organisation. We hypothesised that employee engagement is determined by employee participation, job security, performance feedback, as well as rewards and recognition. The following subsections explain how these factors influence employee engagement.

## **2.1 Employee participation**

Employee participation is the opportunity for employees to participate in an organisation's decision-making process (Heery and Noon, 2017). It is defined as a mixture of decision-making participation, in which employees may provide input into job-related choices, and financial participation practices, which refer to remuneration based on group or individual performance (Park, 2015). Employee involvement may apply to choices involving a variety of concerns, such as organisational concerns and work-related difficulties. Work-related concerns include arranging work tasks, working time, and completing work activities, whereas organisational difficulties pertain to choices on organisational strategy or financial considerations (Prouska et al., 2019).

When employees are offered opportunities to participate in decision-making or financial results, they tend to take these organisational efforts as evidence of the organisation's commitment to them (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades et al., 2001). Furthermore, employees tend to enhance their devotion towards work when their participation in decision-making activities that impact the nature of their job is well valued by the management (Northouse, 2004). Participation in decision-making may also lead to improved labour-management relations, higher-quality decisions, stronger employee loyalty to organisations, and increased productivity (Kearney, 2003). Nonetheless, higher levels of employee engagement in decision making are associated with reduced employee turnover, better levels of organisational loyalty, and greater staff productivity rates (Cotton et al., 1988; Kahnweiler and Thompson, 2000; Kearney, 2003). Employee morale is boosted when they are recognised for their contributions to decision-making, which also implied that they are competent, intelligent, and valued collaborators. This leads to increased employee satisfaction and, as a result, increased productivity (Cotton et al., 1988) – which are evidences of employee engagement. Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesised:

H1: There is a significant influence of employee participation on employee engagement.

## **2.2 Job security**

Job security has also been found to be an important factor influencing an employee's level of engagement. Job security refers to the extent to which a person obtains a stable employment opportunity from their organisation (Herzberg, 1987). Job security is an indication of the expectations of continuity in the present job (Davy et al., 1997). Meltz (1989) stated that employment security is defined as continuous employment with the same business with no decline in salary, pension rights, seniority, and a variety of other benefits.

Employees in Japan are highly committed because they have a strong feeling of work security, which is connected to Japanese work arrangements such as seniority system and lifelong employment (Abegglen, 1958). According to a study, employees who are pleased with their job security are more devoted to their organisations and perform better at work (Yousef, 1997). Similarly, Bhuian and Islam (1996) concluded that work security satisfaction is highly connected with continued commitment among expatriate employees in Saudi Arabia. Schein (1996) argued that individuals must have a match between what they anticipate from the organisation and what they owe the organisation in order to develop dedication, loyalty, and passion for their organisation and its aims, as well as to gain satisfaction from their job. Money in exchange for time at work, social-need satisfaction and security in exchange for work and loyalty, opportunities for self-actualisation and challenging work in exchange for high productivity, quality work, and creative effort in service of organisational goals, or various combinations of these. Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesised:

H2: There is a significant influence of job security on employee engagement.

### **2.3 Performance feedback**

Another key facet that drives an employee's engagement to contribute and achieve more on job and personal growth is performance feedback. Performance feedback is the extent to which an employee may acquire useful information about their performance that might help them improve and boost their job contribution (Xie et al., 2016). Performance feedback has been found to increase job satisfaction and motivation (Hackman, 1980), and is critical in many organisational activities, including work satisfaction, motivation, career growth, and performance management (McCarthy and Garavan, 2005).

Three separate forms of feedback can be used to evaluate an employee's performance. The first form is feedback from individuals who have witnessed the employee's behaviour and are thus qualified to offer feedback, such as the superior, subordinates, colleagues, and customers. The second form of feedback relates to the job environment, for example, while monitoring tasks, it is often obvious when the employee is not on target. The employees themselves, who may be able to judge their own performance, are the third source of feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Supervisory input, on the other hand, may not contribute as much and may be viewed as less effective in affecting engagement under settings of high perceived autonomy, because more autonomy implies that individuals have more internal discretion over how to complete tasks. That is, they are less reliant on and influenced by supervisory feedback than they would be under low perceived autonomy situations. As a result, the benefits of supervisory input on engagement are likely to be restricted at high levels of perceived autonomy (Menguc et al., 2013). Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesised:

H3: There is a significant influence of performance feedback on employee engagement.

### **2.4 Rewards and recognition**

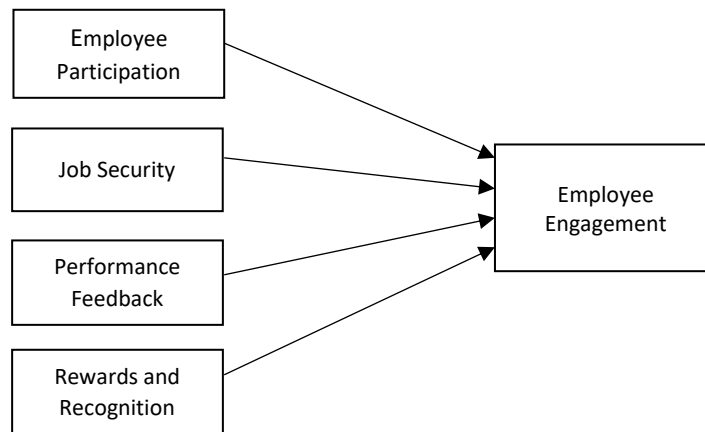
Rewards and recognition programmes of the organisation are important instruments for recognising and inspiring employees to achieve organisational goals (Aktar and Pangil, 2018), and are among the significant precursors of employee engagement (Saks, 2006). A rewarded employee regards his or her work output as valuable to the organisation, resulting in a sense of recognition that inspires him or her to strive for higher job performance (Umesh et al., 2013). Employee engagement completely mediates the impacts of rewards and recognition on in-role and extra-role performance, according to the findings of a study done on 247 sales associates from 35 retail stores in North India (Alka et al., 2017).

One of the most effective methods to reward employees is through recognition (Armstrong, 2007). Previous research has revealed that incentive and recognition programmes have a substantial motivating influence on staff performance (Stajkovic et al., 2018). The level of employee engagement has been found to increase as a result of appreciation on the efforts contributed and work completed (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Rewards and recognition enable employees to link their success to the organisation's performance and such linkage has been found to significantly influence employee engagement (Dharmendra and Mehta, 2013). According to Schein (1996), employees tend to be loyal and devoted to their employers if there is a balance between their expectations and the rewards provided by the employers. The trade includes duties that are difficult, chances for organisational growth, high productivity, and payment. Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesised:

H4: Rewards and recognition has positive influence on employee engagement.

### 3. Methodology

Figure 1 illustrates the direct influence of the four independent variables on the dependent variable, which was examined using quantitative methods. For the purpose of data collection, a research questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire contains four sections: respondents' demographics such as age, sex, job position, salary, and work experience; and the measures of each independent and dependent variables. A statement of disclosure was included in the questionnaire as to ensure that respondents were of their free will to participate and at the same time maintained their anonymity. No personal information such as name, contact information and non-related credentials were collected. Convenience sampling method was used in this study as it requires less time and cost in obtaining data from the population. Invitation emails, with a link to the online survey, were sent to 260 employees in private sectors in Melaka, out of which, 142 have responded to the online survey.



**Figure 1:** Research framework

Table 1 depicts the demographic details of the respondents. It illustrates that the majority of respondents were males, where it comprises 60 per cent of the total respondents. The data also reveal that about 80 per cent of the overall respondents were aged between 24 to 30 years old. The majority also have less than 3 year of work experience.

**Table 1: Demographic data**

Items	N	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	85	59.9
Female	57	40.1
<b>Age</b>		
24 years old and below	67	47.2
25 – 30 years old	49	34.5
31 – 35 years old	14	9.9
36 – 40 years old	7	4.9
41 – 45 years old	3	2.1
46 – 50 years old	1	0.7
51 years old and above	1	0.7
<b>Education Level</b>		
High School	7	4.9
Diploma	24	16.9
Bachelor’s Degree	97	68.3
Master’s Degree	12	8.5
Doctoral Degree	2	1.4
<b>Working Experience</b>		
Less than 1 year	67	47.2
1 – 2 years	40	28.2
3 – 5 years	17	12
6 – 10 years	13	19.2
More than 10 years	5	3.5

Table 2 shows the sources of the measures used and the internal reliability of each measurement. The Cronbach’s Alpha values range between 0.607 to 0.8878, indicating good internal consistencies of the data collected.

**Table 2: Measurements**

Variable	Authors	Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Employee Participation	Aktar, <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	4	0.822
Job Security	Aktar, <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	4	0.845
Performance Feedback	Karasek’s (1985)	4	0.878
Reward and Recognition	Ali, <i>et al.</i> , (2018)	4	0.697
Employee Engagement	Saks (2006)	9	0.869

#### 4. Data Analysis

Table 3 summarises the means and standard deviations of all tested variables. Each statement was rated by the respondents on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The mean and standard deviation for employee engagement were computed as 4.3302 and 0.72685, respectively. Respondents rated performance feedback at the highest, with a mean of 4.5546, and a standard deviation of 0.91874. This is followed by job security (mean = 4.3732; standard deviation = 0.98470), employee participation (mean = 4.2025; standard deviation = 0.96523) and rewards and recognition (mean = 4.1109; standard deviation = 0.87697). Overall, the data were found to be normally distributed.

**Table 3: Mean and standard deviation**

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employee Participation	4.2025	0.96523
Job Security	4.3732	0.98470
Performance Feedback	4.5546	0.91874
Rewards and Recognition	4.1109	0.87697
Employee Engagement	4.3302	0.72685

A Pearson’s Correlation analysis was performed on the data to determine the relationships among them, illustrated in Table 4. Results show employee engagement is positively and moderately linked to all the independent variables, with job security showing the highest correlation ( $r=0.708$ ), and rewards and recognition the lowest correlation ( $r=0.638$ ).

**Table 4: Correlation analysis**

	Employee Engagement	Employee Participation	Job Security	Performance Feedback
Employee Engagement	1			
Employee Participation	0.670**	1		
Job Security	0.708**	0.748**	1	
Performance Feedback	0.660**	0.637**	0.686**	1
Rewards and Recognition	0.638**	0.643**	0.632**	0.603**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the effects of the four independent variables on employee engagement. Table 5 summarises the results. Overall, the model was found to be significant with  $F$  value of 52.77 (sig. = 0.000). Results also show that 60.4 per cent of the variance in employee engagement is explained by the dependent variables ( $R^2 = 0.604$ ). The Durbin-Watson coefficient is 1.946, which is near to 2, indicating that the residuals are associated.

**Table 5: Multiple linear regression**

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	$t$	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	1.323	0.217		6.104	0.000
Employee Participation	0.134	0.066	0.179	2.050	0.042
Job Security	0.217	0.067	0.294	3.247	0.001
Performance Feedback	0.176	0.062	0.223	2.831	0.005
Rewards and Recognition	0.168	0.063	0.203	2.687	0.008
$R$	0.777				
$R^2$	0.604				
Adjusted $R^2$	0.593				
$df$	4				
$F$	52.277				
Sig.	0.000				

\* Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Overall, findings of this study show significant influence of the four independent variables (employee participation, job security, performance feedback, and rewards and recognition) on employee engagement. The associations between the variables are considerable, with standardised beta coefficient ranging between 0.179 to 0.295. The four independent variables are drivers of employee engagement and organisations need to find ways or device new techniques

to enhance the processes related to employee participation, job security, performance feedback, as well as rewards and recognition.

Findings of this study indicated that employees are driven by a solid belief in job security. Job security showed the highest impact on employee engagement ( $\beta=0.294$ ), even higher than rewards and recognition. During uncertain times, employees are willing to work in less-than-ideal environment as long as job security exists. Job security can be achieved when there is assurance that the organisation is performing well, which could be evidenced from the organisation's financial performance. Thus, it is imperative that organisations share information on financial performance when there are indications of good performance and quickly provide assurance to the employees when there are signs of poor performance. Organisations need to respond quickly to any unfavourable changes to performance, as well as obtain feedback and recommendation from the employees.

The second influential factor is performance feedback ( $\beta=0.223$ ). The significance of performance feedback is in terms of providing information that can enhance employees' confidence towards their actions and decisions. Positive performance feedback could also be linked to job security. An ethical manager tends to engage their employees through various aspects of communication methods as it will increase employees' creativity and innovation through feedback. Performance feedback also helps employees to identify their weaknesses, directs employees' actions towards organisational goals, and corrects unfavourable behaviours before such behaviours become damaging to the organisation. Thus, it is crucial for organisations to ensure constant feedback were provided to employees to increase their knowledge, skills and abilities, and at the same time allowing managers to provide high autonomy to their employees in executing their tasks.

It has been long accepted that rewards and recognition is a way to motivate the employees, as it is one of the strategies that could enhance employees' morale. The findings of this study have determined that rewards and motivation ( $\beta=0.203$ ) is not that superior in determining employee engagement, compared to the other factors discussed in this study. However, it is essential for organisations to address rewards and recognition as it provides an opportunity to improve engagement among employees regardless of industries. Employees who are actively engaged in their work tend to constantly exchange information, knowledge and skills and it can be considered as a part of reward. In this context, the reward elements can be conceptualised as the knowledge that is being transferred, flourishing communication, and trust that are projected among members of the organisation.

The final influential factor analysed in this study is employee participation ( $\beta=0.179$ ), which forms the fourth influential factor on employee engagement. The significance of employee participation in organisations is that it can be diverse, depending on different positions, assigned tasks and responsibilities. Thus, one of the ways that organisations may increase employee engagement is by involving employees in various levels of organisational activities. The intensity or frequency in which employees exert can be considered as significant to the overall performance of the organisation. By involving employees in various activities and decision-making, new ideas can be generated and employees' contributions that are adequately recognised can increase their appreciation towards the organisation, resulting in high engagement.

## **6. Limitations**

The convenience sampling technique used in this study could have limited the generalisability of the findings. The survey invitation could have been circulated among friends, co-workers, and spouses, who may represent similar organisation or industry. This research study also employed quantitative methods in all measurements and assessments that are related to employee engagement thereby limiting the meaning placed on employee engagement. A qualitative design



study, however, has an equal chance of introducing new elements that may reaffirm or contradict the findings discussed herein.

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