

The Role of Psychological Empowerment as a Mediating Variable between Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Organizational citizenship behaviour is essential in maintaining the pursuit of public universities in offering a quality of education. High sense of organizational citizenship behaviour among employees enables an organization to manage its resources efficiently. This conceptual article will add to the knowledge of the literature by investigating the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behaviour in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. The expected findings will provide a guideline for both policy makers and universities management. The theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: Psychological Empowerment; Perceived Organizational Support; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Higher Education; Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the Malaysian higher education system has advanced better and more competent. For the last ten years alone, the system has significantly attracted more students enrolling in Malaysian universities and increased its global rank in terms of various dimensions, including research publications, patents, and institutional quality. It has also become a top destination for international students coming from various Asian countries, including Middle East countries (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025). The Malaysian government has given much attention to higher education based on the belief that this sector plays a key role in supporting its plan of transformation of the country from a middle income country into a high income by 2020 (ETP Annual Report, 2014). In parallel with improvement of higher education, The Malaysian National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 has put forward several thrusts for future directions. One of these important directions is establishing the country as an international hub of higher education excellence (ETP Annual Report, 2014). This has led the Ministry of Higher Education to plan several reforms in the Malaysian higher education in order to attract a large number of international students to Malaysian universities.

For the last decade, the concept of empowerment of academics and staff in universities has emerged in the context of higher education (Ahadi & Suandi, 2014). This is because of its benefits for universities and academics as well as staff (Short & Johnson, 1994). In universities, like in any other workplaces, empowering human resources is believed to be the key element in the success and achievement of such higher educational institutions. What makes empowerment more important is that educational institutions may not be able to survive and perform well without competent and committed academics and staff (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). Similarly, organizational citizenship behaviour is essential element in every organization and awareness of the importance of OCB is increasing in most of the organization to encourage the employee's positive behaviour. Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is regarded one of the key elements and factors contributing to achieving overall organizational effectiveness as well as success of the organization in an intensity competitive environment (Chan, 2014). Besides, empowerment of academics is one of the most successful means to improving academics' positive behaviors towards their work, including organizational citizenship behavior (Abdulrab, Zumrah, Almaamari, & Al-Tahitah, 2017; Ameen & Ahmad, 2017; Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007; Bogler & Somech, 2005; Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Farzaneh, Dehghanpour Farashah, & Kazemi, 2014; Jha, 2014; Najafi, Noruzy, Azar, Nazari-Shirkouhi, & Dalvand, 2011; Wat & Shaffer, 2005).

Review the literature show that perceived organizational support improves organizational citizenship behaviour (Lamm, Tosti-Kharas, & King, 2014; Pohl, Battistelli, & Librecht, 2013; van Knippenberg, van Prooijen, & Sleebos, 2015). However, the mechanisms and processes by which perceived organizational support influences

employee's organizational citizenship behaviour, especially in the higher educational context, have not been adequately addressed in the literature. This conceptual paper argue that psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behaviour.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support is one of the contextual factors that would increase employees' felt obligation to help university reach its objectives, and they are likely to develop more positive attitudes towards organization. Recent studies shows that perceived organizational support has a positive impact on: transfer of training (Zumrah, 2015; Zumrah, Boyle, & Fein, 2012), career success (Liu, Yang, Yang, & Liu, 2015; Suazo & Turnley, 2010), work engagement (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014), citizenship behavior (Ahmed & Nawaz, 2015; Chiang & Hsieh, 2012), and negative impact on Withdrawal Behavior and withdrawal intensions (Shusha, 2013), turnover intentions (Madden, Mathias, & Madden, 2015; Ameen & Ahmad, 2014; Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2011), dialogue and inquiry, team learning, embedded system, empowerment, system connection and strategic leadership (Salehzadeh, Asadi, Khazaei Pool, Reza Ansari, & Haroni, 2014).

Recent studies showed that perceived organizational support have been frequently examined as the antecedents of psychological empowerment (Ali et al., 2010; Bogler & Nir, 2012; Ameen & Ahmad, 2013; Ertürk & Vurgun, 2015; Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015; Salehzadeh et al., 2014). Such studies examined a relationship of perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment, however, there is still lack of understanding about the mediating role of psychological empowerment between perceived organizational support and positive work outcomes, especially in the Public higher education institutions. Reviewing the previous studies showed that, perceived organizational support in the field of academic empowerment has been ignored. Besides, according to organization support theory, if employees perceive more support from the organization, they are likely to develop more positive attitudes towards organization. Previous studies show lack of knowledge on understanding the mechanism through which perceived organizational support related to other positive work outcomes.

Furthermore, previous studies have found that perceived organizational support is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior (Lamm et al., 2014; Pohl et al., 2013; van Knippenberg et al., 2015). Based on the literature, most studies that investigated the impact of perceived organizational support on employee work behavior have been conducted in western context. However, due to lack of published academic and empirical research on the influence of perceived organizational support on employee's behaviors outcomes (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Patrick & Laschinger, 2006; Salehzadeh et al., 2014; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011) , this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the impact of and perceived organizational support on positive work outcomes among employees in Malaysian Higher education institutions. Consequently, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Perceived organizational support has a positive effect on psychological empowerment.

H2. Perceived organizational support has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

2.2 Psychological Empowerment

Previous psychological empowerment theories show the importance of psychological empowerment to business and organizations (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Other studies reported the important of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, service quality, job performance, effectiveness and innovative behavior (Bhatnagar, 2005; Ismail et al., 2009; Joo & Shim, 2010; Marane, 2012; Seibert et al., 2011; Ameen & Ahmad, 2012; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2009; Wang & Lee, 2009). Furthermore , psychological empowerment improves positive work outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Bogler & Somech, 2005; Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Farzaneh et al., 2014; Jha, 2014; Najafi et al., 2011; Wat & Shaffer, 2005). An empirical study conducted by Chiang and Hsieh (2012) psychological empowerment was hypothesized to be positively influences Organizational Citizenship Behavior. The study confirmed that the higher the level of employees' psychological empowerment, the more motivated employees are to perform well at work. As well, while employees have positive feelings about psychological empowerment, they are motivated to demonstrate more OCB. Similarly, Najafi et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine causal relations between organizational justice, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and OCB. The study found that psychological empowerment correlated positively with job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

Furthermore, a study was conducted by to Jha (2014) to investigate the impact of psychological empowerment on work outcomes like Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). The results demonstrated a

significant association between psychological empowerment and OCB. Thus it was found that there is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and OCB when psychological empowerment acts as a moderator.

Perceived organizational support can be a powerful influence on components of psychological empowerment (Ali et al., 2010; Bogler & Nir, 2012; Ertürk & Vurgun, 2015; Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). As stated by the organizational support theory, employees develop a sense regarding the extent to which the organization appreciates their contribution and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Perceived organizational support was an important antecedent variable of OCB (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). It has been argued in previous researches that psychological empowerment was the mechanism through which perceived organizational support related to positive work place behaviors (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Lamm et al., 2014). Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Psychological empowerment has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior.

H4. Psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior.

2.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizational citizenship behaviour is one of the important determinants and leading factors that contribute to overall organizational effectiveness and towards to the success of the organization in an intensity competitive environment (Chan, 2014; Organ, 1988). Specifically, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour may affect the performance of the organization in terms of: encouraging increased manager and employee productivity (Purnama, 2013). Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) defined by Organ (1988) as a type of personal behaviour which is discretionary, and which is not recognized by the formal reward system neither directly nor explicitly. Such behaviour tends to promote the efficient functioning of the organization. According to Organ (1988), there are five distinct dimensions of OCB identified in previous research : Altruism (helping specific others); civic virtue (keeping updated with most important matters within the organisation); conscientiousness (compliance with norms); courtesy (consulting others before taking action); and sportsmanship (not complaining about trivial matters). However, Williams and Anderson (1991) provided a classification of OCB from a different perspective into two kinds: (1) behaviours which are oriented towards certain people in the organization, such as courtesy and altruism (OCBI), and (2) behaviours which are related to how to benefit all people in the organization. For the purpose of this study organizational citizenship behaviour defined as the individual's extra-role behaviors that includes his/her voluntary effort towards his/her university . Such behaviour is not directly and explicitly rewarded by the faculty/university and eventually enhances the effectiveness of the university.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Overview of the Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework explains the effect of perceived organizational support on psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behaviour. Psychological empowerment defined as motivation structure which consists of four dimensions meaning, competence or self-efficacy, self-determination, and impact. Perceived organizational support is defined as the employees' general belief that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002) which consists of three dimensions including supervisory and colleague support, training and acknowledgement, and rewards (Ameen & Ahmad, 2017; Osca, Urien, Gonzalez-Camino, Dolores Martínez-Pérez, & Martínez-Pérez, 2005). While organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) is defined as an individual's behaviour which is voluntary effort of the employee towards the organization and not rewarded by the organization directly and explicitly which eventually improves the effectiveness of the organization. OCB was operationalized in two dimensions, namely OCB directed towards fellow employees (OCBI) and OCB directed towards the organization (OCBO). In addition, the research framework of the study also explains about the impact of psychological empowerment on organizational citizenship behaviour.

The proposed conceptual framework can be seen in Figure 1 below. The proposed conceptual framework examines the relationship between perceived organizational support as antecedent variable and psychological empowerment as a moderating variable to organizational citizenship behaviour as an output variable among academic staff who work at public universities in Malaysia. The proposed model has seven hypotheses to test.

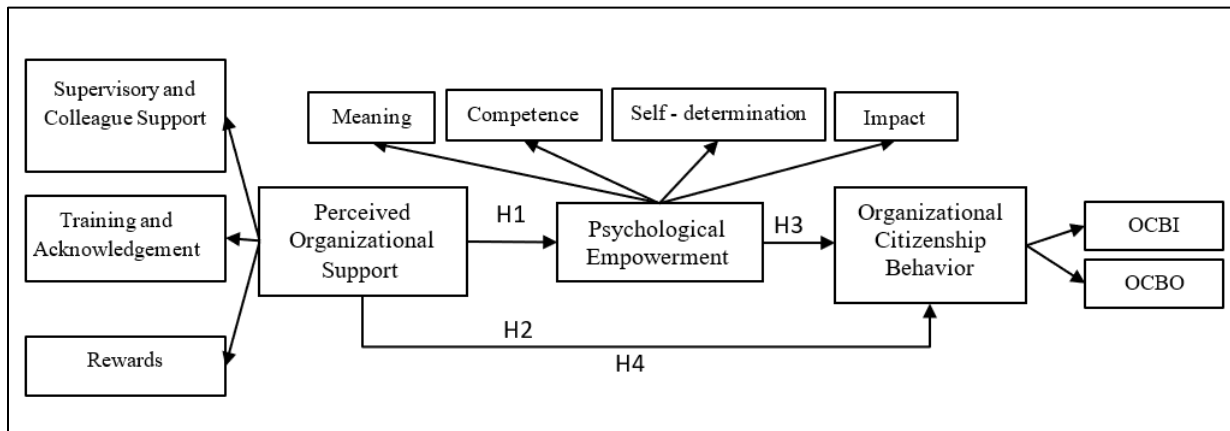


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

4. IMPLICATIONS

The findings would be useful for managers in the higher education sector in understanding the crucial influence of perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment on organizational citizenship behaviour. Moreover, given the priority of management in determining of academics' performance and effectiveness (A. H. Aldholay, Isaac, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2018; A. Aldholay, Isaac, Abdullah, Abdulsalam, & Al-Shibami, 2018), this study will also provide the management with knowledge about the role of perceived organizational support in increasing organizational citizenship behaviors among employees in public universities. It could provide the management with clear reasons to pay more attention to perceived organizational support as an antecedent to psychological empowerment by caring about employees' opinions and well-being, valuing their contributions, providing assistance to them when needed, and by giving more focus on ways to demonstrate their support for individual employees, as this should improve their work attitude. Moreover, this study could also provide guidelines to managers about what is needed to keep the more committed to the university.

By increasing the advantages of employee's empowerment as a motivation mechanism (Dewettinck & van Ameijde, 2011; Spreitzer, 2008), this study helps managers in public universities by implementing certain policies which encourage employees to improve work related behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior. They may also consider implementing effective empowerment policy seriously and promote empowering environment for workplace. This will help to develop good teamwork in order to achieve individual and organizational goals while eliminating traditional controlling. In addition, this study helps the management of public universities to create an appropriate environment for empowerment among academics by considering the perceived organizational support when designing or redesigning the organization strategies (Aldholay, Abdullah, Ramayah, Isaac, & Mutahar, 2018; Aldholay, Isaac, Abdullah, Alrajawy, & Nusari, 2018). More empowered employees are more likely to engage in their jobs and will increase the productivity and the effectiveness. Therefore, the effective management that encourages leaders to pay attention to enhance employees' perception toward their jobs, empowers them in order to be more engaged, achieve high performance and improve service quality provided to customers.

5. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The sample of the study was mainly driven from five research universities in Malaysia. Accordingly, future studies could extend the sample by including all public universities in Malaysia for better generalization of the findings. The current study used a quantitative approach where the questionnaires distributed to academic staff in Malaysian research universities. Thus, future researchers may consider collecting deeper qualitative data from the academic staff as well as from leaders in Malaysian research universities. The use of qualitative data may provide better understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, thus uncovering trends in thoughts and opinions, and diving deeper into the problem. One of the limitations of this study is that the data gathered was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in nature. The longitudinal method might improve the understanding of the associations and the causality between variables (Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, & Mutahar, 2017; Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, Mutahar, & Alrajawy, 2017; Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, & Mutahar Ahmed, 2017). Future research should be conducted to investigate the relationship between variables by conducting cross-cultural studies as recommended by previous studies (Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, & Mutahar, 2017a; Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, & Mutahar, 2017b; Isaac, Masoud, Samad, & Abdullah, 2016).

6. CONCLUSION

Organizations should increase spending on research and development in order to increase the organizational effectiveness (Osama Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, Mutahar, & Alrajawy, 2018; Osama Isaac, Abdullah, Ramayah, & Mutahar, 2018; Alrajawy, Daud, Isaac, & Mutahar, 2017). The study will provide an empirical evidence about the role of psychological empowerment as a mediator in the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behaviour. The proposed study will try to offer leaders in Malaysian research universities a strategy that enhances the psychological empowerment of the academic staff in order to maintain the academics' high sense of citizenship behaviour to universities, which in turn, will enhance the performance and effectiveness of Malaysian public universities as well.

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