

## Organizational Commitment And Employee Engagement Among Administrators In Public Universities In Malaysia

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### Abstract

This study attempted to examine the effect of organizational commitment on employee engagement among universities' administrators in public universities of Malaysia. For the purpose of the study, data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 400 participants consisting of administrators in public universities in Malaysia. Collected data were analyzed using partial least square (PLS) structured equation modeling with the support of SMART PLS 2.0. Findings revealed that affective commitment and normative commitment has significant effect on employee engagement while continuance commitment was not found to have any significant effect on employee engagement. The outcomes of this empirical study will help in designing appropriate human resource management policies to improve the engagement level of administrator at all public universities in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement; continuous commitment; normative commitment; affective commitment; public university administrators

### Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji komitmen organisasi dan penglibatan pekerja di kalangan pentadbir universiti di universiti awam Malaysia. Untuk tujuan kajian, data dikumpulkan dengan soal selidik berstruktur daripada 400 peserta yang terdiri daripada pentadbir di universiti awam di Malaysia. Data yang dikumpulkan telah dianalisis menggunakan pemodelan persamaan berstruktur iaitu (PLS) dengan sokongan perisian SMART PLS 2.0. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa komitmen afektif dan komitmen normatif memberi kesan signifikan kepada penglibatan pekerja manakala komitmen berterusan tidak dapat memberi kesan signifikan kepada penglibatan pekerja. Hasil kajian empirikal ini akan membantu dalam merangka dasar pengurusan sumber manusia yang sesuai untuk meningkatkan tahap penglibatan pentadbir di semua universiti awam di Malaysia

**Kata kunci:** Penglibatan kakitangan; komitmen berterusan; komitmen normative; komitmen afektif; pentadbir universiti awam

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term employee engagement is widely recognized and used in today's world (Robinson et al, 2004). This is because employee engagement is seen as a crucial emerging organizational issue in today's highly competitive environment in business organization as well as in non-profit organizations such as public universities. Organization begins to see that their priorities must be not only increasing sales or improving services, but also the engagement of their employees towards the organization. Employee engagement is defined as the employee's faith in the mission, purpose and values of an organization. This can be proven by their attitude, actions and effort towards their employers and customers, which will be translated into their commitment.

The public higher education institutions in Malaysia, which is the focus of this study, have entered a new era of international competition whereby they participate in a variety of competitions at the international level in the attempt to improve on quality and effectiveness (Norzaini, 2012). The current knowledge-based economy spurs the demand for highly educated and specialised people (Yean et al., 2016) that can only be made available by having in place of good higher education institutions. This is evidenced by the priority put on higher education institution by the Malaysian government (Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006–2010, 2006; Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2007). In conjunction with that, the public universities in Malaysia need to enhance employee engagement in their organization to gain mutual benefits to enhance and ensure quality education provided to stakeholders. Employees who are committed towards their organizations goals are the ones who are motivated enough, and thus, are the main elements of the organization's future (Smith, 2013). In order to succeed in today's globally competitive world, employers need dedicated and committed employees to propel their success.

To establish a framework of the study, a preliminary interview was conducted among few selected administrators in public universities namely the assistant registrar officers to find out issues related to their engagement. A total of 13 questions related to engagement issues were asked. Example of questions being asked are: "Is there any differences in employee engagement among assistant registrars now

compared to five years before”, “any differences in employee engagement among permanent and contract assistant registrars”, “any differences in employee engagement among senior and junior staff, absenteeism and turnover issues. The findings from preliminary interview revealed issues related to employee engagement problem and it could be concluded that the overall level of employee engagement is moderate. This study focuses on factors affecting employee engagement as revealed in the past literature such as organizational commitment (Popoola & Ayeni, 2007; Vance, 2006; Keller, 2005; Allen & Meyer, 1990).

## ■2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Organizational Commitment

Organisational commitment and employee engagement are positively related and contribute to individual readiness to change besides showing a stronger relationship (Mangundjaya, 2012). Organizational commitment has been conceptualized by Allen and Meyer (1990) with a combination of three components: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment denotes to individuals' recognition and attachment with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment contributes to the emotional attachments that employees have for personal interaction with co-workers, organisation's culture and job characteristics (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Robinson et al., (2004) reported strong relationship between the two variables (affective commitment and engagement). Babakus et al. (2003) also observed that affective commitment is the emotional bond of an individual's feeling towards the organisation and participation with the organisation as well as the pleasure in being a member of the organisation (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). Dedication, loyalty and satisfaction are considered important in securing employee's affective bond with their organisation (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

In raising and retaining company's commitment index, organizations are expected to take initiatives to motivate their employees. Hence, analysis and understanding of the commitment set as drivers in employee engagement (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014). To this end, an appreciative enquiry on regular basis is a must to measure and monitor commitment level. There are more empirical studies on affective commitment as it has been recognized as the strongest and most consistent commitment among the three components of organizational commitment (Allen, 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000).

Employees are considered to be in a positive state when they relate themselves with the organization goals and continuously desire to be a part of the organization. Affective commitment is made of a sequence of being satisfied with the work experiences, leading to compliance with organizational norms and practices (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Affective commitment can be increased by participation when employees are involved in decision-making process and the organizations' orientation is decentralized (McElroy, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: Affective commitment is positively related to employee engagement among assistant registrars of public universities in Malaysia.*

Meyer et al. (2002) stated that the high degree of continuance commitment shown by employees to their organisation is due to the fact that their level of affective or normative commitment influences it. However, according to Wallace (1997), notwithstanding the continued commitment, employee does not display reason to continue working for the organisation. However, according to Gagne and Deci (2005), continuance commitment derives from external constraints (i.e., rewards and punishments). Due to employees' strong normative and affective commitment, they still intend to continue working for the organisation despite the decreasing continuance commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) mentioned that the rising costs incurred should employees choose to discontinue work with the organisation contribute to the conditions of reaction when workers are more aligned to the continuance commitment and work experience. However, continuance commitment found to have little, or even a negative impact on attendance, performance and organisational citizenship behaviours. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

*H2: Continuance commitment is positively related to employee engagement among assistant registrars of public universities in Malaysia.*

The development of normative commitment is believed to be as a reaction to social pressure. Affective commitment is anticipated to exert the greatest positive effect on preferable work behaviours, for example attendance, performance and organisational citizenship behaviour followed by normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Powell and Meyer (2004) found that the side bets carrying social costs (expectations and self-presentation concerns) correlate more strongly with normative commitment than with continuance commitment. This suggests that normative commitment might be a special form of side-bet commitment, which is one that is sensitive to social norms and the penalties associated with failing to meet the expectations.

Examples provided by Meyer and Smith (2000) shows that the means of the workflow of human resource management (HRM) can display these results. Training opportunity provided by the organisation is one of the many instances where reciprocal benefits received by the employees that lead to affective commitment and normative commitment or perceived organisational support (affective commitment contribution) or as an investment that adds up on the cost of leaving the company (leading to continuance commitment).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

*H3: Normative commitment is positively related to employee engagement among assistant registrars of public universities in Malaysia.*

## ■3.0 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 shows schematic diagram of the research framework. The framework is drawn with independent variables such as affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment and employee engagement as dependent variable.

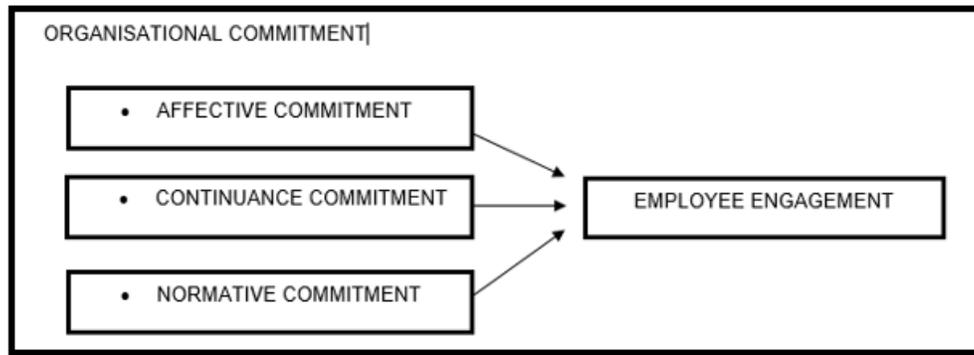


Figure 1 Research framework

#### 4.0 METHODOLOGY

##### Survey Procedures

A quantitative research method (survey) was used to solicit responses from assistant registrars grade N41 of 20 public universities in Malaysia using stratified random sampling. Overall, the population number of assistant registrars grade N 41 is 1464. Twenty assistant registrars from each of 20 universities were chosen to participate in this study. The medium used is monkey survey link which was sent directly to respondents' e-mail and 400 responses were collected. The sample size was chosen as per recommendation by Sekaran's (2003), where she proposed a sample size of larger than 30 and less than 500 is considered as good in social science research.

##### Measures

Organizational commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment) consisted of 21 items was measured using measure adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990). All items were measured using 5-point Likert Scale.

#### 5.0 RESULTS

##### Profile of Respondents

Table 1 provides a summary of sample distribution on demographic characteristics (N=400). Majority of the respondents (59%) were female. The majority of the respondent's age (55.5%) is between 30-39 years old and most of the respondents' education level (71.5%) is degree. 82.3% of the respondents in this study are married and the majority of them (92.8%) are Malay. Most of the employees in each public university hold permanent position and have been occupying their current position for more than 10 years, which makes about 39.3%.

Table 1 Profile of respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	236	59.0
	Male	164	41.0
Age	20-29	58	14.5
	30-39	222	55.5
	40-49	85	21.3
	50 years and above	35	8.8
Marital Status	Single	64	16.0
	Married	329	82.3
	Divorced/Separated	7	1.8
Race	Malay	371	92.8
	Chinese	1	0.3
	Others	28	7.0
Education Level	Degree	286	71.5
	Master	103	25.8
	PhD	6	1.5

	Others	5	1.3
Employment Status	Permanent	329	82.3
	Contract	71	17.8
Length of Service	<1 year	9	2.3
	1 - 5 years	106	26.5
	6 - 9 years	128	32.0
	>10 years	157	39.3

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics in terms of mean and standard deviation of all variables under study. The results show that three variables (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) have mean value of above moderate.

**Table 2** Mean and standard deviation of variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affective commitment	3.265	0.329
Continuance commitment	3.305	0.478
Normative commitment	3.265	0.329

### Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The study has examined the convergent validity and the discriminant validity to evaluate the measurement model. As recommended by (Hair et al. 2014), while assessing convergent validity the factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) was checked. The results show that all the item loadings were higher than 0.5, the AVE were higher than 0.5 and the CR were above 0.7 which fulfilled the benchmark suggested by (Hair et al. 2013). Table 3 shows the results of convergent validity.

**Table 3** The results of convergent validity

Item	Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square
AC1	0.865	0.599	0.855	0.476
AC2	0.828			
AC4	0.664			
AC6	0.724			
CC2	0.960	0.567	0.700	
CC4	0.460			
EE1	0.821			
EE2	0.739	0.527	0.868	
EE3	0.802			
EE5	0.774			
EE6	0.575	0.673	0.892	
EE8	0.610			
NC3	0.850			
NC4	0.795	0.788		
NC5	0.847			
NC6	0.788			

Note: AC = Affective commitment; CC = Continuance commitment; NC = Normative commitment; EE = Employee engagement

To measure discriminant validity (the degree to which items differentiate among constructs or measure distinct concepts), the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was examined. The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion is comparing the correlations between and the square root of the AVE for that construct. The results of discriminant validity show all the values are greater than the corresponding row and column values indicating the measures were discriminant. Table 4 shows the results of discriminant validity.

### Structural Model (Inner Model)

To examine the structural model, the  $R^2$ , standard beta, t-values via a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5000 were assessed according to the cut-off values by Hair et al. (2014). The results (see Table 3) revealed that out of three (3) hypotheses, two (2) hypotheses were significant.

Assessment of the path coefficient (refer to table 5) shows that two proposed hypotheses are supported. The *R*-squared value represents the proportion of variation in the dependent variable(s) that can be explained by one or more predictor variable (Hair et al., 2010; Elliott & Woodward, 2007; Hair et al., 2006). Although the acceptable level of *R*<sup>2</sup> value depends on the research context (Hair et al., 2010), Falk and Miller (1992) propose an *R*-squared value between 0 and 0.10 as a minimum acceptable level. Meanwhile, Chin (1998) suggests that the *R*-squared values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 in PLS-SEM can be considered as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. The research model in this study explains 47.6% of the total variance in employee engagement. This suggests that the antecedent's variables collectively explain 47.6% of the variance of the employee engagement (refer to table 3). Hence, following Falk and Miller's (1992) and Chin's (1998) criteria, the endogenous latent variables showed acceptable levels of *R*-squared value, which is considered as substantial.

**Table 4** Discriminant validity

	AC	CC	EE	NC
AC	<b>0.774</b>			
CC	0.369	<b>0.753</b>		
EE	0.618	0.251	<b>0.726</b>	
NC	0.386	0.297	0.519	<b>0.820</b>

**Table 5** Structural Model Results for Hypothesis Testing

	Path Coefficient	Std Error	T-Values	Findings
H1: AC -> EE	0.501	0.042	11.881	Significant
H2: CC -> EE	-0.034	0.043	0.796	Not Significant
H3: NC -> EE	0.336	0.044	7.643	Significant

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Three hypotheses were postulated to study the factors affecting employee engagement among administrators (i.e assistant registrars grade N41) in public universities in Malaysia. These three hypotheses were studied to establish the relationship between each dimension of organizational commitments (affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment) towards employee engagement. This study concluded that affective commitment and normative commitment are two most important factors that contribute to employee engagement among assistant registrars of public universities in Malaysia.

Findings of this study showed that continuance commitment does not have any significant relationship with employee engagement. The sense of commitment to the organization comes from mutual contributions with the organizations and the loss they relate with leaving, which is a stage namely continuance commitment. Therefore, employees with strong continuance commitment stay with the organization by their own will (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Nevertheless, particularly among the assistant registrars in Malaysian public universities, there is no significant connection found in this study.

This study concluded that affective commitment and normative commitment are relevant to employee engagement. This means that engaged employees are the ones who accomplish high level of affective commitment with the organization. These findings are coherent with previous work of Rhoades et al (2001) and Meyer & Allen (1997) on affective commitment. The matter is applied in public universities where staffs shows dedication by portraying the image of university logo and name of the university to the media and public when engaging with competition, research, debate, or any level of participation or success both locally and internationally. Researcher observed that when the sense of excitement and the existence of work engagement exist, the thought of leaving or changing workplace did not appear in the administrators' mind.

In conclusion, the improvements of affective and normative commitment are crucial to increase employee engagement of administrative staffs in public universities in Malaysia. Therefore it can be concluded that affective and normative commitments are the most significant contributory factors in achieving high-quality and loyal staff.

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