Determinants of Job Satisfaction and Ethical Behaviour towards Organisational Commitment – A Review

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Abstract

The paper reviews the influence of various dimensions of job satisfaction and ethical behaviour on organisational commitment. Several distinctive factors stemming out from each of these two dimensions will also be identified and studied. The paper concludes with discussion on managerial implications and direction for future research.

Keywords: Organisational commitment, Job satisfaction, Ethical behaviour, Malaysia

1. Introduction

A developed country must have a good infrastructure, large middle class, good technological and industrial capacities, and most importantly an ethical, educated and well-trained work force ("Malaysia Has Appearance of Developed Nation," 2012). Over the last two decades, many countries including Malaysia have been facing serious talent outflow problem, reflecting the country's struggle with brain drain and retaining talent.

It is interesting to note that the World Bank's report on the country's brain drain showed that in the past 20 years, the number of Malaysians with tertiary education who moved abroad tripled. In other words, two out of every 10 Malaysians with a tertiary education opted for either OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries or Singapore (Lee, 2011).

No doubt that globalisation, technological advancement as well as evolving business ethical practices will continue to influence organisations all around the world. Successful organisations realise that the retention of employee with higher organisational commitment is a source of competitive advantage in sustaining their growth and leaderships in the market place. Many companies are facing intensive challenge in improving employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment in their quest to retain these talents in their

organisations. The aim of this paper is to further understand the dimensions of job satisfaction and ethical behaviors toward organisational commitment.

2.   Literature Review

Generally, employees feel satisfied when they are rewarded fairly for their genuine contribution to the organisation and that these rewards are comparable to market trends. Employees' overall job satisfaction covers a variety of factors other than monetary rewards such as satisfaction with supervision, coworkers, and work. Employees with higher job satisfaction believe that their employer will give credit to their work where and when it's due and that their future in the organisation is bright. As a result, employees are more committed to the organisation, have higher productivity and higher retention rates.

In addition, Peterson (2002) has also focused on the role that ethics play in the scope of organisational climate and employee behavior. It is imperative to identify areas of operational concern where ethics can have a positive or negative effect. This includes the effect that managers and coworkers have on their colleagues' behavior. The impact to the bottom line can be overwhelmingly apparent even though the detailed financial implications of these behaviors are difficult to identify. Hence, organisations that promote ethical climate within their social norms and values can experience lower levels of deviant workplace behaviors, and an increase in organisational commitment. Taken together, this study will explore two important constructs, job satisfaction and ethical behaviour believed to have significant impact on organisational commitment. Several distinctive factors stemming out from each dimension as identified in Figure 1 below will also be explored.

Figure 1: Research Framework
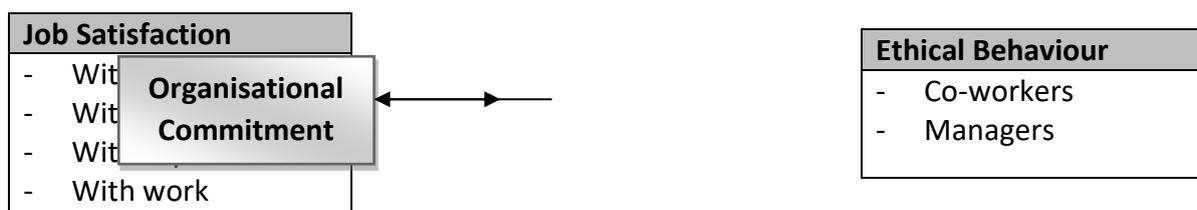
Organisational commitment is defined as an individual's willingness to contribute their efforts and loyalty to an organisation (Kouvonen et al., 2006). According to Mowday et al., (1982), organisational commitment is identified by three characteristics; (1) a strong desire to remain a member of the organisation; (2) a strong belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organisation; and (3) a readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation.

Job satisfaction is an analysis of employees' decisions about their labour force participation, whether to stay on at a job or to quit, and how much effort to contribute to their job. According to Mitchell and Lason (1987), it is commonly claimed that in the organisational

behavior environment, job satisfaction is the most important and frequently studied component. Most models of voluntary turnover assume that job dissatisfaction is the primary contributor for high turnover. Several studies have showed the negative relationship between employee turnover and job satisfaction (Locke, 1969; Mobley, 1977; Vroom, 1964). Ethical behaviour on the other hand looks at the employees' workplace behaviour or conduct as a reflection of the organisational procedures, policies, and practices with moral consequences (Cullen et al., 2003). Posner and Schmidt (1993) claimed that employees' attitudes about work and ethical practices are more important than clarity about organisational values.

2.1 Relationship between satisfaction with pay and organisational commitment

Formally, the word "pay" refers to all forms of compensation which evolved from both direct cash payments (e.g., salary) to indirect noncash payments (e.g., benefits). According to Miceli and Lane (1991), pay satisfaction is the individuals' overall amount of positive or negative affect (or feeling) toward their pay from their employers. According to Randstad Workmonitor 2012 Quarter 2 report, 62 percent of Malaysian employees consider a good salary as being more important than job satisfaction. The discrepancy theory (Lawler, 1971; 1981) states that, the primary factor of pay satisfaction is the discrepancy between the pay that should be received and the amount of pay actually received. Employees will be satisfied with their pay when their perceived amount of pay that should be received and the amount of pay received is equal. On the other hand, employees will be dissatisfied with their pay if the perceived amount of pay deserved is greater than the amount received as postulated in the theory.

Negative correlation between pay satisfaction and turnover rate has been demonstrated by many studies (Jaros, 1997; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). In addition, Williams and Hazer (1986) also suggested that organisational commitment being positively related to pay satisfaction. A sense of pay equity can increase employment and job satisfaction (Ago et al., 1993; Witt and Nye, 1992; Berg, 1991) and satisfaction with the organisation which then contribute to a higher level of organisational commitment (Alexander and Ruderman, 1987; Ronen, 1986). In fact, according to Cox (2000), a favorable view regarding the allocation process has been found to have significant impact on organisational commitment. Scandura and Lankau (1997) also demonstrated that perceived equity in pay resulted in higher commitment to the organisation. On the other hand, a decreased perception of pay satisfaction was seen among workers hired under a lower pay scale compared to existing workers (Townsend and Patridge, 1999).

Some theoretical models such as Lawler (1971) and Deckop (1992) are generally based on the concept that pay satisfaction has a direct influence over organisational commitment. However, findings from few studies have shown that pay satisfaction can affect the desire to join a union (Weiner, 1980), staff turnover (Covin et al., 1993), employment and job satisfaction (Summers and Hendrix, 1991) and absenteeism (Weiner, 1980).

2.2 Relationship between satisfaction with co-workers and organisational commitment

According to Blustein (2006); Fine (1983); and Freud (1930), work is the domain in which individuals spend one third to one half of their lives, thus work is an integral component of the overall quality of life. It is only natural that employees would hope to have satisfaction in

their work lives especially satisfaction with co-workers whom they spend most of the time with.

Interpersonal relationships in workplace have a great impact toward employees' overall job satisfaction, which contribute to the pleasure in employees' job. Social support from co-workers is identified as an important predictor of job satisfaction, perceived stress and perceived likelihood of leaving the organisation (Hatton and Emerson, 1993; Blustein, 2006). Job satisfaction increase when employees receive adequate co-workers support (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Poor relationships at work may contribute to dissatisfaction with and misery in employees' job.

There have been many studies on job satisfaction in various industries that show that satisfaction with relationship with co-workers at workplace significantly impact job satisfaction which affects the overall organisational commitment of employees. Employees' perspectives regarding the quality of interpersonal relationship with co-workers have been positively correlated with overall job satisfaction among the professionals in multinational corporations (Raabe and Beehr, 2003); factory workers in Mexico (Peterson, Puia, and Suess, 2003); employees of small company (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995); blue-collar workers in work teams (Hodson, 1997); staff at educational industry (Paoline et al., 2006); child-care workers (Jorde-Bloom, 1988); and many other professionals and working class individuals in various industries (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006).

Harmer and Findlay (2005) examined the relationship between workplace friendship and job satisfaction. The authors noted that there will be motivation for employees if positive social connections are established in the place of work. Lee and Ashforth (1996) suggested that employees who had social support from co-workers and autonomy from supervisors were less likely to experience job dissatisfaction. The authors also reported that when service workers feel stressed and the working environment has no adequate emotional support, the workers may begin distancing themselves from the job unconsciously and the level of organisational commitment continues to be lower. Social support from co-workers were identified as an important predictor of job satisfaction, perceived stress and perceived likelihood of leaving the organisation (Hatton and Emerson, 1993).

2.3 Relationship between satisfaction with supervision and organisational commitment

As early as the 1930, Hawthorne factory study (Vroom, 1964) has suggested that satisfaction with supervision has been certified extensively as a major contributor to overall job satisfaction (Cunningham and MacGregor, 2000; Schyns and Croon, 2006). More recently, several reports were written which claimed that supervisors often treat their subordinates differently thereby creating a relationship that affect their overall job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. Thus, the concept of leader-member exchange (LMX) within the business environment has become a widely researched and debated topic (Harris, Harris and Eplion, 2007; Liang et al., 2007; Rosen et al., 2006). According to the LMX theory, the relationship between a supervisor and an employee develops in term of work-related exchanges between the two individuals (Morrow et al., 2005). LMX has been conceived as the one-on-one relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate in workplace. These relationships can be classified as high in quality or "good" (i.e., reflecting trust, respect, and

loyalty) or low in quality or "bad" (i.e., reflecting mistrust, low respect, and a lack of loyalty). LMX theory attempts to understand the quality of each relationship and its effects on organisational outcomes over time (Lussier and Achua, 2004). The understanding of these relationships is extremely important due to the increasing number of employees who dissatisfied with their current work positions. By understanding these relationships, organisations are exposed to lower turnover rate (Lussier and Achua, 2004).

According to Williams (2002), the main reason people leave their organisations is because they are being treated poorly by their supervisors. Those who remain in their jobs while working for poor supervisors tends to have lower job satisfaction, lower organisational commitment, higher conflict between work and family, and psychological distress (Tepper, 2000). Spinelli and Canavos (2000) suggested that a chance to participate in decision-making, to have equal opportunities for training, to receive equal benefits, and to get quick responses from their immediate supervisors can significantly enhance employees' satisfaction with their supervision. In addition, Brown and Peterson (1993) highlighted that supervisors' treatment will positively affect employees' overall job satisfaction. Shaw (1999) claimed that the relationship between employees' job satisfaction with their supervision and organisational commitment reflects an inverse relationship. Consecutively, Mobley (1997) argued that organisations' close supervision will directly lead to high turnover rate in an organisation.

While the concept of leader-member exchange has been studied in-depth by many researchers, few studies have come to determinate the consistent results regarding its impact on employees, their job satisfaction, and turnover. Turnover experts, both academic and practitioner, have claimed that supervision plays a meaningful role in employee turnover decisions (Morrow et al., 2005). With this thought in mind, it is easy to see how supervisory relationships can cause employees to lose commitment to or satisfaction with their jobs. There is a need for more research and study within the realm of LMX and employee job satisfaction.

Relationship between satisfaction with work and organisational commitment

In The Division of Labor in Society, Adam Smith recognises the potential mental health disadvantage for individuals "who would throughout their lives perform the same number of simple tasks over and over again". Since then, social scientists have documented that poor work environments can increase stress, erode health (Kahn et al., 1982) and have other deleterious effects on psychological functioning (Kohn and Carmi, 1973) whereby all these may depreciate organisational commitment.

Mowday et al., (1982) indicates that a variety of work role may affect employee's commitment towards their organisation. Three component of this work-role includes job scope or challenge, role conflict, and role ambiguity. Role conflict is said to be inversely related to commitment in two separate studies by (Mathieu, 1990; Morris and Sherman, 1981). In another study, Angle and Perry (1981) published that both role conflict and role ambiguity demonstrated a significant inverse relationship to organisational commitment. Consecutively, Mathieu (1990) stated that role overload has strong and inverse relation to employee commitment.

In addition, the characteristics of the job itself can also affect the level of commitment among employees through reduced turnover and absenteeism. There are five constructs to the Job Characteristics Model. They are: (1) Task significance refers to the extent of job impact on the specific individual in the organisation as well as the society; (2) Task identity is in means of the extent of job involvement completion as a whole identifiable outcome; (3) Skill variety defines the extent of job requirement whereby the utilisation of different talents; (4) Autonomy refers to the extent of job providing employees with discretion to determine how works are to be done; (5) Feedback is in means of the extent to which carrying out the work task gives the employee clarity of information, evaluation and analysis about one's performance (Hackman and Oldham ,1975).

Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) states that job enrichment provides employees more autonomy and advancement in their job placement and results in commitment enhancement and reduced turnover and absenteeism. Furthermore, as employee's job scope increases through enlargement or varies through job rotation, one's degree of commitment would eventually increases accordingly. Autonomous jobs allow individuals to make more decisions on their own, control the speed of their work, and have more freedom (Schwepker, 1999). Similarly, challenging and non-routine work may be associated with occupational roles in which individuals possess greater self-directedness, power, and control (Kohn and Carmi, 1973). Work roles allow individuals to experience and express their own values and goals-and gain personal and social rewards (Pearlin, 1983).

2.4 Relationship between ethical behaviour of co-workers and organisational commitment

Coworkers' actions have been related to individual-level outcomes in workplace (Barnard, 1938; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). A few studies have suggested that coworkers' matter and that their support, ethical or unethical doing are related to their colleagues' burnout, stress, physical strains, and perspective on ethics (Beehr et al., 2000; Halbesleben, 2006; Viswesvaran et al., 1999). Therefore, it is logical to state that coworkers' actions are influential for certain work outcomes, such as their colleagues' attitudes, learning, and ethical or unethical behaviours (Hackman, 1992).

Based on the Social Information-processing theory, co-workers are important source of information from employees' immediate social environment because (1) when looking at how to do a job, co-workers are the most immediate source of information; (2) there is an increased reliance on work groups thus making co-worker exchanges influential and less independent when getting a job done (Parker, 2007); (3) Co-workers communicate frequently due to time constrains, proximity, etc. (Cole et al., 2002). Thus co-workers' ethical behaviours serve as an important guide towards employees' interpretations of ethical or unethical behaviours (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Baumeister et al. (2001) also suggested that job satisfaction decreases because of their co-workers' negative or unethical behaviours but increases in job satisfaction driven by positive or ethical behaviours.

In addition, Festinger (1954) has claimed that social environment's information is conspicuous and particularly applicable when the receiving employee assumes the individual sources as very similar to him or herself. The author also argued that if information from formal channels is uncertain, unstructured or absent, employees will then start to rely on the social

environment to gain interpretations. Thus, employees' interpretations can be influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of those co-workers whom they perceive as similar to themselves.

O'Fallon and Butterfield (2005) proposed that peer influence on ethical behaviour will have a significant impact on employees' organisational commitment. Co-workers often serve as role models for others and their actions will definitely been followed by those newly joined employees. Thus, this will create norms for the workplace. This is consistent with the social learning theory which proposes that people learn new behaviour through observing associated people's behaviour closely (Bandura, 1977). Meanwhile, differential association theory expresses that ethical behaviour or unethical conduct of a specific reference group has a significant impact on a person's ethical behaviour (Ferrell and Gresham, 1985). These two theories have certified the existence of concrete relationship between co-workers' ethical behaviour and organisational commitment.

The more individuals acknowledge peers engaging in unethical behaviour, the more likely they will engage in the same or similar activities (Jones and Kavanagh, 1996; Keith et al., 2003). These individuals are highly sensitive to peer's influence because they are more likely to place a strong emphasis on their social environment and seek ways to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behaviour from what they learned in their social environment (Kohlberg, 1969). Furthermore, observing unethical peer behaviour may also lead employees to feel that they are at a disadvantage, prompting unethical behaviour to ''level the playing field'' or to prevent one from falling behind. These will dramatically lower overall employees' organisational commitment.

2.5 Relationship between ethical behaviour of managers and organisational commitment

One of the main factors affecting the ethical behaviour of employees is the role that managers play within the organisational climate (Peterson, 2002). Leadership involves the ability to influence others (Maxwell, 2005). Brown et al., (2005) defined ethical leadership as the demonstration of appropriate conduct via interpersonal relationships and personal actions. When employees are treated with respect and fairness, their commitment toward the organisation is strengthened.

The study of ethical leadership is formed based on the foundations of social learning. According to Brown and Gray (2004), managers might influence the ethical behaviour of others through modeling. In short, it is the managers' responsibility to model the ethical behaviour they would want their followers to emulate which will then contribute to higher level of organisational commitment. Wimbush and Shepard (1994) proposed that employees tend to follow their managers' behaviour because it is the supervisors who hold their subordinates accountable for their actions. Managers become a critical determinant of how organisational policies are perceived throughout the entire organisation. Hence, when expectations and policies are miscommunicated, various organisational climates begin to emerge leading to lower organisational commitment.

Managers' legitimate power which comes along with their position as well as their ability to allocate and control organisation's resources influences the perception of fair treatment. One

way to carry out fair treatment for employees is through the concept of ethical stewardship. Caldwell et al., (2010) mentioned ethical stewardship is simplified as "a higher level duty of governance in which the motivations of the manager are based on pro-organisational rather than self-interest behaviour". Therefore, managers must carry out their responsibility (e.g. allocate resources, provide adequate training and developmental opportunities) in a considerate and fair manner. When employees are being treated with respect and fairness, their commitment toward the organisation is strengthened.

Besides, McFall (1987) also indicated that managers need to apply ethical principle in order to enhance trust. The degree on how the trustee's (manager) integrity is judged are associated with several issues such as credible communication about the trustee, the consistency of the trustee's past actions, belief that the trustee has a strong sense of justice, and the extent to which the trustee's actions are compatible with his or her words (Mayer et al., 1995). Lieberman (1981) suggested integrity is an important trust factor; the evaluation of trustworthiness is based on the perceived level of integrity. Thus, managers' ethical behaviour in the organisation is highly important to promote integrity within the organisation.

Peterson (2002) suggested that the ethical climate of an organisation is linked directly to the employees' positive behaviour and also to the range of negative work behaviour including absenteeism and tardiness. "Those (employees) with at least one negative relationship at work and unethical behaviour were significantly less satisfied and reported less organisational commitment" (Morrison, 2008). Negative workplace relationships and unethical behaviours will impact the level of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions.

Employees claim to prefer ethical organisations (Jose and Thibodeaux, 1999), which proposed that managers' awareness of code of ethics may enhance employees' organisational commitment (Fritz et al., 1999). Formal managers' code of ethics might lead to a more positive perception of organisation's ethical values (Valentine and Barnett, 2002) and impose a higher level of ethical conduct among employees (McCabe et al., 1996). The managers' code of ethics can lead employees to believe that the organisation's values are compatible with their own, which may then lead to higher levels of organisational commitment (Finegan, 2000).

Job dissatisfaction occur when the hygiene factors are either absent or insufficient (Nelson and Quick, 2009). Based on Herzberg's two factor theory, motivation factors were those aspects of the work environment that lead to psychological growth and promote job satisfaction. Hygiene factors on the other hand refer to aspects of the work environment that established psychological discomfort and job dissatisfaction. In this scenario, managers' unethical behaviour in the organisation is considered to be hygiene factor. According to Nelson and Quick (2009), unethical behaviour influence the level of job dissatisfaction. If hygiene factors are well administrated, the result is a higher organisational commitment as decrease in employee dissatisfaction.

Based on Trevino, Butterfield and McCabe (1998), employees who perceived that the organisation supports and encourages ethical conduct are more committed to their organisation. Although there is little empirical attention on the relationship between organisational commitment and managers' code of ethics, one study of accountants actually

did figure out that organisational commitment was higher among employees in organisation with code of ethics than in organisation without codes.

3. Conclusion

Globalisation, technological advancement and insatiable hunger for a better life are forces that have brought about positive changes to the world. However, along with those positive changes, companies began to face many new and evolving challenges. One such challenge involves the retention of their most valuable asset, their employees. The days of recripocal lifetime commitment between employer and employee are long over. According to Jeanne Meister, a contributor to Forbes online magazine, 91 percent of Millennials (born between 1977 - 1997) are expected to stay in a job for less than three years. This computes to an average of 15-20 jobs over the course of these Millennials' lives.

What this only means in today's globalised world where opportunities are limitless is that organisations are forced to work harder and more creatively to win over their employees' commitment. Many companies are facing intensive challenge in improving employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment in their quest to retain these talents in their organisations. By understanding the impact of various dimensions of job satisfaction and ethical behaviour on organisational commitment, firms can look into specific areas within their organisations that require changes to not only attract but also to retain their valuable human assets by winning over their commitment to the organisation naturally.

Researches done so far point to a strong link between satisfaction with pay and organisational commitment. Pay satisfaction must be fulfilled as to meet their increasing daily needs and wants in order for them to remain committed to their organisation. Many organisations will have to embrace the fact that employees' salary is a major factor in attracting and retaining talented employees. It is therefore crucial for organisations to review its pay policy and to address any dissatisfaction that current employees may have with its existing pay structure in order to eliminate low organisational commitment among its highly valued employees.

Satisfaction with co-workers also seems to have an impact on organisation commitment. When employees become dissatisfied with their jobs resulting in lower organisational commitment, it is most likely that they will actively engage in increased criticism of their co-workers. It is common and normal that employees hope to have satisfaction in their work especially satisfaction with co-workers whom they spend most of the time with. Job satisfaction increase when employees receive adequate co-workers support (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). By comparison, organisations which have a weak cooperative working environment among its employees tend to have high turnover rate. Thus, it is essential for organisations to create and promote a working environment where co-workers often share common work experiences and similar responsibilities which results in an increase in employees' emotional support (providing positive interactions and trust toward each other) and instrumental support (providing mutual support to accomplish work tasks) (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Furthermore, organisations might experience greater efficiency and effectiveness of work quality through better satisfaction with co-workers in the organisation. Once a strong working relationship among co-workers has been established, organisations

will begin to reap the benefits of having higher organisational commitment among its employees.

Current researches also indicate that satisfaction with supervision has an effect on organisation commitment. Just as with satisfaction with co-workers, employees's job satisfaction increases when they receive adequate support from their managers. As managers are the ones employees look up to and turn to for guidance, the selection of managers must be done with utmost care. Organisations should also look into ways to develop their managers to make them more effective and efficient in their job.

Satisfaction with work has an impact towards organisation commitment. Past researches found satisfaction with work as a predictor of job satisfaction resulting in employees' commitment towards their organisations. Hence, higher satisfaction with work would tend to elicit greater job satisfaction and higher levels of organisational commitment among employees. Once again, the responsibility falls on the organisations to turn even the most menial job to be interesting and fulfilling for the employees.

Ethics remain an important factor in maintaining a good reputation of an organisation. Findings from past research also show evidence that ethical behaviour of co-workers will significantly impact organisational commitment. This can be explained by a study conducted on marketing practitioners across U.S., Malaysia and Australia (Peppas, 2002). The study found that older employees tend to perceive business ethic differently from younger person. As employees get older, they tend to behave based on moral principles and pay more attention toward their co-workers' ethical behaviours. Therefore, it would not be inconceivable to explain that employees who see their co-workers' ethical behaviours may in fact be more committed to their organisation.

Past research also revealed that ethical behaviour of managers has an impact towards organisational commitment. According to Donnelly, Gibson and Ivancevich (1992), management's ethical misconduct will significantly harm an organisation and can turn out to be an extremely costly mistake for the organisation as a whole. Thus, organisations will need to look at making business ethics training a must for all its employees. This may have an impact on employees' commitment level with their organisation in the long run. Future studies could extend these findings by further exploring the influence of gender, culture as well as generational differences on these dimensions of job satisfaction and ethical behaviour and its impact towards organisational commitment.

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