Perceived Leader's Support, Performance Feedback and Employee Engagement in Malaysian Private Hospitals

Sharfika Raime[1], Azrin Abdul Razak[1], Norsafriman Abd. Rahman[2]

[1]UNITAR International University, Malaysia, [2]UNITAR College, Malaysia.
Corresponding Author Email: sharfika@unitar.my

Abstract
Employee engagement is a crucial factor for organisations for its contribution to the organisation's development and sustainability. This research was conducted to examine whether or not perceived leader's support ("PLS") and performance feedback ("PF") have significant relationships with employee engagement. This research was also carried out to empirically prove which factors cause or are the main reason for employee engagement. Additionally, this research examines if there is a significant difference of opinion between genders about perceived leader's support as well as the level of employee engagement at Malaysian Private Hospitals. The results show that, although both determinant factors (PLS and PF) have a significant relationship with employee engagement ($p<0.001$), only PLS causes employee engagement ($p<0.001$, t-value>1.96). This research also proves that there is no difference of opinion between genders about the importance of PLS in the workplace. Furthermore, it has also been proven that there is no difference in the level of employee engagement between male and female employees at Malaysian Private Hospitals. It is hoped that the results of this research will benefit hospitals in Malaysia, mainly private ones. This is because employee engagement in private hospitals could help improve private hospitals' performance and reputation, thus attracting a larger number of patients as well as generating more revenues, all of which can contribute to Malaysia's economic well-being.
Keywords: Employee Engagement, Perceived Leader's Support, Performance Feedback, Social Exchange Theory.

Introduction
Employee engagement is essential for an organisation because, with a sense of engagement towards career and workplace, employees will be more dedicated to carrying out their responsibilities. Furthermore, engaged employees are also said to be more sincere and that sincerity will cause them to excel in fulfilling their responsibilities (Zhu et al., 2023). However, the situation with regard to employee engagement in private hospitals has worsened and is

no longer a new phenomenon in Malaysia. According to Anthony and Nordin (2023), the lack of support from the top management and the lacking of a pleasant working environment has contributed to employee engagement problems in privately owned hospitals in the country. Some opinions also state that this is the case in private hospitals where employees are not communicating and receive no feedback on their performance from their top management (Ahmed et al., 2021; Mok & Leong, 2021). If this continues, it will have a detrimental effect on private hospital performance and therefore can negatively impact Malaysia's economic well-being. It is because hospital employees are less likely to engage if they do not receive support from the leader and feedback on their performance. Undesirable events such as poor performance, lack of good patient care and being rude or vulgar to patients can happen simultaneously when employees are not engaged (Anthony & Nordin, 2023). Poor performance from employees due to these undesirable behaviours will instantaneously tarnish a private hospital's reputation. If a reputation is tarnished, it discourages patients from going to the hospital, which means less revenue for the hospital. Therefore, if this phenomenon continues to be widespread in Malaysia, it will have a negative impact on the country's economy because many of its citizens are going to choose healthcare providers from abroad. In addition, Malaysia's reputation as a country that promotes decency and morality ("kesopanan dan kesusilaan") will also undoubtedly be damaged by the news that will spread all around the world about the poor performance of private hospitals in Malaysia because of rude, vulgar and totally unprofessional employees. If the situation does not improve, this could also negatively impact the number of foreign nationals who want to seek private hospital services in Malaysia and this will also affect the economy in a negative way. Thus, Malaysian private hospitals' employee engagement is very important for Malaysia and has become a major motivation to conduct this research in order to determine which factors have a significant influence on employee engagement.

Literature Review
Employee engagement is defined as the relationship between the employees not just with the organisation they are working with but encompassing their level of participation, commitment, loyalty, sincerity, and contribution to their responsibilities (Schaufeli et al., 2006). According to Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022), employee engagement is often measured by assessing the employee's perception of their leaders; communication and feedback received; as well as organisational culture. Despite research about employee engagement has been done by many, there are still researchers (Hamzah & Nordin, 2022; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022; Othman & Nasurdin, 2019) citing that there are still room and demand to resume research on employee engagement. Recent studies by Anthony and Nordin (2023) cover employee engagement in the context of private hospitals but their scope was narrowed to private hospitals in Perlis only. They have therefore suggested that future researchers conduct employee engagement research involving private hospital employees at other places. Moreover, their research was adopting independent variables like motivation, organisational citizenship behaviour and job satisfaction, hence opening the opportunity for this research to be resumed with perceived leader's support and performance feedback as the independent variables.

Perceived leader's support is defined as employees' perception or belief of how their leaders value and appreciate their well-being as well as their contribution towards the organisations (Karasek, 1985). Leader's support has been reported by many (i.e., Akinlawon & Jamila, 2022; Kenny et al., 2020; Kurniawan & Anindita, 2021), to be influential towards employee

engagement. Nevertheless, the researchers have identified that most previous studies studied the relationship between a leader's support and engagement that involved employees from setting other than the healthcare industry (i.e., banking industry, higher educational industry, and manufacturing industry). Researchers like Othman and Nasurdin (2019) have also recommended for more future works to adopt leaders' support in the context of the healthcare industry, thus becoming one of the reasons for this research being conducted.

Sims et al (1976) defined performance feedback as an exchange of information between two parties (normally between leader and employees) to update one's status and quality of work product to improve the performance of the employees. Researchers like (Akinlawon & Jamila, 2022; Mkunde, 2022; Prabasari et al., 2018) purported that performance feedback has a statistically significant relationship with employee engagement. Nevertheless, their research was done involving respondents from the setting of the higher education industry, NGO organisations, and the energy industry. Moreover, these studies were done in countries other than Malaysia like South Africa, Tanzania, and Indonesia hence, providing literature gaps related to performance feedback and the reason for this research.

Underpinning Theory and Proposed Research Framework
The proposed research framework for this research was underpinned by two underpinning theories namely, the Social Exchange Theory ("SET") by Homans (1958) and the Social Constructivism Theory ("SCT") by (Vygotsky, 1968). The SET refers to social interactions between two individuals who respond to each other's actions (Homans, 1958). Therefore, SET supports H1 and H2 because, through the leader's support and feedback given by leaders to employees, the employees will respond by becoming engaged employees at their workplace. In addition, the SET also underpins H3 because, it has become normal for human beings to be in favour of receiving support and assistance, then feedback or comments. Therefore, employees who get support from their leaders will definitely be more engaged and love not just their jobs but their workplaces too. The SCT on the other hand is to supports the notion that gender can have the same opinion, perception, or judgement because each individual makes his/her own life decisions through what he/she has gone or going through (Vygotsky, 1968). Therefore, SCT supports H4 and H5 because each individual's opinion about employee engagement and perceived leader's support is dependent on their own experience at their workplace and it is independent of the employees' genders.
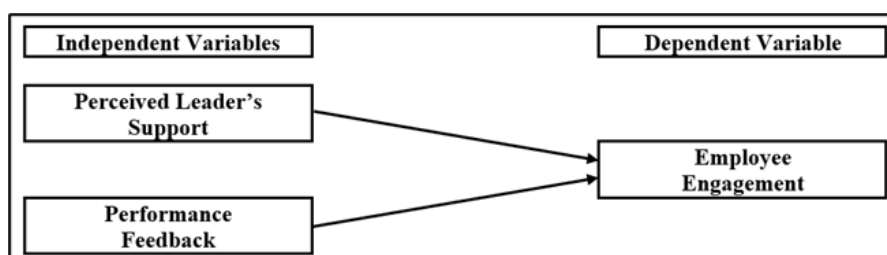

Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

Based on the underpinning theories and discussion from previous literatures, the proposed hypotheses for this research are:
H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived leader's support and employee engagement in Malaysian Private Hospitals.

H2: There is a significant relationship between performance feedback and employee engagement in Malaysian Private Hospitals.

H3: Perceived leader's support is the cause to employee engagement in Malaysian Private Hospitals.

H4: There is no significant difference between male and female engagement at Malaysian Private Hospitals.

H5: There is no significant difference of opinion about perceived leader's support between male and female employees in Malaysian Private Hospitals.

Methodology

This research is quantitative correlational and causal-comparative research. The population involved in this research are employees (i.e., nurses, general workers, administration workers, etc.) who serve in private hospitals in the Klang Valley area. The researchers chose private hospitals in Klang Valley only because Klang Valley is a densely populated area and it has the largest number of private hospitals in Malaysia (Behrouzi & Ma'aram, 2019).

This research has adopted the self-administered convenience sampling method. The reason for using this method is that it is fast, convenient, and also makes it easier for the researchers to get access to the subjects who are willing to be the participants (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The questionnaire for this research is adapted from previous studies. Questions to measure the employee's engagement, perceived leader's support and performance feedback were adapted from Schaufeli et al (2006); Karasek (1985); Sims et al (1976), respectively. The reason for adapting their questionnaires is that the researchers want to align them with the operational definitions of each variable adopted for this research. To ensure that the participants feel less pressure and enable them to answer all questions honestly and openly, the researchers have placed a statement in the questionnaire that the data collected will be used for research purposes only. The identity of all respondents who answer the questionnaire will also be kept confidential and no questions containing personal information (i.e., email address, name) were asked in the questionnaire. All potential respondents are also given the absolute right to participate or to refuse from participating. All the questions in the questionnaires are in English. After reaching a total of 187 respondents who answered the questionnaire voluntarily, the researchers proceeded to the next process which is data analysis. Data screening, measurement model analysis, and structural model analysis were conducted utilising the SPSS version 26.

Results and Discussion
Data Screening and Cleaning

This study has carried out a data screening or data cleaning procedure as the preliminary stage to identify if there are any outliers in the data that can distort the research results. Figure 1.0 shows case 110 as an outlier. The researchers have agreed to delete the case.
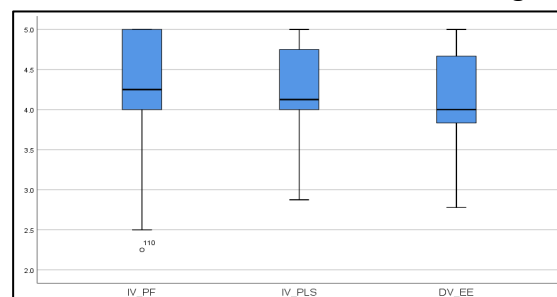
Figure 2.0: Boxplot

After the data cleaning procedure, the researchers have performed a normality test to ensure that the dataset that has been cleaned is normal and most importantly the dataset is sound to undergo the next procedure. Normal dataset is vital because this research utilised SPSS 26 where the dataset will only be able to be accurately analysed if the dataset is normal. Based on the normality results in Table 1.0, it can be confirmed that all the data representing each variable is normal with the results of skewness (-2≤x≤2) and kurtosis (-3≤x≤3) are within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1.0
Skewness and Kurtosis for Variables of Study

	Overall Mean	Overall SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived Leader's Support	4.2867	0.5313	-0.254	-0.403
Performance Feedback	4.3071	0.6214	-0.718	0.273
Employee Engagement	4.1932	0.5192	0.298	-0.662

Measurement Model Analysis

Before proceeding to the structural model analysis, every research must go through the measurement model analysis procedure. Among the measurement model analysis that needs to be done is the reliability test to check on the internal consistency. Confirming internal consistency is crucial to ensure all the items in the research measuring instrument are related to each other, as well as to identify earlier if any problematic items should be removed from the scale. In other words, the reliability test is to ensure that there are no items that can distort the results of the research or prevent the research from fulfilling the research objectives and answering each of the research questions (Hair et al., 2010). Reliability test results are as summarised in Table 2.0. The results prove that all the variables only contain reliable items through Cronbach's Alpha reading that is higher than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, with reliable items and sound data, this research continues with further analysis namely, the structural model analysis.

Table 2.0
Reliability Results - Cronbach's alpha

	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Leader's Support	0.880
Performance Feedback	0.880
Employee Engagement	0.897

Structural Model Analysis

The structural model analysis is the ultimate analysis of this study to fulfil the research objectives as well as to answer the research questions. However, before correlation and regression analysis are conducted, the multicollinearity analysis needs to be carried out first. In addition to being the first analysis in structural model analysis, multicollinearity analysis is to ensure the non-existence of multicollinearity issues that are believed to undermine the statistical significance of each variable, independently. Multicollinearity issues can be detected through collinearity statistics which consist of two categories namely tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF). According to Hair et al (2017), the collinearity statistics should not be higher than 4.0 for VIF and should not be less than 0.30 for Tolerance. Results

presented in Table 3.0 confirm that the multicollinearity issue does not exist between the variables involved.

Table 3.0
Multicollinearity

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	**VIF**
Employee Engagement (Constant)		
Perceived Leader's Support	0.454	2.203
Performance Feedback	0.454	2.203

To fulfil some of the objectives of this study and to confirm H1 and H2, correlation analysis was conducted. Table 4.0 summarises the results of the correlation analysis. Based on the results presented, both perceived leader's support ("PLS") and performance feedback ("PF") have a significant relationship with employee engagement with $p<0.000$ (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4.0
Correlations

		Employee Engagement	**Perceived Leader's Support**	**Performance Feedback**
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation, r	1.000	0.717[**]	0.589[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N	183	183	183

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

Meanwhile, H3 was tested through regression analysis and the results are presented in Table 5.0. Perceived leader's support (P-value=0.000; T-value>1.96) proved to be the cause of employee engagement. Performance feedback, on the other hand, is found to be not the reason for employee engagement with P-value = 0.089 and T-value = 1.711, hence H3 is supported. PLS is the cause of employee engagement plausibly because support from leaders is very important in any matter. According to Anthony and Nordin (2023), employees who get support from their leaders will definitely feel more belonging to the organisation where they work. The support that is given from leaders acts as a booster of enthusiasm in the life of each employee and at the same time makes employees feel more motivated and they will subsequently fall genuinely in love with their career and workplace. PF, on the other hand, is not the reason for employee engagement, possibly because, some think that even if leaders always give feedback and comments about the performance of their employees, without support and encouragement, the feedback becomes meaningless to the employees. Leaders can voice their opinions and be vocal about someone's work performance, but comments without support will not change anything and will neither create a sense of affection nor engagement among employees. This is supported by previous researchers (Blau et al., 2023; Filstad & Traavik, 2019) where in the article they also reported that feedback alone will not make someone feel belonging to the organisation.

Table 5.0
Regression Analysis

	Beta	T Value	P-Value
Employee Engagement (Constant)		4.967	0.000
Perceived Leader's Support	0.620	8.111	0.000
Performance Feedback	0.131	1.711	0.089

Apart from examining the difference in the level of influence between two independent variables (PLS and PF) with employee engagement, another objective of this study is to examine if there is a difference in the level of employee engagement between male and female employees. To fulfil this research objective, Levene's Test for equality of variances was conducted. The results as presented in Table 6.0 show statistically that gender does not contribute to differences of opinion about employee engagement in Malaysian private hospitals, with a significant value of $p>0.05$ (sig. 0.763). Thus, H4 is supported. Opinions between male and female employees are the same probably because all employees have almost the same experiences at their workplace. This result is very important because it indirectly informs the leaders in Malaysian private hospitals that every employee regardless of gender deserves equal treatment and interests to create a sense of engagement.

Other than confirming H4, Levene's Test for equality of variances (Table 6.0) was also conducted to confirm H5. The results show that there is no significant difference of opinion about PLS between male and female employees in Malaysian Private Hospital with a significant value $p>0.05$ (sig. 0.712). Hence, H5 is supported. The decision to prove H5 can once again be used as a reference to leaders in Malaysian private hospitals that regardless of gender, support and encouragement from leaders is indeed very important. Therefore, leaders should not compromise matters related to support and should be the backbone of employees in any situation. This is because, according to Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022), support from leaders will indirectly contribute to the success of the organisation. Employees who receive the support of leaders will feel valued, at the same time making them more engaged with their work and the organisation they work for. Finally, the employees will be willing to offer their level best to the organisations and cooperatively develop the organisations.

Table 6.0
Independent Sample T-Test for Gender Differences

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
					F	Sig.
Employee Engagement	Male	88	4.1679	0.5138	0.091	0.763
	Female	95	4.2187	0.5280		
Perceived Leader's Support	Male	88	4.2926	0.5279	0.137	0.712
	Female	95	4.2842	0.5392		

The coefficient of determination result (R^2) for this research is 52.2% (per Table 7.0). Despite the regression results showing that PLS has a strong influence and the reason for employee engagement, the R^2 result implies that there are other factors that influence employee engagement, apart from PLS and PF.

Table 7.0

Coefficient of Determination

Variables	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Engagement	0.522	0.517

Conclusion

Like any other research on employee engagement, this research has its limitations too. Among the limitations of this research is that, the respondents involved are employees who work at Malaysian private hospitals only. Therefore, the ability to generalise the results is limited. In addition, this research has adopted the convenience sampling method, though reported by Sekaran and Bougie (2013), this sampling method does not allow the results to be generalised. Despite the limitations, this research gives space to future researchers to continue this research and use the same framework on respondents from different contexts than private hospitals. In addition, to enable research results to be generalised, future researchers can consider adapting other sampling methods such as the random sampling methods or stratified random sampling to ensure unbiased research results by ensuring that each organisation is represented by the same number of respondents. Since this study is a quantitative cross-sectional, future researchers may consider a qualitative study involving employees' focus groups to identify in depth the elements that they feel are prominent and have substantial influence towards employee engagement.

Another significant contribution of this research is that, firstly, the proposed research framework for this research can be utilised as a basis for future researchers to continue the same study by adding other elements as independent variables. Future researchers can consider factors like work-life balance, workload, or peers-support due to the moderate coefficient of determination results ($R^2 = 0.522$) (Hair et al., 2017). The R^2 result signifies there are other determinants that have an influence towards employee engagement. Most importantly, this research has proven that support from leaders towards employees is indeed important to foster employee motivation which at the same time will make employees more engaged towards work and the organisation where they work. This is an essential reference finding for organisation leaders in their endeavour of recognising ways to improve their organisations' performance as employee engagement is closely related to the triumph of the organisation (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022).

It is hoped that the results of this study can be used as a basis of reference for hospitals in Malaysia, specifically the private hospitals so as not to underestimate matters related to leader's support because it has been empirically proven that it plays a significant role towards employee engagement. The research results are deemed to indirectly help Malaysia achieve a healthy economy because leader's support is not only to achieve employee engagement but to improve the private hospitals' performance too. When employees like nurses are engaged, dedicated, and sincere in performing their responsibilities, the hospitals stand the opportunity to attract more patients. This at once helps the hospitals to generate more revenue, hence contributing to Malaysia's economy. This is eventually in line with Malaysia's sustainable development agenda (SD8) which strives for economic growth through decent work (i.e., employee engagement). In addition, awareness of the importance of a leader's support to increase the level of employee engagement is also harmonised with the National Unity Policy 2021-2025 framework that promotes unity. Other than creating a decent workplace environment, the leader's support also fosters collaboration among every employee. The support given by leaders infers that leaders are willing to sacrifice, always strive to give the best to their employees, and are willing to move together with employees

regardless of rank, thus causing employees to be more engaged. This can help break down social or status barriers and promote understanding and empathy, contributing to the promotion of national unity.

Acknowledgement

References

Ahmed, S., Abd Manaf, N. H., & Islam, R. (2021). Assessing top management commitment, workforce management, and quality performance of Malaysian hospitals. *International Journal of Healthcare Management*, *14*(1), 236–244.

Akinlawon, O. A., & Jamila, K. A. (2022). The Impact of Supervisor Support, Performance Feedback and Workload on the Engagement of TVET Lecturers in Gauteng, South Africa. *Expert Journal of Business and Management*, *10*(1), 14–24. http://business.expertjournals.com

Anthony, E., & Nordin, N. (2023). Factors Affecting Employee Engagement during Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Healthcare Workers in Perlis. *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science*, *06*(02), 152–161.

Behrouzi, F., & Ma'aram, A. (2019). Identification and ranking of specific balanced scorecard performance measures for hospitals: A case study of private hospitals in the Klang Valley area, Malaysia. *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, *34*(4), 1364–1376.

Blau, G., Goldberg, D., & Kyser, D. (2023). Organizational belonging–proposing a new scale and its relationship to demographic, organization, and outcome variables. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2023.2178448

Filstad, C., & Traavik, L. E. M. (2019). Belonging at work: the experiences, representations and meanings of belonging. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *31*(2), 116–142.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). Examining Your Data. In *Multivariate Data Analysis* (7th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall. http://www.personal.psu.edu/jxb14/M554/articles/Hair et al 2010 -- Chapter 2.pdf

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). In *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* (Vol. 38, Issue 2, pp. 190–273).

Hamzah, H., & Nordin, N. S. (2022). Perceived Supervisor Support and Work Engagement: Mediating Role of Job-Related Affective Well-Being. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, *37*(2), 149–164.

Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, *63*, 597–606.

Karasek, R.A. (1985). Job content instrument questionnaire and user's guide, Version 1.1. Department of Industrial

Kenny, A. P. A., Zeplin, J. H. T., Rismawati, B. S., & Sanju, K. S. (2020). Leadership Style, Employee Engagement, and Work Environment to Employee Performance in Manufacturing Companies. *SHS Web of Conferences*, *76*(01020).

Kurniawan, R., & Anindita, R. (2021). Impact of Perceived Supervisor Support and Rewards and Recognition Toward Performance Through Work Satisfaction and Employee Engagement in Employee Marketing Banks. *Business and Entrepreneurial Review*, *21*(1),

171–192.

Mazzetti, G., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2022). The impact of engaging leadership on employee engagement and team effectiveness: A longitudinal, multi-level study on the mediating role of personal- and team resources. *PLoS ONE*, *17*(6 June).

Mkunde, B. M. (2022). Current Issues Performance appraisal systems: The need to focus on employee engagement. *Global Journal of Business, Economics, and Management: Current Issues*, *12*(3), 233–243.

Mok, M. K. M., & Leong, Y. Y. (2021). Factors affecting the effectiveness of employees' performance appraisal in private hospitals in Malaysia. *International Journal of Business and Society*, *22*(1), 257–275.

Othman, N., & Nasurdin, A. M. (2019). Job characteristics and staying engaged in work of nurses: Empirical evidence from Malaysia. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, *6*(4), 432–438.

Prabasari, I. G. A. M., Martini, L. K. B., & Suardika, N. (2018). The Effect of Communication and Employee Engagement on Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Employee Performance in Employees Pt. Pln (Persero) Distribution of Bali. *International Journal of Contemporary Research and Review*, *9*(08), 21014–21025.

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2013). *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach*. Wiley.

Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A., and Salanova, M. (2006) The Measurement of Work Engagement with a Short Questionnaire: A Cross-National Study. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 66, 701-716.

Sims, H. P., Szilagyi, A. D., & Keller, R. T. (1976). The measurement of Job Characteristics. Academy of Management Journal, 19, 195-212.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1968). The Psychology of Art. Moscow: Art.

Zhu, Y., Obeng, A. F., & Azinga, S. A. (2023). Supportive supervisor behavior and helping behaviors in the hotel sector: assessing the mediating effect of employee engagement and moderating influence of perceived organizational obstruction. *Current Psychology*, 1–17.