EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY AMONG NON-ACADEMIC STAFF

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ABSTRACT

Many previous studies have solely focused on measuring employee satisfaction among academic staff. However, in a higher educational institution, there are two categories of workforce whom work hard in developing the university; academic and non-academic staff and study on employee satisfaction among non-academic staff still lacking in providing evidence. Hence, it is crucial to study their satisfaction working in the university. This study adapts the research frameworks from previous researches to study the relationship between factors contribute to employee satisfaction and employee satisfaction among nonacademic staff. Specifically, the aim of this article is to investigate the relationship between knowledge management, training and leadership and employee satisfaction among non-academic staff at one of public universities in Malaysia. Results of the multiple regression analysis shown that the knowledge management and followed by training are highly affected their overall employee satisfaction, and on the other hand leadership and employee satisfaction shown no significant relationship among non-academic staff. Data analysis of the study has been analyzed using SPSS version 23.

Keywords: Employee Satisfaction, Non-Academic Staff, Knowledge Management, Training, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Employee satisfaction has been widely studied in the field of organizational behavior research (Howard and Gengler, 2001). Formerly, the definition of employee satisfaction is defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of that job or the job experiences" (Locke, 1976). Simultaneously, in recent study by Tomazevic, Seljak, and Aristovnik, (2014), the researchers similarly defined employee satisfaction as a pleasant or positive emotional state that will be resulting from the perception of work, conception of work environment, assessment of work environment, work experience and the perception of all the element of the work and workplace. Until now, the definitions are still actively been discussed by scholars and academicians, Ukil (2016) specifies employee satisfaction is also known as job satisfaction, in which he also defined them as a positive emotional state that demonstrates the perceived

relationship between the exception of an employee from his job and his perceived offering the job. Tomazevic et al. (2014) also stated that employee satisfaction is a vital factor in ensuring a long-term efficiency and effectiveness of the organization in both public and private sectors.

Previous studies examined the relationship between employee satisfaction, training, leadership and knowledge management (Latif, Jan, & Shaheen, 2013; Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2013; Wu, 2013). However, in higher education, there are few studies and models researched the relationships between variables, as Yuliarini, Mat, & Kumar (2012) and Kianto, Vanhala, & Heilmann (2016) discussed. Moreover, very few higher education studies have assessed the employee satisfaction of non-academic staff rather than that of academic staff (e.g. Wan Ahmad & Abdurahman, 2015). According to Arrington (2015), non-academic staff are also known as non-teaching or academic support staff and he defined them as those mid-level staff who works in academic departments such as nursing or management including administrative assistants, advising staff, and program support staff. Further, Arrington (2015) described this support staff as an "institutional agents" that can promote success of a university by providing information, advice, motivation and interaction. According to Z. Mulligan (2015) cited in Germaroth (2015) comprises this group of support staff is one of the larger worker groups in an academic institution. This group is described as an individual that perform clerical duties at different level, security officers in charge of overall safety and emergencies. It also known as custodial staff and it include wide range of duties from cleaning, gardening, and light maintenance jobs, and maintenance workers who perform general repair and maintenance duties (Germaroth, 2015). Employee satisfaction level is one of the important components for non-academic staff due to their daily work routine and dealing with administrative activities. Tooksoon (2011) stated that the higher the worker satisfaction level, the higher the workplace commitment, productivity, employee-relationship, and organizational success and hence reduce the turnover rate as well as the replacement cost.

Nevertheless, the role of non-academic staff in the support of the mission of higher learning institutions is often overlooked (Banks, 2007). Correspondingly, Barakos-Cartwright (2012) acknowledge the success of an academic institution is greatly come from the support staff, yet this workgroup is often the most underrepresented, least compensated, and least valued group for input toward organizational goals and decision-making. Despite integral to the services that the faculty provides, they are important in providing essential administrative and the technical support that the faculty needs to conduct the day-to-day operation, research and teaching activities (Arrington, 2015). Further, the occurrence of improper conflict management between non-academic and academic staff is frequently reported (Bakanauskiene, Bendaravičiene, & Krikštolaitis, 2010).

More emphatically, in the local extent, the study on job satisfaction among non-academic staff in Malaysia's higher education institutions is still lacking in providing evidence (Hong, Lim, Tan & Othman, 2012). Instead, most of the studies have been carried out at other universities outside Malaysia, for instance, Olorunsola (2010), study on administrator's job satisfaction in Nigerian universities, Glick (1992), Volkwein, Malik and Napierski-Prancl (1998) and Hong et al., (2012), investigated this issue in universities around the United States. It is also supported by Che Nawi, Ismail, Ibrahim, Raston, Zamzamin, & Jaini (2016) stated that the role provided by the non-academic staff are very critical for the Malaysian institutions, yet it is still overlooked or underrepresented in scholarly research.

In addition, Yuliarini, Mat, & Kumar (2012) and Kianto, Vanhala, & Heilmann (2016) have conducted a survey on identifying factors on employee and job satisfaction, revealed that lack of personal growth/training programs, knowledge management and leadership in organization for non-academic staff

at the university has led to low level of employee and job satisfaction. Therefore, this study would like to investigate the effect of training, leadership and knowledge management on employee satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Satisfaction among Non-Academic Staff

Employee satisfaction plays as a crucial element that organization should earn to sustain in the market for a long-term. Higher level of employee satisfaction becoming a competitive advantage for an organization to be a leader in employment market. Most of previous research was only focused on measuring job satisfaction level among academic staff (Lacy and Sheehan, 1997; Santhapparaj and Alam, 2005; Khalid, Irshad, and Mahmood, 2012). Studies focusing on employee satisfaction among non-academic staff is still lacking in providing evidence. Several issues have been discussed regarding employee satisfaction among non-academic staff in universities. One of the issue is the difficulties faced by university students especially in communicating and dealing with non-academic staff. Although students can obtain some of the information from other sources (i.e. senior students, websites, etc), but still they need to interact with the non-academic staff for some other purposes that required their assistance (i.e. application, registration, examination, etc) (Yuliarini, Mat and Kumar, 2012).

Thus, this study seeks to address the factors influence employee satisfaction level among nonacademic staff in higher learning institution is important to ensuring the sustainable of good quality and service that offered to the main customer (i.e. students). In local issue, Rahman, Osmangani and Daud (2015) stated that the non-academic staff require knowledge sharing among themselves to reduce previous mistakes to be reoccurred. In previous report conducted by MoHE (2013) on 20 public universities and 33 private universities and number of university colleges, it is reported that the non-academic staff who are providing services to the respective stakeholders is important human capital to solve job-related problems and to maintain their institution in a competitive position (Osmangani et al., 2015).

The Effect of Knowledge Management on Employee Satisfaction

Based on a historical perspective, the idea of knowledge management is not new (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Pugna & Boldeanu, 2014; Riege & Lindsay, 2006). The general principles of knowledge management have been applying by human being for decades ago. In 1960's, the researchers began to create the theories related to the application of knowledge management as a discipline (Adams Jr, 2016). Some literatures suggested the impetus of the modern concept of knowledge management began in the 1960s when the idea of a knowledge worker was introduced to identify employees within an organization who able to use institutional knowledge to meet organizational needs (Leon, 2015; Marilena & Mihaela, 2008).

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) divided knowledge management into two practices; knowledge cooperation and dissemination. Further, Demarest (1997) proposed four knowledge management process; knowledge construction, embodiment, dissemination and use. Then, Alavi and Leidner (2001) found knowledge management as knowledge creation, storage, transfer and application. Moreover, Lawson (2003) cited by Jones (2009), found there are six process of knowledge management; creation, capturing, organizing, storing, dissemination and application of knowledge.

Knowledge is the greatest asset to any organization (Evans, 2013). There is a method for knowledge retention and it has become a very popular concept, where many organizations nowadays are using

knowledge management to retain and share organizational knowledge. Karkoulian, Canaan Messarra & McCarthy (2013) described by implementing knowledge management, organization can easily find, retrieve, and utilize knowledge in many ways that benefit the users. This topic had an evolving history among theorists throughout the ages and has increased the interest of researchers and practitioners to fill the knowledge gap in the field area.

The recent researcher, Islam, Agarwal & Ikeda (2014) has proposed knowledge management in the perspective of practical, theoretical, and spiritual to understand the knowledge management and its purpose. According to Kainto et al. (2016), knowledge management is to identify and leverage the collective knowledge in an organization to sustain the organizational competitiveness. It helps the organization to process the knowledge through creating, sharing, acquiring, applying and transferring knowledge. If this strategy combines with infrastructures, capabilities and management activities, it will support and enhance the knowledge process. Furthermore, Kainto et al. (2016) found that if all the definitions is combined together, it becomes to five main practices; knowledge acquisition/capturing, knowledge sharing/disseminating, knowledge creation, knowledge codification/organization and knowledge retention/storing.

First, knowledge acquisition/capturing is organizational practice that focusing on collecting the knowledge from extra-organizational sources, meaning that outside network and the collaboration arrangements are important sources of knowledge for all types of organization. The important group of knowledge acquisition is customer because it is a useful knowledge for organizations to succeed. Second, sharing/disseminating can be obtained from tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is embedded through shared learning experiences and shared in social interaction. Some tacit knowledge will be codified but many of them will remain tacit. The only way to share the tacit knowledge creation is the ability of organization on developing new and useful ideas and solution in various aspects of organizational activities, from products and technological processes to managerial practices. Knowledge will be created when the members learn and innovate something. Basically, the organization is encouraging and promoting a culture of innovation through development of idea among its workforce at all level.

Four, codification/organization is applying and storing the knowledge. The organization stores the knowledge and reuse it when the knowledge is needed. It consists of coding the tacit knowledge into explicit form and store the documented knowledge. Then, the knowledge will be useful to the organization and provide an up-to-date information to others in the organization. Fifth, knowledge retention refers to activities related to managing personnel turnover and the associated loss of expert knowledge. Expert knowledge can be lost when expert employees leave the organisation. For instance, when the baby boomers retire, there is a difficulty for organization in attracting and maintaining the new generation employees to be retained in the organization for a long term.

In the current knowledge era, knowledge management processes constitute such contextual features of the work environment, which can enrich the job and increase employee satisfaction. From this, knowledge management is an important component for organizational success and it must be managing well to ensure organizations achieve its goals and objectives. Thus, previous researches suggest employees will be more satisfied with their jobs if they experience in practicing knowledge management in their day-to-day work routine. As a result, previous researchers have found that there is a relationship between knowledge management and job / employee satisfaction (Almahamid, McAdams, & Kalaldeh, 2010; Lee and Chang, 2007; Singh and Sharma, 2011; Kainto et al., 2016). On the other hand, Koseoglu, Bektas,

Parnell, & Carraher (2010) have failed to find a connection between knowledge management and job satisfaction. In sum, it can be stated that existing research evidence on the relationship between knowledge management and job satisfaction is still not consistent.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that there is a relationship between knowledge management and job satisfaction among non-academic staff.

The Effect of Training on Employee Satisfaction

Nowadays, training programs becoming a vital success element for organizations. Educating the workforce at all level make the work processes of all department run smoothly as planned. The employer needs to provide various form of training to the employees to ensure the job duties is performed at higher standard (Hoekstra, 2013; McGrath, 2015). According to McGrath (2015), training is designed to further the learning of the employees, and it is also implied that it will improve the output of the employee. From this, the researcher can say that the organization need to have a training because it can develop the worker and hence, learning new thing. In addition, McGrath (2015) also state training makes improvement on work and individual performance, hence, it's ultimately gain employees' confidence level in reaching the organizational goals which finally may contribute to higher level employee satisfaction and employee retention. Hanaysha & Tahir (2016) describe training as development of knowledge and skills to achieve certain measurable objectives, where it can lead to favourable changes in employee's behaviour.

In other perspective, training is considered as a systematic process in helping employees on how to be more productive at the workplace through beneficial training programs (Vasudevan, 2014; Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016). Despite training can lead to changes in behaviours and achievement of performance standards, De Grip & Sauermann (2012) argues training programs is not related to the transfer of the knowledge or skills to the work environment but a result of loyalty employees.

The effectiveness of training program able to produce employees who solving their problem, solving more problem on self-efficacy, greater positivity, higher employee satisfaction and higher life satisfaction (Karim & Rehman, 2012). Previous studies have found training have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Khuong & Tien, 2013; Vasudevan, 2014; Adesola, Oyeniyi and Adeyumi, 2013). In addition, training and career development plays a significant role in increasing employee satisfaction level (Amin, Wan Ismail, Abdul rasid & Andrew Selemani, 2014).

Therefore, it is hypothesized that there is a relationship between training and job satisfaction among non-academic staff.

The Effect of Leadership on Employee satisfaction

Leadership was become controversial concept and it has more than 350 definitions, Mahdi, Gulam Mohd & Almsafir (2014). Leadership concept is persistent to be one of the most famous topic that have been discussed by the researcher and practitioners from all over the world. According to Mahdi et al. (2014) the difference of leadership definitions was the difference between the theories and practical position of leadership. Further, leadership is a process of interaction between leaders and subordinates and leaders are also the attempts to influence the followers to achieve common goals. Leadership is not only influencing others to recognize and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, it is also the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Northouse, 2015; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

For the success of an organization, all people must support the organization and at the same time and the organization should continuously aware of its employee's willingness to support their organization and understand the essence of the collective work (Kivipõld & Vadi, 2013). Kivipõld & Vadi (2013) also named it as organizational leadership and they argued that organizational leadership involves organizational processes and proximal outcomes. It also has influence the organization life where individual leader influence is grounded in cognitive, social, and political processes, and it is inherently bounded by system characteristics and dynamics of an organization.

Furthermore, in modern perspective of leadership, Mahdi et al. (2014) think considerate leaders are sociable, provide open communication, develop teamwork, and are oriented toward their subordinates. Moreover, Joshi, Kaur, & Jain (2016), describe there are five core of leadership practices that is common to know whether the leaders are at their personal best or not. It is model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Leader or manager is an important person and playing a key role in affecting employee satisfaction and success (Jackson, Meyer, & Wang 2013).

Chiok Foong Loke (2001) found job satisfaction was explained by leadership behaviours of managers followed by organizational commitment and productivity. Riaz and Haider (2010) and Desa (2011) also found that there is a positive correlation between leadership and job satisfaction. In addition, Akdol and Arikboga (2015) perceived effective leadership behaviours cannot explain 20% of change on job satisfaction, and the other 80% is the changes in employee attitude, behaviour and motivation related to job satisfaction. The reasons of the employees feel highly satisfied with the job is when there is a communication between the employees and managers, good relationship with the colleagues and managers and the most important part is they have faith in managers in developing their motivation to perform in a positive working atmosphere (Sypniewska, 2014; Joshi et al., 2016).

Therefore, it is hypothesized that there is a relationship between leadership and job satisfaction among nonacademic staff.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The most important thing in designing a research is to make sure when the data is gathered, it is from the reliable sources, hence, it will provide a valid and reliable results. A research design embodies the design and plans employed in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data. It includes the basic structure of the study. This is a quantitative study. It incorporates a scientific research inquiry designed to study the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The researcher uses the correlational or hypothesis testing to examine the effect of training, leadership and knowledge management on employee satisfaction. The correlational study is suitable when the researcher intentions to find whether the important variable(s) had positively or negatively affected one another.

In this study, non-academic staff members who were surveyed are not only in faculty roles, but they are also from academic and student affairs divisions. The non-academic staff members in Malaysian public universities have positions as government servants. They are assigned to a specific division in a university, or they move to other divisions for their career advancement purposes. In addition, the public university has been affected by government personnel policy in contrast to private universities. This university has been ranked in local and global rankings and is rapidly moving toward a world class university in engineering, science and technology for sustainable development in both teaching and research to enhance its global status. Thus, this study focuses on the employee satisfaction of non-academic staff working in one of public universities located in Malaysia.

The sample of target population was drawn from all non-academic employees from all level of positions and divisions. As of April 2017, the population of this company is 1205. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the best sample size for 1205 number of population is 291. So, the researcher used the rule of thumb and took 291 as the sample subjects of the study. To determine the sample, the researcher used simple random sampling as a technique to choose the list of samples of respondents from the total population. The simple random sampling technique is conducted to make sure that each of the population has an equal chance of being selected.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), simple random sampling method involves selecting at random from a list of population that required number of subjects for the sample. As this technique provides the assurance that sample will accurately reflect the true population and this technique makes it easy to assemble the sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Every element in the 1205 population has the same equal chance to be selected as the subject sample. The database of all non-academic staff is obtained from the human resource department. All the name list of the population is listed from 1 to 1205 and 291 numbers has been extracted by the randomizer website represented as the respondents of the study.

Data Collection and Measurements

Data were collected between April and June 2017, and the structural questionnaire was distributed to all full-time non-academic staff in this university by hand. The researcher mentioned the purpose of the survey in our opening remarks and guaranteed confidentiality of the data to respondents. The research instruments comprise of self-administered questionnaires (primary source). A set of questionnaires using Likert type scale (1-5) were administered to respondents by the researcher. The Cronbach alpha values at the pre-test and actual test are above 0.8. Thus, the consistency of inter-item used for this study is reliable.

The questionnaire used to measure all the variables of this study have been adapted from previous researches. The questionnaire contained of two main part which is part A and part B and all together the set of questionnaires consists of forty-six items. Part A includes all demographic profile questions with 6-item, questioned about the respondents' background (e.g. gender, age, marital, status, academic qualification, division, and length of service). Part B has four sections included dependent and independent variables of the research. Section B1, consists of 7-item for employee satisfaction (by Barakat, Isabella, Boaventura, & Mazzon, 2016) which it represents the dependent variable of the study. Followed by section B2 consists of 24-item for knowledge management (by Jones, 2009), section B3 consists of 5-item for training (by Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016) and the last section B4 consists of 4-item for leadership (by Jones, 2009).

FINDINGS

Of the 291 full-time non-academic staff members, 219 responded completely (81%). The researcher has conducted simple random sampling technique to collect and distribute the data and compared the demographic distribution of the population and sample of this survey. The researcher has also confirmed that the data collected represent the total population relatively well in terms of their age, position and educational level. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that, there were more female respondents (55.3%)

than male respondents (44.7%); over 60% of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39; 30.6% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, and nine of the total respondents had a master's degree. Of the respondents, 32.4% had worked as university non-academic staff members for between 6 to 10 years, followed by 26.9% had worked in the university for between 11 to 15 years. On the other hand, 66.2% of respondents were from academic and student affairs divisions and the remaining 33.8% were from faculty roles.

Table 1 summarizes the regression analysis. The R-squared was 0.439, indicated that 43.9% of the variance in employee satisfaction was explained by knowledge management, training and leadership. The adjusted R-squared was 43.1%. The findings revealed that knowledge management ($\beta = 0.414$, p = 0.040), training ($\beta = 0.138$, p = 0.042) and leadership ($\beta = 0.115$, p = 0.131). Thus, this finding indicated that knowledge management and training have significant and positive relationship with employee satisfaction. Thus, on the other hand, leadership has no significant and positive relationship with employee satisfaction. Thus, only H1 and H2 were supported. Finally, from the findings, it is indicated that the most influential factor that influence employee satisfaction is knowledge management. Therefore, the coefficient indicates that, as there is increase in knowledge management by 1%, the increment intention will increase by 0.414.

Model	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Knowledge Management	0.414	4.747	0.000
Training	0.138	2.045	0.042
Leadership	0.115	1.517	0.131
R square	0.439		
Adjusted R square	0.431		

Table 1 Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent variable: Employee Satisfaction

CONCLUSION

This research was done at one of public universities in Malaysia. This organization is involved in education sector. The most influential factor that contributing the employee satisfaction among non-academic staff at the university was knowledge management followed by training. From the research findings, the result of the first hypothesis is consistent with previous researches findings (Almahamid et al., 2010; Lee and Chang, 2007; Singh and Sharma, 2011; Kainto et al., 2016), stated that the relationship between knowledge

management and employee satisfaction is significant and positive. Further, the result for second hypothesis also shows consistency with previous researchers findings (Karim & Rehman, 2012; Khuong & Tien, 2013; Amin et al., 2014; Vasudevan, 2014; Adesola et al., 2013), stated that training has a significant and positive relationship with employee satisfaction.

In the term of knowledge management, the organization is advisable to establish their own standard operating procedures (SOP) on how to manage the organizational knowledge. It is not easy to manage various knowledge from various level of positions and division because the data becoming big and bigger each day. Thus, the most effective way to retain those data is by establishing a SOP for each position and practice knowledge management at all level. If employees able to manage the knowledge management, employee knows how to do the task based on the knowledge they have and this will lead to the feeling of meaningfulness (i.e. employee satisfaction). Knowledge management is where employees acquire/capture, share/disseminate, create, codify/organize, and retain/store the knowledge. Thus, this will certainly increase their satisfaction level (Kainto et al., 2016).

Training also shown as second most influential factor to employee satisfaction. Opportunity to attend effective training program related to job descriptions does improve employee performance, hence employee satisfaction. Training need analysis (TNA) must be first conducted prior assigning them for any training program. TNA is concerned with addressing skills gaps at three main level in an organization (organisational level, group level and individual level), and this dimension falls under the responsibility of employee learning and career development. TNA should be conducted at all three levels to ensure the maximum return from training contents is related to the job but as well as able to apply the knowledge acquired from the training programs to resolve real problems and to perform better at the workplace. Otherwise, it is just a waste effort by the management, hence, employee still at the same level of performance. Thus, employee motivation and satisfaction level will be decreased.

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