

A Review of Organizational Relationship Quality, Trust, Commitment and Lecturers' Perceived Performance in Institution of Higher Learning

Zainuddin Zakaria^{1*}, Nik Fakrulhazri Nik Hassan², Nurmuslimah Kamilah Abdullah³, Nazlin Emieza Ngah⁴, Rusnah Ismail⁵, Elisabet Siahaan⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5}Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Malaysia

⁶Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan Indonesia

Authors' Email Address: *¹hzainudd@uitm.edu.my, ²nikfa480@uitm.edu.my,
³nazlin5316@uitm.edu.my, ⁴nurmuslimah@uitm.edu.my, ⁵rusna366@uitm.edu.my,
⁶elisabet@usu.ac.id

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

As a result of globalization and the influence of working remotely, it has become more important to develop high-quality relationships in the organization for more cohesive teamwork among employees. High cohesiveness and synergy among employees will help organizations to achieve their goals. Management needs to understand how to interact with employees in ways that boost job satisfaction and engagement as perceived by employees. Many scholars agree that organizational performance is an indicator of how well an organization attains its desired goals. In addition to the roles played by the managers and superiors, organisational performance is also dependent upon the synergy of each employee's performance and their teamwork. Whether it is private or government agencies, service or manufacturing, employee performance is very important. In this paper, we hope to discuss and describe the relationship between three elements of Organizational Relationship Quality with the lecturer performance. The dimensions of Organizational Relationship Quality include Organizational Trust, Organizational Commitment and Organizational Relational Norms. In addition, we hope to better understand the relationship and how the dimensions of relational norms are associated with a lecturer's performance in an institution of higher learning.

Keywords: *Organizational Trust, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Relational Norms, Participation, Solidarity, Flexibility*

INTRODUCTION

Studies on relationship quality between employees and their superiors and its association with organizational productivity are increasing. The commitment of an organization in maintaining the relationship qualities can be viewed as part of forces that can direct behaviours or performance. Based on a study done by Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu, Malaysia from 2017 – 2018, the level of lecturers' happiness index declined from 70% in 2017 to 69% in 2018. Doing the happiness index project itself shows the commitment of the organization towards relationship qualities, even though the result indicates a decline.

This paper focuses on documenting relevant previous studies with regards to organizational relationship qualities with lecturer perceived performance. The organizational relationship qualities consist of organizational trust, organizational commitment, and organizational relational norms. The organizational relational norms entail Solidarity, Participation and Flexibility. Therefore, it is vital to determine what is the association of the level of organizational relationship qualities on the lecturer's performance level, and hopefully, the best relationship quality practices will become an organizational culture. We also hope this culture will increase the level of happiness among academics regardless of their role and duties.

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Working for a typical organization with multiple divisions makes up a huge percentage of an adult's life (Rehman et al., 2015). The members of each division contribute to the goals of the organization in their way. Therefore, sales and profits are highly dependent on the KPIs met by the employees (Masa'deh & Kuk, 2009; Hee et al., 2014). The closer the contribution to the organizational goal, the better the employee performance (Abualoush et al., 2018). The contributions may be monetary or nonmonetary. Additionally, the performance may have a direct and indirect influence on the goal achievement (Dajani, 2015), the measurable outcomes, and the speed of the goal achievement (Tajuddin, 2013).

According to Akhtar et al. (2016), job performance also refers to the standard of outcomes achieved by individuals compared with their colleagues, and the key to improving the whole organization's performance. Employee performance can be viewed in light of two perspectives: 1) employee perspective, which is the result of a series of behaviors and tasks performed daily. 2) Manager's prospective outcomes are the key factor for work performance appraisals (Yilmaz, 2015). Thus, many business directors assess employee performance on a yearly or quarterly basis to identify and suggest areas needed for improvement (Hee et al., 2014). Effectiveness and productivity are mainly used by researchers as synonymous with performance, but actually, they are not similar. Effectiveness refers to the evaluation of the outcomes of performance, and the worker should reward through performance, not effectiveness (Schleicher et al., 2019).

Employee performance is also understood as the comparison of outcomes contributed by people of the same organization that are judged based on company standards with expectations to improve the company performance (Akhtar et al., 2016). Performance from the employee's standpoint is the completion of daily assignments and achieving annual targets while from the superior's standpoint, the work appraisals (Yilmaz, 2015) are conducted once a year or once every three months (Hee et al., 2014). Many scholars interchangeably use the terms effectiveness and productivity with performance; these terms, however, should be differentiated. Performance should be categorised as the benchmark in acknowledging employees' contributions rather than their effectiveness. (Al-Dmour, Yassine & Masa'deh, 2018). The evaluation of employee's performance can be conducted not only for the short or long term but can also be conducted at the individual, groups or organizations level. Performance can also be an act of execution of tasks that have been completed by a person in a specific time and can be measured by four elements: the results of job functions, factors that affect the achievement of employees; the achievement of organizational goals; and a specific period (McLaughlin & Elaydi, 2014).

We proposed that an employee's performance level is influenced by three factors or predictors which include organizational Trust, Commitment, and Relational Norms. In this article, trust is defined from the perspective of the management towards their subordinates. Trust displayed by the management staff may increase employee's motivation to work harder to achieve the organization's Key Performance Indicators (KPI). Similarly, a higher commitment displayed by the management will send signals to the

employees that the management team is concerned about their welfare and career advancement. Furthermore, relational norms (participation, solidarity and flexibility management) serve as guidelines that define the positive relationship between the management and the employees. A positive and trusting relationship will help increase employees' productivity and performance based on the perception that there is a high concern, synergy and sense of comradeship among staff and the management team.

Trust

The presence of trust is unavoidable in any relationship; hence the notion of trust as an "underlying psychological condition" is put forth by scholars. Similarly, we argue that trust may affect the action of both individuals and an organization. The researcher would like to suggest that trust may be manifested in the action of partners or individuals engaged in a relationship, but the true nature of trust exists internally in the heart and mind of the beholder. We argue that the management of any institution of higher education (IHE) must identify the actions and verbal cues of its staff that indicates the lack of trust among its staff and towards the management team. Hence, the behavioural components of trust cannot be ignored if both management and their subordinates desire a long-lasting relationship. The management of the trust is also vital in creating strong relations between the management and its staff of IHE which is vital in producing high organizational performance. Leaders and subordinates of organizations should realize that trust has also been proven to boost collegial relationships such that they feel more connected to the organization and thus, are ready to serve others without any feelings of being victimized (Sparrow & Marchington, 1998).

In contrast, relationships with little to no trust could motivate employees to be more sceptical, hardly encouraged, less devoted, and more doubtful in organization-related matters (Carnevale & Wechsler, 1992). A lack of trust also hinders the unlocking of employees' full potential (Nedkovski et al., 2017), their ability to work in a team and serve clients and customers. Furthermore, organizational trust is defined as how much its members anticipate the expertise, dependability and goodwill of the organization. Organizational trust can be divided into two, namely interpersonal trust and institutional trust (Mayer et al., 1995). Institutional trust is more relevant in the context of superior-subordinate relationships in IHE. Furthermore, institutional trust is earned by an institution when the employee sees promising career development by contributing to the institution (Birkenmeier & Sanséau, 2016). Therefore, superiors have to play their part in motivating employees to develop and utilise that potential. Trust is intricate and multifaceted and should be acknowledged as an important motivational driver by the organization. Commitment and trust are beneficial in creating high-quality relationships between superior and subordinate organizations, therefore increasing employees' job satisfaction and productivity (Sheik-Mohamed et al., 2012). We also postulate that combining trust with organizational commitment will enhance the performance and productivity of lecturer's at IHE.

Organizational Commitment

In any relationship, when combined with trust, organisational or personal commitment are considered critical in developing high-quality relationships between superiors and subordinates and between colleagues. A higher organizational commitment has been revealed to generate higher employee's performance (Hafiz, 2017; Susanty & Miradipta, 2013). Commitment signifies the high value and the desire of the parties involved to maintain the relationship (Gray & Wilson, 2008). Plewa et al. (2013) also argue that the commitment construct is dependent on its relationship to the element of "time". The connection between time and commitment means that commitment will become stronger as the relationship becomes longer. This definition puts forth the argument that relationship commitment comprises not only "attitudinal commitment" but also "behavioural commitment". Moreover, the long-term nature of relationship commitment is taken into account thus implying the "long-term durability" of relationship commitment (Plewa et al, 2013). We proposed the relationship

between lecturers and their superiors is enhanced by the long-term commitment and trust exercised by both superiors and subordinates. As young lecturers, they rely on their seniors for guidance and encouragement. When they stay longer in their respective universities or colleges, they will develop higher commitment towards their superior and the organisations if their trust in their superior and organisation increases. Higher commitment towards the IHE will encourage them to become more productive which will, in turn, will motivate them to better serve their customers. Liu, Guo and Lee (2011) proposed that a relationship can only exist when the relationship is “important enough” for a partner; that it is worth it for the partner to invest their resources and time to maintain a long-term relationship. Applying the social exchange theory, employees and organizations may keep exchanging contributions based on their level of commitment. In the context of the relationship between lecturers and their superiors, lecturers will seek advice and guidance from their superiors and superiors are depending on the lecturers to perform the organisation’s activities, programs and projects.

Employees who consider themselves insiders to an organization have developed organizational commitment. Organizational commitment correlated better with employee performance in collectivist societies as opposed to individualistic ones. A positive relationship between organizational commitment and employee performance was discovered from comparatively analysing the three dimensions of organizational commitment (Khan & Rashid, 2012). Normative commitment, one of the three dimensions, yielded the best results on the dependent variable (Khan & Rashid, 2012). An Indian study on 231 white-collared working men generated a positive correlation between commitment to the organization and support to the organization which measured employee performance (Darolia et al., 2010). Similarly, case studies in Malaysia and Pakistan showed that performance was considerably affected by organizational commitment, in which the latter was identified as a moderator variable for work-related stress and performance (Jamal, 2011). Therefore, we hypothesize that organizational commitment is a huge contributor to work performance.

Organizational Relational Norms

Organizations and employers tend to be too law-centric and less norm-centric despite labour norms being more comprehensive than legal agreements (Benitez-Avila, 2018). Employment norms are regarded as more superior and practical than the law where it is inevitably influenced by the work culture and environment. Many members of an organization observe the behaviour of their colleagues in practicing the workplace culture instead of the employee manuals. Furthermore, working norms help fill the blanks left by the manuals. There are limits to what the laws can cover. Other abstract social standards such as corporate culture, office politics, and the complex organizational lifestyle are left to the employment norms to establish (Nedkovski, 2017; Fafchamps, 2011).

Relational norms also serve as a social agreement to guide employees in facing various situations better than the legal manuals. Relational contracts have the power to form relationships based on planning, trust and solidarity, superseding the ability of written laws. Defining terms not apparent in written laws but in everyday social interactions are a significant advantage of relational contract. Relational contracts not only supplement legal agreements but have positively affected the written law when combined with the organization’s policy, rules and regulations. In this paper, we are proposing three relational norms postulated to influence lecturers’ perceived performance which include participation, solidarity and flexibility norms (Liu et al, 2020; McLaughlin et al, 2014).

Participation Norms

Participation norms refer to the participation and influence of employees in decision-making throughout the company. The influence felt by employees through participation is not necessarily associated with the job of the individual and the immediate work situation, but can also be achieved

through such activities such as in meetings at a department or company level or through elected representatives. We postulated that research into employee participation may contribute to higher employees' satisfaction and perceived performance (Groen et al. 2017, Irawanto 2015, Abdulkadir et al. 2012). Employee participation is, therefore, an endeavour of workers and their organizations, something that is positive depending on context; workers' say or voice, co-decision, industrial democracy, employee involvement, empowerment, etc. (Al-Dmour, Yassine, & Masa'deh, 2018 and Marin-Garcia & Bonavia, 2015). Employee participation implies that the employer, voluntarily or by compulsion, yields a power of decision to the employees or their representatives. This may occur in the form of joint decisions (e.g. pay and working hours agreed in collective bargaining), decision-making based on consultation with employees (e.g. in works councils or at workshop level), or decision-making left by the employer to the employees themselves (delegation of decision authority, autonomous teams and self-management). All of the above fall under the concept of employee participation and imply the potential influence of the employer on their subordinate's decision-making process. In terms of the relationship between lecturers and their superiors, participation norms are manifested in the form of the design of class schedule, publication target, joint evaluation of student's assignments and tests, consultations and community service activities. Participation norms are also manifested in joint activities that aim to increase the solidarity and synergy among the lecturers, for example organising family days, religious festivals and celebrating the promotion of faculty members and other events. More importantly, a joint decision in setting the key performance indicators and promotional guidelines for lecturers and supporting staff indicates the willingness of the management team to participate in the welfare and career development of both lecturers and non-academic staff.

Employee participation refers to the involvement of employees and the control that they possess over organization-related decisions. Participation is typically accessible by employees through their position or current tasks. However, intradepartmental and interdepartmental meetings alike can also give a platform to employees to offer their thoughts themselves or through other more high-ranking colleagues on behalf of them. Employee participation may lead to better scores of employee satisfaction and perceived performance, as found in previous studies (Groen et al., 2017; Irawanto, 2015; Abdulkadir et al., 2012). Thus, employee participation is a favourable quality also termed the employees' voice, co-decision, industrial democracy, employee involvement, and empowerment (Al-Dmour, Yassine, & Masa'deh, 2018; Marin-Garcia & Bonavia, 2015). Participation of subordinates would not be possible if superiors do not extend the invitation. The salary and daily work discussion, employee training programmes, and retirement plans are examples of two-way decision-making between superiors and subordinates. In the context of lecturers-management relationships, these forms of joint decision making are essential in creating a positive attitude towards the management team. A positive attitude towards the management team would instil a feeling of trust and a sense of belongingness not only among lecturers but also the non-academic staff. These feelings and attitudes will motivate the employees to work harder and give more than what is defined by the work descriptions.

The issues are whether these feelings and attitudes would improve the employee's performance. Would it result in a sense of solidarity and a positive working environment among lecturers and non-academic staff? We proposed that together with solidarity norms, participation norms would contribute to the Esprit de Corps between lecturers, their subordinates and non-academic staff. Furthermore, Solidarity norms are considered the antecedents of participation norms as the perception of solidarity would entail a perception among subordinates that there is little authority gap between them and their superior. This perception would persuade subordinates to believe that the management team is on their side and a member of the organisational family, hence motivating the employees to participate in the organisational activities and job tasks designed by the management team.

Solidarity Norms

Solidarity should be a mutual want by both those in the higher and the lower ranks. However, it is not easy to inculcate due to the organizational hierarchy. The reality states that the power to initiate change in the formal work culture and to influence more apparent change in relational outcomes is only given to the superiors (Kelly & McDonald, 2019; Kelly et al., 2018). When managers act distant with their employees, the employees feel the need to keep their heads down in fear of increasing that distance (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). As a result, solidarity becomes difficult to attain. Therefore, as solidarity is more effectively achieved by the efforts of managers in the workplace context, managers have to not only initiate but also be persistent in instilling solidarity (Schmidt & Achtzehn, 2018; Syahrizal et al., 2016). In this respect, we proposed that to increase the productivity and performance of lecturers, both lecturers and their superiors should display their solidarity norms in their daily interactions. Solidarity norms are manifested in the willingness of the management of the IHE to share the policy, objectives, rules and regulations with their subordinates. The management team is also transparent and sincere in their relationship with their subordinates and vice versa. As lecturers, solidarity is a relational norm that is important not only between them and their superiors but also among lecturers and non-academic staff. This relation is forged by lecturers with these two parties because lecturers need assistance and support from these two parties to execute their daily tasks. The solidarity norms exercised between lecturers and both these parties also entails the willingness of all parties to participate in the operations and work activities of the IHE. As the teaching workload increases and other tasks become more complicated, the solidarity and participation norms become critical since lecturers can only perform to the best of their ability with the support of every member of the IHE.

Flexibility Norms

In the past decades, employee flexibility has garnered traction, consistent with the increasing demand for more flexible work culture. Furthermore, when employees are allowed to practise flexibility, their productivity and diligence increase which in the long run, would help the company to run smoothly. Simultaneously, unnecessary workplace issues due to work inflexibility could be avoided (Shaed, Ishak & Ramli, 2015). Hence, a previous study proposes that university management should focus on practising flexible working systems and decision-making that hinge on the situation and work task to increase the level of happiness among an academician and their performance. Flexibility management affords members of an organization to have a work-life balance with success in both aspects (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Allen et al., 2013). Moreover, flexibility grants members more autonomy in managing their work schedule as they would do work when they are most energetic, prepared and focused. Hence, work piles can be settled more efficiently, boosting individual performance. A positive correlation between active job participation and increased performance levels was revealed in a previous study (Demerouti et al., 2014). Working together in large numbers tends to be challenging but showing flexibility at the managerial level has been posited by scholars to be a powerful strategy. Thus, the better performance shown by an individual with flexible working practices benefits his department, company, and himself in terms of career advancement (Ubeda-Garcia, 2018).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The expected results from the previous discussion are the organizational relationship qualities; with trust, commitment and relational norms that might associate with or contribute to lecturer performance. The analogy is, if the top management puts trust in the lecturers, then the lecturers feel more attached to the organization, thus the willingness to work towards organizational goals increases. The organizational commitment entails the acceptance of the lecturers towards organizational goals, where the lecturers will put efforts towards the goals. Norms are like unwritten contracts that are pervasive in the organization, it becomes a culture, so when the diffusion of relational norms happens it becomes a

conductor to performance. It is a hope that the theoretical framework will assist the researchers to develop and test hypotheses for future empirical study.

The researchers also postulate that other conceptual models are relevant in explaining the changes in an academician's satisfaction and performance in the education sector. For example, Azizaha et al (2020) who studied the lecturer's satisfaction and performance at an Islamic University in Jakarta suggested that both transformational and transactional leadership has a significant effect on lecturer's satisfaction even when delivering their lectures online. Based on previous studies, lecturer's satisfaction is also found to positively influence lecturer's performance and lecturer's satisfaction is found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and lecturer's performance. This relationship is identical to the relationship between transactional leadership and the lecturer's performance. The studies are done before also showed that lecturers are willing to engage in using new technology in delivering their courses through online distance learning, even though, the majority of lecturers did not think using online platforms and methods would improve their teaching qualities, there would be additional stress and low satisfaction in managing their teaching burden and university-related tasks. In the end, this study will be able to establish the relationship between lecturer level of performance and boost up the level of happiness index among lecturers.

We also postulate the elements of relationship norms which include participation, solidarity and flexibility norms are also critical elements in motivating and enhancing the passion and mental strength of lecturers who are involved in the online teaching activities as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. Students and lecturers felt supported and motivated during the pandemic. According to Sieber et al. (2020), lecturers who received the trust, commitment and support from their superiors feel motivated and appreciated by their organization, which may increase their performance, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic. Furthermore, we also propose a new style of leadership such as transactional and transformational leadership that can boost the motivation and focus level of academicians that will help them to give their best performance.

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