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Employee Engagement is the Key: Its Mediating Role between Person–Environment Fit and Organizational Commitment among Filipino Employees

Keterlibatan Karyawan adalah Kuncinya: Peran Mediasi antara Kesesuaian Orang–Lingkungan dan Komitmen Organisasi di antara Karyawan Filipina

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has been a popular topic in human resources management and development for several years now. However, the majority of the information on this construct came from the perspective of other cultures, and scientific research-based literature conducted on the engaging behavior of Filipinos, most notably on the antecedents and consequences, is limited. Thus, this study aimed to examine P–E fit and organizational commitment as an antecedent and the consequence of employee engagement, respectively. Similarly, the mediating function of employee engagement on the association of P–E fit with organizational commitment was explored. A total of 1252 employees from different Filipino-owned companies participated in the study through opportunity sampling. They answered three survey questionnaires that measure P–E fit, engagement, and organizational commitment. Results of the study revealed that P–E fit and organizational commitment are an antecedent and outcome of employee engagement, respectively. Findings further revealed that employee engagement mediates the connection between P–E fit and organizational commitment.

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ABSTRAK

Keterikatan karyawan telah menjadi topik populer dalam manajemen dan pengembangan sumber daya manusia saat ini. Namun, sebagian besar informasi tentang topik ini berasal dari perspektif budaya lain, dan terbatasnya literatur yang dihasilkan oleh orang Filipina, terutama pada anteseden dan konsekuensi dari keterikatan karyawan tersebut. Dengan demikian, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji *P-E fit* sebagai anteseden dan komitmen organisasi sebagai konsekuensi dari keterikatan karyawan. Demikian pula akan dieksplorasi fungsi mediasi dari keterikatan karyawan pada hubungan antara *P-E fit* dan komitmen organisasi. Terdapat 1.252 karyawan dari berbagai perusahaan di Filipina yang berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini melalui *opportunity sampling*. Mereka menjawab tiga kuesioner survei yang mengukur *P-E fit*, keterikatan karyawan, dan komitmen organisasi. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa *P-E fit* adalah anteseden dari keterikatan karyawan, dan komitmen organisasi adalah hasil dari keterikatan karyawan. Temuan lebih lanjut mengungkapkan bahwa keterikatan karyawan memediasi hubungan antara *P-E fit* dan komitmen organisasi.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has been a popular topic in human resources management and development in the last several years. Many believed that employee engagement could help boost organizational performance. A highly engaged workforce is believed to be capable of offering more considering performance, thus providing additional contribution to the success of the organization (Macey et al., 2009). Moreover, employee engagement is a key driver in determining the business performance of organizations and employee

performance, morale, and motives for staying in the organization (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Employee engagement has many different definitions. For instance, Kahn (1990), the first researcher who studied engagement, described it as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Kahn (1990) further defined employee engagement as a state, absorption, and energy that can change across situations depending on the

following: 1) work-related variables, such as challenging jobs or having autonomy in doing one's tasks; 2) circumstances or situations outside work, such as domestic concerns; and 3) personal disposition of the employee. Feeling absorbed and energized may lead to specific behaviors, such as applying a considerable amount of effort at work and going beyond the formal requirements of one's job (Inceoglu & Fleck, 2010). In addition, engagement is a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Vigor in employee engagement includes "high levels of energy, mental resilience" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74) and making an extra effort in completing tasks. Dedication is "characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Absorption is finally described as being totally immersed in one's work, wherein one does not notice the time when he or she is working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Several theories and models can explain employee engagement; one is the social exchange theory (SET). Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) mentioned that the underlying assumption of SET is that the relationship between parties may progress into meaningful, trustworthy, and reciprocated commitments on the condition that both parties must follow certain "rules of exchange." They further explained that the best-known exchange rule involves reciprocity or repayment in kind. SET describes that the exchange process occurs when the employees develop a sense of obligation due to the perceived delivery of valued resources from the organization (Albrecht, 2010). Employees will reciprocate this feeling of obligation to the organization with prosocial and engagement-related behaviors (Albrecht, 2010). Thus, employees who receive resources that are important to them will feel obliged to repay the organization through high engagement (Saks, 2006).

However, a persisting question on employee engagement remains: that is, if the meaning and its drivers are consistent across all cultures. Macey et al. (2009) suggested the necessity of ensuring that employee engagement is viewed positively in the cultures of the company where it is located. Employee engagement is currently popular in the Philippines. Several companies currently acknowledge not only the existence but the importance of this concept in an organization. In the 2018 Trends in Global Employee Engagement Report, the employee engagement levels in the Philippines reached 71%, which is larger than China (69%), Thailand (64%), Malaysia (63%), Australia (60%), and Singapore (59%) (Aon, 2018). Thus, Filipino companies are assumed to view employee engagement as an essential factor in increasing organizational performance based on the

aforementioned data. However, the majority of the information on this concept came from the perspective of practitioners and scientific research-based literature conducted in the country on the engaging behavior of Filipinos, most especially on the antecedents and consequences, is limited. Thus, understanding the extent of knowledge and employee engagement in the Philippine culture, including the antecedents and outcomes, is necessary. Therefore, the current research aims to study P-E fit and organizational commitment as the antecedent and consequence of employee engagement, respectively. Similarly, the mediating function of employee engagement on the linkage between P-E fit and organizational commitment will be explored.

Person–environment fit

Engagement is essential in an organization's performance; thus, studying its key drivers is important. Drivers will help in increasing the engagement behavior of employees. For instance, job resources are consistently correlated with engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Job resources play a motivating role in increasing employee engagement in accomplishing work goals (Bakker, 2010). Inceoglu and Fleck (2010, p. 32) mentioned that "drivers of engagement are the characteristics or the features of the work environment." They also explained that a predictor of high engagement levels lies in a superior fit on these characteristics or features considering what employees want and what is available to them. Thus, the match between the employee and the environment or the person–environment fit (P-E Fit) plays a vital role in enhancing engagement behavior.

P-E fit occurs when the characteristics of the employee and work environment are well-matched (Chuang et al., 2016). The four types of fit are as follows: person–job fit (P-J fit), person–organization fit (P-O fit), person–group fit (P-G fit), and person–supervisor fit (P-S fit) (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). P-J fit is the "relationship between a person's characteristics and those of the job or tasks performed at work" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 284). This type of fit also refers to the requirements of the job that correspond to the competencies of an employee (demands–abilities fit) and the match between the employees' needs and the assignments that they complete (needs–supplies fit) (Edwards, 1991). Chuang et al. (2016) explained that the demands–abilities fit involves the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personality of an individual. The needs–supplies fit includes the dimensions of interests and job characteristics. Employees who experience high levels of P-J fit are usually effective and successful in performing their job, leading to high work engagement (Hamid & Yahya, 2011). Meanwhile, P-O fit is the "compatibility between people and entire organization" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 285). The match focuses

on the values and goals of the individual and the organization (Kristof, 1996). P–O fit occurs when individuals in the organization have confidence in the compatibility of their values and that of the organization and the values of their colleagues (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Moreover, P–O fit contributes to the general wellbeing of an individual, resulting in a highly engaging behavior (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). P–G fit is the match between employees and their workgroups (Kristof, 1996). The match is in connection with the values, goals, and group member attributes (Chuang et al., 2016). P–G fit also focuses on the interplay between the personal characteristics of an individual and those of other group members that determines the individual-level outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2014). The P–S fit is the values and aims of an individual that match his or her supervisor (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Employees who have a positive relationship with their leaders (supervisors) are found to have increased levels of engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). According to SET, if an improved fit exists between employees and the work environment, then they will feel obliged to reciprocate with high engaging behavior. Thus, employees with strong levels of P–E fit are hypothesized to exhibit a remarkably engaging behavior.

Organizational commitment

Recent studies indicate increasing evidence of the significant correlation between employee engagement and positive organizational results (Bailey et al., 2017; Albrecht, 2010; Saks, 2006). One of the most consistent findings among these studies lies in the positive correlation between engagement and organizational commitment (Bailey et al., 2017). Organizational commitment is the “psychological link between the employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1996, p. 252). Allen and Meyer (1991) explained the following three components of organizational commitment: affective commitment, which pertains to the strong connection of an employee to his or her organization; normative commitment is the perceived duty of an employee to remain in an organization; and continuance commitment, which is the realization of possible loss if an employee will leave the organization.

From the perspective of SET, the relationship between employees and the organization is grounded on the standards of reciprocity (Bailey et al., 2017). As mentioned, the underlying assumption of SET is that the relationship between parties may progress into remarkably meaningful, trustworthy, and reciprocated commitments on the condition that both parties must follow specified “rules of exchange” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, employees with high

engagement levels tend to have a valued relationship with their organization, resulting in a substantially favorable attitude concerning their organization (Saks, 2006). Thus, highly engaged employees are hypothesized to demonstrate high levels of organizational commitment.

Employee engagement as a mediator

Additionally, Shahidan et al. (2018) argued that employee engagement functions as a mediator between two essential constructs. Recent studies show that engagement mediates the relationship between antecedents and consequences or outcomes (Shahidan et al., 2018; Hamid & Yahya, 2016; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Inceoglu, & Fleck, 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For instance, Shahidan et al. (2018) studied the mediating function of engagement on the relationship between P–E fit and adaptive performance. Another study examined the mediating function of employee engagement on P–J fit and employee retention (Hamid & Yahya, 2016). Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013) also studied how employee engagement mediates the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and P–O fit with organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Accordingly, employee engagement is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between P–E fit and organizational commitment.

2. Methods

Participants

Participants are gathered after securing approval from the University of Santo Tomas College of Science Ethics Review Committee. A total of 1252 employees participated in the study through opportunity sampling. The participants comprised 787 females (62.86%) and 465 males (37.14%) with age ranging from 21 to 64 ($M = 35$, $SD = 10.76$). Among the participants, 651 are rank and file employees (52%), 279 are supervisors (22.28%), 198 are managerial employees (15.81%), and 124 are top executive individuals (9.90%). The gathered participants are also from different Filipino-owned companies, with a length of service ranging from 1 year to 40 years. Moreover, these participants are all college graduates.

Measures

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17)* by Wilmar Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker was used to measure employee engagement. This scale is considered to be one of the most widely used tests in measuring employee engagement. *UWES-17* is a 17-item test comprising three scales, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption, and uses a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 (Never) to 6 (Always or every day). The summation of the three scales comprises the total work

Table 1. Estimates of Regression Weights of the Hypothesized Paths of P–E Fit, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Commitment

	<i>B</i>	β	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P-value</i>
P–E Fit to Employee Engagement	2.28	0.48	0.15	14.89	***
Employee Engagement to Affective Commitment	0.05	0.18	0.01	4.91	***
Employee Engagement to Normative Commitment	0.09	0.37	0.01	8.03	***
Employee Engagement to Continuance Commitment	0.05	0.10	0.02	3.06	**

Notes: **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01, N = 1,252

engagement score of the participant. The *Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale (PPEFS)* of Chuang et al. (2016) was also utilized in the present study for the P–E fit. This scale is a “theory-driven and systematically-validated multidimensional instrument of P–E Fit” (Chuang et al., 2016, p. 66). This tool, which has 26 items, comprises the following four dimensions: the Person–Job Fit Scale (PJFS), Person–Organization Fit Scale (POFS), Person–Group Fit Scale (PGFS), and Person–Supervisor Fit Scale (PSFS). The participants answered the survey using a 7-point scale from 1 (meaning “no match”) to 7 (meaning “complete match”). The *TCM Commitment Survey* was finally used to measure the organizational commitment of the participants. This tool is an 18-item survey instrument designed to assess the three types of employee commitment: affective, normative, and continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1996). The participants were asked to indicate their agreement on the items by choosing a number from 1 as strongly disagree to 7 as strongly disagree. The scale has six items, and each scale was scored separately.

3. Results

All measures in the present study obtained Cronbach alpha values higher than 0.70. Therefore, employee engagement ($\alpha = 0.92$), P–E fit ($\alpha = 0.97$), and organizational commitment ($\alpha = 0.77$) are considered to be reliable constructs used in this study.

The results provided empirical support for the hypotheses because P–E fit predicts employee engagement, and, in turn, employee engagement influences the three components of organizational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance) as shown in Table 1. This finding indicates that employees with high P–E fit will possibly exhibit high levels of employee engagement; consequently, highly engaged employees will demonstrate high levels of organizational commitment. The results further revealed that normative commitment ($\beta = 0.37$, $R^2 = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$) obtained a high predictive value while continuance commitment ($\beta = 0.10$, $R^2 = 0.009$, $p < 0.01$) had the lowest regression estimates.

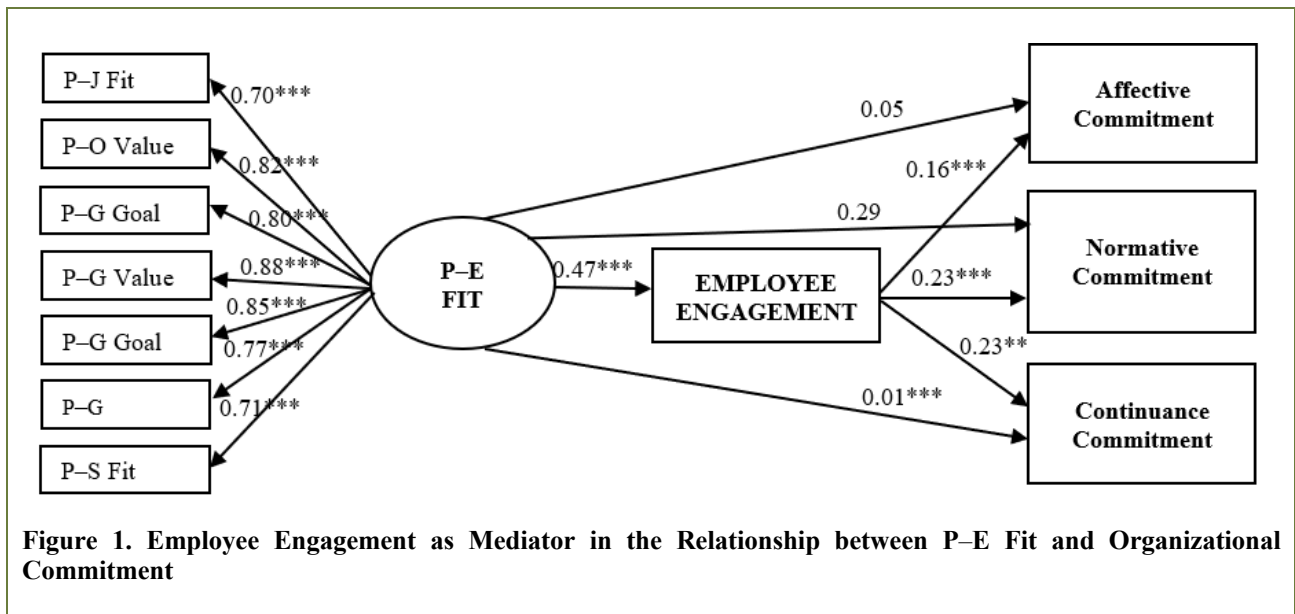
Fit indexes were computed to determine if the gathered data fit the hypothesized model. Results reveal that the proposed model fits well with the data, as shown in Table 2. The CFI, NFI, RFI, and TLI indexes of the present study are within the cutoff for good fit because the recommended values should be ≥ 0.90 (Hair et al., 1998). Moreover, the RMSEA estimated only around 5.6% amount of error, which indicates a good fit. An RMSEA of < 0.08 signifies a satisfactory model fit (Hoe, 2008).

Table 2. Model Fit Measures and Indexes

Fit Measures	Fit Indexes
X ² /df	4.88/23
GFI	0.98
AGFI	0.98
NFI	0.98
TLI	0.97
CFI	0.99
RMSEA	0.05

Note: GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit; NFI = Normed Fit Index; Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

Figure 1 shows the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between P–E fit and organizational commitment. The indirect effects of P–E fit on affective commitment [Effect = 0.074, 95% C.I. (0.05, 0.10)], normative commitment [Effect = 0.05, 95% C.I. (0.09, 0.14)], and continuance commitment [Effect = 0.111, 95% C.I. (0.02, 0.08)] are statistically significant. Thus, this finding supports the third hypothesis of the present study that employee engagement mediates the relationship between P–E fit and organizational commitment.



The direct relationship between P-E fit and the two components of organizational commitment (affective and continuance) is also insignificant in the presence of employee engagement, thus indicating full mediation. However, the mediating effect of employee engagement on P-E Fit and normative commitment is considered partial because the direct relationship between the two constructs is still significant even in the presence of employee engagement.

4. Discussion

The present study recognized the need to understand the extent of knowledge and employee engagement in the Philippine culture, including the antecedents and outcomes. Thus, the study aimed to examine P-E fit and organizational commitment as an antecedent and the consequence of employee engagement, respectively. Similarly, the mediating role of employee engagement on the linkage between P-E fit and organizational commitment was also explored.

Results of data analysis supported the first hypothesis of this study that employees with strong levels of P-E fit will exhibit a more engaging behavior. P-E fit is the compatibility that occurs when the characteristics of the individual and work environment are effectively matched (Chuang et al., 2016). As mentioned, four types of P-E fit are involved in this study, namely P-J, P-O, P-G, and P-S fit. The match between the employees and their environment includes the features of one’s job, the characteristics of the organization, the attributes of the teams that the employee belongs to, and the quality of working relationship with the supervisor of the employee. All these features contribute to the fit between the employees and the work environment. Moreover, the fit between the employees and the work

environment influences the work experience of the employees, thus increasing engagement or disengagement toward their work (Inceoglu and Fleck, 2010). From the perspective of SET, employees who perceived improved fit with their work environment will feel obliged to reciprocate with high engaging behavior.

Moreover, the findings of the current study are consistent with the hypothesis postulated that highly engaged employees would demonstrate high levels of organizational commitment. This finding indicates that employees with high engaging behavior are likely to show emotional commitment to their company (affective), feel obligated to stay in the company (normative), and perceive remarkably significant benefits if they will remain in the organization (continuance). Employees with high engagement levels also have a highly valued relationship with their organization, resulting in a substantially favorable attitude concerning their organization (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement predicts all the components of organizational commitment. However, results reveal that normative commitment is the stronger consequence of employee engagement among the three components. This finding is similar to that of Ortiz et al. (2013) in which employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on normative commitment. They explained that engaged employees tend to commit themselves to the organization because they want to reciprocate with loyalty and strong moral obligation (Ortiz et al., 2013). A concept called *utang na loob*, which means indebtedness, exists in Philippine culture. Filipinos feel indebted to someone who helped them; thus, reciprocating the help that they received is necessary. From a cultural lens, *utang na loob* is described as indebtedness arising from the being of a person whose act of moral obligations persists and

endures through time (Dancel, 2005). Hence, a debt of gratitude continues in the organization because of the assistance extended to employees. Employees perceive this *utang na loob* as a psychological contract that morally binds the employer–employee relationship (Jocano, 1997). This debt will serve as a reason for Filipino employees to be highly engaged, thus feeling obligated to stay in the organization.

Another significant finding of the study lies in the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship of P–E fit and organizational commitment. Results revealed that employee engagement fully mediates the relationship between P–E fit and affective and normative commitment and partially mediates the relationship between P–E fit and continuance commitment. As mentioned, SET indicates that the exchange process occurs when the employees develop a sense of obligation due to the perceived delivery of valued resources from the organization (Albrecht, 2010). Employees will reciprocate this feeling of obligation to the organization with prosocial and engagement-related behaviors (Albrecht, 2010). This finding indicates that employees who perceived a strong fit between their values, goals, attributes, and their work environment will most probably reciprocate their organization with increased enthusiasm, energy, passion, and vigor, which are the characteristics of actively engaged employees. Consequently, this engaged behavior will result in a highly committed relationship with the organization.

5. Conclusion

The present study explored the antecedent and outcome of employee engagement as an attempt to address the need for additional culture-based research on employee engagement. Moreover, this study examined the mediating function of employee engagement. Overall, the results of the present study suggest the following. First, developing the fit between employees and the work environment (P–E fit) will likely lead to high levels of employee engagement. Second, increasing the engaging behavior of employees will result in high organizational commitment, which includes affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Third, boosting employee engagement can help in improving the effect of P–E fit on organizational commitment. Last, the present study provided contributions to the engagement behaviors of Filipino employees, adding to the limited scientific research-based literature on the antecedent and outcome of employee engagement.

However, areas that need further clarification are as follows. First, the study did not consider the demographic variables that may produce different results. Future research may consider the job position, rank, gender, and generational differences as variables

that may affect engagement behaviors. Moreover, future research may consider comparing engagement behavior in different business fields, such as health care, academe, and government service.

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