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CONSIDERING UNVIERSITY GOVERNANCE: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATIONNAL INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Effective university governance provides a good framework of organizational practices to engage academic staff. The critical resource for building global competitiveness of university. This study, considering the university governance, is aimed to evaluate the levels of employee engagement in universities. A preliminary investigation was carried out using questionnaire survey. 160 randomly selected academic staff from one public university and one private university participated the survey. Statistics results show that levels of employee engagement from both universities are high. Moreover, the academic staff from the private university are more engaged comparing with the public university. Hence, it proposes a worthy question for further exploration: is the governance of private university better than that of public university?

Keywords: Employee engagement, Malaysia, Higher educational institutions, University governance

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays important roles in enhancing national development and developing knowledgeable individuals. Due to a range of external forces (i.e. markets, virtualization, competition), it is undergoing transformations giving rise to new ways of understanding the functions and governance of university. University governance refers to the structure and process of authoritative decision making across issues that are significant for external as well as internal stakeholders within a university (Gayle, Tewarie, & White, 2011). There is no doubt that academicians are the critical resources involved.

According to Nkogbu and Offia (2015), effective system of governance provides the framework for organizational practices which to a great extent contributes to the level of employee engagement. Employee engagement is the positive attitude held by employees towards their organization, their colleagues and their work conditions. Thus, for employee

engagement to occur, academicians should be engaged effectively through the provision of good governance by university. And having engaged employees brings real benefits to the performance of organizations (Saks, 2006; Simpson, 2009; Gruman & Saks, 2011). According to Gallup study which studied engagement at more than 125 organizations, organizations that invest in engaging employees can stand to grow their earning 2.6 times faster than those who do not (Fleming, 2009). Inversely, those with low employee engagement levels experienced more than 32 percent decrease in operating income and 11 percent decline in earnings per share growth (Maniam & Samuel, 2015).

Hence, this study considering the governance of university, aims to access the levels of employee engagement among academic staff in higher educational institutions in Malaysia and the preliminary investigation was carried out in one private university and one public university. Section 2 further elaborates the definition of employee engagement. Details of survey investigation are provided in Section 3 with respondent's profile presented. Section 4 analyses the statistics results with conclusions drawn upon in Section 5.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Organizations that struggle to survive these difficult time must seek to understand how to effectively engage their most valuable asset, employees, to ensure lasting business continuity (Naicker, 2013). Kahn (1990) introduced employee engagement that is “ the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles where employees express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”. Baumruk (2004) defined employee engagement as employees’ emotionally and intellectual commitment to the organization or the discretionary effort employees provide above and beyond what is required by employees in their job. Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss (2008) argued that engagement as the ability of creating opportunities for employees to contact with their colleagues, managers and wider organization; and also about creating an environment where employees are motivated to connect with their work and really care about doing a good job since it makes employees feel they are a part of the organization.

In short, employee engagement consists of two different but interrelated elements (Heintzman & Marson, 2005). They are employee commitment and employee job satisfaction. Employee commitment is the pride people who feel for their organization; and the degree that they intend to stay with the organization and they desire to perform at high levels, as well as they strive to improve the organizations’ performance (Peters, 2007). Employee job satisfaction is the level of contentment an employee assigns to attributes of their jobs. Naicker (2013) further stratified employee engagement into three intertwined dimensions which are emotional, behavioral and cognitive. The emotional aspect relates to how employees feel about their organization; behavioral dimension refers to actual energies employed by individuals during their role performance; cognitive element deals with how is the employees belief about their organization, for example, do employees’ believe and follow their organization’s goals? The survey investigation of the study is following the three dimensions as stated above.

SURVEY INVESTIGATION

A questionnaire survey was designed consisting of two sections. Section A includes demographic information and section B covers questions on employee engagement. Each question uses five-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The survey questionnaire was randomly distributed to academic staff in one public university (A) and one private university (B) in Malaysia. In total, 160 respondents participated in the survey among which 80 were from the public university A and 80 were from the private university B.

The demographics of respondents are provided from Table 1 to Table 4 in terms of gender, age, faculty, designation, level of education and years of academic experience as well as years of working in the current university. It indicates that, in both universities, majority of respondents are aged between 25 to 44, and most of them are senior lecturer and at PhD level, as well as almost all of participated academic staff have more than 10 years academic experiences and they have worker more than 2 years in their current university.

Table 1 shows that the respondents in the public university A are almost equal in male (53.8%) and female (46.3%) respondents, while in the private university B male respondents (70.0 %) are greater than female respondents (30.0 %). Moreover, the majority of respondents from both universities are between the age 25 to 44.

Table 1 : Gender and age of respondents

Gender	Public university A		Private university B	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Male	43	53.8	56	70.0
Female	37	46.3	24	30.0
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0
Age				
25-34years	30	37.5	20	25.0
35-44years	37	46.3	28	35.0
45-54years	8	10.0	16	20.0
55-64years	5	6.3	16	20.0
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0

Table 2 demonstrates that the respondents are selected from 10 faculties of the public university A and 9 faculties of the private university B. Furthermore, the generalization is not applicable for non-academic staff in universities.

Table 2: Faculty of respondents

Public university A			Private university B		
Faculty	Frequency	Percent	Faculty	Frequency	Percent
fkksa	11	13.8	ChE	12	15.0
fkasa	6	7.5	CiE	8	10.0
fskkp	9	11.3	ME	11	13.8
fkee	8	10.0	E&EE	9	11.3
fist	11	13.8	PE	10	12.5
fkp	6	7.5	GE	6	7.5
fkm	9	11.3	F&AS	6	7.5
ftek	6	7.5	M&H	8	10.0
fim	5	6.3	C&IS	10	12.5
cmlhs	9	11.3			
Total	80	100.0	Total	80	100.0

Table 3 presents that, in both the public university A and the private university B, the most of the respondents are at PhD level and are senior lecturer.

Table 3: Respondents' education and designation level

Level of education	Public university A		Private university B	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor Degree	0	0.0	6	7.5
Master's Degree	30	37.5	15	18.8
PhD	50	62.5	59	73.8
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0
Designation				
Tutor	1	1.3	0	0.0
Lecturer	30	37.5	13	16.3
Senior Lecturer	45	56.3	34	42.5
Associate Professor	2	2.5	27	33.8
Others	2	2.5	6	7.5
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents in the public university A have less than 5 years of academic experience, while the majority of respondents in the private university B have more than 10 years of academic experience. Furthermore, the most of respondents in both universities have worked more than 2 years in their current university.

Table 4: Years of academic experience and working years in current university

Years of Academic Experience	Public university A		Private university B	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1 - < 5 years	30	37.5	17	21.3
5 - < 10 years	22	27.5	29	36.3
≥ 10 years	28	35.0	34	42.5
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0
Years of working in the current university				
< 2 year	15	18.8	6	7.5
2 - < 5 years	19	23.8	26	32.5
5 - < 10 years	24	30.0	23	28.8
≥ 10 years	22	27.5	25	31.3
Total	80	100.0	80	100.0

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Data Reliability & Validity

Reliability test was conducted to estimate the internal consistency of research instrument. As shown in Table 5, Cronbach's alpha of 0.904 indicates that the measuring items of employee engagement provide a reliable measure of internal consistency, as the reliability measures exceed the minimum value of 0.6 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Table 5 : Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.904	.904	12

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed with a principle component analysis as the extraction method conducting Varimax with Kaiser Normalization Rotation method to explain the items' variance. In addition, varimax rotation is used to see how groupings of items measure the same concept. The following criteria were used for extracting factors: factors with an eigenvalue greater than one (Nunnally, 1978); each factor retained will explain at least 10% of the variance (Suhr & Shay, 2009); the items with Varimax value less than 0.4 should be dropped for analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). Table 6 indicates that the appropriateness of factor analysis was supported by both Bartlett's test of sphericity, Chi-square = 1036.456, p-value < 0.000, and the measure of sampling adequacy by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of 0.855, which is exceed the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974).

Table 6: KMO and bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.855
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1036.456
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

There are three different components extracted, where component 1 gets 5.866, component 2 gets 1.243 and component 3 gets 1.110. And the total variance explained by the 3 components is 68.489. As shown in Table 7, item 1, 2, 3, 4 fall under component 1, which is called affective dimension. Item 4, 5, 6, 7 fall under component 2, which is named behavioural dimension. And item 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 fall under component 3, which is defined as cognitive dimension.

Table 7 : Rotated component matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
1. I feel confident that I can meet my goals.	.782		
2. I am excited about how my work matters to my team.	.732		
3. I am excited about how my work matters to my organization.	.805		
4. I am happy to take on new responsibilities as the need arises.	.631		
5. I look for ways to improve the way I work.		.702	
6. I work to ensure that I assist in meeting my organization's objectives.		.674	
7. I look for ways to reduce costs.		.645	
8. I work to maintain my focus on being more efficient.		.617	
9. I recognize the link between what I do and organizational objectives.			.732
10. I understand how my efforts are contributing to meeting the organization's objectives.			.765
11. I have a good idea of what the organization is trying to accomplish.			.704
12. I understand how my work impacts service delivery of my organization.			.786

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Therefore, it further confirmed that employee engagement has three dimensions which are affective dimension (including item 1, 2, 3, and 4), behavioural dimension (including item 5, 6, 7, and 8) and cognitive dimension (including item 9, 10, 11, and 12).

Levels of Employee Engagement

One sample t-test is used to compare the sample mean with a known mean value of 4, which is the 'agree' level. Table 8 shows that mean values of employee engagement in both the public university A and the private university B are significantly greater than 4, which means the levels of employee engagement of both universities are towards 'strongly agree' level. Furthermore, the mean value (4.24) of employee engagement of private university B higher than the mean value (4.12) of employee engagement of public university A. It seems the

academic staff from the private university B are more engaged compared with the academic staff from the public university A.

Table 8 : One sample statistics of employee engagement (test value=4)

Variable	N		Mean		Test Value		Sig. (2-tailed)		Std. Deviation		Std. Error Mean	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
EE	80	80	4.12	4.24	4	4	.020	.000	.466	.460	.052	.051

To confirm which university has higher employee engagement, the mean value of employee engagement for the public university A respondents is set as the test value to run one-sample test in SPSS. As shown in Table 9, the mean value of employee engagement (Sig. = 0.026) between the public university A and the private university B are significantly different at the level of 0.05 (2-tailed). Hence, it further proves that the academic staff from the private university B are more engaged compared with the academic staff from the public university A.

Table 9 : Comparison of levels of employee engagement between the public university a and the private university B

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Test value
					Lower	Upper	
EE	2.265	79	.026	.116	.01	.22	4.12

Table 10 shows the levels of employee engagement in three dimensions: affective, behavioural and cognitive among academic staff. It indicates that the public university A have higher level of the behavioural engagement, and followed by the cognitive engagement and then affective engagement. Additionally, the private university B have higher level of behavioural engagement, and followed by the affective engagement and cognitive engagement.

Table 10 : One-sample statistics of employee engagement in three dimensions (test value=4)

	N		Mean		Test Value		Sig. (2-tailed)		Std. Deviation		Std. Error Mean	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Affective	80	80	4.0344	4.2406	4	4	.591	.001	.56918	.61036	.06364	.06824
Behavioural	80	80	4.2094	4.2750	4	4	.000	.000	.46634	.44580	.05214	.04984
Cognitive	80	80	4.1281	4.1938	4	4	.055	.002	.58730	.55401	.06566	.06194

To compare level of behavioural engagement in both universities, table 11 indicates the academic staff in both universities have similar level of behavioural engagement.

Table 11 : Comparison of levels of behavioural engagement between the public university A and the private university B

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Test Value
					Lower	Upper	
Behavioural	1.316	79	.192	.06560	-.0336	.1648	4.2094

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the academic staff in the participated private university B are more engaged comparing with the public university A. Why? The potential reasons could be related to the determinants of employee engagement, such as supportive work environment, organization's leadership, recognition, compensation, etc. And all these are actually under the coverage of university's governance system as the governance system works as kind of organizational policies within an organization which is critical determinant of employee engagement. Hence, it indicates another interesting question to further explore: is the governance of private university better than that of public university? As the study is limited to only two universities, future research is recommended to enlarge the scope of study by including more universities in Malaysia.

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