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Participative Decision-Making, Psychological Empowerment and Job Performance: Evidence from the Malaysian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturing Firms

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between participative decision-making, psychological empowerment and job performance among engineers in the Electrical and Electronic (E&E) manufacturing firms in Malaysia. The study used a structured survey questionnaire to collect data from both managers and engineers as the study utilized matched-pair analysis. Human Resource (HR) managers from 73 manufacturing firms agreed to cooperate in the data collection process. The researchers were able to collect 173 matched responses from both managers and engineers. For the purpose of data analysis, the study used SEM-PLS method to analyse the direct and indirect effect between the variables. The results indicated that all the direct effects were significant and only the perceived meaning dimension of psychological empowerment was not significant as a mediator. The practical implication of participative decision-making and psychological empowerment on job performance leads employees to learn new skills, obtain information, help one another, enhance social contact, and fulfill the obligation.

Keywords: Job performance, participative decision-making, psychological empowerment

INTRODUCTION

According to Ghani et al. (2016) employees' job performance affects the organizational outcomes. In other words, employees' job performance ensures the realization of the firm's business and operational objectives. In the current competitive scenario, employees' job performance is a key factor for the manufacturing firms to

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gain competitive advantage and improve productivity. Thus, the high standard of employees' job performance obtained from proficient human resources is one of the competitive advantage available to improve performance in the Malaysian Electrical and Electronic (E&E) manufacturing sector. Furthermore, Huang (2012) and Kimpah and Raudeliuniene (2014) found that participative decision-making and empowerment were factors that influenced employee job performance, particularly within the context of two-way interactions between superiors and subordinates.

Employees in the manufacturing firms have variety of issues related to job performance, particularly in-role performance between superiors and subordinates. The first issue; is the lack of communication between managers and their subordinates regarding the company's objectives and performance expectations (Chelniciuc, 2010). Second issue; managers often do not take enough time to determine the source of the problem, when engineers do not have the ability or the motivation to do work. The third issue; is the lack of participative decision-making and improper empowerment practices in organizations. The reason is the budget for human resource development is at the bottom of the list of priorities (Chan et al., 2016). Fourth issue; its engineers are among the unhappiest employees in Malaysia based on a Work Happiness Survey in 2013 (Boo, 2014). All issues mentioned above can be factors that influence the engineers' job performance.

There have been limited empirical studies conducted to assess factors influencing employees' job performance associated with superiors and subordinates, specifically between managers and engineers in the Malaysia E&E manufacturing firms. There is a line of logic which supports the view that an organization obtains benefits from the interaction of managers and employees in the workplace (Dodi, 2015). It is expected that being involved in the decision-making process as well as being empowered will be challenging for many employees and might influence his or her performance. Furthermore, sharing information can lead to enhanced job performance (Abdul-Rasit & Isa, 2015) Thus, this shows a strong need for the research to be conducted, to investigate employee job performance-related issues in the workplace and how such performance is influenced by the interaction between the managers and their engineers.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were 1) to examine the relationship between participative decision-making and psychological empowerment on in-role performance; 2) to investigate the mediating role of psychological empowerment between participative decision-making and in-role performance.

Job Performance

Job performance is defined as the effectiveness, productivity and efficiency when employees maximize their work behaviour and resources. Normally, performance comprises two dimensions: those related to the task/in-role performance

and the contextual/extra-role performance (Motowidlo et al., 1997). In-role performance is an action that contributes to performing a task to generate the expected and precise outcome. In other words, the in-role performance consists of job-specific behaviours including core job responsibilities. Meanwhile, contextual/extra-role performance is the effectiveness of the workers in performing his or her job which is supported by his or her personal behaviour, social and physiological ambience of the workplace (Mohd-Rashid et al., 2016). The focus of the current study is on in-role performance orientation of job performance.

A classic view of in-role performance refers to an objective indicator to measure employees' job performance. Furthermore, in-role performance is related to the employees' workplace behaviour based on his or her prescribed job descriptions (Shen et al., 2014). Similarly, in-role performance is based on the activities related to formal tasks, duties, and responsibilities outlined in the employees' job description. It is reasonable to conclude that in-role performance refers to employees' behaviours specified by the job description and contributes to the organization's technical core.

Participative Decision-Making

Participative decision-making calls for a participative style of management, which will increase the productivity of employees and increase their satisfaction (Ghattas et al., 2014). According to Parnell et al. (2012), participative style of management calls for employees from multiple hierarchies and tiers uniting and combining their resources. Such practices correspondingly contribute to improved work practices, greater productivity, and improved efficiency in organizational performance. From the management perspective, this gives the perception of shifting responsibility to the employees making them having better perception about themselves and thus improving both supervisors and their subordinates' job performance. Indeed, participative decision-making in an organization indicates that the organization is more responsive towards empowering the employees. Employees pursue meaningful, competent, and impactful objectives on their work outcomes. In conclusion, the employees' participative decision-making role is significant for its links with psychological empowerment and in-role performance. The hypotheses formulated are:

Hypothesis 1: Participative decision-making has a positive and significant effect on perceived meaning;

Hypothesis 2: Participative decision-making has a positive and significant effect on perceived competence; and

Hypothesis 3: Participative decision-making has a positive and significant effect on perceived impact.

Psychological Empowerment

Appraisal of empowerment and factors influencing its characteristic by an aspect of job performance are extensively deliberated

in the scientific literature with sufficient controversial viewpoints (Raudeliuniene et al., 2014). The most recent and well-known psychological empowerment concept is derived from the works of Spreitzer (1995), Spreitzer et al. (1997), and Spreitzer et al. (1999). The concept of psychological empowerment namely perceived meaning, perceived competence, perceived impact and perceived self-determination has been widely investigated since 1995. However, none of the psychological empowerment constructs has an ideal definition, researchers have aligned the definition within the context of productivity, profitability, and the effectiveness of the workplace. All in all, this study will employ three out of four dimensions adopted by Meyerson and Kline (2008) and Kimpah (2018). Self-determination is excluded because of its essential link with job autonomy. Thus, this study will investigate psychological empowerment without the influential of self-determination or job autonomy.

Psychological empowerment namely perceived meaning, perceived competence, and the perceived impact can improve employees' perceptions about themselves and improve their self-esteem in the workplace (Meyerson & Kline, 2008). Meyerson and Kline (2008) and Kimpah (2018) suggested that through perceived meaning, perceived competence, and perceived impact would result in an improved concentration of the employees and this in return would improve the employees' job performance. Therefore, researchers expected that these three dimensions of psychological empowerment to be positively related to engineers' in-role performance and researchers formulated the hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived meaning has a positive and significant on in-role performance;

Hypothesis 5: Perceived competence has a positive and significant effect on in-role performance; and

Hypothesis 6: Perceived impact has a positive and significant effect on in-role performance.

The participative style of management is considered to enhance the work outcomes of subordinates through induced psychological empowerment. Several studies revealed that psychological empowerment significantly mediated the relationship between participative leadership and job performance (Huang, 2012). Researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: Perceived meaning mediates the relationship between participative decision-making and in-role performance;

Hypothesis 8: Perceived competence mediates the relationship between participative decision-making and in-role performance; and

Hypothesis 9: Perceived impact mediates the relationship between participative decision-making and in-role performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data Collection

The unit of analysis of this study is the individual, specifically individuals working in the Malaysian E&E manufacturing firms. Individuals working in the E&E manufacturing firms must be the managers and engineers. The engineers must have worked for their present company for at least a year and each engineer must be directly supervised by a specific manager who has been identified by the HR manager as the direct coordinator or superior of the engineer based on his or her work outcomes relationships. As such, judgemental sampling was utilized for sampling technique.

For data collection purposes, structured survey questionnaires were used to obtain responses. The process of data collection involved; firstly, the HR managers of the E& E manufacturing firms were contacted to inform them of the research and the "walk-in, drop-off, and collect" method. This facilitated an explanation of the purpose of the study and to secure their cooperation in identifying the relevant managers and engineers. The HR managers were requested to identify managers and engineers under the managers' direct supervision. This meant that the HR manager provided the matched-pairs; one manager and one engineer under the manager's supervision. The manager will respond to the survey on the engineer's in-role performance and the engineer will self-rate their perception of participative decision-making and psychological empowerment. Secondly, as a follow-up, the researcher also posted a cover letter to the Human Resource Department to explain the purpose of this research and to obtain permission to conduct research in their organizations. The researcher contacted and sought permission from 274 firms of whom 73 firms agreed to allow data collection to take place in their firms after discussing the research with the HR managers. An important technique to increase the return rate of questionnaires is through a gentle reminder by letter and phone calls after two weeks of dropping off the questionnaire.

Measurement

The participative decision-making instrument was developed by Siegel and Ruh (1973) and adopted by Lam et al. (2002). This instrument is used due to its appropriateness for the matched-pairs method in this study (Lam et al., 2002). This instrument consists of 5 items and is scored using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neither, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree.

The psychological empowerment instrument originated from the work of Spreitzer (1995) and adopted by Meyerson and Kline (2008) and Kimpah (2018). This instrument investigates the psychological empowerment dimensions of perceived meaning, perceived competence, and perceived impact. The scale measures the engineers' psychological empowerment. This instrument consists of 9 items and is scored using a 7-point Likert scale ranging

from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= slightly disagree, 4=neither, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree.

In-role performance instrument originated from Williams and Anderson (1991) and adapted by Frieder et al. (2018). As mentioned earlier, this variable is for the manager to assess his or her engineers' in-role performance in accordance with a matched-pairs analysis method. There are 7 items and respondents were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometime, 4=often, and 5=very often.

For the purpose of data analysis, the study employed the latest version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and Partial Least Square (PLS) with SmartPLS version 3.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents of this survey comprised 173 managers and 173 engineers; they are full-time workers presently working in E&E manufacturing firms located in states of Johore, Selangor, Perak, Penang, and Sabah. The manager's profile based on gender shows that 86.7% were male and 13.3% were female. Majority of respondents' age was in the range of 41 to 50 years old with a percentage of 62.4%, and the age in the range of above 51 years old had a percentage of 37%. The percentage of married managers was 94.2% and non-married managers was 5.8%. Concerning the manager's educational level, the percentage of bachelor's degree holders was 87.9% compared to the master's degree holders at 12.1%. Most of the managers were Chinese with a percentage of 78.6%, followed by Indian with a percentage of 11%, Malay with a percentage of 7.5%, Bumiputra from Sabah and Sarawak with the same percentage of 1.2%. In addition, the length of the manager's working service at the current company was in the range of five to 10 years at 50.3% and more than 10 years at 49.7%. Moreover, the length of the manager's relationship with his or her current engineer showed 85.5% with more than one to less than five years, followed by the range of 5 to 10 years at 13.9%, and more than 10 years at 0.6%.

As for the engineers, 80.9% of the engineers are males with the remaining 19.1% being females. The majority of engineers are between the age of 31 to 40 years old with a percentage of 55.5% and in the age range of below 30 years old with a percentage of 27.7%. It demonstrates that the majority of engineers are relatively young and middle age. In terms of marital status, 87.3% are married and the remaining of 12.7% are unmarried. Most engineers have a bachelor's degree with 88.4%. Chinese engineers dominated the sample with 59.5% in this study, Malays and Indian engineers showed a percentage of 24.3% and 16.2%, respectively. Year of service at the current company showed that engineers with more than one to five years at 48% and the range of five to 10 years showed 37%. It can be seen that 87.9% of the engineers have been working with their current managers for more than one to less than five years with the remaining 12.1% at five to 10 years.

Convergent validity is the degree to which a measure or indicator correlates positively with other alternative measures or indicators of the same constructs (Hair et al., 2017). The purpose of convergent validity is to evaluate a reflective form of relationship with the construct. The indicators must be in a high proportion of variance or among each other (Hair et al., 2017). Assessment of convergent validity is based on the average variance extracted (AVE) and factors loading. The AVE with a value of 0.5 or higher indicates that on average, a construct explains half or more than half of the variance of its indicators. Table 1 presents the AVE value of all the constructs are greater than 0.5.

Discriminant validity or divergent validity test is to ensure the measurements are not supposed to be related. Fornell and Lacker's criterion are assessed based on the square root of AVE of each variable (diagonal values). The result of the Fornell and Lacker criterion showed that each variable (diagonal values) was higher than the correlation between the variable (diagonal values) and other variables (off-diagonal values) as shown in Table 2.

Table 1
Result of the measurement model

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Participative decision-making	PDM1	0.856	0.736	0.933
	PDM2	0.874		
	PDM3	0.866		
	PDM4	0.884		
	PDM5	0.808		
Perceived meaning	PE_M1	0.933	0.874	0.954
	PE_M2	0.940		
	PE_M3	0.932		
Perceived competence	PE_C1	0.910	0.856	0.947
	PE_C2	0.945		
	PE_C3	0.919		
Perceived impact	PE_I1	0.920	0.876	0.955
	PE_I2	0.961		
	PE_I3	0.927		
In-role performance	IRP1	0.851	0.684	0.938
	IRP2	0.781		
	IRP3	0.873		
	IRP4	0.807		
	IRP5	0.830		
	IRP6	0.807		
	IRP7	0.836		

Note. Loadings>0.708; AVE>0.500; CR>0.700

Table 2
Fornell and Lacker criterion

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. In-Role Performance	**0.827**				
2. Participative decision-making	0.825	**0.858**			
3. Perceived competence	0.759	0.775	**0.925**		
4. Perceived impact	0.754	0.786	0.757	**0.936**	
5. Perceived meaning	0.746	0.770	0.778	0.787	**0.935**

Note. Diagonal represents the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlations

The result of bootstrapping analysis shown in Table 3, participative decision-making has a direct effect of on perceived meaning (β=0.770, p<0.01), perceived competence (β =0.774, p<0.001) and perceived impact (β=0.786, p<0.001). The results indicated as positive and significant. Hence, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

The direct effect (Table 3) of perceived meaning (β=0.133, p>0.10), perceived competence (β=0.258, p<0.01) and perceived impact (β=0.220, p<0.001)) are found to have a positive and significant effect on in-role performance. Therefore, there is support for hypotheses H4, H5 and H6.

Table 3
Result of direct effect

H	Relationship	β	Std Error	*t*-values	R^2	Decision
H1	PDM →PEM	0.770	0.057	13.419***	0.593	Supported
H2	PDM →PEC	0.774	0.058	13.242***	0.599	Supported
H3	PDM→PEI	0.786	0.051	15.274***	0.618	Supported
H4	PEM→IRP	0.133	0.094	1.406*	0.708	Supported
H5	PEC→IRP	0.258	0.081	3.172***	0.708	Supported
H6	PEI→IRP	0.220	0.074	2.986***	0.708	Supported

Note. n=173; ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10; 5,000 re-sampling bootstrapping; one-tiles

Table 4
Result of the indirect effect

H	Relationship	β	Std Error	*t*-values	Decision
H7	PDM→PEM→IRP	0.102	0.074	1.372	Not Supported
H8	PDM→PEC→IRP	0.200	0.065	3.060***	Supported
H9	PDM→PEI→IRP	0.173	0.061	2.817***	Supported

Note. n=173; ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10; 5,000 re-sampling bootstrapping; two-tiles

As indicated by Table 4, the relationship between participative decision-making and in-role performance via perceived meaning (β=0.102, p>0.10) is not significant and therefore H7 is not supported. The result revealed the positive and significant relationship between participative decision-making and in-role performance via perceived competence (β=0.200, p<0.001), perceived impact (β=0.173, p<0.001). Thus, only H8 and H9 are supported.

CONCLUSIONS

Engineers' perception of participative decision-making was found to be significantly related to the three dimensions of psychological empowerment; namely, perceived meaning, perceived competence, and perceived impact. Therefore, the conclusion based on the results indicated that all three dimensions of psychological empowerment are influenced by participative decision-making among engineers in the E&E manufacturing firms. H1 was supported in this study. The mean score of the participative decision-making was 5.506 and perceived meaning was 5.657; both of these variables are well above average. Furthermore, the t-values were 13.419***, β was 0.770, and R^2 was 0.593. In short, the analysis showed that the engineers did experience participative decision-making and were aware of their personal desire or perceived meaning at the workplace. The result is consistent with the findings by Emamgholizadeh et al. (2011) and Fock et al. (2011) where perceived meaning provided employees with greater decision-making ability and they might feel psychologically empowered if they interpreted their job task as meaningful and they were free to determine his or her work.

The relationship between participative decision-making and perceived competence (H2) was supported. The result indicated that the mean score was 5.543, t-values were 13.242***, β was 0.774, and R^2 was 0.599. It is relevant to add that promoting participative decision-making may enable engineers to experience perceived competence in the workplace. This is supported by Amundsen and Martinsen (2015) who explained that the employees' perceived participative decision-making might lead to perceived competence and skills optimization. The results of this study demonstrated that the engineers' perceived participative decision-making was positively and significantly related to their perceived impact at the workplace, indicating that H3 is supported. The mean score was 5.347, t-values were 15.274***, β was 0.786, and R^2 was 0.618. This result is consistent with where employees perceive their involvement in the decision-making process allows them to create more meaningful and impactful results in the workplace.

Studies by Moake and Oh (2015), Chiang and Hsieh (2012), and Huang et al., (2012) had acknowledged that psychological empowerment significantly influenced employees' in-role performance at the workplace. Results of this study revealed three dimensions of psychological empowerment, such as perceived meaning (β=0.133), perceived competence (β=0.258),

and perceived impact (β=0.220) having a positive and significant impact on in-role performance. Based on the results of this analysis, there is support for hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 meaning when engineers experience perceived meaning, perceived impact and perceived competence at the workplace, they are willing to put extra effort and diligently seek for better ways to do his or her work, resulting in improved productivity.

Previous studies by Park et al. (2015) had proven that psychological empowerment was significant as a mediator. Thus, it is expected that each dimension of psychological empowerment would act as a significant mediating variable particularly between participative decision-making and in-role performance in the E&E manufacturing context. The result revealed that perceived competence (H8) and perceived impact (H9) were significant as mediators; however, perceived meaning (H7) was not significant as a mediator. The non-significance of H9 could be attributed to the engineers' lack of emotional engagement with their work roles, beliefs, values, and behaviours at the workplace (Brief & Nord, 1990; Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

The results of the current study confirm that there is evidence of engineers' involvement in the decision-making process at the workplace in Malaysian E&E manufacturing firms. Consequently, their participation in the decision-making process leads to a sense of empowerment; evidently, this indicates social exchange between the engineers and their managers. Previous studies established that a sense of fairness and social exchange between the managers and employees was mutually beneficial to the organization. Since the results were based on a matched-pair analysis, the non-significance of perceived meaning as a mediator could be the result of the managers' perception that engineers were not emotionally invested in their job performance but rather regard their task as being routine.

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