Mediating Influence of Work Engagement between Person-Environment Fit and Adaptive Performance: A Conceptual Perspective in Malaysia Public Hospitals

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this study is to recommend a conceptual framework on the mediating effect of Work Engagement (WE) on the linkage between Person-Environment Fit (PE fit) and Adaptive Performance (AP) among nurses at the public hospitals in the context of Malaysia. This paper is aimed to focus on three PE fit dimensions, which are Person-Job Fit (PJ fit), Person-Group Fit (PG fit), and Person-Supervisor Fit (PS Fit) and its impact to employee's adaptive performance by using Work Engagement as a mediator.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This causal research has used quantitative methodology to draw propositions about the phenomenon under study.

Findings: The finding of the study is supported by two theories which are Theory of Performance (ToP) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). It is anticipated to yield significant linkage between PE Fit and AP by employing a mediator of WE.

Implications/Originality/Value: The contribution of the study delivers useful information and adds knowledge to the literature pointing to increase their employees' performance in public sector. For a practical implication, strong emphasis should be dedicated to the causes that can strengthen employees' performance particularly in the public sector to ensure, the employees in their organization are fully fitted with their working environment, thus can provide the finest service to the customers. Social implication from the study is the implementation of the adaptive performance concept will encourage a healthy and positive working environment that can add to positive and healthy life in social community and practice rapid respond to mitigate the patients' complaints related to the staff performance in the public hospitals.

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1. Introduction

In the recent times, today's organizations are fronting with dynamic working settings and almost everything in working place is different from the previous time. Henceforth, it is imperative for today's

worker to adapt well with these alterations. Due to this, the demand for adaptive workers has increased drastically as today's work place is also altered from the nature, as it was previously (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015). Although adaptability is not a fresh concept, the pace and varieties of change increasingly develop from time to time, which has made academic researchers, industry practitioners to become keener in order to comprehend, and enhancing adaptability in the work environment (Pulakos et al, 2000).

Likewise, health care sector is also confronting with these dynamics and develop quite fresh challenging environment to all employees to keeping up their performance level in any condition. For instance, in public hospitals, employees have to face new situations when new diseases have been discovered while the specialist around the globe still endeavoring to have a cure for it. For instance, in 2016 health sector around the world was confronted with Zika Virus, which created a panic situation for the public (US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Additionally, not merely new diseases are still unknown, technology development also one of the changes happens nowadays. Altering in the technologies, advancement continues to alter the nature of work activity (Forman, King, & Lyytinen, 2014). This scenario demanding employees to acquire new ways to deliver their respective jobs thus can perform well in any difficulty.

In addition, with limited number of available nurses in public hospitals and high number of patients to emergency department each day will further caused mistreatment (Ibrahim, Liong, Bakar, Ahmad, & Najmuddin, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to understand the adaptive performance of hospital's employees particularly the nurses on how they deal creatively under limited resources in the emergency situations. Hence, the study needs further empirical investigation to address this issue in emergency department as to help the employees specifically nurses to deal under stressful condition. This is important because the number of complaints by the patients in emergency department is high (Ibrahim et al, 2017). Thus, it shows the performance level of public hospitals' employees is collapsed and affects the reputation of public hospitals as a whole.

Arguably, high-quality service and motivated workers are the major source of health care performance system (Mutale et al., 2013) because patient complaints towards staff's performance are one of the crucial indicator of hospital service quality (Xiong et al, 2016). Thus, health care performance especially in public hospitals are depend on patient's evaluation towards staff's performance. However, delivering best service to patient is very challenging because they are now more educated than before. In other word, health care service quality is difficult to define and measure than any other sector (Mosadeghrad, 2014) since it involves the direct evaluation of staff's performance from patient's view. In addition, performance of public workforce in today's challenging environment is one of the important indicator to achieve health care service's quality standard (World Health Organization, 2017).

However, the findings remain inconclusive to this point and thus shortcomings in literature resulted to more in-depth study of the adaptive performance, particularly on nurses working in the Malaysian hospitals with combination of several factors to enhance employee's adaptive performance in Malaysia's public hospitals. Therefore, the study is highly needed to be conducted in order to achieve service's quality standard in public hospitals as suggested by World Health Organization (WHO). But in spite of this, lack of improvement has seen in the public hospitals performance and also the ability of employees to deal with emergency situations (Barnard, Woods, Noskin, Kricke, & Cella, 2016). Therefore, the current study addresses this issue appropriately and will link the findings to the existing knowledge in the literature.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Malaysia Public Hospitals Overview Having certain fits criteria with the working environment may have significant association with worker's performance on the working place (Tilcsik, 2014). Particularly, for the employees engaged in critical job such as emergency unit; firefighters, nurses, doctors, army, and

police. The reason for this is that they are dealing with different working environments every day since emergency cases are volatile and unanticipated. In particular, nurses who have close link with serious disease, suffering, and death when engaging with the patients in public hospital (Le Blanc, Bakker, Peeters, Van Heesch, & Schaufeli, 2001). In short, to be a well performed nurse, employees must fit with certain criteria that match able with the demand of their working environment, especially to nurses, especially working at emergency department.

In similar vein, factor that contributes to adaptive performance as suggested by William and Waldo (2010) is the knowledge, skill, ability (KSAs) and environment. This finding gives a light into new concept of adaptive performance particularly to professional and skill workers like nurses. Similarly, nurse's job requires person ability, skill and knowledge (KSAs) to deal with the patients and also the emergency situations (environment). Moreover, American Nurses Association (ANA) suggested that nurses are a group of people who undergo several practical and special trainings before hiring. Therefore, a nurse must obey the Standard of Professional Nursing Practice as recommended by nursing guidelines in their daily task which require their knowledge, skill and ability to perform their work (ANA, 2010). These constructs can easily be explained by PE fit as it included the compatibility between individual (employees) and their environment (work place).

Logically, in the real working environment, people are connected to each other in their workplace like their vocation, organization, jobs, colleagues, or their supervisors (Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001). All of these items are fully described the match of individual with their work environment in any work place. Realizing the important of PE fit to employee's outcome, several researches have been done to explain the association. Even though there exists a considerable amount of studies examining the bivariate relations between PE fit and employee's outcomes (e.g., job performance, work engagement), only few research studied the processes of which PE fit links to the outcomes (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009) especially to adaptive performance, since it is a new side of job performance. Thus, a knowledge gap left behind the existing literature and need to be filled especially in nursing profession.

In addition, while P-E fit theory proposed the interactive relationship between a person and his/her environment requires a certain level of adaption (Lawton, 1990), the concept of PE fit and to what extent each dimension contributes to the person-environment interaction with other outcome is less clear (Wahl et al., 2012). Without a clear understanding of the interactive relationship between employees and their environments, successful interventions that allow nurses to well perform in work place are uncertain. Thus, the variable of PE fit (PJ fit, PG fit and PS fit) contains the element of person's KSAs; knowledge, skill (job requirement) and ability (including the ability of them to work with team and supervisor) with the environment (workplace; emergency department of public hospitals) should be considered as important factors that influence adaptive performance among nurses in public hospital.

Meanwhile, data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016 revealed worldwide issue of shortage skilled nurses and health professionals. It is clearly shows the shortage of skilled work force with adequate KSAs in professional job like nursing. In addition, hiring new staff is very costly, since nurses job require intensive trainings and practical aspects. Above all, American Hospital Association (AHA) Commission on Workforce for Hospitals and Health Systems recognized that the key to maintain their performance is to get the right candidate at the right place to overcome the issue of nurses. Therefore, as to place right person to right place, PE fit plays significant role as it generally conceptualizes the concept of individual match with their workplace environment. PE fit dimensions involved in this study are PJ fit, PG fit and PS fit.

Other than that, the other factor that may help to improve employee's performance specifically in difficult working place is by increasing employee's motivation (Anitha, 2014), meanwhile, work engagement is a part of employee's motivation (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). This is because the degree of work engagement is one of the motivation indicator which is positively associated with the job performance

(Dubbelt, Rispens, & Demerouti, 2016). Even though previous studies have found that working environment is a stressor to employees (Panchal et al, 2015; Lottrup et al, 2013) especially nurses in emergency department, however, by having strong work engagement, they can perform any task given whole heartedly and go beyond work's routine (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

However, the issue of engagement in workforce of Malaysia is remain unsatisfied as reported by Aon's Trends in Global Employee Engagement Report of 2017, which revealed that Malaysia's employee engagement level become the lowest among other Asia countries. Even though work engagement is considered as one of the significant intervening variable that may enhance the employees' performance (Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010). Surprisingly, very little research was conducted on mediating effect of work engagement among vary profession, especially nurses (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Simpson, 2009; Tomic, 2010; Othman & Nasurdin, 2012; Keyko, 2014). Thus, this has created knowledge gap in understanding the mediating effect of work engagement in enhancing worker's performance in term of adaptive performance, specifically in nursing profession in public hospitals. Therefore, this study endeavors to fill the gap in the existing literature by employing work engagement as a mediator to study adaptive performance among nurses in Malaysia public hospitals.

2.2 Person Environment Fit and Adaptive Performance

PE fit theories propose the interactive relationship between a person and environment which requires a certain level of adaption (Lawton, 1990), however, the role of objective and perceived aspects of P-E fit and the extent to which each contributes to the person-environment interaction is less understandable (Wahl et al., 2012), particularly in today challenging work environment. Consequently, without a clear understanding of the interactive relationship among people and their environment, employees to work well in uncertainty situation like emergency department has not been explained properly in the literature.

Even though all these four types of fit (PJ, PO, PG, and PS fits) have significant relationship to work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, performance, and turnover intentions (e.g., Verquer et al., 2003; Hamid, 2013) and behavioral outcomes (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). However, it is not easy to capture which fit concept is form more crucial to differentiate individual's fit with respect to conceptualization, measurement, and analytical approaches (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Generally, P-E fit is a reciprocal relationship and ongoing process (Rounds & Tracey, 1990). Thus, the multidimensional construct of PE fit is related to each other in a unique manner. However, several past studies analyzed each dimension of PE fit separately (Herdman & Carlson, 2009), thus, limited knowledge is available to understand the simultaneous effect of the multi dimensions of PE fit outcomes (Oh et al., 2014). Consistently, Cable and Edwards (2004) also stated that PE fit impacts employee outcomes either directly or indirectly.

Since the theory and research exhibit that PE fit is multidimensional construct, thus, it is essential to investigate all or major dimensions of PE fit concurrently to comprehend the respective significance of different forms of PE fit (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Van Vianen et al., 2011). However, in this study, we only consider three out of four PE Fit dimensions and excludes PO Fit, since the study objective and unit of analysis are only individuals. Secondly, because of the nature of respondent's job is same either they work in private or public hospitals. Thus, to study PO Fit in current study context is not relevant for the respondents. While, as discussed in the existing PE fit literature, this study involves in three dimensions of PE fit variables which are PJ fit, PG fit and PS fit.

2.3 Person Environment Fit and Work Engagement

A recent study by Hamid (2013) on the effect of PE Fit dimensions on work engagement found that only three out of five dimensions of PE fit (PO fit, PJ fit, and PS fit) are positively related to work engagement. Similarly, a study by Manson and Carr (2011) discovered that PJ fit had a positive impact on an individual finding. Furthermore, both studies found Demand-Ability (DA fit) which is also known as specific requirement to perform well in a particular job. In other word, employees who equipped with adequate KSAs will feel easy to perform work and feel

engaged with their work. Therefore, PE fit dimensions in term of Demands-Abilities fit enhance employee's work engagement.

Even though PE fit has found to be a strong contributor toward employee's outcome (Oh, Guay, Kim, Harold, Lee, Heo & Shin, 2013), however, only few studies identified the effect of PE fit dimensions on the work engagement (e.g. Beer, Rothmann & Mostert, 2016; Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014; Manson & Carr, 2011). Moreover, all these studies have concentrated only on the linkage between PJ fit and work engagement and neglected the other PE Fit's dimensions like PS Fit, PG Fit and PO Fit.

Moreover, past study by Scroggins on 2008 found meaningful work related to self-concept-job fit. To add, self-concept-job fit is a part of PJ fit model and meaningfulness is a part of work engagement (Kahn, 1990). Thus, both variables were found associated with PE fit and work engagement. This argument was also agreed by May et al. (2004), in which he observed that association build at work place provides notable influence on meaningfulness; a part of engagement's construct. Even though self-concept-job fit and PJ fit are different concepts, however it is still under new PE fit dimensions (Scroggins, 2008), thus, may lead to work engagement.

In short, this explains that high KSAs' employees experience high level of meaningfulness at work as they are fit with their jobs. This further may have resulted to increase in their work engagement level since they are fully motivated when performing their task. Therefore, when a nurse in emergency department having enough KSAs during a work, they will perform well as they are possessing with engagement bond to each person within their working environment. Precisely, when employees build a good relationship with any person or individual within the organization, their work engagement reaches to high level (Anitha, 2013).

2.4 Work engagement and Adaptive performance

Engaged employee is linked with a job with self-investment, energy, and passion, that increase the job performance in both roles; in-role and extra-role performance (Kahn, 1990). As mentioned earlier, engagement is a part of motivational aspect, therefore, it is related to persistency and intensity to lead employee's task performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Burke, 2008; Kanfer, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). Highly engaged employees are found to be motivated and emphasized on their respective tasks, therefore, it is estimated that engagement has positive relationship with task performance.

Engagement also act as an indicator of the level of employee's willingness to exhibit discretionary effort in order to assist the employer (Erickson, 2005). Thus, in the context of nurses working in emergency department of public hospitals, they always perform extra role and go beyond their job scope as they are working in critical unit. Moreover, the main objective of their work is to save the patient's life. Therefore, they have to perform their work with full devotion and put discretionary efforts to succor the organization in the large context including assist the people in an organization (Rich et al., 2010).

Previous findings found that motivation; engagement has significant relationship between behavior and performance (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002; Judge & Ilies, 2002). Despite, the main issues regarding engagement and behavior are still not well addressed (Bakker et al., 2011). On the other side, engagement is not always a reason for high performance, also, high performance is not always depending on the input of employees work engagement. Referring to this basis, which type of behavior is possible to affect the outcome is still questionable (Parker & Griffin, 2011). Additionally, even though past literatures revealed the essential linkage between engagement and performance, however, only few studies have investigated on how employees adapt and which engagement's processes can direct them to great performance (Jundt et al., 2015).

Despite the well-known concept of work engagement and its ability to give positive performance outcome, there is still a lack of empirical investigation on work engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). However, only few qualitative and quantitative studies examined the relationship

between work engagement and organization performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Thus, there is a need to conduct an empirical study to examine the relationship in the context of different organizations (Kim, Kolb & Kim, 2012) including public organization in health care sector. Therefore, this study should be done to contribute to the existing literature and enhance the contemporary knowledge by examining the relationship between work engagement and adaptive performance in public health care's perspective.

2.5 The Mediating Effect of Work Engagement

In meta-analysis, recent studies found that engagement function as a mediator between key antecedents and consequences particularly in job performance (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011). This clearly shows the ability of work engagement to work as mediator between any two relevant constructs. However, particular issues remain unsolved even have relatively important implications, for instance; engagement has faced the issue of inconsistency in definition and operationalization (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Therefore, still there is a confusion that whether engagement can be differentiated from other constructs conceptually and empirically (Dalal, Brummel, Wee, & Thomas, 2008; Newman & Harrison, 2008).

Although it is obviously clarified the crucial point of engagement as mediator to employee's outcome, nonetheless still inadequate number of empirical research applicable to the antecedents and impacts of work engagement (Karatepe, 2013). Based on above justification, that distal antecedents used in previous studies giving impact to other psychological factors that may influence the job performance (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kanfer, 1990; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). This notion is a main principle of theory of engagement proposed by Kahn on 1990, which is based on notion of critical psychological states rather than physical states. However, scarce research revealed about the ability of psychological factor to mediate the association between PE fit and outcomes of the employee (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009) specifically work engagement.

Similarly, previous studies show the positive outcome of employee's performance with the presence of work engagement as a mediator (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Recently, even though work engagement has been proven as an essential mediator in the linkage between antecedents and employee outcomes, however, there is still limited knowledge revealed the process that mediates the relationship between these two construct (Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, De Witte, Niesen, & Van Hootegeem, 2014). Therefore, the current study is designed to contribute to the prevailing literature by assuming that work engagement may play a significant role as a mediator for personality traits and PE Fit to adaptive performance.

Moreover, previous studies (e.g. Hamid, 2013; Agarwal et al., 2012; Karatepe, 2013; Vincent-Höper et al., 2012; Sulea et al., 2012, 2011; Ng & Tay, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, 2003; Koyunco et al., 2006; Saks, 2006) found that work engagement can act as reasonable mediator variable of another two constructs. Similarly, they found support that work engagement has significantly mediated the association between the antecedents and outcomes of work engagement. In addition, the past literature also tried to examine the correlation between personality traits and adaptive performance among public hospital nurses (Naami et al., 2014) however, findings remain questionable and also lack of studies has seen to find the mediating effect of work engagement (Paek, Schuckert, Kim, & Lee, 2015).

Concurrently, only few empirical studies showed that engagement have high influence to enhance individual employee's performance (Smythe, 2008; Walters, 2008; Chang, 2006; Crawford, 2006; Echols, 2005; Tasker, 2004; Tritch, 2003), however, limited studies found the mediating role of work engagement between any other two variables. Although, previous studies examined the bivariate relationships between PE fit and employee's outcomes (e.g., performance), however, few studies have identified the process in which PE fit links to these findings (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to identify the suitable variable that can act as a part of process of PE Fit in relationship with work outcome. Conclusively, based on the past literature and above discussion, it has been noted that engaged employees have willingness to perform well in any uncertain work place environment. Thus, it shows that work

engagement is reasonable to mediate the relationship between two constructs like PE fit (with three dimensions) and employees' adaptive performance.

3.0 Proposed Framework

Theoretical framework below is proposed to address the issues as discussed above. By relying on the framework designed, there are three different variables that can be considered, namely independent variable, mediating variable and dependent variable. Independent variable consists of three dimensions of PE Fit which are Person Job Fit, Person Group Fit and Person Supervisor Fit. Work Engagement will act as mediation between PE Fit and while dependent variable is Adaptive Performance.

Figure 1: Proposed Framework

4.0 Research Propositions

As the focus of the study is to estimate the linkage between PE Fit (and its dimensions) and Adaptive Performance using mediating effect of Work Engagement. Thus, the research proposition are as follows:

- P1: There exists an association between PJ Fit and Adaptive Performance
- P 2: There exists a linkage between PG Fit and Adaptive Performance
- P3: There exists a connection between PS Fit and Adaptive Performance
- P4: There exists a linkage between PJ Fit and Work Engagement
- P 5: There exists an association between PG Fit and Work Engagement
- P 6: There exists an association between PS Fit and Work Engagement
- P 7: Work Engagement mediates the relationship between PJ Fit and Adaptive Performance.
- P 8: Work Engagement mediates the relationship between PG Fit and Adaptive Performance
- P 9: Work Engagement mediates the relationship between PS Fit and Adaptive Performance
- P10: There exists a linkage between Work Engagement and Adaptive Performance

5.0 Discussion and Recommendation

Health care sector holds a vital role in every person's life particularly in public hospitals; therefore, this sector is significant to be highlighted in order to increase its efficiency and services. In addition, the contribution of the study probably may assist to decrease complaints by the patients regarding the staff's performance in public hospitals especially with nurses. Most importantly, the main contribution of the current study is to combine the Theory of Performance (ToP) by Champbell 1993, which will be the underpinning theory and a support theory of Social Exchange Theory (SET) in explaining the relationship of PE fit and work outcome (work engagement and adaptive performance). Both theories support the current framework as enhancing worker's performance at workplace in a single study of nurses in public hospitals of Malaysia. As linking SET in relationship between PE fit and work engagement, it explains that employee tend to engage well in their work when they perceive well fit from their working environment, because, SET stand from a reciprocal relationship between PE Fit and work engagement. It implies that, the more employees match with their environment, the more they will get engaged. In addition, these variables have not been given adequate attention particularly by introducing work engagement as mediating variable to make the model more unique with combination of two theories mentioned as above. Therefore, it could make provision for broader perspective on the factors that affect adaptive performance. The implication of this study is to assist the Ministry of Health to assign the right

person with the right kind of personality to execute a nurse's duty. This is essential to ensure that they are enthusiastic to perform extra duty even in uncertainty and serious condition. Further researches related to adaptive performance especially those involved employee's behavior in current workforce are invigorated to further the study in the different scenarios and occupation scope.

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