

## Fostering Faculty Engagement in Public Sector Universities: A Proposed Conceptual Model

Mr. Muhammad Shahid Shams<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Murtaza Masood Niazi<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*This paper proposes a conceptual model in the domain of employee engagement by examining the research undertaken in the same area. A literature-based analysis is carried-out for proposing the conceptual model. The main aim of this study is to elucidate linkages between perceived organizational support (POS), Job characteristics (JC) and employee engagement through motivation while applying exchange ideology (EI) as a moderator in the context of public sector universities of developing countries. Employee engagement, especially faculty engagement, appears to be a missing link in Public sector universities of developing countries, which results in students' disengagement in the class. Hence, affecting the overall quality of education. Correspondingly, it has the direct implications for the university graduates. The proposed conceptual model can help the public universities leadership to retain, accommodate and engage the most important assets of the university i.e. Faculty, for achieving organization success, growth and sustainability.*

**Key words:** Faculty Engagement, Public Universities, Developing Countries

**JEL Classification:** L10, M13, O4

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### 1. Introduction

The current study aims at investigating factors contributing to faculty (employee) engagement in public universities of developing countries. This article proposes a conceptual model based on the comprehensive literature review that abridges the gap between theoretical practices and contemporary managerial practices in the domain of employee engagement. It can further be used by the public universities' leadership to ensure and enhance the engagement levels of their teaching faculty.

Employee engagement is a global issue for all organizations regardless of their nature and output. For instance, Gallup survey reports as minimum as 13% of the employees globally are engaged with their organizations (MacLeod & Clarke, 2011). Nevertheless, a little improved percentage i.e. 34% is reported as engaged employees (both faculty and staff) in the higher education sector worldwide (Gallup, 2016), which, in comparison to some of the industries, is still very less. Consequently, students appeared to be less likely engaged in education and prepared for life's challenges. Indeed, the influence of the teachers' behavior has been documented to affect student engagement (Rocca, 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Employee engagement is widely studied in the context of commercial organizations in developed countries mostly and somehow in the developing countries. But the lacuna still exists. There is paucity of literature in the education sector especially in the context of developing countries.

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1. Assistant Professor, Kardan University, Kabul Afghanistan

2. Assistant Professor, Kardan University, Kabul Afghanistan

The aim of current study is to propose a conceptual model that will enhance employee(faculty) engagement in the context of public sector universities of developing countries. The proposed conceptual model is based on the social exchange theory. The social exchange is the most accepted and widely used theory in recent research on work engagement. According to Saks (2006), a strong theoretical rationale for explaining employee engagement can be found in Social Exchange Theory (SET). This is because the central tenet of the social exchange theory is that people make social decisions based on perceived costs and benefits. This assumption affirms that human being evaluate all social relationships to determine the benefits they will obtain out of such relationship (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). The next section focuses on the relevant literature on employee engagement which is followed by study propositions. A conceptual framework is proposed in section 3, which shown the links among different constructs to employee(faculty) engagement. Towards the end, section 4 discusses the future research recommendations of this study followed by section 5 wherein the authors present the conclusions and implications of the present study.

## 2. Literature Review

Employee engagement is an important element contributing enormously towards the success of an organization. It is a positive energy that helps connecting employees to their organizations physically, emotionally or cognitively (Kahn, 1990; Wellins & Concelman, 2005). Employee engagement results in individual outcomes such as job performance, less absence and sickness etc while performance and productivity as organizational outcomes (Schaufeli, 2013). Thus, employee engagement is a much talked about issue from the leadership perspective (Seijts & Crim, 2006), since employees are considered as the core assets of any organization (Lockwood, 2007). Engaged employees become the reason for seeking competitive advantage and overall productivity of the organization (MacLeod & Clarke ,2011). Therefore, engaging employees, both emotionally and intellectually, is in the clear interest of a company.

Human resource (HR) specialists and other researchers, over the years, have unearthed that the passionate employee is a main reason behind organization's productivity (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Likewise, a positive nexus between engagement at work and work aspiration is reported by many researchers (Geldenhuis et al., 2014). Although, having known the importance of employees' engagement, a very small number of employees are engaged with their organizations.

The notion of employee engagement has much variation in its characterization as published in several academic and specialist journals (Saks, 2006). Schaufeli et al. (2004) proposed to operationalize the concept into an emotional status. Consequently, employees exhibit certain attributes like vigor, absorption and dedication, which infer engagement. Vigor means employees are persistent; absorption signifies preoccupation with their job, while dedication explains employee's involvement with the job.

Employee engagement especially faculty, despite its significance, appears to be a missing link in the context of public universities of developing countries. The available literature underlines issues and problems that are prevailing in public universities, which eventually become the reasons for faculty disengagement.

Starting with the appointment of vice chancellor (VC), which comes in the leadership and is key position in

a university setup. The appointment of VCs of university is purely on political basis regardless of experience in academia or management. Such VCs hold overwhelming powers and controls. The decisions made by them are in a top-down hierarchical manner with no transparency and accountability. Consequently, the issue of weak governance and leadership arises (Gilani, 2006). Moreover, deans and the head of the departments also hold high powers, which have not benefited the academics. Among some issues which are complaints of irregular promotion of staff (Iram, 2010), lack of motivation (Malik et.al, 2010); Lack of autonomy and academic freedom (Bushra, 2012; Kalsoon, 2014); low salary of staff, pitiable working environment, lack of research and teaching resources (Lodhi, 2012); involvement of politics in students and teachers and administration, short term ill policies, and unavailability of good governance (Mangi et al., 2011). Thus, these issues demotivate faculty, which leads to job dissatisfaction, further burnout and ultimately causes disengagement. Correspondingly, academicians start switching their jobs from public to private sectors and vice versa (Ghafoor et al., 2012). The Gomal University's (one of public universities) budget documents and the Syndicate Minutes (2005-2012), clearly portray the same picture of job switching due to the aforementioned reasons.

In summary, the public sector universities in the developing countries are in shabby condition and require reforms to make sure that the intellectuals (faculty) of a university are engaged and well accommodated.

## 2.1 Correlates of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is an important and crucial element for the success of an organization. Previous researches have established that for engaged employees, day to day work is more meaningful in relation to their personal lives (Mishra et al., 2014; Ugwu et al., 2014). Thus, the managers should play their role in putting meaning into the tasks by identifying and resolving the problems being faced by employees at work (Biswas et al., 2011). Furthermore, a clear guidance and direction along with empowerment, gives employees a feeling that their contributions matter and are significant for the organizational success (Robbins and Judge, 2012). Truss et al. (2006) posited that engaged employee demonstrate specific behaviors as a result of the feeling of being involved, enthusiastic, loyal and empowered. Specifically, these employees have passion for their work, have great energy and are fully absorbed in their work in a way that they enjoy every minute of their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008; May et al., 2004).

Further, according to the research report by Blessing White-leadership development and employee engagement (2013) that engagement is directly related to input from the top level. Work Trends report revealed that the extent to which employees are motivated enough to put discretionary efforts willingly in fulfilling their undertakings as well as adding to the hierarchical achievements, which are vital for achieving organizational goals and strategic objectives, is directly linked up with the competencies and capabilities of the top management (Kenexa, 2011). Engaged employees stay more with the organizations and find more creative and effective ways to add value to the organization. In doing so, they turn the business into high quality business with increased productivity for life long (Cattewu et al., 2007). Several studies concluded that engaged workers possess higher levels of energy and they contribute significantly to their tasks creatively, besides they feel responsible for achieving high-quality performance standards and for their own professional development (Paulsen et al., 2013).

Therefore, to have an engaged work force, the different elements of the job i.e. meaningfulness, autonomy, and feedback (job characteristics) and support from the organization in terms of supervisors and colleagues; fairness; organizational rewards and working conditions (perceived organization support) should be ensured by the management. Many scholars found that the job characteristics (JC) (Saks, 2006; Janjhua et al., 2016; Ram & Prabhakar, 2011) and perceived organizational support (POS) (Pati & Kumar, 2010; Saks, 2006; Alvi et al., 2014; Zacher & Winter, 2011; Rurkkhum & Bartlett, 2013) are good predictors of employee engagement. The conceptualization of employee engagement has always been conflicting between academic communities and practitioners (Shuck et al., 2011), however, social exchange theory is used as a most common philosophy which is to minimize expenses and maximize benefits (Saks, 2006).

### 2.1.1 Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Engagement

POS considers the basic belief of the organization that the organization cares for the employees' wellbeing and acknowledges employees' contributions as valuable, hence POS predicts organizational commitment, citizenship behavior and employee retention (Pati & Kumar, 2010) as well as employee engagement (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, researchers have reported that providing recognition and authority make employees feel that the organization supports them, which subsequently leads to increasing work engagement as well as higher self-determined motivation. Thus, ensuring POS in the organization provides organization a competitive edge over the others who do not foster emotional engagement through POS (Alvi et al., 2014). Additionally, the dimensions of POS such as Fairness (Greenberg, 2006; Colquitt et al., 2006; Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004; Elovainio et al., 2004; Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002), supervisor support (Shantz et al. 2013; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Hakanen et al. 2006; Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002; Bakker et al. 2007; Otken & Erben 2010; May et al. (2004) and organizational rewards and recognition (Soemaryani & Rakhmadini, 2013; Abu Khalifeh & Som, 2013) are reported to be good predictors of the employees' engagement construct. Therefore, considering the available literature, faculty with a strong POS will ensure higher level of engagement in the public sector universities of developing countries.

Thus, the study's first proposition based on the above literature is as follows;

Proposition 1: POS positively leads to faculty engagement.

### 2.1.2 Job Characteristics and Employee Engagement

The theory of Job Characteristics (JCT) (Hackman & Oldham 1976, 1980) postulates that five core characteristics of a job (i.e. task autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance and feedback) contribute to some personal and job-related outcomes via three psychological states of employees (i.e., experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility and knowledge of results). 'Job characteristics' is found to be the most important variable in predicting employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Janjhua et al., 2016; Ram & Prabhakar, 2011). In addition, Kittredge (2010) established the relationship between job characteristics and the three dimensions of employee engagement i.e. vigor, dedication and absorption.

Moreover, each of the dimensions of job characteristics has been found to have impact on employee engagement like feedback (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Van den Broeck et al.,

2008), task variety (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008) and autonomy (Van den Broeck et al., 2008; Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). Furthermore, Kahn (1990) has opined that employees, who tend to get more feedback on their work tasks, are likely to be more engaged. Employees may be connected to their job as if they are responsible for the entire meaningful work (Shantz et al., 2013). Hackman and Oldham (1980) proposed that task significance refers to evident impact of a job on employee. Thus, applying meaningful job characteristics to the faculty in public universities will engage them more with their work.

Hence the study presents the second proposition in the light of given literature;

Proposition 2: Job characteristics would positively lead employee engagement.

### **2.1.3 Perceived Organization Support, Job Characteristics and Motivation**

Motivation can be grouped into content and process theories. The content theory describes what motivates employees, while process theory posits on how does motivation take place (Uzonna, 2013). Motivation is reported in many studies to have a direct effect on performance (Maduka & Okafor, 2014; Kiruja E.K. & Muku, E. 2013). Subsequently, Perceived Organizational Support and job characteristics help employees achieve higher level of performance as it increases their motivation level for their job. May et al. (2004) concur with Kahn (1992), have found significant relationship between POS and motivation. Likewise, Juhdi, Samah and Saad (2007) concluded in their study that job characteristics results in motivation, satisfaction and effectiveness. Therefore, it is expected that POS and job characteristics will increase the motivation level of faculty in public universities of developing countries.

Based on logical relationship given between POS, JC and motivation, lead this paper to the third proposition as follows;

Proposition 3: POS and JC would positively contribute in faculty motivation.

### **2.1.4 Motivation and Employee Engagement**

Motivation plays a prominent role in inspiring employees towards the attainment of organizational goals. Employees upon getting benefits and resources from their organization will eventually engage their selves in their jobs to benefit organization in terms of more efforts and more output. Many studies have reported a link between motivation and employee engagement (e.g. Christain, Ghaza & Slaughter (2011); Kahn (1990); May, Gilson & Harter (2004). Organizations' productivity, high profit and employee performance are the apparent outcome of Motivation and employee engagement. Some researchers have also found the link between intrinsic motivation and employee engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). The above literature suggests that motivated employee (faculty) will ensure higher level of engagement. Therefore, the study presents another proposition as follows;

**Proposition 4: Motivation leads to Faculty Engagement**

### **2.1.5 Motivation as a mediator**

Motivation has been used as a mediator in some studies (Moradi et al.,2014; LAI et al.,2012; Steinmayr

et al.,2012). Motivation is an outcome variable (as discussed above) to POS and job characteristics as well as a predictor of employee engagement. Therefore, motivation can be used as a proposed mediator in the relationship between POS, JC and faculty engagement for the current study.

Hence, this study offers another proposition as;

Proposition 5: Motivation mediates the relationship between POS, job characteristics and faculty engagement.

### 2.1.6 Exchange Ideology

The exchange ideology (EI) which is attributed to Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains that employees' engagement level varies with the perception they have about the support from their organization. Higher the support by the supervisor, better the involvement of employee towards their task and organization (Chen et al., 2009; Eisenberger et al., 1986). The use of EI as moderator is a theoretical contribution of this study. Since, it has not been used as a moderator in the context of education sector in the developing countries.

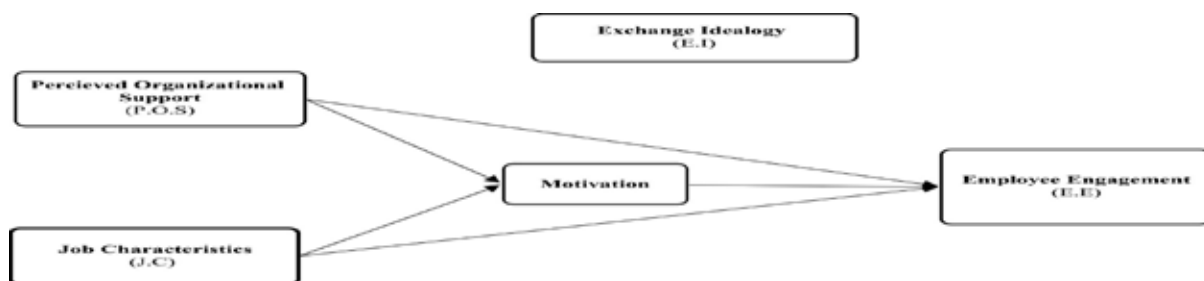
Hence the study's last proposition is as follows

Proposition 6: Exchange ideology will moderate the relationship between POS and faculty engagement.

### 3. Proposed Employee Engagement framework

The current study presents six proposition derived from the literatures in the sphere of employee (faculty) engagement as well as the study proposes a conceptual framework. In his framework, which is shown in Figure 1, employee engagement is the dependent variable; motivation mediates the relationship between the two independent variables POS and JC. While EI moderates the relationship between POS and EE, i.e. EI will strengthen the relationship between POS and EE.

**Fig.1: Proposed conceptual model**



Source: Author's Compilation

(Saks, 2006) describes engagement as a two-way exchange between employees and managers. Many studies have revealed different outcomes of employee engagement such as higher employee retention, efficiency, productivity and development, employee and customer satisfaction (Lockwood, 2007; Malik, 2013; Silverthorne, 2001). Thus, there are practical incentives available to examine further the concept of employee engagement with the proposed related construct to extenuate the importance of the proposed engagement model especially in the context of higher education sector of developing countries. Although measuring engagement is a challenging task as it embodies employee attitudes and behaviors (Macey & Schneider,2008).

#### 4. Future research recommendation

Employee engagement is a broad area, future research should be conducted to identify the other antecedents and consequences that will help in getting a better understating and definition of the notion. Some potential themes for the future research can be; self-esteem, employee empowerment, self-efficacy, self-expression, individual characteristics, communication, perceived supervisor support, perceived employer branding, and procedural justice, (Anitha, 2014; Bakker et al., 2008; Chaudhary et al., 2012; Hicks et al., 2014; Holbeche & Springett, 2004).

Moreover, empirical research should be undertaken to substantiate the relationships between the study variables mentioned in the proposed conceptual model.

#### 5. Conclusions and implications

This study was designed to gain an insight into and give furtherance to the body of knowledge in the area of employee engagement. The study will provide leaders especially in academia with literature on the impact of behavioral efficiency and its importance for the organization growth and sustainability. New areas for further investigation in relation to employee engagement are highlighted in this study.

This study proposes a conceptual model of employee(faculty) engagement, establishing the relationships between POS and JC through employee motivation as mediator. While EI is used as a moderator between POS and EE. EI is proposed as a moderator for the first time in the context of higher education sector.

Employee engagement is an issue worldwide, however in the context of public universities especially in the developing countries, it is very critical. It is the responsibility of the university leadership to take some corrective measures by creating an environment based on collaboration and participation to ensure greater faculty engagement.

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