



Antecedents of Employee Engagement in The Saudi Labor Market

Abdelmohsen A. Nassani

Professor in Business Administration College
King Saud University
Nassani@ksu.edu.sa

Khalid A. Althunayyan

College of Business Administration
King Saud University
442911346@student.ksu.edu.sa

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance, and job satisfaction as independent variables on employee engagement and to address the factors that lead to employee engagement. The study was conducted on employees working in the Saudi labor market. A total of 266 Participants to the survey and data were collected using a digital link. Analyzing the data was done through descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, and correlation). Also, reliability analysis was applied to the data. Regression analysis was used to examine the influence of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance, and job satisfaction on employee engagement. The relationship between ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction and employee engagement was significantly high while it was moderately negative between workload and work engagement. This study is useful for top management, organizational developers, and HR specialists. It indicates that to get employees engaged, it's necessary to provide managers with the appropriate recommendations to increase job satisfaction, ethical climate, and employee engagement by facilitating the work and reducing workload.

Keywords: *Workload, Ethical Climate, Work-Life Balance, Job Satisfaction, Employee Engagement.*

Introduction

Employee engagement is one of the most critical subjects for the organization's sustainability, success and competitive advantage. In recent years the concept of employee engagement gained attention among human resources professionals and business sectors. Good customer experience, high performance, profitability, and job satisfaction have all been related to high levels of employee engagement. Enhancing engagement may have a significant impact on organizational performance and cost reduction. Organizations with a high employee engagement ratio had 147% higher profits per share than those with a lower employee engagement ratio (Cama, 2018). Employee engagement can be defined as the degree to which organization members employ themselves to work roles, and link to their tasks and other people physically, cognitively and emotionally in the work environment (Kahn, 1990). According to Moore (2021) Employees that are engaged create more profit than non-engaged in their industry, spend fewer sick days annually and achieve greater customer satisfaction levels. Organizations should provide their employees with the tools and resources they need to become more engaged and motivate them to put up their best effort, go above and beyond, and persevere in the face of challenges (Eldor, 2014). According to Rittenhouse (2017) Employee engagement may improve quality of life, a condition of total satisfaction carried on by the achievement of one's potential and comprehensive satisfaction with life.

Our present study is on employees in the Saudi labor market and discusses in detail the impact of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction on employee engagement. Figure 1 shows the research model:

* This article was submitted in November 2022, and accepted for publishing in December 2022.

© Arab Administrative Development Organization- League of Arab States, 2025, pp 1-11, DOI: 10.21608/AJA.2022.172325.1350

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

The relationship between workload and employee engagement

The workload can be defined as the number of tasks to be completed; the specific part of the time that is being considered; the employee's subjective psychological experiences (Lysaght, 1989). Ahmed et al., (2017) defined the workload refers to job situations that require an individual to perform greater mental and physical effort, leading to tiredness and strain.

Crawford et al., (2010) and Cama (2018) highlighted that workload does not always have a negatively related to employee engagement. It all depends on the tasks of the job; challenging tasks lead to a positive relationship with employee engagement, while hindrance tasks have a negative relationship with employee engagement. Wright (2009) and Caponetti (2012) stated that workload would be negatively and significantly related to employee engagement and a higher workload will be associated with decreased engagement. Sawang (2012) argued that employee engagement is negatively influenced by workload. For example, individuals who have been subjected to high work tasks would burn out and disengage from their job.

However, the relationships between the independent variable (workload) and the dependent variable (employee engagement) confirmed the findings in previous studies, it was assumed that workload was negatively related to employee engagement.

This study showed a negative relationship between workload with employee engagement, so the hypothesis is not significant or rejected. With the support of previous studies, the following hypothesis can be assumed:

H1: Workload has a negative effect on employee engagement.

The relationship between ethical climate and employee engagement

The ethical climate is defined as the common impression of the organization's processes and activities with an ethical component (Victor & Cullen, 1988). The ethical climate describes how the employees in an organization often think about what is correct and wrong. All organizational principles related to concerns of right and wrong lead to the company's ethical climate, common beliefs of what is appropriate behavior and how ethical problems will be addressed. According to Victor and Cullen's (1987, 1988) conception, ethical climates are classified into three types: egoism, benevolence, and deontology to determine the sources of ethical thinking within an organization. Victor and Cullen (1988) developed the three types into five climates: independence, instrumental, caring, law, codes and rules which have a majority use in searches filed.

However, a significant factor influencing organizational decision-making is the ethical climate (Cullen, Victor & Stephens, 1989). According to Newman et al., (2017) ethical climate improves as a result of organizational rules, procedures and management, and has a big impact on how individuals in the organization make ethical decisions, which significantly influence their attitudes and conduct at work. So, organizations must advise employees on what constitutes proper behavior in the workplace. One method of offering structure and direction to employees is through the organization's ethical code (Kuenzi, Mayer, & Greenbaum, 2020). Employees prefer to engage with an organization that has an ethical climate that covers a group-based and interdependent method of handling ethical problems, over one with an ethical climate of self-interest, which emphasizes a single and isolated course of action (Teresi et al., 2019). Mitonga-Monga and Cilliers (2015) indicate that employee engagement was highly correlated to the ethical climate, and other previous searches refer that the employees who are intellectually, affectively, and emotionally engaged in their job are more

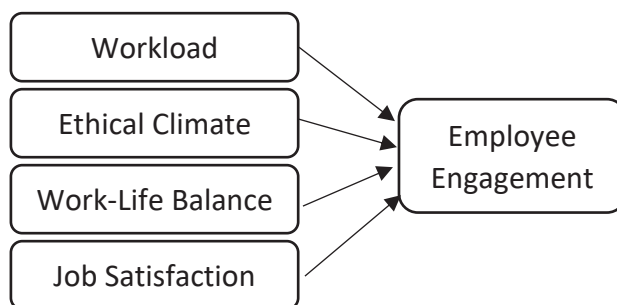


Figure 1 Research Model

likely to be found in organizations that set and promote ethical climate and procedures. In addition, employees who see their organization providing them with the required resources and tools, like ethical climate are more likely to show good attitudes and conduct, as well as be emotionally and effectively engaged with the organization. Therefore, Accordingly, the hypothesis can be established:

H2: ethical climate has a positive effect on employee engagement.

The relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement

Work-life balance is defined as the employee's ability to meet his obligations to family, work, and other duties and activities not related to the work (Parkes & Langford, 2008). This also, indicates that an individual is balancing his job, family, and other responsibilities (Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019). The work-life balance started in the nineteenth century as a result of a lengthy fight by factory employees against extended working hours (Khateeb, 2021). In both the academic and corporate sectors, there is a lot of discussion on the need for work-life balance, and new studies are always being undertaken. WLB is a major concern for organizations both, as an employee and employers. Organizations that encourage long-term work-life balance increase loyalty among their employees and enhance their attitudes toward work (Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012). According to Lockwood (2003) life planning and work-life balance programs are a new and unique trend that helps employees to explore and understand essential elements of their professional and personal lives. The purpose of programs is to inspire employees to evaluate their relationships, mental and physical well-being, and financial status, improve life balance and develop a personal life plan.

According to Parkes & Langford (2008) The findings indicate that work-life balance procedures are better understood as other work practices and should encourage organizations to implement them providing work-life balance through values and goals, will increase employee engagement, loyalty and satisfaction with work-life balance. Results suggest that work-life balance encourages engagement and a positive correlation between work-life balance and employee engagement. Jaharuddin and Zainol (2019) argued that work-life balance has also played a key role and a good indicator of employee engagement and there is a positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. According to Larasati and Hasanati (2019) based on the study, work-life balance is one of the elements that might influence employee engagement. The higher the employee work-life balance, the higher the employee engagement. Also, employee engagement will grow when employees are allowed to control their personal life. The finding showed a positive correlation between work-life balance and employee engagement. Based on these discussions, the following hypothesis can be suggested:

H3: work-life balance has a positive effect on employee engagement.

The relationship between job satisfaction and employee engagement

job satisfaction can be defined as the employee's attitude toward their work from various sides. It is about how much workers enjoy or do not in their jobs (Spector, 1997). Job satisfaction has many aspects such as job nature, work conditions, total reward, career development, promotion and security. Job satisfaction aspects had a strong impact and correlation with employee engagement (Spector, 1997; Yalabik et al., 2017). job satisfaction of employees is reflected in the organization's success, sustainability and achieving competitive advantage. Also, it is an important element of employee performance and motivation (Karamanis, Arnis & Pappa, 2019).

According to Yalabik et al. (2017) argued that employees are more likely to be engaged when they are satisfied with their jobs. The study result has significant consequences for organizations, understanding the causes of satisfaction may assist organizations in situations in which to predict employee engagement. Satisfied employees are more likely to engage with their organizations. Job satisfaction has a strong impact and is positively related to employee engagement.

Djoemadi et al., (2019) indicated that one of the elements that positively impacts employee engagement is job satisfaction and that the chance of advancements, employment connections, and job quality are the most major elements in job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is a key factor in determining employee engagement, according to correlation studies, which indicated a positive relationship between them, and some studies highlighted that job satisfaction leads to increased employee engagement (Tepayakul & Rinthaisong, 2018).

According to this literature, this hypothesis can be formulated:

H4: job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee engagement.

Methodology

Sample and data collection (questionnaire design)

This study aims to examine the relationship between workload, ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction on employee engagement in the Saudi labor market. Data was gathered utilizing a Google Forms-based digital link questionnaire. There were two categories on the questionnaire. The first category related to the demographics of the participants (gender, age, sector, industry, qualification and years of experience) and the second category contained 38 items related to the research variables. 6 items to measure workload, 6 items to measure ethical climate, 6 items to measure work-life balance, 5 items to measure job satisfaction and 15 items to measure employee engagement. To increase the quality of the instruments, some items have been removed from the scales and others have been reverse-coded for analysis. The data was collected in around two weeks, and 226 usable responses were obtained. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale: [1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree)].

Researchers from different fields have approved Likert scales as suitable instruments for examining people's attitudes and have the characteristics required to produce data. (Sandiford & Ap, 2003).

Measures

Workload

The general workload scale of Siegrist et al. (2004) and Rothmann & Joubert (2007) was applied to measure this item. We conducted 7 items to evaluate workload.

Ethical climate

The ethical climate scale was written by Olayiwola (2016) and used to measure this variable. This scale includes 6 items has been used to evaluate the ethical climate.

Work-life balance

The work-life balance scale was adopted and the scale was developed by Shukla & Srivastava (2016) and Chaney (2007). which consisted of 9 items.

Job satisfaction

The job satisfaction scale included 5 items written and developed by Kinicki et al., (2002) and Fock et al., (2011).

Employee engagement

We applied Gallup Q12 for measuring employee engagement (Luthans and Peterson, 2002) and Wilson (2009).

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version (SPSS) Version 26 and Microsoft Excel 2019. Means and Standard Deviations were calculated, which provided us with a

more comprehensive perspective of the data. Stepwise regression analysis was also used to examine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The participants' demographic variables as listed in Table 1 determined that 44.4% (N=118) of employees were males, and 55.6% (N=148) were females. Furthermore, they ranged in age from 18 to 25 years old (18%), 26 to 35 years old (50%), 36 to 45 years old (22.9%), and more than 46 years old (15.3%). Finally, the respondents' years of experience were as follows: less than 2 years (26.3%), from 2 to less than 5 years (28.2%), from 5 to less than 10 years (18%) and more than 10 years of experience (27.4%).

Means, standard deviations & correlation analysis of scales

Table 2 provided the mean and standard deviation scores, as well as the relationships between the research variables. Workload with a mean score of 3.19 (SD=1.01), ethical climate with the highest mean score of 3.38 (SD=1.03), work-life balance with a mean score of 3.18 (SD=1.01), job satisfaction with a mean score of 2.88 (SD=1.07). Finally, the mean score for employee engagement was 3.21 (SD=0.85).

As shown in Table 2, a Pearson correlation was applied to examine the hypothesis regarding the association between workload and employee engagement, ethical climate and employee engagement, work-life balance and employee engagement and job satisfaction and employee engagement as demonstrated in Table 2.

According to the results, Pearson product correlation between workload and employee engagement was determined to be moderately negative and statistically significant ($r=-0.330, p<0.01$). Then, the Pearson correlation between ethical climate and employee engagement was determined to be highly positive and statistically significant ($r=0.555, p<0.01$). Also, the correlation between work-life balance and employee engagement was determined to be highly positive and statistically significant ($r=0.773, p<0.01$). Finally, the correlation between job satisfaction and employee engagement was determined to be highly positive and statistically significant ($r=0.808, p<0.01$).

Reliability Analysis of the Scales

The reliability analysis of the scales is shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's alpha for the workload scale was 0.853, the reliability analysis of the ethical climate scale was 0.889, and the reliability analysis of the work-life balance scale was 0.888. Finally, the Cronbach's Alpha for job satisfaction and employee engagement scales was 0.885 and 0.917 respectively. Based on these findings, the scales are acceptable and reliable.

Regression Analysis

Table 4 shows how stepwise regression analysis was used to examine the impact of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction on employee engagement. The independent variables include job satisfaction, work-life balance, and ethical climate, while employee engagement is the dependent variable.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Male	118(44.4%)
Female	148(55.6%)
Total	266(100%)
Age	
From 18 to 25 years old	48(18%)
From 26 to 35 years old	133(50%)
From 36 to 45 years old	61(22.9%)
More than 46 years old	24(9%)
Total	266(100%)
Experience	
Less than 2 years	70(26.3%)
From 2 to less than 5 years	75(28.2%)
From 5 to less than 10 years old	48(18%)
More than 10 years	73(27.4%)
Total	266(100%)

Table 2 Mean, standard deviation and correlation

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Workload	3.19	1.01	1				
(2) Ethical Climate	3.38	1.03	-.231**	1			
(3) Work-Life Balance	3.18	1.01	-.383**	.482**	1		
(4) Job Satisfaction	2.88	1.07	-.362**	.551**	.693**	1	
(5) Employee Engagement	3.21	0.85	-.330**	.555**	.773**	.808**	1

Table 3 Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Workload	0.853	6
Ethical climate	0.889	6
Work-life balance	0.888	6
Job satisfaction	0.885	5
Employee engagement	0.917	15

These variables were submitted to a stepwise regression analysis.

As shown in table 4, Job satisfaction, work-life balance and ethical climate were entered for the stepwise multiple regression equation and the results showed that all independent variables (Job satisfaction, work-life balance, ethical climate) were significant for the prediction of employee engagement. Results demonstrated that 74.7% of the variance in employee engagement was significantly predicted by Job satisfaction ($\beta=0.48$; $p<0.01$), work-life balance ($\beta=0.39$; $p<0.01$), and ethical climate ($\beta=0.10$; $p<0.01$). Therefore, we may assume that **H1, H2, H3 and H4 are supported based on these findings.**

Table 4: Stepwise multiple regression predicting employee engagement

Variables	R	R ²	Adj R ²	SEm	F-value	Sig.
Model 1:						
Job Satisfaction	.808	.653	.651	.504	496.3**	.000**
Model 2:						
Job Satisfaction	.860	.740	.738	.436	374.6**	.000**
Work-Life Balance						.000**
Model 3:						
Job Satisfaction						.000**
Work-Life Balance	.864	.747	.744	.431	258.1**	.000**
Ethical Climate						.008**
Note: ** significant at 0.01 level.						

Discussion

The objective of this study was to discover the impact of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance, and job satisfaction on employee engagement in the Saudi labor market. Workload and employee engagement have a moderate relationship, according to the findings of this research. As a result, the first hypothesis is rejected and this finding is consistent with previous studies. Cavanaugh et al. (2000) argued that there is a growing awareness of the potential employee engagement related to positive workload "challenges" and negative workload "hindrances" and both related to the engagement but on the opposite side. According to surveys, at least some managers believe workload leads to positive employee engagement and they recognize that not all workload is negative; workload may provide a competitive advantage and drive beneficial changes. According to Alshebl (2022) workload was found to be a positive predictor of employee engagement and it is positively affected by challenge workload, while it is negatively influenced by hindrance workload. Broeck et al. (2017) noted that employee engagement is negatively influenced by workload. For example, individuals who are subjected to a high number of demands would burn out from their work and stop caring about their work. Employee engagement and workload could have a negative correlation and results.

The second hypothesis is that ethical climate influences employee engagement. This result is consistent with the results of Yener, Yaldiran & Ergun (2012) and Yaldiran (2010) that proved that ethical climate has a significant influence on employee engagement. Organizations should maintain ethical principles since it is the reason for their existence, to enhance their revenues, increase employee engagement toward their organization and seek excellence in every area. Employees are more likely to want to work for an organization have an ethical climate standard that manages their ethical concerns and promotes positive employee engagement instead of working for one with an ethical climate of self-interest (Teresi et al., 2019). It also confirmed the findings of Hough, Green & Plumlee (2015) who found that organizational trust is built on the presence of an ethical climate. This strong positive correlation suggests how ethical an organization's climate is, we demonstrate that the level of trust is positively and significantly connected to how engaged or disengaged employees are. Young (2012) supported suggesting that ethical climate is positively associated with employee engagement in the organization and is positively impacted by caring about ethics. Moreover, this improves our knowledge of the association between an ethical workplace climate and employee engagement. Thus, the result of these findings along with previous studies supports the second hypothesis that ethical climate influences employee engagement.

The third hypothesis is that work-life balance influences employee engagement. The result of these findings indicates that there is a highly positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. This result is consistent with the study of Shankar & Bhatnagar (2010) that expected work-life balance has a positive effect on employee engagement. WLB could serve as a strong leverage point for enhancing both employee and organizational performance. Pandita & Singhal (2017) suggested that there is a significant relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. The relationship between work-life balance

and employee engagement affects the individual's personal life, which may prevent them from becoming completely involved. Today, it has been discovered that employee engagement is a key and desirable aspect of increasing productivity, revenue, and customer satisfaction. Also, the findings of Arief, Purwana & Saptono (2021) support this correlation that work-life balance has a positive relationship with employee engagement. Employees had to be able to maintain a balance between their obligations to support their family and their need for pay from their job. With the support of the findings and the previous studies, the third hypothesis is accepted that work-life balance has a significant impact on employee engagement.

Job satisfaction has a high correlation with employee engagement. The result of this study shows that there is a highly positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee engagement. Vorina, Simonič & Vlasova (2017) investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and employee engagement, and they find out that it is positive and the result is similar between gender. The third hypothesis of Ali & Farooqi (2014) study shows that job satisfaction has a positive relationship with employee engagement and to keep individuals satisfied and engaged should be applied to HR best practices and programs by human resource management. Riyanto, Endri & Herlisha (2021), Kamalanabhan, Sai & Mayuri (2009) demonstrate experimentally how job satisfaction has positive effects on employee engagement and has consequences for increasing an individual's output. Hence, we prove our fourth hypothesis stated above and it is accepted that job satisfaction has a strong influence on employee engagement according to the support of the previous findings.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is a critical factor of business success. Employees that are deeply engaged in their job contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. The intention to stay in the organization will increase, the reputation will improve and revenue will grow. Saudi employees were the subjects of this study. We investigated the impacts of workload, ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction on employee engagement. Each one of the independent variables affects employee engagement. Job satisfaction and work-life balance have the most effects on employee engagement and the effect of ethical climate on employee engagement was moderate, while the workload has little effect. These results are in a line with various previous studies on the same variables. Workload, which is an employee's challenge job demands, if it is reasonable will lead to involve an employee to perform his work and unreasonable job demands will lead to disengagement. The ethical climate which is related to a positive workplace affects employees' perception and feeling toward organizational justice and makes them aware of what is right and wrong. Work-life balance, which is the balance of an employee's responsibilities toward his family and work, makes the employee achieve his tasks effectively and efficiently. Job satisfaction is linked to the employees if they like or dislike their job or if they comfort with their work. Job satisfaction enhances a stable and sustainable environment and competitive advantage.

Practical Implications

We performed this research to assist human resource managers and professionals in the Saudi labor market to understand how to apply HR best practices and policies to deal with many elements such as workload, ethical climate, work-life balance and job satisfaction and their influence on employee engagement. That's could help businesses attract and retain talented employees while reducing their intention to leave.

HR best practices are one of the best approaches utilized to facilitate the workload, provide appropriate tools and motivate employees to engage with their reasonable job demands. Thus, productivity and self-efficacy will improve within the workplace.

When the employees see the climate of their organization as ethical with the right codes and policies, they will be more engaged because they see justice, they look to the correct behaviors which be reflected in their personal moral beliefs and actions. The right way of doing things in the organization will keep the business growing and existing. Work-life balance is an important element of employee engagement, when the

employees found enough time for their family and life responsibilities, they will provide high performance in the workplace and enjoy their job life. Organizations need to increase the level of job satisfaction by creating an environment that encourages initiatives that lead to involvement, for example, benefits, incentives, rewards, promotions, succession plans and programs that enhance the employees' loyalty and commitment within the organization.

Limitations and Future Research

First, this study was applied to employees in the Saudi labor market. So, the findings are limited to employees of Saudi organizations and the result does not include all industries. Thus, future research may apply to other international organizations and other industries. Second, this study focuses on positive influences between variables and the factors that lead to emphasizing this relationship. Moreover, future research may conduct other factors that lead to negative influences and how to deal with them. Finally, the study data were collected from a single source a digital form, however, future research may conduct extra data sources.

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