

The Influence of Job Autonomy on Organizational Cynicism: The Reliability Test

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ABSTRACT

Research on organizational cynicism is gaining increased attention, as it has been identified to be one of the major problems that hinder the organizational goals and success. A lack of job autonomy is believed to be one of the antecedent which cause organizational cynicism. In this paper, a research framework is proposed towards explaining the influence of job autonomy on job organizational cynicism. By selecting 60 immigration officers of Malaysia, who work at the Immigration Depot of Langkap, Perak as a research sample, this study attempts to determine the reliability test of job autonomy and organizational cynicism. The findings indicate that both of the measurement which is applied for job autonomy and organizational cynicism have research an acceptable the minimum 0.70 reliability test. Although the sample size is very limited to be generalized, this research propose that the measurements that have been employed in this study could be applied in a wider context of generalization in the future studies

Keywords: organizational cynicism, job autonomy,

INTRODUCTION

Public sector in Malaysia has dealt with such rapid transformation in terms of its human capital development. Many initiatives have been introduced by the government such as the Government Transformation Program (GTP), whereby this program focuses on the improvement of the Malaysia's public services (Government Transformation Program, 2011). The improvement of a public service is important especially when it involves the employees who are working under the public sector to serve the public. However, the issues that involve employees' attitude are really alarming and should be taken into account. This is due to the fact that the impact of work attitude problems has also bring negative impacts to the public sector as well (Mat, & Zabidi, 2010). For example, the local public sector often deals with customers' complaints which associated with rudeness, punctuality, and low commitment in service delivery. This is believed to be happened due to lack of work motivation and resulted in their low performance (Mahazril' Aini, Zuraini, Hafizah, Aminuddin, Zakaria, Noordin, & Mohamed, 2012). The rapid change and development of the country has brought major impact on the organizations including their most component asset, namely employees. There is also a need for organization to address and have a deep understanding in terms of employees needs in order to retain and keep them motivated (Patra & Singh, 2012). As been stated by Havaner (1999, p.1), "Talented people demand meaningful work... deny it, they leave". It is known that employees play a crucial role in determining organizational survival. Also, their contribution is a key factor that bringing towards organizational effectiveness. As Malaysia is moving towards knowledge-based economy, it is important to fairly recognize every employee who has served the organization and also the nation. This recognition should also involve the other occupational group particularly, for those who have contributed their knowledge, skills and abilities in protecting the country such as those work who with the enforcement agencies. If this being neglected, it is not impossible that it may reflect employees' attitude in the workplaces.

In discovering problems that relates with employees attitude, the individuals involved cannot be blamed for things to be happened, it is rather more importantly to look into the factors that cause the issues and find the right solutions to reduce the problems. The issue that relates with employees

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attitude, organizational cynicism for example, is currently expanding in organization. Scholars of this study agreed that organizational cynicism is everywhere in the workplaces' (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998, p.341). The changing environmental condition, gaps between individuals and social expectation, complexity of work life and difficulties in time management of today's workplace create tension for employees which contributes towards negative attitudes among them. This phenomenon on the other hand, it also could potentially have devastating effects on organization and also the employees. It is reported that Malaysia public sectors employee are not excepted from experiencing cynicism in the workplace. For example, As reported by Mohd Noor, & Mohd Walid (2012), there are quite of numbers of academic staff of the Malaysian Polytechnic are experiencing cynicism due to the influences certain factors. With this regards, this issue should not be ignored as it may involves employees. If organizations do not aware about the cynicism existence that spread in a workplace, this might potentially bring a negative image to both employees and the organizations. This issue must be taken care of seriously, which organization should look it on the positive perspective whereby it enables organization to find the right solutions to reduce this problem.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The issue that associated with employees' attitude is one of a big problems that organizations have to deal with, which should be taken into account. However, there might be factors that lies behind problems which lower employees' motivation and leads to frustration, job dissatisfaction and lower commitment, whereby it is closely related with organizational cynicism. With this regards, it is important for every organizations to find better solutions in reducing this phenomena which can hinder organizational success.

Organizational cynicism is one of the major issues that exist in organizations including the social service public sector of a developing country like Malaysia. It is considered as a problematic issue that organizations have to deal with (McCarty & Caravan,2007). In dealing with this issue, there is a need to expand the study on this topic as many of the organizational cynicism studies have been conducted in the developed countries, while there are very limited discussion on this issue in other developing countries (Bashir,Nasir,Saeed & Ahmed,2011). To relate the issue within the context of organizational cynicism in Malaysia, it is supported that the findings which has been examined based on the western countries perspective could be tested in other Asian countries including Malaysia. This is to prove that the western countries findings can be applied in examining the issue of organizational cynicism among employees, using the local samples (Mohd Noor, & Mohd Walid, 2012).

Many of the organizational cynicism literatures have been devoted towards understanding the impact of organizational cynicism on organizational change efforts (e.g., Brooks & Vance, 1991; Vance, Brooks, & Tesluk, 1995; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000; Williams , Pillai , Deptula & Lowe, 2010). This could be contrast with the real situation of any organizations that remain unchanged which is believed to influence the employee attitude which is really need to be having a further investigation by both academician and practitioners.

The less autonomous power given to the employees is believed to be one of the major concern that influencing organizational cynicism. It is suggested that more studies on organizational practices need to be further investigated whether it can reduce organizational cynicism among employees (Chiaburu et.al, 2013). In viewing the level of job autonomy and its influence on organizational cynicism, it is believed that low autonomy could influence the level of organizational cynicism. For example, as cited by Bashir (2011), “The absence of autonomy creates melancholy (Stets, 1995) and frustration which results towards misbehaviour and felony (Agnew, 1984) creating serious problems for the organization” (p.46). Although employees are hardworking and take seriously on their work, but still they seems to less satisfied and lack of passion which cause them to be less committed to the organization. These problems happened as employees feel restricted from working freely and be a part in decision making regarding their own work by themselves. (Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Kanwal & Mohsin Ali, 2013). In handling with the issue of organizational cynicism, job autonomy is believed to be one of the necessary weapons to reduce negative attitude, as employees will not be strictly controlled in their job (Meyer,1987). Furthermore, autonomy also will enable employees to have more freedom in terms of controlling their work and to form procedures on work assessment (Dee,Henkin & Chen,2000).

Although job autonomy has been found to negatively related with organizational cynicism (Avey, Hughes, Norman and Luthans ,2008), there are some inconsistencies found in the past research which

seems difficult to confirm the association of these two variables. This can be due to the reality that job autonomy is considered as a risky option. Many employees are not willing to be empowered with autonomy (Bashir2011), as it requires a high level of confidence and accountability on the individuals with the least supervision (Langfred,2004). With such inconsistencies found, it is relevant for the present study to continuously investigate and discover the influence of job autonomy on organizational cynicism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Cynicism

Some of the research on positive workplace attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment have gained numerous attention by scholars for decades. Recently it is shown that researchers have increased interest towards paying attention on a negative workplace attitude such as organizational cynicism (Bashir et.al,2011). The issue relating to organizational cynicism has become the topic of interest for researchers more the past several years ago. It refers to the negative feelings among individuals, which is believed to have a negative impact on organization such as dissatisfaction, disturbance, hopelessness about the organization and also the colleagues in the workplaces (Ozler and. Ceren, 2011; Özler et al., 2010). Andersson (1996) viewed organizational cynicism as general or specific attitude characterized with anger, disappointment, and also a tendency to distrust individuals, groups, ideologies, social abilities or institutions. This kind of attitude mostly experienced among employees who believe that their organization is lack of honesty. Research has indicated that organizational cynicism is resulted from the employee’s perception in terms of morality, integrity and justice are being despoiled (Ozler et.al 2010)

Ferris, Arthur, Berkson, Kaplan, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, (1998) consider organizational cynicism is something that associated with employees’ perceptions of self-centeredness, misuse, exploitation, partiality and nepotism at work. Eaton & Struthers, (2002) in his study described cynical employees as the individuals who have gave up on their hope which may cause anger among the employees and influencing their action to express and act on their frustration. With such problem, is risky to the organization to have employee who are cynical as they can influence the entire organization and hinder the organization to reach its goal (Barefoot et al., 1989 ; as cited in Nafei, 2014).

On the other hand, Wanous, Reichers and Austin (1994) have specifically described organizational cynicism as “encompassing pessimism about the success of future organizational changes based on the belief that change agents are incompetent, lazy or both” (p.269). In the context of organizational change management perspective, Ince & Turan (2011) viewed organizational cynicism as an attitude that arise in the workplaces due to the mis-managed of change efforts and it is believed that organizational change is considered as one the major factors of organizational cynicism (Nafei,2013).

The term of organizational cynicism which defined by Dean et.al (1998) is known as the most commonly cited in the literature and it is conceived as representing an attitude rather than an enduring trait. It is because, organizational cynicism is known as a state variable which may change depends on the experience faced by employees. In addition, Dean et. al (1998) have listed the three basic dimensions of cynicism that is known as cognitive, affective and behavioural. The cognitive cynicism dimension is the belief that organization is lack of integrity. Affective cynicism is the reaction of the organization, whereby it involves emotional reactions such as aggravation, irritation, tension and anxiety. Meanwhile for the third dimension, behavioral refers to tendencies and mainly negative disparaging behaviour that includes sarcastic humor, criticism of the organization, negative nonverbal behaviour, cynical interpretations of organizational events and pessimistic predictions regarding the organization’s future cause of action. Therefore, with based on Dean et.al (1998), organizational cynicism can be generally referred as “ a negative attitude toward one’s employing organization, which involves a ‘belief’ that organization lacks of integrity and negative affect toward the organization which has tendencies to disparaging critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (p.345).

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is considered as a main characteristic of work and has been most extensively studied by researchers in job design characteristic (Smith, Kot & Leat, 2003). Karasek, Brisson, Kawakami, Houtman, Bongers, & Amick, (1998) relate job autonomy with workers’ possibilities of making

decisions regarding their work. It is conceptualized as the extent of power that employees have to delegate their own task and other job activities, which specifically concerns on the voluntary power and freedom towards the work goals, task elements arrangement and determining the process and the pace of task that are conducted (e.g. Kwakman, 2003; Xanthopoulou, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2007).

Based on the numerous research on job autonomy, scholars have generally defined it as “the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and to determine the procedures to be used and carried out (Hackman & Oldham 1975; Marchese & Ryan, 2001; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger & Hemingway, 2005; Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001; Dysvik and Kuvaas 2011; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). On the other hand, it is also specifically refers to employee’s self rule and independence in terms of decision making (Hackman & Oldham, 1976)

Job autonomy also is generally associated with employees’ choice and freedom that exist in the job to perform variety of task (Brey, 1999) which enriches the job domain and develop employees competency in terms of creativity and problem resolution (Volmer, Spurk, & Niessen, 2012). The other important benefit of autonomy is, it gives employee the authority and enable them to find out solutions personally (Wang & Netemeyer, 2002). It is also considered to be a worthy choice if employees can make a knowledgeable decisions (Ben-Shemesh, 2005). Job autonomy is also believed to reduce the strictness controls that have to be faced by employees (Meyer, 1987), which provides employees to establish work and assessment procedures (Dee, Henkin & Chen, 2000).

Despite of the positive influences of job autonomy on employees, it is also understood that autonomy is perceived as something that is problematic for individuals, which not every employees prefer an autonomous job. This is due to the reason that autonomy becomes a tough task to cope, as it requires a higher trust and responsibility on the individuals (Langfred, 2004). But in most finding, job autonomy contributes to a higher level of liability and responsibility for behaviour and conduct, that leads towards improving employees performance and commitment (Marchese & Ryan, 2001), high motivation and self-confidence (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Moreover, autonomy in job will be better handled if there is no interference even by the co-workers which enable employees to make decisions for each stage of work (Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005).

Additionally, based on the self determination theory perspective, job autonomy is considered an essential weapon which foster satisfaction while need for autonomy is important in find out the employees outcomes (Gagne and Deci 2005; Deci and Ryan 2000). In relating towards the service sector, job autonomy is important in discovering the degree of how employees of the service sector can adapt to the changes (Iqbal, 2013). Therefore, job autonomy is useful to be regarded as one of the most important sources in a service sector employees like the Immigration officers to increase their motivation, fulfilling their job satisfaction and also reduce cynicism.

Job Autonomy and Organizational Cynicism Relationship

Autonomy refers to a characteristic of task that has a huge impact on employees’ psychological states, for example, a feeling of responsibility for job satisfaction and the work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Every individual have the ability to seek the opportunities towards growth and development. It is not matter whether they are fail or success, but it depends on the features of the context, which they may looking forward as an opportunity that will help to develop themselves (Maree Roche & Jarrod Haar 2010).

Autonomy also may act as a factor to enhance employees motivation to give more effort into their work (Chen & Chiu, 2009). It is because, employees who are given the autonomy will have more liberty to control and regulate the pace of work and its processes and also be able to evaluate the procedures of work. (Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Nousheen, & Ali 2013). Job autonomy also contributes to improve job performance for employees who are well equipped with skills and creativity to accomplish their work (Saragih, 2011; Çekmeceliog˘lu & Günsel, 2011). By given the job autonomy, it enables organization to explore more how its service sector employees can be adapted to the changes (Iqbal, 2013).

It is found that the high level of job autonomy brings employees to feel well adapted with the situational factors compared with other employees who experience less autonomy (Gellatly & Irving,

2001). In comparison with those who have little job autonomy, those who with more job autonomy will show more satisfaction with variation aspects of the work context (Oldham & Hackman, 1981), positive affect, self confidence and internal motivation (Hackman & Oldham,1976). Besides, it enables employee to expand their creativity (Oldman & Cummings, 1996) and less emotional dissonance (Abraham 2000). Having jobs with adequate autonomy in the organization could equip employees to experience more engagement as autonomy helps to decrease emotional dissonance (Karatape, 2011). On the other hand, as job autonomy is important towards employee wellbeing, it gives employees more opportunities to adapt themselves with stressful situation and assist them to make decisions on how and when to respond to job demands. With such benefits, employee will face less burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Research has also indicated that job autonomy has a huge impact in influencing employees work attitude (Naus et.al,2007). This is because employee who are empowered to control over their work will be able to meet the job demand and adapt with ambiguity that placed on them which also may reduce the role ambiguity that they have faced. With this regards, it is supported by the previous research that job autonomy affecting in reducing the role ambiguity (Çekmecelioğlu et.al, 2011) . On the other hand, Çekmecelioğlu et al, 2011 also found that job autonomy may leads to a higher level of employee creativity and performance. It is because, job autonomy provides freedom and discretion. So that, employees become more independent to carry out their task. Therefore, it may boost employees’ self confidence level. As other benefits, autonomy may give employees more opportunity to show their extra role behaviour such as OCB (Runhaar , Konermann & Sanders,2013)

It is important for employees to have significant roles in organizational decision making process (Ince and Gul,2011). To be a part in a decision making team for example, it is important for employees to be given an autonomy. This has been stated in the previous research that job autonomy is a part of job characteristic that enriches employees’ competencies in problem resolution (Volmer et al.2012).On the other hand job autonomy has been found to be very useful to sustain and improving employees contribution to the organization (Holz-Clause, Koundinya, Franz, & Borich, 2012).It is also believed to be one of the important sources to discover the degree of how employess of the service sector accustomed to the changes (Iqbal,2013). Kroth and Puets,(2011) in their research has stated that, job autonomy is one of the important requirement factors that helps to foster a supportive work environment. When employee’s need of autonomy is fulfilled, many of the positive outcomes will benefit the employees (Gillet, Philippe Colombat, Estelle Michinov, Anne-Marie Pronost & Evelyne Fouquereau,2013). Gillet et al,(2013) have demonstrated in their research which also concurs with other past studies that these positive outcomes has been found to increase well being, (e.g. Panaccio & Vandenberghe 2009; Brien, Forest, Mageau, Boudrias, Desrumaux, Brunet, & Morin, 2012), organizational commitment (e.g. Tremblay, Cloutier, Simard, Chênevert, & Vandenberghe, 2010; Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012) and work engagement (e.g. Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010; Zacher & Winter 2011). Therefore, it is expected in this research that high level of job autonomy can potentially influence toward reducing organizational cynicism among employees

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

By using a convenient sampling technique, a reliability test of this study has been conducted by using 60 sets of distributed questionnaires with the sample size of 60 officers of the Immigration Department of Malaysia in Langkap, Perak who work under the security and defence division. A formal letter of approval to conduct a research has been sent through email to the selected immigration office before the questionnaire is distributed. After receiving the approval, one representative among the immigration officers has been appointed to assist the researcher in distributing the questionnaire. The total of 100% response rate has been received two weeks after the questionnaire distribution

Measurement

Organizational Cynicism

In connection to select the instrument, the 14- items which developed by Dean et al. (1998) is used in this research. These items consists of 3 dimensions proposed by Dean, namely cognitive, affective and

behavioral, and the Cronbach’s Alpha has been shown to be ranged at 0.86, 0.80 and 0.78 respectively (Brandes et.al,1999). As for the measurement of organizational cynicism in this study, there are five (5) items for the cognitive dimensions, five (5) items for the affective dimension and four (4) items for the behavioral dimension. These items are measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘1’ “strongly disagree” to ‘5’ “strongly agree”. As for cognitive (belief) dimension, the respondents will be asked 5 questions to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on items such as “I believe my organization says one thing and does another”, “My organization’s policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common”, “When my organization says it’s going to do something, I wonder if it will really happen”, “My organization expects one thing of its employees, but rewards another”. “I see little similarity between what my organization says it will do and what it actually does”. The relevance of selecting this instrument because it has been used to a considerable extent among the recent researchers, which is also widely tested in both public (eg:Nafei,2013; Ince & Turan2012; Bashir,2009) and private organization (eg:Tukelturk,2012;Bashir & Nasir,2013). Although the finding has been mostly generated based on the western countries context, it is supported that the western finding is also can be utilized as to generalize this issue within the Malaysia context (Noor,Walid,Ahmad & Darus,2013; Noor & Walid 2012).

There will be 5 items that is measured for the emotional (affective) dimension for example: “When I think about my organization, I experience aggravation.”, “When I think about my organization I get angry.”, “When I think about my organization, I get tension.”, “When I think about my organization, I feel a sense of anxiety”, “I complain about what is happening in the work to my friends beyond my institution.”.

Meanwhile, for the third dimension of the organizational cynicism, there are 4 items representing the behavioral dimension such as “We look at each other in a meaningful way with my colleagues when my institution and its employees are mentioned”, “I often talk to others about the ways things are run in my organization”, “I criticize my organization practices and policies with others”, “I find myself mocking my organization’s slogans and initiatives”.

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is measured based on selecting the 8 items of the job decision latitude proposed by Karasek (1979) with the 0.79 Cronbach alpha, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘1’ “strongly disagree” to ‘5’ “strongly agree”. The job decision latitude is known as the working individuals’ potential control over their tasks and their conduct during the work day. With reference to Karasek (1979), there are two measure that are identified. Namely, “Decision authority” and “Intellectual discretion”, that were selected for this study due to their similarity with other measures stated in other previous literature (“discre-tion and qualification scale,” Gardell, 1971; “intellectual dis-cretion,” Kohn and Schooler, 1973). These measures are also found to be similar to the two components of the ‘Development of the Job Diagnostic Survey’ developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) and also Turner & Lawrence’s (1965) ‘Motivating Potential Score’ which organization decisions and skill variety is used.

Each of the measurement (decision authority) and (intellectual discretion) consist of 4 items each. As for the decision authority, the selected items is utilized to measure the level of skill required, new things that are learnt, work condition either repetitious or non-repetitious and also creativity that is required. For example “My job requires high level of skills”, “My job requires me to learn new things”, “My job requires non repetitive jobs” and “My job requires creativity”. Meanwhile for the decision authority, the items is selected to gauge freedom in terms of work and decision making. The representative items for this measure are “My job allows me freedom to decide how to organize my work”, “My job allow me to make decisions on my own”, “My colleagues are helpful in assisting in one’s own decisions”, and “I am allowed to say over what had happened”.

RESULTS

The table below illustrates the reliability test result of the research that has been conducted. Cronbach alpha coefficient is used to measure the reliability level of organizational cynicism and job autonomy. As shown in the findings, the Cronbach Alpha for Organizational cynicism is found to be at 0.802, and 0.781 the for job autonomy. Both of the variables indicate the acceptable minimum value level of 0.60 (Sekaran & Bougie,2010). Therefore, all the measurements of this study have an acceptable level of reliability.

Variable	Cronbach Alpha
Organizational cynicism	0.802
Job Autonomy	0.781

DISCUSSION

In this research context, it is believed that one of the factors that could influence organizational cynicism among employees is low level of job autonomy, whereby it should be properly managed in order prevent and overcome organizational cynicism that becoming pervasive in the organization. With regard of this issue, a proper strategic planning and actions could be suggested to the top management of any organizations in allowing more decision making to be made by the employees and also to strengthen employees empowerment. These kind of strategies could be useful to motivate, engage and retain the employees by giving more autonomy in their job to prevent this issue from recur.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study also have tested the level of reliability of the two measurements namely, job autonomy and organizational cynicism .Based on measurement that have been selected in this study, it is found that the respondents did not have any critical problems in terms of understanding the items stated in a questionnaire. Both of the measurement of variables (organizational cynicism and job autonomy) have met the target of a minimum 0.70 of Cronbach alpha. Undoubtedly, the results obtained from this study should be considered in the limitations of the selected local enforcement agency. This cannot be deduced into a wide generalization of the results shown in the reliability test with 60 employees who have participated. However, the reliability test result in this study could be useful to be evaluated within its limitation based on the obtained findings. More over, the instruments used in this study is consistent with both present and past studies. Therefore, both of the instruments that have been applied to measure organizational cynicism and job autonomy can be considered as reliable.

It is also important for the organizations and researchers to aware about the issue regarding organizational cynicism, as it potentially bring negative influences to both organizations and employees. Since the study on organizational cynicism in Malaysia is very few, it is without doubt that the measurement of instruments that have been used in this study could be useful to be applied in a wider context of a future study. For examples, by specifically focusing on the Immigration Department Officers in whole country as a sample of the organizational cynicism research context.

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