

## **Employee Engagement in Public Organizations in Malaysia** ***Penglibatan Pekerja dalam Organisasi Awam di Malaysia***

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Organizations competing for talent in today's strong job market are increasingly putting their attention to prevent fatigue and burnout and improve employee engagement. However, the challenges are intact and with so many variables that can influence and degrade engagement make it more difficult to determine which factors to be given focus and attention. Employee engagement can give effects to overall organization performance. Lack of understanding towards the influence of employee engagement can cause employers or managers not able to take appropriate and correct actions to improve employee motivation and performance. This paper is written to discuss the factors that influence engagement in the Public organizations in Malaysia. The respondents for this study were those who works in fourteen ministries in Putrajaya. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed however, only 259 respondents have returned a complete questionnaires in this study. We found that factors such as career development, supervisor and subordinate relationship have a positive and moderate strength relationship with employee engagement. While another factor, work life balance, has a positive but low strength relative to employee engagement. The result suggested that the government has managed its staff career development and this has led to their engagement with their organisations.

**Key words:** Career Development, Supervisor-Subordinate Relationship, Work Life Balance, Employee Engagement, Public Organizations, Malaysia

### ***ABSTRAK***

*Organisasi yang bersaing untuk bakat dalam pasaran kerja hari ini semakin diberi perhatian untuk mengelakkan keletihan dan meningkatkan penglibatan pekerja. Walau bagaimanapun,*

*cabaran-cabarannya adalah utuh dan dengan begitu banyak pembolehubah yang boleh mempengaruhi dan menurunkan keterlibatan menjadikannya lebih sukar untuk menentukan faktor-faktor mana yang akan diberikan tumpuan dan perhatian. Penglibatan pekerja boleh memberi kesan kepada prestasi keseluruhan organisasi. Kurangnya pemahaman terhadap pengaruh penglibatan pekerja boleh menyebabkan majikan atau pengurus tidak dapat mengambil tindakan yang sesuai dan tepat untuk meningkatkan motivasi dan prestasi pekerja. Arktikel ini ditulis untuk membincangkan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi penglibatan dalam organisasi awam di Malaysia. Responden di dalam kajian ini adalah mereka yang bekerja di empat belas kementerian di Putrajaya. Sebanyak 350 soal selidik telah diedarkan, tetapi hanya 259 responden telah mengembalikan soal selidik lengkap dalam kajian ini. Kami mendapati bahawa faktor-faktor seperti pembangunan kerjaya, penyelia dan hubungan subordinat mempunyai hubungan kekuatan positif dan sederhana dengan penglibatan pekerja. Walaupun faktor lain iaitu keseimbangan kehidupan kerja, mempunyai hubungan yang positif tetapi kekuatan yang rendah terhadap penglibatan pekerja. Hasilnya dari kajian, dicadangkan agar pihak kerajaan menguruskan pembangunan kerjaya kakitangannya dan ini telah membawa kepada penglibatan mereka dengan organisasi.*

***Kata kunci:*** *Pembangunan Kerjaya, Penyelia Hubungan Subordinat, Imbangan Kehidupan Kerja, Penglibatan Pekerja, Organisasi Awam, Malaysia*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Employee engagement is very important. This topic of employee engagement has received a great attention from any organizations in order to retain and improve employee performance (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Mayo, 2016). Employee engagement also can be a crucial factor that attracts and retains talents from inside and out of the nation. Lin and Lee Ping (2016) cited from Quah (2014) who stated that one out of two Malaysian employers deemed people issues as the top business challenge, emphasizing on the need for employee engagement in order to propel Malaysia to a high-income status. Other studies from Bates and Weighart (2014) and Richman (2006) suggested that employee engagement can be a powerful organizational lever for increasing employee productivity and improving various organizational performance measures. Literature also suggested that there is a need to clearly understand the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement because a disengaged workforce can be very costly (e.g. MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Rayton, Dodge & D' Analeze, 2012).

Why employee engagement is important? Almost all organizations today recognise that employee engagement provides their company with a competitive advantage (Anitha, 2014): Rodriguez and Shaw (2014). Additionally, a study by Bersin (2014) found that only 13% of worldwide employees are fully engaged at work. In addition, twice as many are so disengaged that this negative behaviour is spread to other employees (Bersin, 2014). Further, according to Deloitte 2015 report, the issues of "retention and engagement" have become No. 2 to the business leaders, second after the challenge of building global leadership (Schwartz, Bersin & Pelster, 2014).

This study aims to contribute to the on-going debate about the factors which can influence employee engagement in organizations specifically in the Public organizations. Majority of studies on employee engagement were mostly concentrated in Europe and North America and a few from Australia (Mun, Suhaimi, Abdullah, Abdul Rahman & Nik Mat, 2013) while in Malaysia studies were focused within the private organisation, for e.g Johari, Adnan, Yean, Yahya and Isa (2013) and Mun *et al.* (2013). The organization itself and/or the interactions of employees with their organizations create certain expectations – whether implicitly or explicitly – about various aspects of jobs, and the employees expect their organizations to meet those expectations (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). Additionally, according to Ahmad and Bakar's (2003) Malaysians have different attitudes and the older they are, there is an opportunity that they will stay longer within the organization. They also suggested that research is needed in the context of Malaysia because there is uncertain business environment in Malaysia. Engagement led to performance of employees, thus it is very important.

In another study, Kaifeng and Marc (2006) stated that higher performance will lead to greater citizen trust in government. Today not only those private sectors need to compete with others, but the public sector also needs to become competitive and challenging. In Malaysia, government has introduced few programs such as the Government Transformation Program (GTP) to focus on how to improve the public services in Malaysia (Government Transformation Programme, 2011). The program provides incentives such as salary increment and good remuneration to ensure public servants are highly competent and motivated. Work motivation will be able to motivated employees in the public sector to do good for others and shape the well-being of society (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008).

Given the importance of keeping employees engaged, it is certainly crucial for every business leader to understand the factors contributing to employee engagement. There are many academic papers have focused on this important topic such as Kahn (1990)'s with the focus on psychological conditions including availability, meaningfulness, and safety, Maslach and Leiter (2001) looked into fairness, value fit between job demands and personal principles, rewards and recognition, and job control, Macey and Schneider (2008) measured personal characteristics, leadership, and work attributes and many more.

A study by Johari *et al.* (2013) determined the influence of human resource management (HRM) such as training and development, financial and non-financial recognition, fringe benefits, and supervisor-subordinate relationship on employee engagement, while Mun *et al.* (2013) studied on the influence of s job autonomy, strategic attention, role benefit and goal setting in private sector in Malaysia as antecedents to employee engagement. This paper discusses the influence of factors such as career development, work-life balance and supervisor-subordinate relationship with employee engagement in the public sectors in Malaysia. These factors were chosen because being in the public organizations, most of the time, people are focused on non monetary rewards in boosting motivation and performance. Additionally, past research also suggest that financial or monetary rewards are not the most motivating factor (Perry *et al.*, 2006). Prior to that, Nelson and Spitzer (2002) stated that although cash rewards are welcomed by employees, managers should never use this as a tool to motivate their employees to improve their performance levels.

This study used Social Exchange Theory (SET), the second mostly used theory to study employee engagement. SDT was formally introduced in the mid-1980s by Deci and Ryan (1985) to examine employee motivational factors. Saks (2006) postulated that engaged employees are likely to share a more trusting and high-quality relationships with their employer, therefore they are more likely report positive attitudes and intentions toward the organization. Additionally, according to Osbourne and Hammoud (2017), the disengagement and personal engagement of employee can be closely related to the SDT based on the reason that an employee's behavioural state is a key driver of motivation to demonstrating behaviour at the professional and personal levels. The study chose factors career development, work-life balance and the relationship between supervisor-subordinate because they are also acknowledged as motivation factors and are suitable to be supported by the underpinning theory in this study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has become a critical aspect of understanding and enhancing not only an individual's performance but also the organization's performance as a whole (e.g: Miller, 2014; Singh, 2015). In the contemporary business world, organizations demand high performance and productivity from every employees compared to a few decades ago (Sahoo & Mishra, 2012)

The meaning of employee engagement actually comes in variety of definitions, Aon Hewitt defines employee engagement as the "state of emotional and intellectual commitment to an organisation or group; the extent to which an organisation 'wins the hearts and minds' of its employees". Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour (i.e. feeling energetic and resilience at work), dedication (i.e. being proud of and happy about one's work) and absorption (i.e. being totally immersed in one's work).

The concept of engagement as a multi-dimensional construct was first introduced by Khan in 1990. Personal engagement was defined as the harnessing of employees' selves to their work roles where they express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances. Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter (2011) stated that engaged employees preserve their own engagement through a process of job crafting and they think that there is a need of organizational interventions to increase work engagement. While according to Balakrishnan, Masthan and Chandra (2013) employee engagement leads to commitment and psychological attachment and reflects in the form of high retention of employees. While, according to Macey and Schneider (2008) employee engagement has an organizational purpose with both psychological and behavioural aspects and it involves energy, enthusiasm and focused effort.

Considerable studies have shown that the existence of a statistical positive relationship between employee engagement and business productivity, profitability, employee retention, safety and customer satisfaction. This notion is also agreed by Musgrove, Ellinger and Ellinger (2014) who stated that organizational productivity is depending on the employees' efforts and engagement.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), there are four reasons why engaged employees perform better than unengaged employees.

- i. engaged employees have positive sentiments towards their job
- ii. engaged employees are more open to work opportunities and more confident and optimistic
- iii. engagement is positively related to employee well-being, leading to better performance
- iv. engaged employees work more productively because they have the ability to create their own resources.

### **Drivers for Employee engagement**

Deci and Ryan conducted the most influential study on employee engagement in 1985 (Berens, 2013). Deci and Ryan (1985) expanded on early work by differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness which are psychological needs, motivate the individual to initiate behavior essential for psychological health and well-being of an individual and if satisfied may lead to optimal function and growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

There are many factors that can influence employee engagement. As stated by Robinson *et al.* (2004) regardless the fact that drivers of engagement are common to all organizations, the engagement level can vary depending on the demographic and job-related factor. It has depicted on the model, some factors are basic or contractual for the organization (the hygiene factors) such as pay, benefits, health, and safety, whereas others can be compulsory factors which cause employees to go extra mile such as effective communication, leadership, and cooperation. Past research on motivation suggested that May *et al.* (2004) showed that supportive supervisor relations were positively correlated with engagement and their notion is supported by Saks (2006) who also found a positive association of supervisor support and engagement. Anitha (2014) proposed employee engagement factors such as leadership, team, co-worker relationship, training, career development, and compensation. Other an indispensable attribute includes organizational policies, procedures, structures, systems, and workplace wellbeing.

For the purpose of this paper three factors were measured to examine their relationship with employee engagement.

### **Career Development**

According Egan, Upton and Lynham (2006), Career development (CD) has long been cited as a core area associated with human resource development (HRD), which provide learning opportunities that nurture human expertise in organizations (Peterson, 2004). While other literatures have linked that equipping employees with additional or new knowledge and skills or training, is associated with positive organizational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and employee performance (Bohlander & Snell, 2013). Most employees are interested in learning new skills, knowledge, and approaches in their work, because this keeps their work interesting and fresh (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). Past literature suggested that employee will be satisfied when there is a good career development system and the system is designed by the company for managerial and professional staffs (McCracken, 2002; Rutherford, 2005).

According to Murray (2008), mentoring is also a career development practice which entails helping and supporting people to manage their own learning in order to maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be in alignment with organization objective. Benson (2006) in his studies showed that opportunities for advancement and development enhances the retention of employees. However, McKnight, Phillips and Hardgrave (2009) found a negative relationship between opportunities for advancement and development and turnover intentions.

A study by Johari *et al.* (2013) found training and development to be non-significant factor in exerting employee engagement. The result was inconsistent compared to the findings from Chang and Chen (2002) and Keaveney (1995) that showed positive and significant influence of training and development on employees' attitudinal outcomes, such as commitment and motivation. Based on the literature, the paper developed the following hypothesis;

**H1: There is a significant relationship between career development and employee engagement among employees in the public sector organizations.**

### **Work-life Balance**

Maintaining a balance between work and life is a well-known topic in society as well as a significant concern for individuals and organizations (Aziz, Adkins, Walker & Wuensch, 2010). Hudson (2005) defined work life balance as a satisfactory level of involvement or fit between the multiple roles in a person's life. Work life balance practices enable employees to be effective in both work and personal roles. The more control an employee has on their lives the more able they are to balance work and family. (Lazar, Osoian & Ratiu, 2010).

According to Bilal, Zia-ur-Rehman and Raza (2010). organizational leaders must put effort to ensure that their employees are not given overloads which can interfere their personal lives as this could lead to other issues such as work stress or other medical issues, it is also has the potential to affect morale, low productivity, and decrease job satisfaction. In another study, work-life benefits have been shown to be positively related to work outcomes, such as increased commitment, reduced turnover rate, lowered absenteeism, reduced stress, increased job satisfaction, increased employee engagement, and increased productivity (Darcy *et al.*, 2012). Based on the above literature, we developed the second hypothesis (H2).

**H2: There is a positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement among employees in the public sector organizations.**

### **Supervisor-Subordinate Relationship**

Relationship between supervisor and subordinate explained that co-workers and supervisors who can support each other and mutual respect will lead to confidence and improve the psychological condition of a secure and strong engagement to work (Ariani, 2015). Amicable relations between you and a staff member work well when you are on the same page. A study by Sardar, Abdul Rehman, Yousaf and Aijaz (2011) reported few factors as most important sources for organizations to generate a pool of motivated, competence and high performing employees, and one of them is a good supervisor-subordinate relationship. In addition, a study by Li, Sanders and Frenkel (2012) also stated that the job performances of employees will increase when they

are highly supported by their supervisors which led to their willingness to invest in difficult tasks, and engagement

Communication can give a positive implication within the relationship of superior-subordinate, and as stated by Yates (2008) and Welch (2012) who agreed that effective communication between employees and leaders can play a significant role in employee engagement. This is agreed by Ariani (2015) who pointed that satisfactory upward and downward communication is essential for a successful organization to close the gap between superior and subordinates by increasing the levels of trust, support, and the frequency of their interactions.

There are mixed results for the relationship between supervisor-subordinate and employee engagement. While past researchers such as Wagner and Harter (2006); Swindall (2007) and McPhie (2008) showed that supervisor-subordinate relationship has a strong influence on employee engagement but Johari *et al.* (2013) found supervisor-subordinate relationship had no significant impact on engagement level among employees. Therefore, for this study the hypothesis is suggested as;

**H3: There is a positive relationship between supervisor-subordinate relationship and employee engagement among employees in the public sector organizations.**

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted with employees within public organizations in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Putrajaya is chosen because this place is the federal administrative centre and it is the headquarter location for a total of 25 ministries. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed. The population for this research was selected at random from the 25 ministries, and the questionnaires were distributed using the manual or hand distribution, however, at the end, it was found the research managed to get the employees to participate in this research from fourteen (14) ministry namely Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Prime Minister (JPM), Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and few more. To ensure a more reliable answers from the respondents, the study focused on those who have been served in the public sector for at least 3 years (purposive sampling).

According to Dajani (2015), employee engagement became a very popular managerial construct in which every organizations use different engagement building tools in order to stay competitive and improve performance. As stated earlier, for this paper, 3 predictors to measure employee engagement were used, which are career development, work life balance and supervisor-subordinate relationships.

### **Instrument**

There were two parts to the instrument. The first part is the demographic profile questions and the second part measure the employee engagement and factors career development, work life balance and supervisor-subordinate relationships. All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale (1= unimportant, 5= important).

The employee engagement scale was adapted from previous research by Thomas (2007). It included 10 items. Career development and supervisor-subordinate relationships scale were adapted from previous research Anitha (2014). Career development measured 9 items and supervisor-subordinate relationships has 15 items. Finally, item work life balance was adapted from Susi and Jawaharrani (2011) with 9 items.

## **RESULTS**

This study uses the SEM PLS to analyse the data. Reliability is measured by average variance extracted (AVE), construct reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, Validity is ascertained by construct validity which is checked by convergent validity and discriminant validity. Fornell and Larcker, (1981) presented formula to compute confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for AVE, CR which ascertained the reliability of the construct.

### **Frequency Test**

The demographic details are listed in Table 1. A total of 259 respondents were participated in this study. Almost equal number of male (52.5%) and female (47.5%) were collected. In this study majority of the respondents' age was in between 30 to 34 years old with 95 people (36.7%). In terms of education qualification, majority hold a diploma with 96 of them or 37.1%. A total of 79 (30.5%) respondents has 9 to 10 years working experiences, 84 of them has been working more than 10 years, which suggested that 62.9% of our respondents has a long working experiences. Other than that, the profile from Table 1, also shown the list of respected ministries that participated in this study. Majority of respondents was from Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) with 32 %, Ministry of Education (MOE) with 26.6%, 13.5% of them from Ministry of Health (MOH) and Prime Minister Department of Malaysia (JPM), and few were collected from other various government departments.

**Table 1: Respondent Profile**

<b>Descriptive</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender		
Male	136	52.5
Female	123	47.5
Age		
18-24years	13	5
25-29 years	67	25.9
30-34 years	95	36.7
35-39 years	54	20.8
40-45 years	15	5.8
45-60 years	15	5.8

Education Level

SPM	60	23.2
Certificate	29	11.2
Diploma	96	37.1
Bachelor	69	26.6
Master	5	1.9

Ministry		
MACC	83	32.0
MOH	35	13.5
MOE	69	26.6
MCMC	15	5.8
Prime Minister Department	35	13.5
KPWKW	8	3.1
JPN	3	1.2
PDRM	1	0.4
JKM	5	1.9
KDN	2	0.8
MOT	1	0.4
MAMPU	1	0.4
KKLW	1	0.4

**Working Years**

3-5 years	47	18.1
6-8 years	49	18.9
9-10 years	79	30.5
More than 10 years	84	32.5

**Note:** MCMC (Malaysian communications and multimedia), Prime Minister Department (JPM), KPWKW (Ministry of women, family and community development), JPN (Department of Education), PDRM (Royal Malaysia Police), JKM (Department of Health), KDN (Ministry of Home Affairs), MOT (Ministry of technology), MAMPU (Malaysian administrative modernization and management planning unit), KKLW (Ministry of Rural Development), Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) or SPRM

**Assessment of Measurement Model**

PLS-SEM was selected as the data analysis tool for this study due to fact that, PLS- SEM is one of the causal predictive approach which emphasizes prediction in estimating the research models (Wold, 1982, Hair et al., 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2017). Besides, PLS-SEM model is suitable for complex model (i.e., six or more constructs per model sand more than four indicators per construct).

Additionally, two different type of measurement model were suggested in PLS-SEM namely reflective and formative construct. A reflective construct arises when the indicators serve as representation of the latent variable. In other word, all the indicator are high interchangeable and correlated, thus, removal of any of the indicator would not alter the meaning of the latent variables (Ramayah et al., 2017; Haenlain & Kaplan, 2004; Hulland, 1999). This study used a reflective model because to reflect the construct that we were using. In the measurement model,

convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. Convergent validity was ascertained by examining the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and also the composite reliability (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt & Thiele, 2017). Among that, four items (i.e., CD3, WLB2, and WLB3) were deleted due to low loading. According to Henseler, Ringle and Sinkovics (2009), it makes sense to eliminate an indicator if the deletion makes substantial increase of AVE and CR. Based on Table 2, it can be depicted that all variables are reliable with CA were higher than 0.7 while AVE were above 0.50 as recommended by (Hair et al. 2014). (see Table 2)

**Table 2: Measurement Model**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Outer Loading</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Employee Engagement	EE1	0.776	0.883	0.909	0.589
	EE2	0.81			
	EE3	0.806			
	EE4	0.782			
	EE5	0.72			
	EE6	0.707			
	EE7	0.766			
Career Development	CD1	0.744	0.735	0.833	0.556
	CD2	0.726			
	CD3	Deleted			
	CD4	0.738			
	CD5	0.757			
Work Life Balance	WLB1	Deleted	0.703	0.813	0.523
	WLB2	Deleted			
	WLB3	Deleted			
	WLB4	0.617			
	WLB5	0.708			
	WLB6	0.702			
	WLB7	0.692			
Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships	SSR1	0.815	0.929	0.942	0.67
	SSR2	0.871			
	SSR3	0.856			
	SSR4	0.782			
	SSR5	0.817			
	SSR6	0.778			
	SSR7	0.798			
	SSR8	0.826			

*Note: CR(Composite Reliability), AVE (Average Variance Extracted); CD3,WLB1,WLB2 and WLB3 deleted due to loading <0.4.*

According Ramayah, Cheah, Chuah, Ting and Memon (2018) discriminant validity is used to assess the degree to which items were distinct among constructs. The discriminant validity of the constructs for this study were assessed using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method. Fornell and Larcker's (1981) stated that discriminant validity exists if the shared

variances between a pair of variables are all less than the AVE for that variable. Refer to Table 3, our result showed that the square root of the AVEs on the off-diagonals were higher compared to others.

**Table 3: Square Root of The AVEs**

	1	2	3	4
Career Development	<b>0.745</b>			
Employee Engagement	0.606	<b>0.768</b>		
Supervision Subordinate Relationship	0.325	0.614	<b>0.818</b>	
Work Life Balance	0.361	0.541	0.549	<b>0.723</b>

### Structural Model

In the initial step, it is crucial to check on lateral collinearity issue before assessing the structural model. Table 4 presents that all the VIF values were range between 1.177 to 1.480 (<3.33) (Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt,2014), which indicates multicollinearity was no issue in this study. By using bootstrapping resampling technique, career development ( $\beta=0.417$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supervisor-subordinate relationship ( $\beta=0.378$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and work life balance ( $\beta=0.182$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were positively related to employee engagement.

R<sup>2</sup> represent the coefficient of determination – indicates the variance explained in each of the endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2017). The assessment of R<sup>2</sup> indicate as a measure of the model’s predictive accuracy which ranges from 0 to 1, with higher levels indicting more predictive accuracy. As a rough rule of thumb, the R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be considered substantial, moderate, and weak (Henseler et al. 2009; Hair et al. 2011). This research has R<sup>2</sup> value (=0.584) which greater than 0.35 as suggested by Cohen (1988) indicating a substantial model. This suggest that it can be concluded 58.4% of the variance in employee engagement is explained by career development, supervisor-subordinate relationship and work life balance.

**Table 4: Structural Model**

Path	Std. Beta	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value	VIF	f <sup>2</sup>
CD-> EE	0.417	0.047	8.822**	0.000	1.181	0.354
SSR -> EE	0.378	0.048	7.813**	0.000	1.471	0.234
WLB -> EE	0.182	0.052	3.472**	0.000	1.513	0.053

Note: \*\* $p<0.01$ ; CD (Career Development), SSR (Supervisor-subordinate relationship), WLB (Work life balance), EE (Employee Engagement)

To measure the magnitude of the effect size we used Cohen’s (1988) guideline which is 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, representing small, medium, and large effects respectively. Looking at the f<sup>2</sup> values in Table 4 showing that career development (f<sup>2</sup>= 0.354) represents a large effect size, supervisor-subordinate relationship (f<sup>2</sup>=0.234) indicates a medium effect size whereas work life balance (f<sup>2</sup>=0.053) shows a small effect size with employee engagement.

Lastly, predictive relevance of the model is tested using the blindfolding procedure. If the  $Q^2$  value is larger than 0 the model signifies predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Fornell & Cha, 1994). Similarly, the  $Q^2 = 0.321 (>0)$  suggesting that the model has sufficient predictive relevance.

## **DISCUSSION**

Malaysia aims to be a developed and high performing nation. Based on the results from this study, it is hoped that more steps can be taken to improve employee engagement in the public sectors. The objective of this paper was to examine the influence of factors such as career development, work-life balance and supervisor-subordinate relationship with employee engagement in the public sectors in Malaysia. The results shown that career development has ( $f^2 = 0.354$ ) represents a large effect size with employee engagement. This finding is similar to the research by Liyanage and Gamage (2017) who studied the employee engagement among the Gen Y in the private sectors in Sri Lanka. We assumed our findings is similar because according Table 1, only 23.1% of our respondents came from the Gen X. However, our result was inconsistent with Johari *et al.* (2013) where according to them, training and development was nonsignificant factor in exerting employee engagement. They studied on the influences of HRM practices on employee engagement among the employees in the manufacturing firms in Malaysia.

Past researchers such as Wagner and Harter (2006), Swindall (2007) and McPhie (2008) suggested that supervisor-subordinate relationship has a strong influence on employee engagement. In our study, supervisor-subordinate relationship shown ( $f^2 = 0.234$ ) which indicated a medium effect size with employee engagement. Thus, it is assumed that despite the substantial role of the leaders and supervisors in monitoring employees' work attitude and performance, the result proved that the supervisors have a medium effect only in influencing subordinates' level of engagement at work. This is actually not really good as it demonstrated that supervisor-subordinate relationships are not strong and viable teams. Our findings also inconsistent with Johari *et al.* (2013) where, in their studies, they indicated that supervisor-subordinate relationship had no significant impact on engagement level among the manufacturing employees in Malaysia. Again, our result is consistent with Liyanage and Gamage (2017) who found that the item was significant predictor to the employee engagement of Generation Y in a private company in Sri Lanka.

Employees are key assets to any organisation therefore, it is important for leaders or management to provide the right space and time to make a perfect blend of work and fun at workplace. The result of this study depicted that work life balance ( $f^2 = 0.053$ ) shown a small effect size to employee engagement. It can be assumed that work life balance contributed the least to employee engagement, which we can assume, there was no issue with work life balance. This may be due to the situation that employees in the public organization rarely have to work for additional hours due to the high work volume, which can cause to negative impact on their work life balance. However, it is believed that if the leaders can change the work schedules to be more

flexible, to ensure employees especially with small kids can attend their family matters, the engagement will increase.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations today, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014). This study found that career development, supervisor and subordinate relationship and work life balance can influence the employee engagement among the employee in the Public organizations in Malaysia. The findings thus add knowledge for leaders in public organization to implement some of the strategies that can help improve employee engagement. Improving employee engagement strategies is important to promote organization's competitive advantage, while disengaged employees can have a significant impact on an organization's profit, ability to retain skilled employees, and employee citizenship (Berens, 2013).

Johari *et al.* (2013) based on their studies among the operational workers in manufacturing companies found that training and development and supervisor and subordinate relationship were not significant with employee engagement. However, in our study, which involved employees in Public organization, there are relationship between career development and supervisor and subordinate relationship with employee engagement. This suggest that, the nature of business or organization do give impact on the factors to influence employee engagement.

The findings of this study have managed to provide theoretical as well practical ramifications. this study has given additional empirical evidence in the growing body of literature on employee engagement and SET from the Malaysian perspective. Based on the result, it can be proposed that leaders in the public organizations to consider factor such as on-the-job development and career enhancing skills for employees through training and development, as it acknowledged as one of the most important factors in employee motivation as well as employee engagement (Keaveney, 1995).

This study has also paved several directions for future research. First, the future research should extend the sample to a bigger population. Second, it is a need to conduct a study on Gen Y and Gen X separately. This is because, there are mixed result based on the past research on the factors influencing engagement. For example, some research suggests that business leaders should engage younger workers using monetary compensation, as these workers left their organizations for lack of monetary compensation even when the occupation is consistent with their needs and desires (Butler, Brennan-Ing, Wardamasky & Ashley, 2014). Millennial are not willing to make personal sacrifices for a career and are less loyal to their organizations (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). Baby Boomers are less prone for monetary reward and more to processes and loyalty to their organization (Saber, 2013). However, in another researches, it was stated that Gen Y employees are not materialistic. Instead, they value other aspects at the workplace or they equivalently require other aspects along with extrinsic rewards. Indeed, there is anecdotal information which places an emphasis on providing freedom work values for the generation-Y

workforce in order to retain them and manage their attitudes successfully (Eisner, 2005; Gordon, 2010).

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