

WORKPLACE FACTORS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG EMPLOYEES IN SELECTED SERVICES SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted to examine the relationship between workplace factors and work-life balance among employees in selected services sector. The independent variables of this study comprise of supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working arrangement; whereas the dependent variable in this study is work-life balance. The quantitative research method is selected and questionnaire is used as the research instrument to collect data. There are 98 samples randomly selected from selected services sector ($N=110$). The data collected is analysed by using Statistical Packages for Social Science Version 22.0 (SPSS Version 22.0) software. The Spearman rho test is used to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The results revealed that there are positive relationship between work-life balance with supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working arrangement. In short, the workplaces factors contribute to work-life balance under Malaysia context. This study gives an insight to the organization in designing an appropriate system to enhance work-life balance.

Keywords: Work-life Balance; Supervisor Support; Co-worker Support; Flexible Working Arrangement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is not merely defined by time divided between work-life and non-work-life. It needs to be achieved by minimizing the conflict among these two domains by balancing the multiple roles and tasks (Kumarasamy, Pangil, & Isa, 2015). In other words, a person who experiences lower work-family conflict can be concluded as work-life balance. Aside from that, there is a prior study outlined the elements in work-life balance.

As Ronda, Lopez, and Goni-Legaz (2016) quoted Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003),

Work-family balance must contain the following three components: (1) time balance (time dedicated equitably to work and family responsibilities); (2) involvement balance (equitable psychological involvement in work and family roles); and (3) satisfaction balance (the equitable satisfaction level that individuals get from work and family responsibilities). (p.7)

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In short, work-life balance included roles and responsibilities in work and non-work domain. The multiple roles of employees in this fast pace environment arouse the needs of work-life balance. Many organizations in western recognize the importance of work-family culture and adopt work-life balance policies such as flexible working schedules to increase the satisfaction of employees (Sivatte, Gordon, Rojo, & Olmos, 2015). Besides, work-life balance is prevalent in Israel as there is a study claimed that not only full-time employees look for work-life balance but students who worked part-time during they are not in school (Russo, Shteigman, & Carmeli, 2015). Apart from looking at global perspectives, The Kelly Global Workforce Index (KGWI) claimed that the nearly two-third of Malaysian prefer work-life balance compared to higher wages (Study: Malaysians prefer work-life balance, 2015). For an instance, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development provides flexible working schedules to fulfil the demands of employees towards work-life balance (Bong, 2015). Apart from that, social support at workplace also manipulate the level of work-life balance. Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, and Alegre (2016) had conducted a study in a Spain pharmaceutical organization to find out the relationship between job autonomy and social support with work-life balance. Besides, Russo et al. (2015) also conducted a study in examining the relationship between workplace support and social support in Israel among part-time student and full-time contract worker from multiple sectors. Their results showed the significant relationship between the work-life balance and several workplace factors. Nevertheless, their studies unable generalize perception of Malaysian. Therefore, the relationship between selected workplace factors (social support and flexible working arrangement) and work-life balance under Malaysia context are tested by using correlation test.

1.1. Relationship between Workplace Factors and Work-Life Balance

The study had been done by Russo et al. (2015) suggested that social support in work and non-work increase work-life balance by regulating the multiple roles of employees. Furthermore, the supervisor shows supportive in term of decentralizing decision-making to make employees feel comfortable with the working environment (Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, & Alegre, 2016). However, there are studies mentioned that supervisor support does not significantly increase the satisfaction towards the personal life. Wu, Rusyidi, Claiborne and Mccarthy (2013) stated that the supervisor support is not significantly influencing work-life balance but pleasant working environment plays a significant role in enhancing work-life balance. In short, the researcher concluded that support from supervisor do not important if the organization provides a family friendly environment in promoting work-life balance. The finding is similar to Malaysia context as Au and Ahmed (2016) proposed that Malaysian supervisors do not contribute to work-life balance since employees perceived their supervisor as a source of stress and negatively affect work-life balance. The inconsistent findings lead this study to examine the relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance by using correlation test. The hypothesis was generated based on the past studies.

Ha1: There is a Positive Relationship between Supervisor Support and Work-Life Balance

Co-worker support is different from supervisor support because co-workers work laterally and no rights to command. Valcour, Ollier-malaterre, Matz-costa, Pitt-catsouphe, and Brown (2011) claimed that support from co-worker will enhance the perceived of work-life support. Researchers concluded that co-worker support is one of the resources that helps employees developed a caring and helpful workplace in integrating work and nan-work domain. In addition, it will help employees to divide their time and energy in personal life with the tangible support from their co-worker. There is a study that revealed co-worker support is classified into different aspects, they are; instrument,

emotion, role modelling and work-life management (Russo et al., 2015). Instrumental refers to tangible support from co-worker such as considerate to the demands of job sharing due to some personal issues. Whereas emotional refers to support in physiological such as exchanging opinions and ideas in better regulating work-life and personal life. These two elements help in regulating work and non-work domain. In fact, co-workers support contributes to positive job outcome as well. Their finding is consistent with a previous study that examined the effect of co-worker support and job satisfaction (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). The researcher concluded that co-worker support from both affective and instrument aspects will give positive impact on job satisfaction and lead to the sense of well-being. By having low work-family conflict and high job satisfaction, the co-worker support is the essential element in work-life balance. This study aims to examine the relationship between co-worker support and work-life balance under Malaysia context by using correlation test. The hypothesis was generated based on the existing studies.

Ha2: There is a Positive Relationship between Co-Worker Support and Work-Life Balance

From international perspectives, findings from Sivatte et al. in (2015) mentioned that flexible working schedules enhanced work-life balance and labour productivity. However, there is an interesting issue in India. Based on the study done by Baral and Bhargava in (2010), the researchers proposed contradict viewpoint that flex time or child care does not contribute in balancing work-family issue. On the other hands, those studies that had been done in Malaysia mentioned that FWAs help a lot in reducing females stress regarding household chores, job demands and commuting to workplace. In other words, increasing in job autonomy will generate a positive effect in reducing work-family conflict and work-life balance can be achieved indirectly. Yet, the researchers realized that female experience high stress since they are the main care-giving in Malaysia (Subramaniam, Tan, Maniam, & Ali, 2013). In addition, the prior study that had been done in Malaysia mentioned that both working arrangements have a relationship between quality of life in 4 domains: work-life, work design, work context and workload which relevant to work-life balance. Researchers concluded that long working arrangement makes academicians satisfy in self-esteem while flexible working arrangement helps academicians to balance work and non-work domain (Ariffin et al., 2016). Since the effectiveness of flexible working arrangement is a main concern for Malaysian, this study aims to examine the relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance. The hypothesis was generated based on the previous studies.

Ha3: There is a Positive Relationship between Flexible Working Arrangements and Work-Life Balance

Allen and Meyer (1990) propose organizational commitment theory. The researchers divided it into three dimensions: affective (want to), continuance (need to), and normative (ought to) commitment. Affective commitment refers to emotionally attached to the organization; continuance commitment refers to awareness of costs needed to leave the organization; whereas the normative commitment refers to the development of the obligations for being loyal (Alniaçik, Alniaçik, Erat, & Akçin, 2013). Since work-life balance is associated with emotional attachment, thus, this study relates affective commitment to draw the clear picture regarding the relationship between work-life balance and selected workplace factors. On the other hand, Omar (2013) proposed the positive relationship between working arrangement and affective commitment. In addition, Ariffin et al. (2016) also proved that affective commitment can be enhanced by introducing flexible working arrangement since this formal organization support can enhance life satisfaction by integrating work and non-work domain issues. Other than flexible working arrangement, affective commitment is triggered by social

support. Çakmak-Otluoğlu (2012) mentioned that supervisor support enhances both affective and normative commitment among worker towards an organization and reduce the possibility of career mobility that is moving to a new organization. As a result, these prior studies provide insight, which relates affective commitment to outline the relationship between work-life balance and working arrangement and social support.

2. METHODS

2.1. Sample and Design

A cross-sectional survey research design was selected. The data was collected in quantitative by distributing closed-ended questionnaire. This study was conducted in Kuching, Malaysia. Employees who worked in the services sectors are selected as they are the key person who provides services to customers and this will affect the business directly. There was one selected organization involved in this research. According to the HR department, there are 38 employees and 82 employees in the two selected branches. In this study, simple random sampling method was utilized and 98 respondents were selected based on Krejcie and Morgans sampling table.

2.2. Measures

Close-ended survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The close-ended questions help to draw the relationship between the independent (workplace factors) and dependent (work-life balance) variables. The instrument was prepared in dual language to enhance the understanding of respondents. The perception of respondent towards the supervisor support was measured by 9 items including question such as My supervisor understands my work and non-work issue. In the meantime, level of agreement towards co-worker support was measured by 8 items such as My co-workers give useful advice on job problems. Apart from that, the options for flexible working arrangement were flexi-hours, unpaid leave, career break, compressed work-week, homeworking network and job sharing. On the other hand, the perception of respondent towards work-life balance was measured by 6 items such as There is a good fit between my personal life and work life. The Likert Scale measured the level of agreement whereas 1 corresponds to Strongly Disagree while 5 correspond to Strongly Agree.

2.3. Analytic Strategy

The pilot study was used to test reliability and validity of the instrument by referring to Cronbachs Alpha value. It is the prerequisite to undergo data collection procedure. After the first draft of the questionnaire was prepared, 30 sets of questionnaires were randomly distributed to the sample and data collected was ran in reliability analysis. The instrument used in this study was considered as valid and reliable because it obtained the Cronbachs Alpha value which was in between 0.70 to 0.95. In the meantime, normality test is used to identify the skewness of the data. Every parametric test has its assumptions and normality of data is one of them (Pallant, 2016). The selection of data analysis tool is depending on the result of normality test. Based on the results generated by using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, the data is not normally distributed since the p-value for every variable is less than 0.05. Therefore, the data is not normally distributed and non-parametric test was selected to analyse the data.

Data from Section A (demographic profile) was analysed by using descriptive statistics analysis. The chart and graph outlined the demographic profile of respondents in the simplest way. Furthermore, descriptive statistics analysis is useful to analyse data with a large number of respondents since there are 98 respondents in this study. Meanwhile, the inferential statistics was used in this study to interpret the data gathered. Spearman rho is designed for use with ordinal level or ranked data and is particularly useful when your data does not meet the criteria for Pearson correlation (Pallant, 2016). The data for workplace factors are not normally distributed and Spearman rho used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample of this study comprised of 98 respondents. The researcher analysed 4 demographic profiles which were: age, gender, marital status and working tenure. The age group of respondents was classified into three groups: 20-35, 35-50 and greater than 50. According to the table 4.1, 62 respondents (63.3%) fell in category 20-35 years old; 28 respondents (28.6%) fell in the category 35-50 years old; whilst only 8 respondents (8.2%) fell in the category greater than 50 years old. The distribution of gender was considered as equal due to the difference between the amounts of male and female was insignificant. There were 45 males (45.9%) and 53 females (54.1%) respondents. The respondents were in three different statuses: single, married and divorced. The respondents were built up by 54 single (55.1%), 43 married (43.9%) and 1 divorced (1%). From this, the researcher concluded that majority of the respondents were single. Moreover, result indicates that 38 respondents (38.8%) who have been worked for less than 2 years, 15 respondents (15.3%) who have been worked for 2 to 5 years and the others 45 respondents (45.9%) who have been worked for more than 5 years.

Spearman rho was used to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Based on the result, H_{a1} is accepted and there is a positive relationship between supervisor support and work-life balance. The p value is smaller than 0.01 ($p < 0.01$) whereby $p = 0.001$ at the significant level of 0.01. Furthermore, the moderate positive r value which is 0.457 indicated there is a moderate positive relationship between supervisor support and work life balance. This finding is consistent with finding generated by Russo et al. (2015) and Mas-Machuca et al. (2016) as they mentioned that social support in the workplace is a powerful tool for monitoring employees' personal and working life. In brief, this can be supported by the affective commitment theory which proposed by Allen and Meyer which stated that commitment to an organization and job is depending on the emotional attachment (Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012). However, the finding is contradict with findings done by Au and Ahmed (2016) as they argued that supervisor is the main source of stressor in assigning tasks and setting dateline.

The pressure exerted by the supervisor to the employee is one of the main reasons lead them to the failure of work-life balance. In addition, Wu et al. (2013) claimed that supervisor plays a minor role in achieving work-life balance and they proposed the positive working environment is promoting work-life balance. After referring to the previous studies, the inconsistent findings can be explained from the aspect of job nature. The job nature of the services sector is customer-oriented and the main stressor is harsh demands from customers. As an impact, in this study, supervisor support can reduce the stress exerted by the customers. To be brief, supervisor support is contributing to work-life balance in the selected services sector and under special conditions.

Moreover, the H_{a2} is accepted and there is a positive relationship between co-worker support and work-life balance. The p value is smaller than 0.01 ($p < 0.01$) whereby $p = 0.001$ at the significant level of 0.01. Furthermore, the moderate positive r value which is 0.430 indicated there is a moderate positive relationship between co-worker support and work-life balance. This finding confirmed that the positive effect of co-worker towards work-life balance as instrumental support from colleagues is one of the strong reasons to achieve greater work-life balance (Valcour et al., 2011). In addition, both supervisor and co-workers are contributing to work-life balance by providing emotional support in order to reduce the negative job outcome such as stress by giving emotional support (Ducharme & Martin, 2000; Russo et al., 2015). For example, co-worker helps to fill in when the employees unable to perform their jobs due to family or personal issues. In another word, the affective commitment theory proposed by Allen and Meyer can be used to explain this process. This is due to the sense of belonging to the specific norm make people more emotional attached to the norm. The emotional attachment increases the level of job satisfaction and reduces the conflict in work-family interaction as the employee found the ways to express their work-family related problem. In short, co-worker support from both instrument and emotional aspects enhance work-life balance.

Last but not least, result showed that H_{a3} is accepted and there is a positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance. The p value is smaller than 0.01 ($p < 0.01$) whereby $p = 0.001$ at the significant level of 0.01; hence, the H_{a3} is accepted. Furthermore, the moderate positive r value which is 0.490 indicated there is a moderate positive relationship between flexible working arrangement and work life balance. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable issue that women in Malaysia who perceived greater work-life balance do not experience a significant change in lifestyle since the community view women's role as care-giving (Subramaniam et al., 2013). Besides, Baral and Bhargava (2010) also suggested that the flexible working arrangement is an ineffective tool in solving work-family issue compared to the introduction of a training program. However, the study was done in a working environment which is dominated by male (India) will generate different interpretation from Malaysia. Even though the implementation of flexible working arrangement at international perspectives proposed positive and negative effects, yet, there are similarities between the results generated by Sivatte et al. in (2015) and those described by Ariffin et al. (2016) and Mas-Machuca et al. (2016). Both of them mentioned that the impact of flexible working arrangement towards work-life balance from a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in the allocation of time and energy. The positive relationship between flexible working arrangement and work-life balance se can be explained by affective commitment theory as Omar (2013) and Alniaçik et al. (2013) claimed that the flexible working arrangement can increase the emotional attachment of employee towards the organization in term of person-fit organization and higher degree of self-control. To be brief, the implementation of flexible working arrangement brings positive effect to Malaysian. This can be proven by the initiatives took by authorities such as establishment of TalentCorp in order to promote flexible working arrangement.

Based on the results, the relationships between independent and dependent variables were identified by using Spearman rho. According to the findings, there is a positive relationship between supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working arrangement with work-life balance. The three hypotheses proposed were failed to reject. Even though there were past findings which contradict to the current findings, but positive relationships between independent and dependent variables were supported by many past findings. The contradict findings can be explained due to the difference background and job nature of sample selected. In short, supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working arrangement contribute to work-life balance and eventually lead to development of affective commitment to an organization.

4. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

This study is contributing to the future research in term of clarifying the relationship between selected workplace factors and work-life balance. This study can provide an insight for future researcher so that they can expand the study to a broader aspect. Other than that, this study helps the future researcher to develop a research instrument that fits to Malaysia context. This study reveals the most significant factor that drives employees to achieve higher work-life balance. This can be the guideline for the organization to develop vision, mission or business strategy plan. In addition, the higher level of work-life balance among employees contributes to retention of the capable workforce as work-life imbalance is one of the reasons that lead to loss of competent workforce especially women. Besides, the work-life balance can enhance the diversity of an organization by retaining female workforce. This study provides a clear picture for HR practitioner to develop a policy. They can refer to the findings generated in this study to develop strategy human resources plan to attract, acquire, and retain competent workforce. As a result, they realized the useful and statistically significant alternative to manage talent in the particular organization.

The small sample from an organization in Kuching unable generalizes perception of employees from the services sector. Besides, the sample selected from the services sector unable generalized perception of workers from another sector such as manufacture or production as the differences in work characteristics. Furthermore, a survey research design in quantitative may lead to self-report bias. Respondents interpret accordingly and they unable to explain to the researcher. In addition, the cross-sectional design shows us the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables but unable shows the relationship between independent and dependent variables across a period. Hence, the study can expand by including large sample from different sector. Besides, qualitative research design helps researchers to collect precise data.

5. CONSLUSION

As a summary, this study claimed that there is a positive relationship between supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible working arrangement to work-life balance. The three elements are interrelated since the implementation of the flexible working arrangement highly depends on the coordination of supervisor and co-worker. Therefore, the management should concern to this and respond to the needs of employees so that they can achieve greater work-life balance.

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