

## Employee Engagement among Gen Y Engineers in Malaysian Engineers Consultants Service (ECS) Firms

Zuraina Dato Mansor <sup>\*1</sup>, Loke Yen Theng <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics & Management, University Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup> Putra Business School, University Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

**Abstract:** This study provided additional understanding between the areas of work life and employee engagement specifically among Gen Y engineers who are working with Malaysia Engineers Consultant Service (ECS) Firms. According to the board of engineers, there was about 58,994 Graduate Engineers who are currently working in this knowledge-intensive nature and relatively high labor costs area. The job satisfaction and engagement were important issues for them. The study aimed to examine the relationship between subscales of areas of work life (workload, control, rewards, community, fairness and value-fit) and elements of employee engagement (Vigor, Dedication and Absorption) among the engineering consultant. The findings suggested that the best predictor for employee engagement is Value-fit. The study also proposed that leader or manager should prevent mismatches between the organization's values and the values of its employee. In other words, organization must make sure there is shared value between employer and employees.

**Key words:** *Areas of Work Life, Employee Engagement, Gen Y, Engineers*

### INTRODUCTION

Engaging employees to their work and organization is very challenging. According to a report by [1], there was only 13 per cent of employees in this world who are "engaged" in their work. Engaged employees are important to support organizations success and sustaining the competitive edge. In addition, the report stated that Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have among the highest proportions of "not engaged" employees in the world and Malaysia has almost 81 per cent employees who were "not engaged" and 8 per cent who were "actively disengaged". Engagement is a positive attitude where an individual goes above and beyond the call of responsibility to enhance the level of possession, and to further the business awareness as a whole [2]. It is a thought of personal engagement that is leading employee's focus to perform an assigned task. Improving employee engagement strategies is essential to an organization's profitability. Disengaged employees will result in reduced workplace productivity and decreased customer service skills [3].

The topic on employee engagement has received a great attention as it is important for organizations to be aware that they need to react and do something in order to

retain and improve employee performance ([4]; [5]). There are various factors that affect employee engagement. A study by [6] found there was relationship between behavior and thinking and engagement. Further, [7] in his studies posited there is relationship between cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements and employee engagement. [7] stated that cognitive engagement is employees feeling about their company, their leaders and their colleagues while the behavioral factor is the component put by the employee as a reflection in their work. Previous researches also suggested that disengaged employees are a liability to the organization and hardly challenge the status quo, in contrast engaged employees promote emotional job attachment, continuous commitment, high productivity, positive job passion, and in most situation they are willing to go extra miles ([8]; [9]; [10]). The study by [3] found that the bond between leaders and employees is an essential element for engaging employees, and to increase organizational profitability. [11] suggested organizations should look for leaders that can both communicate the organization's vision and secure employees' support in achieving organizational goals. [12] based on his study pointed that construction engineers served as knowledge employees and thus,

**Corresponding Author:** Zuraina Dato Mansor, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics & Management, University Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia, no.phone: + 60389467672

play an important role in delivering their engineering high quality expertise and knowledge to safeguard the client's interest, however, due to high work stress and an unstable working environment, the turnover of construction engineers has been an alert but neglected subject. This paper aimed to study about the engagement among the engineers because it is believed that by understanding the engineers work environment and their personal behavior and interest, would help employees to become more engaged in their jobs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Definition of Employee Engagement** Employee engagement has been defined differently among researchers. In the early study of employee engagement, [13] defined it as people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. [14] defined employee engagement as psychological involvement of employees in business. Few definitions had been made by some researchers over the years. Some researches focused on worker burnout which the idea being that employees who are not experiencing burnout are engaged [15]. Others researches emphasized on the basic needs at a workplace for example workplace conditions, meaningful of their work and sufficiency of resources for completing tasks [13]. [16] referred engagement as an individual's participation and as passion for work and [15] referred engagement as a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind.

Proponent of human resources argued that staffs are the main sources of creativity and innovation however, creativity and innovation could neither be imposed nor be driven with disengaged employees [17]. [10] explained employee engagement as the measurement for the degree to which a worker is satisfied with his job. [18] explored the emotional side of work which provided a comprehensive, emotional and behavioral components associated with an individual's performance. [19] defined it as a positive and rewarding psychological work related state, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. This paper used this definition in explaining employee engagement.

Many positive outcomes were associated with work related engagement in organization [20]. For example, [18] suggested that the presence of high levels of employee engagement enhances job performance, task performance, productivity, discretionary effort, affective commitment, continuance commitment, levels of psychological climate, customer services and increase employee's motivation. Employee engagement also promoted client satisfaction, working safety, lower the intention to quit job, increased profits and return on assets ([21]; [22]), therefore, in order to maximize input from employees, business needed employees that feel energetic, dedicated and able to absorb by their work [23].

Past literature also suggested that engaged employee could deliver higher productivity, superior service quality, high job satisfaction, lower absenteeism, more satisfied and loyal customers, increased organizational citizenship behavior and improved bottom-line results [5] as well as lower levels of employee accidents and turnovers [24].

**Definition of Gen Y** According the Price Waterhouse Corporation (PWC), Gen Y were born in year 1980 until year 1999 and join the organization as the workforce somewhere started July 2000 [25]. Gen Y is expected to shape the world at work for years to come as they are now the majority of work composition in many organization including engineering firms. The baby boomers soon would retire and resigned from the workplace.

Additionally, according to the past literature, the current issues with Gen Y employees were they start leaving their workplace at a shocking rate [26] ). Based on the survey by [27], more than 70 percent of Millennials expected their employers to focus on societal or mission-driven problems; 70 percent wanted to be creative at work; and more than two-thirds believed it is management's job to provide them with accelerated development opportunities in order for them to stay with the organization. Additionally, [28] also reported that the Millennial has little loyalty to their current employers and many are planning near-term exits. Thus, many researchers have given attention to study on how to retain and attract talent and refrain from shortage of Gen Y knowledge workers [29].

**Engineers in Malaysia.** Malaysia Engineering Consultant Service (ECS) industry played an important role in the growth of our country's economy since 1957 [30], this was due to the fact that the firms were responsible to help Malaysia transforms from a manufacturing to a service and productivity-driven economy. Most of the well-established and renowned consultancy firms in Malaysia were members of Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM) [31]. The ACEM was founded in 1963 with the objective of 'promoting the advancement of the profession of consulting engineering by associating together for consultation and cooperation those engineers whose work is of a purely consultative nature, and of providing facilities for Governments, Public Bodies, Associations representing industry and trade, and others to confer with Certified Engineers as a body and to ascertain their collective views' [31]. There were a total of 69,714 engineers registered with Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM) as at 30th September 2011. They comprised of 10,654 Professional Engineers (PEs), 58,994 Graduate Engineers and 66 Temporary Engineers.

**Current challenges at work.** The highly competitive market required cost optimization where people are expected to utilize available resources and struggle to cut cost. This caused some employees have to cope with more tasks in less time [32]. Even though features of

psychological strain (work factors such as work task, work organization and social system) have become especially important in work design, they have rarely been included in work organizational processes. According to the survey on Millennial, [28] reported that Millennial felt underutilized and believed they're not being developed as leaders, they also felt that most businesses have no ambition beyond profit, and there was a gap between what they believed on the purpose of the business and what they have in reality.

***Antecedences of Work Engagement based on Areas of Work Life.*** Studies on employee engagement have proposed few engagement models by relating to few theories. For instance, [33] used job resources to study how encouragement from team members, informative comments and supportive actions from the leader or supervisor positively associated with work engagement. [18] studied employee engagement based on components such as leadership, team, coworker relationship, training, career development and compensation. Other an indispensable attributes included organizational policies, procedures, structures, systems, and workplace wellbeing [19]. Additionally, [34] advised that in order to impact employee engagement, managers should pay attention to staff skills, knowledge and talent.

Based on the perception that there was incongruity between the individual and the job especially in the work-life areas such as workload, control, reward, fairness, community and values, [35] formed the AWS to measure employees' perceptions of their work environments. The 6 AWS measurements are able to help the researchers to determine unique relationships with employees and used as antecedents for employee engagement. The definition of each area is described as below:

- 1) Workload is defined as the amount of work that needs to be done in a specific time given. Manageable of workload for the employee gave the opportunity to do what he or she enjoy to do while a crisis in workload is not a matter of simply stretching to meet new challenges but of going beyond human limits.
- 2) Control is defined as the chance to make options and decisions to solve problems and to contribute to the fulfilment of responsibilities. A good match occurred when there is a correlation between control and accountability. A mismatch happened when the employee lack sufficient control to fulfil the responsibilities for which they are accountable.
- 3) Rewards are a recognition given by the employer to employee for the contributions on the job. A well reward system would provide clear indications of what the organization values on the contributions given by the employee.
- 4) Community is the quality of an organization's social environment. Employee who thrived in communities characterized by support, collaboration, and

positive feelings. Mismatch would happen when there is no sense of positive connection with others in an organization.

5) Fairness is the extension to which the organization has consistent and equitable rules for everyone. Fairness communicated respect for the members of an organization's community. A lack of fairness indicated confusion in an organization's value and in its relationship with colleagues.

6) Values-fit is defined as what is important to the organization and its members. Successes are shared inside the organization when the organizational and personal values are congruent. Mismatch would take place when differences exist between an organization's values and the values of its staff.

***Dimensions of Employee Engagement.*** [36] defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UEWS) was developed by [17] to measure dimensions of work engagement based on Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. Vigor was defined as an employee who having a high level of energy and mental resilience while working. Vigor is known as the first step in work engagement. Employee with high level of Vigor willing to invest effort in their work and remain persistence even they face difficulties. Dedication is characterized by having a mind of inspiration, pride and enthusiasm in what the employee has done when encountered with work-related challenges [37]. It is a second step of engagement which referred as the emotional side of work engagement and the effort of people to spend time in doing something meaningful. Absorption means a characteristic of an individual being fully concentrated and happily engrossed on their work where they experience difficulty to detach themselves from his work [38]. Absorption is also known as third step of engagement. These employee engagement dimensions consider engagement in terms of the employee's relationship with his or her work, as well as occupational role and organization [39].

## OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to examine employee engagement among Gen Y engineers in ESC firms. The study used a quantitative survey approach. Engagement as described earlier is an emotional commitment to one's job at his organization. Engineers are known as knowledge workers. They have to cope with various tasks using their technical knowledge and expertise and could not avoid from psychological strain, and their engagement to work are very important to produce quality works. Based on the situation surrounding the engineers work load and work life, the study focused on the following objectives; i): to examine the relationships between the area of work life and employee engagement of Gen Y in Malaysia Engineering Consultant Service (ECS) firms. ii): to

examine the factors that is the best predictor for employee engagement among Gen Y in Malaysia.

**METHODOLOGY**

A study by [40] adapted AWS and UWES scales in their research to measure the work engagement in a Turkish bank. The results has shown that there were high relationship between levels of rewards, control, recognition and value-fit and level of engagement. Another study by [41] investigated the relationship among athletes also using AWS and UWES. Their research found that all participants had relatively high levels of engagement dimensions of confidence, vigor, dedication, and enthusiasm. This research also used AWS and UWES to measure employee engagement but to the group of knowledge workers that are engineers. The populations for this research were engineers working with the Malaysian ECS Firms. There were a total of 180 ECS firms in Malaysia registered under the Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM) located in Klang Valley in Year 2014.

This study used AWS, a model and scales that was developed by [35]. The questions for each element used 5-points likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Further, to measure employee engagement, the study used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) created by [15]. This questionnaire consisted of 3 elements which are Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. The measurement also used 5-points likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study has collected data from 152 Gen Yers who were working as engineer in the Malaysia ECS firms especially within the Klang valley area using hardcopies and online survey. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software. Based on the data, the Cronbach Alpha for each items were found as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Summary of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Item	N of Items
Workload	0.265	0.265	5
Control	0.726	0.727	4
Rewards	0.843	0.843	4
Community	0.852	0.854	3
Fairness	0.618	0.617	3
Value-fit	0.777	0.777	4
Vigour	0.765	0.768	2
Dedication	0.887	0.886	5
Absorption	0.775	0.783	6

Further, the data was analyzed to determine the relationships between the areas of work life and employee engagement of Gen Y Engineers in ECS firms using a Pearson Product-moment Correlation. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Pearson-moment correlation analysis

		Employee Engagement			
		Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	
Areas of work life	Workload	Pearson Correlation	-.071	-.132	.060
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.387	.105	.466
		N	152	152	152
	Control	Pearson Correlation	.587**	.457**	.152
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.062
		N	152	152	152
	Rewards	Pearson Correlation	.084	.089	.140
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.304	.278	.085
		N	152	152	152
	Community	Pearson Correlation	.504**	.546**	.034
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.675
		N	152	152	152
Fairness	Pearson Correlation	-.091	-.088	.021	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.266	.280	.796	
	N	152	152	152	
Value-fit	Pearson Correlation	.591**	.575**	.257**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	
	N	152	152	152	

Note:

- 1) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)\*\*

The correlation value between Vigor and Value-fit (0.591) was the highest and correlation between Absorption and Value-fit (0.257) was the lowest. The relationship between AWS and employee engagement was clear, AWS were positively correlated with Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. The results of analysis between the areas of work life environment and employee engagement were found as follows:

- i. A moderate positive relationship existed between Control and Vigour,  $r = 0.587$ ,  $p < .05$ . A moderate positive relationship existed between Control and Dedication,  $r = 0.457$ ,  $p < .05$ .
- ii. A moderate positive relationship existed between Community and Vigour,  $r = 0.504$ ,  $p < .05$ . A moderate positive relationship existed between Community and Dedication,  $r = 0.546$ ,  $p < .05$ .
- iii. A moderate positive relationship existed between Value-fit and Vigour,  $r = 0.591$ ,  $p < .05$ . A moderate positive relationship existed

between Value-fit and Dedication,  $r = 0.575$ ,  $p < .05$ . A weak positive relationship existed between Value-fit and Absorption,  $r = 0.257$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The second objective for this study was to examine the factors that is best predictor for employee engagement among Gen Y in the ECS firms in Malaysia. Multiple regression analysis was performed between the AWS and Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. It was found that Value-fit was the best predictors for elements of employee engagement; the dimension was also positively significant to Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. This is based on the significant levels as shown in the Table 3 below. The finding was not correspond with [42] who reported based on his study that the best predictors of employee engagement among Gen Y are Workload, Control and Award. The different result might be due to the different industry leading to different employee engagement predictor.

**Table 3:** Relationship between AWS and Employee Engagement

		Employee Engagement		
		Vigour	Dedication	Absorption
Areas of Work Life	Control	Significant (p=0.000)	Significant (p=0.000)	Not Significant (p=0.062)
	Rewards	Not Significant (p=0.304)	Not Significant (p=0.278)	Not Significant (p=0.085)
	Community	Significant (p=0.000)	Significant (p=0.000)	Not Significant (p=0.675)
	Value-fit	Significant (p=0.000)	Significant (p=0.000)	Significant (p=0.001)

**Conclusion**

Our study has examined the employee engagement among the Gen Y engineers in ECS firms in Malaysia. The findings suggested that in order to engage Gen Y Engineers especially those working with the ECS Firms, the management of the company should emphasize on promoting good value-fit between the company and the engineers. Additionally, the study also found that the factors in AWS able to promote employee engagement among Gen Y engineers. The findings for this research has shown that direct relationship occurs between subscales of AWS (Workload, Control, Rewards, Community, Fairness and Value-fit) and elements of employee engagement (Vigour, Dedication and Absorption). The study found that the relationship between rewards and the scales for employee

engagement was not significant. The findings was not similar to the earlier study such as [43].

This research also found that the best predictor for employee engagement is among the engineers was Value-fit. Value fit was positive and significant to Vigour, Dedication and Absorption. It was also found that the level of employee engagement among Gen Y in Malaysia Consultant Service (ECS) Firms was high.

In sum, this research found that value-fit played an important role in promoting employee engagement in Malaysia ECS Firms. When organizational and personal values of Gen Y employees are congruent, successes could be shared. Therefore, the leader of the organization should prevent mismatches that could form the differences of value between the organization's values and the values of its employee. The organization

is recommended to practice its own value in order to make Gen Y employee engaged. Further, based on the findings, it is proposed that organizations should develop training programs that focus on skills to influence employee performance and engagement. Organizations should attract employees who are willing to be engaged, which would increase the organization's profitability.

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