

ISLAMIC WORK ETHIC, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS IN MALAYSIA

Subramaniam Sri Ramalu¹
Zulhusni Mohamad Rashid²

Abstract

Civil servants has vital role to play in execution of various national economic transformation plans in realising vision 2020. Civil servants who possess Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) that voluntarily transcend beyond their task performance expectation are crucial to enhance government delivery efficiency to the public. Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) has been widely embraced by majority of civil servants in this country and has significant effect on various workplace behaviours. This study examines the relationship between IWE and OCB with possible mediation effect of Employee Engagement (EE) using a survey method. A total of 153 state civil servants from the Unfederated Malay States (UFMS) namely Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu have participated in this study. The findings of this study revealed that EE mediates the relationship between IWE and OCB among the civil servants in Malaysia. The findings of this study have made significant contribution to the body of knowledge in understanding OCB and EE among civil servants in Malaysia who predominantly guided by IWE. This study also has few practical implications to government agencies and policy makers in devising appropriate human resource strategies to ensure efficient public service delivery.

Keywords: Islamic work ethic, organizational citizenship behaviour, employee engagement

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Introduction

Malaysia is in final leg in her journey towards realising Vision 2020 to become high income knowledge-based economy. In order to realise this aspiration, government machineries and public service delivery system must act as catalyst provide necessary support for the economic growth. Government constantly revise its service delivery model to remain relevant

¹ Lecturer, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Tel: +60195131666 E-mail: subra@uum.edu.my

² Research Student, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Tel: +60134318181 E-mail: zulhusni_81@yahoo.com

and better suited to today’s technologies, socioeconomic and generation needs. The reform to new delivery and service will help the government machineries to be more cost-effective and better equipped to meet the demands and expectations of the public for 2020 and beyond. This will also require the public sector to be leaner, facilitative, more efficient, more productive, more skilled, more open, more innovative, and less bureaucratic, in order to better deliver for the public and for Malaysia. Government’s pledge to become more citizen-centric and focus on enhancing the efficiency and productivity of the public service manifested in almost all the national economic development plan beginning from the First Malaysia Plan (1966–1970) to the current Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020). A number of initiatives were undertaken to improve the efficiency of public service delivery. Among the first initiatives was the establishment of Malaysian Public Complaints Bureau (PCB) in 1971 to ensure an effective and equitable public administration and service delivery to the public (Malaysia Public Complaints Bureau, 2013). National Integrity Plan and Integrity Institute of Malaysia were established later with the objective to improve governance and work ethics, to prevent misuse of power and curb corruption. To further strengthen the public service delivery, the Malaysian government has introduced the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) and Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) (Mahazril, Zurainim Hafizah, Adnan, Zaherawati, Nazni & Badrul, 2012).

Table 1: Total Complaints Received (2010-2015)

Year	Overall Complaints			No Action/delay		
	Agencies		Total	Agencies		Total
Ministry	State	Ministry		State		
2010	9,503	5,197	14,700	3,817	2,635	6,452
2011	8,321	5,035	13,356	3,241	2,734	5,975
2012	7,647	4,899	12,546	3,095	2,784	5,879
2013	6,183	3,696	9,879	2,428	1,846	4,274
2014	4,518	2,681	7,199	1,596	1,132	2,728
2015	3,892	2,496	6,388	1,432	1,129	2,561

Source: Malaysia Public Complaints Bureau 2010-2015

The focal point in addressing public expectation is the public service employee’s job performance and quality of the public service delivery that is fully emphasized by Malaysian government under the new 1Malaysia principle: “People First, Performance Now”. Despite all these effort, the quality of public service delivery to the public service still failed to achieve the expected result (Siddiquee, 2006). Table 1 depicts the number of complaints received by PCB from 2010 to 2015 for both Ministries and States agencies (Malaysia Public Complaints Bureau, 2010-2015). Quick glance on the statistics depicted in Table 1 provides some insight into performance of these government agencies though the number of complaints seems to decrease gradually. The total complaints received especially on the delay and no action taken category still an unhealthy trend for a country targeting to become developed nation by 2020.

One of the effective ways to enhance the employees' job performance is by having employees that are more likely to engage in positive and proactive work behaviour and willing to go beyond the expectation in performing his/her job. Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), a concept of employee proactive behaviour has been thoroughly studied and is positively linked to both employee and organizational performances. According to Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie (2006), OCB makes a significant contribution to overall organizational performance considering that it can facilitate work processes by filling the gaps associated with non-prescribed tasks that job descriptions might not have been covered clearly. Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff and Blume (2009) have compiled considerable evidences on OCB where it can be linked directly to variability in organizational performance including both productivity and efficiency indicators. In the context of this study, public service employees with OCB are likely to transcend beyond their in-role or task performance expectation to deliver more than expected from their side hence increase government delivery efficiency to the public (Kim, 2005; Vigoda & Golembiewski, 2001). Studies also concluded that employees that display OCB in their work will lead to greater job performance in both private and public sector (Ali Rastagar, Zarei, Mousavi Davoudi & Fartash, 2012; Nikolaou & Robertson, 2001; Wei, 2014). Fulfilling in-role or task performance which predominantly taken root as the work culture among government agency employees will no longer relevant with the rising demand and expectation from the public. The escalating number of complaints received by the government agencies due to poor service quality can be significantly reduced if the service provider willing to go extra mile in discharging their role for public good.

In identifying motives and understanding OCB, some behavioural researchers have turned their attention to dispositional factors. Dispositional factors are those factors that are "internal to the individual and which individuals bring with them from situation to situation and from one organization to another" (Scholl, 2008). The organizational outcomes are largely influenced by individual dispositional factors in the form of work values (Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham & Cummings, 2000; Wagner & Rush, 2000), personality traits (Neuman & Kickul, 1998; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Konovsky & Organ, 1996), attitudes and cognitive style that are relatively consistent over time and situations and are difficult to change (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Scholl, 2008; Weiss & Adler, 1984). Among these individual dispositional factors, work ethics received considerable attention among the researchers in behavioural science. Prior to study on Islamic work ethics, Protestant work ethic which was proposed by Blood (1969) is one of the most discussed and examined work values across the social sciences (Mirels & Garrett, 1971). In line with Mirels and Garrett (1971) and Ryan (2002) argument on outcome of religion based work values, Abdi, Muhamad Nor and Radzi (2014) opined that Islamic work ethic is a dispositional variable which varies among the individuals. In addition, Nasr (1984) reckoned that the Islamic work ethic is worthy of discussion because it plays a significant role in the realization of the Muslims around the world. As a country with Malay Muslim as majority of population that practice Islam, the religion has become the most influential factor that has practically shaped Malaysian work value systems. Prior studies done in the Malaysian public service shows that Malaysian public sector employees strongly observe Islamic work ethic at their workplace (Kumar & Rose, 2010; Mohd Yunus, Abdul Rahim, Shabuddin & Mazlan, 2011). The researcher in a view that Islamic work ethic will have influence on enhancing OCB based on prior research done by Alhyasat (2012), Abbasi and Rana (2012), Fakhar Zaman and Ramay (2012) and Zahrah (2015).

Apart from work cultures, prior research has examined several other positive antecedents of OCB namely optimism, trust and engagement (Burke & El-Kot, 2010; Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008). Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) purported employee engagement is another positive attitudinal factor that can be examined as potential predictor of OCB. Prior research on employee engagement indicated that employees who are highly engaged can be expected to excel in formal job tasks as well as tasks outside their formal job description (Cardona, Lawrence & Bentler, 2004; Cohen & Keren, 2008; Gebauer, Lowman & Gordon, 2008; Tsui, Pearce & Porter, 1997). When highly engaged employees invest their energies in their work, they are expected to exhibit higher contextual performance i.e. OCB (Ariani, 2013). Employee engagement also indicates the employee willingness to expend discretionary behaviour as it focuses on participation and dedication shown by employees which lies outside the organizational boundaries (Ahmed, Rasheed & Jehanzeb, 2012).

While majority of the study have proposed employee engagement as the predictor of various positive behavioural outcomes at workplace, this study positioned employee engagement as the enabler or process variable which explains the underlying mechanism that took place as the effects of Islamic work ethics is taking place on OCB. Many studies have tested the mediating role of employee engagement on various organizational outcomes (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013; Rubel & Kee, 2013; Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2008; Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne & Rayton, 2013). In addition, past studies have shown that OCB was mediated by employee engagement (Ariani, 2014; Coralia, Delia, Laurentiu, Wilmar, Catalina & Florin, 2012; Krishnan, Ismail, Samuel & Kanchymalay, 2013; Saks, 2006 & Zahrah, 2015). However, the researchers acknowledged that limited research has been conducted to understand the role of employee engagement as mediating variable on the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB among the state civil servant. In addition, according to Krishnan et al. (2013), studies examining employee engagement as a mediator on the relationship between various antecedents and consequences is still at a nascent stage. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by investigating employee engagement as the mediating variable in order to further explain links between Islamic work ethic and OCB.

As the above discussion attests, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB with the presence of employee engagement as the mediating factor among state civil servants focusing on the Unfederated Malay States in Malaysia. Previous studies have examined Islamic work ethic, employee engagement and OCB separately i.e. Islamic work ethic and OCB, Islamic work ethic and employee engagement, employee engagement and OCB. This study nevertheless integrates the mediating effect of employee engagement to construct a mediated model in the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB in a single study specifically on the state civil servants in the Unfederated Malay States in Malaysia. By integrating employee engagement as a potential mediator in the Islamic work ethic-OCB relationship, the proposed study could contribute to the theoretical understanding of the condition under which the effect of employee engagement influenced by Islamic work ethic could mitigate or enhance OCB among the state civil servants.

Hypothesis: Relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB is mediated by employee engagement.

Methodology

Data were collected using mail survey method. The respondents are state civil servants from the Unfederated Malay States (UFMS) namely Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. The population size for this study is 754 middle level administrators of state service from grade N41 to N54, classified as management and professional group (Malaysia Public Service Department, 2002) working in the four UFMS. The sample population obtained from Human Resources Department of each state. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed and total of 256 surveys were sent out. A total of 153 usable questionnaires were returned representing 60% response rate. A standard multiple linear regression analysis using enter method was performed to test the proposed hypothesis of the study.

Islamic work ethic was measured using instrument developed by Ali (1992) consisting 17 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale range between 0.76 and 0.89 (Ali, 1992; Kumar & Raduan, 2010; Yousef, 2000a). Organizational Citizenship Behaviour Questionnaire (OCBQ) established by Podsakoff et al. (1990) was used to measure OCB. The OCBQ was employed to investigate the five facets of OCB namely altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue which consist of 24 items measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The OCBQ average internal consistency reliability range between 0.70 and 0.85 (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Employee engagement on the other hand was measured using UWES scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), which investigates three facets namely vigor, dedication and absorption. All seventeen items are measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “strongly agree”. The Cronbach’s alpha of the UWES typically ranges between 0.80 and 0.90 (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006).

Result and Discussion

The main hypothesis postulates relationship between IWE and OCB is mediated by employee engagement. A bias-corrected bootstrapping method procedure was conducted using Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS to obtain result for the mediation test. Table 2 depicts the mediation result as well as the bootstrap indirect effects on OCB through employee engagement. The indirect effect is significant at 95% level of significance with both lower and upper limit of the confidence (through employee engagement) is positive ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$). This result provides support for hypotheses that employee engagement mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB.

Table 2: The Mediation Result (N=153)

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	
	Employee Engagement β (EE)	OCB β (EE) ^a	
Independent Variables			
Islamic work ethic	0.7294 (0.1351)**	0.6644 (0.1168)**	
Employee Engagement	-	0.1743 (0.650)*	
R ²	0.1646	0.2971	
Bootstrap indirect effects on execution (through employee engagement)			
	β (EE)	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Employee Engagement	0.1271 (0.0506)*	0.0429	0.2379

Notes: LL = Lower limit; UL = Upper limit; CI = Confidence Interval. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported with standard error in parentheses.

^aDirect and total effect. ^bBootstrap sample size = 1000

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

In essence, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB with employee engagement as the mediating factor among state civil servants serving in Unfederated Malay States in Malaysia. Firstly, the findings of this study revealed that respondents recorded a relatively high level of Islamic work ethic considering the high mean score obtained in this study. The present study demonstrates that Islamic work ethic still remains superior and acknowledged in Unfederated Malay States thus fair to conclude that the state civil servants have high orientation towards Islamic work ethic. The embedded positive values in Islamic work ethic among state civil servants is deemed good for Malaysia in achieving its target as a high income nation status and developed nation by year 2020. With regards to OCB, the results indicate that the overall level of OCB experienced by the state civil service in this study is relatively high. In short, it can be concluded that the state civil servants have high orientation and the willingness to go beyond their assigned task and exhibit extra role behaviour in order to achieve work goals. As for employee engagement, the results indicate that overall the level of employee engagement experienced by the state civil servants in this study was relatively high as well. Generally, the respondents demonstrated high level of IWE, OCB and EE indicating possibility cross over effects on various positive work outcomes such as high levels of quality, productivity and performance.

The results of the proposed model showed that employee engagement was influenced by Islamic work ethic and in turn it has spill over effect onto employee organizational citizenship behaviour. Thus, this result supported the findings of Ardalan et al. (2014) and Salmabadi et al. (2015) that showed the level of employees' engagement was influenced by employees' level of Islamic work ethic. The direct effect shows that when employees with high intrinsic motivation, high level of Islamic work ethic and provided with ethical environment in carrying out their job; they will invariably reciprocate by engaging in helping behaviours as well as performing well in their work. Furthermore, the energy that highly engaged employees display results in positive work outcome in a sense of stronger

citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006). Highly engaged employees have more dedication to their organization. Thus, they are more likely to help other employees and go above and beyond their job requirements resulting in high citizenship behaviour. The finding of this research indicates that the state civil service practices and adhere to the values of Islam at the workplace. Values shown such as collective responsibility and working hard towards the same goals, showing unwavering commitment and perseverance at workplace, ensuring that products and services meets the customer demands; as well as creative in carrying out the tasks that have been assigned to them. Subsequently, the attitude and behaviour of the employees at the workplace are more positive when they follow the principles of Islam. In short, employees who are considered high on Islamic values are more ready to demonstrate unspecified and proactive behaviour that are directed to benefit the entire organisation. This result is also in line with past study that was conducted with several research results Alhyasat (2012), Abbasi and Rana (2012) and Zaman et al. (2012) that shows positive relationship between Islamic work ethic and the employees' willingness to show discretionary behaviour toward their organisation. The present study findings support the idea that employees that are mostly Malay Muslim are devoted to the rules and instruction of Islam at workplace, which influence their pro-social behaviour positively.

According to the self-determination theory and social exchange theory, the indirect relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB through employee engagement implies that when employees with high intrinsic values experience a positive attitude like employee engagement it will in turn enhance their OCB (Saks, 2006; Sparrow et al., 2010). This finding has shown that employees' values are a significant factor that explains why Islamic work ethic enhances OCB. It implied that Islamic work ethic can affect both employees' attitudes and behaviours that benefits organization, co-workers and customers. Engaged employees may achieve higher performance because they focus their efforts on work-related goals, are cognitively vigilant and are emotionally and socially connected to their work (Kahn, 1990).

Conclusion

This study contributes new knowledge to the body of research primarily with the presence of employee engagement as the mediator in the relationship between Islamic work ethic and OCB which is little known thus far. Specifically EE helps to explain the underlying process that took place on the relationship between IWE and OCB which was assumed to be straightforward relationship offer greater insight in understanding the dispositional factor of IWE. It is therefore suggested IWE will help individuals to form a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind (EE) before it spills over to OCB. This study has demonstrated that state civil servants' IWE was found to affect their job attitude, especially their engagement which could effects positive workplace behaviour especially their extra role behaviour i.e. OCB. Specifically, this study shows that Islamic work ethic as an important dispositional factor in promoting voluntary behaviour among employees. Besides that, this study offers an insight into the Malaysian civil service sector, whereby most of the previous studies on citizenship behaviours were conducted in other sector such as in service, financial and manufacturing sectors in Western environment. Basically, the results obtained have contributed empirical evidence to the theoretical framework and enriched the conceptual model in the Malaysian civil service environment as a whole and State civil service in particular.

As suggested by Creswell (2005), managerial implications comprise the usage of the results obtained for practice and for decision making process. Basically, one of the research questions in this study is concerning the relationship between the Islamic work ethic and OCB with the mediating effect of employee engagement among state civil service in Unfederated Malay States in Malaysian. A number of findings (Abbasi & Rana, 2012; Alhyasat, 2012; Fakhar Zaman, Marri, Sadozai, & Ramay, 2012) suggested that Islamic work ethic have significant influence on citizenship behaviour and employee engagement mediates between the Islamic work ethic and OCB. Consequently, high levels of IWE can enhance the EE and citizenship behaviour of the state civil service. Therefore, in order for the state government to promote extra role behaviours among the state civil servants it need to promote and uphold the Islamic work ethic in their respective organization. In terms of human resource development, as suggested by scholars and practitioners (Ahmad, 2011; Kirke, 2012; Salem & Syed Agil, 2012) the state human resource management can concentrate on developing formal or informal developmental and training programs to enhance the Islamic work ethic, employee engagement and OCB of the existing state civil services. On the other hand, the human resource management can also support and promote the present developmental programs concerning Islamic work ethic, employee engagement and OCB. Since it's not easy to evaluate the candidates' level of work ethic, level of engagement and level of citizenship behaviour during the recruitment process, the human resource department can use appropriate tools that can be used in selection processes which can help the management to choose the right candidate that are suitable for the job at the state government agencies.

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