Training, Work-Life Balance, and Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement –A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract. This conceptual study examines the effects of training and work-life balance (WLB) on employee performance through the mediating role of employee engagement from the perspective of Social Exchange Theory. It aims to develop a conceptual framework explaining the direct and indirect relationships among these variables while addressing inconsistencies in previous studies. The proposed methodology adopts a conceptual approach to help clarify theoretical constructs and to offer new interpretation based on the existing literature to examines the effects of training and (WLB) on employee performance through employee engagement. The study results show that training and work-life balance positively enhance employee engagement by improving employees' competencies, motivation, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. These factors also contribute directly to employee performance, while employee engagement serves as a key psychological mechanism that strengthens the relationships between organizational support and performance outcomes. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, the findings suggest that employees reciprocate organizational investments with higher engagement, commitment, and performance. Therefore, integrating continuous training programs with effective work-life balance policies provides a comprehensive human resource management strategy for fostering employee engagement and achieving sustainable organizational performance.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Employee Performance, Training, WLB

1 Introduction

The role of human capital in organizational success and long-term competitiveness is still a major determinant factor. Employee performance, however, goes beyond technical skill and is a result of the interplay of behavioral, motivational and psychological affects. It is important to take into account the individual and organisational determinants of performance because performance outcomes are consistently and significantly different.

In the HRM field, performance not only includes measurable outputs but also quality and value of employee contributions. Within the organizational factors affecting performance, training and WLB have been the ones that have been given significant attention. Studies over the years have shown that companies that invest in employee development, combined with a program of support for combining work and personal life, are able to increase productivity, efficiency and quality of

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work [1], [2]. Similarly, the importance of WLB has risen in the context of the conflicting demands of roles that employees face. A balanced work-life arrangement fosters psychological health, job satisfaction, motivation and enhanced performance, while an imbalance can result in psychological distress, burnout and diminished performance [3], [4].

Although the positive effects of training and WLB are widely acknowledged, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Several studies report that their affect on performance is not always direct, suggesting the presence of underlying psychological mechanisms. In particular, the effects become more evident when psychological variables are incorporated into the explanatory model [5]. This inconsistency highlights the need to examine how organizational practices translate into employee outcomes.

Employee engagement is a state of emotional, cognitive and behavioral investment in work that leads to increased employee enthusiasm, persistence and commitment, therefore improving employee performance. More importantly, engagement is a pathway by which organizational practices make their difference in employee outcomes [5]. It is closely associated with the development in the workplace. Relevant training enhances competence and self-efficacy, whereas supportive WLB policies create perceptions of caring and support in the organization. All of these can help foster higher engagement, which in turn leads to better performance [3], [5].

The dynamics are demonstrated in observations at PT. Shanum Digdaya Saputra, Semarang. Optimal improvements in performance have not been achieved with training and WLB issues are ongoing resulting in stress and loss in productivity. Performance gaps are also exacerbated by employee engagement variations, which further highlights the complex and multi-faceted relationship between training, WLB and engagement and performance.

Although training and WLB are both positive and significant to employee performance, the empirical results of previous studies are inconsistent, and this leaves a significant gap in research [1], [2]. Specifically, prior literature offers limited explanation regarding the underlying psychological mechanisms that enable employees to achieve high performance [5]. Consequently, there is an urgent need to incorporate employee engagement as a mediating variable to elucidate this internal mechanism. Empirically, studies positioning employee engagement as a mediator within the dual pathway of training and WLB on employee performance remain remarkably scarce. Therefore, this conceptual analysis is established to address and bridge this research gap.

Based on this research gap, the research question of this study investigates whether training and WLB influence employee performance both directly and indirectly through employee engagement. Aligned with this research question, the objectives of this study are to examine the direct effects of training and WLB on job performance, to substantiate the mediating and amplifying role of employee engagement within this causal relationship, and to validate the tenets of social exchange theory.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) views the employment contract as a two-way street where both parties give and receive from one another [6], [7]. In this context, organizational efforts like training and WLB can be considered as support that fosters positive employee reactions (such as increased engagement and improved performance) [7]. The employment relationship thus becomes more of a trust-based relationship, where the two parties in the relationship exchange resources based on trust, and in this relationship, there is reciprocity and a long-term commitment [8].

Training is used as a strategic tool that can enhance employee skills and also help to maintain the perception of organizational support. By supporting employee development, the company fosters a virtuous cycle that will lead to increased employee engagement and performance.By investing in employee development, the company encourages a virtuous cycle, where employees feel the company is investing in them, and will do the same in return. Likewise, the WLB projects are indicative of the organization's care for employee well being. These activities not only help to decrease stress, but also enhance psychological well-being, which can lead to better performance and increased employee loyalty and engagement [7] [9].

In SET, employee engagement is the primary pathway through which organizational support is associated with employee outcomes. Staff who feel that they are provided with useful support usually exhibit higher levels of effort, commitment and engagement in their roles, leading to high levels of productivity and proactive practices [6], [7]. Empirical evidence also indicates that the impact of training and WLB on performance are often indirect, mediated through engagement, which is the process of turning organizational resources into actual outcomes at the workplace [6] [8], [10], [9]. Thus, the organizational support to stimulate engagement and, in return, to enhance performance is a continuous process of reciprocal exchange of which SET provides a strong framework [6], [7], [10][10].

2.2 Job Performance

Job Performance is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to behaviors, actions, and results that lead to organizational goals. Today, things have evolved beyond output measurement to consider behaviour processes in creating value and maintaining competitive advantage [11]. As a output, performance is measured in quantitative terms as well as in terms of qualitative contributions in relation to organizational goals.

In a wider sense, performance is a result of the effective implementation of the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees when performing tasks, working in team and solving problems [12]. It also has added contextual contributions, adaptability, and the avoidance of counterproductive behaviors [13]. There is now a greater focus on sustainable performance in recent scholarship, which has underlined the need to sustain effectiveness and adaptability in the long term [14]. In today's competitive and highly dynamic business world, performance has become a key factor in the long-term competitiveness of organizations. It is heavily influenced by HR practices, especially training, WLB strategies and efforts to build and reinforce employee engagement [15], 16].

2.3 Employee Engagement

The classic definition of employee engagement by Kahn considers the physical, cognitive and emotional commitment of people towards their work positions [17, 18, 19]. So, engaged employees are not simply there in the room, they are deeply involved and psychologically linked to what they do. Employee engagement is a positive workplace emotion that is characterized by energy, commitment and working involvement. It can be targeted at specific job tasks or the organization as a whole and can be the basis for various widely adopted scales like the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) [20], [21], [22], [23]. Taken together, employee engagement is a psychological commitment in which the employee goes above and beyond what is required of them in their role, and brings value to the business' success [24, 25].

2.4 Training

Training is a systematic and organized process used to develop employees' knowledge, skills and competencies, and to make them more effective in fulfilling their jobs [26]. So it helps not only with individual progress but also pushes the organization forward, growth wise. In the organizational context, training helps in building the skills and changing the attitude of the employees which leads to high productivity and efficiency [27]. It is characterized by its design, which has a plan, its objectives and its measurable results [28].

The modern literature clearly makes it a point to stress the importance of a training that goes beyond the acquisition of technical skills to attitudinal and behavioral changes. Training improves motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, which have an impact on engagement and performance [29]. Recent improvements in technology have led to the variety of training approaches such as e-learning, mentoring, coaching, and on-the-job training, which is consistent with the need of the contemporary organizations [30, 31].

2.5 WLB

WLB refers to " an individual’s ability to maintain meaningful participation across professional and personal domains with minimal conflict " [32]. It not only focuses on the distribution of time but on the quality of role involvement as well. WLB is a psychological balance that allows people to effectively deal with demands of multiple components conceptually [33, 34]. It is a blend of emotional, behavioral and temporal aspects, and is different from work–life conflict [35], [36], [37]. The construct includes elements such as time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance [38], [39], [40]. More recent models also include aspects like energy management, role commitment and control over schedules and workloads [41].

The paradigm of WLB has shifted from a conflict to an integrative approach, from work and personal life as competing spheres to work and personal life as mutually enriching [42], [43]. The dynamic-subjective view of WLB emphasizes the role of the individual in managing multiple roles in a competent way [44], [45]. Research today see WLB as not only an individual state, but also as an organizational strategy that promotes well-being, satisfaction and performance, and improves the organizational engagement–performance connection [46], [47], [48], [49].

3 Methodology

A conceptual approach is adapted in this study to help clarify theoretical constructs and to offer new interpretation based on the existing literature [37]. A conceptual review, as described in [38] can assist in identifying gaps in research and creating a structure for future empirical studies. The critical literature review is included to tie in with the research objectives, so that the whole picture of relationships between the main concepts can be seen. This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach that aims to examine the influence of training and WLB directly and indirectly via employee engagement on employee performance. In line with the procedures proposed by [35], this method is used to examine a specific population through a Likert scale questionnaire instrument adopted from [5] research to test the established hypotheses. The research location was at PT. Shanum Digdaya Saputra, Semarang, applying census sampling technique because the number of study population equivalent with number of this study sample = 105 people. Primary data were analyzed using inferential statistical method to evaluate the relationship between variables in a concrete and specific manner, which according to [36] is an essential step in organizational research to transform abstract concepts into statistically measurable data in order to accurately test the relationship between variables. The result of this method is a conceptual framework that can be tested through future research. This framework aims to answer several key questions: (1) the effect of training and WLB on employee engagement and (2) its relationship with employee performance. (3) Is training, WLB and engagement related to one another? (4) Do job performance and positive impact of training and WLB have a link with each other? (5) Do the links between training, WLB and performance go through engagement as the mediating variable?.

4 Results & Discussion

4.1 Impact of Training on Employee Engagement

As seen from the lens of SET, training is a more than just a skill building exercise, it is an implicit message that employees are worth the investment. Employees who perceive learning opportunities to be meaningful and of value, may see them as signs of organizational concern, which can lead to greater work bond [6, 9]. Good programme work can also develop confidence and professional confidence which will over time become a sense of capability and further involvement in job activities [50, 51].

From a Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) point of view, training is considered as a valuable resource in the workplace that can assist workers to cope more confidently with demands, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation and engagement. It has been consistently found to have a positive impact on engagement, either directly or indirectly via motivational mechanisms [52, 53, 54]. Previous study finding from [27], [54], and [53] consistently with this study results demonstrated that training has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This indicates that the better the training provided by the organization to its employees, the higher the level of employee engagement achieved.

4.2 Impact of WLB on Employee Engagement

WLB can be understood as a subtle yet powerful indication that an organization acknowledges employees as people rather than merely workers. This can engender positive emotional reactions and improve the employee-organization link [9]. WLB helps to manage role stress and maintain psychological space for the person to be more immersed in their task, and less burdened with emotional baggage from other roles [33]. It also promotes satisfaction, trust, commitment, and a greater sense of belonging, which is of course related to engagement. Empirical evidence across a myriad of contexts consistently reveals that those employees who feel better in balance are more engaged [44, 55, 56]. It above statements supported by all of these studies from [3], [55] and [56] showed that WLB has a positive and significant effect to employee engagement. The higher of employee WLB, the greater the level of their employee engagement.

4.3 Impact of Training on Job Performance

The idea of training is that it makes performance sharper, essentially adding to an employee's knowledge base and their repertoire of behaviors and skills, and adding to that would be around the loop. The benefits are not only for the execution of routine tasks, they also reach the more context related, and more adaptive aspects of performance [13, 27]. From the human capital angle, training grows employees' productive potential ,and makes them more agile and creative, plus better at tackling what shows up as workplace challenges [29]. It also builds self-confidence, a determining factor in determining whether competence can become outputs [57]. Most studies continue to indicate training is a powerful enabler of performance enhancement in terms of capability enhancement and psychological reinforcement simultaneously [26, 58]. The study findings consistently with previous studies form [26], [57], [58] confirmed that training has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This implies that the more effective the training programs provided by the organization, the higher the level of employee performance achieved

4.4 Impact of WLB on Job Performance

Not surprisingly, workers tend to perform better when their job and personal life don't go head to head for a few final ounces of performance, as it were. WLB positively affects performance by reducing strain and maintaining the mental resources required for extended periods of focused, uninterrupted performance and more effective, effective decision-making [15]. Employees can dedicate more of their focus to achieving work goals when there are fewer competing demands [33]. This balance can also help improve employee satisfaction and engagement, leading to more loyal and productive employees. There is a considerable amount of evidence that supports the notion that WLB continues to be a significant predictor of higher job performance [8, 48, 59]. Finding of this study align with previous studies results from [48], [59], and [8] found that WLB has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This means that the better employees maintain work-life balance, the higher their performance in accomplishing organizational objectives.

4.5 Impact of Employee Engagement on Job Performance

Often times, employee engagement is the heat that converts potential into real and noticeable performance. Those who feel good about their work, committed and very engaged will be more inclined to do more than the required amount of work, expectations [20]. The added involvement may encourage people to be proactive, take action early and maintain a tighter focus on organizational objectives [16]. But engagement isn't simply about getting work done: it also supports adaptability, and the contributions made to the context, which are increasingly important in environments where conditions are constantly changing [13]. Numerous empirical studies continue to demonstrate and reinforce, over and over again, that engagement is a powerful lever of positive performance outcomes [60, 61]. Several previous study from [20], [60], and [61] consistently with this study findings demonstrated that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This indicates that higher employee engagement leads to higher employee performance in achieving organizational goals.

4.6 Employee Engagement Mediates Training on Job Performance

Training by itself does not just automatically yield better performance. The whole process seems, kind of, more nuanced than that. In many cases, training is one of the first things to happen to increase engagement, primarily through increased competence, and then follows the performance improvements [53]. Engagement is the process by which recently acquired knowledge is transformed into constructive action. If engagement is lacking, even well-established skills can become unusable, the return on the investment in training diminishes [52]. For this reason, engagement has been described as the missing link between boost in capabilities and the actual outputs of performance, and empirical evidence has consistently reiterated this point, time and again [5, 62]. Several previous study from [5], [53], and [62] consistently with this research result demonstrated that employee engagement positively and significantly mediates the effect of training on employee performance. This implies that better training enhances employee engagement, which subsequently leads to improved employee performance.

4.7 Employee Engagement Mediates WLB on Job Performance

WLB kind of drives job performance, not only straight but also in indirect ways, and in the middle there is employee engagement that works as a key mediator, you could say, the central bridge. when WLB improves psychological well-being, it builds the kind of setting where employees end up getting more involved, more committed, in their work role. In this overall picture, engagement plays an important linking part that ties WLB to performance. Still if engagement is too low, then the favorable impacts of WLB on performance usually get weaker , or they dont really show up as strongly. Lots of empirical work backs this up, showing that employee engagement mediates the relation between WLB and job performance [5, 55]. The previous studies from [5], [55], and [56] consistently with this research result demonstrated that employee engagement positively and significantly mediates the effect of work-life balance on employee performance. This indicates that better work-life balance enhances employee engagement, which in turn improves employee performance

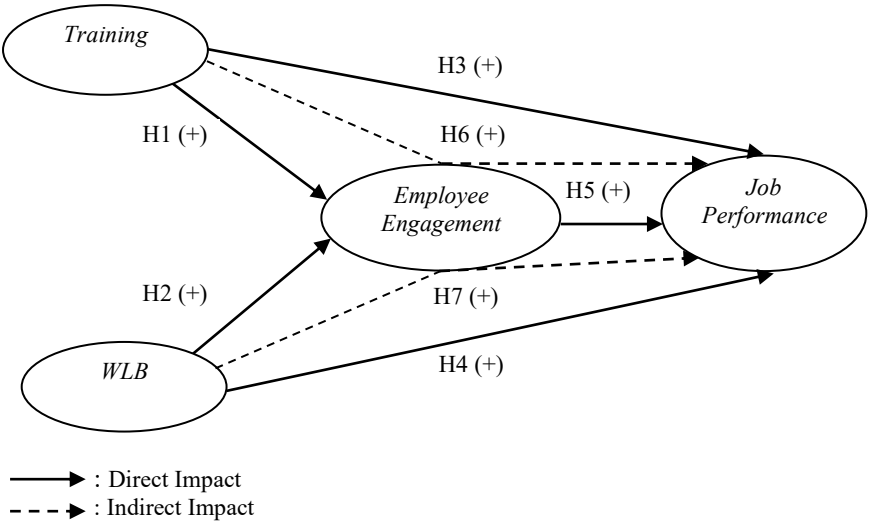


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

The framework basically sets training and WLB as, kind of, the first causes of job performance, while employee engagement acts as a in-between mechanism, so to speak. Both of these variables still affect performance directly and also indirectly, mainly because they help raise engagement. So it looks like competency development plus balanced work conditions make people more deeply psychologically involved, and that involvement is what pushes performance in the end. Overall, the model highlights that organizations should connect their everyday practices with internal psychological drivers if they want performance that can last over time.

5 Conclusion

This conceptual study emphasizes that employee performance is influenced not only by employees' competencies and organizational policies but also by employee engagement as a key psychological mechanism. The discussion indicates that training and WLB positively enhance employee engagement by improving employees' competencies, motivation, well-being, and psychological attachment to their work, which subsequently leads to higher employee performance. Furthermore, employee engagement serves as a significant mediating mechanism that strengthens the effects of training and work-life balance on performance. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, this study highlights that integrating continuous training with effective work-life balance policies provides a comprehensive human resource management strategy to foster employee engagement and achieve sustainable organizational performance.

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