

Why Workers Disengage? Factors from “Head” or “Heart” to Be Tagged on?

Normala S Govindarajo¹, Dileep Kumar. M¹ & Subrahmanium Sri Ramulu¹

¹Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYA-GSB), Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Correspondence: Normala S Govindarajo, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYA-GSB), Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. E-mail: gnmala@yahoo.com; dileep@uum.edu.my

Received: June 7, 2013 Accepted: June 24, 2014 Online Published: August 20, 2014

doi:10.5539/ass.v10n17p108

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n17p108>

Abstract

Oil palm plantations are decisively situated in the various regions of Malaysia where the climatic conditions are appropriate for planting oil palm. One cannot compare the work environment of such plantations with normal office settings. The workers in those plantations are working in remote locations, totally cut off from the other part of the world. Majority workers are from Indonesia, Philippines like low income countries. The work environment is physically demanding and challenging to the workers due to many factors. An exploratory study has conducted on employee disengagement in the oil palm plantations in the Sabah region of Malaysia. The study has taken up employee disengagement factors due to the lack of interest among the local people to engage themselves in the oil palm plantations work and the plantation industry in Malaysia is facing an acute labor shortage to carry forwards the oil palm business. The study follows, field visits, interviews with the workers, focus group discussions and specifically Delphi. The findings supported to identify the 7 factors coming under the theme employee disengagement as Wage and Welfare, Work Environment, Lack of Safety and security, Poor Organizational Support, Rigid Rules and regulations, and Lack of individual motivation. The study paves better insight to lead this qualitative research in an organized quantitative research.

Keywords: employee engagement, disengagement, oil palm plantations, working condition

1. Introduction

Much research has come out in the field of employee engagement in industrial settings. Several models have come out to explain the nature and significance of employee engagement and disengagement in organizational setting due to various organizations and individual factors. These models and theories can be the base to determine and fix the variables that are closely related to any field research endeavor. While the issue here is that how far these models can be purely adopted considering the nature of field settings and organizational and individual factors. A study would be curious if those models and theories adaptability on the field settings like plantations. To explore the variables suitability to conduct a research on employee disengagement in oil palm plantations, where majority workers are working in a field setting in remote habitat an exploratory study was conducted. The study once again clarifies the variables suitability, by segregating each variable and further subjects them under the field setting for expert observation in order to ascertain which one are more relevant in the plantation environment and which one are irrelevant. The study has come up with a model which is suitable to analyze the factors contributing to employee disengagement in oil palm plantations in general and Sabah region of Malaysia in general.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employee Disengagement

Kahn (1990) gave following definition for personal disengagement: “Personal disengagement... is the simultaneous withdrawal and defense of a person’s preferred self in behaviors that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performance.” Furthermore, Kahn discussed problems of personal disengagement, which lead to “the uncoupling of slaves from work roles” (Kahn

(1990). Depending on the researcher, such unemployment of the self in one's role can be called "robotic or apathetic" behavior, "burn out", "apathetic or detached" behavior, or "effortless" (Kahn (1990).

2.2 Employee Engagement and Disengagement

The Gallup Organization in its survey (Gallup 2006) used the following characteristics of employees:

- Engaged workers, who involve their work with desire and eagerness and who are conscious of being highly associated with their firm. They provide emotional and physical input to the organization's performance and growth, and facilitate forward movement.
- Disengaged workers who are in fact "checked out". These workers put their time into their job, but there is no vigor, desire or eagerness from their side; it looks like "sleepwalking" during the workday.
- Keenly disengaged workers, who are unhappy at a job and who devote their working time actively acting out this feeling. The undesirable influence of such workers continually influences other people and destroys attainments of engaging workmates.

2.3 Consequences of Disengagement

Wellins and Concelman, (2005) indicates that disengaged employees are not enthusiastic; they do not want to expend extra effort and support teamwork. They adopt a "wait-and-see attitude" and behave in a similar way requiring a push to join in. It is indicated that the employees with a low level of engagement are not interested and not inquisitive about their firm and their own role in it. Further, they frequently have deprived affairs with their supervisors and workmates.

According to Branham (2005) disengaged workers can negatively influence morale and revenues of the organization; they often make trouble, complain, and have accidents. They can harm the organization in the manner in which they speak to customers; their negative behavior affects client satisfaction, and can lead to loss of them (Vajda & SpiritHeart, 2008).

Disengaged employees are usually unhappy at work and actively express this feeling. The undesirable influence of such employees continuously affects other persons in the team and destroys accomplishments of engaged workmates (Gallup, 2006). Detached workers are disengaged from their jobs, tend to be suggestively less competent and less dedicated to their firms; they are less happy with their personal lives, experience more stress and uncertainty about their work than their co-workers (Gallup, 2001).

2.4 Reasons Why People Disengage and Quit

Having studied the findings of Kahn (1990), Branham (2005), and Pech and Slade (2006) it is possible to determine the potential sources or causes of employee disengagement and to divide them into several groups: External environment causes, which can become challenges for employees, for example, instability and insecurity arising from government, unions or shareholders, or possible opportunities, such as sudden wealth to buy independence, an unanticipated outside job offer, and so on. Psychological causes and sources, more specifically: lack of psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety at work, lack of identification with an organization, lack of trust, a sense of being undervalued, perceived inequities in pay and performance, unrealized ambitions, stress and anxiety, disinterest, etc.; Organizational causes, such as restructuring of the company and connected to it, transformational changes, company's culture with inadequate norms, traditions, policies and practices (unethical actions, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, unreasonable enforcement of authority, etc.), bad working conditions, poor management and leadership, overgrown bureaucracy, lack of resources, low standards and acceptance of poor performance, work complexity, etc.; Other sources, for example, employee's substance abuse and unacceptable behaviour, illness, laziness, competency issues, poor interpersonal relationships leading to conflicts, etc.

Findings of unpublished Saratoga Institute research showed that initiators of people's disengagement at work were aligned with reasons of final decisions to quit the organization. The research results indicate that the employees leave the organization because of unsatisfactory leadership characteristics (35 %), firm environment (49 %), and job characteristics (11 %). Only five percent from the explanations of parting were inevitable and comprised superannuation, birth of a child, household issues, and so on. (Branham, 2005) Negative comments about leadership included grievances about the lack of boss respect for employees, inattentiveness, absence of support, deprived leadership skills, partiality, inability, insensitivity, and discrepancy. Poor sides of organizational environment included inadequate career growth, inadequate compensation and benefits, excessive workloads, lack of recognition, bad working conditions, poor quality or lack of training, unethical behaviors inside the organization, and lack of collaboration. People were not satisfied with the job itself, if tasks were boring or not challenging. (Branham, 2005)

2.5 Negative Influence of Disengagement

Organizations should pay attention to the employee disengagement phenomenon, because it has great impact on both the worker and employer, just as employee engagement.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008) disengaged employees experience negative feelings and have health problems more often than engaged workers; they also can influence their colleagues by transferring negative emotions. Employees with a low level of engagement are more often likely to suffer from anxieties and depression (Robinson, 2010); they are more likely to be emotionally exhausted, cynical (Maslach et al. 2001), and unhappy in the workplace, as well as in their personal lives because of the inability to manage with work stresses (Gallup, 2006).

Disengaged employees have misgivings about their company in terms of customer satisfaction, providing little personal investment in customer focus, so the productive output of not-engaged and disengaged employees is much less than the output of engaged workers (Perrin, 2003). Employees with a low level of engagement have more accidents at work and more inventory shrinkage (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, & Asplund, 2006).

Disengaged employees do not advocate their company as a place to work and less often recommend their company's products or services (Baumruk, 2004). They are less innovative and creative, and do not tend to share new ideas with co-workers (Krueger & Killham, 2007). Disengaged employees often are not satisfied, not committed, and have an intention to leave their organization (Saks, 2006).

Prior notification of worker disengagement is employee physical absence from work, slowness, or behavior that shows withdrawal or high negativity (Branham, 2005). According to Pech and Slade (2006), the symptoms of employee disengagement also can be represented by low morale, mistakes, lack of energy, and lack of attachment. By probing the effects of disengagement on both the worker and the company, it is possible to determine that this phenomenon can cause substantial harm to the business. The only way to get protection from the effects of employee disengagement is to halt it by pinpointing and removing its causes.

2.6 The State of Non-Engagement

Non-engagement is the level of engagement when employees are not highly engaged or actively disengaged; this condition is some kind of "stuck in neutral position" (Sanford & Coffman, 2002). Not-engaged employees are not necessarily negatively disposed, but they do not have positive attitudes either. These employees spend their time and get their tasks done in accordance with organizational standards, but they do not have passion, enthusiasm, and the desire to put extra effort into their work. It happens because not-engaged employees do not feel a sense of achievement; in most cases, they are fixated on the process of doing the job instead of the results. They do the minimum they can in order only to accomplish the task. Not-engaged employees are stuck in a low-risk, low-commit mode being emotionally disconnected from their organization, their manager, or their workmates. They do not commit to work. As a result, not-engaged employees are likely to feel their contributions are being underestimated, and their potential is not being realized. (Sanford & Coffman, 2002)

According to Towers Perrin (2003), the large number of moderate or non-engaged employees is a challenge for the typical company right now. There is a risk for an employer that this group of people will slide towards the increasing disengagement with serious consequences on productivity and morale (Perrin, 2003). If this happens, improvement of the employee engagement level will become a more complicated and time-consuming process.

2.7 Kahn's Model of Engagement

During two of Kahn's qualitative studies (1990), he examined the psychological situations of individual engagement and disengagement at the task. Kahn interrogated employees of two different organizations about their moments of engagement and disengagement. The researcher stated that there are three psychological conditions that people experience at work, particularly, meaningfulness, safety, and availability. These psychological conditions are linked to personal engagement or disengagement. According to Kahn (1990), employees in each work situation unconsciously ask themselves three questions:

1. How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance?
2. How safe is it to do so? and,
3. How available am I to do so?

An empirical test of the model proposed by Kahn (May et. al., 2004) indicates that meaningfulness, safety, and availability have significant influence on engagement. There were also identified several important links:

- Job enrichment, as an attempt to make the work different and interesting, and also fit between the employee and his or her work role, is constructive forecaster of meaningfulness.
- Worthy relationships with work-mates and helpful supervisor relationships are constructive forecasters of safety
- Strict observance of workmate rules (rules within the groups and firm) and self-consciousness is destructive forecasters of safety.
- Accessibility of physical, emotional and cognitive workers' resources is a constructive forecaster of psychological availability.
- Contribution in external activities is a destructive forecaster of psychological availability (May, et. al., 2004).

2.8 Model of Task Engagement - Job Demand-Resources

Bakker and Demerouti (2008) reviewed qualitative and quantitative studies on work engagement in order to identify its antecedents and consequences. Basing on the findings of previous studies they developed an overall model of work engagement that can be used in today's workplace. The Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model of work engagement. The authors indicated that the main prognosticators of engagement are working resources (autonomy, performance feedback, supervisory coaching, etc.) and individual resources (optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, etc.). Predictors of engagement can take effect independently or be combined with other factors. When job demands are high, these resources have a positive impact on work engagement, which, in turn, has a positive influence on job performance. Engaged employees provide better performance. Therefore, they are able to generate their own resources, which over time facilitate engagement development and create a positive gain spiral. (Bakker & Demerouti (2008).

2.9 Saks Model Employee Engagement

Saks (2006) did a research that meant to examine a model of the antecedents and consequences of job and firm engagements. Results of tests done by Saks (2006) showed that there is a difference among the constructs of job engagement and organization engagement. The support provided by an organization is a positive predictor of both work and firm engagement. The work features considerably forecast work engagement. Procedural fairness is an important predictor of organizational engagement. Work and firm engagement are important prognosticators of work satisfaction, firm commitment, intentions to quit, and organizational citizenship behavior directed to organize. Saks (2006) asserted that employee engagement is a meaningful construct that should be studied more. Identification of other potential predictors of the phenomenon and possible effects of experimental interventions on employee engagement were offered by the researcher as issues for further studies.

2.10 Wage

Unequal or inferior pay edifices come under this group as well. While two or more workers perform almost alike work and have comparable accountabilities, variation in pay rate can lead to lower paid employees to leave the organization. Further, if the organization pays less than other employers for comparable work, workers are possible to jump ship for greater pay, if other aspects are comparatively equal. (Handelsman, 2009).

2.11 Organizational Environment

In one his study Kahn (1990) specified that interpersonal relationships encourage emotional safety if the organization provides support, trust, openness, flexibility and lack of threat. The results of the study done by May et al. (2004) showed that the relationship with the supervisor is also an important factor affecting employee engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and Saks (2006) confirmed that support from colleagues predicts engagement.

2.12 Safety

Safety is the ability to be oneself at work without fear of negative consequences. It means that individual feels safe to take the risk of self-expression understanding the boundaries between allowed and disallowed behaviors. Employees feel safe in situations that are trustworthy, predictable, consistent, and secure (Kahn, 1990)

2.13 Work-life Balance

It is pointed out by Penna (2005) that work-life balance, is an appropriate ordering between "work" (career and ambition) on one hand and "life" (outside activities and family) on the other, is an important predictor of employee engagement. Respondents to Penna's (2005) research pointed out that being able to leave work on time and enjoy a work-life balance creates a positive experience at work.

2.14 Ergonomics

Certain jobs or work conditions cause a greater rate worker grievance of unnecessary strain, localized exhaustion, uneasiness, or pain that does not move away after an overnight rest. These types of jobs are often those involving actions such as monotonous and vigorous exertions; recurrent, hefty, or overhead lifts; stropy work positions; or usage of vibrating instruments (NIOSH, 2003).

2.15 Welfare

Welfare services may be provided for matters concerning employees in terms of supplementing the income of the workers by providing services such as housing, medical assistance, canteens and recreation facilities (Manju & Mishra (2007). Priti (2009) argues that the role of welfare activities is to promote economic development by increasing efficiency and productivity with the underlying principle being made workers give their loyal services ungrudgingly in a genuine spirit of co-operation and the general well-being of the employee.

2.16 Work Environment

Guaranteeing acceptable amenities are provided to workers is vital to producing greater employee commitment and productivity. Providing insufficient instruments, and adverse working conditions have been shown to influence workers' commitment and intention to stay with the organization (Weiss, 1999).

2.17 Lack of Safety and Security

Generally, health and safety at work are closely interrelated to ensure personal and material working conditions. Occupational hygiene refers to norms and procedures aimed at protecting workers' physical and mental integrity, protecting them against health risks inherent to the type of tasks of the job and to the physical environment where these tasks are executed. Safety at work consist of the technical, educational, medical and psychological measures used to prevent accidents, either by eliminating unsafe conditions within the environment or instructing or convincing workers of the need to introduce preventive practices (Aço, 1998).

2.18 Poor Organizational Support

As we aware the Social Exchange Theory concentrates more on the stages a firm should take to enhance workers' commitment (Blua, 1964). Adding to this point Gouldner, (1960) indicates that workers should feel cared and respect from the firm in order to be more dedicated to reduce labor turnover and job changing. Organizational support has a constructive association with a worker's sense of perceived self-obligation to care for the organization's well-being in making sure that it reaches its goals (Eisenberger, et. al., 2001).

2.19 Lack of Individual Motivation

It is argued by Kahn (1990) that emotional variances may affect on persons' ability to attach or detach in their role enactment, just as they shape a person's capability and readiness to be involved or committed at work. Consequently, individuals would engage in different manner given their experiences of psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability in specific situations (Kahn, 1990). It is pointed out that when people feel circumstances as unsafe, it is a concern of individual difference, what coping strategies they deploy, and the extent to which they engage or disengage (Portello, 1996).

2.20 Workplace

Holbeche and Springett (2003) in their study indicate that person's views of 'meaning' in relation to the workplace are evidently connected to the levels of engagement and, eventually, their performance. The authors argue that workers enthusiastically seek meaning through their work and, unless the firm attempt to offer a sense of meaning, employees are likely to quit.

3. Problem Formulation

Oil palm plantations are operating with foreign workers from Indonesia and Philippines in the eastern part of Malaysia, especially the Sabah region. Since local people gradually detach from oil palm plantation work, and trying to engage them in other occupations, more and more foreign workers are in need to fill up vacant positions and the oil palm operations to smoothly to be run. While it is observed that the rate of employee attrition is high in oil palm plantations, especially in small holding plantations. In general, it is observed that large-scale organizations are making provision of better working and living conditions of the workers compared to small holding plantations. It is observed that many workers are working plantations are with illegal status recruited by contractors and sub-contractors that to meet the oil palm plantation operations. An initial field visit in the plantations where these foreign workers are more located was given a surface view about the working and living condition of the plantation employees. Since, Malaysian economy, to a certain extend depends on the oil palm

operations, the workers' productivity and performance is a factor to be serious to be looked into. It assumes that a fair and decent working and living conditions can ensure better engagement of the workers in the plantations. While the plantation workers are moving from one plantation to another due to several reasons associated with their working and living conditions. Hence, contemporarily, studies to be conducted to ascertain the factors that will lead to employee disengagement in the oil palm plantations. It is well evaluated that the foreign workers' movement would considerably affect the plantation operations, and it intern affect the economy as a whole. Since very less studies on foreign workers are conducted so far in the oil palm context an exploratory study, need to be conducted to explore the factors that correlated to employee disengagement at work.

4. Problem Statement

Hence, this particular study identifies its research topic as Why workers disengage? Factors from "head" or "heart" to be tagged on?

5. Research Methodology

The methodology of research followed in this study was Delphi technique which provided exploratory insight into major factors of working conditions and living conditions. The Delphi technique, mainly developed by Dalkey and Helmer (1963) at the Rand Corporation in the 1950s, is a extensively used and established technique for attaining merging of opinion regarding real-world knowledge besought from experts within definite theme areas. The Delphi technique is considered as a group communication process that targets of leading detailed investigations and deliberations of a specific issue for the purpose of goal-setting, policy examination, or forecasting the occurrence of future events (Ulschak, 1983; Turoff & Hiltz, 1996; Ludwig, 1997). The research engaged semi-structured interviews. Based on the suitable time for the resource person interviews were arranged, during March 2013 to middle November 2013. Direct interview is conducted to gather information from the respondents. 20 experts from the Plantation Managers, Plantation Workers, Mandors of Plantations, Officers of Consulate Indonesia, Officers of Detention Centers, Officers of Immigration, Humana (NGO), Schools for Migrant Workers, Trade Union Leaders, Contractors of Housing, Faculty Members and Dean of Social Sciences Universiti Malaysia, Sabah (UMS), and Research Scholars were identified and approached by email or telephone and were invited to take part in the study. All the clarifications related to the objective of the study were made by the researcher. However, 30 respondents were being interacted and communicated, only 20 respondents shown their willingness to participate in the discussion. Finally, 20 participants were interviewed directly. The conversations taped recorded, and manually analyzed. The procedural steps in adopting the Delphi technique were as follows.

5.1 Expert Panel Identification

The group of professional was made from specialists having high knowledge and expertise in plantation related. They are closely associated with plantation, as consultants, government body, Top-level managers, NGO, Consulate, Professors, Researchers and Academicians. The specialized areas of these expert members include, 12 male members (60%) and 8 female members (40%). These dynamic groups of panel of experts are knowledgeable and familiar to give relevant opinions and an admissible understanding of the employee disengagement.

5.2 Rounds

5.1.1 Round 1

In the first round, the Delphi process usually initiates with an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire attends as the keystone of soliciting precise information about a content area from the Delphi subjects (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999).

The questions:

1. How do you define employee disengagement?
2. Which are the major factors, in general closely related to employee disengagement?
3. Which are the major factors, in general closely related to employee disengagement with specific with oil palm plantation among foreign workers?

5.1.2 Round 2

In the second round, each Delphi member obtains a second questionnaire and is requested to analyze the items abridged by the investigators based on the data provided in the first round. Accordingly, Delphi panelists may be needed to rate or rank-order items to institute initial priorities among items. Because of round two, areas of incongruity and agreement are identified (Ludwig, 1994). In this round, consensus begins forming and the actual

outcomes can be presented among the participants' responses (Jacobs, 1996). Information regarding the employee disengagement collected from the respondents. The process identifies 103 categories, which are having items with high and low proximity of employee disengagement identified. Rating process further identified in the categories and items identified.

5.1.3 Round 3

In the third round, each Delphi panelist obtains a questionnaire that includes the categories and items ratings, abridged by the investigators in the previous round and are asked to revise his/her judgments or "to specify the reasons for remaining outside the consensus" (Pfeiffer, 1968). This round gives Delphi panelists an opportunity to make further clarifications of both the information and their judgments about the relative importance of the categories and items. Second level screening of the 103 categories which were having a high and low influence on employee disengagement identified with corresponding items. The process further identified 54 categories, which are having high and low proximity of the employee disengagement identified. Classification of the items in 64 categories of 2 factors was being made with appropriate loaded items. Thematic presentation and the categorization of the items were done.

5.1.4 Round 4

In the fourth and often final round, the list of remaining items, their ratings, minority opinions, and items achieving consensus are distributed to the panelists. This round provides a final opportunity for members to review their decisions. It should be recalled that the number of Delphi iterations is contingent largely on the degree of agreement sought by the investigators and can vary from three to five (Van de Ven & Gustafson, 1975; Ludwig, 1994). During fourth level, screening of the 30 categories, which were having, items with high and moderately high proximity of the employee disengagement identified. Sought the expert opinion on the appropriateness of the core factors selected for the study.

Table 1. Disengagement – Delphi analysis

BIP S/N	Factors	Categories	No. Items	No of Experts (N=20)	% of Experts
1	Education	Children Education	2	16	80%
		Transportation to school	2	16	80%
		Tuition fees	2	17	85%
		Future for next generation	1	16	80%
		Right to learn	2	16	80%
2	Benefit	No leave	1	16	80%
		Wages too low	2	18	90%
		Wages difference among gender	3	18	90%
		High Electricity charges	2	15	75%
		Health/ medical	3	16	80%
		Retirement	2	16	80%
		Insurance	2	17	85%
Maternity	2	15	75%		
3	Safety	Security	2	16	80%
		Ethnic clash	3	17	85%
		Sexual harassment	2	18	90%
		Hazardous jobs	3	17	85%
		Isolated workplace	2	18	90%
4	Support	Transportation	2	18	90%
		Training on Labor	2	15	75%

		Restrict movement	2	17	85%
		Occupational health	1	15	75%
		Social justice	2	16	80%
		Inadequate workers	2	16	80%
		No recognition	1	16	80%
		Work irregular	2	15	75%
		Temporary contract	2	16	80%
		Strict discipline	2	17	85%
		Protection tools	2	16	80%
5	Rule & Regulation	Protection Cloths difficulty	2	16	80%
		Rigid rules	2	15	80%
		Condition of employment	2	17	85%
		Unfair dismissal	2	17	80%
		Monoculture	2	15	75%
		Monotonous work	2	16	80%
6	Motivation	Poor Social entertainment	2	16	80%
		Religious facilities	3	16	80%
		No power and freedom	3	16	80%
		Work stress	3	17	85%
		Low Inner happiness	2	17	85%
		Workload	2	17	85%
		Abuse at work	2	17	85%
		Working hours	3	17	85%
7	Workplace	No harmony	3	15	75%
		Work discrimination	3	16	80%
		Low job satisfaction	2	17	85%
		Injustice at work	2	16	80%

The dimensions taken into account is the disengagement which comes with 7 factors to define the term which are education, benefit, safety, support, rule & regulation, motivation and workplace. Among the 20 experts identified 47 categories total and 100 items in disengagement. The 5 major categories with 9 items under education factor are tuition fees 85%, children education 80%, transportation to school 80%, the future for the next generation 80% and right to learn 80%.

The next factor is the benefit which consists 8 categories with 17 items such as wages too low 90%, wage difference between gender 90%, insurance 85%, no leave 80%, poor health or medical facilities 80%, retirement 80%, maternity leave issue 75% and high electricity charges 75%.

The third factor is safety included 5 categories and 12 items to explain the factor, which is sexual harassment 90% and isolated workplace 90%, is the highest highlight by the experts and followed by hazardous jobs 85%, ethnic clash 85% and security 80%.

The fourth factor identified by expert is supported with 9 categories and 16 items which cover transportation 90% restrict movement 85%, temporary contract 80%, no recognition 80%, inadequate workers 80%, social justice 80%, work irregular 75%, occupational health 75% and training on labor 75%.

The fifth factor identified by experts under the group of rule and regulation structure with 6 categories and 12 items are strict discipline 85%, condition of employment 85%, protection tools 80%, protection clothes difficulty during working 80%, rigid rules 80%, and unfair dismissal 80%.

The sixth is a motivation factor as identified by experts which will lead to disengagement are sub categories into 7 and 17 items such as low inner happiness 85%, work stress 85%, no power and freedom 80%, religious facilities 80%, poor social entertainment 80%, monotonous work 80% and monoculture 75%.

The final factor influence disengagement is the workplace, which refers the plantation sector, acknowledge by the experts during discussion. There are 7 categories with 17 items which are workload 85%, abuse at work 85%, working hours 85%, low job satisfaction 85%, work discrimination 80%, injustice at work 80% and no harmony among clan 75%.

6. Discussion

The objective of the present research was to identify and fix variable related to employee disengagement in Malaysia oil palm plantations. In order to explore the factors and categories related to employee engagement the study followed case study analysis, field observation and primary Delphi technique of quality research. The results of the study clearly lead us to focus on 7 factors and 47 categories related to employee disengagement in Malaysia oil palm plantations. A detailed discussion on employee disengagement factors are incorporated below.

The first factor identified by the experts in this particular research include the plantation workers dissatisfied towards the future of their children who are staying on the plantation devoid of proper education facilities. Many small holding plantations are not making provision of education to the children of plantation workers in and near to the plantation. Since the housing facilities arrange by the plantation to the plantation workers are very much deep inside the plantation the workers' children would not be able to travel to a nearby school, adding to that there is no transportation facilities arrange by the plantation management. In comparison with the wage, the workers are facing difficulty in paying regular monthly tuition fees for their child's education in school. In principle, the children of oil plantation are devoid off right to learn and educated. Giving due weightage to the future of children and their education workers of oil palm plantation do not want to continue their present job and their attitude clearly persecuted in employee disengagement at work.

One of the motivating factors which that influence employee stays back in any organization include the benefits that an organization extent to the employee. The benefits available from the organization develop attachment and detachment feeling among the workers at work. It is pointed out by the experts that wages, health facilities, medical facilities, insurance, maternity benefits, availability of leave and holidays, proper composition among male and female employees etc. correlated to employees feeling of attachment and further engagement at work. Contextualization oil palm plantation an especially to small holding majority health and wealth fare facilities are totally lacking. The workers are devoid of proper compensation packages, safety and security, adequate health and medical facilities. Transportation facilities, leave and holidays, retirement benefits etc. it is almost a kind of unorganized form of labor policy with which the employees are reluctant to continue their in the small oil palm plantation. It is rightly pointed out by Saks (2006), that disengaged employee often are not satisfied, not committed and have an intention to leave their organization. All the above mention factors related to employee benefits, which the expert in this study points out does lead to understand the complexity employee disengagement in small holding oil palm plantation.

The other factor pointed out by experts includes lack of safety employees feel at work leading to employee disengagement oil palm plantation. It is pointed out by many researchers like Kotowski, Davis, water-hose, (2003) that oil palm harvester are exposed to multiple risk factors leading to musculoskeletal disorder MSD. The workers are provided with many equipment conventional and more prompt to work injuries and accidents. Hence, this hazardous nature of jobs associated with oil palm plantation work leading to employee feelings of detachment. In additional to that the experts also pointed out the categories closely knit with isolated working condition in remote locations. Categories leading to employee disengagement also include the physical harassment both male and female workers faced from the mandor and the plantation manager. A quite different category identified by the expert in this study include the ethnic clash between clan coming from different country. It has been pointed out that many cases are reported on lack of adjustment between the clans and their switching over from one plantation to another collectively. The worker does feel lack of safety and security at work and leading to employee disengagement.

The next factor identified by the experts includes the support facilities provided by plantation management leading to employee disengagement at work. It is expected plantation workers that they should get a proper employment contract before they get into the work. In many situations, this contractual agreement does not observe because of the supply of labor done through the contractor and sub-contractor legally or illegally. The workers do not have a valid employment permit or the passport when they get into oil palm plantation for their work due to which there is nobody support these workers to get proper compensation and wealth fare facilities

and majority workers faces atrocities discrimination and injustice at work. Since the workers are not part of regular employment, the government seldom would be able to ensure proper health, security compensation packages and other wealth fare facilities. It has been rightly identified by the experts that the plantation management neglects these workers of oil palm plantations and there is no freedom, no recognition, no contractual obligation and further subjected to poor management support leading towards employee disengagement at work.

One of the major factors identified by the experts in relation to employee disengagement include rigid rule and regulation followed by the plantation management. As indicated elsewhere, the plantation workers are facing many challenges due to their lack of contractual employment and illegal status prevalent the host country. Many of the workers came to this plantation long years back. These workers, second and third generation are leaving in same plantation, with their extended families and without passport facing a unique condition of statelessness. This means that, these workers belong neither to their own motherland or belong to the host country. Due to which there are devoid of the protection from their own country as well as the host country. Unfair dismissal, lack of safety and security, rigid working condition, forces labor, strict discipline, discrimination, bonded labor etc. are quite common in oil palm plantation. All the above factors and the categories identified by the experts closely link to employee disengagement at work.

Motivated workforce is a blessing to any organization while there are lots of factors which affect employee motivation at work. Contextualizing the topic to oil palm plantation the experts identified 7 categories which closely link to employees lack of motivation and leading to employee disengagement at work. As it is pointed out oil palm plantation is situated far interior from town and cities. The workers engaged in oil palm plantation totally cut off from common life. One cannot expect so much of the variation in costume, practices and culture followed in plantation work. It is a form of monoculture and almost monotonous in nature. The nature of work circle around harvesting, pruning, fruit collection, loading and unloading of fruits like highly labor-intensive task. The work stress, which involves both physical and mental stress, is very high and there is less entertainment, leisure and freedom at work. It can be inferred from this field observation, case studies and expert opinion the workers in the oil plantation devoid of inner happiness and comfort of life. All these factors thus lead to employee disengagement at work.

The last factor pointed out by the experts include workplace environment, which is unique to plantation. As indicated above issues related to education, issues related to wealth fare and composition, work discrimination, work injustice, long working hours, the role of contractors and sub-contractors, the harassment and abuse at work, excessive workload etc. are all leading to employee's lack of motivation to work in oil palm plantation and leading to employee disengagement at work.

7. Model Development

The study has come out with a model, which is having a direct relationship with the employee disengagement at work in oil palm plantations. It can be illustrated as;

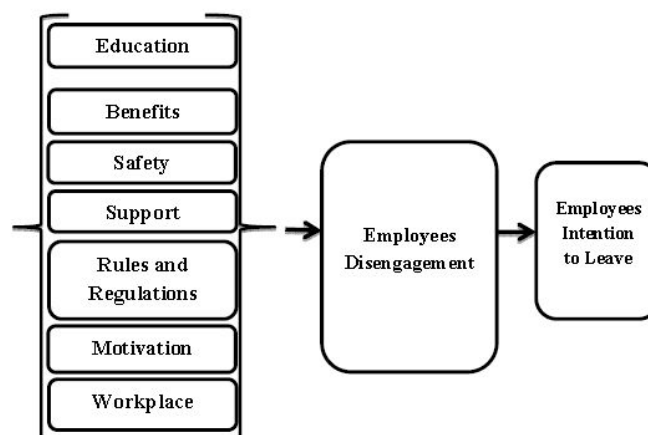


Figure 1. Model on disengagement

8. Implication

This particular study concentrates on identifying and fixing variable on employee disengagement in oil palm plantation. The study has pointed out major 7 factors (education, benefit, safety, support, rule and regulation, motivation and workplace) and 47 categories. These factors incorporated with employee disengagement in oil palm plantation several implications like policy, managerial, theoretical and methodological. Sticking to the major objective of identification and categorization factors correlated to employee disengagement. The study strictly followed the triangulation method of qualitative research like case analysis, field observation, interview and especially Delphi techniques of qualitative research. This indicated that the observation make out of triangulation will provide appropriate methodological validity. This further support the researcher to apply factor analysis with appropriate factor loading and the instrument which is developed out of this research may subjectively to the extensive level of quantitative research, contextualizing the topic to oil palm plantation. This particular research further evaluates, integrated and adopts a certain employee engagement model which may be considered as theoretical of the study.

Further, the factors and categories identified by the expert have far-reaching consequences in relation to employees disengagement it may lead to employee's intention to leave the plantation. Finally, these factors giving better inside of the government of Malaysia to keenly look into the factors related to the employees productivity and performance, which may affect contribution plantation to Malaysia economic development. Thus, these particular researches provide better understanding on issues related to employee disengagement in plantation thru qualitative research intervention.

9. Conclusion

This particular study was conducted to explore the factors pertaining to employee disengagement of workers in oil palm plantations in the Sabah region of Malaysia. The study followed Delhi technique and allied qualitative research methods to arrive at the factors and categories that are closely knit with employee disengagement oil palm plantations. The study indicates two major factors, which lead to possible employee disengagement viz., organizational factors, individual factors and Geographical factors. The organizational factors consist of categories like wage and welfare, safety, management, work environment,. The individual factors consist of health issues and motivation. While the geographical factors consist of many categories like, living in remote locations, issues of transportation, issues of hygiene, no access to better food drinking water, poor accommodation in remote areas, and wildlife issues. Thus the study identifies and fixes the variables which are closely linked to employee disengagement of workers in oil palm plantations, that support the future research with the support of quantitative research incorporating all these variables for validity and reliability.

References

- Aço, S. (1998). *Administration and management of human resources*. Professional Training. Didactic material. Luanda: Emosist.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13, 209-223. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13620430810870476>
- Baumruk, R. (2004). The missing link: The role of employee engagement in business success. *Workspan*, 47, 48-52.
- Blau, P. (1964). *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, Wiley, New York, NY.
- Branham, L. (2005). *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., Rexwinkel, B., Lynch, P. D., & Rhoades, L. (2001). Reciprocation of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(1), 42-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037//0021-9010.86.1.42>
- Gallup Organization. (2001). Gallup Study indicates actively disengaged workers cost U.S. hundreds of billions each year. *Gallup Management Journal*. Retrieved from <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/466/gallup-study-indicates-actively-disengagedworkers-cost-us-hundreds.aspx>
- Gallup Organization. (2006). *Feeling good matters in the workplace*. Gallup Management Journal. Retrieved from <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/20770/Gallup-Study-Feeling-Good-Matters-Workplace.aspx>
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25(2), 165-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2092623>

- Handelsman, J. (2009). *Understanding and Remediating Employee Turnover*. Retrieved November 14, 2009, from Business Owner's Toolkit: <http://www.toolkit.com/news/newsDetail.aspx?nid=138>
- Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., Killham, E. A., & Asplund, J. W. (2006). Q12 Meta-Analysis. Retrieved from http://strengths.gallup.com/private/Resources/Q12Meta-Analysis_Flyer_GEN_08%2008_BP.Pdf
- Holbeche, L., & Springett, N. (2003). *In Search of Meaning in the Workplace*. Horsham, Roffey Park.
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/256287>
- Kumar D. M. (2013). *Ways and Means of Research Method*. Research India Publication. New Delhi, India.
- Krueger, J., & Killham, E. (2007). The Innovation Equation. *Gallup Management Journal*. Towers Perrin, Global Work Force Study (2007-2008).
- Manju, B., & Mishra, S. (2007). *The Principles for Successful Implementation of Labour Welfare Activities. From Police Theory to Functional Theory*. Retrieved October 26, 2011, from <http://www.tesioline.com/intl/indepth.jsp?id=575>
- May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 77, 11-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1348/096317904322915892>
- Pech, R., & Slade, B. (2006). Employee disengagement: Is there evidence of a growing problem? In *Handbook of Business Strategy* (pp. 21-25).
- Penna Consulting P. L. C. (2005). *Meaning at work. Research report*. Retrieved November 23, 2010, from <http://www.penna.com/research/?pageIndex=2>
- Portello, J. (1996). *Dimensions of managerial and professional women's stress: Interpersonal conflict and distress*. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: the Sciences and Engineering, US: University Microfilms International, 57(6-B).
- Priti, S. (2009). *Employee Welfare*. Retrieved July 1, 2012, from <http://www.citehr.com/176307-employee-welfare.html#ixzz1zTZ8HheC>
- Robison, J. (2010). *Disengagement can be really depressing*. *Gallup Management Journal*. Retrieved May 17, 2010, from <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/127100/Disengagement-Really-Depressing.aspx>
- Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(7), 600-619. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690169>.
- Sanford, B., & Coffman, C. (2002). *Start worrying about "not engaged" employees*. Retrieved June 25, 2012, from <http://gmj.gallup.com/content/142/Start-Worrying-About-Not-Engaged-Employees.aspx>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 293-315. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/job.248>.
- Vajda, P. G., & Heart, S. (2008). *The thrill is gone - when employees disengage*. Retrieved June 23, 2013, from http://www.spiritheart.net/media/the_thrill_is_gonewhen_employees_disengage.pdf
- Weiss, E. M. (1999). Perceived Workplace Conditions and First-year Teachers Morale, Career Choice Commitment and Planned Retention: A Secondary Analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15, 861-879. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(99\)00040-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00040-2)
- Wellins, R., & Concelman, J. (2005). *Creating a culture for engagement*. *Workforce Performance Solutions*. Retrieved April 7, 2010, from http://www.ddiworld.com/pdf/wps_engagement_ar.pdf

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).