



Enhancing Malaysian SME Employee Work Engagement: The Mediating Role of Job Crafting in the Presence of Task Complexity, Self-Efficacy and Autonomy

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Currently, Malaysian SME organizations intend to enhance employee work engagement at the workplace through accessing them freedom of job design, enhanced employee's self-belief and meaningful and challenging tasks. The purpose of this study is to identify the work engagement level of the employees of Malaysian SMEs with the mediating role of job crafting in the presence of autonomy, task complexity and self-efficacy. This study was quantitative and utilized PLS-SEM version 3 to analyze the data. Sample size was 300 and 5 the point Likert scale random sampling technique was used for data collection. The findings of this study show that in order to sustain competitive edge, worker's engagement is very critical to sustain the Malaysian SME employees. Moreover, the mediating role of job crafting has very crucial influence on the work engagement level of the employees. Secondly, a higher level of autonomy and self-efficacy ensure the job crafting has a positive effect resulting in production of a higher level of work engagement. The level of task complexity in this study also enables the employees to perform tasks independently and that evidently boosts their work engagement. Future studies could be conducted on a moderator such as organizational culture and mediation organizational citizenship behavior or perceived organizational support etc. to further add to this field of investigation.



Key words: *Autonomy, Task Complexity, Self-efficacy, Job crafting, Work engagement.*

Introduction

A number of researchers have observed that highly engaged employees generate a highly competitive edge for organizations (Oentoro & Popaitoon, 2017). Earlier studies identified the constructive connectivity between employee work engagement and a firm's performance (Nazir & Islam, 2017; Lynch & Madden, 2017). Moreover, in academic literature regarding the employees, it is of note that work engagement has a positive effect resulting in employees who are full of energy and demonstrate a work-related state of mind reflected by concentration, energy and dedication (Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2017). This concept has gained a very significant amount of importance as the initial findings prove the positive association between employee work engagement and performance (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017). In recent times, Kang and Sung (2017) conducted a study on 438 service sector employees of south Korea and found that internal communication process has emerged as the main predictor of employee engagement and ultimately ensured the higher level of employee performances.

Based on these research findings researchers have agreed that priority in order to increase the level of employee engagement (Bakker, 2011; Myambo, & Munyanyi, 2017) is the key. Moreover, a number of observations have identified those factors that play their role in the enhancement of employee engagement and indicate the gap for future research in this field. However, lot of studies have focused on some personal factors like self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) and researchers further argued that in the development of employees' job attitude, contextual factors play very critical role (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). Furthermore, Presbitero (2017) explained that specifically for the service sector, employee work engagement is considered a very important tool because employee level of engagement is pretty much dependent on job-related aspects like human resource management (HRM) practices. Additionally, Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) established that the connectivity between employee engagement and HRM practices is still under studied and that there is a need for more research in the field of HRM.

Problem Statement and Background of the Study

In the Malaysian context, the performance of SMEs regarding their role and contribution for the economy leaves much to be desired. This problem needs to be addressed because this situation not only negatively affects the performance of the SMEs but also the country's vision of becoming a high income nation by 2020 could be at risk (Rashid & bin Mohd Harif, 2015; Myambo, & Munyanyi, 2017). A number of studies identified Malaysian SMEs with a low

productivity level. To support this, the census 2005 results of Establishment and Enterprises illustrated that in comparison with large firms the productivity level of Malaysian SMEs was critically low and that they only added value of RM0.3 per establishment comparatively with large enterprises who added value of RM41 million per establishment. Further, employees are also demotivated to perform well (Ahammad, Tarba, Liu, and Glaister, 2016) and organizations find themselves incapable of retaining talented workers (Fauzi, Ahmad, and Gelaidan, 2013) and in SMEs, employee low work engagement has become the critical issue that needs to be resolved. For that reason, further research is needed on employee work engagement in Malaysian SMEs. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to determine what motivates employee work engagement to boost the performance of Malaysian SMEs performance through organizational factors: autonomy, task complexity, self-efficacy and job crafting.

Figure 1. Employee Engagement Score

Southeast Asia Trends in Employee Engagement Scores



The Southeast Asia scores present an inverse pattern to the Asia Pacific scores. This graph represents the decline in Malaysian worker's work engagement which has dropped by 53% from 60% in the year 2011 to 2012. The reason behind this decreased work engagement of Malaysian employees is the unstable economic and political condition of the country.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the association of autonomy with job crafting
2. To examine the association of job crafting with work engagement
3. To examine the link of self-efficacy with job crafting
4. To find out the connectivity of task complexity with job crafting
5. To observe the mediating role of job crafting among the association between autonomy and work engagement

6. To observe the mediating role of job crafting among the association between self-efficacy and work engagement.
7. To observe the mediating role of job crafting among the association between task complexity and work engagement.

Literature Review

Autonomy

Chiniara and Bentein (2016) explained the concept of autonomy as being to what extent employees are given free hand to schedule their work without any restriction and how independent they are in utilizing the methods which are helpful for them to perform their daily job tasks and activities. Employees with high level of autonomy are likely to indulge themselves in job crafting activities, in comparison with those employees who are not given a significant amount of freedom, so in this situation such employees will not be willing to bring certain changes which are required to perform the job effectively (Gözükara & Şimşek, 2015; Oluwaseun, & Boboye, 2017). A study conducted by Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton (2010) on how employees at different levels strive for job crafting showed that employees with lower autonomy considered that their formal job designs paid attention on both the ends and means about how the performance prevail at work. Such job designs precisely explain how workers need to devote their energy and time, therefore diminishing the opportunities for employees to engage in job crafting activities.

Abrahams (2014) further explained that autonomy also represents the state of being independent when performing the job tasks. Another aspect which Ghitulescu (2007) represents is that employees with high level interdependence are likely to face more problems when they try to bring changes in their job tasks and association at the workplace, because on the job, they have to consider the actions and work of their co-workers. Employees, who are given higher levels of task independence, don't pay much attention on other workers and this supports the employees as they strive for change in their jobs, and likewise such changes don't effect the work of their co-workers. Giebels, de Reuver, Rispens, and Ufkes (2016) further describe that a higher level of autonomy enables the employees to acquire new skills that helps them in boosting their experiences and taking responsibility when tackling problems more effectively at the job. Dhar (2016) elaborated that employees who enjoy higher levels of autonomy are identified with a variety of skills and knowledge which is very critical for their job role and therefore those employees would indulge themselves in worthwhile activities, so this behavior leads towards the job crafting behavior.

Task Complexity

Task complexity represents the level of ease and or difficulty with which employees fulfil their jobs (Ghitulescu, 2007). Complexity of task enhances the resources, skills and knowledge of the workers and enables them, progressively, to face more challenging situations proficiently. Thus it is quite important to clear the difference between to what extent the job holder assumes the task complexity itself and how much complexity the actual tasks entail. Relating to this study, complexity of tasks is described as an individual's perception of the level of difficulty and complexity of the tasks, for example subjective task complexity (Abrahams, 2014; Naghavi, & Mubarik S., 2018). When employees feel that the assigned task is tough then in order to complete such tasks successfully, employees seek resources.

Resources which employees seek in performing a complex job task include support and feedback from supervisors and co-workers, by sourcing this support and feedback, workers become aware of necessary changes and improvements required for the effective completion of their job. Researchers Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) explained that complex of tasks demand the critical skills because such tasks are challenging and demanding and for that reason they positively affect the employee's motivational levels. Haji, Rojas, Childs, de Ribaupierre, and Dubrowski (2015) stated that task complexity can also be regarded as environmental supports which enhance the value of the employee imitative which has been used to perform the job effectively and independently.

Self-efficacy

Tims and Bakker (2010) defined self-efficacy as the important predictor for employees to indulge in the practices of job crafting. Mauer, Neergaard, and Linstad (2017) described "self-efficacy as 'personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals'". "The concept of self-efficacy further is explained by Hsu, Wiklund, and Cotton (2017) as a person's belief in his/her 'capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands' (Hsu et al., 2017). Employees with high level self-efficacy show more motivation about the assigned job tasks because they are sure that they possess the requisite skills which makes task completion successful (Hu, Huhmann, & Hyman, 2007). Employees naturally become more efficient when they possess a higher level of self-efficacy and their determination and motivation produce greater results in job performances. Alternately, employees with low level self-efficacy tend to give up easily when faced with difficulty in their jobs and such attitudes assure their failure towards task completion (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). Erez and Judge (2001) stated that generally, self-efficacy might affect the level of employees' job satisfaction via its connectivity with the practical achievement on the job.

Moreover, it was further debated that employees with high levels of self-efficacy show courage when faced with difficult circumstances on the job and through the power of self-efficacy they perform better, and consequently based on this scenario such employees achieve very valued results that ultimately create highly satisfied employees. Likewise, self-efficacy also works as a very important resource for the employees at work. This statement has been supported by Abrahams (2014), he stated that employees' wellness and motivation level is affected by the level of self-efficacy and therefore self-efficacy might be taken as a very important predictor for the process of job crafting. Similarly, employees with high levels of self-efficacy show confidence in their capabilities and confidently make alterations in their jobs and environment whenever needed, on the contrary, employees with low level self-efficacy show reservations in their skills and capabilities which affect their attitude towards the job.

Job Crafting

Job crafting from the perspective of the workplace is the ongoing process that employees experience and through this process workers bring lot of changes physically and psychologically in their relational boundaries and jobs (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013). Such changes are impulsive and management don't interfere in this matter, moreover these alterations facilitate the employees to better fit their jobs and align their needs, preferences, knowledge and skills with the assigned job demands (Bakker, 2011). Job crafting is also regarded as a proactive behavior that make the employees adaptive to face the challenges and constraints of the working environment (Berg et al., 2010; Sanchez, 2018). Currently, the business world is facing rapid continuous change, so employees strive for job crafting activities that help them to perform their job effectively and also prepare them to confidently cope with rapid changes (Grant & Parker, 2009).

Job crafters are particularly focused on the different aspects of their job and while physically they bring some modifications regarding the boundaries of the job; cognitively, they bring changes in the manner in which job tasks are connected with each other; and from the relational point of view, they make some changes in their set boundaries of relationships and interactions with their co-workers on the job (Tims et al., 2013; Obodo, 2018). Job crafting has been observed as the predictor of enhancing work engagement of those workers who become dissatisfied with their jobs. Employees work engagement has been positively affected by job crafting (Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013). Further, according to Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) job crafting also facilitate the actions of employees that engage them in proactive activities and encourage them towards higher performance.

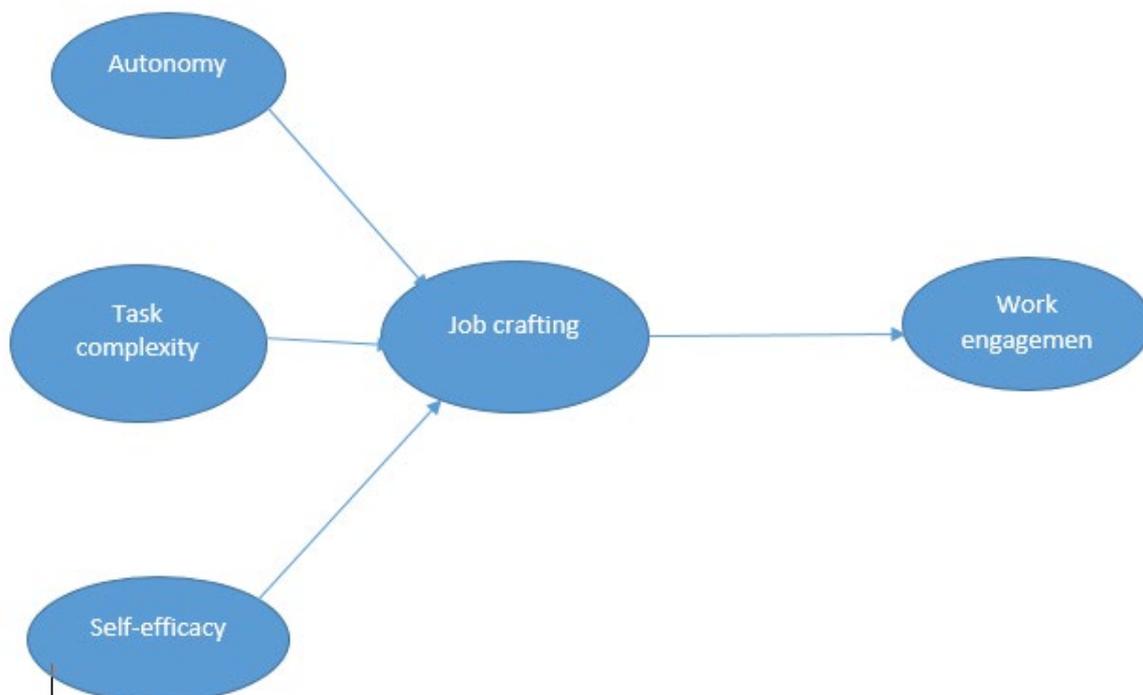
Work Engagement

Work engagement refers to the connectivity that employees develop with their work patterns (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). Moreover, work engagement is considered

a motivational tool for the employees and represents the feelings that they experience at the job (Sangperm, 2017). Work engagement is also measured by concentration, dedication and vigor. Moreover, vigor refers to energy, identification and dedication, whereas absorption is considered concentration (Bhargkavi, 2017; Olowa, 2018; Hussain, Sallehuddin, Shamsudin, & Jabarullah, 2018). Work engagement works differently from the concept of job involvement. In this context, work engagement is mainly concerned with how employees make effective use of their emotions, cognitions and behavior, on the other hand job involvement is referred to as what extent employees involves themselves in the duration of job performance.

Engaged workers become more active in their jobs and try to build important connections with their co-workers as they sense that their assigned tasks are quite challenging instead of damaging (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Fatula, 2018). Similarly, when employees are highly engaged in their jobs they show positive attitude, for example decreased absenteeism and decreased turnover rate has been observed when there is high level of work engagement and moreover, these employees exhibit positive emotions and good health both physically and psychologically (Bhargkavi, 2017). On the same note, research showed that level of work engagement varies from employee to employee based on the level of task and work activities that are part of the job (Bakker, 2011). Moreover, task significance also determines the level of employee work engagement (Olkiewicz, 2018).

Framework



Research Hypothesis

1. Positive connectivity has been measured between autonomy and job crafting
2. Positive connectivity has been measured between job crafting and work engagement
3. Positive connectivity has been measured between self-efficacy and job crafting
4. Positive connectivity has been measured between task complexity and job crafting
5. Positive mediating role of job crafting has been examined between autonomy and work engagement
6. Positive mediating role of job crafting has been observed between self-efficacy and work engagement
7. Positive mediating role of job crafting has been observed between task complexity and work engagement

Research Methodology

The population of this study was comprised of managerial staff of Malaysian SMEs as respondents. The managerial staff means those employees who have a managerial position and seek empowerment and are open to innovation.

These SMEs were available on the website of “Malaysian SME Business Directory by SME Info Portal” as a selected sample for this study. The registered or listed SMEs consists of all business sectors e.g., manufacturing-related services, manufacturing, services and Information Communication Technology and these SMEs were the population of this study. Responses were collected in the form of a questionnaire through an email survey. The 5 point Likert type scale was used to measure the responses. Basically, this type of scale is used to enhance the level of response rate and quality. This scale ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Further cluster sampling was used to collect the responses. This formation was bases of Malaysian states. Every state was selected as only one cluster and 5 cluster means 5 states were selected. Therefore, this study selected “Kedah, Kuala Lumpur/Selangor, Johor, Sabah, and Terengganu”. After this process, respondents were selected from each cluster randomly. Many researchers suggest this process for cluster sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Okon, 2017).

Sample Size

Mundfrom, Shaw, and Ke (2005) stated that a 300 respondent sample size is good for a large population. Accordingly, a 300 sample size was taken in the current study. Smart PLS as a statistical tool was used to analyze the responses. This tool was selected on the basis of sample size. In this study, the response rate was 119 valid responses which could be used further to analyze the data. For the PLS 3, it is not necessary to use a large data base (Hair Jr, Babin, &

Krey, 2017). Many studies have been used small data for PLS as PLS has the statistical power to analyze small data (Rigdon, 2016).

Figure 2. Measurement Model Assessment

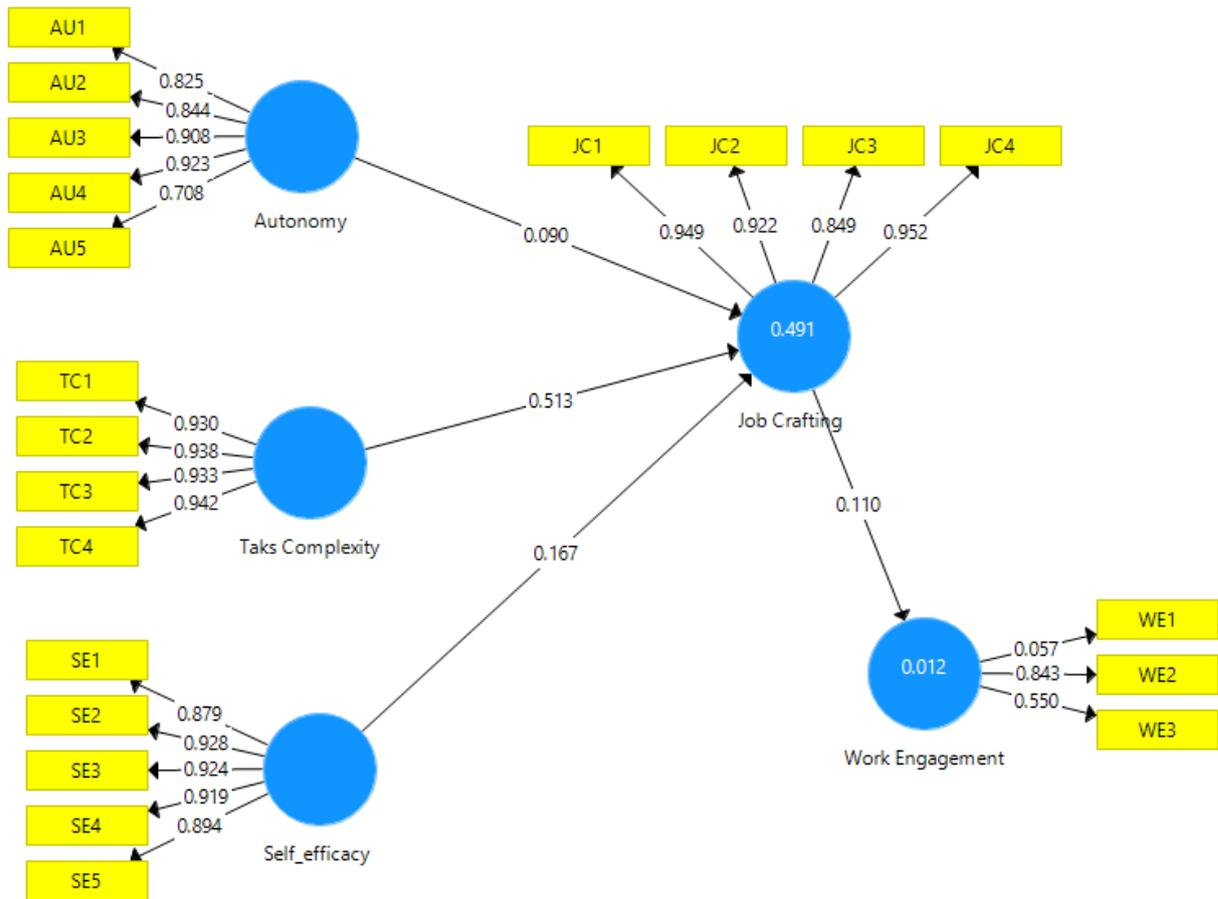


Table 1: CR and AVE

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Autonomy	0.899	0.925	0.714
Job Crafting	0.938	0.956	0.844
Self-efficacy	0.948	0.960	0.826
Tasks Complexity	0.953	0.966	0.875
Work Engagement	0.853	0.957	0.851

A test of reliability was used to examine the consistency and a test of convergent validity was also used to measure the consistency (Surienty, Ramayah, Lo, & Tarmizi, 2014). Factor loading values of each item should be significant at the level of 0.05 p value. Further, Composite

reliability was used to examine the overall reliability of each variable since similar collection of items or heterogeneous items and its value would be greater than 0.70 (Mihail & Kloutsiniotis, 2016). All variables achieved the threshold level which is 0.70 for alpha (Mihail & Kloutsiniotis, 2016). The values of AVE greater than the level of threshold value 0.50. Each item which is greater than or equal to 0.50, other should be deleted. So, in the current study all items of each construct were greater than 0.50.

All reflective variables in Discriminant validity measured in the model through Fornell-Lacker criteria. The AVE values were compared to the correlation of each variable and these values of AVE would be above correlation values (Mihail & Kloutsiniotis, 2016).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	Autonomy	Job Crafting	Self-efficacy	Tasks Complexity	Work Engagement
Autonomy	0.845				
Job Crafting	0.565	0.818			
Self-efficacy	0.552	0.769	0.792		
Tasks Complexity	0.547	0.752	0.754	0.719	
Work Engagement	0.502	0.719	0.692	0.705	0.691

Table 3: Structural Model Assessment (Results)

Relationship	(β)	(STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
AU→JC	0.09	0.088	3.107	0.000	Supported
JC→WE	0.11	0.168	3.193	0.001	Supported
SE→JC	0.17	0.118	3.101	0.000	Supported
TC→JC	0.51	0.138	5.192	0.002	Supported

Direct effect of measurement assessment model in table 3 was recognized that all these relations with value of t which is greater than 1.96 at p value 0.05. So, these associations are significant, value of β shows positive relation.

Fitted model in table 3 shows the results and explains the direct relations among exogenous constructs and endogenous construct.

The exogenous variable, Autonomy has a direct effect on job crafting. Similarly, The exogenous variable, job crafting has a direct effect on work engagement. Likewise, The exogenous variable, self-efficacy has a direct effect on Job crafting, The exogenous variable, tasks complexity has a direct effect on job crafting. Thus, the H1, H2, H3 and H4 of the study

are supported. The results display a significant relationship among exogenous and endogenous variables with the significant level at 0.05%.

Table 4: Structural Model Assessment (Results)

Relationship	(β)	(STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
AU→JC→WE	0.19	0.158	4.172	0.001	Supported
SE→JC→WE	0.23	0.214	4.293	0.000	Supported
TC→JC→WE	0.12	0.213	3.492	0.000	Supported

Mediation effect through method bootstrapping might be used along with 2000 drawn sample at p value 0.005 level (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).

In table 4, the indirect effect of mediation, t value is greater than 1.96 which signifies the all mediating hypothesis. However, job crafting mediates the relationship between autonomy and work engagement. Similarly, job crafting mediates the relationship between tasks complexity and work engagement. Likewise, job crafting mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement.

Table 5: R-Square (R²) Value

Latent Variables	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Job Crafting	0.491	0.475
Work Engagement	0.387	0.364

Furthermore, in table 5, R² values job crafting and work engagement are respectively 0.49 and 0.387 these values of R² are moderate. It is demonstrated that autonomy, tasks complexity and self-efficacy are expected to explain 49 % of variance in job crafting. Similarly, job crafting is expected to explain 39 % of variance in work engagement.

Discussion

The objective of the study focused on the effect of job crafting on work engagement in the presence of employee autonomy, employee's self-efficacy and employee's perception of tasks complexity. Statistical analysis shows that autonomy and job crafting, value of t is 3.107 ($t > 1.96$) with β -value is 0.09. This result supports H1 and shows that autonomy and job crafting have significant positive relationship. Thus, increase in autonomy enhances the level of job crafting. Therefore as to the 1st objective of the study, it is found that autonomy makes a major contribution to job crafting. Similarly, job crafting and work engagement, value of t is 3.193 ($t > 1.96$) with β -value is 0.11 and this result supports H2. Thus, job crafting and work engagement have a significant positive relationship. Increase in job crafting enhances the work

engagement and as to the 2nd objective of the study, it is found that job crafting makes a contribution to work engagement.

Similarly, self-efficacy and job crafting, value of t is 3.101 ($t > 1.96$) with β -value is 0.17. This result supports H3 and displays that self-efficacy and job crafting have a positive significant relationship. Increase in self-efficacy enhances the job crafting and thus, the 3rd objective of the study finds that self-efficacy makes a contribution to job crafting. Similarly, task complexity and job crafting, value of t is 5.192 ($t > 1.96$) with β -value is 0.51 and this result supports H4. It displays that task complexity and job crafting have a significant positive relationship. Increase in task complexity enhances the job crafting and thus, the 4th objective of the study finds that task complexity makes a contribution to job crafting.

Statistical results support the mediating role of job crafting between autonomy and work engagement as the value of t is 4.172 ($t > 1.96$) with value of β is 0.19. In the case of mediation of job crafting, the relationship between autonomy and work engagement with value of t is 4.172 with β -value 0.19 and supports H5. Thus, job crafting mediates the relationship between autonomy and work engagement significantly. Statistical results further support the mediating role of job crafting between self-efficacy and work engagement as the value of t is 4.293 ($t > 1.96$) with value of β is 0.23. In the case of mediation of job crafting, the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement with value of t is 4.293 with β -value 0.23 which supports H6. Thus, job crafting mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement significantly. Finally, the mediating role of job crafting between task complexity and work engagement as the value of t is 3.492 ($t > 1.96$) with value of β is 0.12. In the case of mediation of job crafting, the relationship between task complexity and work engagement with value of t is 3.492 with β -value 0.12 supports H7. Thus, job crafting mediates the relationship between task complexity and work engagement significantly

Conclusion of the Study

This study has deepened the understanding of the concept of work engagement with the mediating role of job crafting in the presence of autonomy, task complexity and self-efficacy. The findings clearly show that job crafting plays a very positive role in enhancing the work engagement of those employees who work in Malaysian SMEs. This study also explored whether a higher level of autonomy and self-efficacy ensures the job crafting in a positive way such that it ultimately produces higher levels of work engagement. Moreover, the level of task complexity was found to enable employees to perform the tasks independently and task complexity also engaged the employees at a higher level. These positive findings also ensure the higher performance of Malaysian SMEs, and Malaysia aspires to be known as a high income nation by 2020. Moreover, for any country, the role of SMEs is particularly very important for economic development.



Limitation of the Study and Future Research

Future studies could be conducted on a moderator such as organizational culture and mediation organizational citizenship behavior or perceived organizational support etc. In the current study, the first limitation is sample size of 300 and in future studies this could aim to be 500 or more. The generalizability and validity both are a concern with regard to the limited size of the sample in this study. Secondly, it is a limitation that self-report data was collected. The third limitation is that the study used data collected from only one country, Malaysia. A final limitation is that the data taken from the one country Malaysia, was specific only to the SME sector. Due to the above limitations it must be noted that the data may be affected with regards to validity and generalizability which could render the findings ineffective for another country. Therefore, further studies should collect data from other Asian countries.

Implications of the Study

The results of the current study establish that job crafting mediates the relationship of autonomy, task complexity and self-efficacy with work engagement. This study contributes to the current literature on the effect of job crafting on work engagement in the presence of autonomy, task complexity, and self-efficacy in the context of Malaysian SMEs. This study presents practical implications for employees and their motivation in Malaysian contexts. Firstly, as job crafting was found to affect work engagement, job crafting should be measured as an important specific expansion at workplace. Job crafting seemed to be an unknown term. The employees should be made aware of job crafting techniques so they can learn how to practice skills of job crafting in their role and accordingly they might amend task-related features of the job. Altering aspects of their allocated tasks can enliven their energy, appeal to creativity and might move employees out of their comfort zone, encouraging them to make the effort to try novel things. Ultimately, the findings suggests auspicious results which indicate that job crafting is an important procedure relating to work engagement and autonomy, task complexity and self-efficacy. Job crafting, in fact, is developing as new subject matter of concern to Malaysian SMEs and the current study hopes to stimulate future research in this field.



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