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THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PRACTICES ON EXECUTIVES' PERFORMANCE IN MANUFACTURING FIRMS AT KULIM HI-TECH PARK, KULIM, KEDAH, MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to assess the extent of the role of employee relations and their contribution to the performance of executives in manufacturing firms. Methodology in this study was built where a questionnaire was designed for data collection to measure employee relations-related communication sessions, employee representative committee, harmonious atmosphere, providing fair treatment and counseling to improve satisfaction on executives' performance. Data were collected among executives in manufacturing firms at Kulim Hi-tech Park, Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia. A stratified sampling method was used to collect data and the data obtained were analyzed using SmartPls 3.7.8. The finding of this study found that there is a significant relationship between communication sessions, employee representative committee, harmonious atmosphere, fair treatment, and counseling sessions to improve satisfaction on executives' performance. It is proved from SmartPls analysis shown that all independent variables have a positive impact on executives' performance in manufacturing firms. The limitation of the study only covers the manufacturing firms. Another limitation is the respondents only included executives. Apart from these limitations, this study can give a strong impact on the top management of manufacturing firms to design the strategy of employee relations to be more effective in improving the work performance of executives.

Keywords:

Employee Relations, Communication Sessions, Employee Representative Committee, Harmonious Atmosphere, Fair Treatment and Counseling Session, Executives' Performance

Introduction

Employee relations are defined as practices in an organization to create and maintain good relationships among its employees (Philips, Michle & Boerman, 2017; Nishanthi, 2018). Employee relations involved two-way communication sessions between employees and top management, taking care of problems faced by employees and working to resolve problems arising between employees, and establishing an employee representative committee (ERC) to convey any information related to issues in the organization to be consulted jointly with the organization's superiors, create a harmonious atmosphere to increase employees motivation to work more aggressively, play a role in providing fair treatment to all employees in performing a given task and responsibilities, provided advice and counseling to improve satisfaction among employees and job performance as well as playing an effective role in corporate social responsibility (CSR) effectively (Mickle & Dorman, 2018; Rahman & Taniya, 2017). By maintaining positive and constructive employee relationships, the organization hopes that its employees will always be involved in activities involving the organization as a platform to strengthen the relationship between employees and the organization (Bratton & Gold, 2017; Cascio, 2017; Berman, Bowman & Van- Wart, 2019).

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objectives

1. To identify the relationship between communication session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.
2. To examine the relationship between counseling session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.
3. To evaluate the relationship between employee representative committee on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.
4. To find out the relationship between fair treatment on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.
5. To evaluate the relationship between harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between communication session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms?
2. Is there any significant relationship between counseling session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms?
3. Is there any significant relationship between employee representative committee on executives' performance in manufacturing firms?
4. Is there any significant relationship between fair treatment on executives' performance in manufacturing firms?
5. Is there any significant relationship between harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance in manufacturing firms?

Literature Review

Communication Sessions

Ali, Lei, and Wei (2018) in their study, on the role of employee relations and human resource management strategies on the job performance of employees and organizations, found that in

employee relations, human resource management through employee relations in the organization has the main function of helping to prevent discrepancies in between employees and top management of the organization through communication session. In maintaining a positive working relationship, an organization should first view its employees as an important asset in playing a role as a major contributor to the growth and profitability of the organization (James, Sammuell & Hang, 2017; Mickle & Dorman, 2018).

The communication session approach is very effective to encourage employees in the organization to give positive feedback to the organization, recognition of the achievement of excellent work performance, and consider all opinions among employees when making a decision involving mutual interests between employees and management of the organization. In addition, organizations that have a role in good employee relations enjoy many benefits. In general, it is easier for employees to engage, motivate, understand and care for them better. There are many benefits to be gained by both parties when employee relations play a role more efficiently and effectively in a productive workplace environment. Based on the research that has been done, employees' involvement in communication can have a positive impact on each employee to share, review and update on any current situation in the organization to be shared and discussed jointly with both parties, encouraging open communication on issues faced collectively in the organization through communication session and idea-sharing, focusing on any feedback provided by employees and recognizing them consistently as well as emphasizing and explaining the importance of employees involved in activities in the organization to enable both parties to reach an agreement in resolving the problems that occur. Employee relations can also directly produce a high level of job satisfaction among the organization's employees, increase productivity and quality of work, low retention and loyalty to the organization, motivation, perseverance, can build experience as a result of a constructive communication session and always maintain a positive work culture among employees in the organization (Hanaysha, 2016; Samwel, 2018).

Counseling Session

Counseling is a professional help process that aims to help employees understand themselves and their environment. Managers in industrial relations try to listen, provide good service and understand the issues faced by employees. While employees describe the issues and understand and take action to manage the issues faced. Managers accept and respect their employees and build positive relationships between them (Aziz & Umaru, 2016; Duah & Danso, 2017). The role that can be played as a counselor manager must be based on the knowledge of proper guidance and counseling to be able to deal with problems among employees and successfully turn on the real function of guidance and counseling in the workplace. Helping employees to understand themselves concerning the social and psychological world in the workplace. It also means that a counselor's role is to help employees so that employees can recognize who they are and can make meaningful relationships with the world around them in terms of socialization and psychology. The most important task of a counselor manager is to help employees find and understand the attitudes, interests, talents, and abilities of employees to grow well, understand the opportunities that employees have as a result of their discussions obtained for the process towards perfection self as well as the relationship between all the elements that have been stated solely to find the balance of self as desired by the wishes of each employee (Egwuonwu, 2017; Fischer, Greiff & Funke, 2019).

Assist employees to behave by their talents, interests, attitudes, abilities, and opportunities for self-fulfillment. Counselor managers in industrial relations also have a role to help employees to be able to prepare for their interests and talents and abilities. All actions done by employees must be in line with what they want so that they have the opportunity to achieve their job goals and direction of good job performance (Gong, Zhao, Wang & Yu, 2018; Gupta & Singh, 2019). For example, if we take the point of view of the interests and ambitions of an employee who wants and has a tendency towards becoming a high-performing job, then the role of industrial relations manager as a counselor is to provide guidance and some suggestions appropriate to interest and provide guidance on the job and skills that must be mastered by an employee if the employee wants to achieve the maximum level of job performance, self-based on what the employee wants. Helping each employee to understand the needs of the individual and providing additional information and consulting assistance is intended to help them better understand the employee. A counselor manager's role is to help not only employees but too involved the whole organization so that they understand the need for personal needs and rights that belong to an employee to be respected. have the right to seek guidance and counseling from their counselor manager if they wish to do so and also counselor managers also have the right to call troubled employees to seek counseling expertise. This is to ensure that each employee can perform the task better. The results of this study also found that the role of counseling has a significant relationship with job performance. Counseling sessions that are in line with organizational goals have a positive impact on job performance (Hartoyo, 2017; Hassan, 2018).

Employee Representative Committee

Villajos, Garc, and Topa (2019) in their study, the role of the employee representatives committee (ERC) and its impact on job engagement and job performance. In this study, it was found that there is a significant relationship between employees' involvement as employee representatives with job satisfaction and performance. The employee representative association has the role of obtaining information on specific issues involving employees such as promotions, bonuses, salary increments, promotion opportunities for internal employees, and preference for local employees over foreign workers to be proposed to top management to take a supportive approach recommendation given. The association of employee representatives committee discussed with employees' representatives from each department to get the latest information and these proposals were discussed in a communication session between the two parties. The results of this study found that each employee was able to convey their views to the employee association representative as a representative of the entire employees and this directly provided a stimulus for each employee to be satisfied with their suggestions and opinions receiving attention by top management to review whether appropriate to implement (Hanaysha, 2016; Laroche, Salesina, 2017). Employee relations that serve to strengthen the relationship between employees and top management are very concerned in activities involving employees' involvement to be communicated to top management as a contributing factor to high levels of satisfaction and situation this gives the best result of high job performance among the employees in the organization (Hatane, 2015; Saed, 2017).

Fair Treatment

Currie, Gormley, Roche, and Teague (2017) found that each employee has their personality and character and differs from each other, and efforts towards the formation of good fair treatment often give rise to various misunderstandings especially disputes involved in work as well as disputes about an employee's attitude with other employees toward work commitment.

The management of the organization needs to provide fair treatment for each employee to be treated equally with other employees. Providing fair treatment can overcome any problems that disrupt the workplace environment that can prevent work performance from being affected. This study also found that providing fair treatment to every employee is important in ensuring that work performance can be maintained and productivity continues to increase. Providing fair treatment should be given attention so that good relations between each employee and top management in the organization are maintained.

Morais (2017) stressed that providing fair treatment that emphasized the importance of balanced employee relations leads to a sense of satisfaction between the interests of employee welfare and the top management of the organization. This study found that providing fair treatment that tends towards increased productivity caused employees to feel satisfied to enjoy their jobs. The feeling of love built from providing fair treatment causes employees not to feel that they are isolated because every employee gets fair treatment from their top management and this situation caused them to constantly strive to improve job performance because they already have a high level of motivation to moving forward in producing excellent quality work to ensure that organizational goals are achievable (Currie, Gormley, Roche, & Teague, 2017; Aziz, Hasbollah, Yaziz, & Ibrahim, 2017).

Harmonious Atmosphere

There are previous studies that supported that employee relations have a significant relationship to job performance mainly involving a harmonious atmosphere. Chelladurai and Kerwin (2018) found that job performance has a close relationship with the harmonious atmosphere for each task performed by each employee. Undoubtedly, a harmonious atmosphere, relationships among employees, effective communication, and leadership contributed to the improvement of job performance and this situation directly strengthens the relationship between the organization and its employees. This study also found that there is a good relationship among employees due to employee attitudes that form a harmonious atmosphere and maintain good relationships especially teamwork, the role of effective communication among leaders, and success in forming a positive work culture to improve work performance. The study also found that good relationships among employees have a positive effect on the overall work process, affect the spirit of work in a team, and in turn have a positive impact on the work culture of the organization.

Zak (2017) found that organizational employees feel happy as a result of a harmonious atmosphere culture that pays attention to lower-level employees. This study found that employees feel valued by top management for their achievements while communication in the organization is to create satisfaction, appreciation, respect, and increase trust in the organization. As a result, the relationship between employees and the organization is very satisfactory. the hormonal atmosphere can be maintained.

Executives' Performance

The performance of an organization is the result of the excellent work performance shown by executive-level employees. Executives are middle-level management staff who are responsible for planning and executing a task assigned by top management. While the achievement of an organization is valued based on the performance of the organization's executive employees (Singh & Kassa, 2018). Executives can be defined as employees who are responsible for planning, organizing, executing, and monitoring all their daily job responsibilities by focusing

all activities on achieving organizational goals (Amin, Halim & Majid, 2017; Mutua & Kinyili, 2017). Executives' performance refers to the skills, abilities, and competencies that an executive possesses in an organization. Previous literature reviews are showing that there is a positive relationship between executives' performance on work quality and productivity, skills and competencies, creativity and innovation, problem-solving and decision making, job knowledge, attitudes and discipline, communication, teamwork, management skills, and professionalism with the job performance of each employee in an organization. Amin et.al.(2017) in a study stated that an executive in an organization has a big role to perform especially in a job designed to achieve maximum profitability for a long time. In addition, executives also have a role to ensure the existence of their organization is very important in the global market and the ability to move the organization forward compared to other competitors. An executive is said to be an efficient and skilled person when they can perform a task with excellence. As a result of success in the implementation of a task, the organization also moves forward to achieve the success that has been set based on the vision and mission that has been designed about what needs to be achieved in a certain period.

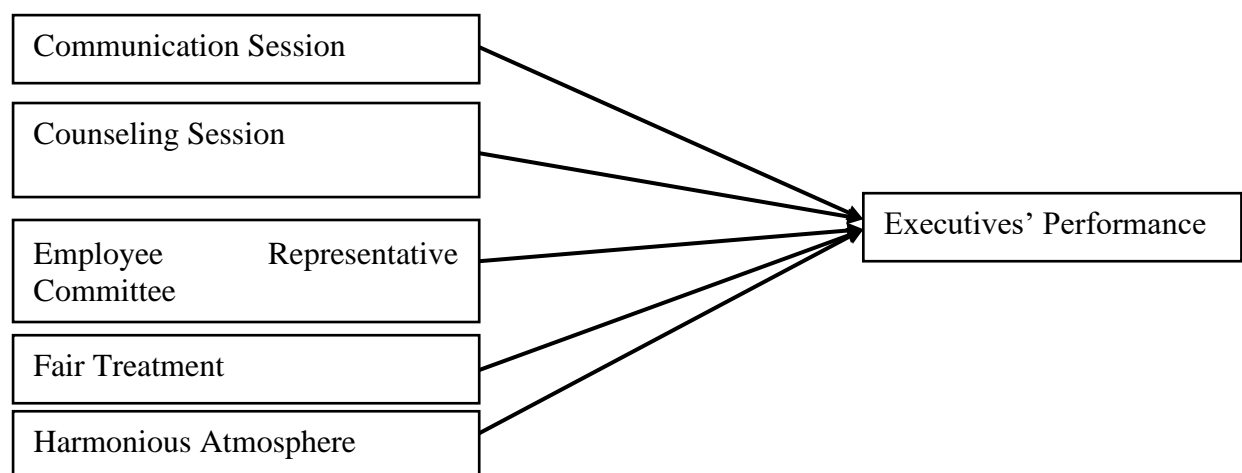
Research Framework

Independent Variables

- Communication Session
- Counseling Session
- Employee Representative Committee
- Fair Treatment
- Harmonious Atmosphere

Dependent Variable

- Executives' Performance In Manufacturing Firms



This research was conducted to identify the relationship between communication sessions, counseling sessions, employee representative committee, fair treatment, and a harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance. A questionnaire was designed to collect the data from manufacturing firms at Kulim Hi-tech Park, Kulim Kedah, Malaysia.

Hypotheses Development

Hypotheses development in this study:

H1: There is significant relationship between communication session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

H2: There is significant relationship between counseling session on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

H3: There is significant relationship between employee representative committee on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

H4: There is significant relationship between fair treatment on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

H5: There is significant relationship between harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

Methodology of Research

Research Design

In this study, a fully quantitative research survey was adopted and respondents comprise executives in the manufacturing firms. The research study was conducted to determine the impact of the communication session, counseling session, employee representative committee, fair treatment, and harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance.

Data Collection Instrument

The following Table shows the instrument measurements in this study:

Likert Scale Measurement				
1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Sources: De-Winter & Dodou, (2010)

Scope of Study/ Sampling

The scope of the study covers manufacturing firms at Kulim Hi-tech Park, Kulim, Kedah. There are 25 manufacturing firms in this area. About 25600 employees in the population of this study are 4438 executives (FMM,2021). Kulim Hi-tech, Kulim, Kedah was selected in this study because this area provided sophisticated technology manufacturing firms consisting of electronic, electrical, textile, and fabricated products which the investors came from many countries especially Japan, America, China, and Europe (FMM,2021). Kulim Hi-tech, Kulim, Kedah contributed about 22.2 billion to Malaysian economic (MIDA,2021). Based on the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the number of a sample depends on the total population obtained by the researcher. The table shows the total sample selected based on the population, which is 351 samples of respondents.

Table for Determining Sample Size

N	S
3500	346
4000	351
4500	354
5000	357
6000	361

Sources: (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)

Note:

N=Population

S= Sample size

Stratified Sampling Technique / Method

A stratified sampling technique method is employed to enable the findings generalized to the population and every executive in manufacturing firms has the chance to be selected as a respondent. In techniques of data analysis discuss the use of statistical methods used to analyze data and hypothesis testing made to test the objectives of the study. A stratified sampling technique ($351/4438 = 0.079$) method was employed to enable the findings to generalize the population and every executive in manufacturing firms has the chance to be selected as a respondent. The data obtained were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.7.8. A total of 4438 is population and 351 are samples. For example, Infineon Technology (M) Sdn. Bhd has 1800 employees with 349 executives, the calculation to get the respondents is $0.079 \times 349 = 27.571 \sim 28$. Therefore, 28 executives from this manufacturing firm are a respondent in this study. All respondents among executives from 4438 and 25 manufacturing firms are calculated with the same formula to get 351 samples.

Result

Respondents

The data was collected from 25 manufacturing industries and 360 questionnaires were distributed among the executives, 262 were successfully collected and 244 were used for analysis after deducing incomplete and damaged questionnaires. The respondents were selected using the stratified sampling technique mentioned above.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were studied using SmartPLS version 3.7.8 to discuss the findings obtained. SmartPLS is highly recommended by statistical scholars in producing an accurate analysis of the cause and effect relationship of each variable. SmartPLS is also referred to as a large multivariate analysis technique in social and psychological research. SmartPLS is capable of analyzing measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation.

Table 1 shows the Loading, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct studied and the lowest value is 0.7209 and the highest value is 0.8516. These values are greater than 0.5 (> 0.5), confirming that the study construct can explain the mean change of variance within the items (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Gefen & Straub, 2005; Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009).

Table 1
Loading, CR & AVE Results

	<i>Loading</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Communication Session		0.9140	0.6037
COM1	0.7615		
COM2	0.7676		
COM3	0.8516		
COM4	0.8144		
COM5	0.7845		
COM6	0.7331		
COM7	0.7180		
Harmonious Atmosphere		0.8795	0.5939
ERC2	0.7601		
ERC3	0.7916		
ERC4	0.8108		
ERC5	0.7600		
ERC9	0.7281		
Harmonious Atmosphere		0.9215	0.6623
HA3	0.8042		
HA4	0.8228		
HA5	0.8515		
HA6	0.8380		
HA7	0.8378		
HA8	0.7216		
Fair Treatment		0.9131	0.5681
FT1	0.7209		
FT2	0.7468		
FT3	0.7358		

FT4	0.7594
FT5	0.8100
FT6	0.7651
FT7	0.7576
FT9	0.7305

Counseling Session	0.9360	0.6201
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CS3	0.7405
CS4	0.7070
CS5	0.7204
CS7	0.8235
CS8	0.8210
CS9	0.8280
CS10	0.8318
CS11	0.8464
CS12	0.7532

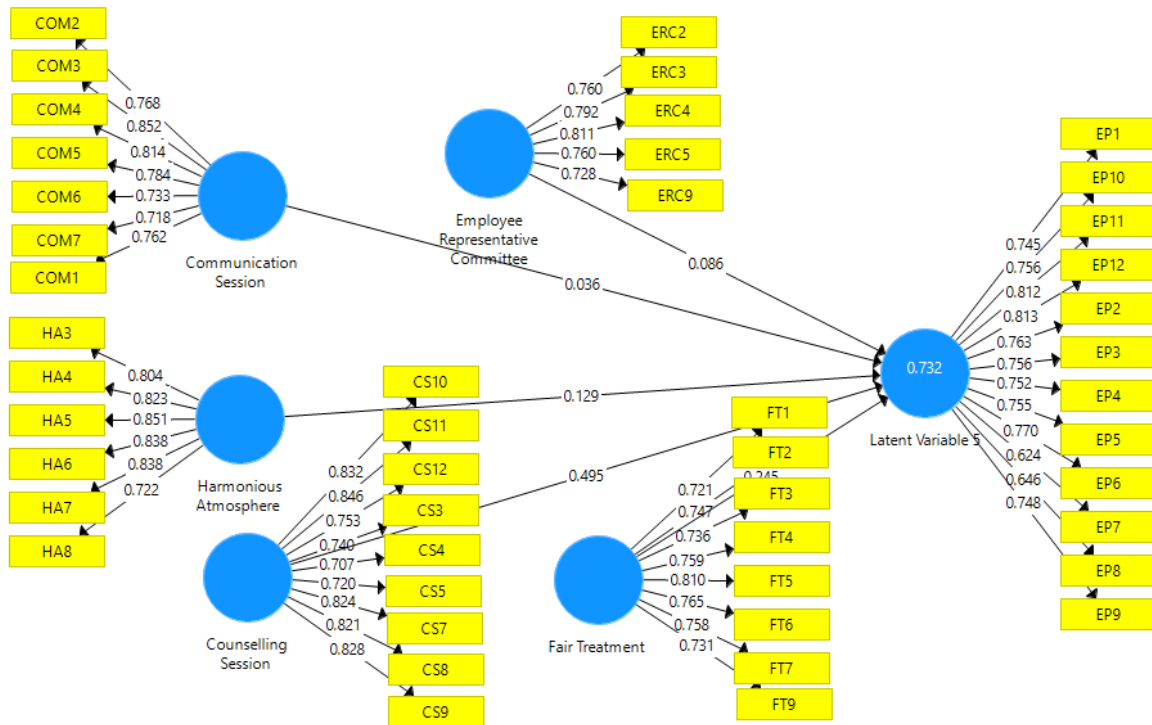


Figure 1: Structural Model Direct Effects

The discriminant validity test was measured through two methods, namely the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion test and cross-loading (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 2 below shows the output from the HTMT analysis. The results can be calculated easily using the formula as in (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015).

**Table 2
Discriminant Validity**

Constructs	COM	CS EP	ER	FT	HA	
COM	0.7770					
CS	0.4660	0.7875				
ER	0.4751	0.5858	0.7706			
FT	0.4953	0.6885	0.5371	0.7537		
HA	0.6236	0.5714	0.4692	0.6877	0.8138	
EP	0.5099	0.8050	0.5855	0.7389	0.6436	0.7468

Note: Values in Bold face are the square root values of average variance extracted

Assessment of Structural Model

The findings for testing this direct effect model using SmartPLS software package version 3.7.8 that is through the structural equation model. This measurement aims to test the direct effect model and the effective model of the mediated variable. Therefore, empirical evidence has been used to construct a direct effect model as shown in Figure 3.

Table 3
Summary of Hypotheses

Relationship	Summary of Hypotheses				
	beta	Std Error	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
COM -> EP	0.4363	0.0677	3.5368	0.0000	Supported
CS ->EP	0.4954	0.0685	7.2364	0.0000	Supported
ERC -> EP	0.3859	0.0586	3.4655	0.0000	Supported
FT -> EP	0.2446	0.0630	3.8819	0.0000	Supported
HA ->EP	0.1294	0.0642	2.2109	0.0000	Supported

Discussion

Communication

The results obtained shown that the communication session variable has a significant relationship on executives' performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.4363$; $t = 3.5368$; $p = 0.000$). H1 Accepted. The results also showed that communication sessions contributed 3.6% ($R^2 = 0.036$) to changes in executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

The results of the above study show that there is a significant relationship between communication on the work performance of executives in manufacturing firms. Communication session refers to two-way communication between executives and each employee whether non-executives, executives, or top management. Failure in communication has a negative impact on job performance. This is because all information related to the job to be done must be clear. Poor communication has a detrimental effect on every job done. The impact on poor communication has a negative impact on productivity and quality of work as expected by manufacturing firms.

Counseling Session

The results obtained shown that the counseling session variable has a significant relationship on executives' performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.4954$; $t = 7.2364$; $p = 0.0000$). H2 Accepted. The results also showed that counseling sessions contributed 49.5% ($R^2 = 0.495$) to changes in executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

The results of the above study show that there is a significant relationship between the counseling session on the work performance of executives in manufacturing firms. Workplace counseling has become a hot issue and a must in the field of firms commercial, especially in developed countries. In Malaysia, workplace counseling services continue to grow in line with the development of firms in the country. It is undeniable after entering the modern era the life of the world community has changed a lot in many ways. Furthermore, these changes also trigger various complexities and problems as a result of stress faced by individuals from a variety of aspects, including stress in the workplace.

Employee Representative Committee

The results obtained show that the employee representative committee variable has a significant relationship with executives' performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.3859$; $t =$

3.4655; $p = 0.0000$). H3 Accepted. The results also showed that the employee representative committee contributed 8.6% ($R^2 = 0.086$) to changes in executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

The results of the above study show that there is a significant relationship between the employee representative committee on the work performance of executives at manufacturing firms. These results indicated that the employee representative committee plays an important role between executives and the top management in the manufacturing firms. Each executive has an equal opportunity to present any views to solve their problems by appointing several executives to represent all executives in presenting the problems that occur to get the attention of the top management of manufacturing firms towards problem-solving and take appropriate action to ensure each executive is satisfied as a result of the decisions that have been made.

Fair Treatment

The results obtained shown that the fair treatment variable has a significant relationship on executives' performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.2446$; $t = 3.8819$; $p = 0.0000$). H4 Accepted. The results also showed that fair treatment contributed 24.5% ($R^2 = 0.245$) to changes in executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

The results of the above study show that there is a significant relationship between fair treatment on the work performance of executives in manufacturing firms. Fair treatment is important to ensure that every executive achieves a high level of motivation in carrying out their daily tasks. High awareness of fair treatment among the top management of manufacturing firms has a positive impact on job performance, especially in improving the quality and productivity of work. Improving the quality and productivity of work directly affects the level of profitability of firms in the face of the challenges of complicated business competition.

Harmonious Atmosphere

The results obtained shown that the harmonious atmosphere variable has a significant relationship on executives' performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.1294$; $t = 2.2198$; $p = 0.0000$). H5 Accepted. The results also showed that a harmonious atmosphere contributed 12.9% ($R^2 = 0.129$) to changes in executives' performance in manufacturing firms.

The results of the above study show that there is a significant relationship between a harmonious atmosphere on the work performance of executives in manufacturing firms. Good relations and harmony between employers and executives help created strong corporate relationships at work. It is therefore important for both parties to strive to maintain good relations which are continuous with each other. Harmony in the workplace not only helps preserve the interests of the employer and every executive but also helps to enhance the sustainable development of the country.

Conclusion

This study provided an important result to manufacturing firms that employee relations involved communication sessions, counseling sessions, employee representative committee, fair treatment, and a harmonious atmosphere are given major attention because their role is very important to a peaceful workplace environment. A peaceful workplace environment has a positive impact on job performance. There is a significant relationship between communication

sessions, counseling sessions, employee representative committee, fair treatment, and a harmonious atmosphere on executives' performance. Every executive feels that manufacturing firms care deeply about their well-being. This situation increased their level of work motivation better. Executives also have a strong passion to improve all skills in improving their ability to handle their daily tasks more excellently. This is because their work environment that involved employee relations practices is practiced effectively to increase their interest to work hard in ensuring manufacturing firms grow rapidly and can maximize profits besides maintaining the presence of manufacturing firms in the global market.

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