Employees' Engagement at Work: The Role of Workplace Health and Safety

Raiza Mae C. Narciso*, Hilbert S. Narciso

University of Mindanao Tagum Collage, Tagum, Mabini Street, Tagum City, Davao del Norte 8100.

*Corresponding Author: raiza_mae30@yahoo.com, hilbert221990@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main objective of this study was to investigate if there is a correlation between workplace health and safety and employee engagement. Random sampling technique was used in identifying the respondents and sample size of this study.

Design/methodology/approach: This study used the quantitative non-experimental research design using correlational technique with mean, pearson-r, and t-test as statistical tools. A validated survey questionnaire was used as principal data collection instrument.

Findings: Results revealed that the level of workplace health and safety was very high. Same goes with the level of employee engagement which was also very high. Finally, findings showed that there was a significant relationship between workplace health and safety and employee engagement.

Research limitations/implications: The implication of this study to the global setting is that as employee engagement is vital in an academic institution, colleges and universities may provide different intervention programs to employees in order to increase the level of employee engagement in their institution. Since COVID is a Global issue it must also be considered that different programs must be given in accordance with the current practices in this pandemic.

Paper type: Research paper

Keyword: Employee Engagement, Human Resource Management, Philippines, Tagum, Workplace Health and Safety

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on work engagement has become increasingly popular due to the fact that engaged workers contribute to organizational productivity, performance, sales, and customer satisfaction while also reporting improved health and higher well-being (Amor et al., 2021). In fact, Wood, J. et al. (2020) highlighted that companies are making more and more efforts to develop the ideal work-life balance conditions. Employers that care about their organizational-level goals support increasing employee work engagement at the same time. In addition, Work engagement is characterized by a positive outlook on work and a person's level of commitment to the organization. Accordingly, Ali & Anwar (2021) highlighted the significance of work difficulties in inspiring people to get more engaged in their workplaces.

Furthermore, government authorities, standards-setting groups and numerous experts consider the engagement of employees to be a beneficial safety force. Practical guidance on employee engagement has been provided by these organizations and people (Mullins et al., 2019). Moreover, engagement of management with employee safety is central and a primary obligation of the employer. In relation to this, Geller (2008) emphasized that leaders must be held accountable and take responsibility for workplace safety flaws to avoid high turnover rate. To prevent the cost of turnover, leaders and managers must develop a deeper knowledge of how employee engagement influences adjunct faculty member turnover intentions, both favorably and adversely (Saleem & Qamar, 2017) since unnecessary turnover degrades educational quality, disrupts business continuity,

and exerts a financial strain on institutions (Takawira, N. Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014). Thus, management, according to Tews, M. J. Michel & Noe (2017), must establish an atmosphere of a safe and healthy workplace and where employees have the freedom to help balance home and work life.

In particular, a safe and healthy working environment appropriate to educational institutions must exist. Simultaneously, the presence of vulnerable groups (such as students) and the requirements of disabled individuals must be taken into consideration. The Philippine National Statistics presented that there has been an overall decline (in trend) of occupational injuries in the Philippines from 2011 (46,655 instances) to 2017. (38,235 cases). But overall, there was a rise in work-related injuries from 2011 (48,975 instances) to 2015 (20,961 cases) (Lu, 2021). In 2015, the European Agency for Workplace Safety and Health has listed five fundamental factors that must be considered in an educational set-up: Indoor workspaces, whether a classroom, a staff office, or a kitchen, must be appropriately ventilated and lit, as well as have an appropriate degree of humidity, sufficient space, and cleanliness. If automobiles are allowed to enter the institution, the signalling must be obvious, and the driveway and pedestrian area must be separated as much as possible; To lessen the risk of slipping and falling, the floors must be adequately maintained and kept clean. The protection against falls from heights in locations such as balconies and staircases will be given special consideration. For very young children, additional railing protection may be required; doors and transparent windows must be marked and made of a suitable material (Rusu-Zagar & Rusu-Zagar, 2015). More so, employees with an adverse perspective of a healthy and safe workplace seem to be involved in dangerous behaviors that improve their vulnerability to injury, and employees experiencing job uncertainty, anxiety and stress have showed declines in motivation and enforcement for safety, whereas employees with a favorable attitude of safety at work have reported lower number of accidents. Employees' perceptions of their organizations as inviting, compassionate, and concerned about their general well-being and happiness are likely to influence their knowledge of the organizational safety environment, as well as effect healthy work habits and accident rates (Gyekye, 2005).

Small-Medium Enterprises' promoters, owners, and managers regard their employees' health and safety issues as a top priority in order to get the most out of them as per (Gyensare et al., 2018) wherein a positive correlation was seen between occupational health and safety on employee engagement. Moreover, engagement of management with employee safety is central and a primary obligation of the employer. In relation to this, Geller, (2008)emphasized that leaders must be held accountable and take responsibility for workplace safety flaws. However, unnecessary turnover degrades educational quality, disrupts business continuity, and exerts a financial strain on institutions (Takawira, N. Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014). To prevent the cost of turnover, leaders and managers must develop a deeper knowledge of how employee engagement influences adjunct faculty member turnover intentions, both favorably and adversely (Saleem & Qamar, 2017). Moreover, employee engagement may suffer when job responsibilities become more demanding, resulting in a high percentage of employee turnover. Management, according to Tews, M. J. Michel & Noe (2017), must establish an atmosphere where employees have the freedom to help balance home and work life.

Meanwhile, even though there is already a committee assigned to ensure if the University of Mindanao Tagum College institution is following the standards of a safe and healthy workplace, it is still helpful to identify the employee's perceptions on a safe and healthy workplace. The employees' perceptions may enhance the success, satisfaction, and engagement in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace (da Silva & Amaral, 2019). Complying with standards is a must and, extending one's service beyond can be a way of increasing employee's commitment to the institution.

Therefore, in this context, the researchers feel the need to conduct the study, particularly in identifying if both variables are correlated. Ensuring the employees' welfare is vital in every educational institution since they are the front liners in giving direct service to the students. Moreover, if employees are well valued, a reciprocal process will take place in which they will, in turn, take care of their customers.

In the light of these concerns, this study was undertaken. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research objectives:

1. To identify the level of workplace health and safety at UM Tagum College in terms of:
   a. premises of establishments;
   b. construction and maintenance;
   c. walkway surface;
   d. working environment;
   e. workplace policies and procedures;
   f. occupational health and safety awareness; and
   g. participation in occupational health and safety
2. To assess the level of employee engagement at UM Tagum College.
3. To ascertain if there is a significant relationship between workplace health and safety and employee engagement.

The outcome of the study would give pertinent data to the institution, especially the *UM Administration*, in implementing a suitable intervention program based on the study's findings. This can also help the administration enhance the level of employee engagement and employee welfare. Also, the results of the study can help the *teaching and non-teaching employees* improve their level of engagement while staying here in the institution. Lastly, this study is beneficial to *Handicapped/Differently abled employees/guests/students* since they can be considered vulnerable groups. The intervention program will be intended mostly for them.

II. METHODS

The quantitative non-experimental descriptive-correlational research approach was utilized since it is a measure of changeable associations with varied levels of measurement. According to Szapkiw (2012), descriptive-correlational studies assess the degree to which two or more variables are related to one another and provide comprehension of what is in a certain circumstance with a selected population. Researchers can use the results of a correlational study to identify whether or not two variables change together, and to what extent. In addition, this technique is used when the goal is to define the status of the scenario as it exists to investigate the causes of a specific phenomenon at the moment (Campbell, 2015).

Presented below are the research steps and procedures that the researchers in this study took. These include the Participants, Research Instruments, Design, and Procedure. A random sampling technique was used wherein the respondents in this study were the 150 teaching and non-teaching personnel of UM Tagum College.

The primary tool used in the data gathering process is an adapted and modified survey questionnaire from the Institute for (Institute for Work & Health, 2016). The researchers contextualized the questionnaire to fit the statements in the workplace setting where the respondents are situated to acquire data efficiently. Moreover, secondary data was utilized to measure the level of employee engagement with the approval of UM Tagum College administration, ensuring the data privacy act. Presented in Table 1 is the Pilot Testing (Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test) Result which shows that there is an internal consistency with regards to the variables in the instrument used.

Table 1. Pilot Testing (Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test) Result

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Interpretation
Workplace Health and Safety	*0.967*	*Excellent*
Employee Engagement	*0.929*	*Excellent*

The following steps were followed in gathering the data: Upon approval, the questionnaire was presented to the experts (at least a Master's degree holder in a related field) for modification and content validation of the survey questionnaire. Afterward, the questionnaires were administered via google form by the researchers to the respondents of the study. Lastly, after the questionnaires were accomplished, the data gathered were tallied, analyzed, and subjected to statistical analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the level of workplace health and safety at UM Tagum College in terms of premises of establishments, construction and maintenance, walkway surface, working environment, workplace policies and procedures, occupational health and safety awareness, and participation in occupational health and safety. The overall mean for this indicator is 4.39 and described as Very High. This means that the workplace health and safety at UM Tagum College is very much evident.

Results showed that in UM Tagum College, employees have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities concerning workplace health and safety. The implementation of workplace health and safety at UM Tagum College is very much evident as perceived and experienced by the employees. In fact, the institution shows standard practice on maintaining a health and safety workplace. Also, employees are well aware and involved in the health and safety procedures.

Table 2. Summary of the level of workplace health and safety at UM Tagum College

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Premises of establishments	4.22	0.67	High
Construction and maintenance	4.47	0.68	Very High
Walkway surface	4.29	0.66	Very High
Working environment	4.39	0.65	Very High
Workplace policies and procedures	4.43	0.61	Very High
Occupational health and safety awareness	4.62	0.56	Very High
Participation in occupational health and safety	4.39	0.77	Very High
Overall	4.39	0.55	Very High

Shown in Table 3 is the data on the level of employee engagement among at UM Tagum College. The overall mean for this indicator is 4.49, which is described as Very High. This means that the level of employee engagement at UM Tagum College is very much observed.

Results revealed that employees know what is expected of them at work. They also affirm that in the last year, they had opportunities at work to learn and grow. Likewise, at work, they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. Also, the University of Mindanao's mission or purpose makes them feel that their jobs are important.

Table 3. Level of employee engagement at UM Tagum College

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Employees know what is expected of them at work.	*4.63*	*0.52*	*Very High*
Employees have the materials and equipment needed to do their work.	*4.49*	*0.55*	*Very High*
At work, employees have the opportunity to do what they do the best every day.	*4.59*	*0.56*	*Very High*
In the last seven days, employees have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	*4.25*	*0.84*	*Very High*
Their supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about them as a person.	*4.54*	*0.63*	*Very High*
There is someone at work who encourages their development.	*4.53*	*0.61*	*Very High*
At work, employees' opinion seems to count.	*4.38*	*0.74*	*Very High*
The mission or purpose of their company makes them feel their job is important.	*4.57*	*0.55*	*Very High*
Employee's associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	*4.52*	*0.63*	*Very High*
Employees have a best friend at work.	*4.49*	*0.71*	*Very High*
In the last six months, someone at work has talked to them about their progress.	*4.27*	*0.78*	*Very High*
This last year, employees have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	*4.63*	*0.61*	*Very High*
Total	*4.49*	*0.48*	*Very High*

Presented in Table 4 is the data on the correlation between Workplace Health and Safety and Employee Engagement. Pearson-r was used to determine the significance of the relationship of both variables.

Since the p-value is lesser than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Hence, we can say that there is a significant relationship between Workplace Health and Safety and Employee Engagement at UM Tagum College. The r-value of .162 also exemplifies that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. Thus, when the level of Workplace Health and Safety increases, the same goes with Employee Engagement and vice versa. However, although there is a correlation for both variables, only 2.6% of Workplace Health and Safety affects Employee Engagement, while other factors influenced the remaining 97.4% of it.

Table 4. Correlation between Workplace Health and Safety and Employee Engagement

Variables	r-value	r-squared	p-value
Workplace Health and Safety	.162	0.026	0.047

Decision on H_o = rejected
n=150

A. Discussions

The level of workplace health and safety is described as very high. The following are the specific results of the seven indicators under this variable. Six out of seven indicators: construction and maintenance, walkway surface, working environment, workplace policies and procedures, occupational health and safety awareness, and participation in occupational health and safety got very high level except for the premises of establishment which acquired a high level. This means that the level of workplace health and safety is very much evident. The result is congruent with the Department of Labor and employment mandate, which emphasized that every establishment shall give mandatory seminars and training on the said matter. This is pertinent to ensure the welfare of all human resources in the workplace. In order to achieve the purpose, the 1978 Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS) offer advice and enforcement for workplaces, including personal health and safety training, safety and health commissions, records of occupational and environmental diseases, occupational and environmental hazard management, personal protection equipment, safe use of equipment, and fire protection and occupational health records. As an educational institution, maintaining a safe and healthy workplace must be taken seriously. (Occupational Safety and Health Center, 2006).

The level of employee engagement at UM Tagum College is very high, which means that UM Tagum College's employee engagement is very much observed. This affirms the proposition of (Nordmark, 2017), who stated that if a school wants to develop a strategy that addresses students' needs and the higher education sector, universities will need fully committed faculty and employees. This approach provides a significant incentive for schools to provide services that assist students in achieving their goals.

Using Pearson-r to determine the significant relationship, results reject the null hypothesis since the p-value is less than .05 level of significance. Therefore, we can say that there is a significant relationship between workplace health and safety and employee engagement. This is in congruence with the key findings of (Nahrgang et al., 2011) study's which showed that there is a positive association with burnout were the job demands of risks, health and hazards and job difficulty, and the work resources of safety expertise, job autonomy, and a supportive atmosphere had positive associations with employee engagement.

IV. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were derived based on the statement of the problem: First, the level of workplace health and safety is very high. Likewise, the level of employee engagement at UM Tagum College is very high. Lastly, there is a significant relationship between workplace health and safety and employee engagement.

A. Implication

The *practical implication* of the result to UM Tagum College is that even if employees have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities concerning workplace health and safety and though they affirm that they had opportunities at work to learn and grow. Enhancement program can still be formulated to help sustain the best practices of the institution. Among all the indicators, the premises of establishments under workplace health and safety must be elevated to very high. To do this, further improvement in the physical facilities are needed to address concerning issues.

Meanwhile, the implication of this study to *future research* is that, since a small percentage of 2.6% of the variation of employee engagement is explained by the workplace health and safety, future researchers may conduct a Focus Group Discussion to determine more about other factors that might affect the employee engagement in the institution. Thus, this may become an opportunity for future study in seeking other factors that might affect the increase and decrease of employee engagement.

Finally, is the implication of this study to the *global setting*. As employee engagement is vital in an academic institution, colleges and universities may provide different intervention programs to employees in order to increase the level of employee engagement in their institution. Since COVID is a Global issue it must also be considered that different programs must be given in accordance with the current practices in this pandemic.

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