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## The Cross Over Process of Employees' Dedication on Visitors' Satisfaction using UWES Work Engagement Model: A Case on MAHA Expo 2018

Nor Azmawati Husain<sup>1</sup>, Norlela Abas<sup>1</sup>, Norshiba Norhisham<sup>2</sup> & Nurul Azrin Ariffin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Management & Marketing, Faculty Business Management, University Teknologi MARA UiTM Melaka Jasin Campus, Merlimau, Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>Department of Human Resource, Faculty Business Management, University Teknologi MARA UiTM Melaka City Campus, Bandar Melaka Country, <sup>3</sup>Department of International Business, Faculty Business Management, University Teknologi MARA UiTM Melaka City Campus, Bandar Melaka Country

Email: [noraz462@uitm.edu.my](mailto:noraz462@uitm.edu.my), [norlela192@uitm.edu.my](mailto:norlela192@uitm.edu.my), [shibahisham@uitm.edu.my](mailto:shibahisham@uitm.edu.my), [nurulazrin@uitm.edu.my](mailto:nurulazrin@uitm.edu.my)

### Abstract

Mega events such as expo give valuable opportunities to visitors for them to experience the unique natures of presented themes. Malaysian Agriculture, Horticulture & Agrotourism Show (MAHA) was organised annually in Malaysia with a based-theme of agriculture. In general, many factors has been considered in measuring visitor's satisfaction with regards to mega events such as expo. Visitors' satisfaction is crucial as this level of satisfaction affecting their experiential product hence change their whole experiences in visiting expo in future. The purpose of this study is to identify the association of job resources such as skill discretion and co-workers' support among employees at booths during the MAHA 2018 event crossover on visitor satisfaction, specifically through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) I (e.g. dedication and absorption). 99 onsite surveys were collected on employees and visitors at various booths at the MAHA 2018 event. Data was analysed using SPSS version 20 using multiple regression analysis. Main findings indicates that the dedication of employees mediates the relationship between skill discretion and visitor satisfaction. we also discovers dedication of employees at the expo do crossover to visitors and affect their satisfaction level as been predicted through the actor-partner independence model (APIM). This supports the notions of employees' work engagement, especially the aspect of dedication is crucial as this elements of work engagement has direct effect on visitors' satisfaction level. Further studies should focus on improving dedication of employees at expo as it has the marketing implication to attract more visitors in future.

**Keywords:** Work Engagement, Visitor Satisfaction, Dedication, Absorption, Job Resources

## Introduction

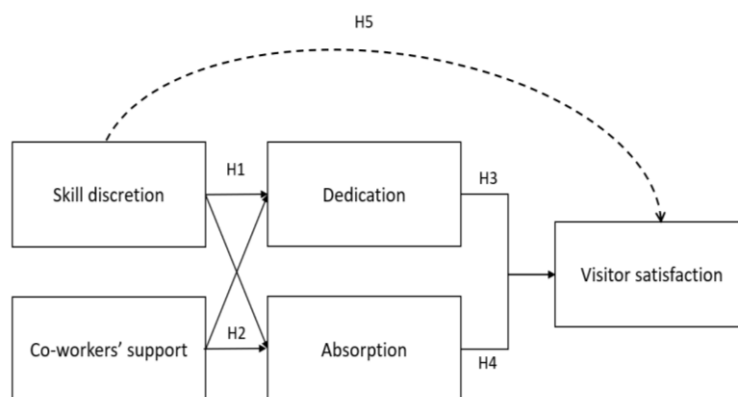
Over the years, trade shows and exhibitions have provided a smooth playing field in which small and large businesses come together to celebrate their effectiveness. According to Situma (2012), organizations constantly drawn into the economies of scale implementation when it comes to promote their products or services in which trade shows can give them exactly the marketing platform they are looking for. According to Scott, Si, Schumilas and Chen (2014), agriculture shows have existed since the late eighteen century and since then have evolved to be one of the most popular events with a constant growing number of attendees each year. For instance, one of the earliest agricultural shows, the Royal Lancashire Show which began in 1767, and the Royal Cornwall Show, now in its 222nd year as of 2017, were initially designed to showcase “best in breed” livestock. This soon developed into the highlight of the farming social calendar (Darlan-Smith, 2011).

Originally, these agriculture events were mostly attended by farming families, livestock breeders and the associated companies and services in similar fields. Today, the diversity of the attendees such as consumers and anyone interested in joining the trade fairs have become more significant. Agricultural fairs offer an idyllic platform for educating the visitors and for them to “re-image” agriculture (Holloway, 2004). This can be linked with the changing consumer lifestyle relating to health, well-being and transparency in the food origins. Therefore, agriculture events must evolve in response to consumers’ demand to ensure the longevity of their appeal. For example, the visitors have expressed desire to witness performances motivated by the exhibitors’ care for the animals and for these visitors to get the chance to assess both, the business side, and on the community side of exhibiting farmers (Larsen, 2017)

One of the agriculture events, the Malaysia Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism (MAHA), is organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries where it aims at promoting agriculture and agro-based industries. The MAHA fair highlights efforts made by the government agencies, as well as presenting numerous business opportunities. For instance, approximately 2.7 million visitors attended the MAHA 2016 which was organized at The Malaysia Agro Exposition Park in Serdang (MAEPS), and the expected number of visitors for MAHA 2018 was roughly 3.5 million people. This indicates that visitors are interested in the agriculture shows that are offered as they help visitors broaden their knowledge and experiences in the field. Besides that, this agriculture expo focuses on emphasizing the importance of innovation and technology in the agriculture industry. Recently, the MAHA 2020 acted as a “game changer” in this new norm in which the event was conducted virtually as a platform that was specifically designed to fulfil the business needs of the agriculture and food industries. Various activities were available such as discussions, business connections, webinars, video conferencing, product displays and promotions by more than 700 exhibitors, either from domestic or international markets.

However, studies on the effectiveness of trade shows, particularly on the employees-visitors’ engagement have been neglected from a research perspective, despite the importance and popularity of these trade events worldwide. Work engagement can be described as a persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Although the agricultural fairs have remained well-known annual events, surprisingly, there lacks rigorous academic literature and research devoted to understand the effects of work engagement on the workers at these expos on its visitors. The main purpose of this research is to examine the work engagement model and its influence towards the expo visitors’

expectations. From the employees' perspective, satisfaction with job resources had a statistically significant positive influence on both dimensions of work engagement in which, this workplace practices that emphasize on care and respect and the job resources development will technically improve the work engagement. The engagement between the employees and the visitors at an expo or an exhibition is vital in a sense that the success of the event lies within them. This study aims at contributing to the in depth understanding from a new perspective of two sources of data such as dyad data from employees, as well as the visitors. It is considered common to study on the work engagement, however, specifically for this study, the researchers will explore more on the workers' engagement -visitor to further understand the visitors' satisfaction at an agricultural expo.



**Figure 1: Proposed model**

### Literature Review

Job resources, as stated by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) are positive job characteristics that can reduce the negative effects of job demands and induce motivation on workers to achieved organizational goals. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) also argued that job resources are one of the main instruments in achieving work goals as well as stimulating personnel growth and development. Among the examples of job resources are employees who experience autonomy at work, have supportive colleagues, receive proper coaching and high-quality feedback, and have opportunities for professional development. These possess the instrumental means for workers to be intrinsically motivated to achieve their work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) in their reviews suggested that most job resources positively influence work engagement, and a few job demands (i.e., Hindrance job demand) significantly influence work engagement. Given the positive influence brought by work engagement, numerous studies were conducted in identifying the combinations of resources that can be used to develop engaged workers (Bakker et al., 2011).

The relationships between different types of resources and work engagement are best explained when all potential effects are simultaneously considered. Specifically, the current study shows that job resources influence work engagement reciprocally (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009). For example, in the teaching profession, supervisor support, innovativeness, information, appreciation and organizational climate can all be considered important job resources as each of these conditions are able to buffer the negative impact of pupil misbehaviour on work engagement (Bakker et al, 2007). Hence, it is suggested that job resources should be ample enough to deal with the former job demands as a suitable fit between these two aspects are related to work engagement. This would further contribute

positively to other organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and engagement (Albrecht & Anglim, 2018).

Work engagement is still the highlight of many organizational studies. In a study conducted by AL-Dubai, Qureshi, Ismail and Rampal (2012) reported that the overall level of work engagement was higher in Finland than in Russia. The opportunity to learn new skills at work was the strongest predictor of work engagement in both countries. The most significant difference was that once job demands and resources were taken into account, the managerial position had a strong effect on work engagement in Russia, while there were no such significant findings in Finland.

All job resources have a distinct effect on work engagement. Studies conducted by Allahyari et al (2008) suggested that co-workers' support and skill discretion positively correlated with the person organization (P-O) fit. Meanwhile, Arezes and Miguel (2008) in their study found that co-workers' support has a direct effect on Total Quality Management (TQM) implementation and organization performance. Co-workers' support is another source of social support that helps in managing and coping with the job demands and thus, increase job performance (Arnold et al., 2009).

Meanwhile another type of job resources known as skill discretion has been labelled as the degree of the workers making full use of their skills (Bailey, Gremler & McCollough, 2001). This resource often receives less attention among scholars and little to be found established scales to represent skills can be found. Bakker, Demerouti and Euwema (2005) included skill discretion as the job resource in their study by establishing their own scale. Skill discretion is when the workers feeling benefited from the work and it improves his competency. Since skill discretion is not commonly tested as job resources among service workers (i.e., workers at expo), we incorporated both types of job resources to be tested in the model.

Work engagement are multidimensional measures that are comprised of several constructs namely vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour refers to the high level of energy and mental resilience while working, dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm and challenge, and lastly, absorption refers to being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 210). In regard to this current study, only two constructs were used, which are dedication and absorption. One study conducted among Palestine University staff discovered that the dedication and absorption levels are high (82%)(Bakker, 2014). Dedication refers to the strong embrace of the individual in his work, his sense of value and importance, as well as the feeling of enthusiasm, inspiration and challenge when practicing his work. It can become a primary barometer that significantly leads to job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions compared to vigour and absorption (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Absorption is argued to be influenced by many factors including job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), emotional stability (Barken et al., 2018) and many other potential factors. Absorption alone has a direct effect on various positive organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction (Barken et al., 2018).

The mediational roles of work engagement constructs (e.g., Dedication and absorption) have been discussed in several occupational contexts. For example, work engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and prosocial service behaviours among hotel staff in Taiwan (Bakker, 2009). Within group level, work engagement mediates the relationship between team resources and team performance among employees in Spain (Bianchi, Schonfeld & Laurent, 2020). Meanwhile Biswas, Varma and Ramaswami



(2013) in their study discovered that not every construct of work engagement possessed the mediational elements. They merely found support on the mediational roles of vigour and dedication on the relationship between job resources (i.e. coworkers' supports) and nurses' performances.

Scholars suggested a possible potential of a cross over mechanism occurring between the work engagement of an individual to another individual (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). We expect one construct of work engagement that may have a cross over effect and influence on visitor satisfaction. The Actor Partner Independence Model (APIM) (Cook & Kenny, 2005) was used in this current study where workers acted as actors, and visitors as partners. Conventionally, the study that concerns the satisfaction level of visitors to exhibitions often highlighted factors such as quality, emotions/moods (Bass, 1985), programme, souvenirs, food and facilities (Baxter, Lyndon, Dole & Battistutta, 2004), whereas less focus was given to factors related to workers such as work engagement. Hence, we incorporated other factors to be considered as part of the determinant in visitors, thus postulating hypotheses below:

*H1a: Skill discretion is positively associated with dedication*

*H1b: Skill discretion is positively associated with absorption*

*H2a: Co-workers' support is positively associated with dedication*

*H2b: Co-workers' support is positively associated with absorption*

*H3: Dedication is positively associated with visitors' satisfaction*

*H4: Absorption is positively associated with visitors' satisfaction*

*H5: Dedication mediates the relationship between skill discretion and visitors' satisfaction*

## **Methodology**

### *Procedures and participants*

The research was conducted among a dyad of 99 workers and visitors who operated their booths during the MAHA 2018 event. The employees were requested to answer the survey by the enumerators that approached them during the event. Meanwhile, we also gathered the feedback from the visitors who visited their booths at the same time. Of the 150 surveys distributed, only 99 were able to complete the survey (66% response rate).

### *Instruments*

#### *Skill discretion*

The variable "Skill discretion" represented job resources for which four items were adopted from the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek, 1979). The responses ranged from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "strongly agree". An example of a related question is: "My job requires me to learn new things". The reliability of the scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

#### *Coworkers' support*

The variable "Coworkers' support" represented job resources for which four items were adopted from the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek, 1979). The responses ranged from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "strongly agree". An example of a related statement is: "People I work with are competent in doing their job". The reliability of the scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ).

### Work Engagement

Work engagement was measured by using two constructs i.e., dedication ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and absorption ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá & Bakker, 2002). The scale ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Examples of the statements are “I find my work full of meaning and purpose” and “When I am working, I forget everything else around me”

### Visitor's Satisfaction

The variable “visitor satisfaction” measured the visitor outcome in this study. We adopted the questions from (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994) which comprises of a 4-item scale. Examples of the related questions are: “I am very satisfied”; “I will encourage friends and relatives to visit the booth operated by this organization” and “I love to talk to my friends about how I am satisfied with the booth operated by this organization”. The scale ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The reliability for this scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ).

### *Analysis Strategy*

Descriptive and frequency information were derived to assess the representativeness of the sample. Bivariate correlation analysis was undertaken to delineate the relationship between job resources, work engagement and visitor satisfaction. The data were initially screened using descriptive statistics. We then used the IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS) software package to see the inter-correlations between the variables. Through the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), we confirmed the reliability of the studied variables and the instruments where the KMO value is acceptable at 0.75 near to 1. The next analysis is the multiple regression analysis to test the direct effect of each variable which includes the mediation effect. In order to see the mediation effect, we utilized the mediation test using the Monte Carlo simulation (Selig & Preacher, 2008)

**Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**

	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ED3	0.93						
ED4	0.842						
ED2	0.838						
ED1	0.812						
SK6		1.084					
SK4		0.578					
SK5		0.522					
SK1		0.465					
DED2				0.931			
DED1				0.795			
DED3				0.664			
CO1					1.065		
CO2					0.459		
CO3					0.374		
PS3						0.848	
PS1						0.696	
PS2						0.435	
AB3							0.903
AB2							0.722

*Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.*

*Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.*

*a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.*

**Table 2: KMO values**

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.75
	Approx. Chi-Square	1078.887
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	276
	Sig.	0

### Discussion

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents for the study. There are 99 respondents for this study where among them are the workers at the MAHA Expo 2018. The majority of the respondents were aged 20-29 years old (51.5%), male (60.6%) and of the Malay race (89.7%). The workers possessed 0-9 years of working experience (71.4%) where some were in the management level of employment (58.8%), in private sectors (62.6%) as well as Diploma holders (42.4%) in various industries (60.6%). With regards to the visitors' profiles, both genders have equal interest in these events in which the percentage of male visitors is slightly higher (51.5%) compared to the female visitors.



**Table 3: Demographic profile of the respondents (workers)**

	Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	< 19 years old	1	1.0
	20-29 years old	51	51.5
	30-39 years old	37	37.4
	40-49 years old	9	9.1
	50-59 years old	1	1.0
	>60 years old	0	0.0
<b>Gender</b>	Male	60	60.6
	Female	30	39.4
<b>Status</b>	Single	50	51.5
	Married	47	48.5
<b>Race</b>	Malay	87	89.7
	Chinese	7	7.2
	Indian	1	1.0
	Others	2	2.1
<b>Experience</b>	0-9 years	70	71.4
	10-19 years	22	22.4
	20-29 years	6	6.1
<b>Position</b>	Management level	57	58.8
	Non-management level	40	41.2
<b>Ownership status</b>	Government agencies	37	37.4
	Private sectors	62	62.6
<b>Education level</b>	SPM	26	26.3
	Diploma	42	42.4
	First Degree	29	9.3
	Degree/PhD	2	2.0
<b>Industry</b>	Food	8	8.2
	Agriculture	26	26.5
	Livestock	4	4.1
	Others	60	60.6

*N* = 99 respondents

**Table 4: Demographic profile of the respondents (visitors)**

	Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	50	51.5
	Female	47	48.5
Age	<19 years old	10	10.3
	20-29 years old	46	47.4
	30-39 years old	20	20.6
	40-49 years old	17	17.5
	50-59 years old	4	4.1
Race	Malay	81	84.4
	Chinese	11	11.5
	Indian	4	4.2

***N* = 99 respondents**

Table 5 shows the correlation, mean and standard deviation (*SD*) for the studied variables. The mean value for each variable has a central tendency with the distribution of 3.07 – 4.78. Meanwhile, the standard deviation for every variable ranged from 0.48 to 1.08.

**Table 5: Correlations, Means and standard deviation for studied variables**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Visitor satisfaction	4.04	0.48	-				
2. Emotional demands	3.07	1.05	0.14				
3. Skill discretions	4.12	0.63	0.10	0.19			
4. Co-workers' supports	4.21	0.57	0.08	-0.04	0.41***		
4. Dedication	4.78	0.88	0.26*	0.07	0.54***	0.39***	
5. Absorption	4.45	1.08	0.27**	0.22*	0.41***	0.22*	0.50***

***N* = 99 \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , +  $p > 1$**

Hypothesis 1 and 2 predicted that skill discretion and coworkers' support have positive associations with dedication and absorption. According to Table 6, the multiple regression analysis was used to assess the association between two variables (skills discretion and co-workers support) towards dedication. The  $R^2 = 0.42$  means that only 42% of the variance of dedication (dependent variable) can be explained by the independent variables (skills discretion and co-workers support), while the remaining 58% can be explained by other variables. Skill discretion and coworkers' support are significant with dedication where  $\beta = 0.69$  (skills discretion) and  $\beta = 0.31$  (co-workers' support) are at the level of  $p < 0.001$  and  $p < 0.1$ . Therefore, H1a and H2a are supported where skills discretion and co-workers' support have associations with dedication.

Hypothesis 1b and 2b predicted that both job resources have associations with absorption. Table 7 shows the multiple regression results of the association between the two variables (skills discretion and co-workers support) towards absorption. The  $R^2 = 0.17$  means that only 17% of the variance of absorption (dependent variable) can be explained by the independent variables (skills discretion and co-workers support), while the remaining 83% can be explained by other variables. Only skill discretion is significant with absorption, where  $\beta = 0.54$  (skills discretion) and  $\beta = 0.06$  (co-workers' support) at the level of  $p < 0.01$  and  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore, H1b is supported, and H2b is not supported.

The next hypothesis (H3& H4) predicted that the dedication and absorption have a direct effect on visitors' satisfaction. Table 8 shows the multiple regression results of the association between dedication and absorption towards visitors' satisfaction. The  $R^2 = .017$  means that only 17% of the variance of visitors' satisfaction (dependent variable) can be explained by dedication and absorption, while the remaining 83% can be explained by other variables. Only dedication have a significant association with visitors' satisfaction where  $\beta = 0.13$  (dedication) and  $\beta = 0.07$  (absorption) at the level of  $p < 0.1$   $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, H3 is supported, while H4 is not supported where only dedication has an association with visitors' satisfaction.

The last hypothesis predicted that dedication mediates the relationship between skill discretion and visitors' satisfaction. Based on the findings from the Monte Carlo Mediation Simulation (Selig & Preacher, 2008), it shows that dedication mediates the relationships between skill discretion and visitors' satisfaction (95% The Confidence Interval (CI), LL = 0.02429 UL = 0.2267) does not contain 0.

**Table 6: Results on the regressions analysis for dedication**

	Dedication	
	Step 1( $\beta$ )	Step 2( $\beta$ )
<b>Step 1</b>		
<b>Control variables</b>		
Position	-0.57*	-0.34+
Ownership status	0.14	-0.15
Education	-0.10	0.04
Types of products	0.26*	0.09
<b>Step 2</b>		
<b>Main variables</b>		
Emotional demands		-0.02
Skills discretion		0.69***
Co-workers' support		0.31+
R <sup>2</sup>	0.14	0.42
$\Delta R^2$	-	0.28

$N = 99$  \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , +  $p > 1$

**Table 7: Results on regression analysis for absorption**

	Absorption	
	Step 1( $\beta$ )	Step 2( $\beta$ )
<b>Step 1</b>		
<b>Control variables</b>		
Position	-0.29	-0.14
Ownership status	0.08	-0.15
Education	-0.16	-0.07
Types of products	0.21+	0.98
<b>Step 2</b>		
<b>Main variables</b>		
Emotional demands		0.15
Skills discretion		0.54**
Co-workers' support		0.06
R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.23
$\Delta R^2$	-	0.17

$N = 99$  \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , +  $p > 1$

**Table 8: Results on regression analysis for visitor's satisfaction**

	Visitors' satisfaction	
	Step 1 ( $\beta$ )	Step 2 ( $\beta$ )
<b>Step 1</b>		
<b>Control variables</b>		
Position	-0.13	-0.08
Ownership status	0.12	0.09
Education	-0.03	-0.02
Types of products	-0.01	-0.05
<b>Step 2</b>		
<b>Main variables</b>		
Emotional demands		0.05
Skills discretion		-0.14
Co-workers' support		-0.02
Dedication		0.13+
Absorption		0.07
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.17
$\Delta R^2$	-	0.14

$N = 99$  \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , +  $p > 1$

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

In conclusion, consistent with the actor-partner independence model (APIM)(Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Cook & Kenny, 2005), the cross over between work engagement

(dedication) and visitor satisfaction is as expected, as the dedication is the most reflected matter in the behaviour of the workers. Thus it would directly influence the satisfaction of the visitors (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2014). This study contributed to the literature by providing new insight on the factors affecting visitors' satisfaction by incorporating work engagement as the alternative element. In this case, we borrowed the crossover theory (Westman & Etzion, 1995) and APIM to explain the cross over mechanism that occurs between workers and visitors.

Both of the resources highlighted in the present study are the common job resources with regards to services. We provide evidence on the indirect effect of skill discretion on visitor satisfaction through the dedication of workers. Promoting a healthy workplace by providing opportunities in developing competencies significantly benefits not only the workers, but indirectly the customers of the organization. Adequate skill discretion opportunity can significantly improve the organizational performance through customer feedback.

Among the limitations of the present study is the limited number of respondents (dyads). While numerators managed to retrieve 99 usable and complete survey forms from the booths available, feedback from the respondents may not reflect the true answers because we approach them during working hours that might limit their respond. Future research should consider the incorporation of technology to solve such matters and to increase the rate of responses.

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