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## The Relationship between Work Environment and Work Engagement on The West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia

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### Abstract

The study aims to investigate the relationship between the work environment and work engagement at one multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The work environment was measured by Work Environment Scale (Billing and Moos, 1982) and work engagement was assessed by Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). A total of 103 employees from the customer relations department of the multinational company have been chosen as the respondents in this research. Structural equation modelling using SmartPLS has been adopted to analyze the collected data. The results reveal that the level of the work environment is at moderate while work engagement is at high. The findings from SmartPLS discover that there is a significant and positive relationship between the work environment and work engagement at the multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. A few recommendations were suggested such as the company can improve the low level of relationship dimension in the work environment by initiating team-based projects rather than individual-based projects. Suggestions were also provided for future research including combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches in conducting the research.

**Keywords:** Work Environment, Work Engagement, Performance

### Introduction

Work engagement has drawn significant attention in the working world, the organizations are trying to ensure that the employees have an engagement with their work (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). Besides, employees who are engaged with their work can increase performance (Bakker, 2014) and performance in the organization (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the work environment also plays an important role for the employees to be engaged with their work. As confirmed by Hanaysha (2016) work engagement has become one of the aspects of the work environment. The work environment is the first factor to ensure that the

employees can balance their work and activities in the organization (Razak *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, to enhance work engagement among employees, the organization needs to provide a better working environment (Danish *et al.*, 2013). A healthy and peaceful work environment will assist the organization to establish and create work engagement among the organization's employees, especially those in Malaysia (Razak *et al.*, 2016).

High work engagement among employees will be achieved if employers provide a positive working environment. Parkers (2017) claimed that to ensure employees are comfortable with the physiology and physical conditions to engage with their work in the organization, the good condition of the work environment is important. Besides, a meaningful working environment helps employees to understand how valuable they are within the organization and to engage them in their work (Osborne and Hammoud, 2017). Thus, having an effective work environment can increase work engagement among employees. Moreover, Hanaysha (2016) agreed that the organization can design the work environment in such a way that the level of work engagement can be enhanced.

Therefore, in the field of organizational behavior and management as well as Human Resource Development (HRD), practitioners give significant attention to work engagement (Tauhed *et al.*, 2018). According to Christian *et al* (2011), work engagement can help an organization encourage their employees to have high engagement towards their work. However, according to the Trends in Global Employees Engagement by Aon (2017), Malaysian employees have the lowest engagement with work among Asian countries. Besides, Malaysia has the world's highest proportion of disengaged workers because they do not even think their work is worth it to them (Salleh, 2016). Besides, the lack of support from the supervisor (work environment) leads to disengagement among the employees with their work (Bennetts *et al.*, 2017). In parallel to this worrying situation, therefore this paper aims to:

- identify the level of the work environment among the employees
- identify the level of work engagement among the employees
- identify the relationship between the work environment and work engagement among the employees

## Literature Review

### **A Brief Overview of Work Environment**

As mentioned by Moos and Insel (1974), work environment refers to the social environment in the workplace, counselling support and career planning that encourage improvements in the workplace. Furthermore, the work environment can be described as an area in the organization where the employees perform the task given (Hanaysha, 2016) and the place where the morale of employees, efficiency, and engagement are impacted (Chandrasekar, 2011). Moreover, Mehboob *et al* (2012) state that a work environment is a place that sweeping with the psychological, physical, and social aspects that enhance organizational performance. Besides, different factors in the working environment can impact both the psychological and physical of the employee (Agbozo *et al.*, 2017). Thus, to support the work environment variable, the Work Adjustment Theory by Dawis *et al* (1968) has been adopted.

Work Adjustment Theory describes the relationship between the employees and the work environment (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984). According to Brown *et al* (2013), the Theory of Work Adjustment is known as the P-E theory. This theory indicates P as a person meanwhile the environment as E. Besides, the Work Adjustment Theory is aiming at the individual and individual's behaviour (Brown *et al.*, 2013). As mentioned by Dawis and

Lofquist (1984), the structural and dynamic aspect of P-E provides data or information to analyze the mutual adjustment and adaptation process. Work Adjustment Theory starts with the assumption that P has requirements to be met by a living organism, and most of them by E. Due to that, the work environment dimension by Billings *et al* (1982) has been applied in this research which is the relationship dimension, personal growth or goal orientation dimension, and system maintenance and change dimension.

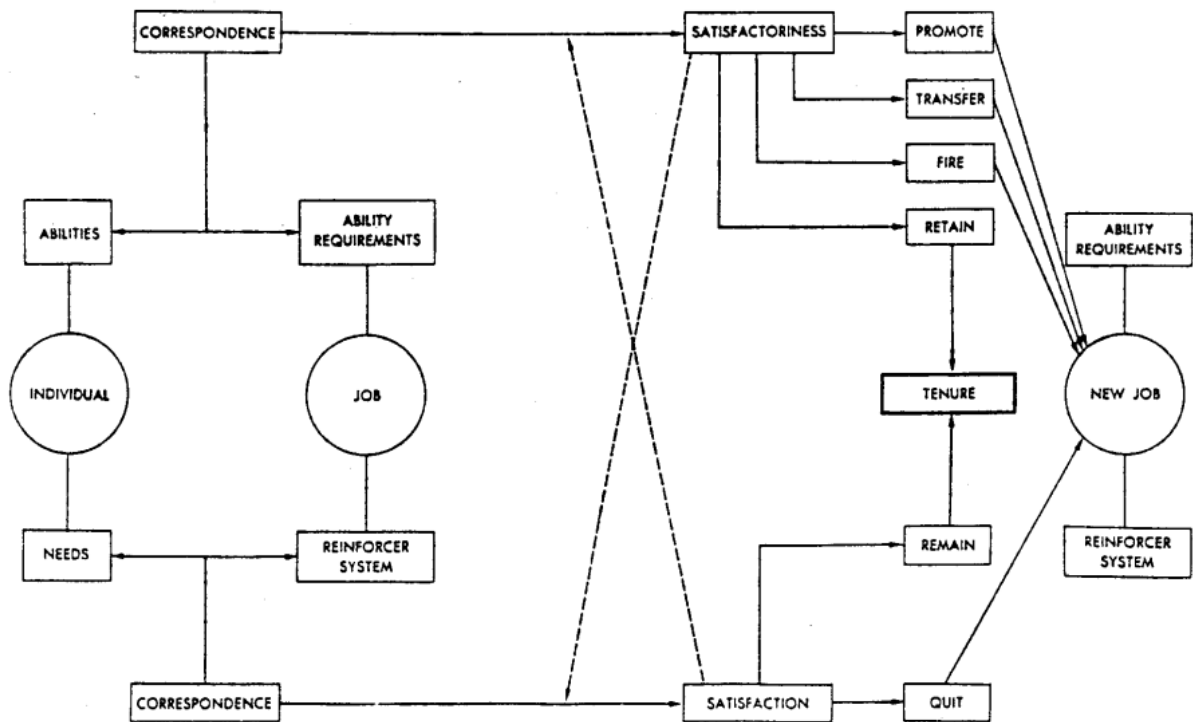


Figure 1  
P-E Theory (Source: Dawis, Lofquist and Weiss, 1968:12)

The first dimension in the work environment is the relationship dimension. According to Billings *et al* (1982), the relationship dimension refers to participation in the workplace, supporting and assisting each other, and expressing themselves freely and honestly in the workplace. In other words, the relationships dimension refers to the quality of personal relationships. This dimension contains three sub-dimensions which are involvement, peer cohesion, and supervisor support. The second dimension is personal growth or goal orientation. The dimension is to examine the basic objectives of the environment and the areas in which personal growth and self-improvement begin to occur (Walsh, 1987). This dimension contains three sub-dimensions which are autonomy, task orientation, and work pressure. The last dimension is system maintenance and change. As stated by Yamura and Westerman (2007), this dimension shows how the work environment is orderly and coordinated, how consistent it is in its goals, and how much control it retains in the organization. This dimension contains four sub-dimensions which are control, clarity, innovation, and physical condition. Moreover, this research has also been identified as the conceptualization of work engagement.

**Brief Overview of Work Engagement**

Work engagement is a high-energy optimistic, effective motivated condition combined with high commitment and a high focus on work (Shaufeli and Bakker, 2003). As stated by Khan (1990), employees are employed physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally and reflected in engagement during role performance. Besides, Shaufeli (2012) claimed that work engagement is a behavioural-energetic, psychological, and cognitive part of work. Furthermore, work engagement can be defined as cognitive, emotional, and physical organizational activity that makes employees have positive thoughts about improving performance and making an effort to accomplish certain tasks (Kuok and Taormina, 2017). By referring to this variable, Social Cognitive Theory (1991) has been used as the underlying theory to understand the nature of work engagement in the workplace.

Social Cognitive Theory refers to the capacity of the person to develop and sustain behaviours by pointing out external and internal social reinforcement (Cashin and Ifinedo 2014). As mentioned by Bandura (2001), this theory shows the most common human system function is perceived self-efficacy, which describes the perceived power that individuals have over themselves and environmental events. The Social Cognitive Theory is also used to explain how self-efficacy affects the thinking patterns and emotional responses of employees as they deal with work and family requirements (Chan et al., 2017). Consiglio et al (2015) stated self-efficacy can be the main personal resource that can facilitate both work engagement and a positive environment for social work. In 2004, Shaufeli and Bakker have coined the work engagement theory based on the main principles of the Social Cognitive Theory. Shaufeli and Bakker’s (2004) theory has introduced three-dimension which are vigor dimension, dedication dimension, and absorption that is used in this study.

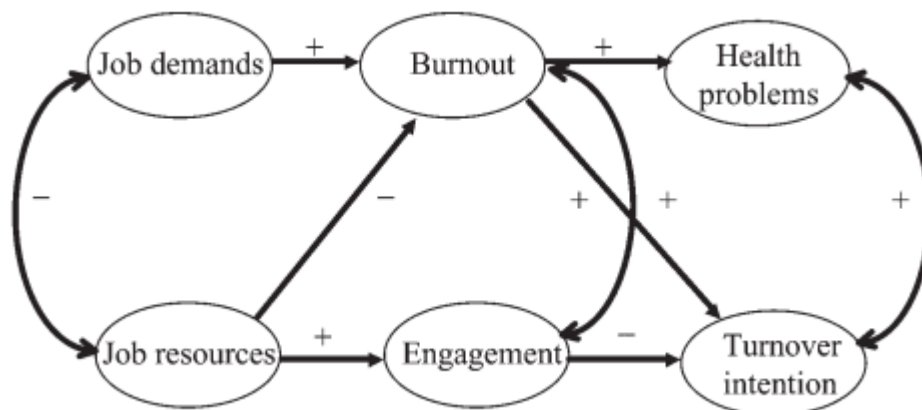


Figure 2  
 Work Engagement Theory (Source: Shaufeli and Bakker, 2004: 297)

The first dimension in the work engagement is the vigor dimension. As mentioned by Tsaur *et al* (2019), vigor explained that employees are having greater strength and mental elasticity at work and the capacity to put effort into their job. In other words, employees who have this type of personality seem to have more initiative and can go through any difficult situation more effectively (Sharma *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the second dimension in work engagement is the dedication dimension. This dimension shows that employees are highly inspired to work given and have a sense of meaning, inspiration, pride, and challenges in their work (Tsaur *et al.*, 2019). Thus, dedication refers to constructive engagement in any

work assigned to the employee. (Sharma *et al.*, 2017). Finally, is the absorption dimension. According to Boikanyo and Heyns (2019), absorption is when a person is completely and fully immersed in the work and unable to remove himself from it so that time passes easily and everything else is forgotten. Therefore, the relationship between the work environment and work engagement was identified.

### ***Relationship between Work Environment and Work Engagement***

As stated by Schaufeli and Salanova (2010), various sources such as work environment are positively linked with work engagement. As mentioned previously, the work environment is associated with work engagement. Therefore, there is some evidence in previous research that shows the relationship between the work environment and work engagement. Align with the mentioned statement, some research has been found and explained subsequently. Suan and Nasruddin (2016) had researched the employees in the hospitality sector in Malaysia. In this research, a positive correlation was found between the interested variables. The researcher state that supervisor support (work environment) positively affects work engagement in the hospitality sector. Therefore, this indicates that supervisor support (work environment) plays an important role in ensuring that the employees are satisfied and involved in their job.

Another research by Park and Lee (2018) was to examine the work environment and work engagement in Korean clinical nurses. Recent findings explained that the working environment has a significantly positive impact on work engagement. Thus, in order to increase the level of work engagement among employees in the organization, a positive working environment is important. For instance, the role of supervisor support is to support the effort of employees in the organization to improve performance and create a supportive environment in the organization. Similarly, Ashari *et al* (2016) found that the work environment and work engagement possessed a positive relationship. This is because a good relationship among employees increases the level of work engagement in the organization. This research has been conducted among female engineers in the Malaysian corporate sector. It is worth conducting current research in line with previous research, so a clear framework for the relationship could be established. Therefore, a hypothesis has been formulated:

H1: There is a relationship between work environment and work engagement among employees at one multinational company in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

### **Methodology**

This research followed descriptive research as a research design. The population of the study is the employees from the customer relations department at one multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. A total number of 140 employees from the multinational company have been chosen by using the random sampling method as the respondents of the study. To collect the data, a set of questionnaires has been distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of Work Environment Scale (WES) 1981 by Billing and Moos (1981), and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) 2003 by (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). The Work Environment Scale (WES) (1981) consisted of three dimensions. The first dimension is the relationship, the second dimension is personal growth or goal orientation and the third dimension is system maintenance and change. The score of answers ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Work Environment Scale (WES)

demonstrated acceptable internal reliability with Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.72 to 0.87 and the overall work environment Cronbach value is 0.75. Meanwhile, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (2003) comprises three dimensions which are the vigor dimension, dedication dimension, and absorption dimension. This instrument has 17 items that employed a 7-point scale ranging from Never (0) to Everyday (6). UWES has an excellent internal consistency with the Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.74 to 0.85 which accumulates the value of 0.79 for the overall work engagement alpha Cronbach. To respond to the objectives of the study, the data were analyzed using SmartPLS software.

## Result

### **Demographic of Respondents**

Most of the respondents of the current study are female (53%) and aged between 20 to 29 years old (68%). The rest are male (47%) and aged between 30 to 39 years old (16%), 40 to 49 years old (11%) and above 50 years old (8%). In terms of education, most of the respondents were degree holders (43%) and followed by Malaysia Certificate of Education (also known as *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) holders (29%). Meanwhile, there are some respondents who obtained a diploma (24%) and only 3 respondents possess a master's degree (3%). Findings regarding job tenure, most of the respondents had been working in the company between 6 to 10 years (60%) and followed 11 to 15 years (25%), 16 to 20 years (10%) and 5% for above than 21 years.

- **Level of Work Environment among Employees**

Table 1 represents the overall mean score of the work environment in the multinational company with its dimensions.

Table 1  
*The Level of Work Environment*

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Relationship	3.52	.384	Moderate
Personal Growth	3.41	.344	Moderate
System Maintenance and Change	3.53	.374	Moderate
Overall Work Environment	3.49	.317	Moderate

The work environment showed a moderate level with a total mean score of 3.49 and standard deviations of 0.317. This moderate level shows that respondents are satisfied with the physical condition in the multinational company but they lack autonomy in performing the work given. One of the contributors is the moderate level possessed in the dimension of the relationship. Referring to this moderate level, the respondents are willing to help new employees in the organization, but they rarely do things together with other co-workers. On the other hand, most of the respondents are comfortable showing how they feel in the company (Somewhat Agree: f=33, %=32.0; Agree: f=49, %=47.6; Strongly Agree: f=14, %=13.6). Besides, most of the respondents usually eat lunch together with their co-workers (Somewhat Agree: f=37, %=35.9; Agree: f=32, %=31.1; Strongly Agree: f=25, %=24.3). Moreover, most of the respondents agree that their supervisor will stand up for the employees (Somewhat Agree: f=26, %=25.2; Agree: f=59, %=57.3; Strongly Agree: f=12,

%=11.7). This proved that the employees have a good relationship with others in the multinational company.

The moderate level possessed through the dimension of personal growth or goal orientation also succeeds in explaining the moderate level of the work environment within the studied organization. The moderate level indicates that the respondent can use their initiative to perform the work, but they do not have enough freedom to do as they want. However, the respondent was encouraged to make their own decision in the organization (Somewhat Agree: f=34, %= 33; Agree: f=42, %=40.8; Strongly Agree: f=8, %=7.8) Moreover, the majority of the respondents think that the organization plan the activities in an efficient way of the organization (Somewhat Agree: f=19, %= 18.4; Agree: f=67, %=65; Strongly Agree: f=14, %=13.6). Next, the respondents agree that the work are challenging in organization (Strongly disagree: f=3, %=2.9; Disagree: f= 3, %= 2.9; Somewhat Agree: f=30, %= 29.1; Agree: f=56, %=54.4; Strongly Agree: f=11, %=10.7). The personal growth or goal orientation in the multinational company was well designed.

The work environment is also being influenced by the moderate level of system maintenance and change dimension. The moderate level indicates that respondents are encouraged to learn things even those that are not directly related to the job but a new approach to things is rarely tried in the organization. However, most of the respondents agree that the responsibilities of the manager have clearly been defined in the organization (Somewhat Agree: f=26, %= 25.2; Agree: f=59, %=57.3; Strongly Agree: f=10, %=9.7). Moreover, the respondents agree that new and different ideas are always being tried out in the organization (Somewhat Agree: f=27, %=26.2; Agree: f=61, %=59.2; Strongly Agree: f=8, %=7.8). Besides, based on the finding shows that the organization is quite a lively place for most respondents in the organization (Somewhat Agree: f=15, %= 14.6; Agree: f=67, %=65; Strongly Agree: f=16, %=15.5). By referring to this, the multinational company has clearly explained the expectations and responsiveness to environmental change.

• **Level of Work Engagement among Employees**

Table 2 illustrates that respondents are positively responding to each of the dimensions measured under work engagement.

Table 2  
*The Level of Work Engagement*

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Vigor	3.70	.601	High
Dedication	3.90	.656	High
Absorption	3.68	.702	High
Overall Work Engagement	3.76	.543	High

The overall mean score of work engagement shows it was at a high level with a total mean score of 3.76 and 0.543 of standard deviations. One of the contributors is the high level of the vigor dimension. The high level indicates that the respondents often think they are bursting with energy at work and preserved even when things do not go well. On the other hand, most of the respondents feel great to go to work when waking up in the morning (Sometimes: f= 26, %= 25.2; Often: f=60, %= 58.3; Very Often: f=11, %=10.7). Besides, most of the respondents feel strong and vigorous while performing the job (Sometimes: f= 23, %=



23.3; Often: f=60, %= 58.3; Very Often: f=13, %=12.6). Moreover, the respondents are mentally resilient on their job (Sometimes: f= 36, %= 35; Often: f=45, %= 43.7; Very Often: f=15.5, %=10.7). Hence, it showed that during work, employees have greater endurance and mental elasticity and the capacity to put effort into their work.

Apart from that, the high level of dedication dimension also contributes to the high level of work engagement in the multinational company. The high level indicates that the respondents are proud of what they do and claimed that the job is challenging in the multinational company. Besides, the respondents claimed their job inspired them in the organization (Sometimes: f= 28, %= 27.2; Often: f=47, %= 45.6; Very Often: f=22, %=21.4). Furthermore, most of them feel that they are performing the work with full meaning (Sometimes: f= 27, %= 26.2; Often: f=54, %= 52.4; Very Often: f=19, %=18.4). Thus, based on these findings, the employees in the multinational company show that they are strongly inspired to work and in the work they do, they have a sense of value, motivation, pride, and challenge.

Lastly, another contributor to the high level of work engagement achieved could be seen from the dimension of absorption. The high level of absorption dimension indicates that the respondents feel time flies when they are working and are happy when performing the job in the organization. Moreover, most of respondents forget everything else around them when working (Sometimes: f= 42, %= 40.8; Often: f=37, %= 35.9; Very Often: f=12, %=11.7). However, only one respondent is rarely carried away when performing the work (Seldom: f=1, %=1; Rarely: f=1, %=1). In short, this finding shows the employees are completely and fully immersed in the job and unable to remove themselves from it, so that time passes quickly and all else is forgotten.

- ***The Relationship between Work Environment and Work Engagement among Employees***

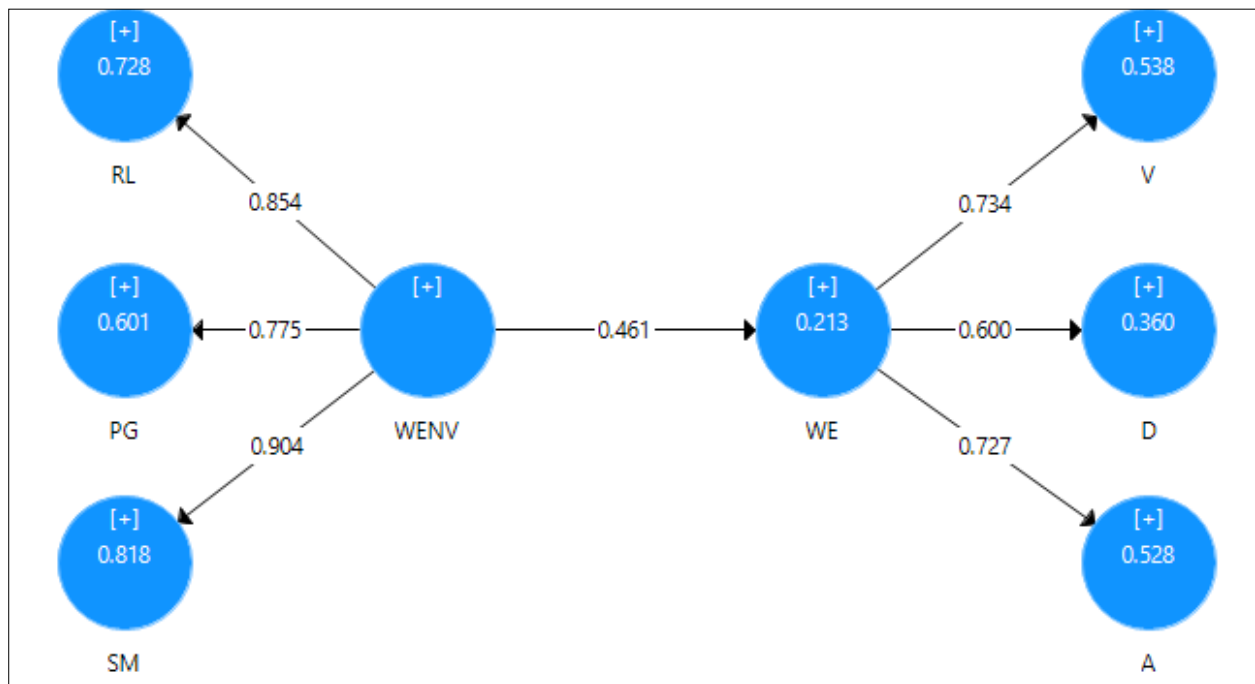
Table 3 shows the summary of the analysis between the work environment and work engagement among respondents in the multinational company. The p-value of the variables which are the work environment and work engagement is 0.000 statistically significant at 0.001. Based on the analysis the R<sup>2</sup> is 0.442. This result shows that the work environment has affected work engagement by 44%. Meanwhile, the t-value amount will explain the significant relationship between work environment and work engagement. It can be concluded that work environment and work engagement has significant effect, and the hypothesis is accepted in this study.

Table 3

*Results of SmartPLS for the Relationship between Work Environment and Work Engagement*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std. Error	t-value	Decision	R <sup>2</sup>
H1	Work Environment → Work Engagement	0.443	0.242	1.024	Supported	0.442

Note: \*\*p < 0.01, \*p<0.05



\*WENV= Work Environment, RL= Relationship, PG=Personal Growth, SM= System Maintenance and Change, WE= Work Engagement, V=Vigor, D= Dedication, A=Absorption

Figure 3

*Analysis of the model to measure the relationship between Work Environment and Work Engagement*

### Discussion

This section will explain the findings according to three research objectives which are identifying the work environment and work engagement level as well as the relationship between the work environment and work engagement within the multinational company. The first objective of this research is to determine the level of the work environment among the multinational company employees on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The level of the work environment among multinational company employees is at a moderate level. This research has been supported by Pranitasari (2019) research, which established an average level of work environment among lecturers at the College of Economics in East Jakarta as the college provided for the needs of the lecturers while teaching. Therefore, this level indicates that employees at the multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia have a healthy work environment in terms of relationships but are unclear about personal growth or goal orientation. The employees display positive feedback working in the multinational company employees as the organization not only focuses on the business but also on the needs of the employees.

The second objective of this research is to identify the level of work engagement among the employees in the multinational company. Overall, the results show that the level of work engagement among the multinational company employees is high. This level indicated that the employees are engaged with their work. This is because they like their work and find it interesting. Besides, a study by Park and Lee (2018) agreed that nurses in Korean clinical who have a strong feeling toward their work show a high level of work engagement. Thus, the multinational company enable employees to have optimistic

thoughts about improving results, feeling good about the job, and making an effort to accomplish the job.

Finally, the main objective of this research is to identify the relationship between the work environment and work engagement among the employees in the multinational company. A significant and positive correlation was successfully found between both variables. It means that the supervisor's support, task orientation, and physical conditions in the organization help the employees feel energetic while performing their work. This result is congruent with previous research which also showed a significant positive association between the work environment and work engagement in the corporate sector (Ashari et al., 2016) and hospitality sector (Suan and Nasruddin, 2016). Even though it is only at a moderate strength, this relationship is strong enough to claim the existence of the relationship between the work environment and work engagement.

### **Conclusion**

In general, this study was mainly conducted to investigate the relationship between the work environment and work engagement at one multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It is believed that people who are engaged in their work indeed prefer to have a good working environment. The unsatisfied working environment can lead to several organizational issues such as reputation issues. This issue is imperative to be studied in Malaysia as work engagement among Malaysia's employees is the lowest compared to other Asian countries (Hweitt, 2017). Findings from the structural equation modelling analysis via SmartPLS have discovered that there is a positive and significant relationship between work environment and work engagement among employees at one multinational company on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It indicates a positive work environment will cause the employees to be happy while performing jobs at the workplace. Findings from the descriptive statistics have also revealed that the employees are satisfied with the working environment (moderate level of work environment) and enjoy doing their job at the multinational company (high level of work engagement).

Several recommendations were pointed out to improve the current situation at the multinational company and future research. For the multinational company, it is suggested for the top management to provide more team-based projects rather than individual-based projects. From this team-based project, the employee will be able to get know to each other and at the same time they will be able to build their networking at the workplace. Once the employees have a good relationship with other co-workers, it thus makes the work much more enjoyable to be performed in the multinational company. As for future research, it is recommended to conduct a similar study on other different departments or levels of employees in a workplace. This is because the different departments and levels of employees may yield unique findings due to different job responsibilities in the workplace. department and level of employees. In conclusion, it is hoped that the current findings of the study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on work environment and work engagement particularly in a Malaysia context.

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