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Social Support and Career Motivation in Public Service

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Abstract

The quality of public service is very much depending on the motivation level of public servants. Even though career motivation is one of the important aspects of the public service, only a few studies were conducted to cover this topic. Most studies on public servants were conducted to address public service motivation rather than career motivation. Therefore, this article is an attempt to delve into the meaning of career motivation in public service as well as some common issues related to the level of career motivation among public servants. The enhancement of career motivation level could mean the major improvement of the quality of the public service. The arguments were arranged to highlight on the key findings from the previous studies that have been conducted on career motivation among public servants to serve as a contribution to the body of knowledge in the area of career motivation in human resource management in public service. The authors also investigated the role of social support on career motivation level among public servants. It was suggested from previous literature that focusing on social support could enhance career motivation among employees. To conclude, some suggestions for future studies were also conferred in this article.

Keywords: Career Motivation, Social Support, Public Service

Introduction

The quality of public service is very much depending on the motivation of the public servants (Berman, 2011). However, it was argued that the level of motivation of public servants are relatively low due to promotion to a higher grade while they are not qualified for the position (Berman, 2011). Hence, they have to remain in the public service for a long duration while waiting for retirement which resulted in low motivation level among them. Motivation formed a foundation for career development and advancement (Heimler, Rosenberg, & Morote, 2012) but very few research focus on career motivation in public service (Berman, 2011). The importance of studying the career motivation in public service is increasing to improve the quality of public service and it is particularly important in Malaysia due to the enormous size of its public service (Kuan Heong, 2018). To understand the factors that affect motivation in public service surely is a big challenge by means of

handling different people with different life objectives is not a simple mission (Mohammed, Khaliq, Sbaih, & Kamil, 2014).

There are two major types of employee motivation in the public sector, namely, public sector motivation and public service motivation (Ritz, Neumann, & Vandenabeele, 2016). Most research on public service focuses on public service motivation (Vandenabeele & Skelcher, 2015), which highlighted the public servants' level of motivation in serving the other people or public (Mustapa & Mahmud, 2016; Vandenabeele & Skelcher, 2015). While public service motivation is important in the public service, public sector motivation also play the role in ensuring the sustainability and quality of public service (Salleh, Dzulkifli, Wan, & Ariffin, 2011). Therefore, this article is attempting to highlight the importance of focusing on public service motivation particularly career motivation in public service.

Career Motivation

Motivation as a term is derived from the Latin word "movere", meaning "to move" (Mohammed et al., 2014). Zoogah (2013) defined motivation as the direction, arousal, amplitude, and persistence of an individual's behaviour. People are usually motivated by a combination of different factors and ways (Mohammed et al., 2014). Motivation is the process that arouses, energizes, directs, and sustains behaviour and performance by which it stimulates people to act and reach desired tasks through their actions. Motivation is closely related to stress and work performance of individuals (Chan, Leung, & Liang, 2018). Managers can use motivation as a tool to stimulate factors that could push the employees towards achieving the organization's goals (Mohammed et al., 2014).

Career motivation is central to the individual and is dependent upon the individual's characteristics and environmental influences (Ortiz, 2015). The concept of career motivation applies motivation theory to understanding career plans, behaviors and decisions (London, 1993; Peters, Doorewaard, & Eisinga, 2014). The term career motivation is associated with a wide range of career decisions and behaviors ranging from searching for a job and accepting a job, to revisiting one's career plans. Career motivation is also defined as a set of individual characteristics that are associated with career decisions and behaviors (London, 1983; Peters et al., 2014).

Career motivation is a multidimensional construct consisting of three major domains: career resilience, career insight and career identity (London, 1983). Career identity is the direction of the motivation whereby the degree that people define themselves by their work and by their organization. Career resilience is the sustainability of motivation through the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Finally, career insight is the energizing of motivation through the realism and clarity of the individual's career goals. It involves the degree to which they immerse themselves in activities related to their job and the organization. Furthermore, motivation also can be seen through hard work, view themselves as an expert (professional or technical expert) as well as communicate pride in their organization (Alniacik, Alniacik, Kultigin, & Erat, 2012; Mohammed et al., 2014; Zoogah, 2013).

Motivation and performance are more important in the public sector rather than the private sector since the society is more affected by their service than the private sector. The benefit of having motivated employees could be seen from two aspects: benefit to the organization and benefit to the employee. Individuals that are motivated experience less stress, enjoy their work and have better well-being. They are also creative and innovation which in turn would benefit the organization through their contributions towards the success of the organization. Motivated employees usually have a fewer ethical problem and are more committed to the organization. The organization also would experience less employee absenteeism and turnover (Re'em, 2011).

Issues in Public Sector Motivation

The importance of career motivation can be drawn upon the overall satisfaction among the employees and this is also applicable to the public servants. Thus, the motivation and satisfaction could help the government to improve their service to the people. Despite lower pay and shortness of resources and staff, the level of motivation among public servants is particularly high because they found their work to be meaningful (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Kuan Heong, 2018; Talmage, 2018). Also, the public servants' motivation reflects the way that they reacted towards human resource strategies of the public organization (London, 1988) and it was found that motivated employees are more loyal to the organization (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). However, a study conducted in a government department in Kedah found that the motivation level of the public servants there was mostly low (Mahazril et al., 2012) whereas another study conducted in Penang found the opposite (Che Embi et al., 2016). The contradicting findings in previous research formed a solid ground for another study to be conducted on the public servants' career motivation level. Thus, the career motivation level in public service could be questioned when only 53% of them are confident and looking forward to career development (Talmage, 2018).

Frequently, most public servants maintain their motivation to work in public service mainly because of job security (Munnell & Cannon Fraenkel, 2013) and clearly structured pay scale (Talmage, 2018) in the government office. However, job security, as well as comfort at the office, could also mean difficulties to enhance motivation in public service due to complacency at the workplace (Re'em, 2011). Public service employees suffer from low morale and motivation due to the negative image of the government and its community painted by the media as well as politicians (Lavigna, 2014). Public workers have a reputation for being lazy and lethargic (Re'em, 2011), low efficiency (Raudeliūnienė & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2014), ageing and plateauing public sector (Lavigna, 2014). Sometimes, public servants are also perceived as overpaid and underworked (Lavigna, 2014) who are hard to motivate (Re'em, 2011). Due to rigid civil-service laws, there is limited opportunity to manoeuvre the motivation level (Lavigna, 2014; Re'em, 2011). Other challenges to motivate public servants such as frequent and abrupt changes of leaders make it hard to measure the achievement of public servants (Lavigna, 2014).

Some researcher alleged that employees are commonly motivated by extrinsic motives rather than intrinsic motives (Re'em, 2011). However, it was believed that public service employees are motivated by different sets of motives among others their commitment to governments agenda to

serve the public (Lavigna, 2014). Monetary rewards, pay-for-performance or bonuses will be less influential on the motivation of public sector workers than private sector employees (Rashid & Rashid, 2012). Public sector employees are more motivated by work contents and experience more balance between work and family life (Rashid & Rashid, 2012). Public sector employees are also more attracted to intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation (Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2011).

How Social Support Affect Career Motivation

The definition of social support is always being criticized for its variety and vagueness (Ortiz, 2015; Sarwar & Khalid, 2015). Frequently, social support refers to the amount of value that an individual believes he or she will receive from their social interactions (Ortiz, 2015) and the degree to which employees perceive their support system (family, friends, supervisors and co-workers) care about their well-being as well as respecting their contributions (Simosi, 2012). The support can be offered by providing practical (such as assisting in managing daily household's operations) or emotional support (such as giving advice) (Achour, Mohd Yusoff, & Mohd Nor, 2013; Nasurdin & O'Driscoll, 2011; Russo, Shteigman, & Carmeli, 2015). Work and family social support is vital to unleash positive energy among employees (Russo et al., 2015).

Russo et al. (2015) in their study investigated two types of support namely; workplace support and family support. Workplace social support is defined as "the degree to which individuals perceive that their well-being is valued by workplace sources... and the perception that these sources provide help to support this well-being" which includes support from the organisation and its members, i.e. the organisation itself, supervisor and co-workers (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Family support refers to support that acquired from family members or family unit such as spouse, parents, siblings, children as well as extended family. Both workplace and family social support can be instrumental (such as tangible help offered by the sources) and emotional (such as actions by sources that make the recipient feel that they are taken care of) (Russo et al., 2015). There are also studies that focus on social support from the perspective of different culture such as *wasta* in the Arab culture (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015, 2016; Afiouni, 2014; Omair, 2010; Said, Rasdi, Samah, Silong, & Sulaiman, 2015; Tlaiss, 2015; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011) and *guanxi* in the Chinese culture (Kashif, Zarkada, & Thurasamy, 2017; Millar & Culpin, 2014; Napasri & Yukongdi, 2015; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010).

London (1993) stressed that career behavior and decision making should be steered by the amount of support and guidance provided by the environment. Frequently, employee performance and productivity are strengthened by support from supervisors and co-workers in managing work, personal and family life (Kim & Wiggins, 2011). The employees that have support from supervisors and co-workers usually experience life satisfaction. In a study conducted among students, both motivational characteristics and perceived social support from family and friends were shown to be highly contribute to academic outcomes (Ortiz, 2015) and support from others (i.e., parents, siblings, and teachers) significantly influenced both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vatankhah & Tanbakoei, 2014).. Other studies also showed that there was a positive correlation amongst the

levels of external motivation, internal motivation, and motivation for the subject value of the individuals who received sufficient social support from their environment (Noe, Noe, & Bachhuber, 1990; Tezci, Sezer, Gurgan, & Aktan, 2015).

London (1983) stated that the components of career motivation such as career insight and career resilience should be related to the amount of support and guidance provided by the organization (London, 1983). Another study also indicated that social resources (i.e. social support) are one of the critical career resources which are essential for career development (Hirschi, 2012).

Social support also enhances intrinsic motivation (Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, & Alegre, 2016; Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003) and social support is the most effective way to enhance intrinsic motivation (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003). Social support is also recognized as one of four critical factors of career resources (Hirschi, 2012) for career self-management. Sarwar and Khalid (2015) found that there was a significant positive relationship between social support and work motivation. Having the people around to provide support will provide more opportunities in a career because resources do not generally exist in isolation but work in a collective way (Hirschi, 2012). For young people in Malaysia, parents have most influenced career choice (Kuan Heong, 2018) thus this could also affect career motivation. The significant relationship between social support and career motivation suggests that organizations need to train managers to ensure that they have competence in the interpersonal roles necessary to facilitate and maintain employees' career motivation (Noe et al., 1990). Employees with supportive managers and organization feel more confident and positive and likely to view their workplaces as favourable (Alniacik et al., 2012; Shuck, Peyton Roberts, & Zigarmi, 2018). Similarly, social support increases the motivation level of employee to learn to improve performance (Karami, Ismail, Omar, Abdul Wahat, & Badsar, 2012; Ng & Ahmad, 2016).

Conclusion

There are many issues and challenges that are faced by managers in public service in motivating public servants. However, with limited studies conducted in career motivation among public servants, some of the issues and challenges remain unanswered. Previous studies had proved that workplace social support can enhance the motivation level of employees. Nevertheless, not many researches focused on social support from family members and friends as related to career motivation. There is evidence that family and friends support contributed to a higher motivation level among students, but it cannot be claimed the same for the working adults due to lack of evidence. Therefore, it is suggested that more research is conducted to study the effect of social support from family and friends on career motivation, particularly in public service.

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