

## **Employee Creative Behaviour as a Consequence of Workplace Autonomy in Kuwait: A Meditative Study on Employee Engagement**

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### **Abstract**

The study centralises around the depiction of employee engagement as one of the major factors in determining Employee Creative Behaviour (ECB) within an enterprise. This concept has been explained through the exploration of the notion that ECB could be promoted and induced within a workplace by means of various triggers. These prerequisites are fundamentally accountable for the estimation of the productivity within a firm, thus entailing the profitability revenue generation, sustainability and development of a business operative. In this regard, workplace autonomy has been selected to be the core factor to be investigated in this study, by highlighting the significance of ECB, and the requirement of encouraging employee engagement through promotion of autonomy and providing similar individual employee benefits. This study explored that there are different factors that depict employee engagement and creative behaviour within an organisation. Considering the business market of Kuwait, these could either be general or interpersonal. The former includes incentives, training, workplace environment, and leadership. Whereas, age, gender, qualification, income, organisational experience, employment level, and ethnicity, all come under the umbrella term of interpersonal characteristics that participate in generating ECB. The study was conducted by the exploratory analysis of the secondary data available on Kuwaiti business practices. The results suggest a significant impact of workplace autonomy on the formation and cultivation of employee creative behaviour with employee engagement acting as a mediating factor.

**Keywords:** Employee Creative Behaviour (ECB), employee engagement, workplace autonomy, Kuwait, workplace environment, organisational innovation.

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## Introduction

Employee Creative Behaviour (ECB) refers to the inclusion of creativity and organisational innovation within a workplace environment for the conduction of business operatives by the employees. This entails a significant role of employees in the progress and success of a company. They are accountable for the incorporation and exploration of innovation and creativity within the pre-set business principles. This may, consequently, provide room for further improvement, ultimately enabling the enterprise to build upon an essential competitive edge within the target market (Unsworth, 2010).

Creativity itself is conceptualised as a process, which involves different operative phases within a company, from design to product distribution or service provision. Through this perspective, innovation could be incorporated within any production stage, providing an organisation with the opportunity to hold a certain distinction from other companies offering similar products or services. This not only ensures a competitive edge in the target market for the company but also enables sustainability of the company within the same economy (Tang, 2017).

Primarily, ECB is a result of the integration and promotion of employee engagement within an organisational environment. This entails the enablement of employee input and active participation within a company, which may lead to a new insight into the potential development of a business as a whole. It is thus imperative for the cultivation of such a workplace environment that supports employee

participation, engagement, and contribution to all business activities in order to ensure the incorporation of creative ideas within the business operations. For this purpose, different factors could be deemed crucial in building up a creative employee mindset. These may include creative ability, intelligence level, workplace motivation, active participation tendencies and capacities, situational measures, innovative initiatives, use of integrative models, as well as an open and inclusive organisational framework (Mathisen, 2011). Adhering to modern organisational models that may enforce the prevalence of innovative mindsets and operations within a company is thus depicted to be of high priority, especially in the modern market. The availability of numerous creative tools, theories and strategies for a business setting also allows companies to pursue a more modernistic approach to the conduction of business. Such a futuristic perspective is thus supported by the promotion of employee engagement and creative behaviour, potentially resulting in the build-up of a successful business approach competitive in, and adaptable to, all market conditions (Dul, 2011).

This research thus aims to address core factors for the cultivation of a creative business environment through the utilisation of employee engagement. For this purpose, the market of Kuwait has been targeted for the observation, in order to generate a clear perception about the level of inclusion for creativity and organisational innovation within Kuwaiti businesses. Therefore, through this study, the active role of the ECB for the success of a business could be

defined and highlighted. Moreover, this study strives to determine the potential business strategies for the promotion of employee engagement and creativity within Kuwaiti organisations. This entails a detailed analysis of the available business theories and models promoting employee engagement and creativity, leading to the identification of potential areas for improvement within the pre-existent Kuwaiti organisational frameworks. The results could thus be generalised and implemented for a diverse set of enterprises on a global scale.

## Literature Review

### Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is referred to as the level of participation and involvement of employees within diverse business operations. This includes all organisational phases, from designing and manufacturing, to sales and marketing. Employee engagement could thus be regarded as an essential parameter for all types of organisations, leading to various benefits for companies individually, as well as to the market as a whole (Gruman, 2011). Such an approach is beneficial for businesses in the essence that employee satisfaction and retention rates could be raised, thus ensuring better performances and additional profitability to the firm. It also promotes open communication and inclusivity for employees to form a collective workforce, all empowered and motivated to acquire similar organisational goals. A communicative and open workplace environment also acts as being a motivational boost for employees, leading

towards the development of employee loyalty (Anitha, 2014).

In this context, utilising employee engagement tactics, the workplace environment could be altered in order to promote interactivity, which in turn aids in the establishment of a loyal and motivated workforce. Similarly, this leads to the solution of issues concerning employee turnover ratios, especially considering the recent market where employees are presented with multiple professional options to choose from. Multiple jobs with similar objectives or professional levels are now available to potential employees, causing them to possess the opportunity to switch companies as well, if not provided with an appropriate working environment. Thus, the cultivation of a strong, connected, supportive and mutually beneficial workplace setting is mandatory to ensure employee satisfaction, engagement and consequently, retention, loyalty and active participation (Markos, 2010).

### Theories and Models for Employee Engagement

In order to endorse employee engagement within an organisation, various business theories and models have been designed and implemented as per individual requirements of companies of various sectors. Considering this parameter to be a necessity on a general basis throughout all types of industries, it is thus imperative for the incorporation of effective employee engagement theories and models within the pre-existent organisational infrastructures. These theories are diverse in nature, addressing different aspects of the factor of employee engagement as per the

implementable variations within any business structures, and as per market requirements (Saks, 2014).

#### Social Exchange Theory

This theory covers the conceptualisation of causation and the process behind the enhancement and enforcement of the engagement of employees towards their work. Wu, Chuang and Hsu, (2014) explored the concept of the social exchange theory, stating that the rudimentary concept of this theory is based upon obligations of employees, according to their employment position, which requires interactions between two parties. These parties could either be internal or external. The former portrays the communication between different employees or departments within the same company for major projects; whereas, the external parties could be an enterprise-to-enterprise interaction for collaborative projects. Generally, such business ventures require effective communication and open engagement, which entails the generation and cultivation of trust and loyalty within the engaged parties (Chernyak-Hai, 2018). This theory thus centralises around social aspects of communication within business settings. This entails that the interaction should present a product of benefit towards the participatory firm. On this basis, the fundamental perception of this theory is represented by cost and rewards analysis. Furthermore, elaborating this perspective, social exchange theory builds upon the foundation that a social exchange involves the process of decision making between two parties. In addition, this theory is driven by an analysis of the potential cost and reward

due to the business operative for companies involved. This showcases the significance of effective engagement prior to any decision-making practice, in order to benefit from the maximum amount of rewards with minimal cost to the company (Cook, 2013).

#### Resource-Based Theory

Resource-based theory portrays the significance of effective and optimum utilisation of the available resources for organisations to produce maximum profit and revenue. This includes the factor of human resources, such as workforce is considered to be a crucial player in determination for the productivity of a company (Barney, 2011). Connecting this theory to employee engagement, as per the study conducted by Albrecht et al. (2015), it has been established that active involvement of employees in different business functions leads to efficient and smart use of the available workforce as a human resource. Moreover, motivating them to strive to accomplish the organisational objectives through mutual understanding and efforts. In this manner, the resource-based theory could also be implemented in light of the need for active communication and participation of employees within a company. This will not only enable the induction of personal satisfaction but will also promote a highly productive and smoothly functioning organisational structure.

Consequently, employee loyalty could also be cultivated, such that the workplace environment could be improved by lowering the employee turnover rates. This theory also ultimately enforces the need for sustainable and progressive use of the available resources, specific employees

ashuman resource. Additionally, this theory focuses on encouraging employees in engaging them in the task that would help in obtaining company goals. This may lead to the overall development of employees on an individual level, the company on a collective level, and the market on an economic level. It is also relevant to the conservation of resources theory, which depicts retention of employees as an essential aspect of forming a progressive and productive environment within a company. This also connects to the need for employee engagement, satisfaction and successively, effective human resource utilisation, as depicted in the research conducted by Fairlie (2011).

#### Employee Engagement Models

The employee engagement model presented by Maslach and Leiter (2006) proposed that work engagement is inversely proportional to burnout. This depicts that on a business-oriented spectrum if one end is labelled as engagement, the other is typically represented as burnout. In light of correlativity, burnout should be observed as an erosion of engagement for employees. Maslach et al. (2001), in another study, continued with this directive, adding another dimension to the concept of employee engagement. The authors further elaborated that organisational obligations, workplace involvement and job satisfaction, being similar in nature, are contradictorily different from the practice of employee engagement, portraying the latter as an independent factor. The authors in previous studies had argued an extensive expenditure of energy leads to burnout, turning vigour into exhaustion, and efficacy into ineptitude. This implies that extensive

engagement could eventually result in cognitive, emotional and/or physical burnout, ultimately providing a negative approach to increasing productivity by aiming to increase employee engagement.

Such a perspective also removes the contribution of the external factor of the workplace environment, inclusivity, loyalty, productivity, communication and autonomy towards the development of workplace employee engagement (Remo, 2012). However, these views were contradicted by the engagement model suggested by Schaufeli (2002), which depicted that engagement is also independent of burnout, such that there may be a negative relation between the two parameters, but they are not necessarily anonymous to each other. Contrastingly, this model focused upon the design of an alternative scale for the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) for the estimation of the level of employee engagement within a business setting. MBI operated on the basis of measuring employee engagement against burnout, which was later depicted to be not entirely accurate within the business setting where multiple other factors come into play (Wheeler, 2011). Thus, for this purpose, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was established, which addressed the factor of employee engagement in terms of persistence, motivation, positive output, and objective accomplishment. These interdependencies were categorised into three broad parameters: vigour, dedication and absorption. The latter involves the level of interest and self-motivation of employees towards their employment obligations (De Bruin, 2013). Therefore, this modified

model highlighted the contribution of other external factors; mainly, the workplace environment as one of the core parameters for the assessment of employee engagement. According to the findings of Shuck et al. (2011), factors such as employee satisfaction, inclusivity, creativity, interactivity, and autonomy formed a business environment that was included in the estimation or development of employee engagement within a firm.

### **Employee Creative Behaviour**

Creativity is induced through the behavioural inclinations within employees towards the implementation of change or a new outlook in the case of prevalent business activities. Such a mindset encourages employees to generate new ideas, concepts, product or process designs, marketing strategies, or distributional practices. In this manner, the overall business procedural infrastructure is subject to change in accordance with the ever-fluctuating and developing demands of the market. As a result, through the integration of creativity within the business practices, organisations are able to maintain their place in the global market and motivating them to meet the market requirements. This necessitates the involvement of employees, as a 'fresh' and innovative perspective to different business designs could be catered to with the help of these individuals. Furthermore, the notion of creativity itself could be implemented only through the effective utilisation of human resources by organisations. It is thus, crucial for the production of creative outputs through modifications within processes themselves. In this manner, creativity or innovation

could only be implemented by altering various business processes in order to ultimately produce a creative outcome (Orth, 2017).

### **Theories for Employee Creative Behaviour**

#### *Social Cognitive Theory*

This theory centralises around the concept of the process of social interactivity among individuals which promotes the cultivation of cognitive skills for them, enforcing the idea of social learning. Applying this concept in a business setting, employees could therefore grow within an organisational environment through engagement and communication, participating in the individual development which subsequently leads to mutual growth for the overall workforce and the firm. This theory focuses upon the behavioural aspects of conducting business activities, as a result, it could be effectively be linked to the cultivation of creative behaviour within employees as well (Schunk, 2012).

The interconnection of ECB and employee engagement could thus be explored on the basis of the social cognitive theory. Elaborating this prospective business tactic, the generation of creative business ideas and their implementation could be done through manipulation of the parameter of the social engagement for employees. Social engagement within business settings leads to sharing of ideas, analysis of current operatives through a fresher, diversified perspective, and mutual participation in the accomplishment of business objectives in a collectively incorporative manner. As a whole, ECB could be effectively integrated within business operatives, through

successful manipulation of the workplace environment and the promotion of employee engagement, similarly suggested by Kang and Sung,(2017).

### Behavioural Management Theory

Behavioural management theory directly addresses the enhancement of productivity for a company through an increase in motivation for employees. This implies the assessment of requirements and interests of employees as a human resource for any business organisation. In this manner, factors associated with the aspect of the growth of employee motivation for the fulfilment of company objectives are required to be identified, explored and utilised for the development of the behavioural skills of the employees, specifically in the case of ECB(Kwok, 2014).

### **Factors Promoting Workplace Autonomy, Employee Engagement and Creative Behaviour**

#### Monetary and Non-Monetary Incentives

The basic monetary incentives provided to employees are financial benefits. The practice of offering external financial compensation and benefits to employees for additional efforts made by them is towards the achievement of company goals has been commonly implemented in various business settings(Markos, 2010). It not only acts as an encouragement for employees to perform better and invest their efforts on a higher level but also allows an increase in overall productivity, generating higher revenue and profits. Employee engagement has thus been observed, in multiple studies, to have increased immensely through a presentation

of the opportunity for procuring financial benefits on the basis of individual efforts(Cantor, 2012; Glavas, 2012; Grayson, 2017).As per findings of an investigation directed by Alm, (2018), for the Kuwaiti companies, the lack of personal taxation applied on individual employee salaries in Kuwait has been estimated to be one of the leading factors for the inclination of employees to join Kuwaiti companies. Furthermore, other monetary benefits, such as bonuses and overtime pay, are also being provided to employees in Kuwait, as per policies followed in other countries as well(Alansari, 2018).

In addition, the non-monetary incentives could include praise for employees as per their efforts and performances within the company towards the achievement of organisational goals. It has been observed through various case studies that employee motivation is significantly boosted through a portrayal of appreciation for employees based on their organisational performance. This includes their efforts towards engagement, orientation towards career and business growth, the potential for personal skill development, and their overall positive contribution to the company in the form of profitability and efficiency. These non-monetary incentives could be tangible or even be intangible, including personal encouragement, autonomy and the provision of a productively progressive working environment. This allows employees to view themselves as a highly important asset to the company, inducing a sense of loyalty within themselves which ultimately aids them in

performing as per their optimum capacities(Liu, 2011).

Apart from these, the improvement within the workplace environment provided to employees could also be done by focusing on the integration of inclusivity and diversity within the workforce. This entails portraying consideration in the recruitment of employees regardless of any biases towards gender, ethnicity, colour or language, and solely employing individuals on the basis of their business skills and treating them as equals. The incorporation of different cultures within the workplace by recruiting a diversified workforce will not only allow the company to be viewed as highly professional and justified in operations but will also ensure employee loyalty and appreciation, which could also induce a sense of personal responsibility to perform better from their part as well. Moreover, an inclusive business setting also ensures the potential of employee engagement through an open and communicative environment, consequently leading to the possibility of the growth of ECB as well. Therefore, by ameliorating employee relations through an inclusive workplace environment, employee engagement could be promoted, resulting in better opportunities for employees to incorporate creative ideas and innovation within their performance(Waqas, 2014).

#### Interpersonal Attributes and Skills

Apart from external environmental factors, interpersonal attributes and skills could also be deemed as factors involved in the estimation of employee engagement and creative behaviour. These include age, gender, qualification, employment level,

marital status and income. Interpersonal skills may include leadership, communication, business mindsets, and creative abilities(Mencl, 2016). These factors also entail the level of autonomy that employees may enjoy within a company, especially in the case of businesses in Kuwait. Considering the majority of the population of the country to be conservatives, the involvement of women in businesses is less as compared to the Kuwaiti men. This entails the direct relation of gender in the estimation of the performance of employees within an organisational setting. Workplace autonomy and performance are also impacted by other factors such as age and marital status, which are also gender-biased, even including incomes and employment positions in Kuwait(Al-Mutairi, 2014). This, as a result, provides a major hindrance, especially for business-oriented Kuwaiti women, for their personal growth and development in organisational performance. It also provides them with fewer incentives and lower levels of motivation for engagement, loyalty to the company and, generally, incorporation of a creative approach to business operatives. The latter is also a major issue as the level of autonomy defines the scope that employees are provided to integrate creativity and personally assessed modifications within their organisational duties(Abdullah, 2014). As depicted in previous studies, innovation requires personal input(Simanis, 2011; Duran, 2016; Sørensen, 2011). Providing Kuwaiti employees with low workplace autonomy will inevitably result in lower levels of personal input and opportunity for engagement, and thus, have minimal

creativity. This could also be applied on a more generalised basis as well (Gagné, 2011).

### **Research Methodology**

The research has been conducted on the basis of an exploration of the relation between ECB and workplace autonomy, with employee engagement being the mediating factor for the build-up of this foundational contingency. For this purpose, multiple research articles, books and case studies have been investigated and evaluated through the secondary analysis approach. The data gathered has been incorporated within the general business perceptions, relevant theories and models, and diverse business strategies, which will enable the formation of a strong qualitative foundation. Therefore, on this basis, this study will present a detailed examination of the environmental factor of workplace autonomy, depicting its potential for the cultivation of ECB through increasing employee engagement and satisfaction. For the thorough assessment of this relation, the Kuwaiti market has been targeted for this study to generate results on a more practically informed basis. The results will then be further assessed in light of the general businesses practice, in order to ensure their applicability for future research (Wirtz, 2016).

The literature analysed within this research is selected to be from journal articles, books and case studies for the generalised investigation of the business strategies, theories and models, as well as the specific assessment of the practical implementations and requirements of the Kuwaiti market. The statistical data has also

been collected from the previous case studies available on the economy of Kuwait in particular. Similarly, the qualitative data is secondarily gathered in order to incorporate diverse perspectives of different authors and business analysts (Lawrence, 2013), varyingly addressing the need for ECB and its potential use and development through relevant parameters.

### **Results and Discussion**

Conclusively, it could be stated that employee engagement does potentially act as a mediator for the provision of workplace autonomy and the generation of employee creative behaviour within Kuwaiti business settings. The theories regarding ECB and employee engagement also centralise the maximisation of the utilisation of available resources, specifically human resources, supporting the relations established in this study. This conceptualised and investigated relation could also be implemented on the business operatives within different regional markets, in a more generalised manner (Alvesson, 2012). The depiction that employee engagement leads to effective communication and the sharing of ideas and self-motivation is associated with the induction of the personal interests of employees in establishing themselves as the core resource or asset for their company (William, 2010). Through this perspective, employees are motivated to perform on a higher scale, consequently promoting loyalty to the organisation and their duties. The development of communicative channels among employees enables them to share ideas and innovative perspectives, inducing a sense of creativity within the manner in which they may tackle

a problem or conduct a business activity (Chiang, 2012). The factor of workplace autonomy comes into play in this stage, as it defines the level of personal input an employee could indulge within their organisational obligations, allowing them to modify the prerequisite business practices for the betterment of the company (Singh, 2015). Ultimately, the increase in revenue generation, profitability, competitiveness, and general market progress could be viewed as a mutual advantage to employees individually, as well as to the company collectively.

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