

Original Paper

The Predominant Factors Affecting Frontline Employees’ Engagement: Case of the Lebanese Service Sector

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Received: March 22, 2021

Accepted: April 6, 2021

Online Published: June 3, 2021

doi:10.22158/jbtp.v9n2p37

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jbtp.v9n2p37>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to first identify the predominant factors shaping frontline employee engagement and then to explore the outcomes of the employees’ engagement within the context of the service sector in Lebanon. The main theory used to ground the research is the explanatory power of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). A qualitative ethnographic method was used to explore the salient drivers and outcomes of employees’ engagement. The qualitative approach was implemented by observing and informally interviewing frontline employees, and by gathering documentary data for a greater understanding of this phenomenon. Findings show that supervisor support, organizational support, training, distributive justice and procedural justice appeared to be significant drivers of employee engagement. It was also evident that personal resources and self-efficacy have a significant moderator effect between supervisor support, distributive justice and employee engagement. Moreover, employee organizational commitment, intention to quit and organizational citizenship behaviors revealed to be the direct outcomes of employees’ engagement. This study is among the first undertaken in the Lebanese context. The findings shall help to close the gap in the reported literature about the topic and will serve HR decision makers as new knowledge for future endeavors.

Keywords

employee engagement, self-efficacy, distributive and procedural justice, social exchange theory, Lebanon

1. Introduction

Human resource management has become increasingly important due to employees’ significant effect on the organizations’ performance and overall effectiveness and sustainability. Many scholars examined main employees related factors which have significant impact on enhancing organizations bottom-line performance such as employee’ overall satisfaction (Melián-Gonz ález et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Antoncic & Antoncic, 2011; Heskett et al., 1994; Petty et al., 1984), employee’s loyalty (Heskett et al., 1994; Duboff & Heaton, 1999) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Organ et al., 2006; Yen & Niehoff, 2004; Walz & Niehoff, 2000; Allen & Rush, 1998), and employee learning (Achi, 2017).

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, “Employee Engagement” is perceived as the main determinant enhancing employee performance and ultimately boosting the overall business performance. Hence, managers and decision makers must mark it as their end-to-end practice (Saks, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010; Doherty, 2010; Hejase et al., 2012; Ibrahim & Falasi, 2014; Hejase, 2020a).

Despite its increasing worldwide popularity and importance for organizations, there is a dearth of academic studies examining employees’ engagement, in the Middle Eastern region in general and in Lebanon in particular. Accordingly, this article addresses the “Engagement-Gap” by examining the outcomes and main determinants affecting frontline employee engagement. It also examines the importance of personal resources in relation to the level of engagement in the service sector in Lebanon. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill the current gap by studying employee engagement using the explanatory approach and relying on the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

This paper consists of five sections. The first section introduces the background and aim of the paper. A review of theoretical models is presented in section two followed by the methodology in the third section. Section four presents a full discussion of the research questions. Finally, in section five, the conclusion including implications of the research and the recommendations are offered. Moreover, the limitations and future research are also addressed.

2. Literature Review

Despite the popularity and importance of employee engagement to organizations’ success and enhanced performance (Choo et al., 2013), there is a scarcity in the studies tackling the after mentioned concept (Robinson et al., 2004; Saks, 2006). The employee engagement concept is repeatedly discussed yet rarely understood in the workplace (Doherty, 2010). There is no one definition of “engagement”, as it is described and perceived differently by academics (Choo et al., 2013; Hughes & Rog, 2008), and given that it is relatively a new concept in academia (Wefald & Downey, 2009).

2.1 Engagement: Definitions and Drivers

The term “engagement” is rooted in the work of Erving Goffman (1961) as being spontaneously involved in the task and when high attention and muscular effort are perceived by employees at work. Afterwards, Kahn (1990) introduced “employee engagement” as a concept and defined engagement as the attachment of employees to their organizational work. The author emphasized on the three psychological conditions for engagement: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Some authors associated engagement to the employee emotional bond with the organization (Baumruk, 2004; Shaw, 2005; Richman, 2006). Rothbard (2001) defined engagement as a psychological presence involving attention and absorption. Albrecht (2010) defined employee engagement as “a positive work-related psychological state characterized by a genuine willingness to contribute to organizational success” (p. 5). Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, effective-motivational state of work-related well-being, and so did Ferreira and Oliveira (2014). Others viewed engagement as the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Harter et al., 2002).

This paper’s preferred engagement definition will be the one provided by Schaufeli et al. (2002) and later on by Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006), who presented the concept of employee engagement theoretically and empirically, as representing experiences of vigor, dedication to the role, and periods of absorption over extended periods of time—weeks, months, or even years. This definition remains extensively acknowledged in the academic domain (Albrecht, 2012) and the most widely cited (Albrecht, 2010). Indeed, the three dimensions of engagement namely vigor, dedication, and absorption

have been widely adopted (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a, 2004b; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Yener et al., 2012).

Many authors discussed employees' engagement drivers such as Saks (2006) who found that the antecedents of employee engagement were; perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, job characteristics, rewards and recognition, procedural justice and distributive justice. On the other hand, Slåtten and Mehmetoglu (2011) found that job autonomy, perceptions of role benefit and strategic attention increase frontline engagement. Moreover, Barnes and Collier (2013) developed a model that links antecedents of work engagement (service climate, job satisfaction, and affective commitment) to the outcomes (career commitment and adaptability) in the service environment. Banihani et al. (2013) proposed a conceptual framework that shows that it is harder for women to demonstrate work engagement than for men and that work engagement is a gendered concept. Later on, Ghosh et al. (2014) extended Saks' model and added organizational justice for determining job engagement. Furthermore, Rana et al. (2014) identified job design and characteristics, supervisor and co-worker relationships, workplace environment, and human resources department practices as the major antecedents to employee engagement.

2.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET): Theoretical Framework to Explain Engagement

The social exchange theory was developed by the sociologist George Homans (1958). Later on, Peter Blau (1964) introduced the term "theory of social exchange". SET assumes that when a person obtains something favorable from others, he/she has an obligation to reciprocate. Social exchange is defined as "voluntary actions of individuals who are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (Blau, 1964, p. 91). It is based on each actor's motivational investment and forecasted benefits (Lee et al., 2010). While its beginning was at the individual level, SET has been widened at organizational and inter-organizational levels.

Designed to examine interpersonal social exchanges, SET analyses people's social behavior in terms of exchanges of resources (Bignoux, 2006), tangible and intangible resources (Tanskanen, 2015), such as knowledge (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Liao, 2008). Social exchanges include actions dependent on the rewarding reactions of others, which, over time, provide reciprocal and beneficiary transactions (Chang et al., 2015), these rewards can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Blau, 1964). The detection of the effects of dependence among exchanging partners is considered a main contribution of SET (Lambe et al., 2001; Chang et al., 2015).

The benefits from social exchange are often voluntary, as a result the social exchange theory focuses on the personal relations among the actors that result from successful and rewarding exchanges over time (Tanskanen, 2015). Blau (1964) poses two assumptions of SET, the first is that the actors involved in the exchange aim to obtain rewards from their relationship that would be unobtainable on their own, and the second is that the maintenance and growth of the relationship which depends on the attractiveness and evaluation of the exchange outcome. Thus, SET is an innovative approach of analyzing economic and non-economic exchanges between different actors (people, organizations), especially that the Lebanese business culture is a relationship-oriented culture where exchanging favors are expected (Yahchouchi, 2009). Therefore, when employees obtain valued resources, rewards and recognition (social, emotional and economic) from their firm, they feel indebted to pay back the firm (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006), and one way for doing that is through higher levels of engagement (Saks, 2006).

Based on the above analysis, the authors of the current paper chose to explain the Lebanese frontline engagement phenomenon in the service sector from the lens of employees, while building on the explanatory and predictive power of the Social Exchange Theory.

2.3 The Impact of Individual Characteristics and Personal Resources

The impact of employee personality traits on engagement is critical since employees working for the same supervisor in the same organization performing the same job, might exhibit different levels of engagement. Certainly, people's different experiences and individual traits could result in different reactions to the same organizational and environmental circumstances (Ghorbannejad & Esakhani, 2016).

Furthermore, scholars suggest that individual preferences and personality traits have a significant effect on engagement (Mello & Wildermuth, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008a, 2008b). It is generally recognized that both working context and individual traits influence employees' behavior (Meyer et al., 2010). Moreover, Self-esteem, neuroticism and extraversion were suggested by Wildermuth and Pauken (2008a; 2008b) to effect employee engagement. Indeed, Langelan et al. (2006) found that burned out individuals were more likely to score high in neuroticism while engaged individuals scored lower in neuroticism, higher in self-esteem and higher in extraversion. In addition, employees' personal resources, individual characteristics and proactive personalities such as optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, conscientiousness and resilience could drive higher levels of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rana et al., 2014). Besides, personality traits are critically important to consider especially for frontline employees, since these employees are regularly involved in an emotional labor, where they must constantly express positive emotions and suppress negative ones during their interactions with customers in conformity with organizational rules (Walsh & Bartkowski, 2013). It was even found that personality traits are substantial antecedents of job performance in service sectors (Brown et al., 2002); noting that emotional labor can enhance intentions to quit (Chau et al., 2009; Goodwin et al., 2011).

Individual traits were found to influence employees' work engagement, as employees with higher self-efficacy and conscientiousness were found to exhibit higher engagement levels (Bakker et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a; Ghorbannejad & Esakhani, 2016). Interestingly, Dagher et al. (2015) also found that self-efficacy has a significant positive influence on the three dimensions of employee engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) using a sample of employees in the service industry from Lebanon. On the other hand, some scholars argued that personality traits have a moderating effect on the relationship between Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) and frontlines' service performance and that the Social Exchange Theory (SET) is the best context to explain it, since employees with different personality traits, though working under the same organizational practices, will form different perceptions (Petrou et al., 2011; Ruppel et al., 2013; Fullarton et al., 2014; He et al., 2015) and therefore develop different levels of obligation to return the organization's favors (Oentoro et al., 2016).

In fact, Liu et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy moderates the effect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on work engagement. Moreover, in their theoretical model of the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement, Rana et al. (2014) proposed that individual characteristics act as moderators to the relationships between the antecedents and employee engagement.

2.4 Individual Self-efficacy as Moderator

In fact, it makes sense to presume that people with different experiences and different individual's traits would react differently to the same organizational and environmental circumstances (Ghorbannejad &

Esakhani, 2016). It has been argued that individual preferences and personality traits play a key role on engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008a, 2008b; Mello & Wildermuth, 2010), and that both working context and individual traits will mutually alter employees' behavior (Meyer et al., 2010). In this respect, Janssen et al. (1999) found that individuals with low self-esteem were more likely to become burned out while, Langelaan et al. (2006) found that burned out individuals were more likely to score high in neuroticism. In contrast, engaged individuals scored lower in neuroticism, higher in self-esteem and higher in extraversion. Moreover, employees' self-efficacy, conscientiousness and resilience could drive higher levels of engagement as suggested by (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rana et al., 2014).

In fact, it seems critically important to consider the moderator effect of employee's Individual traits among which self-efficacy in the case of frontline employees, as it was found that employees with higher self-efficacy exhibit higher engagement levels (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a; Ghorbannejad & Esakhani, 2016). Additionally, Dagher et al. (2015) also found that self-efficacy has a significant positive influence on the three dimensions of employee engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) using a sample of employees in the service industry from Lebanon.

2.5 Conclusion

As a conclusion, main determinants and outcomes of employees' engagement have been highlighted in the above-mentioned literature. The main determinants identified are supervisor support, organizational support, resource and training availability, and organizational justices; the main outcomes that have been discussed are organizational commitment, intention to quit and organizational citizenship behaviors. In this study thus we attempt to explore the following research questions related to employees' engagement in the case of the Lebanese banking sector:

- R1. What is the effect of Perceived Organizational Justice (Procedural and Distributive Justice) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- R2. What is the effect of Perceived Resource availability on frontline employees' Engagement?
- R3. What is the effect of Perceived training availability on frontline employees' Engagement?
- R4. What is the effect of Perceived Supervisor Support and Care (PSS) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- R5. What is the effect of Perceived Organizational Support and Care (POS) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- R6. What is the effect of Self-efficacy on the relationship between (a) organizational Justice, (b) Resource Availability, (c) Training, (d) PSS, (e) POS and care and frontline employees' Engagement?
- R7. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' organizational commitment?
- R8. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' intention to quit?
- R9. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)?

3. Method

A qualitative ethnographic method is used to explore the drivers and outcomes of employee engagement within the Lebanese service sector. Ethnography derives from (ethno-) which means culture and (-graphy) which means explanation and is the study of behaviors, opinions, and interactions occurring within team and group members, and communities (Reeves et al., 2008). Accordingly, researchers should reach a profound understanding of individuals and the environment within which

they work. Based on Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), “the ethnographic researcher participates, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned” (p. 2).

Practically, ethnography refers to social research forms with the following characteristics: a strong focus on the exploration of the nature of a specific social phenomenon; mainly work with unstructured information, examination of few cases, if not one case in detail; data analysis including explicit descriptive interpretation of the meanings of human actions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Moreover, Dey (2002) defines ethnography as the methodology in which researcher is totally engaged in the case under study which enables him to get helpful insights for the data gathering process related to the particular group under study.

In this study, ethnography is mainly adopted through the participant observation methodology. Jorgensen (1989) defines the participant observation methodology in terms of seven main features: high interest in the meaning of human as perceived from insiders or members of specific situation; located within everyday life situation and as the basis of inquiry; comprehension of human existence and theorizing interpretation; open ended process of inquiry; need continuous redefinition of the problem relying on the gathered facts in real settings of human existence; qualitative in depth case study approach; building and conserving relationships with participants in the field; using direct observation in addition to other gathering information methods. Jorgensen explains that participant observation method will eventually generate theories and practical truth of human life embedded in daily life realities. Observation is in fact an effective tool for managers as it allows the understanding of the organizational internal environment and that by gathering detailed information about employees’ interaction and abilities to achieve their work (Slack & Rowley, 2000).

The qualitative approach is implemented by observing and informally interviewing frontline employees’, and by gathering documentary data for a greater understanding of this phenomenon.

3.1 Data Collection Process through Observation

One of the authors being the head of learning and development department in one of the main Lebanese private retail banks enabled a fast and good quality frontline employees’ data collection. Ethnographic data was collected from a pure and natural reality.

Referring to the most popular classifications of the observation method (Boote & Mathews, 1999); human versus machine; structured versus unstructured, the researchers decided to conduct a human, rather than machine-based observation. A covert observation was adopted without the knowledge of those being observed so as not to make them alter their behavior or feel uncomfortable. A natural observation will take place in the natural environment of the employees to keep the observed more relaxed, thus getting a genuine picture of the phenomenon as it happens in a “real-world” situation (Boote & Mathews, 1999). The researchers will participate as a member of the staff (Slack & Rowley, 2000) and will conceal our research role, so as not to arouse any suspicion or behavior’ modification on the part of the observed (Boote & Mathews, 1999).

Indeed, our ethnographic activity involved shadowing frontline employees during their day-to-day work, conducting informal interviews and small talks with the employees, attending meetings, workshops and training courses. This opportunity allowed us to spend time physically with the frontline employees as insiders. We were also included in regular e-mail contact as we were included in the organizational distribution lists. This type of fieldwork observation is capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior, especially that there is

insufficient knowledge about the subject (the Lebanese antecedents of frontline engagement in our case). Moreover, it helped us gain deeper insights about Lebanese frontline engagement, especially that the research objective is to identify the key issues that frontline employees across the entire organization believe to have a significant impact on their performance and decisions about to engage or not. Finally, the information collected by our fieldwork observation was used to explore and respond to the questions and confirm our proposed model.

3.2 The Selected Sample

The chosen private retail bank had at that time 20 local branches and 2 foreign branches. The local branches were divided into three different regional areas and each area responded to a regional manager. The observation was planned by choosing three branches of each area and by ensuring that the chosen branches are from different sizes.

Each day, we made sure to be the first ones to arrive at the concerned branch and the last ones to leave, in order to observe the behavior of the frontline employees from the moment they arrive till the moment they finish their work and leave. Our first task was to introduce ourselves to the Branch Manager and to notify him/her that we are going to spend the day in the branch. Then we were introduced by the Branch Manager to the rest of the branch's staff. Our ethnographic activity involved shadowing the frontline employees during their day-to-day work, conducting informal interviews and small talks with the employees, and carefully observing their interactions with the customers and with each other, while taking hand notes. The observation and hand notes were typed by the end of the day since the events of the day were still clearly captured and remembered.

The sample consists of 57 employees among which 54% are male and 46% are female. The employees were selected from different age ranges, positions, branches and number of years' tenure at the bank to allow further exploration and in-depth understanding of the case. The 9 branches of the bank are distributed in different regions of the Lebanese territory: 3 branches are located in Beirut (the capital), 3 in Mount Lebanon (central Lebanon), 2 in Tyr and one in Sidon (both in south of Lebanon).

The age ranges of the selected employees were distributed as follows: 7.01% are less than 25 years old; 50.87% are aged between 26 and 35 years old; 19.29% are aged between 36 to 45 years old; 7.01% are aged between 46 to 55 years old and 15.78% are above 56 years old. The positions held by these employees are various: 8.77% work as Branch Managers (BM) and 15.78% as Assistant Branch Manager; 7.01% are officers at the Back Office; 1.75% are Business Developers; 21.05% are Credit Officers; 17.54% are officers at the Customer Service and 28.07% work as tellers.

As for the years of tenure, 68.42% of the employees composing the sample have been working at the bank for 5 years or less; 19.29% for 6 to 10 years; 5.26% for 10 to 15 years and the remaining 7.01% have been working at the bank for more than 15 years.

3.3 Formulation of the Research Propositions

3.3.1 Perceived Organizational Justice (Distributive and Procedural) versus Frontline Engagement

The current literature indicate that employees' organizational justice and equity perceptions are among main factors behind employee engagement enhancement (Maslach et al., 2001). In his work, Saks (2006) talked about engagement sub-dimensions and stated that procedural and distributive justices are positively related to employee' work engagement. On the other hand, Sze and Angeline (2011) stated that distributive justice rather than procedural justice have a greater impact on employee engagement. This is further supported by Law (2014) who asserts that distributive justice enhances engagement level more strongly than procedural and interactional justice. Moreover, Alvi and Abbasi (2012) claimed that procedural justice had minor impact on work engagement. It is worth mentioning in his study

conducted on the Egyptian banking sector, Dajani (2015) deduced that organizational justice, including the distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice, was the second main predictor of employee engagement.

Based on the aforementioned, the first proposed statement and which will be addressed in the current ethnographic study is the following:

P1. Perceived Organizational Justice (Distributive and Procedural) is positively related to frontline Engagement

3.3.2 Resource Availability and Frontline Engagement

Medlin and Green (2014) confirm that by providing employees with the job needed resource, a higher level of engagement is perceived. In their analysis, the authors rely on the management process associated to the planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling management functions as described by Fayol (1916) while combining the goal setting theory Locke's (Locke, 1968) and the MBO identified by Drucker (1954). Thus, they explain that managers implementing the management process closely follow up on their employees to ensure that employees know their duties and objectives which need to be achieved and they ensure the availability of necessary resources to complete assigned tasks and objectives. Hence, job clarity and availability of necessary resources enhance employees' engagement.

The studies highlighting the positive correlation between resources availability and employees' engagement do exist yet are very limited since most studies examining engagement focus on the job demand resources engagement model described by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). The job demand resources model is very popular and highly discussed in the HR field. It is about the way job resources including autonomy, supervisor support, and feedback and personal resources including positivity and flexibility highly affect employee working engagement (Kerdpitak & Jermstiparsert, 2020). So it mainly examines the physiological intangible employees' engagement boosters. Thus, our second research proposition is as follows:

P2. Resource availability enhances frontline Engagement

3.3.3 Perceived Training Availability Is Positively Related to Frontline Engagement

Training is referred to the systematic activities which transferred needed knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes to an employee for him/her to achieve efficiently and effectively organizational objectives (Azeem et al., 2013; Dessler, 2013). Training has always been among main HR practices which positively affect employee behaviors and work outcomes (Azeem et al., 2013; Luthans et al., 2010).

Indeed, many empirical studies validated the correlation between training and positive organizational behaviors and enhanced performance, learning, commitment, OCB, motivation, creativity, satisfaction and turnover intentions reduction (Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008; Schmidt, 2007; Frayne & Geringer, 2000; Skarlicki & Latham, 1997). Moreover, in their study titled "Diving Deep in Employee Training to Understand Employee Engagement", Ahmed et al. (2015) confirmed that training is a main employee engagement inducement. These findings are further supported by Suan and Nasurdin (2014) and Azeem et al. (2013) who assert that employee training is a key element boosting employee engagement. This can be explained based on the SET as employee' engagement enhancement reflects employee' appreciation and gratitude for the effort made by the company to implement training (Karatepe, 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Nawaz et al., 2014).

Moreover, Nawaz et al. (2014) found that providing services training improves employee creativity and therefore work engagement. Also, Azeem et al. (2013) examined the impact of trainings sessions such as "stress management" and "conflict management" on engagement and concluded that firms need to

implement the right training program for it to enhance employee engagement. Consequently, our third research proposition is

P3. Perceived training availability is positively related to frontline engagement

3.3.4 Perceived Supervisor Support and Care (PSS) and Frontline Engagement

PSS is defined as the degree to which employees feel the care of their supervisors toward their feelings and well-being, and the extent to which they perceive managers' appreciation to their work contributions (Kossek et al., 2011; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Cole et al., 2006). It is mainly reflected by the quality of interaction between different parties. When the relationship is positive the PSS is enhanced and when it is negative the PSS is decreased and thus employees' engagement.

The PSS has become very popular and extensively discussed in the literature due to its ability to predict employees' outcomes and several behaviors within the workplace, such as employees' motivation, intention to leave, performance, productivity, satisfaction and well-being (Babin & Boles, 1996; Ng & Sorenson, 2008; DeConinck & Johnson, 2009; Lapalme et al., 2009; Tuzun & Devrani, 2011; Campbell et al., 2013). Furthermore, many studies highlighted the positive correlation between PSS and employees' engagement (Dabke & Patole, 2014; James et al., 2011; Richman et al., 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2008; Hakanen et al., 2006; Bakker et al., 2005; Salanova et al., 2005; Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Moreover, while examining PPS effect within the service industry, Swanberg et al. (2008) argued that PPS enhances lower-wage hourly frontline employees' engagement. Following the aforementioned facts, the fourth proposition is formulated.

P4. Perceived Supervisor Support and Care (PSS) increases frontline Engagement

3.3.5 Perceived Organizational Support and Care (POS) versus Engagement

Many scholars have discussed the positive effect of organizational support on employees' job performance, employee engagement, organizational commitment and staff retention among others (Masterson et al., 2000; Rhoades et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Baran et al. 2012). In addition to employees' perception and appreciation of supervisor support and care, employees will develop a positive perception of the organization known as Perceived Organization Support (POS). After perceiving the organizational support, employees' productivity, OCB, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy enhance and their intention to leave decrease (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Furthermore, POS shapes the relationship between employees and organizations based on the SET framework, since employees' productivity and engagement increase reflecting employees' appreciation and gratitude toward the support provided by the organization (Settoon et al., 1996; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Krishnan & Mary, 2012).

The relationship between POS and PSS is debatable; while some scholars claim that POS and PSS are similar and that PSS is just a part of POS (Levinson, 1965; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006) given that employees consider their supervisors a representative of the organization and so an increase in PSS will normally enhance the POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Ng & Sorensen, 2008; DeConinck & Johnson, 2009; Lapalme et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2013). Others believe that POS and PSS are distinct variables (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Hutchison, 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2002), given that employees build distinct relationships with their supervisors regardless their experience with the organization. Furthermore, Saks (2006) studied both variables' effect on engagement and concluded that POS has more impact on engagement than PSS. While on the other hand, Dabke and Patole (2014) argued that PSS has a stronger effect on engagement than POS.

The above researched facts lead to the proposition of the fifth research question herein,

P5. Perceived Organizational Support and Care (POS) enhance frontline Engagement

3.3.6 Self-efficacy Relationship with (a) organizational justice, (b) resource availability, (c) training, (d) PSS, (e) POS and care and frontline engagement

Positive psychology research stresses on the “self-efficacy” belief and the “can-do” attitude which are reinforced by enhanced self-confidence. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is defined as individual’s belief in his/her capability to perform well in a given situation. As such, when employees have more confidence in their capabilities and self-efficacy, their motivation increases as they believe they are able to overcome varied kind of obstacles. Accordingly, the amount of effort put and maintained by an individual while solving a specific problem and facing difficult situations is determined by this individual’s perceptions of his/her own self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In this respect, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) introduced the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) concept described as individuals’ beliefs in overall competencies, which according to Urban (2006), it positively affects performance and induce variety of achievements.

Moreover, Bandura (1997) identified the following characteristics of self-efficacy: (1) mastery since when a task is successfully completed, individuals will have more confidence in themselves and will believe more in their competencies to succeed similar future tasks which will consequently improve their self-efficacy. (2) Modeling which occurs through a social comparison processes whereby an enhanced self-efficacy will develop when observing others’ successful behaviors. This is understandable under the duplication of successes rational, that is, having two similar persons, if one can succeed so can the other. (3) Symbolic experience reflected by the encouragement and social persuasions. This means that verbal reassurance such as positive feedback can boost individuals’ self-efficacy. (4) Emotional arousal increases self-efficacy due to the capability of individuals in managing their emotions and maintaining a positive mood. Hence, nervousness can be perceived as excitement with boost individuals’ self-efficacy.

Interestingly some academics talk about efficacy as engagement inducer while categorizing inefficacy under burnout dimensions (Maslach et al., 2001). The relationship between employees’ self-efficacy and engagement has been widely discussed in the literature (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Therefore, Xanthopoulou et al. (2009a; 2008; 2007) and Bakker and Demerouti, (2008) confirm that engaged employees have a high degree of self-efficacy. Indeed, self-efficacy is perceived to be among main personal resources which lead to employees’ engagement (Bakker et al., 2008). As such, self-efficacy mediates the relationship between job resources and work engagement (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). This is further supported by Demerouti et al. (2001) who believe that self-efficacy among other positive personal resources induces desirable psychological and organizational outcomes such as engagement. Self-efficacy helps engaged employees to properly manage their work environment (Luthans et al., 2008).

In conclusion, our sixth research proposition is developed herein,

P6. Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between (a) organizational Justice, (b) Resource Availability, (c) Training, (d) PSS, (e) POS and care and frontline engagement

3.3.7 Frontline Engagement Relationship to Employees’ Organizational Commitment

Engagement is among the main factors affecting organizational outputs such as employee commitment, productivity and performance (Rameshkumar, 2020). Employee engagement and organizational commitment have developed as an important construct in the world of business research due to their constructive impact on employees’ behaviors, which improve companies’ performance and increase profit (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). In this regard, Robyn and Mitonga-Monga (2017) argue that when

employee' engagement increases, employee' loyalty is increased since employee feels more identified to his organization. The employee becomes psychologically attached to his/her organization and thus highly committed. When employee engagement increases, an employee becomes highly dedicated to his/her job, and proud to be part of his/her organization, his/her self-esteem increases which strengthens further his/her bond with the organization and enhances his/her commitment and productivity (Choi et al., 2018). Moreover, while examining the relationship between employee engagement and employees' commitment in developing countries, Mitonga-Monga (2019) found out that job satisfaction along with positive work environment amplify the positive effect engagement has on commitment. Authors believe that job satisfaction and positive working climate enhance employee' dedication, loyalty, perseverance and employee psychological attachment to the company. Furthermore, Anindita and Seda (2018) focused on the individual factors and claim that co-employees support, as well as employees' development and communication increase engagement and consequently enhance employees' organizational commitment. When employees' engagement increases their emotional attachment to the organization is enhanced. The emotional attachment is reflected by the achievement of goals in alignment with the organization values which ultimately reveal employees enhanced commitment.

Based on the aforementioned literature facts, the seventh research proposition is formulated.

P7. Increase in frontline engagement enhances employees' organizational commitment

3.3.8 Frontline Engagement Relationship to Employees' Intention to Quit

Current literature has shown a highly negative correlation between work engagement and turnover intention (Rai et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018; Huang, et al., 2016; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2010). Engaged employees are motivated and excited at work, they are more responsible and try to gain from their work experience and thus they have less intention to leave their organization (Alfes et al., 2013). More precisely, Bailey et al. (2017) asserted that highly engaged employees have a lower level of turnover intention and enhanced performance. This is further supported by a recent study made by Rafiq et al. (2019) who examined the mechanism linking work engagement to employee intention to leave in the media sector in Pakistan. Authors found out that work engagement turnover intention were negatively correlated while highlighting the contribution of trust on turnover intention reduction. In this regard, Saks (2006) explained that engaged employees are full of positive energy that they work hard and immerse themselves in their assigned activities leaving no time for negative feelings such as, leaving the company.

Moreover, Gupta and Shaheen (2017) added that the psychological capital such as employee personal resource and more precisely self-efficacy strengthen the negative correlation between employee engagement and turnover intention. In addition, Alarcon and Edwards (2011) explained that engaged employees usually find difficulty leaving his job given the great investment they have put in their organization. On the other hand, Ivanovic et al. (2020) highlighted the indirect relation linking work engagement to intention to leave as they explain that work engagement negatively affect employee burnout which once reduced has a positive effect on turnover intention. Consequently, the eighth research question is proposed herein,

P8. Increase in frontline engagement reduces employees' intention to quit

3.3.9 Frontline Engagement Relationship with Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Ocampo et al. (2018) worked on identifying OCB antecedents. They came out with 50 determinants of OCB among which was employee engagement. Moreover, Buil et al. (2019) confirmed the positive and significant correlation between employee engagement and OCB. Besides, while trying to improve employee engagement in the corporate sector in Pakistan, Iqbal et al. (2017) found out that employee

engagement is enhanced by rewards and recognition at work and once engaged employee satisfaction, retention and OCB are enhanced. Besides, in their recent study, Kapil and Rastogi (2019) contended that a positive supervisor exchange promotes positive energy and enhances employees' engagement which ultimately increases employee OCB. In their investigation of IT organizations in India, the authors explain that when employees feel their supervisor support, equity and care, they reciprocate by becoming more engaged to their work and subsequently their OCB increases as they are more willing to do extra effort beyond their job description. Furthermore, in the field of hospitality management, Sugianingrat et al. (2019) confirmed that ethical leadership increases employee engagement which consequently enhances employee OCB. Authors explicate that when employees perceive the ethical behavior of their manager, they show more respect toward him; their sense of attachment and engagement to their organization is enhanced. Employees' engagement is therefore reflected by an increase in employees OCB which ultimately improves employee performance and organizational bottom line.

P9. Increase in frontline engagement increases employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

3.3.10 Summary

The article started by the literature review phase, followed by an exploratory phase. During the empirical phase, the researcher conducted brief semi-structured interviews and observed the frontline employees at work to identify the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement within the service sector in Lebanon. In fact, many anthropologists adopted qualitative tools such as observation and interviewing among others to understand employees' attachment to the organization as well as employees' perception toward the firm's culture (Mendez, 2009). The exploratory phase led us to the assessment of the nine research questions which constituted the framework model for current study. See Figure 1 for the framework model;

3.3.11 Formulated Propositions and Suggested Framework

- P1. What is the effect of Perceived Organizational Justice (Procedural and Distributive Justice) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- P2. What is the effect of Perceived Resource availability on frontline employees' Engagement?
- P3. What is the effect of Perceived training availability on frontline employees' Engagement?
- P4. What is the effect of Perceived Supervisor Support and Care (PSS) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- P5. What is the effect of Perceived Organizational Support and Care (POS) on frontline employees' Engagement?
- P6. What is the effect of Self-efficacy on the relationship between (a) organizational Justice, (b) Resource Availability, (c) Training, (d) PSS, (e) POS and care and frontline employees' Engagement?
- P7. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' organizational commitment?
- P8. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' intention to quit?
- P9. What is the effect of frontline employee engagement on employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)?

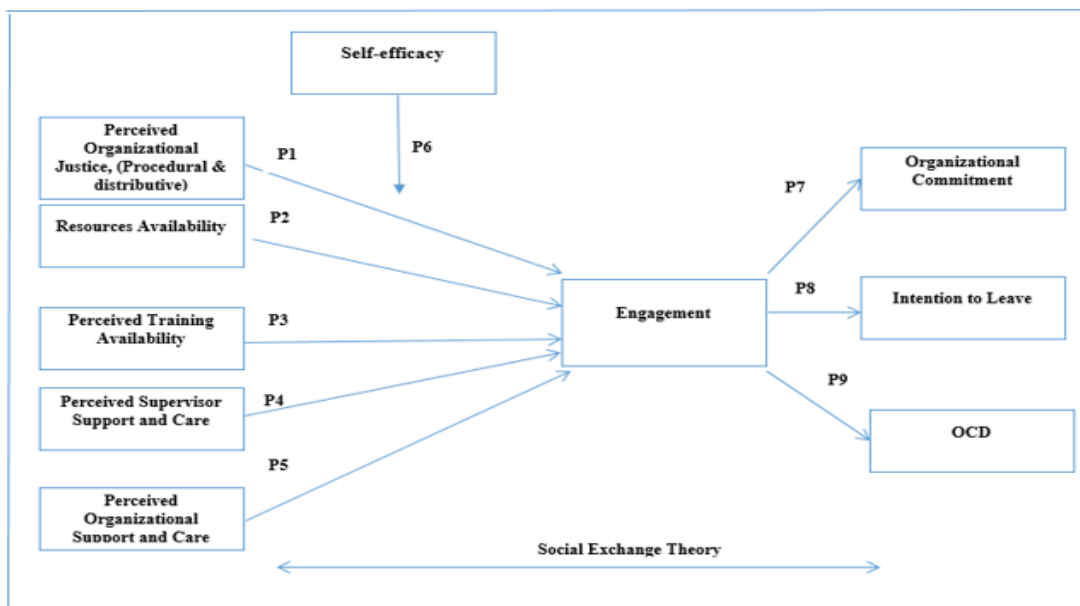


Figure 1. Lebanese Frontline Employees' Engagement Model

4. Discussion

This section capitalizes on the inputs gathered from the sampled interviewees who responded to each of the proposed research questions.

4.1 Perceived Organization Justice

Thirty-eight employees expressed concerns, if not frustrations, with the inequity they were experiencing in the organization and mainly in term of procedural and distributive justice. Also, twenty-six employees described the performance appraisal process at their organization as biased, inconsistent and based on inaccurate information. Seven employees revealed that they never saw or were asked to sign their appraisals while four other employees said that they never got an appraisal and that they didn't even know that such appraisal exists.

As an example, a managerial employee raised concerns about employees' dissatisfaction and di-motivation due to lack of procedural transparency. Another employee, who has been with the organization for more than 20 years, expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction due to inequity and injustice and said that the appraisal is not serious and has nothing to do with employee promotion and rewards. A staff member, who has been with the organization for 6 years and underwent only two appraisals, explains that the appraisal leads nowhere and doesn't have much meaning.

Besides, thirty-five employees exposed the unjust distribution of pay, rewards, and promotions, given their contributions, performance and effort they are putting in their work. It was obvious that twenty-six employees are fully aware about each other's compensation rate and feel unfairly treated.

For example, twelve employees expressed dissatisfaction when talking about their contract. An employee holding an MBA and has several years of experience revealed injustice saying that new employees with less qualifications and experience are being assigned better jobs with better compensation than him. A senior employee expressed dissatisfaction and feelings of demotion with his newly assigned duty since this is prohibiting him to go outside the branch and assume the position he applied and selected for. Another frontline employee, who has been working for the bank 20 years now, said that she has recently received her first raise. Another employee expressed frustration from the injustice in terms of rewards and promotions distribution saying that she only got a part of the deserved

and promised incentive. Finally, one staff member, who was described by the manager as a hard worker, said “I am unhappy because I am the least paid between my peers”.

Consequently, in terms of SET we posit that when employees have high perceptions of justice in their organization, whether “distributive Justice” OR “procedural Justice”, they are more likely to feel indebted to the organization and in exchange of this fairness their engagement is enhanced. On the other hand, low perception of justice is more likely to increase disengagement.

4.2 Resources Availability

Seventeen employees criticized the lack of resources, a fact that is hindering them from performing their jobs adequately. While eight employees talked about unrealistic deadlines and targets, in addition seven of them complained about technology problems and malfunctioning equipment. The twenty-eight raised the issue of not having sufficient resources to complete the job.

For example, one employee complained about having problems with the information system. Another employee revealed his dissatisfaction related to the poor quality of the counting machine, saying that it is not working well. Twelve employees complained about the deficiencies in reading the cheques’ MICR code (MICR printed on cheques: Magnetic Ink Character Recognition technology) and how it is wasting valuable time. Those employees reviewed the Information Technology (IT) department and management in regard to machine and systems failure and asked for a replacement, months ago.

Another frontline employee criticized the head office work while talking about the delays in the customers’ debit cards renewal and said that this is depressing her. One employee said that the management is dispatched from reality and is setting unrealistic goals and deadlines. Forty-one employees grumbled about lack of sufficient staff. They expressed frustration when left alone to run customers’ transactions in the absence of colleagues due to maternity and unpaid leaves. Another employee complained about having to assume the duties of two different employees for the last couple of months. Also, one employee was disengaged for having to cover the duties of an entry level job in several occasions due to shortage of staff. Finally, an employee who was assuming three different jobs expressed his dissatisfaction saying that the workload is preventing him to properly complete his original job which makes it very hard to reach his targets.

Accordingly, from the SET perspective, we postulate that employees who are provided with abundant resources to perform their jobs will feel obliged to respond with a higher level of engagement. In contrast, when employees have low perception of resources availability, they are less likely to work hard and this is reflected by a lower level of engagement. Consequently, the second question derived is as follows:

4.3 Perceived Availability of Training

Thirty-seven employees highlighted the absence of orientation, training, continuous learning and developmental activities. The high criticism of lack of training was expected since we were introduced as the Head of Learning and Development Unit, the unit which was recently created.

For example, twenty-one employees said that they didn’t receive any orientation or training when they first started. Two other employees who recently joined the organization confessed that they are unhappy and disengaged. They don’t know the nature and duties they should accomplish because they didn’t get any orientation or real off-branch training.

Another senior employee said that she didn’t get any training since she first started and that she keeps on calling other branches for guidance when serving customers. Two employees revealed their concerns about their career development due to the lack of training in the organization. Furthermore, two employees have removed some of the organization’s pamphlets saying that they have never

received training about those services thus they have removed the concerned pamphlets so customers don't ask about them. As such, an employee has transferred a customer who came asking about new services to another employee who appeared to be unknowledgeable as well about those services and ultimately called another branch asking for support.

So, in terms of SET, we posit that when employees receive training, they are thankful to the organization and respond with higher level of engagement. Yet, when employees feel that the organization is not investing in their skills, they will respond with lower levels of engagement.

This led to the formulation of the third question:

4.4 Perceived Supervisor Support

Thirty-nine employees exhibited different perceptions about supervisor support and care. This was best described by employees' testimonies about their direct managers. While ten happily talked about the kind role played by their supervisors, and praised how their managers care about their opinions, well-being, goals and values. Twenty-two felt that their supervisors show very little concern for them.

For example, two engaged employees stated that their manager is very supportive. They work hard and willing work extra time when they feel empowered and trusted by their manager. Also, another engaged employee was thankful to his manager' support and trust and said that he respects and considers his manager as his father.

On the other hand, eight employees expressed the lack of support from management, yet they expressed trust in their direct supervisors. Six said that they respect and look up to their direct managers. Four other employees expressed their concerns about the lack of managerial support and said that their manager is careless, authoritarian and unsupportive.

Thus, in rapport with SET, we theorize that employees who have high perception of their supervisors' support and care will feel obliged to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement. On the other hand, when employees don't feel supported by their supervisors, they will become less engaged and passionate toward their organization.

To conclude, the findings are reasonable given the collectivist Lebanese society and paternalistic culture whereby an empathetic manager who shows concerns is highly appreciated and respected by employees which increases the PPS and therefore enhances employees' engagement. Our results are backed by other studies conducted in paternalistic cultures such as the Middle East (Dajani, 2015; Cooke, 2009; Aycan et al. 2001; Zhu et al., 2012).

4.5 Perceived Organizational Support

Fourteen employees exhibited low perceptions of organizational support and care. Perceived organizational support is described by the degree employees feel supported by their organization, where the organization cares about their well-being, opinions, goals and values and that help, support, forgiveness and recognition are available when needed. In this regard, one employee claimed that he has submitted many projects in the past he has never received back any feedback which is really demotivating. Plus, another employee said that she raised concerns many times without getting any feedback from management. While another employee said that there is no need to raise any concerns to the management since they do not care and that they will be wasting time and energy.

A new employee, who has recently joined the organization, confessed that he is unhappy and disengaged since he is always afraid to make mistakes. Most notably, an employee who has been working for a good period in the bank now said that only mistakes are underlined and that the management doesn't appreciate employees' dedication and hard work.

Hence, from a SET perspective, we hypothesize that employees who feel supported by their organization will pay back with becoming highly engaged whereas when employees perceive the lack of organizational support, their engagement becomes negligible.

4.6 Self Efficacy

Thirty employees showed anger and frustration with their jobs though all have been working at least 5 years in their positions. However, they added that there is too much pressure at work but with no attention from their managers or companies. The aforementioned added on their feelings of anxiety and fear to lose their jobs amid a clear distancing by the organization. Moreover, these employees felt not obliged to respond to special requests by their managers as long as these are not part of their duties. Thus, showing less efficacy and less engaged. Another twelve employees felt low self-esteem and a strong feeling of burnt out. Such a situation fits Langelan et al.'s (2006) description of the situation where burned out individuals were more likely to score high in neuroticism. Furthermore, the behavior described by this group does not fit the drivers described by Bandura (1997) and Dagher et al. (2015) in their arguments of sources of high efficacy. Furthermore, eleven employees felt the exact contrary to their colleagues since they discussed much positive relations with their organizations and one can sense their belongingness. These employees were not moody neither depressed leading to a state of low neuroticism. Four more female employees showed high degree of extroversion and outgoing attitudes as well as they were satisfied reflecting happiness and were conscientiousness towards their tasks and jobs. Therefore, with this minority of employees being satisfied and content, their self-efficacy and engagement fit what was reported by researchers like Bakker and Demerouti (2008) and Rana et al. (2014). Based on the aforementioned observations, we suggest that self-efficacy indeed acts as moderator to the relationship between the identified antecedents of engagement and the level of engagement.

4.7 Organizational Commitment

Observed employees manifested different levels of organizational commitment. This can be expressed by the employees' degree of personal attachment to the organization, their sense of belonging to the organization, how proud and happy they are working there. For example, seventeen employees expressed frustrations while four expressed job satisfaction while working in the same organization. Not ignoring the fact that half the group of participating employees felt burned out and apparently announced their low satisfaction with their organizations' interest in their wellbeing. Hence, we posit that employees who have high levels of engagement are more likely to have high level of emotional commitment to their organization. On the other hand, disengaged employees are less likely to be emotionally committed to their organization.

4.8 Organizational Citizenship Behavior

While observing the employees during their normal work days and talking informally with some of them, we noticed that employees are exhibiting different levels of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB). OCB is best illustrated when employees are willing to go the extra mile and to do more than their jobs ask. This can be expressed by a willingness to assist others with their duties, give up time to help others, offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization, take action to protect the organization from potential problems, defend the organization when other employees criticize it, etc. ...

In this regards, one engaged employee usually stays after working hours many times per week. However, thirty-seven employees exhibited low level of OCB, as they were only attempting to do their job and no additional effort. As an example, three different employees instructed a customer who came

to pay his/her university scholarship to go to the other counter (and at each counter he/she waited the turn to be re-directed to the other counter) until the customer was fed up and expresses discontent. It turned out that this type of transaction was complex and needed time, and that the employees were laying it out to the others because they didn't want to perform such transaction which takes time to be completed.

In fact, twelve employees expressed implicitly "it is not my job" attitude, while twenty explicitly said "I will only do my job". One employee went further by saying "Don't expect me to be more devoted, I will only do my job", and another one said that he/she is not willing to put do more than what is required in her contract. Finally, in many occasions we noticed that employees rarely tried to cross sell or market the organization's products and services. This may be caused by lack of training, knowledge and mainly engagement.

Accordingly, we assume that engaged employees will exhibit discretionary efforts and respond with an enhanced OCB while disengaged employees are more likely to withdraw showing lower levels of OCB.

4.9 Intention to Leave

Thirteen disengaged employees confessed during the informal interviews that they are thinking of quitting their jobs. They want to find new jobs where they can develop their career. For instance, one employee told us about his regret of declined a job offer he received months ago saying that he will not repeat this mistake. Another employee described herself as an active job seeker now. While another employee said that she is willing to leave as soon as she gets a new job offer with the same or even lesser compensation. Furthermore, twenty-one employees declared their actual searching for alternatives in other organizations though meanwhile they are performing their jobs with complacency. From the above, we posit that disengaged frontline employees will experience higher intentions to leave the organization while, highly engaged frontline employees will desire to remain with the organization.

To conclude, the outcomes of our ethnographic study regarding the positive/negative relationship between frontline employees' engagement and employees' OCB are congruent with previous studies and aligned with the current literature.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Conclusion

In this article we managed to develop a comprehensive model that may explain the employee engagement concept regarding the Lebanese frontline employees in the service sector. The engagement drivers and outcomes in addition to the moderators were identified through an ethnographic study with close participants' observation. The importance of this study is that it is one of the first studies to identify and examine all these variables within the Lebanese context based on the Social Exchange Theory (SET). This exploratory study helped us validating the following propositions:

- P1. Organizational justice (Procedural and Distributive Justice) improves frontline engagement.
- P2. Resource availability enhances frontline Engagement.
- P3. Perceived training availability is positively related to frontline engagement.
- P4. Perceived Supervisor Support and Care (PSS) increase frontline Engagement.
- P5. Perceived Organizational Support and Care (POS) enhance frontline Engagement.
- P6. Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between (a) organizational Justice, (b) Resource Availability, (c) Training, (d) PSS, (e) POS and care and frontline engagement.

P7. Increase in frontline engagement enhances frontline organizational commitment.

P8. Increase in frontline engagement reduces employees' intention to quit.

P9. Increase in frontline engagement increases Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).

The findings of this study highlight the importance of above-mentioned antecedents in driving employees' engagement and the outcomes as a result of enhanced engagement.

5.1.1 Theoretical Contributions

This article presents many theoretical contributions;

First, it studies positive psychology responding to current research calls by examining positive behaviors such as engagement instead of negative behaviors such as tension and burnout. Second, it contributes to the current literature by filling gaps related to the employee engagement concept in general and more precisely to the qualitative studies within Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon examining employee organizational behavior. Moreover, and as far as we know, this article is the first to explore the drivers and outcomes of employee' engagement in the Lebanese context. Third, this research supports previous studies about engagement which explain engagement concept in the context of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). By perceiving supervisory and organizational equity and support, employee engagement is enhanced; when the organization provides needed resources and training and developmental opportunities, an employee achieves a higher level of engagement which reflects his appreciation toward the organization. Fourth, the results of this explorative research underline the positive relationship between perceived supervisor support and individual engagement in Lebanon reflecting the Lebanese paternalistic culture. Finally, this study highlights the important role of self-efficacy in workforce engagement, and it explains how employee differences can change the engagement level; employees with high self-efficacy level respond significantly to the determinants of engagement and will display enhanced engagement level.

5.1.2 Practical/Managerial Implications

Managerial implications deduced in this research can be understood in the framework of the social exchange theory, which suggests that the relationship linking the organization to its employees may be reciprocal.

First, our results posit self-efficacy among personal resource for employee engagement as asserted by several researchers (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Accordingly, organizations should implement selection strategies in a way to recruit employees with high self-efficacy. Besides, Human resource managers should enhance their existing "self-efficacy". This can be achieved by providing coaching and on-the-job-training, also by breaking an employee' target into smaller goals and by sharing successes stories. Managers should enhance employees' self-efficacy by encouraging them and providing them with positive feedback. The aforementioned have been recently emphasized (Kapil & Rastogi, 2019; Sugianingrat et al., 2019).

Second, based on the current research results, Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) revealed to be an important determinant of employee engagement (Richman et al., 2008; James et al., 2011; Dabke & Patole, 2014). Hence, managers should make their employees feel valued, and cared about (Hejase, 2020b). Subsequently, they need to involve them in the decision making process, take their opinion and use participatory approaches. Plus, firms should recruit or internally promote managers who have caring and supportive traits. Additionally, HR managers should provide executives with soft skills training programs to model the above desired behaviors and to enhance the supervisor support perceived by employees.

Third, Perceived Organizational Support (POS) revealed to be very important in employees' engagement. Employees value the organizations that care about their well-being, feelings and goals. In alignment with the social exchange theory, when employees perceive their organization support, they become highly engaged to show their gratitude and to thank their organization. Accordingly, to boost employee engagement, managers should promote organizational support and develop a positive working environment with fair policies protecting employees and recognizing their contributions (Settoon et al., 1996; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Krishnan & Mary, 2012; Hejase, 2020a). Organizational support can be enhanced as well by the distribution of surveys which aim to identify employees' need for it to be fulfilled later on by newly designed wellness and social assistance programs.

Forth, training has been proven to be an important incentive which fosters engagement (Azeem et al., 2013; Luthans et al., 2010). When organization provides training for its employees, those latter will appreciate the effort and the investment the company is doing to develop their skills and subsequently their engagement is increased (Hashem, Reslan, & Hejase, 2019). Accordingly, organizations should encourage any new training initiatives in the aim to enhancing employee engagement. Training should be seen as an investment and not a cost, and thus organization should encourage the development of a learning culture and integrate training in its strategy. Moreover, managers should encourage employees' participation allowing open communication. The goals and purpose of the training should be explained to employees; it is important for them to understand the necessity of the training and how it is linked to the organization's business strategy (El-Dirani, Houssein, & Hejase, 2020).

Fifth, the results of the observation showed that for a higher level of engagement, job related resources should be available. Thus, managers should make sure to provide the resources when assigning responsibilities and duties to staff. Employees will be ready to work harder when feeling that managers are providing them with what they need for them to properly complete assigned tasks (Clapton, 2014). Employee engagement is further enhanced when he/she is well equipped. Managers should regularly follow up, monitor and guarantee the availability of employees needed equipment and resources.

Sixth, perceived justice (distributive and procedural) revealed to be important reason behind employees' engagement. When treating employees fairly giving them merit based promotion and offering proportional financial and non-financial rewards, employees' engagement increases as sign of appreciation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Accordingly, strategic compensation should focus on employees' individual effort and team contribution to the organizational performance (Turley, 2015). In addition, to ensure procedural fairness, employee should be involved in policies and procedures development. Procedures should be consistent and based on ethical standards. It should also be clearly communicated to employees during the induction period.

Finally, this study increases HR managers' awareness about the importance of 'engagement' and about the necessity to implement HR practices which enhance employee engagement. Managers are more conscious about employee engagement outcomes; the enhanced employee commitment, OCB and retention.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations which must be taken into consideration when dealing with its outcomes. First of all, the sample of respondents was selected from a working environment which may introduce respondents' bias when expressing their views, feelings and opinions. Second, the sample is still limited in its scope to come up with generalized findings about the proposed topics of the research. Third, using a qualitative ethnographic research approach helps only to explore and identify topics

sensitive to the different organizational cultures which may make it difficult to create an overall unbiased collective opinion. Finally, the research outcomes describe a local position about the subjects which may not apply to other national cultures.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Many suggestions for future research are recommended to further improve this research. First, a similar study can be carried out using a longitudinal design to find out if the variables and identified relationships are consistent or vary with time. Second, it could be helpful to examine engagement determinants using other samples such as managers or customers. Studying engagement using other samples will increase the current study's validity, objectivity and will reduce the biases. It is also recommended to conduct future researches that extend to wider samplings and by that increasing the probability to generalize the findings. In addition, to solidify the current research results, the identified propositions can be examined using quantitative methodology that is, using empirical studies to test and validate the proposed model.

Another area is to consider the target population; This study was conducted in Lebanon, and hence future researchers are encouraged to validate it in other emerging economies countries and to test the applicability of the proposed model in other Middle Eastern countries that share similar basic characteristics to offer a better understanding and application of employee engagement in a non-western context. Moreover, cross comparative studies between western and non-western countries would come beneficial in assessing the applicability of western HR practices and interventions in the Middle East. Furthermore, it is recommended to conducting similar studies on other influential sectors in Lebanon than the service sector for future research.

An additional area would be to investigate other potential predictors of employee engagement and to extend the model by investigating additional variables that might predict engagement. There might be other engagement related variables than the ones identified in the qualitative study, such as the work itself, organizational culture, workplace environment, job satisfaction, strategic attention, organizational stress, workload, confidence and trust in leadership and other Human Resource Development (HRD) practices like recognition and rewards, empowerment, and opportunities for development which are worth exploring. Future research might also consider individual characteristics variables and personality variables other than self-efficacy that might predict employee engagement, such as the big five personality traits, locus of control, hardiness and self-esteem.

All the above mentioned ideas are likely to be a fertile area for future research given the increasing interest to improve employee engagement and address the "engagement-gap".

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