EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT PRACTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING PERFORMANCE: MEDIATING ROLE OF QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

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This dissertation is dedicated to

Almighty "Allah"

(Who has given me strength, knowledge, patience and wisdom)

My wonderful parents

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholders are consistently pressurizing manufacturers to integrate the social and environmental factors within their production process to protect the society and environment from the negative effects of the manufacturing process As a result, manufacturing processes experience continuous adaptation that significantly reshaped employee work practices. The literature on identification of the employee work practice that can enhance sustainable manufacturing performance is limited. Literature identified employee empowerment practice not only enhances sustainable manufacturing performance (SMP), but also the quality of work life (QWL). However, few studies have attempted to empirically test the relationship between the employee empowerment, quality of work life and sustainable manufacturing performance. The current study focused on the investigation of the relationship between employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance, and the mediating role of the quality of work life was also investigated. Sustainable manufacturing performance was measured on the basis of social, economic and environmental dimensions. A quantitative research design was used to address the problem. A systmatic random sample of 200 employees from 30 large manufacturers in Malaysia was used to collect data on a 5-point likert scale adapted questionnaire. Furthermore, this data was statistically tested using Smart PLS (SEM) for empirical investigations of the relationships between employee empowerment, quality of work life and sustainable manufacturing performance. The result confirmed the positive relationship between employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance and the mediating role of quality of work life between the relationship of employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance. In conclusion studt recomends organizations to encourage employees to be involved in the decision making process regarding social, economic and environmental factors in order to enhance sustainable manufacturing performance and their quality of work life.

ABSTRAK

Pemegang taruh secara konsisten telah memberi tekanan ke atas pengeluar untuk mengintegrasi faktor sosial dan persekitaran dalam proses pengeluaran bagi melindungi masyarakat serta alam sekitar daripada kesan negatif proses pembuatan. Natijahnya, proses pembuatan mengalami penyesuaian berterusan yang secara signifikan mengubah semula amalan kerja pekerja. Bahan literatur tentang identifikasi amalan kerja pekerja yang dapat meningkatkan kemampanan prestasi pembuatan adalah terhad. Melalui literatur, amalan pemerkasaan pekerja bukan sahaja dikenal pasti dapat meningkatkan kemampanan prestasi pembuatan bahkan turut meningkatkan kualiti kehidupan pekerja. Walau bagaimanapun, sedikit sahaja kajian yang cuba menguji secara empirikal hubungan di antara pemerkasaan pekerja, kualiti kehidupan pekerja serta prestasi pembuatan yang mampan. Kajian ini telah memberi fokus kepada penyelidikan terhadap hubungan di antara pemerkasaan pekerja dan prestasi pembuatan yang mampan, selain menyelidik peranan perantara.kualiti kehidupan pekerja. prestasi pembuatan mampan diukur berdasarkan dimensi sosial, ekonomi dan alam sekitar Reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif telah digunakan untuk menangani masalah tersebut. Seramai 200 pekerja daripada 30 pengeluar besar di Malaysia telah dipilih melalui kaedah sampel rawak. Satu set borang soal selidik berskala Likert 5 mata telah digunakan bagi tujuan pengumpulan data. Seterusnya, data ini diuji secara statistik dengan menggunakan Smart PLS (SEM) bagi kajian empirikal untuk menentukan hubungan antara pemerkasaan pekerja, kualiti kehidupan pekerja dan juga prestasi pekerja yang mampan. Dapatan kajian ini mengesahkan terdapatnya hubungan positif di antara pemerkasaan pekerja dengan prestasi pekerja yang mampan serta kualiti kehidupan pekerja sebagai peranan perantara. Kesimpulannya, organisasi harus menggalakkan para pekerja untuk melibatkan diri dalam setiap proses membuat keputusan terutamanya dalam faktor sosial, ekonomi dan juga persekitaran bagi meningkatkan kemampanan prestasi pengeluaran serta kualiti kehidupan pekerja.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

OECD	Organization Economic Cooperation and Development
IEA	International Energy Agency
ECM	Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing
MMS	Middle Management Support
STS	Socio-Technical Systems
SMP	Sustainable Manufacturing Performance
GM	Green Manufacturing
LP	Lean Production
EE	Employee Empowerment
EI	Employee Involvement
WDP	Work Design Practices
TP	Technical Practices
QWL	University of Swat
TI	Task Interdependence
SEM	Structured Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Science
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
HMRA	Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AMOS	Analysis of Moments Structures
CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFI	Comparative Fit index
TPS	TOYOTA production System
JIT	Just in time
UN	United Nations

TBL	Triple bottom line
TQM	Total Quality Management
TPM	Total Preventive maintenance
ECM	Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The Manufacturing sector is the most resource consuming sector of the economy. International Energy Agency (IEA, 2007) declared that 36 percent of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions over the globe are due to the manufacturing sector. However, the improvement potential towards sustainable development is significant. Technological innovation has somehow improved the manufacturing system towards sustainability. The technological changes have decreased this rate of CO_2 emission to the 19 percent. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008), argues that holistic approaches to sustainable manufacturing, extending beyond the boundaries of the company, would yield better environmental performance improvements.

Over decade manufacturing industry realized the impact of manufacturing practices on the natural environment. Increasingly, stakeholders including regulators, customers, shareholders, board members, and employees are asking organizations to adopt sustainable manufacturing practices (Naffziger, Ahmed and Montagno, 2003). Stakeholder demands include regulatory requirements, product stewardship, enhanced public image, potential to expand customer base, and potential competitive advantages (Ahmed, Montagno, and Firenze, 1998).

Waste management, recyclable products, energy efficiency and environmental friendly manufacturing processes are basic components of the sustainable manufacturing practices. Manufacturing industry has witnessed many procedural and technological changes to meet the global challenges of sustainability (Garetti and Taisch, 2012). Technological and procedural shifts caused significant alterations in socio-technical environment (Davis *et al.,* 2014). Thus, the work practices for manufacturing are also exposed to the change. Autonomous work groups that are empowered to take decision related to effectiveness of the production process without compromising the social and environmental side are much encouraged from the manufacturers that result into the employee empowerment in order to improve their quality of work life and enhance the manufacturing performance. However, it is still largely remained unclear that how employee empowerment and quality of work life can enhance the sustainable performance in the manufacturing sector.

1.2 Manufacturing industry in Malaysia

Malaysia is a prominent member of the Association of Southeast Asia Nation (ASEAN) with a population of about 30 million in 2014 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013; FMM, 2014). In 2004, the country was ranked by the Institute for Management Development as the 5th most competitive country in the world among countries with a population of greater than 20 million, ahead of countries such as Germany, UK, Japan, and Mainland China (Zain *et al.,* 2005). In addition, Malaysia is a multicultural country with different types of organizations and with different organizational structures and cultures as 1739 non-Malaysian ownership and 168 joint Malaysian and non-Malaysian companies are operating in the country (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015).

Recently, manufacturing sector in Malaysia has grown rapidly in comparison with previous decades. The current trading and manufacturing environment in Malaysia are supportive and effective, yet globally competitive. Malaysia is one of the largest trading nations in the world that has a prominent manufacturing sector which contributes almost 80% of overall country's export (Raja, 2009). Raja (2009), the vice president of Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) stated that products which

are manufactured in Malaysia are acceptable in US, EU, and Japan as important developed countries.

Malaysia's geographical advantage has positioned the country strategically to regional resources and supply chains in the South East Asia region (MIDA, 2015). In fact, because of the uniqueness of the country due to its geographical location, Islamic-based country, IT-host country, and etc., this country was selected as the context of this study. This is supported by the following factors that further strengthen Malaysia as investors' choice for their regional operation base. Firstly, strong trade openness policy and trade infrastructure such as transportation, communication, and financial services which facilitate and widen market reach in the region. Malaysia ranked at 29th position in the WEF Global Competitiveness Ranking for Quality Transport Infrastructure (roads, railroads, sea ports and air) in 2012. Secondly, Malaysia offers a cost competitive location for investors intending to set up offshore operations for services and manufacturing activities including in the areas of resource-based industries, high-technology industries, knowledge-based and advanced technology industries for regional and international markets (MIDA, 2015).

1.3 Challenges for manufacturing industry

Sustainable manufacturing system creates reduction in energy consumption, waste generation, and hazardous materials used, thereby building the companies' image as a socially responsible organization. The term "Sustainability" initially was triggered by the environmental scientist and more related to considering the preservation of the natural environment during the production process. Recently, sustainable manufacturing is defined as a production process without compromising on natural environment, society and eco-efficiency throughout the product life cycle (Haapala *et al.*, 2013).

Early work in sustainable manufacturing was carried out through Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing (ECM). It included considerations for source reduction, dismantling, design for manufacturing and assembly as well as cradle-to-reincarnation concepts (Owen 1993). Later development of ECM by Sarkis (1995) identified three dimensions of ECM strategies (product, process and technology) and the strategies themselves constitute the famous 'Rs' (i.e. reduction,

remanufacturing, recycling and reuse) (Sarkis 1995; Sarkis and Rasheed 1995). Research on the impact of environmental practices on organizational outcomes is somewhat inconclusive. Some researchers have founded that environmental initiatives may have a negative impact on company performance (Devirian, and Seaman, 2010; Yu, Ting, and Wu, 2009), other researchers indicate that being environmentally proactive can produce competitive gains (e.g., Hart, 1995; Manzini and Vezzoli, 2002; Jayal, Badurdeen, Dillon and Jawahir, 2010)**.** On the other hand, the effect of human work practices on sustainable manufacturing performance are not well mapped therefore the justification and mechanism for improvements and their impacts are unclear. Mostly the focus of sustainable manufacturing tends to be on the specific technology rather investigating both human and technological aspect. Thus, it is needed to explore work practices that can integrate human and technology to enhance sustainable manufacturing performance.

Still the employee empowerment and its contribution to sustainable manufacturing and employee quality of work life is remained neglected. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the relationship of employee empowerment and quality of work life with sustainable manufacturing to fill the aforementioned gaps.

1.4 Problem statement

The manufacturing sector is the most resource consuming sector of the economy. International Energy Agency (IEA, 2015) declared that 36% of Carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions, over the globe are due to the manufacturing sector. However, the improvement potential towards sustainable development is significant. The technological changes have decreased this rate of CO_2 emission to the 19% (IEA, 2015). Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011), argues that holistic approaches to sustainable manufacturing, extending beyond the boundaries of the company, would yield better environmental performance improvements. Over the decades, manufacturing industry realized the impact of manufacturing practices on the natural environment. Increasingly, stakeholders including regulators, customers, shareholders, board members and employees are asking organizations to adopt sustainable manufacturing practices (Naffziger, Ahmed and Montagno, 2003). The rise of the Malaysian manufacturing sector has been a

revolution, especially for the last 35 years. This sector has reached well in the top 20 biggest manufacturing sectors in the world. Moreover, manufacturing sector of Malaysia is the biggest source of bringing money into the country, as figures indicate that it does not contribute only in 20% of the country's exports share, means the remaining 80% is by this sector. Furniture industry is the highest energy intensive when explored the classification of low carbon di oxide (CO_2) discharge (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2015).

Over the years, the manufacturing industry has implemented programs to improve process effectiveness. However, despite of all its effectiveness in the production process, manufacturing industry is facing a real challenge instigated by the stakeholders (i.e. customers, policy makers, regulatory authorities and society). Stakeholders are consistently pressurizing manufacturers to integrate the social and environmental factors in their production process to protect society and environment from negative effects of the manufacturing process. Some companies are committed to reducing negative impacts of their operations on the environment (Diaz-Elsayed *et al.*, 2013; Deif, 2011).

Recently, most frequent technological changes have been occurred in the manufacturing industry for achieving sustainability in manufacturing (Fullerton, Kennedy and Widener, 2014; Ghosh, 2012; Ramesh and Kodali, 2012; Karim, and Arif-Uz-Zaman, 2013; Agus and Hajinoor, 2012; Diaz-Elsayed *et al.*, 2013; Deif, 2011; Haapala, *et al.*, 2013; Garetti and Taisch, 2012). The latest developments in the manufacturing industry occurred under the umbrella of the sustainability. Sustainability defined the three pillars model i.e. economy, society and environment (Sudin, 2011; De Giovanni, 2012). These developments are based on technological advancements. These changes also reshaped workers job in the manufacturing industry (Sudin, 2011; De Giovanni, 2012). This alteration caused the significant changes in the primary roles of workers.

Sustainable manufacturing performance can be defined as sustainable production, sustainable manufacturing is defined as the creation of manufactured products that use processes that are non-polluting, conserve energy and natural resources, and are economically sound and safe for employees, communities, and consumers (Lowell Center, 1998). This definition leads us to the concepts of integration of technology and human. Recent studies reveal that green HR practices have positive association with the sustainable manufacturing performance (De

Giovanni, 2012). However, most of the work on sustainable manufacturing is either objective or longitudinal in nature. Sustainability index and environmental index have longitudinal measures to compare the sustainability across the globe over the years (Esty *et al.*, 2005; Knoepfel, 2001; Emerson *et al.*, 2012). Few studies are cross-sectional in nature (Sudin, 2011; De Giovanni, 2012), these studies expose the role or HR in achieving sustainability, but still it is required to investigate how workers can contribute to the sustainable manufacturing performance?

Gîfu, Ionescu and Teodorescu (2014) argue that employee's empowerment in making designs and to perform changes in processes helps in both process and product improvements (Gîfu, Ionescu and Teodorescu, 2014). Daily and Huang (2001) indicated that the top management should provide employees empowerment in decision making relative to the environmental issues. The employees who have more sense of control over their work and engaged in to the decision making process are more likely to be concern about the all dimension of the product and process improvement during manufacturing process. Despite of these studies (Sudin, 2011; De Giovanni, 2012; Daily and Huang, 2001), literature on how employee empowerment is related to the improvement in sustainable manufacturing performance is limited. Thus, this provides opportunity to capitalize on the relationship of the employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance to fill the gap in literature. This leads to the first research question of the current study "What is the effect of employee empowerment on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance)?"

Researchers recommended the optimization of the social elements (human interaction) with the technical elements (processes, technology) within an organization can lead to humanization of working conditions and improve the quality of work life for employees (Hyer *et al.*, 1999; Applebaum, 1997; Trist and Bamforth, 1951). On the other hand, employee empowerment can influence quality of work life. Organizations that encourage employee empowerment would usually see an increased workforce commitment and humanization of the workplace, which ultimately can improve quality of work life (Barling *et al.*, 2003; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 1997). Empowered employees can influence work unit outcomes by taking ownership of the process (Spreitzer, 1995; Ashforth, 1989; Treville and Antonakis, 2006; Liden *et al.*, 2000). However, the empirical evidence to claim the relationship of the employee empowerment and quality of work life is limited. The current study aims to

investigate the relationship of employee empowerment and quality of work life. Thus, second research question of the current study is "What is the effect of employee empowerment on employee quality of work life?"

Worker quality of work life can enhance the SMP through the provision of a safer and cleaner physical work environment, opportunities to socially interact with colleagues, assurance of job security, and a feeling of job satisfaction (Phusavat *et al.*, 2009; Lau and May, 1998). Physical context of the workplace help workers to be generous in terms of social interaction with colleagues and they feel more responsibility towards the improvement of economic efficiency and environmental protection (Das *et al.,* 2008). Studies (Phusavat *et al.,* 2009; Lau and May, 1998; Das *et al.,* 2008) mentioned that QWL is important factor for enhancing the manufacturing performance either directly or indirectly. However, these studies have not tested the relationship empirically in the context of economic, social and environmental performance. This leads to the third research question "What is the effect of employee quality of work life on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance)?" and fourth research question "To examine the mediating effect of employee quality of work life between the relationship of employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance?" of the current study.

1.5 Research questions

This study aims to address following research questions

1. What is the effect of employee empowerment on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance)?
2. What is the effect of employee empowerment on employee quality of work life?
3. What is the effect of employee quality of work life on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance)?
4. Does employee quality of work life mediate the relationship between the employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance?

1.6 Research objective

Research questions of the study lead to objective to conduct research. The objectives of the study are

1 To examine the impact of employee empowerment on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance).
2 To evaluate the effect of employee empowerment on employee quality of work life.
3 To examine the impact of employee quality of work life on sustainable manufacturing performance (Social performance, environmental performance and economic performance).
4 To evaluate the mediating effect of employee quality of work life between the relationship of employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance.

1.7 Research scope

Developing countries are consistently facing energy, environmental and economic crisis. So the importance of manufacturing industry sustainability has gained more weight. Manufacturing sector is the biggest contributor of the energy consumption and environmental pollution in Malaysia (Government of Malaysia, 2014) which ultimately brings negative effects to the economy of the country. Most of energy consumption and wastage finally makes addition to environmental pollution occurs during the transformation process. Technology and skilled human resource are involved during the Transformation process. One factor which is most studied for sustainability during the recent years is technology but other factors are neglected.

The current study focuses on how human factor affect the sustainable manufacturing and would investigate the relationship of employee empowerment and quality of work life with the sustainable manufacturing performance. Therefore, study focuses on the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. The study was conducted in the manufacturing sector of the Malaysia, but the results can be generalized to the industries in other countries later.

The main focus of the current study is to test the relationship between employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance with mediating role of employee quality of work life. Thus, the scope of the current study consisted on the employee empowerment, quality of work life, social performance, environmental performance and the economic performance of the manufacturing sector.

1.8 Research significance

A review of literature has exposed that the focus of researchers and practitioners from the last decade tilted towards studying and practicing sustainable manufacturing practices. This results in significant reduction of damage to the environment and society caused by the manufacturing practices. Literature has also revealed that increase in the renewable energy practices, remanufacturing and recycling has dramatically reduce the resource consumption (OECD, 2011) which ultimately result into conservation of natural environment.

Advocates of the lean production system argue that the sustainable manufacturing is an extension of lean production systems (Paul, 2014; Bergmiller, 2006; Bergmiller and McCright, 2009). Lean production concept eliminates 7 seven types of waste from the production process, transcendence towards the sustainable manufacturing by adding some new types of waste management (energy use, pollution control, etc.). These theories lead to the need for a rational contextual investigation of sustainable manufacturing process. Moreover, the role of HR is somehow acknowledged in the literature to achieve sustainability, but work design practices which required to integrate the workers job to the sustainability is still needs to be investigated. Thus, the current study contributes by investigating the relationship of employee empowerment and quality of work life with mediating role of quality of work life.

In the context of Malaysian Manufacturing Industry, the study contributes for the policy reforms about the green manufacturing initiatives. The Malaysian government invested a huge amount in green technology to become an environmental friendly economy. However, the results are still not there. Most probably the missing link is how to integrate human work practices with technology. For this reason the current study is vital for policy reforms.

1.9 Operational definitions

Study mainly focused on the employee empowerment, QWL for SMP. Thus variables of interest need to be operationally define for clear understanding of the concepts. This section provides the operational definitions of the variables.

1.9.1 Sustainable manufacturing performance

Sustainable Manufacturing is a manufacturing process without compromising of future requirements (OECD, 2011). The major focus of the study is to operationalize this definition to save triple bottom-line, i.e. social, economic, and environmental resources should not be affected during the manufacturing process. The study operationalized the sustainable manufacturing on the basis of social, environmental and economic performance.

1.9.2 Employee empowerment practice

The work practice of employee empowerment is defined as an individuals' cognitive state of mind which is characterized by a sense of perceived control, perceived competence, and goal internalization (Menon, 2001). Study operationalized the employee empowerment construct as a 2nd order construct on the basis of four sub constructs i.e. perceived control, perceived competency, physical context and goal internalization

1.9.3 Quality of work life

QWL is defined as the effectiveness of the work environment that transmit to the meaningful organizational and personal needs in shaping the values of the employees that support and promote health and wellbeing, job security, job satisfaction, competency development and balance between work and non-work life (Rethinam and Ismail, 2008). The current study operationalized the construct on the basis of physical context of the worker, workers job satisfaction, workers job security and social context.

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