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The relationship between morale and job performance of teachers: A case study in selected secondary schools in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelationships between morale and job performance of secondary school teachers. This is a questionnaire survey involving secondary school teachers from four schools in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. The information gathered was used to develop a statistical model to explain how teachers' morale affects their job performance. A total number of 92 respondents were involved in this study. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in the morale status between the male and female teachers; the male teachers registered a moderately higher score as compared to the females. It was also found that there is no significant difference in the job performance between male and female teachers. Apart from that, this study also revealed that all the five factors: leadership, belongingness, environment, personal development and collegiality contributed significantly to teachers' morale. The working environment was rated as the most important factor among the five. A structural equation model was developed to determine the relationships between the various morale determinants, morale status, and job performance of the teachers. The results indicate that the 'environment', 'personal development' and 'collegiality' factors affect the feeling of 'personal reward' of the teachers while 'leadership', 'belongingness', 'environment' and 'personal development' influenced their 'cohesive pride'. It was also found that only the 'leadership' factor had a direct impact on 'job performance'. The other morale determinants affect the 'job performance' of the teachers indirectly either by affecting 'personal reward' or 'cohesive pride'.

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Introduction

Managing people is a delicate matter more so if the organisation depends on intellectual capital as its main resource. In enhancing its staffs' performance, organisations not only need to concentrate on the efficiency and effectiveness of the work process, but they also must create a conducive working environment. Martin (2006) argues that to excel, organisations need to tap the best capabilities and creativity of each individual in the organisation and at the same time ensure that the spirit of teamwork exists throughout the organisation. In order to achieve this, management must help employees align their personal goals with the organisation's objectives.

Over the past few decades, numerous researches had focused on organisational culture and its effect on performance. Some researchers viewed organisational performance from the process aspects, thus proposing various frameworks that enhance work process; others emphasized on human factors such as morale and motivation as the key determinants of superior performance (Nagarajah, 2005). There are numerous evidences indicating that the failure of some organisations to excel in this borderless era is due to the mismanagement of their resources, mainly human resource, rather than problems associated with technical systems (Azaranga, Gongalez & Reavill, 1998). It cannot be denied that effective management of the human resource is an important factor in building and sustaining competitive advantage. High performance organisations tend to be better at people management compared

to the sub-standard ones (Schiemann, et.al 1999). This is evident from the numerous research findings indicating positive relationship between effective people management and organisational performance. In other words, organisations that place greater emphasis on people management enjoy better return on their investments. Therefore, one of the ingredients to the success of an organisation is how the organisation capitalises on its human resources effectively.

Issues related to employee performance have been investigated from various perspectives. According to Green and Mitchell (1979), there are various factors that contribute to peoples' performance. Among the notable ones are: working environment, job satisfaction, organization's commitments for employees' personal development, and employee morale (Green et al, 1979). Even though employee morale had been identified as one of the crucial factors for superior performance, many organisations find it difficult to address this issue. Being a psychological construct, morale is influenced by many factors and furthermore due to lack of proper follow-up measures many of the organisation's initiatives to boost their employees' morale do not yield much benefit.

There had been considerable debate among the experts in the field of human resource management over the importance of employee morale in enhancing job performance. According to Longenecker (1999), employees with high morale will have a greater sense of belonging towards the organization and this will enhance their performance. To date, a few studies had been

conducted on issues related to employee job performance and other factors such as employee participation in decision-making, job satisfaction, etc. For example, Nagalingam (1997) studied the relationship between teachers' participation in decision-making and their job performance and concluded that teachers' participation in decision making does indeed significantly contribute to their job performance. In another study, Nagarajah (2005), investigated the relationship between employee participation in decision-making and their morale and suggest that involving employees in the decision making does have a positive effect on their morale. In the educational setting, Rubina (2004) in her study on women teachers in Pakistan found that stress as one of the major contributing factor for teachers' low morale thus inhibits superior performance. Even though the concept of morale had been researched from various aspects, little has been done to establish the direct relationship between morale and job performance empirically, particularly in the Malaysian context.

Research Foundations

The social system theory proposed by Getzel (1968), explains that the social behaviour in an organisation is the product of institutional role and the personality of the role incumbent. In other words, it is the congruence between the organisation's objective and the individuals' goals. In this theory, morale is related to the extra energy required to accomplish institutional tasks. In this sense, high morale can be defined as the tendency to put in extra efforts to achieve group goals. In elaborating the concept of morale, the social system model emphasises on three important variables:

- identification, which refers to the communality of goals- the extent to which individual needs are congruent with organisational goals,
- belongingness, which refers to the congruence between bureaucratic expectation and personal needs, and
- rationality, which refers to the congruence between bureaucratic expectation and organisational goals.

The morale of the employees depends upon:

- i) the extent to which organisational goals and individual needs are one,
- ii) the extent to which bureaucratic expectations and personal needs are compatible, and
- iii) the extent to which bureaucratic expectations are logical and well suited for the achievement of organisational goals.

Figure 1 illustrates how 'identification', 'belongingness', and 'rationality' are related to employee morale.

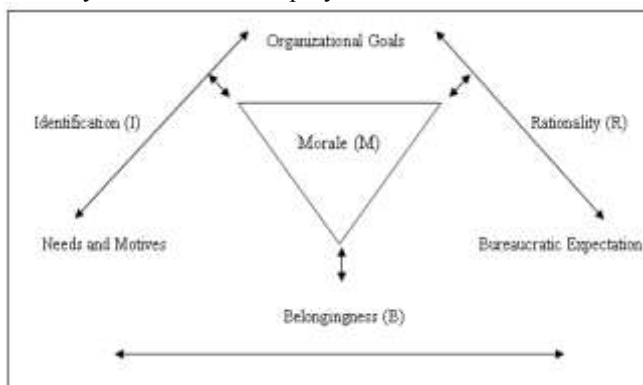


Figure1: Component of Morale (Adapted from J.W. Getzel & E.G. Guba, 1975)

Generally, morale in organisations can be described as a function of the interaction of rationality, identification, and belongingness.

$$\text{Morale} = f(\text{Rationality} \times \text{Identification} \times \text{Belongingness})$$

Theoretically, morale cannot be high if any one of the three components is low. Administrators attempting to obtain high morale in an organisation must be concerned with substantial levels of agreement between bureaucratic expectations, personal needs, and organisational goals (Hoy & Miskel., 1982).

Factors Effecting Morale

Morale is affected by many factors. Even though it is difficult to determine the exact factors that have direct relationship with employees' morale, studies have shown there exist a positive correlation between morale and factors such as working environment (Wong, 1986), job satisfaction (Ho, 1997), and job performance (Nagarajah, 2005). Evans (2004) stated that the attitudes of employees towards their organisation and job affect their morale significantly. Among the factors that influence employees' morale are organisational climate, employees' activities, nature of the job, peers influence, the effectiveness of the leadership and the congruence between employees' personal needs and professional expectations.

Even though many studies have shown that employee morale is an important factor for organisational growth, morale in an organisation is something that management often take for granted. Issues related to employee morale frequently is not noticed unless something has gone awry. Far too often, managers do not recognise how low morale has declined until they are faced with serious crisis. Some of the significant signs of low morale are absenteeism, tardiness, high turnover, strikes and sabotage and lack of pride in work (Evans, 2004). Therefore having the knowledge of the factors that can affect employees' morale may be advantageous to administrators in their effort to create a conducive working environment and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.

Job Performance

The major contribution of an employee's worth to the organisation is the individual's work performance and values. Being a psychological construct, performance is a broad concept that is not easily quantifiable into a single measure. Organisational psychologists are still debating on the definition of performance. However, there are several efforts outlining general models of job performance and the determinants of job performance. Among the notable ones are proposed by Campbell et.al (1993) where they viewed performance as a multi-dimensional phenomenon comprising of various latent factors. These include factors such as declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, skill, and motivation. Other researchers that proposed similar views on organisational performance are Nagarajah (2005) and Waldman and Spangler (1989). In a nutshell, performance can be viewed from two perspectives: task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is the competency level of employees in performing various tasks and duties inherent in fixed jobs and work roles (Arvey, 1998), while contextual performance is defined as extra task proficiency that contributes more to the organisational, social, and psychological environment that help accomplish organisational goals. In this study, the job performance of employees is examined from the contextual perspective.

Theoretical framework

Effective people management is an important factor in building and sustaining superior performance. This is evident

from the numerous research findings indicating positive relationship between effective people management and organisational performance (Azaranga et al. 1998 ; Longenecker 1999; Nagarajah, 2007). However, managing people is not an easy task. Enhancing individual employee's performance via appropriate strategic initiatives must be creatively planned and executed so that a conducive working environment that promotes healthy competition can be fostered. With this backdrop, this paper proposes a framework to enhance employees' job performance by creating an environment that can boost employees' morale. In this paper, those factors that affect employee morale are termed as morale determinants.

The morale determinants are defined as a five-dimension construct comprising of leadership, environment, belongingness, personal development, and collegiality. On the other hand, morale status of the employees is assessed based on two aspects: 'cohesive pride' and 'personal reward'. 'Cohesive pride' reflects the sense of cooperativeness and commitment to the organisation. It describes the feelings of working together towards the organisation's objectives. 'Personal reward' on the other hand, represents the incentive derived from the commitment and sense of belongingness to the organisation. The 'personal reward' dimension measures the degree to which employees are satisfied with the future in terms of material and intrinsic rewards. The dependent variable, which is the job performance of the employees, is assessed in three broad dimensions: work role, teamwork, and work habit. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between morale determinants, morale status, and job performance.

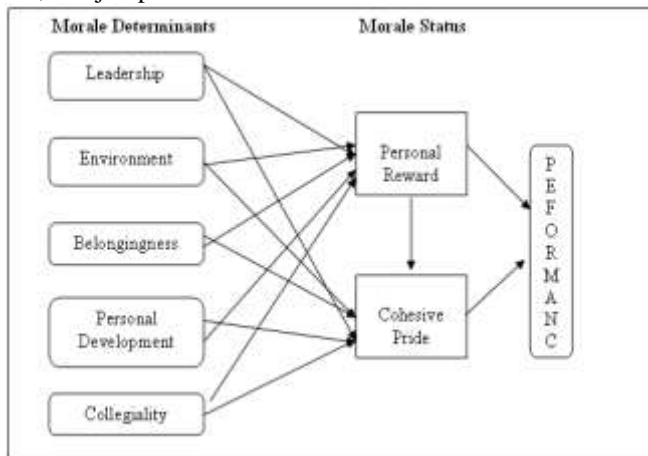


Figure 2: The hypothesized relationships between morale determinants, morale status and job performance

Research Design

In this study, the self-reported measure was used. An adapted questionnaire, with some modification to suit the context of the study, was used to gauge the respondents' perception on morale determinants, morale status, and their job performance. A thorough content analysis and pilot test were performed on the questionnaire prior to data collection to ensure the reliability and the validity of the instrument. The instrument used in this study consists of four parts; a) a checklist eliciting the profiles of the respondents, b) Staff Morale Questionnaire, assesses the morale level from two perspectives, teachers cooperativeness and commitment as well as their feelings of working together, and teachers' feeling of being rewarded, c) Morale Determinant Scale defines the factors influencing teachers' morale as a composite factor comprising of five elements, leadership, belongingness, working environment,

personal development, and collegiality among staff, and d) Job Performance Scale, assess the job performance of the teachers in terms of work role, teamwork, and work habit. This self-assessment instrument requires the respondents to rate their agreement on a seven point Likert scale.

Findings

The subjects that participated in this study were teachers from four secondary schools in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. A total of 92 usable questionnaires were obtained. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Teachers' morale

In general, the morale status of the teachers was at satisfactory level. The mean score for morale is 5.61. This value is above the third quartile value (5.25). This is also evident from the results of one-sample t-test comparing the mean morale score with 5.25 (the upper quartile value of the scale) where the test indicates that the average morale score is significantly higher than the upper quartile value at $\alpha = 0.05$. The small standard deviation (0.80) indicates that the respondents' scores were fairly consistent.

When comparisons were made between the male and female teachers, the results indicate that the mean morale score of male teachers is significantly higher than the females (at $\alpha = 0.05$). In terms of age, the results revealed that the senior teachers seems to pose higher morale level than their younger counterparts. While in terms of job position, there is no significant difference between the two categories assessed; managerial, and ordinary teacher. Table 2 summarises the morale status of the respondents.

Factors Affecting the Morale of teachers

The mean scores and the standard deviation for morale determinants were used to explore the pattern. The analysis was based on the five dimensions of morale determinants: Leadership, Belongingness, Environment, Personal Development and Collegiality. The results indicate that the teachers' rating is the highest for Belongingness, followed by, Environment, Collegiality, Leadership, and Personal Development. Comparison with the upper quartile value indicates that 'Belongingness' and 'Environment' factors were rated favourably by the respondents; the mean scores for these two dimensions are greater than 5.25 (the upper quartile of the range) and is significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, while the other three aspects: 'Collegiality', 'Leadership', and 'Personal Development' were not viewed as critical factors that affect their morale. To illustrate the differences in respondents' perception on the various morale determinants according to gender, the mean scores were computed and the independent sample t-test was used to test for significant differences. The results indicate that there were significant differences in the mean scores between male and female respondents for all the five dimensions. In general, male teachers pose a higher score on all the five dimensions of morale determinants compared to their female counterparts. In terms of age group, there seems to be considerable differences in the mean scores of the respondents belong to the age group '20 to 40 years' compared to those above 41 years old for all the five dimensions. Generally, the senior teachers scores are higher on all the five dimensions of morale determinants. The independent sample t-test also provide similar conclusion, the senior teachers' scores are significantly higher than their younger colleagues on all the five dimensions of morale determinants. Comparisons in terms of job position showed mixed results, the significance differences are only for

the 'Belongingness' and 'Collegiality' aspects where those in the managerial position showed higher sense of belongingness and collegiality. Table 3 summarises these results.

Job Performance Level of the teachers

The survey results indicate that, on the whole the perceived job performance of the teachers is fairly high. The mean performance score is 5.65, significantly higher than the third quartile value, which is 5.25. The small standard deviation (0.47) indicates that the respondents' were fairly consistent in their rating. In terms of gender, the male teachers perceived their job performance relatively higher than their female colleagues. However the difference is not statistically significant. In terms of age group, the results showed that the senior teachers' ratings were significantly higher on their perceived job performance than the younger ones. On the other hand, the perceived job performance of the teachers in the managerial category is significantly higher than ordinary teachers. Table 4 display the results.

Relationship Between Teachers Morale and Job Performance

A structural equation relating the morale determinants, morale status and job performance was specified to explore the pattern of relationship between factors affecting teachers' morale, morale status, and their perceived job performance. The model was tested for goodness of fit. Since this study is only a case study involving selected secondary schools, and making generalization is not the utmost aim of this research, the main concerned is on the patterns of the relationship demonstrated by the variables investigated. Therefore the standardized estimated parameters were used in describing the relationship between the variables. Figure 3 (in appendix A) shows the path diagram for the structural equation model representing the relationship between the morale determinants, morale status and the job performance of the respondents. In the path diagram, acronyms were used to represent the various exogenous and endogenous variables and construct. The definition of nomenclature for the variables used in the path diagram is given in table 5

The equations that make up the structural model are presented below, with the coefficient names, the manifest variables and the constructs corresponding to those utilized in the diagram of the overall model.

$$\eta_1 = \gamma_6\xi_3 + \gamma_7\xi_4 + \gamma_8\xi_5 + \zeta_1$$

$$\eta_3 = \gamma_2\xi_1 + \gamma_3\xi_2 + \gamma_4\xi_3 + \gamma_5\xi_4 + \beta_3\eta_1 + \zeta_3$$

$$\eta_2 = \beta_1\eta_1 + \gamma_1\xi_1 + \beta_2\eta_3 + \zeta_2$$

The estimated values of the standardized coefficients that link the constructs are reported in table 6.

Based on the analysis of the structural model, it is evident that all the relationships examined were significant. Thus the structural model explaining the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous construct can be written as:

Personal reward = 0.27(Environment) + 0.36(Personal Development) + 0.05(Collegiality) + Error

Cohesive Pride = 0.013(Leadership) + 0.22(Belongingness) + 0.41(Environment) + 0.74(Personal Development) + 0.17(Personal Reward) + Error

Performance = 0.54(Leadership) + 0.13(Personal Reward) + 0.11 (Cohesive Pride) + Error

The overall chi-square for the structural model is 1612 with 729 degree of freedom and a p-value less than 0.05. The small p-value of the model indicates that there exist a significant difference between the sample variance-covariance matrix and the implied population variance-covariance. Other goodness of

fit measures were used to substantiate the results of the chi-square test. The summary of the fit measures of the structural model is shown in table 7.

Conclusion

The conclusions were made based on the insights derived from the review of the literature and the empirical findings of this study. In the last few decades, the field of educational administration and management had received enormous attention from behavioural scientists as well as the theorists of administration. The trend showed that there is a constant shift from the scientific to the humanistic approach where the focus is on human relations rather than work process. The thrust of the shift is towards enhancing employee performance through various soft aspects such as job satisfaction and morale.

This study investigates the morale status and the contributing factors, perceived job performance and the causal relationships between the various morale determinants, morale status and the job performance of teachers from selected secondary schools in Seremban.

This study had identified that there was a significant difference in the morale status between the male and female teachers, male teachers registered a moderately higher value as compared to the females. This finding concurs with that of Abd. Shukor Shaari et al (2002), where in their study they found that male teachers show significantly higher job motivation, achievement motivation, and autonomy motivation. Even though the present study does not deal with motivation, morale and motivation and closely related construct (Kossan, 1994).

On the other hand, when compared in term of age, the senior teachers seemed to be happier with their job as compared to their younger counterparts. This supports the findings of Weiss (1999) that older teachers tend to develop a sense of belonging to the organisation, therefore they felt more satisfied with the job as compared to the younger teachers who are still acclimatizing themselves with their working environment and easily disturbed emotionally. However this study did not investigate the reasons for this pattern. Comparison according to job positions revealed that there is no significant difference in the morale status of the employees.

In this study it was also found that the male teachers registered higher job performance as compared to the females. However this study did not investigate further the reasons. In terms of age group, the senior teachers recorded higher job performance as compared to the younger ones. The result concurred with the findings of Weiss (1999) whereby the senior teachers portrayed greater team spirit and cooperation due to their longer years with the organization, which is the catalyst for high performance.

In measuring the perceived morale determinants of the teachers, this study revealed that all the five factors: leadership, belongingness, environment, personal development and collegiality were seen as important in determining the morale of the teachers. The 'working environment' was rated as the most important factor among the five. When compared according to gender, the male teachers placed greater emphasis to all these five factors as compared to the females. Similarly, the senior placed more importance to these factors as compared to the younger ones.

In determining the relationships between the various morale determinants, morale status, and job performance of the employees, it was found that the 'environment', 'personal development' and 'collegiality' factors affect the feeling of

'personal reward' of the teachers whilst 'leadership', 'belongingness', 'environment' and 'personal development' factors influence the 'cohesive pride' of the employees. It was also found that all the other morale determinants, except 'leadership', affect the 'job performance' of the teachers indirectly either by affecting the 'personal reward' or the 'cohesive pride' of the teachers.

Limitation

The results should be interpreted cautiously because the study was confined to only selected schools. Since this is a cross-sectional survey, the relationships captured by the model proposed in this study may not exactly replicate the culture of all secondary schools. A longitudinal study would be more appropriate. Models using time series data will be able to capture the organisational climate more precisely. The model for this study was developed using the exploratory technique; therefore the accuracy of the model depends very much on the quality of the data. Since the analysis focuses only on quantifiable data, the proposed model may not be a comprehensive model to explain the relationship between morale and the job performance.

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Appendix A

Figure 4.1 : Path Diagram Relating The Various Components Of Morale Determinants, Morale Status And Job Performance

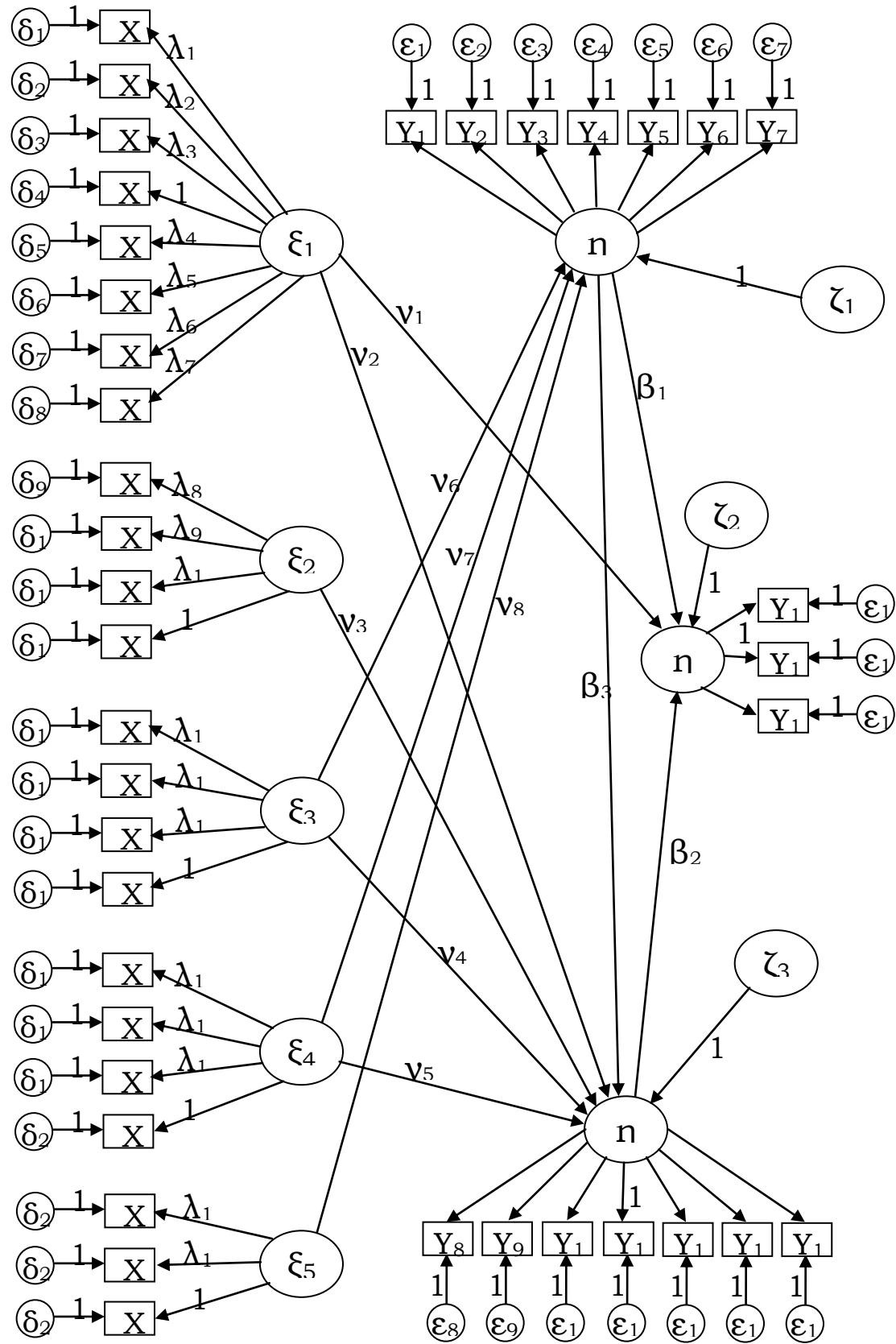


Table 1 : The Respondents' Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	Number	Percentage (%)
GENDER		
Male	41	44.6
Female	51	55.4
AGE		
20 to 40 years	52	56.5
41 to 50	40	43.5
POSITION		
Management (Senior Assistance and 'Ketua Bidang')	36	39.1
Ordinary Teachers	58	60.9

Table 2 : Morale Status

	Mean	SD	p-value (GroupWise comparison)
Overall	*5.61	0.80	NA
Male	*5.90	0.65	0.01
Female	*5.32	0.81	
20 to 40 years	*5.47	0.76	0.03
above 40 years	*5.87	0.82	
Managerial	*5.81	0.85	0.101
Ordinary Teachers	*5.68	0.75	

* Significantly higher than 5.25 at $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 3 : Morale Determinants

	Leadership		Environment		Belongingness		Personal Development		Collegiality	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Male	5.37	0.83	6.02	0.72	5.61	0.87	5.69	0.79	5.54	0.91
Female	4.71	0.87	5.40	0.80	5.04	0.80	5.39	0.68	5.01	0.71
20 to 30 years	4.80	1.02	5.56	0.77	5.06	0.90	5.31	0.87	5.04	0.11
above 30 years	5.28	0.69	5.83	0.86	5.58	0.77	5.78	0.47	5.51	0.10
Managerial	5.12	0.96	5.72	0.81	5.68	0.87	5.58	0.74	5.64	0.76
Ordinary Teacher	5.02	0.98	5.64	0.74	4.98	1.00	5.34	1.09	4.97	1.13

Table 4 : Perceived job performance

	Mean	SD	p-value (GroupWise comparison)
Overall	5.65	0.47	NA
Male	5.76	0.39	0.11
Female	5.55	0.51	
20 to 40 years	5.38	0.48	0.02
above 40 years	5.69	0.45	
Managerial	5.86	0.40	0.01
Ordinary Teacher	5.26	0.40	

* Significantly higher than 5.25 at $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 5: Nomenclature Of The Parameters

Symbol	Dimensions
ξ_1	Morale Determinants – leadership factor
ξ_2	Morale Determinants – belongingness factor
ξ_3	Morale Determinants – environment factor
ξ_4	Morale Determinants – personal development factor
ξ_5	Morale Determinants – collegiality factor
η_3	Morale Status – cohesive pride factor
η_1	Morale Status – personal reward factor
η_2	Overall job performance of employees

Table 6: Analysis Of The Structural Model

Causing construct	→	Caused construct	Std Coefficient	p-value
Environment	γ_6	Personal Reward	0.27	0.052
Personal development	γ_7	Personal Reward	0.36	0.013
Collegiality	γ_8	Personal Reward	0.05	0.047
Leadership	γ_2	Cohesive Pride	0.013	0.051
Belongingness	γ_3	Cohesive Pride	0.22	0.011
Environment	γ_4	Cohesive Pride	0.414	0.001
Personal development	γ_5	Cohesive Pride	0.74	0.000
Personal Reward	β_3	Cohesive Pride	0.17	0.05
Leadership	γ_1	Performance	0.54	0.000
Personal Reward	β_1	Performance	0.13	0.04
Cohesive Pride	β_2	Performance	0.11	0.04

Table 7: Goodness Of Fit Indices For The Structural Model

	χ^2	Df	Normed χ^2	CFI	GFI	AGFI	TLI	STD.RMSEA
Final Model	1612	729	2.21	0.89	0.89	0.87	0.86	0.065