

Antecedents of employees' engagement in Malaysian private higher education

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to examine the direct relationships between peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture, and their impact on organizational commitment and employee engagement in private higher education institutions in Malaysia, for both academic and non-academic staff. The significance of this research lies in the fact that many private higher education institutions in Malaysia are experiencing low levels of employee engagement, which can negatively affect organizational performance and productivity. The research model consists of three independent variables (peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture), with organizational commitment acting as a mediator and employee engagement as the dependent variable. To gather primary data, the study used a survey questionnaire adapted from previous research studies and collected 268 usable responses. The data was then analysed using structural equation modelling to test the hypotheses. The first step in the analysis was to evaluate the measurement model for convergent validity by assessing construct reliability and validity. Then, discriminant validity was assessed and confirmed using cross-loading and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios. Finally, the structural model was assessed to test the research hypotheses. The results indicate that peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture all have a significant positive impact on organizational commitment, which in turn strongly affects employee engagement. These findings suggest that private higher education institutions in Malaysia should focus on improving peer relationships, leadership style, and organizational culture to enhance employee engagement and ultimately improve organizational performance.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Leadership style, Malaysian private higher education, Organizational commitment, Organizational culture, Peer influence.

JEL Classification: M10.

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Highlights of this paper

- This research study examines the impact of peer influence on organizational commitment and employee engagement in Malaysian private higher education institutions for both academic and non-academic staff.
- This research study investigation how leadership style influences organizational commitment and employee engagement among both academic and non-academic employee in private higher education institutions in Malaysia.
- This research study explore the influence of organizational culture on organizational commitment and employee engagement within Malaysian private higher education institutions, encompassing both academic and non-academic employee.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is very important. Alternatively, many companies frequently overlooked its influences to the overall success business as nicely as its people. In reality, many professionals and even scholars have agreed that especially engaged employees can transform the company, boosting productivity and innovation and encouraging higher collaboration and discretionary effort. Historically it has been considered that many organizations could not create long term sustainability and competitiveness through ignoring employee engagement in general and creating work life balance in particular. This is particularly due to the fact of its negative impact on the value delivery mechanism of the organization. Employee engagement has assumed higher currency in the corporate world for addressing the crucial need of any futuristic organization to emerge as innovative and competitive by constantly renewing and reinventing the value delivery to customers and other key stakeholders.

There are many key drivers of employee engagement and one of the drivers is the work environment. It helps employees to strengthen emotional dedication and bond nearer to the corporation reflecting its effective influence on performance, productivity and profitability. Connectedly it has different elusive results that are positive to the working environment, for example, idealism, confidence, and dynamic adapting patterns via (Bal, 2010) to all-inclusive effects from connected with representatives contain consumer loyalty, efficiency, lessened turnover, productivity, and work environment well-being via (Arnold, Wilmar, Michael, & Toon, 2008). The major objective of this study is to show the work environment and employees' satisfaction to allow the possibility to establish employees' engagement in Malaysian Higher Education regarding academic and non-academic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Leadership Style

The way leaders interact with their subordinates is viewed as a combination of a variety of traits, characteristics, and behaviours (Mitonga-Monga, Coetzee, & Cilliers, 2012). According to Mitonga-Monga et al. (2012), leadership is the pattern of managerial behaviour that aims to combine personal or organizational interests with effects for specific goals. Harris (2007) likewise hypothesized that initiative style can be characterized as the sort of relationship that is utilized by an individual to make individuals cooperate for a shared objective or goal. As indicated by present day authority styles, administration styles can be ordered as follows: The transformational leadership style; The transactional leadership style; The culture-based leadership style; The charismatic leadership style; and 5) The visionary leadership style (Harris, 2007).

2.2. Peer Influence

Peer influence is easier to define than it is to implement. "Influence occurs when an individual act or thinks in ways that he or she would not otherwise act or think, an effect that can be attributed to experiences with friends

and affiliates," according to one representative definition (Laursen, 2018). Thus, peer influence is defined as instances in which one person affects or is affected by one or more others of similar age (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021).

2.3. Organizational Commitment

The term commitment, also known as organizational commitment, refers to the subjectively experienced bond that exists between an employee and his employer (Kanning, 2017). Meyer and Allen (1991) and Meyer and Allen (1997) define organizational commitment as a psychological state of mind that reflects a desire, need, and obligation to maintain membership in an organization. Meyer and Allen introduced the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment in 1991, a model that has gained popularity as a dominant predictor of organizational commitment. The model's three components are affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment. Researchers have used the model to forecast important employee outcomes such as turnover, job performance, and absenteeism (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). This study found that need satisfaction and life satisfaction have positive relationships with organizational commitment. Need satisfaction, in particular, is strongly linked to continued commitment, whereas life satisfaction is strongly linked to affective commitment. These findings help us understand the factors that influence employee commitment: need satisfaction leads to need-based (continuance) commitment, whereas life satisfaction leads to emotion-based (affective) commitment. Companies should think about implementing strategies aimed at increasing employee life satisfaction because effective commitment is regarded as one of the most powerful forms of commitment (Puangyoykeaw & Nishide, 2015).

2.4. Culture

Based on Colbert (2010) culture is defined as a collaboration of shared meanings or common beliefs among the members of an organization. Its founders have a significant influence in the development of the initial values and principles that tailor the fabric of the group, which may not be obvious to newcomers to the organization and may be taken for granted by its seasoned members. A culture seeks an identity and strives to maintain its uniqueness and distinctiveness while acknowledging the threads that link it to other cultures in more subtle ways. Culture's roots are thought to be the driving force behind how humans learn to behave (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004). The authors examined global work culture and identified ten cultural characteristics that describe any group of people: (1) a sense of self or space; (2) communication and language; (3) dress and appearance; (4) food and feeding habits; (5) time and time consciousness, whether defined by time, age, or status; (6) relationships; (7) culturally defined values and norms; (8) beliefs and attitudes; (9) mental processing and learning defined by how people organize and process information; and (10) work habits and practises. The findings of JWU's workshop series on individual and institutional perceptions of cultural identity revealed that awareness is the first step towards a culturally responsive teaching environment (Colbert, 2010). To meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and academic community, faculty and the university colleges in which they teach must be prepared to examine their pedagogical approaches (Colbert, 2010).

2.5. Employee Engagement

Employee work engagement is a psychological condition that describes how attached, invested, and dedicated individuals become to their work (Saks, 2006). Budiono, Hamidah, and Yasin (2019) Hamidah also defined employee work engagement as a state of affective emotion of fulfillment in relation to work, which is the employee's level of absorption, dedication, and vigor. Employee engagement is a key business driver that contributes to organizational

success. Saks (2006) established this in his work, stating that employee engagement improves talent retention, customer loyalty, and overall organizational performance. As a result, several academics have taken an interest in employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). The researchers identified vigor, dedication, and absorption as distinct dimensions of engagement in their conceptualization of the construct of employee engagement (Acquah, Seshie, & Zogbator, 2015). Vigor reflects high levels of energy, mental resilience, and perseverance in the face of challenges while performing work (Brenyah & Theresa, 2017). In Ghana's higher education institutions, there is a significant positive relationship between clan culture and employee work engagement (Afrifa Jnr, Fianko, Amoah, & Dzogbewu, 2022).

Based on the above conceptual development, the following research hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H₁: There is a relationship between peer influence and organizational commitment among employees in private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

H₂: There is a relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment among employees in private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

H₃: There is a relationship between organizational culture and organizational commitment among employees in private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

H₄: There is a relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement among employees in private higher education institutions in Malaysia.

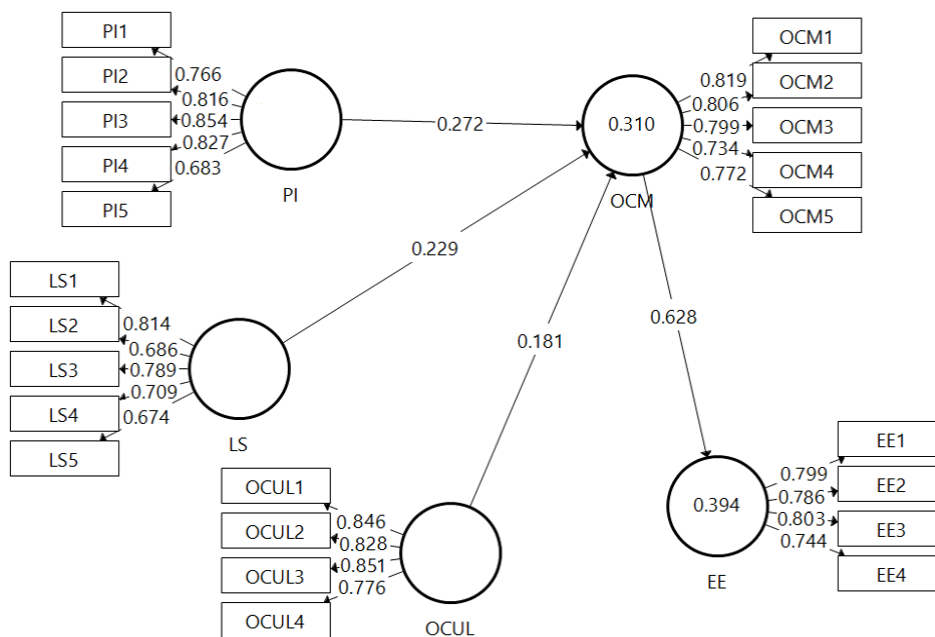


Figure 1. Research model.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Approach, Design & Software

This study used a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between five latent variables and their corresponding observed variables. The research model consisted of peer influence, leadership style, organizational culture, organizational commitment, and employee engagement. To measure these variables, 23 observed variables were used. The independent variables, peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture, were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Organizational commitment, the mediator, was measured using five items. Employee engagement, the dependent

variable, was measured using four items. To ensure data quality and response rate, a 5-point Likert scale was used, and the data was screened and cleaned using SPSS 18 before analysis. The data was analyzed using partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) as recommended by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017). SmartPLS 4 software was also utilized for data analysis (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2022).

3.2. Sample

The study focused on individuals who worked in private higher education institutions in Malaysia, including both academicians and non-academicians. The researchers distributed online questionnaires to 330 individuals, and 272 respondents (81.2% response rate) completed and returned the surveys. The researchers considered this sample size sufficient for the variance-based approach used in data analysis, as there is no standard for the minimum acceptable response rate for online surveys (Hamilton, 2003). After collecting the data, the researchers screened for outliers using the method suggested by Field (2013) and SPSS 18 software. They identified and removed four outliers before conducting the main data analysis using the PLS-SEM algorithm on a sample of 268 respondents. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents who participated in the study. Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents' profiles.

Table 1. Respondents' profile.

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	167	62%
Female	101	38%
Age:		
<20 years old	11	4%
20-30 years old	96	36%
30-40 years old	84	31%
40-50 years old	46	17%
50-60 years old	17	6%
>60 years old	14	5%
Years of service:		
<5 years	12	4%
5-10 years	71	26%
10-15 years	69	26%
15-20 years	55	21%
20-25 years	34	13%
25-30 years	18	7%
>30 years	9	3%
Position:		
Academician	187	70%
Non-academician	81	30%
Education level:		
Certificate	13	5%
Diploma	24	9%
Bachelor	39	15%
Master	109	41%
Doctorate	77	29%
Others	6	2%

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Common Method Bias

Management researchers often face the issue of common method bias, which occurs when the way variables are measured in a field affects the perceived variation. To address this issue, researchers use Harman's single-factor test, which was also used in this study. The test showed that the main factor accounted for only 39.7% of the explained

variation, indicating that there is no problem with common method bias. This finding supports Podsakoff and Organ (1986) assertion that common method bias is not a concern when the variation is less than 50%. The results of this study suggest that the measuring technique used in management research does not significantly impact the variables being studied. However, researchers should still be aware of common method bias and continue to use methods like Harman's single-factor test to ensure accurate results in their studies.

4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation

To evaluate the measurements in the first and second order, we used the techniques suggested by Podsakoff and Organ (1986). This allowed us to identify items with low loading below the threshold of 0.7. After evaluating the loading of items, all constructs achieved a minimum threshold of 0.5 for Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Additionally, Cronbach alpha and composite reliability also met the minimum threshold of 0.7. These statistical requirements confirm the reliability and validity of our research framework, and all item factor loadings are shown in Figure 1. Table 2 summarizes the figures for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and convergent validity assessment in our proposed model. The results indicate that there are no concerns about internal consistency validation, and each construct in the research model has established convergent validity with AVE figures greater than 0.5. We conducted a cross-loading assessment to confirm discriminant validity, and the results showed that all items correctly represented and measured their respective constructs. Additionally, we computed and analyzed the Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio to further assess discriminant validity. The HTMT ratio technique is a recommended criterion for evaluating discriminant validity in Variance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (VB-SEM) (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Table 3 presents the HTMT ratio figures and the 95% confidence intervals for the constructs, indicating that discriminant validity compliance was met with an HTMT of 0.85, and the upper level of the Bias-Corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals was less than 1.

Table 2. Construct reliability & validity.

Construct	Item	EE	CA	CR	AVE
Employee engagement	EE1	0.799	0.791	0.864	0.614
	EE2	0.786			
	EE3	0.803			
	EE4	0.744			
Leadership style	LS1	0.814	0.788	0.855	0.543
	LS2	0.686			
	LS3	0.789			
	LS4	0.709			
	LS5	0.674			
Organizational commitment	OCM1	0.819	0.846	0.890	0.619
	OCM2	0.806			
	OCM3	0.799			
	OCM4	0.734			
	OCM5	0.772			
Organizational culture	OCUL1	0.846	0.844	0.895	0.682
	OCUL2	0.828			
	OCUL3	0.851			
	OCUL4	0.776			
Peer influence	PI1	0.766	0.851	0.893	0.627
	PI2	0.816			
	PI3	0.854			
	PI4	0.827			
	PI5	0.683			

Table 3. Hetrotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

Construct	EE	LS	OCM	OCUL
LS	0.681(0.567, 0.788)			
OCM	0.755(0.667, 0.841)	0.572(0.439, 0.681)		
OCUL	0.561(0.420, 0.669)	0.485(0.332, 0.609)	0.439(0.281, 0.559)	
PI	0.631(0.509, 0.743)	0.776(0.684, 0.859)	0.558(0.411, 0.671)	0.442(0.285, 0.592)

4.3. Structural Model

Hair et al. (2017) provided guidance for evaluating the structural model of this study and testing the significance of the path coefficients. The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 4. The statistical analysis of H1 revealed a positive and significant effect of co-worker influence on organizational commitment ($\beta=0.272$, $t=3.615$, $p=0.000$), supporting H1. Similarly, H2 indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment ($\beta=0.229$, $t=3.433$, $p=0.001$). On the other hand, H3 indicated a positive and significant effect of organizational culture on organizational commitment ($\beta=0.181$, $t=3.317$, $p=0.001$) and H4 showed a positive and significant relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement ($\beta=0.628$, $t=16.531$, $p=0.000$), both hypotheses were also supported. It is important to note that variables in a structural model can be influenced by a variety of factors, and the removal of exogenous variables can affect endogenous variables. The predictive power of out-of-sample models is critical for drawing conclusions and making management recommendations. To assess this, the PLS-Redict approach to intentions was used (Shmueli, Ray, Estrada, & Chatla, 2016; Shmueli et al., 2019). Table 5 shows that $Q^2_{predict}$ is greater than 0, which means that the PLS-SEM prediction was better than the simple average prediction. Furthermore, the root mean square error (RMSE) values of PLS-SEM predictions are lower than the RMSE values of linear model (LM) prediction benchmarks in 7 out of 9 cases, indicating that the proposed model has predictive power (Table 5). Table 6 shows the performance values of the predictors and shows that organizational commitment had the highest impact with an effect size of 0.628, but the lowest performance value was 61.053.

Table 4. Hypotheses testing results.

Hypotheses	Beta	T statistics	P values	2.50%	97.50%
H ₁ : PI -> OCM	0.272	3.615	0.000	0.131	0.426
H ₂ : LS -> OCM	0.229	3.433	0.001	0.083	0.348
H ₃ : OCUL -> OCM	0.181	3.317	0.001	0.081	0.285
H ₄ : OCM -> EE	0.628	16.531	0.000	0.530	0.684

Table 5. PLS predict.

ITEM	PLS RMSE	LM RMSE	PLS-LS	Q ² _predict
EE1	0.618	0.588	0.030	0.252
EE2	0.633	0.639	-0.006	0.187
EE3	0.680	0.673	0.007	0.200
EE4	0.726	0.736	-0.010	0.127
OCM1	0.600	0.602	-0.002	0.232
OCM2	0.617	0.632	-0.015	0.168
OCM3	0.677	0.679	-0.002	0.131
OCM4	0.685	0.709	-0.024	0.152
OCM5	0.599	0.615	-0.016	0.189

On the other hand, organizational culture had the lowest impact with an effect size of 0.113, but the highest performance score of 67.554. Therefore, the priority should be given to improving the performance of organizational commitment, since it has the strongest total effect on the outcome. At the same time, efforts should also be made to improve the total effect of organizational culture, as it has the weakest impact on the outcome. By

focusing on enhancing the performance and total effect of these predictors, the engagement of employees in private higher education institutions can be strengthened.

Table 6. Importance-performance matrix analysis (IPMA).

Dimension	Importance	Performance
LS	0.144	65.674
OCM	0.628	61.053
OCUL	0.113	67.554
PI	0.171	66.251

5. DISCUSSION

Developing strategies to improve the relationship between peer influence and organizational engagement in private higher education institutions is important for several reasons. Organizational engagement is a key determinant of employee retention and satisfaction and is positively associated with job performance and productivity. By strengthening the relationship between peer influence and organizational engagement, institutions can increase employee engagement and lower turnover, resulting in reduced costs and improved institutional performance. Peer influence plays an important role in shaping employee behaviour and attitudes, including their commitment to the organization. A positive and supportive work environment fostered by strong relationships with colleagues can foster a sense of belonging and employee engagement. Developing strategies to improve peer relations and social cohesion can therefore have a significant impact on improving organizational engagement. Private higher education institutions face increasing competition to attract and retain qualified faculty. A strong organizational commitment is a key differentiator in attracting and retaining top talent. By focusing on improving the relationship between peer influence and organizational engagement, institutions can create a more engaging work environment, attract the best candidates, and retain a high-performing workforce. increase.

The relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment is important to the success of private higher education institutions. A positive relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment increases employee satisfaction, retention, and performance. Employees who are committed to their organization are more likely to work harder, be more engaged, and actively contribute to the organization's growth and success. Building a culture of trust, respect, and open communication is key to improving the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment. Managers should present their vision, goals, and strategy in transparent communication formats and proactively solicit feedback from employees. You should also provide opportunities for professional development and growth, and recognize and reward a job well done. Improving the relationship between organizational culture and organizational commitment in private higher education institutions is important for improving employee engagement, job satisfaction, and ultimately organizational performance.

A positive organizational culture helps create a sense of belonging and purpose among employees, which leads to increased commitment to the organization. Company culture can be strengthened by fostering a positive work environment, encouraging open communication, and promoting transparency and fairness. This can be accomplished through initiatives such as employee recognition programs, regular feedback sessions, and team-building activities. Furthermore, it is important to align the values of the organization with those of the employees. This can be achieved by creating a shared vision and mission statement that reflects the core beliefs of the organization and its employees. Additionally, it is important to ensure that employees are aware of the organization's values and how they contribute to achieving the organization's overall goals.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Research on employee engagement in higher education has several theoretical implications. Contribute to the organizational behaviour literature by providing insight into the factors that influence employee engagement in the unique context of higher education. This allows us to extend and refine existing employee engagement theories and models, facilitating their application in other educational institutions and industries. Since employee engagement is often considered a key component of organizational engagement, it helps us to understand the factors that influence organizational engagement more broadly. By examining the specific role of employee engagement in the relationship between various organizational factors and organizational engagement, researchers can better understand the underlying mechanisms that contribute to employee engagement and explore potential interventions. areas can be identified. Studying employee engagement at universities can provide insight into the unique challenges and opportunities that exist in this field. For example, higher education institutions often have complex multi-stakeholder organizational structures where employees have a strong understanding of mission and purpose which can influence engagement and there is. By understanding these unique contextual factors, researchers can tailor strategies to improve employee engagement and organizational engagement in higher education institutions. Research on employee engagement in higher education provides insights into employee engagement and factors influencing engagement in this unique context. Improving employee engagement and organizational engagement identified in higher education. It has the potential to contribute to both theory and practice by providing strategies for educational institutions.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Studying employee engagement in higher education institutions has several implications for management. The results suggest that organizational engagement, peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture significantly influence employee engagement. Managers can use this information to develop strategies to improve employee engagement, provide leadership training to improve company culture, and adopt effective leadership styles. The research highlights the importance of prioritizing organizational engagement as it has the strongest impact on employee engagement overall. Managers can develop policies and programs that facilitate organizational engagement such as professional development and recognition program opportunities. The research highlights the importance of peer influence in increasing employee engagement. Managers can encourage employees to participate in team-building activities, mentoring programs, and other social activities that foster mutual support and collaboration. This research highlights the importance of organizational culture in increasing employee engagement. Managers can develop strategies to foster a positive organizational culture such as promoting transparency, fairness, and trust.

5.3. Practical Implications

Studying employee engagement in higher education institutions has practical implications to help improve the overall performance of these organizations. By understanding the factors that influence employee engagement, managers can formulate effective strategies to increase employee motivation and engagement and improve organizational performance. This research provides insight into the role of leadership style, organizational culture, and peer influence in shaping employee engagement. Managers can use this knowledge to create a supportive work environment that fosters good relationships between employees and between employees and managers. By providing a clear and collaborative leadership style, managers can foster employee engagement and foster ownership, and accountability. This research highlights the importance of recognizing the impact employee

engagement has on organizational performance. By focusing on the drivers of employee engagement, managers can improve employee overall job satisfaction, reduce turnover and increase productivity. This results in better organizational performance, better reputation, and better student satisfaction. This research highlights the importance of effective talent management practices that support employee engagement. Managers can use this information to design effective compensation and recognition programs that align with employee values and motivations. In addition, managers foster a culture of continuous learning and development to improve the skills and competencies of their employees, leading to increased job satisfaction and performance.

5.4. Suggestions for Future Studies

While current research provides important insights into employee engagement in higher education institutions, there are several avenues for future research that could complement the existing knowledge base. One area that needs further research is investigating the impact of demographic variables on employee engagement. Future research will examine the impact of variables such as gender, age, and education level on employee engagement to provide a more detailed understanding of how these factors contribute to employee engagement. There is a possibility. Another area of future research is to examine the relationship between employee engagement and other variables that can affect organizational performance. For example, future research may investigate the impact of employee engagement on employee turnover, absenteeism, and productivity. Such studies can provide useful insight into how employee engagement affects organizational performance and inform the development of strategies to improve employee engagement. Finally, future studies may examine the impact of interventions aimed at improving employee engagement in higher education institutions. These interventions include training programs, leadership development initiatives, and changes to company policies and practices. Such studies provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of various interventions for improving employee engagement and may guide the development of evidence-based strategies for improving employee engagement in higher education institutions. can support.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, studying employee engagement in higher education has important theoretical, managerial, and practical implications. The results of this study suggest that peer influence, leadership style, and organizational culture significantly influence organizational and employee engagement. Private higher education institutions can benefit by developing strategies that improve the relationship between these factors and employee engagement. Future research will investigate other factors that may affect employee engagement in higher education institutions and identify effective interventions to improve employee engagement to explore these outcomes. You can build on your findings. Ultimately, improved employee engagement leads to a more positive work environment, higher job satisfaction, and better organizational performance in higher education institutions.

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