

Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction During Crisis Situations at Private Universities in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT:

Employee engagement becomes a critical factor in enhancing job satisfaction and organizational performance, especially during crises. This study examines the factors influencing employee engagement and its impact on job satisfaction among staff in private universities in Myanmar. A quantitative research approach with a descriptive design was employed, using data collected from 150 university staff through structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 27), including descriptive and regression analysis. The findings show that rewards and recognition, organizational support, working environment, relationships, and training and development were critical predictors of employee engagement. Employee engagement had a positive and significant impact on job satisfaction. The findings contribute to the limited literature on employee engagement in Myanmar's private education sectors during crises. The study highlights the importance of creating a supportive work environment and strong relationships to sustain employee engagement and job satisfaction during crises.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Job Satisfaction, Crisis, Private Universities, Myanmar.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has gained significant recognition as a pivotal factor in determining staff satisfaction. Gallup (2025) defines employee engagement as “the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work” (para. 1). Employee disengagement results from a lack of emotional investment and passion for their work (Saraiva &

Nogueiro, 2025). Employee engagement is critical to achieving a firm's success, especially during crises (Santoso et al., 2023). Harter (2023) reported that the employee engagement rate has noticeably declined, with only 32% of staff engaging in 2022 and 18% of workers disengaging in the United States. In the banking sector, employee engagement becomes a critical issue during crises (Bešić et al.,

2024). The relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction becomes apparent in times of crisis, as employee welfare is a crucial factor in the resilience of academic sectors (Whitsed et al., 2025). Understanding the relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction is crucial for achieving organizational success, particularly in times of crisis.

Private universities in Myanmar are facing crises such as political instability, economic uncertainty, and disruptions to normal academic operations. Despite the importance of these factors, there is limited empirical research examining how employee engagement and job satisfaction interrelate in Myanmar's private higher education sector during crises. Existing research has focused on stable environments and does not analyze crises in Myanmar. Private education sectors need to develop evidence-based strategies to retain employee engagement and job satisfaction during crises. The current study analyzes the factors influencing employee engagement and how it affects job satisfaction of staff at private universities in Myanmar during crises.

Factors of Employee Engagement

Rewards and Recognition

Recognition of employees' hard work and accomplishments enhances their attitude and commitment (Zawawi et al., 2024). Providing rewards motivates staff to continue investing in their work and making valuable contributions to the firm's development. Recognition increases perceptions of inclusion, strengthening the belief that employees are essential to the organization's success. Rewards and recognition programs enhance staff retention by fostering a positive work culture and reducing turnover costs (Sorn et al., 2023). Regularly rewarding and recognizing workers is associated with increased work engagement and satisfaction.

Organizational support

Organizational support influences employee engagement by fostering a climate in which workers perceive themselves as respected, supported, and motivated to bring forth their best capabilities (Siahaan et al., 2023). Providing assets, equipment,

and a conducive workplace atmosphere by the company enhances worker satisfaction (Abdullahi et al., 2025). Perceiving the firm's support, fairness, and inclusion boosts employees' sense of belonging, positively influencing their engagement and job satisfaction.

Working environment

A well-structured, physically pleasant working environment positively impacts employee engagement (Atik et al., 2023). Engaging in social activities, participating in team-building exercises, and fostering a positive work environment contribute to organizational commitment (Muthuswamy, 2023). Organizations that emphasize creating an inclusive and collaborative workplace are likely to see increased staff engagement and satisfaction.

Relationship

Positive interactions foster a friendly, cooperative work atmosphere, cultivating a sense of inclusion and drive (Ramirez-Lozano et al., 2023). The quality of interpersonal relations between employees and their superiors is paramount. Employees who cultivate friendships with coworkers often experience increased engagement and satisfaction (Bella, 2023). Favorable interpersonal connections are crucial for developing a climate of active engagement.

Training and Development

Training programs allow employees to improve their abilities and expand their knowledge (Zafar & Aleem, 2023). Training and development efforts are crucial for enhancing employee engagement by promoting required skills and career advancement (Bhakuni & Saxena, 2023). Employees who acquire essential skills through training are more motivated to be productive, thereby enhancing business effectiveness and significantly influencing engagement.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction means the inherent emotional state that accompanies the achievement of a business objective (Baxi & Atre, 2024). Job satisfaction comprises multiple dimensions, including

workplace culture, recognition, relationships, salary, and opportunities for career growth. Each facet contributes to an individual's overall sense of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is often influenced by how well outcomes meet or exceed expectations.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a theoretical framework from sociology and psychology used to comprehend employee engagement and job satisfaction (Matrafi, 2024). In the workplace, social interaction between employees and the organization influences the dynamics of engagement and satisfaction (Khan et al., 2024). SET asserts that employees who feel their contributions are acknowledged and appreciated are actively involved and content in the workplace. SET provides a foundation for understanding the reasons for workers' decisions to increase or decrease their level of engagement and satisfaction.

2. Research methodology

Saunders et al. (2019) define the research approach as a comprehensive strategy that connects the problem statement and the specific study process to accomplish the study's objectives. This study employs a deductive research approach, which is

appropriate for analyzing the existing framework using quantitative methods. This research employs a descriptive research design to examine relationships among variables. Descriptive research is appropriate for analyzing respondents' perceptions and experiences during a crisis. A quantitative research method is utilized in this study, focusing on the collection and analysis of numerical data to test the research purpose. A quantitative method allows for the statistical analysis of relationships between variables.

The targeted population of this study consists of staff working at private universities in Myanmar with at least 2 years of work experience. The current study uses convenience sampling, as respondents are selected based on availability and willingness to participate. A total of 150 staff from private universities actively participated in data collection. The data are analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Table 1 shows the personal factors of respondents. Over half of respondents are female staff (64%), and just over half (53.3%) aged between 20 and 25 years, followed by 37.3% aged between 25.1 to 30 years. In relation to working experience, 61.3% have two to three years of experience at different operational levels in private universities.

Table 1: Personal Factors of Respondents

Personal factors		frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	96	64.0%
	Male	54	36.0%
Age	20-25 years	80	53.3%
	25.1-30 years	56	37.3%
	30.1-35 years	12	8.0%
	35.1 years and above	2	1.3%
Working experience	2 to 3 years	92	61.3%
	3.1 to 5 years	36	24.0%
	5.1 years and above	22	14.7%

Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire. Participants expressed their perceptions using predetermined scales (five-point

Likert scales). A questionnaire is widely applied in quantitative research due to its efficiency and scalability (Saunders et al., 2019). The Ethics Review

Committee of Lincoln University College has approved the research. It is conducted as part of the unpublished doctoral research. Primary data are collected after obtaining university approval and informed consent from participants. Before data collection, the researcher explained participants' rights and the confidentiality of the collected data. The data are analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics and correlation tests are used to examine the relationships between variables.

3. Findings

Table 2 presents an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding the key variables. The variables show relatively high mean scores, ranging from 3.74 to 3.97, indicating positive perceptions among university staff. Among the variables, rewards and recognition, and employee engagement have the highest mean score of 3.93, suggesting that

respondents perceive rewards and recognition practices and engagement are high. Organizational support and relationships have mean values of 3.89, indicating that employees generally feel supported by their organizations and maintain positive interpersonal relationships at the workplace. The working environment also shows a comparable mean of 3.88, reflecting a moderately favorable perception of workplace conditions during the crisis. However, training and development has the lowest mean score of 3.74, suggesting that employees perceived fewer opportunities for professional growth and development compared to other factors. Employee job satisfaction has the highest mean score of 3.97, followed closely by employee engagement at 3.93. These results imply that despite the challenges posed by crises, employees still report relatively high levels of satisfaction and engagement.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Descriptive Statistics					
Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rewards and Recognition	150	2.80	5.00	3.93	.42
Organizational Supports	150	2.60	4.60	3.89	.29
Working Environment	150	2.80	5.00	3.88	.39
Relationships	150	2.80	5.00	3.89	.40
Training and Development	150	3.00	5.00	3.74	.43
Employee Engagement	150	3.00	5.00	3.93	.43
Employee Satisfaction	150	3.00	4.80	3.97	.33

The multiple regression analysis is conducted to examine the impact of rewards and recognition, organizational support, working environment, relationships, and training and development on employee engagement. The overall model is statistically significant, as indicated by $F = 44.421$, $p < 0.001$. The R^2 value of 0.607 indicates that the five predictors explain 60.7% of the variance in employee engagement. At the same time, the adjusted R^2 of 0.593 confirms a strong explanatory power after adjusting for the number of variables. Among the variables, the relationships have the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.400$, $p < 0.001$),

indicating that positive interpersonal relationships within the workplace play the most critical role in enhancing employee engagement during crisis, followed by working environment ($\beta = 0.223$), rewards and recognition ($\beta = 0.189$), organizational support ($\beta = 0.171$), and training and development ($\beta = 0.161$). The results demonstrate that all examined factors significantly impact employee engagement, with relationships emerging as the most dominant predictor. The results highlight the importance of developing positive relationships and workplace communication to improve employee engagement in private universities during a crisis.

Table 3: Regression analysis between contributing factors and employee engagement

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-.506	.352		-1.437	.153	-1.202	.190
	Rewards and Recognition	.189	.062	.187	3.069	.003	.067	.311
	Organizational Supports	.171	.084	.116	2.031	.044	.005	.337
	Working Environment	.223	.085	.208	2.620	.010	.055	.391
	Relationships	.400	.089	.374	4.483	.000	.224	.577
	Training and Development	.161	.056	.163	2.858	.005	.050	.272
R square							0.607	
Adjusted R-squared							0.593	
F (Sig)							44.421 (<0.001)	
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement								

The simple linear regression analysis is conducted to examine the effect of employee engagement on job satisfaction. The overall model is statistically significant ($F = 64.513$, $p < 0.001$). The R^2 (0.304) and adjusted R^2 (0.299) indicate that 29.9% of the variance in employee satisfaction can be explained by employee engagement. The regression coefficient for employee engagement is positive and

statistically significant ($\beta = 0.419$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher employee engagement is associated with greater job satisfaction. For each unit increase in employee engagement, job satisfaction increases by 0.419 units. The results indicate that employee engagement has a significant, positive influence on job satisfaction among private university staff during crises (Table 4).

Table 4: Regression analysis between employee engagement and job satisfaction

Coefficients ^a								
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.323	.206		11.272	.000	1.915	2.730
	Employee Engagement	.419	.052	.551	8.032	.000	.316	.523
R square							0.304	
Adjusted R-squared							0.299	
F (Sig)							64.513 (< 0.001)	
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction								

Discussion

This study presents those interpersonal relationships are the critical predictors of employee engagement during crises. This result is consistent with prior research indicating that positive workplace relationships enhance employee engagement by fostering trust, collaboration, and emotional support (Bella, 2023; Ramirez-Lozano et al., 2023). This finding supports the social exchange theory, which posits those supportive interactions encourage commitment (Khan et al., 2024; Matrafi, 2024). The result shows that in times of uncertainty, employees rely more on social connections as a coping mechanism. This study indicates that working environment, rewards and recognition, organizational support, and training and development influence employee engagement. These findings are consistent with previous research (Atik et al., 2023; Siahaan et al., 2023; Zawawi et al., 2024), which emphasizes that both tangible and intangible organizational practices shape employee attitudes.

Moreover, this study confirms a positive and significant relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction, aligning with existing literature (Harter, 2023; Santoso et al., 2023). The findings show that higher engagement is associated with greater job satisfaction, supporting the argument that engaged employees are more emotionally connected to work. This study contributes to the relevance of social exchange theory as the theoretical framework for understanding employee behavior. Consistent with SET, employees who perceive organizational

support, recognition, and fair treatment respond with higher engagement, which subsequently enhances job satisfaction. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that firms need to prioritize strengthening interpersonal relationships, supportive work environments, and implementing recognition practices to sustain engagement during crises.

Conclusions

This study investigates the factors influencing employee engagement and its impact on job satisfaction among staff in private universities in Myanmar during crises. The findings demonstrate that employee engagement plays a critical role in employee job satisfaction. This study presents relationships, working environment, rewards and recognition, organizational support, and training and development as significant factors of employee engagement at private universities during crises. The study contributes to the limited body of research on employee engagement in crises, particularly within Myanmar's private higher education sector. Although this study contributes to both theoretical and practical aspects by filling the research gap, it has limitations. This study targets private universities and collects data from university staff using a questionnaire. Future studies should target public education sectors and collect primary data from different stakeholders, using additional methods such as observations and interviews, to gain an in-depth understanding of how employee engagement affects job satisfaction.

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