

THE EFFECT OF SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES ON EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN PENANG MANUFACTURING FIRMS, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

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This study evaluated the relationship between communications, job knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making on employees' performance in manufacturing firms in Penang, Malaysia. A sample size of 222 respondents was taken from 28 electrical manufacturing firms with a 6322 population and 361 samples to examine the relationship. A questionnaire was designed for data collection to measure communication, job knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making on employees' performance in manufacturing firms. A stratified sampling method was used, and the data was analyzed using SmartPls 3.7.8. The study showed that communication, job knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making have a significant relationship with employees' performance in manufacturing firms. However, the limitation of this study only covers electrical manufacturing firms. Suggested for future study focus on electronic, plastic, and fabricated manufacturing firms to be more effective in improving manufacturing firms' supervisor competencies.

KEYWORDS: Supervisor Competencies, Communication, Job Knowledge, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Employees' Performance

INTRODUCTION

The supervisor is a front-line manager whose role is to plan, control and execute a given task to achieve the target as set by their manager in the workplace. Supervisor competencies in this case study covered communication, job knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making to ensure that firms achieved the quality and productivity in performance of their employees and products. Supervisors are a group of middle management staff who are responsible for being the bridge between management and employees in an organization (Suharnomo&Johnpray,2018;Edward,2018). Supervisors are responsible for translating all strategies and policies provided by management aimed at developing and expanding the firm into language and methods that employees can understand for implementation. Supervisors are also responsible for communicating employee feedback to management on issues involving the interests of firms. In a simple sense, supervision means overseeing an activity performed by others (Turney & Ruch,2018).In the context of education, the definition of supervision can be elaborated from various perspectives. Supervisors also need to have special skills to ensure the ability to interact with two very different groups of staff. Supervisory skills are required by all supervisors to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. It is in addition to the technical skills that are indeed the basic needs of every supervisor (Fischer, Tian, Lee & Hughes, 2017;Shen,Yang& Hu,2018).

2. Research Objectives and Research Questions

2.1 Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the relationship between communication on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.
2. To examine the relationship between job knowledge on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.
3. To identify the relationship between problem solving and decision making on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

2.2 Research Questions of the Study

Research questions in this study covered:

1. Is there any relationship between communications on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms?
2. Is there any relationship between job knowledge on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms?
3. Is there any relationship between problem solving and decision making on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Communication

As a supervisor, communication is very important in performing their daily tasks at the workplace. A previous study stated that supervisor communication has a significant relationship with employees’ performance. The benefits of effective communication in the workplace are increased productivity; reduce employee conflict, and better customer relationships. Every business can benefit from increased productivity, and effective communication practices can help achieve this goal. It can also help supervisors better understand the talents and skills of their employees, assign them to the most suitable job and provide clear instructions to ensure the job is done correctly and in a short time (Evans& Suklun,2017;Seitz& Choo,2018). Effective supervisory communication is essential for efficient job training. When the employee begins to know what to expect, he or she will be able to jump with both feet. On the other hand, employees who do not understand the job will blackmail and make mistakes, or repeatedly ask for help. Most conflicts in the workplace are

caused by communication breakdowns. It only makes sense then that effective communication can reduce conflict in the workplace. The three most common types of conflict in the workplace are misunderstandings or feelings of misunderstanding, insufficient understanding of how others communicate, and a person feeling that their needs are not being met or ignored. Furthermore, communication conflicts can arise when employees are from different cultures and there may be misunderstandings related to language and interpretation. Effective communication in the workplace can help alleviate any problems that may arise (Bergman, Dellve & Skagert, 2017; Okoro & Washington, 2018). One of the most important aspects of producing productivity is building quality relationships with employees. One of the best ways to do this is through effective communication. Every employee who works in a relationship with subordinate employees needs to have excellent communication skills. Poor communication with subordinate employees can result in low productivity and a bad reputation if employees feel they are being misunderstood or abused and share their stories with friends, family, or the world on social media. Above all, a firm must practice good communication with them before, during, and after working hours. The results of previous studies also show that effective communication can strengthen the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. This situation makes the workplace cycle peaceful and free from any stress; Effective communication by a supervisor is capable of increasing work productivity and firm growth (Wijayanti, 2017; Yeong & Shah Rollah, 2018).

3.2 Job Knowledge

Job knowledge is an important element in contributing to job performance. Supervisors who have extensive job knowledge have high expertise in a job. Job knowledge involves knowledge of their daily tasks, experts in problem-solving, ability in decision making, skills and ability in performing new tasks and successfully produce the quality and productivity of work as desired by their firm. Job knowledge is increasingly important for an organization because it is the key for a firm to maintain and seize a competitive advantage in a market of products or services. To ensure that a job initiative is successful, knowledge sharing which is one of the main thrusts must be made a culture in the firm (Supriyanto, Sujianto & Ekowati, 2018; Almajali, Alrowwad & Obeidat, 2018). But this culture is not as easy as expected because not all employees want to share knowledge for free. After all, it is a very valuable force. An important group that plays a role in job knowledge is a knowledgeable supervisor as defined as someone who works with information or someone who develops or applies knowledge in his or her workplace (Jing, Stanley, Guo & Wenjing, 2018; Bienkowska & Ignacek-Kuznicka, 2018). This survey paper aims to identify whether there is job knowledge on employees' performance in the firm. Job knowledge that involves knowledge sharing, factors that stimulate job knowledge sharing, and as well as job knowledge factors that are identified can generate high job performance. Findings from this study are expected to help improve the sharing of job knowledge by supervisors in the firm to their subordinates and when the driving factors are implemented towards the achievement of goals. Job knowledge also makes supervisors capable of handling problems in the workplace with accurate and comprehensive solutions. Past studies have also noted that firms decline because supervisors do not have broad competencies in controlling the behavior of subordinate employees that have implications for work productivity and products. The weaknesses of supervisors contribute to the decline in firms' income and directly reduce firms' wealth. This situation affects the competitors of the firms to take advantage of the weaknesses of the supervisor in producing quality products due to wrong instructions and weakness in management. Therefore, the supervisor is the middle manager, and also the front-line manager needs to have job knowledge that is efficient in carrying out his function

as a supervisor to ensure that the output can be produced accurately and with quality (Jung & Han, 2017; Bienkowska, & Ignacek-Kuznicka, 2018).

3.3 Problem Solving and Decision Making

Supervisors have a very important role in problem-solving and decision-making. Past studies have found that there is a significant relationship between problem-solving and decision-making and employees' performance in the firm. Quality supervisors are those who are proficient in problem-solving and decision-making to drive their workplace better in producing satisfactory quality and productive work. Problem-solving is the ability of the mind to find ideas and alternative measures to overcome the shortcomings or obstacles that exist to achieve the desired objectives (Knauff & Wolf, 2017; Prem, Scheel, Weigelt, Hoffmann & Korunka, 2018). Decision-making is the ability of the mind to select one of the best options from several alternatives to achieve a determined goal or objective based on certain criteria. Past studies have stated that a supervisor should be necessary and always encouraged to think. Thinking allows us to solve problems and make decisions. One of the tasks of supervisors recommended by firms is to improve problem-solving and decision-making skills among their subordinate employees. The importance of practicing thinking skills has been discussed at length and the results of the study have concluded that problem-solving and decision-making are found to be able to combine two important skills for thinking namely problem-solving skills and decision-making skills (Sharma, Arora, Chandrashekhar, Sinha, Akhtar & Mehra, 2018;). Both of these skills are basic skills in the thinking process. Aspects that will be covered include the definition of the skills, their functions, objectives, and implementation steps to make firms more competitive. Past studies have also emphasized the importance of supervisors having the competence and skills to think rationally and spontaneously in making the right decisions when there is a problem in the workplace. An effective supervisor is a supervisor who has all the capabilities in managing problem-solving skills and decision-making to place the interests of the firm as a priority to ensure the firm can grow rapidly and move forward in the face of its competition in the market (Abdulwahed & Hasna, 2017; Thampy, Willert & Ramani, 2018).

3.4 Employees' Performance

Employees' performance refers to the quality and productivity of performance in handling their daily tasks given by the organization. To perform a task, employees need a good level of thinking, job knowledge, skills, capability, and desire to improve their work performance to be more professional in performing their daily responsibilities (Martono & Putri, 2018; Sendawula, Nakyejwe Kimuli, Bananuka & Najjemba Muganga, 2018;). Recognition of employees creates a positive, productive, and innovative organizational climate in addition to looking at the factors of caring for employee welfare, which is also recognized to affect the employee atmosphere in an organization which is based on various forms of welfare packages created by the organization in producing excellent levels of work performance. The recognition is given, actually encourages more action, and stimulates an employee's thinking to believe that they have the potential and ability to continue to contribute to the progress and success of their organization. Employees' performance through recognition of employees is a form of credit for the quality of work shown by the employees because quality employees are the main assets of an organization (Beltran-Martin & Bou-Llusar, 2018). The quality of work is how a job is executed, and the output from it is the success of meeting the required expectations. If we look at the definition of quality itself is defined as a degree of excellence that is usually high or quality. The quality of work is essential in the management of an organization because, without it, the organization's function, independence, and sustainability can be disrupted (Wang & Guan, 2018). Thus,

having quality employees at all levels of employment in each department is hope because quality employees translate to the organization's success in producing first-class human resources, which becomes a valuable asset for organizational excellence in the long run. Every employee feels that their organization pays attention to the importance of giving recognition to their ability to handle their daily tasks because it will directly create a new value for employees in the organization is the value to 'give more' and 'not count' while serving the organization (Lakshmi, Narahari& Koneru,2018). When employees can produce output as expected, employees' performance is in a state of availability in handling whatever task is directed. Excellent employee performance positively impacts the organization's performance to continue to grow in maximizing profits and wealth (Bernanthos,2018;Soelton,2018).

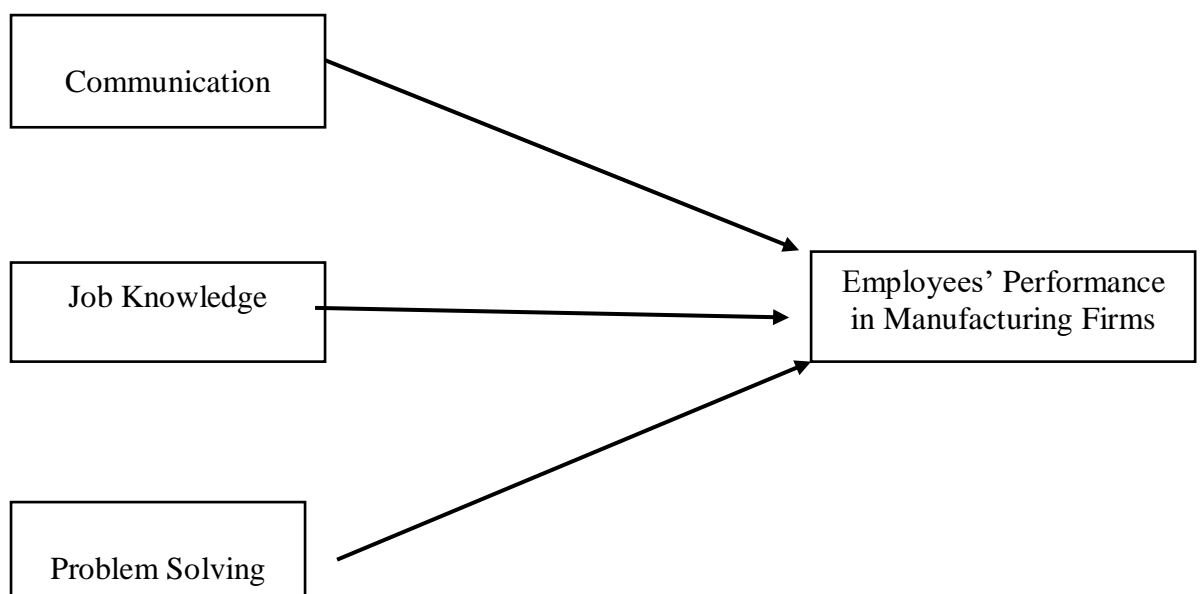
4. Conceptual Framework

4.1 Independent Variables

- Communication
- Job Knowledge
- Problem Solving and Decision Making

4.2 Dependent Variable

- Employees’ performance in Manufacturing Firms



4.3 Hypothesis Development

H1. There is significant relationship between communications on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

H2. There is significant relationship between ob knowledge on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

H3. There is significant relationship between problem solving and decision making on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

5. Result

5.1 Participants

The data was collected from 28 electrical manufacturing firms, 6822 employees, 361 questionnaires were distributed, and 222 questionnaires were analyzed among the employees (Krejcie and Morgan schedule, 1970). The respondents were selected using the stratified sampling technique.

5.2 Measurement Scale

Questionnaires are designed in Linkert Scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree).

5.3 Data Analysis

The data obtained were studied using SmartPLS version 3.7.8 to discuss the findings obtained. Statistical scholars highly recommend SmartPLS in producing an accurate analysis of each variable's cause and effect relationship. SmartPLS is also a sizeable multivariate analysis technique in social and psychological research. In addition, SmartPLS can analyze measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation.

Table 1 shows the Loading, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct studied; and the lowest value is **0.5342**, and the highest value is **0.5668**. These values are more significant than 0.5 (> 0.5), confirming that the study construct can explain the mean change of variance within the items (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Gefen & Straub, 2005; Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009).

Table 1 . Loading, CR & AVE Results

	<i>Loading</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Communication		0.8865	0.5668
CO1	0.7434		
CO2	0.8235		
CO3	0.8264		
CO4	0.7132		
CO5	0.7786		
CO6	0.6098		
Job Knowledge		0.8199	0.5342
JK1	0.6112		
JK2	0.6714		
JK5	0.7934		
JK6	0.8288		
Problem Solving and Decision Making		0.8861	0.5635
PS1	0.7802		
PS2	0.7486		
PS3	0.7484		
PS4	0.7575		
PS5	0.7155		
PS6	0.7548		
Employees’ Performance		0.9073	0.5514
EP1	0.7344		
EP2	0.7091		
EP3	0.7313		

EP4	0.7438
EP5	0.7255
EP6	0.7692
EP7	0.7568
EP8	0.7704

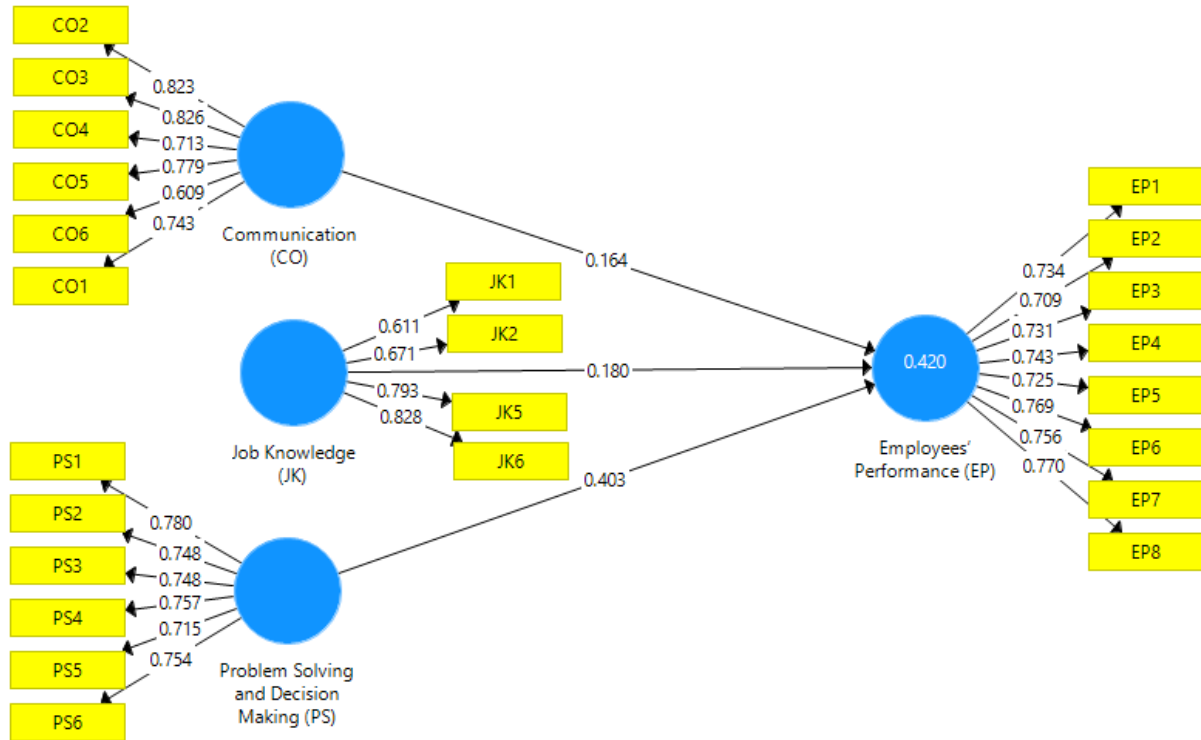


Figure 1: Structural Model Direct Effects

The discriminant validity test was measured through two methods, namely the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion test and cross-loading (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 2 below shows the output from the HTMT analysis. The results can be calculated easily using the formula as in (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015).

Table 2. Discriminate Validity

Constructs	CO	EP	JK	PS
CO	0.7534			
EP	0.4628	0.7422		
JK	0.5722	0.5564	0.7315	
PS	0.4864	0.6082	0.7028	0.7514

Note: Values in Bold face are the square root values of average variance extracted

5.4 Assessment of Structural Model

The findings for testing this direct effect model using SmartPLS software package version 3.7.8 through the structural equation model. This measurement aims to test the direct effect model and the effective model of the mediated variable. Therefore, empirical evidence has been used to construct a direct effect model, as shown in Figure 3

Table 3 ,Summary of Hypotheses

<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Summary of Hypotheses</i>				
	β	Std Error	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
CO->EP	0.1664	0.0691	2.3834	0.0000	Significant
JK->EP	0.1792	0.0853	2.1198	0.0000	Significant
PS->EP	0.409	0.0782	5.1344	0.0000	Significant

6. Discussion

6.1 Communication

The results obtained showed that communication variable significantly affects employees’ performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.0691$; $t = 2.3834$; $p = 0.0000$). H1 Accepted. The results also showed that communication contributed 16.4% ($R^2 = 0.164$) to employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

6.2 Job Knowledge

The results obtained showed that communication variable significantly affects employees’ performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.0853$; $t = 2.1198$; $p = 0.0000$). H2 Accepted. The results also showed that job knowledge contributed 18.0% ($R^2 = 0.180$) to employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

6.3 Problem Solving and Decision Making

The results obtained showed that problem solving and decision-making variable significantly affects employees’ performance in manufacturing firms ($\beta = 0.0782$; $t = 5.1344$; $p = 0.0000$). H3 Accepted. The results also showed that problem solving and decision making contributed 40.3% ($R^2 = 0.403$) to employees’ performance in manufacturing firms.

7. Conclusion

The supervisor’s overall role is to communicate firm needs, oversee employees’ performance, provide guidance, and support, identify development needs, and manage the reciprocal relationship between employees and the manufacturing firms so that each is successful. The supervisor plays the role of linking pin as he communicates the plans, policies, decisions, and strategies of management to subordinates and complaints, grievances, and suggestions of subordinates to management. Whenever subordinates are in doubt and need help the supervisor guides them to come out from their problematic situations. The supervisor makes sure that all the instructions are communicated to each employee. The top-level and middle level, plan out all the instructions but the instructions are issued only by supervisory level management. Control means a match between actual and planned output. Whenever the employees are under constant supervision or monitoring then step by step check is kept and if they are deviating from the plan then immediate instructions are issued by the supervisor. Through this constant monitoring, the supervision function ensures strict control over the activities of subordinates. When the employees are constantly monitored or observed then they always use the resources in the best possible manner which leads to minimum wastage. But if there is no supervision or check on workers it may result in wastage of resources.

The strict supervision and guidance of the supervisor encourage the employees and workers to be more disciplined in their activities. Under the guidance of the supervisor, the workers follow a fixed or strict timetable and execute the plans in the right direction. The supervisors are directly dealing with the subordinates. So, they are the best persons to give feedback to subordinates. They report the working of every worker which becomes the base for the performance appraisal for the employees. The supervisor gives feedback regarding complaints, grievances, and problems of subordinates to superiors. Supervisors issue instructions and orders to all the subordinates and make sure that these instructions and orders are clear to all the members. While playing the role of the linking pin or mediator the supervisor tries to remove the communication gap between the superiors and subordinates as he passes on the complaints and problems of subordinates to superiors and instructions of superiors to subordinates. The relationship with the supervisor is a very good incentive to improve the motivation level of the employees. While guiding the employees the supervisors encourage the subordinates to perform to their best capacity. The supervisor plays a key role in maintaining group unity among employees working under him he maintains harmony among workers by solving their disputes.

The result found that there is a significant relationship between communications on employees’ performance. Communication is important to express oneself. It also satisfies one's needs. One should have effective communication for advancement in the career. In your personal life, effective communication skills can smooth the supervisor way and their relationships with others by helping them to understand others, and to be understood. Being able to communicate effectively is one of the most important life skills to learn. Communication itself is defined as transferring information to produce greater understanding. It can be done vocally (through verbal exchanges), through written media (books, websites, and magazines), visually (using graphs, charts, and maps), or non-verbally (body language, gestures, pitch of voice, and tone). All of these means of communication skills are essential soft skills that are vital for a successful Career.

The result showed that there is a significant relationship between job knowledge on employees’ performance. Workplace knowledge is an invisible lifeline in manufacturing firms. It’s the familiarity, experiences, techniques, awareness, and ability to problem-solve that all effective employees possess. This understanding is critical because it also offers a sustainable competitive advantage that justifies the cost of sharing it between employees. Keeping employees educated on workplace processes, information and needs is a crucial business priority. Without it, supervisors have no competitive advantage since supervisors lack the systematic value (innovative people, processes, products, and strategy) to differentiate themselves as a business. This is why it’s important to create tools and processes to train employees and capture their experiences in easily accessible places.

The result found that there is a sign between problem-solving and decision-making on employees’ performance in manufacturing firms. Problem-solving and decision-making skills are both important because they can help the supervisor to navigate a variety of situations that might come up at work. They complement one another and can be used to resolve many of the same issues. Both problem-solving and decision-making involve critical thinking. Problem-solving and decision-making apply to all careers and industries. Because both can help firms by resolving complex situations and problems, firms typically value these skills in job candidates. They show that supervisors can think through various scenarios and make good decisions that are good for the manufacturing firms.

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