**COWORKER RELATIONSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF TRUST IN MANAGEMENT**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the effect of coworker relationships on organizational engagement among Indonesian employees. Trust in management is predicted to moderate the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement. A total of 135 banking employees in Indonesia participated in this study. The analysis results show that trust in management plays an essential role in coworker relationship interactions and organizational engagement. This study further suggests theoretical and practical implications for organizations.

Keyword: coworker relationship, organizational engagement, trust in management

**Introduction**

Coworker relationships are still an important and complex topic today. However, this study is distracted by the development of technological studies, socio-technical relationships, and management behavior that have developed rapidly this century (Hodson, 2008). Three things caused an increase in the study. Global competition requires strategies to increase productivity and reduce costs. The improvement of workforce education that increase supervisory duties for front-line workers. Microchip technology improvement increase production procedures flexibility (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003).

Organizational studies have found the importance of coworker relationships with employee welfare during work (Simon et al., 2010) and can increase access to opportunities and information (Kleinbaum, 2012; Levin et al., 2011). Satisfaction with colleagues affects job satisfaction (Simon et al., 2010). Informal communication satisfaction among colleagues also affects job satisfaction (Fay & Kline, 2011). Even though there are gender differences in Tennesee's government organizations, good work relationships affect female employees' work commitment (Sloan, 2017). Huang and Liu (2016) found that even organizations that use social networks in work relationships, such as Facebook and Twitter, affect employee satisfaction and performance. Apart from the benefits of a good coworker relationship, conflict in a working relationship will have a negative impact on the organization. Coworker conflicts will impact absenteeism or delays in coming to work and work effectiveness, performance, and counterproductive behavior (Liu et al., 2018).

Laaser and Bolton (2017) found that coworker relationships are critical in banking organizations. To improve banking performance, the organization implements electronic performance management monitoring. This technology's application causes coworker relationships to be more objective, interrupting employee engagement, and triggering conflict. It shows that technological changes impact the work environment and the emergence of efforts to maintain the capacity to care for other colleagues due to the process's tendency to be individualized (Laaser & Bolton, 2017). A decline in organizational engagement had occurred in the United States when there was economic recovery, as many as 40% of global employees reported that they were not attached (Hewitt, 2013). Based on these findings, it is crucial to study the influence of coworker relationships on banking sector. The study of this topic will contribute to the novelty of the theoretical contributions and policies for banking practitioners.

Fay and Kline (2011) and Sloan (2017) found that coworker relationships affect organizational commitment. In contrast to previous studies, this study examines the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement. Organizational engagement is different from organizational commitment. Organizational commitment looks more at a person's attitude and connection to the organization. In contrast, organizational engagement is not an attitude, but the extent to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in their performance role (Saks, 2006).

Studies on the influence of colleagues on organizational engagement with the moderation of trust are still limited. Coworker relationship studies have so far been more studied in terms of work outcome(Huang & Liu, 2017; Simon et al., 2010), communication (Fay & Kline, 2011), organizational commitment (Sloan, 2017), work-family conflict (Zhou et al., 2019) and ethics (Laaser & Bolton, 2017). On the other hand, studies related to engagement have been conducted at the individual level.

Meanwhile, practitioners state that organizational engagement can be one way that it affects organizational performance (Harter et al., 2002). This gap is reasonable because the concept of organizational engagement is relatively new and has infrequently been studied in the last ten years. The lack of research on organizational engagement shows an unlearned organizational capability that helps companies achieve and maintain higher performance (Barrick et al., 2015). Similar to trust in management, previous research on trust in management was conducted in the USA (Mayer & Gavin, 2005), China (Chen et al., 2004; X. H. & Z. Jiang, 2016), and Bangladesh (Rubel et al., 2018), applications in Indonesia will contribute to this empirical gap.

This study chooses banking in Indonesia as the research context. Banking is the backbone of the Indonesian economy, which plays an important intermediary role. Banking health is very critical to the health of the economy (Sufian, 2010). The Indonesian banking sector is open to foreign investment. Banking regulations and policies are now causing increased competition challenges in the Indonesian banking sector (Mulyaningsih et al., 2015). During intense banking competition, workers play an essential role in this service sector. It is predicted that coworker relationships can affect organizational engagement. It is assumed that trust in management in banking organizations will strengthen this influence. Colleagues and supervisors' support can build mutual trust within the organization (Worley et al., 2017). Besides, studies of trust in management have been mostly conducted as a mediating variable ( e.g., Cai et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2004; Jiang, 2016; Renzl, 2008; Rubel et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2016), the role of trust in management as a moderating variable will contribute to this study.

The theory that is usually used as the basis for coworker relationships is social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Coworker relationships are individual interactions with coworkers, supervisors, and their organizations (Biggs et al., 2016). Based on the social exchange perspective, employees exchange with each other regarding respect, mutual trust, and loyalty critical components of relationship quality (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). However, will this reciprocal relationship impact the organization so that employees want to remain in the organization? This study will examine the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement. Besides, what factors can strengthen coworker relationships with organizational engagement? Can trust in management strengthen this relationship? By developing and testing theories on relationships in coworker relationships, this study can contribute to findings that enrich the study of peer relationships, organizational engagement, and trust in management. Testing coworker relationships will provide information about various personal and organizational factors that affect both coworker relationships and relationships with organizations.

**The Effect of Coworker Relationship on Organizational Engagement**

Coworker relationships are individual interactions with coworkers, supervisors, and their organizations (Biggs et al., 2016), or emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Saks, 2006). Coworker relationships characterized by a higher level of interaction, trust, self-disclosure, peer-to-peer function as a mentor, information exchange, ease of innovation, and social support (McManus & Russell, 2007; Sias, 2009). There are three dimensions of coworker relationships, namely cohesiveness, conflict, and peer supervision. Cohesiveness and coworker solidarity provide instruments and attitudes of social support. Although the study of management styles replaced group cohesiveness, this study has improved over from a different perspective, namely the team (Zárraga & Bonache, 2005). Second, coworker relationships can become problematic and become a source of conflict, tension, and bullying in the workplace (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). Last, peer supervision occurs due to coworkers' monitoring, both formal and non-formal (Barker, 1999; Sewell, 1998). This attention was increased with the team's implementation in the field of production (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994).

The interaction of coworkers is more frequent and more likely because they generally have the same status as fellow employees of focus. All types of exchanges are less restricted. Colleagues then significantly influence perceptions, attitudes, withdrawal, and work effectiveness (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Mutual liking between colleagues will affect organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Conversely, when the dislike between colleagues increases, it will strengthen the negative relationship between complaint expressions and organizational commitment. It means that dislike between colleagues causes the expression of complaints to get bigger to affect individual, organizational commitment (Fay and Kline, 2017).

Coworker relationships at work can also form friendships. Physical closeness leads to friendships development, especially in the early stages of relationship development (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Conversely, when workers no longer work in the workplace, they will be less identified with the organization because they do not have duties and social support (Stohl, 1995). However, with the development of technology such as social media today, physical closeness is less critical, but it becomes the initial emphasis on friendship (Fehr, 1996). Furthermore, the friendship becomes closer when coworkers have problems, for example, with their supervisors. Their friendship makes them support and helps each other. Communication is becoming more frequent, more intimate, and personal (Sias & Cahill, 1998).

Positive support from coworkers, groups, and unit superiors is positively related to job satisfaction and negatively associated with worker emotional exhaustion syndrome (job burnout). Healthy work relationships are essential for the individual's psychological well-being, which contributes to job satisfaction and other positive outcomes. Positive work relationships are beneficial for employees as well as organizational success. Furthermore, positive relationships between colleagues contribute to public perceptions of the organization. Positive work relationships are necessary for organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, psychological health, and increased production (Biggs et al., 2016). This positive relationship will also have an impact on organizational engagement.

Organizational engagement is the desire to become a member of a particular organization that reflects behavior based on its values ​​(Saks, 2006). Engagement can be an employee's potential manifestation of the organization. Workers in the organization will share their perspectives as members of their organization invest entirely in work. This feeling of being engaged will appear in various social attitudes and processes in organizations (Hofmann & Morgeson, 1999). The role that workers play in the organization will shape and represent the work mentality and organizational attachments. The higher an employee's position in the organizational hierarchy, the better his understanding will be and the more tied he will be to the job and the organization (Borkowska & Czerw, 2017). Besides, shared vision and mood and views on organizational support will affect organizational engagement (Mahon et al., 2014).

Coworker relationships with organizational can be seen from the perspective of social exchange. According to this theory, obligations resulting from a series of interactions between parties who depend on each other. The relationship includes trust, loyalty, a mutual commitment based on specific exchange rules. The exchange relationship is, for example, from the payment rules. When the organization pays for employees' work, they are obliged to respond to the payment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The organization, in this case, is a place for coworkers to meet and interact. They are in the same workplace, so they experience physical closeness and complete work together. Frequent communication and mutual help will foster friendships. Coworkers who have good relationships with their colleagues will foster a sense of friendship. This feeling arises from the relationships that exist at work.

This coworker relationship will then affect organizational engagement. Organizational engagement shows worker involvement as part of utilizing themselves as organizational members in their work roles (Kahn, 1990). Organizations that have good coworker relationships will foster engagement from their workers. Psychological conditions will create workers bound to the organization (May et al., 2004). The higher the level of engagement, the lower the desire to leave the organization (Juhdi et al., 2013; Vance, 2016). Employees who are very attached to the organization have invested a lot of energy and effort into work and the organization (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). The findings of Laaser and Bolton (2017) show that coworker relationships are significant in banking organizations. Thus the first hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H1: Coworker relationship has a positive effect on organizational engagement

**The Effect of Trust in Management Moderation**

Trust in management is a psychological state consisting of the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of others' intentions or behavior (Deutsch, 1958; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust in management is defined as a worker's intention to accept vulnerability from management when faced with a situation that requires risk (Gao et al., 2011). The key concept is that the trustor takes risks together with the trustee, letting the trustee control issues important to the trustor. Trust in management differs from the trust to other parties, such as individual supervisors and managers, but is more about organizational rules, procedures, policies, programs, processes, and practices (Cho & Park, 2011). Therefore, building trust in management is essential for the effectiveness of organizational operations (Rubel et al., 2018).

Trust has three factors, ability, virtue, and integrity. Someone who feels his manager has the honesty to show concern and consideration will respond with the desired behavior (Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Thus trust is the intention of employees to accept vulnerability in the organization based on their perception that management is competent, cares for them, and adheres to acceptable practices (Rubel et al., 2018).

The relationship between trust in management and coworker relationship and organizational commitment can also be seen from the perspective of social exchange. Workers who feel that managers show honesty and consideration will respond with expected behavior (Mayer and Gavin, 2005). Management as a representative of the organization who shows concern for workers will build their trust and positive behavior (Chou et al., 2011; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Searle et al., 2011). Trust in leadership will produce proximal and distal outcomes. Proximal outcomes were behavior (upward communication, learning, extra-role behavior) and affected (willingness to follow). Distal outcomes were quality of performance, the quantity of performance, turnover, adaptation, and trust (Burke et al., 2007).

Kouzes and Posner (1995) state that today's organizational challenges are how to help employees believe and be loyal to the organization's vision, see their work as necessary, and believe that the organization supports them (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Finding show that trust in organizations is important because it mediates between organizational citizenship and works engagement (Lin, 2010). Trust in management affects employees' willingness to accept and support the change process (Cai et al., 2018), employee service behavior (Rubel et al., 2018), affects organizational commitment (Thomsen et al., 2016), and encourages knowledge sharing (Renzl, 2008). Employees who trust in management are more courageous to speak up when the benefits they expect are more significant than the risks (Hun & Jian, 2016). Workers who show trust in their supervisors are a strong indicator of organizational engagement (Carnevale, 1995; Carnevale & Wechsler, 1992; Mayer et al., 1995). Thus the second hypothesis as follows, the research model can be seen in Figure 1.

H2: trust in management moderates and strengthens the positive influence of coworker relations on organizational engagement

Trust in Management

Coworker Relationship

Organizational Engagement

Figure 1. Research model

**Coworker relationship**

Coworker relationship as dependent variable (X) is individual interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and their organizations (Biggs et al., 2016). The coworker relationship questionnaire refers to Biggs et al. (2016) with a 9 item scale. Coworker relationships assess three dimensions: individual worker relations, supervisor worker relations, and organizational worker relations. Sample of items such as some coworkers are hard to work with (worker-relation individual dimension); I am valued by my supervisor (worker-relation supervisor dimension); a culture of harmonious working relationships is encouraged in this organization (worker-relation organization dimension). The test results show that the coworker relationship variable is reliable, with an alpha score of .790 (Table 1).

**Organizational Engagement**

Organizational Engagement as an independent variable (Y) is the desire to become a member of a particular organization that reflects behavior based on its values ​​(Saks, 2006). The organizational engagement questionnaire refers to Saks (2016) with a 6 item scale. Sample items such as being a member of this organization are very captivating; being a member of this organization make me come "alive." The test results showed that the organizational engagement variable was reliable, with an alpha score of .880 (Table 1).

**Trust in management**

Trust in management is a mediating variable, which intends to accept vulnerability from management when faced with situations that require risk (Gao et al., 2011). The trust in management questionnaire refers to Brockner et al. (1997) with a 3 item scale. Sample items such as I can usually trust my supervisor to do what is good for me; management can be trusted to make decisions that are also good for me, I trust the management to treat me fairly. The test results show that the trust in management variable is reliable with an alpha score of .742 (Table 1).

**Result**

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of research constructs such as mean scores, standard deviation, the correlation between variable, and each variable’s alpha score. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Correlation values indicate that all constructs are positively related to each other. The strongest correlation is in the construct of coworker relationships and trust. Thus the descriptive data has shown a link between the two variable as predicted. The alpha score on the diagonal shows that all constructs are reliable.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, inter-item correlation, the alpha score of research variables

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Organizational Engagement | Trust | Coworker Relationship |
| Organizational Engagement | 3.9481 | .55069 | .880 |  |  |
| Trust in management | 3.8074 | .65216 | .304\*\* | .742 |  |
| Coworker relationship | 4.0000 | .38633 | .316\*\* | .326\*\* | .790 |

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis testing uses moderated regression analysis. The hypothesis testing results show that hypothesis 1 is supported, that coworker relationships affect organizational engagement (b = .102, p = .32). The analysis results also found that trust in management affects organizational engagement (b = .169, p = .001). Hypothesis 2 analysis results have also supported that trust in management positively moderates the effect of coworker relationships on organizational engagement (b = .075, p = .006).

Table 2. Moderated Regression Analysis

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | B | SE | T | *P* |
| (Constant) | 3.908 | .045 | 86.173 | .000 |
| Coworker Relationship | .102 | .047 | 2.164 | .032 |
| Trust | .169 | .048 | 3.496 | .001 |
| Coworker Relationship \* Trust | .075 | .027 | 2.806 | .006 |

 a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Engagement

Figure 2 shows the interaction between trust in management and coworker relationships. This figure illustrates that trust in management moderates the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement, so that coworker relationships affect organizational engagement in low, average, and high trust in management. This finding strengthens support for hypothesis 2. A strong effect is seen in high trust in management compared to average and low. In low trust in management, the coworker relationship with organizational engagement is also low. However, there is a stronger relationship at the level of trust in management average than low trust in management. A very strong relationship with coworker relations with organizational engagement occurs in strong trust in management as well. The stronger the trust in management, the stronger the coworker relationship will have on organizational engagement.



Figure 2. The plot of co-worker relationships with trust in management on organizational engagement (low -1SD, average, high + 1SD)

**Discussion**

This study examines the effect of coworker relationships on organizational engagement. This influence is assessed by moderating trust in management. The results show that coworker relationships affect organizational engagement and confirm hypothesis 1. These findings are in line with previous studies. Laaser and Bolton (2017) state that coworker relationships are significant in banking organizations. The application of technology to performance management causes coworker relationships to become more objective, thus cutting ties and causing conflict.

Meanwhile, working in banking requires ethics and care. Therefore, the relationship between coworkers is one crucial factor that cannot be ignored. Other findings indicate that coworker interaction will lead to employees' desire to behave responsibly (Love & Dustin, 2014). Good coworker relationships can also increase the impact of training (Raabe & Behr, 2003) and increase friendships. Coworker relationships that exist from working together and proximity will increase friendships, and friendships become close friends (Sias and Cahill, 1998). These friendship relationships are formed because of problems that are resolved together, thereby increasing the intensity of communication and the relationship's closeness.

More broadly, coworker relationships affect perceptions, attitudes, OCB, and performance (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Conversely, the exchange (transactions) in coworker relationships has a negative impact on organizational commitment (Sherony & Green, 2002). Therefore, personal vision and positive mood will affect organizational engagement (Mahon et al., 2014). Thus these previous studies support the findings of this study that coworker relationships affect organizational engagement.

Organizational engagement is the desire to remain a member of the organization, namely the desire to remain comfortable with organizational values ​​and strive for the organization (Becker et al., 1995). Organizational engagement provides important outcomes for employees. Psychological conditions can create a bond with employees with a good match between employees, performance and freedom of decision making. Organizational engagement also reduces employees' desire to leave the organization (Juhdi et al., 2013). In addition, organizational support can affect organizational engagement (Saks, 2006).

Coworker relationships in banking organizations will increase intense communication among workers. The tasks carried out to achieve task performance and contextual performance in banking (Widyastuti et al., 2020) (Widyastuti et al., 2020) require a high interaction intensity. The intensity of communication and proximity in office will increase the relationship to be coworkers. This relationship will improve organizational engagement on banking workers. However, coworker relationships do not always go well without problems. Coworker's emotional state can negatively affect interpersonal relationships ( e.g., Bergmann & Volkema, 1994; Deutch, 1969). The results of emotional research show that anger and frustration due to interpersonal conflict can produce verbal aggression and behavior towards parties that provoke conflict ( e.g., Ambrose et al., 2002; Fox & Spector, 1999). Future studies can explore the effect of coworker conflict on organizational engagement.

Furthermore, this study's second hypothesis is confirmed; the effect of coworker relationship on organizational engagement is moderated by trust in management. These findings indicate that trust in management moderates the effect of coworker relationships on organizational engagement. This moderating effect varies at three levels: low, average, and strong. On the low influence of moderation in trust in management, it appears that interactions occur in low coworker relationships and organizational engagement. It means that if trust in management is low, coworker relationships will also have less effect on organizational engagement. When trust in management increases at an average level, the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement is stronger. The best thing happens at a high level of trust in management; at this level, coworker relationships' influence on organizational engagement becomes very strong.

The results of this study are in line with research by (L. Jiang & Probst, 2019). The study found that trust in management can be a buffer for the influence of job insecurity on job-related outcomes. In high trust in management, job insecurity is not related to job satisfaction. Conversely, low trust in management strengthens the negative effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction. Thus trust in management becomes an essential factor that strengthens the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement.

**Implication and limitation**

This research contributes to the social exchange theory. The study results show that exchange relationships between employees, such as respect, mutual trust, and loyalty, will foster good interactions among employees. Organizations that facilitate creating this situation, namely respect, mutual trust, and loyalty, will foster worker engagement to the organization. Thus this study strengthens the social exchange theory in terms of the influence of coworkers on organizational engagement. Contribution to social exchange theory is also in the moderating effect of trust in management. Workers who feel that management can be trusted will be willing to contribute to the organization and be tied to the organization.

Another theoretical contribution is that this study adds to the findings on coworker relationships' effect on organizational engagement. Besides, this study also adds to the findings on the moderating role of trust in management. How trust in management can strengthen and weaken coworker relationships and organizational engagement.

Apart from these findings, this study also has limitations, namely that this study conduct in a cross-sectional manner. It cannot describe how the process of linking coworker relationships with organizational engagement occurs. These studies conducted in the banking sector, studies on other industrial sectors with different management will enrich the findings of the influence of coworker relationships and trust in management on organizational engagement.

**Practical implication and conclusion**

This study suggests organizations to pay attention and facilitate coworker relationship. Attention to coworker relationships is just as important as attention to the work itself. The output of an organization other than performance is engagement. Workers who engage with the organization will be interested and absorbed in their performance roles. Besides, the management must also maintain trust workers towards them. Trust in management plays an important role. High trust in management will increase the influence of coworker relationships on organizational engagement.

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