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# *The Influence of Organizational Climate Dimensions on Ergonomics Citizenship Behaviour: A Conceptual Framework*

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## ABSTRACT

*Musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) is one of the occupational diseases which is caused by exposure of workers to ergonomic risk factors. Statistics from the Malaysian Department of Occupational Safety and Health showed a staggering 160% increase in work-related MSD from 2005 to 2009. In an effort to address this issue, many studies had been conducted to improve workplace ergonomic condition and behaviour. While most MSD-studies have been focusing on the work method and body posture, this article explores an alternative intra-group dynamic construct of employee proactive behaviour towards ergonomics or Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB) which is believed could positively influence workplace ergonomics issues. The concept of ECB is adopted from Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) which had been linked with various positive outcomes. Specific organizational climate factors (employee autonomy, participative decision making, and supervisory support) are also discussed as the predictor variables of the theoretical framework. The Social Exchange Theory is applied to strengthen the empirical justifications and explain the theoretical framework that draws attention to the mutually contingent and rewarding transactional process between both the workers and the organization.*

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## 1. Introduction

Musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) is a disease which may give severe impact to muscles, joints and tendons. This disease can cause pain, numbness, tingling, stiff joints, limited movement, muscle loss, and sometimes paralysis. This disease can progress over the time from mild to severe. MSD had been listed as Occupational Disease by EU communities since 1990 and 12 years later this disease had been listed in the International Labour Organization (ILO) list of Occupational Disease (Kim & Kang, 2013). MSD is a serious issue in the world of occupation as it may cause serious health effect and also loss to the workers around the world. According to the statistics from Health and Safety Executive of United Kingdom, from 2014 to 2015, MSD has contributed 44% of total reported cases of Occupational Diseases in Great Britain, 169,000 were reported as new MSD cases and 9.5 million lost days were estimated due to this disease. While the Bureau of Labor Statistic reported that there were 356,910 MSD cases were recorded in US which represent 31% of total occupational illness cases for the year 2015. In Malaysia, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) reported that

there were 5960 reported cases of Occupational Diseases and Poisoning in 2015, with manufacturing sectors contributed 86.4% to this statistic. While MSD cases shows a significant increase from 161 cases in 2009 to 675 cases in 2014.

According to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2015) the occurrence of MSD at the workplace is caused by two (2) main factors namely as physical factors and psychosocial factors. The physical factors are much related to the workplace conditions which are not adequately fit for worker physical capability. This may lead to the exposure of ergonomic risk factors such as awkward posture, repetitive move, static posture in long hour, sudden or quick motion, compression or contact stress, vibration and cold temperature toward the employees (OSHA, 2000). Previous researches confirmed on relationship between exposure to ergonomic risk factors and development of MSD symptoms (Ozturk & Esin, 2011). While workplace psychosocial factors such as safety climate, organizational culture and human factors may create the condition of MSD to occur (HSE, 2015). Most of ergonomics research works are emphasized on workplace ergonomic interventions such as alterations to workplace lay out, new invention of ergonomics working tools and recommendation of correct body posture at workplace. While some researchers developed ergonomic related model such as intervention model and ergonomic management model.

Eventhough a lot of research works had been done to address this issue, the reported MSD cases in Malaysia still escalate over the year. Hence the research works on ergonomics shall not be limited to only correct body posture or workplace changes. Alternative measures which involve employee proactive behaviour towards workplace improvement are much needed. In this case, the employee proactive behaviour towards ergonomics or Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB) is assumed as one of appropriate alternative measures in prevention of new MSD symptoms. Like Safety Citizenship Behaviour (SCB), the concept of ECB was adapted from Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) which can be defined as employee proactive behaviour which goes beyond their normal functions and without expecting any reward from management. OCB may promote organizational effectiveness and positive outcome. As such, it motivates various researchers in determining the factors that would predict OCB. Instead of general OCB, previous researchers had also explored on specific domains of OCB such as Safety Citizenship Behaviour (Xuesheng & Xintao, 2011), Organizational Citizenship Behavior toward the Environment (Lamm et al., 2013), Service-oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Chou & Rodriguez, 2013), Tourist Citizenship Behaviours (Liu & Tsaur, 2014) and e-Customer Citizenship Behaviors (Anaza & Zhao, 2013). However there is a paucity in the literature with regards to predicting variables of Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB) especially in the context of Malaysian industrial working culture. Therefore the main objective of this conceptual paper is to discuss and propose on specific organizational climate namely autonomy, participative decision making, and supervisory support as the predictor variables of Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB)**

Ergonomics is considered as a part of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) construct. Previous researchers concluded that ergonomics and OSH are considered as a mother-daughter relationship and should not be separated from each other (Herman & Peteghem, 2006). In line with this conclusion, Khandan et al., (2013) adapted safety behaviour definition to define ergonomics

behaviour. Therefore it explains that the definition and construct of ECB could be adapted from Safety Citizenship Behaviour (SCB). However due to the fact that ergonomics and OSH are much related, it looks like SCB itself could adequately resolve most of workplace ill-health issues including ergonomics. However this assumption would be inappropriate for Malaysia because of Malaysian working culture, ergonomics awareness and also OSH legislation are different from other countries. According to Sirat et al., (2011), ergonomics are not being addressed adequately in Malaysian OSH legislations namely Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 (OSHA94) and Factory and Machinery Act 1967 (FMA67).

Furthermore the assumption of Malaysian employees toward OSH might be limited to prevention of injury which only related to occupational safety, while injuries related to occupational health such as MSD might become the least priority. This argument explains on the contrast performance between occupational accident rates and reported MSD cases in Malaysia. The statistic from Department of Occupational Safety and Health shows that workplace accident rate in Malaysia are decreasing while reported MSD cases show escalation from year to year. Therefore the separation of proactive ergonomics behaviour or ECB from SCB is relevant in Malaysia.

Like SCB, the definition of ECB was adapted from Xuesheng and Xintao (2011) definition of SCB. Therefore ECB is defined as employee proactive behaviour towards ergonomics such as reporting of unsafe act/condition, initiating changes, helping co-workers and keeping informed on matters pertaining to ergonomics. Xuesheng and Xintao (2011) discussed that SCB is a stem from Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). Therefore the concept of ECB is going to adapt the SCB construct as well as OCB construct. While Lee et al., (2007) discussed that different researchers proposed different set of OCB dimensions. Randhawa and Kaur (2015) suggested that OCB is constructed with five (5) dimensions namely altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue. These dimensions were later on being categorised into OCB towards individual (OCBI) and OCB towards organization (OCBO). The dimensions of altruism and courtesy were categorised in OCBI while conscientiousness, sportsmanship and civic virtue were categorised in OCBO. This construct is going to be adapted in this conceptual paper.

## ***2.2 Organizational Climate***

Generally organizational climate is an employee perception towards their organization, whereas this perception is reflected by actual behaviour in organization. Shahin (2014) concluded that organizational climate represents life style of people in the organization such as cooperation, friendship, mutual trust and protecting each other. While Qureshi et al., (2014) mentioned that Organizational Climate is a driving force of behaviour in the organization which provides foundations to various physical and psychological phenomena to the employees. Despite of general organizational climate, previous researchers had also shown their interest towards specific areas of climate such as safety climate, service climate and psychological climate which being further explained by Patterson et al., (2005).

As to date the literature that explains relationship between Organizational Climate and ECB are not much found. However some of the empirical findings might be useful in developing a conceptual framework with regards to ECB. For instance previous researchers demonstrated that Organizational Climate is positively associated with worker's health (Viitala et al., 2015), safety climate (Neal et al., 2000) and OCB (Randhawa & Kaur, 2015). While Safety Climate is associated with Safety Citizenship

Behaviour (Xuesheng & Xintao, 2011) and Ergonomic behaviour (Khandan et al., 2013). All of these findings are valuable in predicting ECB.

For the purpose of climate measurements, the set of dimensions were established (Patterson et al., 2005). There are several sets of Organizational Climate dimensions which being introduced by previous researchers. These differences give more variations to the researchers in conducting their research work. For instance Randhawa and Kaur (2015) use the Organizational Climate dimensions which were being introduced by Patterson et al., (2005), Qureshi et al., (2014) and Shahin et al., (2014) adopted different set of Organizational Climate dimensions. Patterson et al., (2005) proposed on categorization of the dimensions into four quadrants namely Human Relations (such as Involvement, Autonomy, Supervisory Support, Integration, Welfare, Training, and Effort), Internal Process (such as Formalization and Tradition), Open Systems (such as Reflexivity, Innovation & Flexibility, and Outward Focus) and Rational Goals (such as Clarity of Organizational Goals, Pressure to Produce, Quality, Performance Feedback and Efficiency). This conceptual paper is focusing on three (3) specific Organizational Climate dimensions which are categorised in Human Relations quadrants. The relationship between these dimensions (Autonomy, Involvement (known as participative decision making and Supervisory Support) with ECB is going to be investigated.

### ***2.2.1 Autonomy and ECB***

Autonomy was discussed as the extent which employee has been authorised to choose their own way to complete the task (Volmer et al., 2012). While Patterson et al. (2005) have defined autonomy as jobs being designed in methods which give employees a wide scope to enact work. In other words employees are permitted to make decision in completion of their task. Therefore employee with high autonomy would be more proactive in completing the work as they do not much rely on the instruction. Furthermore autonomy would enhance employee confidence level. Previous researcher demonstrated that Autonomy is significantly associated with OCB (Randhawa & Kaur, 2015; Yadav & Ragnekar, 2015; Krishnan et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2005). As mentioned earlier that the concept of ECB is adapted from OCB, therefore, it is assumed that workers with high autonomy would demonstrate proactive behaviour towards ergonomic.

### ***2.2.2 Participative Decision Making (PDM) and ECB***

In previous literature, the term participation is referred as the participation of employee in the process of decision making (Patterson et al., 2005). The importance of PDM is undeniable as elements of PDM is written in Malaysian OSH legislation and OSHMS guideline. The OSHA94 promotes PDM through establishment of OSH committee at the workplace. While in OSHMS guideline there are specific requirements with regard to “employee participation”, whereas organizations shall encourage their employee to participate in the improvement of workplace OSH management.

Employees would feel that their existence in the organization is appreciated by the management if they are involved in PDM. Then employees will become more committed to work and thus they will reciprocate OCB as an exchange (Yadav & Ragnekar, 2015). Previous researchers had demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between PDM and OCB (Yadav & Ragnekar, 2014; Randhawa & Kaur, 2015). Therefore it is expected that the PDM would positively related to ECB as the construct of ECB was adapted from SCB

and OCB.

### ***2.2.3 Supervisory Support and ECB***

Middle management such as personnel at supervisory level is one of key positions in the organization because they hold most of the responsibilities to execute company's strategies, objectives and directions those are relied to them (Yadav & Ragnekar, 2014). While Patterson et al., 2005 explained that supervisory support is an employee perception towards supportive and understanding action of their supervisor which based on their real experience.

Supervisor has strong influence on employee behaviour including employee proactive behaviour or OCB. Previous researchers demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between supervisory support and OCB (Randhawa & Kaur, 2015; Yadav & Ragnekar, 2015). Employees feel appreciated when their supervisor shows supportive action towards their initiatives to improve workplace conditions, as an exchange the employees feel obligation to demonstrate OCB. As ECB was adapted from SCB and SCB from OCB, therefore it is assumed that there is a positive relationship between supervisory support and ECB.

## **3. Conceptual Framework**

### ***3.1 Underpinning Theory***

The Social Exchange Theory is one of preferred theoretical perspectives in the area of management, sociology and social psychology. The theory explained about exchange that occurs between two parties for mutual benefits. The party who receives such benefit would response positively in return to the benefit which being received. According to Jain et al., (2013, p. 319), "The theory is also associated with close emotional attachment, as well as informal, personal and more transparent obligations". Therefore, Social Exchange Theory drives an individual to perform OCB even without a formal reward from another party (Yadav & Rangnekar, 2015). The theory is being widely used by researchers in various research area. For instance, Yadav & Rangnekar (2014), Jain et al., (2013) and Konovsky and Pugh (1994) used this theory in argument of OCB's predicting variables. While Huang et al., (2016) explained about Safety Climate influence which goes beyond safety outcome. Furthermore Li et al. (2016) discussed on privacy disclosure in social network system. Other research areas such as Knowledge sharing in online health communities conducted by Yan et al., (2016), employee eco-initiatives (Raineri et al., 2016) and influence of social exchange towards safety management (Dejoy, 2010) were also discussed in the context of social exchange.

While in this conceptual paper, the Social Exchange Theory is applied to explain the relationship between proposed variables. Employee who received special privileges from their organization, may develop a perception that organization values their contribution. In return, the employee feels obliged to demonstrate extra role behaviour as an exchange to the privileges received by employee. In this conceptual paper, the dimensions of Organizational Climate namely supervisory support, autonomy and participation in decision making are discussed as special treatments received by employee whereas employee are being authorised to perform work without much interference from management especially when doing some changes to the workprocess due to ergonomics issues (autonomy), employee receives strong support from their supervisor especially when any workplace

ergonomics issues are being raised up and how to overcome it (supervisory support) and employee being involved during developing any ergonomics related procedure or policy (participative in decision making). In return, employee may develop a feeling that the kindness showed by their organization needs to be compensated back with extra role behaviour towards ergonomics or ECB. Therefore the employee is expected to give extra effort in preventing ergonomics risk at the workplace such as showing how to perform work ergonomically to new workers or colleagues, always give short talk or short advice in relation with workplace ergonomics such as how to lift material manually, raise up ergonomics issues at the workplace and give recommendations for improvement of workplace ergonomics such as alteration to work flow. Based on this argument, the positive relationship between autonomy, supervisory support, participative decision making and ECB would be expected.

### 3.2 Framework

After reviewed of various literatures, a conceptual framework is developed as illustrated in Figure 1. The framework proposed for an investigation on relationship between Autonomy, Supervisory support, Participative decision making and Ergonomic Citizenship Behaviour (ECB).

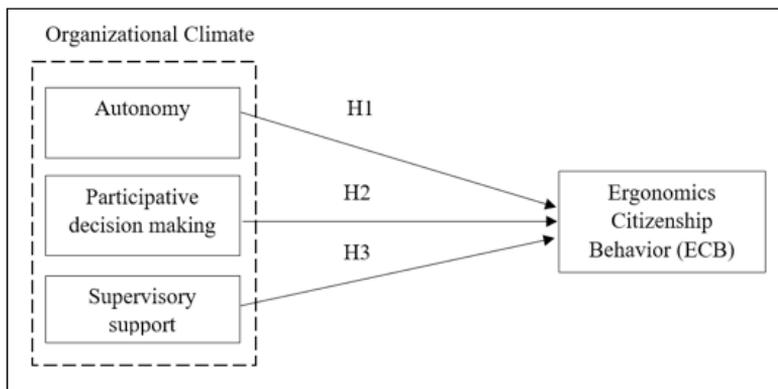


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

### 3.3 Hypothesis Development

Based on the framework and discussion in literature review, three (3) hypotheses are proposed for further investigation;

- H1: Autonomy is positively related with ECB
- H2: Participative decision making is positively related with ECB
- H3: Supervisory support is positively related with ECB

## 4. Conclusion

Workplace ergonomic improvements are essential for prevention of new MSD cases at the workplace. The research on ergonomics shall be extended beyond the scope of workplace lay out alteration and correct body posture assessment. The effluence of organization towards ergonomic improvements shall be further investigated. Organizational factors such as safety climate, culture and size of the

organization are part of contributing factors that lead to the occurrence of MSD cases at the workplace (HSE, 2015; Sirat et al., 2011). Therefore this conceptual paper is emphasized on the assumption that there is a positive relationship between specific organizational climate (Autonomy, Supervisory support, Participative decision making and ECB), the Social Exchange Theory is used to explain this relationship.

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