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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL  
SUPPORT WITH TURNOVER INTENTION**

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***Abstract***

Boredom at workplace is a negative well-being displayed by both blue and white collar employees who had lost their passion and value towards jobs under non stimulating working environment. Yet, there are limited studies in this area. Scholars had constantly associated boredom with negative working performance such as job dissatisfaction, high absenteeism, poor health condition and low organizational commitment. However, the association with turnover intention remains debatable. In Malaysia, the turnover intention among academicians of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) is in critical stage ever since year 2013. Although the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia recognize the potential of PHEIs in supporting Malaysia to be the Asia educational hub, this issue remain unsolved which may jeopardize the success. Therefore, this study put forward the antecedents and consequence of boredom at workplace under a single model which includes the investigation of job autonomy, social support, and turnover intention among academicians. A quantitative study was conducted by obtaining data from 279 academicians working for 20 (PHEIs) in Sarawak. The results showed that job autonomy was not significantly associated with turnover intention because job autonomy has no association with boredom at the first place. In contrast, social support was negatively associated with boredom which led to positive association with turnover intention. Moreover, the result confirmed the presence of boredom as mediator upon bootstrapping. It is suggested that PHEIs shall motivate academicians to actively participate in trainings, conferences, and seminars as the opportune time can be used to build good rapport among them.

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**Keywords:** Boredom at Workplace, Turnover Intention, Job Autonomy, Social Support, JD-R model.



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## 1. Introduction

Job resources refers to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that functional in achieving work goals, reducing the impact of job demands and the associated physiological and psychological cost (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005) and stimulate personal learning and motivational role in achieving work goals (Demerouti, et al., 2001). In this present study, job autonomy and social support are the relevant resources that help academicians to learn and grow.

Job autonomy is a job characteristic that measure the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out. Moreover, Ganster (1989) underlined that job autonomy help employees to make the job more rewarding and less threatening. As employees are empowered, they possessed greater flexibility in deciding (Troyer, Mueller, & Osinsky, 2000) which leads to persistent investment of attention and efforts to derive best solution (Shalleya & Gilson, 2004) towards more complex and demanding job. Thus, such employees may find their job challenging and avoiding boredom. Contrary, employees without empowerment are followers that prefer simple, rigid and routinized jobs that potentially leading to boredom.

Support is regarded as the availability of helping relationship between colleagues (Leavy, 1983). Such relationship exists in term of encouragement towards job participation, guidance and attention (Rodriguez & Cohen, 1998). Practically, the occasion whereby two or more employees exchanging resources with the aim to help employee who demanding support (Van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006) to improve performance without forsaking the availability of the other existing resources (Seiger & Wiese, 2009). Hence, social support is a relationship made available by co-workers or superiors in which act to support employees and increases the quality of work within the organization. According to Fisher (1993), the feeling of bored started to arouse in employees when they get unfriendly and unforthcoming coworkers or superiors. In such social climate at workplace, employees are easily not supported. Besides that, Othman, Ahmad, & Ghazali (2015) found heavy workload had restricted coworkers or superiors from offering support among themselves. Due to lack of support, they may find their job unpleasant and unchallenging as they are unable to perform and thus experience boredom.

Boredom at workplace is a new negative well being that exist unconsciously among various employees with respect to the job characteristic and working environment. Western scholars such as Pekrun (2006) sees boredom as a result of the inability of employee to control and receive value from their current activity (profession), Fisher (1993) the concentration impotence while Mikulas & Vodanovich (1993) the low participation of physical and mental activity among employees as a result of low stimulating working environment. In sum, boredom at workplace is defined as a state of disconnection in term of affection and cognition by employees towards their profession which later, affects their behavioural due to the none stimulating job and working environment (Teng, Hassan, & Kasa, 2016). In fact, western scholars had proven that boredom is widespread among various employees including those white and blue collars which may result the turnover intention.

Turnover intention is a behavior manifested by employees with the intention to exit (Brigham, Castro, & Shepherd, 2007) or intention to leave (Noor & Maad, 2008). This particular intention occurs as a result of strong job dissatisfaction (Hassan et al., 2015; Choong et al., 2012) and poor organizational

commitment (Lew, 2009; Yin-Fah et al., 2010). In specific, the turnover intention among Malaysian academicians of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) is in critical stage (Hashim & Mahmood, 2011). Various studies had been conducted by the local scholars to identify the causes of the turnover such as job stress (Zakerian & Subramaniam, 2009; Nasrudin, Ramayah, & Beng, 2006), work family conflict (Panatik et al., 2011), job burnout (Mukundan & Khandehroo, 2010) and organizational commitment (Marmaya et al., 2011; Lo, Ramayah, & Min, 2009).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Interestingly, boredom was found as another distinctive wellbeing at workplace that differs from job burnout or work engagement (Reijseger et al., 2013) which commonly associated with job dissatisfaction (Spector & Fox, 2010), poor job performance (Watt & Hargis, 2010), health issues (Harju et al., 2014) and monetary loss (Eddy et al., 2010). Yet, boredom is rarely being investigated among eastern countries, particularly Malaysia. This probably because boredom is classified as inconspicuous, “silent” emotion that does not manifest disruptiveness and low possibility in causing mental disorder as compared to anger and anxiety respectively (Pekrun et al., 2010). Thus, boredom is being neglected as one of the potential causes that deteriorate an organization as well as individual performance which worth to be investigated.

In addition, JD-R theory mentioned that wellbeing among employees are determined by the disparity of job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) before they behave negatively or positively. As boredom is capable in leading employees negatively at workplace, the integration of boredom into JD-R theory seems to be granted. In fact, boredom received limited investigation using JD-R theory except by Reijseger et al., (2013), Van Wyk et al., (2016) and Guglielmi et al., (2013).

Statistically, the number of academicians registered showed a drastic shortfall of 8,516 in year 2013 from the previous increasing trend (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Although the numbers are catching up to the normal trend in recent years, the losses are worth to be investigated as the academia remains encountering shortage of academicians (Hashim & Mahmood, 2011) despite greater influx of students recruitment for tertiary education. The findings will be useful for Malaysian scholars in assessing boredom at workplace within the countries in the future.

## **3. Research Questions**

Accordingly, this research explores the following questions:

- a. What are the relationships between job autonomy and social support towards boredom at workplace?
- b. What are the relationships between boredom at workplace and turnover intention?
- c. Does boredom mediate the relationship between the job resources and turnover intention?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Based on the above research questions, this research is designed to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- a. To investigate the relationship between job autonomy and boredom.
- b. To investigate the relationship between social support and boredom.

- c. To investigate the relationship between boredom and turnover intention.
- d. To examine the mediating role of boredom in the relationship between job autonomy and turnover intention.
- e. To examine the mediating role of boredom in the relationship between social support and turnover intention.

## 5. Research Methods

This present study is a quantitative study. Questionnaire was build based on former studies with strong reliability score and convergent validity. Job autonomy and social support was adopted from Karasek (1985) with five items for each construct. Both were measured using five-point Likert scale (e.g: “My superior is helpful in getting job done”; 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) and (e.g: “I can interrupt (suspend) my work as I wish”; 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). For boredom, it was measured using Dutch Boredom Scale with eight single-factors items (e.g: “At work, I spend my time aimlessly”; 1 = never to 7 = always). Lastly, turnover intention was adopted from Wayne, Liden, & Shore (1997) by using five items with five-point Likert scale (e.g: “I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.”; 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). 799 set of questionnaires were distributed by hand and via online survey to all the academicians who work with PHEIs in Sarawak. Total returned questionnaire were 279 sets which give a reading of 36.2% in percentage. The descriptive data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) V.22 while the direct and indirect relationships between constructs were analyzed using Smart PLS V.3.0.

## 6. Findings

In this present study, job resources were represented by job autonomy and social support. It was predicted that both of the constructs will negatively associated with boredom at workplace. However, the current result only found that social support ( $\beta=-0.153$ ,  $p<0.025$ ) to be negatively associated to boredom (see Table 1). Meaning, the more academicians received support from colleagues and superiors, the lesser they will feel bored towards their profession. Therefore, H1b was supported. Contrary, job autonomy ( $\beta=0.034$ , ns) was found to be not significant towards boredom at workplace. The result tells that the academicians boredom experience at workplace is not related to the job autonomy. Therefore, it has rejected H1a. For consequences, boredom was found to be positively significant towards turnover intention ( $\beta=0.460$ ,  $p<0.025$ ). In other words, boredom elevates turnover intention among academicians.

**Table 01.** Path Coefficients

Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics
Job autonomy --> Boredom	0.034 <sup>ns</sup>	0.055	1.068
Social Support --> Boredom	-0.153*	0.055	2.917
Boredom --> Turnover Intention	0.460*	0.059	7.869

\*Significant level at  $p<0.025$ ; ns not significant

### **6.1. Relationship between Job Autonomy (Job Resources) and Boredom at Workplace**

Job autonomy is the empowerment given to the employees to make decision in executing the work by utilizing their related skills to fulfill job demands with minimum superior interference. In this present study, job autonomy was found to be not significantly related to boredom at workplace which has rejected H2a. Meaning to say, job autonomy has no effect towards the experience of boredom at workplace among academicians. This is probably due to the inability of academicians in differentiating job autonomy and workload. In this present context, job autonomy implies more towards an increase in job demand rather than job resource, especially for head of departments. They are expected to involve in management issue such as student recruitment, overall department performance, coworkers working performance, student examination performance and many more. At the same time, there is no complementary reward given to normalize the “extra job” which further anchored the position of job autonomy as increment of workload. In addition, throughout the data collection, some of the respondents posted question such as “What is job autonomy?”. This reflects that some of the academicians are confused with the term job autonomy and workload. Hence, it inferred that academicians are not appreciating job autonomy as a resource for empowerment but increase of job demand. This explained the current finding that job autonomy is found to be not significant towards boredom. From another perspective, academicians prefer to own a routinized job that does not incur many changes from time to time. For example, if academicians are expected to deliver lecture, it is not to their liking in committing to other job empowerment. This is consistent with what was reported by Langfred (2004) and Bashir (2011) that some employees may dislike job autonomy as it requires more commitment, trust and responsibility to be deployed into the job with little support. Moreover, academicians tend to receive instruction rather than questioning. This is supported with the Malaysian culture where power distance was found to be high (Hofstede, 2017). In line with Hofstede’s cultural theory, academicians accept the inequality of power distribution in centralized organizations resulting in one-way communication. Hence, academicians are taking job autonomy as increase in workload which further burdened themselves with the existing workload due to the inability to distinguish the meaning of job autonomy and workload. In sum, it leads to the current finding where job autonomy was found to be insignificantly associated with boredom.

### **6.2. Relationship between Social Support (Job Resources) and Boredom at Workplace**

Social support is regarded as the availability of helping relationship between colleagues and leaders (Leavy, 1983). In this present study, social support was found to be negatively related to the boredom at workplace. Meaning to say, employees have greater chances of encountering boredom at workplace when they have poor social support. Such finding is consistent with Grzywacs & Marks, (2000) and Wayne, Randel, & Stevens (2006) where strong social support will hamper negative effect and increases quality of work. It can be inferred that boredom is possible to be avoided with the presence of strong social support. In the current study, 82.4% respondents of this study are academicians who reported to be socially engaged (M=3.74) despite the claim by western scholars that academicians are overburdened with workload. On top of that, this finding is contradict with Othman, Ahmad, & Ghazali (2015) who claimed that employees are unable to offer up themselves to help others when they are over loaded. Meaning, although there are busy with their work, they remain socially connected among themselves. This is because Malaysia is country

who embraced the collectivism culture where academicians emphasized the “we” rather than “I” concept (Hofstede, 2017). In academia, academicians do not work alone but in a team. They accomplished task together such as paper publications, project consultancy, pre and post conference preparation and many more. Moreover, the task may turns to be stimulating when academicians have more ability to solve tasks together with co-workers. Source of support are made available for them to refer and to seek assistance from their senior or superior. In fact, this is the point where they pick up encouragement from others and self-motivated. According to self-motivational theory (SDT), the fulfillment of competency, autonomy and relatedness needs via social support propel the positive performance and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2002). As academician continuously received support and motivated, they are stimulated from time to time and able to create meaning in their profession. Therefore, boredom is being hindered

### 6.3. Mediation Effect

In term of mediation effect, Baron & Kenny (1986) claimed that as the path coefficient for indirect and direct effects are showing the same direction, it can be concluded that Complementary Partial Mediation has taken place. These partial mediations are subject for Variance Accounted For (VAF) value analysis to determine the strength of mediator in influencing a relationship. In this present study, boredom was found to mediate the indirect path coefficient for the relationship between social support and turnover intention ( $\beta=-0.071$ ,  $p<0.025$ ). However, such effect was absent between job autonomy and turnover intention ( $\beta=0.016$ , ns) (see Table 2). For direct effects, job autonomy was found to be ( $\beta=0.035$ , ns) (see Table 3) in relation to turnover intention while social support was ( $\beta=-0.241$ ,  $p<0.025$ ). It can be noted that both indirect and direct effect for social support are projecting towards same direction and thus Complementary Partial Mediation took place.

**Table 02.** Indirect Effects

Path	Indirect Effect (a*b)	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics
Job autonomy -> Turnover Intention	0.016 <sup>ns</sup>	0.026	1.050
Social Support -> Turnover Intention	-0.071*	0.027	2.717

\*Significant level at  $p<0.025$ ; ns not significant

**Table 03.** Direct Effects

Path	Direct Effect (c')	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics
Job autonomy -> Turnover Intention	0.035 <sup>ns</sup>	0.058	0.909
Social Support -> Turnover Intention	-0.241*	0.056	4.375

\*Significant level at  $p<0.025$ ; ns not significant

In this present study, VAF will be applied to examine the strength of the mediation. Although the indirect and direct effects confirmed the existing of the mediation, the strength of the mediator remains unknown. Via VAF, the power of influential can be calculated statistically based on the formula of:

$$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{(\text{Indirect} + \text{Direct}) \text{ Effect}}$$

**Table 04.** VAF Value

Path	Indirect Effect (a*b)	Direct Effect (c')	VAF Value (%)	Mediation
Social Support -> Turnover Intention	0.071*	0.241*	22.76	Partial

From the Table 4, the strength for the path of social support to turnover intention is 22.76% VAF value which means boredom has the strength of 22.76% in affecting the direct relationship between social support and turnover intention. The VAF value for job autonomy is not required because the significance test has proved that boredom has no mediation effect at all to the relationship.

#### **6.4. Relationship between Job Autonomy, Boredom at Workplace and Turnover Intention**

Job autonomy is categorized as one of the job resources. According to JD-R theory, job resources are expected to produce positive outcomes via positive wellbeing (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Buys & Rothmann, 2010). Logically when academicians are empowered, it creates greater responsibilities and trust in them to execute their work. It enables academicians to learn, grow and lead (Manz & Sims, 2001). It infers that with job autonomy, boredom can be reducing so as the turnover intention. But in this present study, boredom has no mediating effect on the relationship of job autonomy and turnover intention. Empowerment does not significantly lead academicians to feel bored or excited. As majority of the respondents (82.4%) are lecturer who are expected to deliver lecture only, job autonomy seems irrelevant to them. They are to conduct their class, prepare and mark their examination papers. There is not much job autonomy involved at their level. In fact, academicians viewed job autonomy as an increase in workload. They knew their scopes of work are to deliver lecture, examine the students, marking and report to their superior. Any additional job responsibilities will be regarded as additional workload that to the academicians including job autonomy. Job autonomy was not appreciated as job resources according to JD-R theory. This possibly explains current finding that shows boredom has no mediating effect in the relationship of job autonomy and turnover intention.

#### **6.5. Relationship between Social Support, Boredom at Workplace and Turnover Intention**

Following JD-R theory, social support promotes positive wellbeing at workplace and produce positive outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Buys & Rothmann, 2010; Wu et al., 2013; Inoue et al., 2013; Gozukaraa & Simsek, 2015; Alzyoud, Othman, & Isa, 2015; and Othman, Ahmad, & Ghazali, 2015). Previous findings inferred that social support encouraged employees to work eagerly and indulge in their job which reduces turnover intention. In this present study, boredom was found to be partially mediates the negative relationship of social support and turnover intention. In other words, for academicians to initiate the

intention to quit, they will exhibit the bored wellbeing as the result of poor social support. However statistically, academicians are reporting to exert reasonable high workload and establish strong social support at workplace. According to Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema (2005) via JD-R theory, job resources are able to buffer the negative impact of job demands on employee wellbeing and working performance. The greater the job resources are than job demands, the more positive wellbeing and performance will triumph. Hence, as academicians encountering heavy workload, social support act as a catalyst to change the negative impact of heavy workload into something encouraging, motivating and rewarding to them. According to self-determination theory, social support can enhance employee competency and the sense of relatedness at the workplace. Therefore, the presence of support makes the profession becomes more challenging and at the same time intrinsically rewarding which hampers the boredom experience. As academicians constantly get stimulated and engaged to their work, turnover intention will not come across them.

## 7. Conclusion

In sum, job autonomy is not significantly related to boredom while social support is inversely related to boredom. As the consequence, it was found that boredom positively lead to turnover intention. For mediation, boredom was partially mediating the direct relationship of social support and turnover intention with the influencing strength of 22.76% while boredom has no effect on the direct relationship of job autonomy and turnover intention. As the matter of fact, PHEIs management should focuses on social support as it is able to influence the level of boredom experience at workplace which ultimately determines their turnover intention. As an organization in whole, retention is important to maintain talent and competitiveness in the market. Therefore, turnover intention among academicians can be possibly reduced when organizations deploy ample activities for employees to participate in order to build their relationship. With strong relationship among employees, this present finding believes it will keeps them motivated to work and abandoned boredom. The suggestions above are among the types of actions that PHEIs' management can take to reduce academicians' boredom experience and turnover intention. Although the issue of boredom remains silent in Malaysia, the PHEIs management should recognize the effect of boredom in reducing turnover and concurrently, strategizing solution to increase employee relationship for organization development.

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