



***DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A CO-WORKER SUPPORT
SCALE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS
AT THE WORKPLACE***

KHAIRUN NISA' BINTI KHAIRUDDIN

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By

KHAIRUN NISA' BINTI KHAIRUDDIN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

November 2019

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

My beloved parents

*Puan Zainab Binti Bakar
Encik Khairuddin Bin Mansurudin*

My supervisory committee

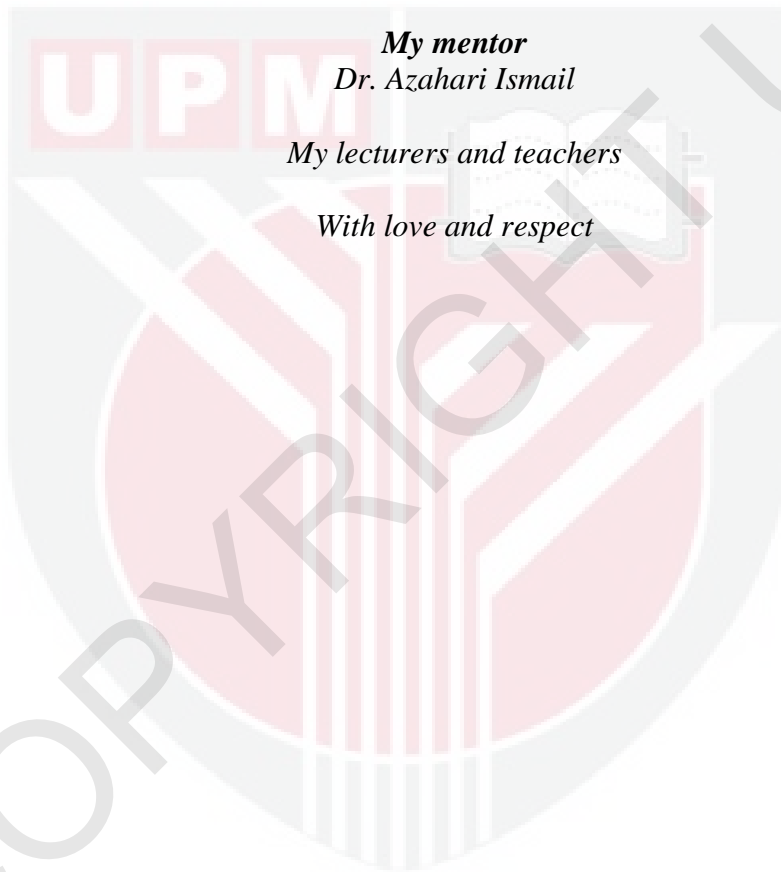
*Dr. Zoharah Omar
Assoc. Prof Dr. Ismi Arif Ismail
Prof Dr. Abdul Lateef @ Steven Eric Krauss*

My mentor

Dr. Azahari Ismail

My lecturers and teachers

With love and respect



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2019

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This study attempts to develop and validate an instrument of co-worker support among HR practitioners. The study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to accurately define and develop the instrument. There were 3 phases in the study: Phase 1 was the conceptualisation of co-worker support which employed a qualitative approach involving in-depth interview sessions with 11 HR practitioners from various organizations in Malaysia. Based on these interviews, six dimensions of co-worker support were identified. The dimensions were labelled as 'Assisting Co-worker', 'Providing Companionship', 'Protecting Co-worker', 'Guiding Co-worker', 'Recognizing Co-worker' and 'Respecting Co-worker'. Consistent with the relationship perspective in the Theory of Social Support (Lakey & Cohen, 2000), this finding helped to clarify the theory by providing specific examples of supportive behaviour at the workplace. Phase 2 was the development of co-worker support scale. Phase 3 was the validation of co-worker support scale which utilised a quantitative approach. Seven expert reviewers verified the validity and relevancy of the 89 items. Their concurrence supported the claim of content validity which was assessed using the Content Validity Index (CVI). The questionnaires were distributed to HR practitioners in the area of Klang Valley, Malaysia. Data were collected consecutively, and the initial data collection was for the Exploratory Factor Analysis, followed by the data collection for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The results of the EFA (n=201) and CFA (n=330) revealed that Co-worker Support (CWS) scale is multidimensional. Thus, the study confirmed the six dimensions of co-worker support that were identified in the conceptualisation stage in Phase 1. The dimensions met both discriminant validity and convergent validity, thus, fulfilling the criteria of construct validity. The reliability scores for each type of co-worker support were above .80. Based on the results, the instrument was proven to be valid and reliable. The Co-worker Support (CWS) Scale can be used extensively. A clearer conceptualisation of the co-worker support established contributed to the body of knowledge. Practically, the CWS Scale can be used to assess potential support-related issues pertaining to co-

worker support, which can help organizations undertake appropriate action to strengthen employee relations.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PEMBANGUNAN DAN KESAHAN SKALA SOKONGAN RAKAN
SEKERJA UNTUK PENGAMAL SUMBER MANUSIA DI TEMPAT KERJA**

Oleh

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Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membina dan menguji kesahan Skala Sokongan Rakan Sekerja (SRS) untuk pengamal sumber manusia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah *Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Method*. Terdapat 3 fasa utama dalam kajian ini. Fasa 1 melibatkan pengkonsepkan sokongan rakan sekerjayang dilakukan melalui pendekatan kualitatif iaitu dengan menemubual 11 orang pengamal sumber manusia dari pelbagai organisasi di Malaysia. Hasil dapatan temubual ini, enam dimensi sokongan rakan sekerja telah dikenal pasti. Dimensi-dimensi ini dinamakan sebagai 'Membantu Rakan Sekerja', 'Menjalin Persahabatan', 'Melindungi Rakan Sekerja', 'Membimbing Rakan Sekerja', 'Menghargai Rakan Sekerja' dan 'Menghormati Rakan Sekerja'. Selari dengan perspektif perhubungan dalam Teori Sokongan Sosial (Lakey & Cohen, 2000), penemuan ini telah mengukuhkan teori ini dengan lebih mantap melalui contoh-contoh spesifik tingkah laku sokongan rakan sekerja di tempat kerja. Fasa 2 merupakan fasa pembinaan Skala SRS. Fasa 3 pula merupakan fasa pengujian kesahan Skala SRS yang dilakukan melalui pendekatan kuantitatif. Tujuh orang pakar penilai memperakui kesahan kandungan Skala SRS. Kesahan daripada mereka telah menyokong syarat kesahan kandungan yang dinilai menggunakan Indeks Kesahan Kandungan (CVI). Borang soal selidik diedarkan kepada pengamal sumber manusia di sekitar kawasan Lembah Klang, Malaysia. Data kuantitatif dikutip secara berturutan: pertama untuk Analisis Faktor Eksploratori (EFA) dan kedua untuk Analisis Faktor Pengesahan (CFA). Keputusan EFA ($n = 201$) dan CFA ($n = 330$) menunjukkan bahawa Skala SRS adalah bersifat multidimensi, dengan itu mengesahkan enam dimensi sokongan rakan kerja yang dikenal pasti dalam Fasa 1. Dimensi-dimensi ini telah berjaya membuktikan kesahan konstruk. Skor kebolehpercayaan bagi setiap dimensi sokongan rakan sekerja melebihi nilai .80. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, Skala SRS terbukti sah dan boleh dipercayai. Skala SRS ini boleh digunakan secara meluas. Pengkonsepkan yang lebih jelas mengenai sokongan rakan sekerja ini telah menyumbang kepada bidang keilmuan. Secara praktikalnya, Skala SRS boleh digunakan untuk menilai isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan sokongan

rakan sekerja, sekali gus dapat membantu organisasi merangka tindakan yang sewajarnya untuk memperkukuhkan hubungan sesama pekerja.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
APPROVAL	vii
DECLARATION	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
LIST OF FIGURES	xx
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study	2
1.2.1 Importance of Co-worker Support for Human Resource Practitioners	4
1.2.2 Co-worker Support as a Catalyst in Strengthening Employee Relations	5
1.2.3 Why Co-worker Support, not Supervisor Support?	6
1.3 Statement of the Research Problem	7
1.3.1 Lack of concrete and precise instrument about co-worker support	7
1.3.2 Incoherent understanding in conceptualizing co-worker support	8
1.3.3 Absence of intervention framework	8
1.3.4 Lack of cultural emphasis in the previous instrument that measuring co-worker support	9
1.4 Objective of the Study	10
1.4.1 General objective	10
1.4.2 Specific objectives	10
1.5 Research Questions	10
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.6.1 Significance to the Body of Knowledge	11
1.6.2 Significance to the Policy	11
1.6.3 Significance to the Practice	12
1.7 Scope of the Study	12
1.8 Limitation of the Study	13
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 Definitions of Social Support	14
2.3 Dimensions of Social Support	19
2.4 Definition and Conceptualization of Co-worker	22
2.5 Definitions and Conceptualization of Co-worker Support	25
2.6 Theories Related to Co-worker Support	26
2.6.1 Theory of Social Support	26
2.6.2 Relationship Processes Perspective	28

2.6.3	Social Relations Model	30
2.6.4	Related Concept in Social Support	30
2.6.4.1	Social connectedness	31
2.6.4.2	Perceived social support	31
2.6.4.3	Actual or enacted social support	31
2.7	Professional Support and Collegial Support for HR Practitioners	31
2.8	Review of Existing Co-worker Support Measurements	32
2.9	Theory of Measurement	37
2.10	Psychometric Paradigms in Scale Development	38
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	39
3.1	Introduction	39
3.2	Research Design	39
3.2.1	Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method Design for Instrument Development	40
3.2.2	Instrument Development Steps by DeVellis (2012)	42
3.3	Phase 1: Conceptualization of Co-worker Support	43
3.3.1	Initial Insights into Co-worker Support Concept	43
3.3.2	Conceptualization by Using Qualitative Design (Interview)	44
3.3.3	Underlying Assumption in Using Qualitative Design	44
3.3.4	Sample Selection and Sampling Procedure for Interviews	45
3.3.5	Data Collection	45
3.3.6	Data Analysis Procedure	47
3.3.7	Strategies for Promoting Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Data	48
3.4	Phase 2: Development of Co-worker Support Scale	49
3.4.1	Item Pool Generation	49
3.4.2	Method for Testing Face Validity	50
3.4.3	Item Refinement and Selection	50
3.4.4	Determination of Type of Scale	50
3.5	Phase 3(a): Content Validity	51
3.5.1	Definition of Content Validity	51
3.5.2	Selection Criteria for Expert Reviewers	51
3.5.3	Data Collection Procedures for Content Validation	52
3.5.4	Data Analysis for Content Validity	52
3.5.5	Formula to Calculate I-CVI and S-CVI	53
3.5.6	Criteria in Evaluating CVI	53
3.6	Phase 3(b): Exploratory Factor Analysis	53
3.6.1	Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure	53
3.6.2	Determination Number of Sample Size	55
3.6.3	Data Collection Procedures	55
3.6.4	Data Analysis Procedures	56
3.6.5	Analysis of Descriptive Statistics	57
3.6.6	Purpose of Using Exploratory Factor Analysis in the Study	57
3.6.7	Basic Assumptions in EFA	57
3.6.8	Factor Extraction Method	58

3.6.9	Decision Criteria for Factor Extraction	59
3.6.10	Factor Rotation Method	59
3.6.11	Reliability Test	60
3.7	Phase 3(c): Confirmatory Factor Analysis	61
3.7.1	Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure	61
3.7.2	Data Collection Procedures	62
3.7.3	Data Analysis Procedures	62
3.7.4	Analysis of Descriptive Statistics	63
3.7.5	Purpose of Using CFA	64
3.7.6	Assumptions in CFA by Using Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM)	64
3.7.7	Construct Validity	65
3.7.7.1	Convergent Validity	65
3.7.7.2	Discriminant Validity	65
3.7.8	Construct Reliability	65
3.8	Summary of Chapter 3	65
4	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	67
4.1	Introduction	67
4.2	Findings from Phase 1: Conceptualization of Co-worker Support (Qualitative Research Design)	67
4.2.1	Demographic Profile of the Interview's Participants	67
4.2.2	Themes Emerged from the Interviews	67
4.2.2.1	Theme 1: Assisting Co-worker	70
4.2.2.2	Theme 2: Providing Companionship	74
4.2.2.3	Theme 3: Protecting Co-worker	77
4.2.2.4	Theme 4: Guiding Co-worker	81
4.2.2.5	Theme 5: Recognizing Co-worker	83
4.2.2.6	Theme 6: Respecting Co-worker	85
4.2.3	Summary Findings from Phase 1 (Conceptualization of Co-worker Support)	86
4.3	Discussion on Qualitative Findings (Conceptualization of Co-worker Support)	87
4.4	Findings from Phase 3(a): Content Validity	92
4.4.1	Profile of Expert Reviewers	92
4.4.2	Result of I-CVI and S-CVI	93
4.4.3	Summary Result of Phase 3(a) Content Validity	100
4.5	Findings from Phase 3(b): Exploratory Factor Analysis	100
4.5.1	Organization Profile of the Respondents	100
4.5.2	Demographic Profile of the Respondents	101
4.5.3	Descriptive Statistics of Items in the Co-worker Support Scale	103
4.5.4	Result of Sampling Adequacy Test	106
4.5.5	Result of Factor Extraction and Total Variance Explained	106
4.5.6	Determining Number of Factor	107
4.5.6.1	Kaiser's Criterion (Eigenvalue more than 1)	107
4.5.6.2	Scree Plot	108
4.5.7	Decision on Factor Rotation Method	109
4.5.8	Result of Communalities for Each Item	109

4.5.9	Result of Factor Pattern Matrix	112
4.5.10	List of Dropped Items after Conducting EFA	114
4.5.11	Discussion on Each Factor (Factor Loading and Determination of Name for the Factor)	116
4.5.11.1	Factor 1	116
4.5.11.2	Factor 2	117
4.5.11.3	Factor 3	118
4.5.11.4	Factor 4	119
4.5.11.5	Factor 5	120
4.5.11.6	Factor 6	120
4.5.12	Result of Reliability Test for the Co-worker Support Scale	121
4.5.13	Definition of Co-worker Support and Its Dimension that Derived from EFA	126
4.5.14	Summary Findings from Phase 3(b) Exploratory Factor Analysis	126
4.6	Findings from Phase 3(c): Confirmatory Factor Analysis	127
4.6.1	Organization Profile of the Respondents	127
4.6.2	Demographic Profile of Respondents	128
4.6.3	Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Individual Constructs	129
4.6.3.1	CFA for Factor 1: Assisting Co-worker	130
4.6.3.2	CFA for Factor 2: Providing Companionship	133
4.6.3.3	CFA for Factor 3: Protecting Co-worker	134
4.6.3.4	CFA for Factor 4: Guiding Co-worker	136
4.6.3.5	CFA for Factor 5: Recognizing Co-worker	137
4.6.3.6	CFA for Factor 6: Respecting Co-worker	138
4.6.4	List of Dropped Item after Conducting CFA for Individual Construct	140
4.6.5	Overall Measurement Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	142
4.6.6	Result of Construct Validity	144
4.6.6.1	Convergent Validity	144
4.6.6.2	Discriminant Validity	147
4.6.7	Result of the Second-order Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	148
4.6.8	Result of Descriptive Statistics of the Final Version of Co-worker Support Scale	152
4.6.8.1	Descriptive Statistics for Overall Summated Score of Co-worker Support	153
4.6.8.2	Descriptive Statistics for Assisting Co-worker (12 items)	153
4.6.8.3	Descriptive Statistics for Providing Companionship (9 items)	155
4.6.8.4	Descriptive Statistics for Protecting Co-worker (6 items)	156
4.6.8.5	Descriptive Statistics for Guiding Co-worker (4 items)	157

4.6.8.6	Descriptive Statistics for Recognizing Co-worker (4 items)	158
4.6.8.7	Descriptive Statistics for Respecting Co-worker (3 items)	159
4.6.8.8	Summary Result of Descriptive Statistics of the CWS Scale	160
4.6.9	Summary Findings from Phase 3(c): Confirmatory Factor Analysis	160
4.7	Discussion on Quantitative Findings	161
5	SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS	162
5.1	Introduction	162
5.2	Summary of the Study	162
5.3	Conclusion	165
5.4	Implications	165
5.4.1	Implications to the Theory	166
5.4.2	Implications to the Policy	166
5.4.3	Implications to the Practice	167
5.5	Recommendations	167
5.5.1	Recommendations for Future Research	167
5.5.2	Recommendation for Policy	168
5.5.3	Recommendations for Practice	169
	REFERENCES	170
	APPENDICES	180
	BIODATA OF STUDENT	236
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	237

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
2.1	Definitions of Social Support	15
2.2	Description of Social Support Dimensions in the Literature	20
2.3	Cross-tabulation of Social Support Dimensions used by House (1981) and Other Authors	23
2.4	Characteristics of Co-worker	24
2.5	Definitions of Co-worker Support	25
2.6	Relationship Qualities in the Theory of Social Support	27
2.7	Dimensions of Relationship Properties and Its Definitions	29
2.8	Components in the Social Relations Model	30
2.9	Existing Co-worker Support Measurements	34
3.1	Research Objective and Phase of the Study	39
3.2	Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria of the Participants	45
3.3	Strategies for promoting validity and reliability in Phase 1	49
3.4	Scale and Its Category	50
3.5	Criteria of Expert Reviewer Selection	52
3.6	Guideline for determining sample size by Comrey and Lee (1992)	55
3.7	Criteria in evaluating KMO statistics by Kaiser and Rice (1974)	58
3.8	Determination of the level of co-worker support in the CWS Scale	63
3.9	Indicator of the determination of level in the CWS Scale	64
4.1	Demographic Profile of Interview's Participants	69
4.2	Quotation, Code, Category and Sub-theme in Theme 1 (Assisting Co-worker)	71
4.3	Quotation, Code, Category and Sub-theme in Theme 2 (Providing Companionship)	75

4.4	Quotation, Code and Category in Theme 3 (Protecting Co-worker)	79
4.5	Quotation, Code and Category in Theme 4 (Guiding Co-worker)	82
4.6	Quotation, Code and Category in Theme 5 (Recognizing Co-worker)	84
4.7	Quotation, Code and Category in Theme 6 (Respecting Co-worker)	86
4.8	Conceptual definition of each dimension of Co-worker Support and its related concept	90
4.9	Profile of Expert Reviewers	92
4.10	Result of I-CVI and S-CVI of the Co-worker Support Scale	93
4.11	Summary result of Content Validity Index for Individual Item (I-CVI)	100
4.12	Frequency and Percentage of the Respondents' Organization Profile for Exploratory Factor Analysis Stage (n=201)	101
4.13	Frequency and Percentage of the Respondents' Demographic Profile for Exploratory Factor Analysis Stage (n=201)	102
4.14	Descriptive Statistics for 51-item of the Co-worker Support Scale (after deleting low and cross factor loading items)	103
4.15	Result of Sampling Adequacy Test by Using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test	106
4.16	Eigenvalues Associated with Each Factor Before Extraction, After Extraction and After Rotation	107
4.17	Factor Correlation Matrix	109
4.18	Communalities for 51-item of the Co-worker Support Scale	110
4.19	Factor Pattern Matrix (as generated by IBM SPSS)	113
4.20	List of Dropped Items after EFA	115
4.21	Factor Loading for 20-item in Factor 1	117
4.22	Factor Loading for 9-item in Factor 2	118
4.23	Factor Loading for 8-item in Factor 3	119
4.24	Factor Loading for 5-item in Factor 4	120

4.25	Factor Loading for 4-item in Factor 5	120
4.26	Factor Loading for 5-item in Factor 6	121
4.27	Reliability Test	121
4.28	List of Factor, Item, Keyword and Definition Derived from EFA	122
4.29	Summary Finding of Exploratory Factor Analysis	127
4.30	Frequency and Percentage of the Respondents' Organization Profile for Confirmatory Factor Analysis Stage (n=330)	127
4.31	Frequency and Percentage of the Respondents' Demographic Profile for Confirmatory Factor Analysis Stage (n=330)	128
4.32	Comparison of Fit Indices for the Initial Model and Modified Model of Factor 1 (Assisting Co-worker)	132
4.33	Fit Indices for the CFA Model of Factor 2 (Providing Companionship)	133
4.34	Comparison of Fit Indices for the Initial Model and Modified Model of Factor 3 (Protecting Co-worker)	136
4.35	Comparison of Fit Indices for the Initial Model and Modified Model of Factor 4 (Mentoring Co-worker)	137
4.36	Fit Indices for the CFA Model of Factor 5 (Recognizing Co-worker)	138
4.37	List of Dropped Items after CFA	140
4.38	Fit Indices for the Overall Measurement Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	142
4.39	Factor Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) for each dimension of the Co-worker Support Scale	145
4.40	Correlation Estimate and Squared Correlation Estimate between Construct	147
4.41	Average Variance Extracted (on the diagonal) and Squared Correlation Coefficient (on the off-diagonal) for Co-worker Support Scale	148
4.42	Summary Result of Construct Validity (Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity) and Construct Reliability	148
4.43	Fit Indices for the First-order Model and Second-order Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	152

4.44	Level of Overall Co-worker Support for Overall Sample and Each Sector	153
4.45	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Assisting Co-worker	154
4.46	Level of Assisting Co-worker for Overall Sample and Each Sector	154
4.47	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Providing Companionship	155
4.48	Level of Providing Companionship for Overall Sample and Each Sector	156
4.49	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Protecting Co-worker	156
4.50	Level of Protecting Co-worker for Overall Sample and Each Sector	157
4.51	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Guiding Co-worker	157
4.52	Level of Guiding Co-worker for Overall Sample and Each Sector	158
4.53	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Recognizing Co-worker	158
4.54	Level of Recognizing Co-worker for Overall Sample and Each Sector	159
4.55	Descriptive Statistics of Each Item in Respecting Co-worker	159
4.56	Level of Respecting Co-worker for Overall Sample and Each Sector	159
4.57	Level of Co-worker Support based on Dimension for Overall Sample (n=330)	160
4.58	Level of Co-worker Support based on Sector (n=330)	160

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.1	Employee Relations at the Workplace	6
2.1	Theory of Social Support	27
2.2	The relationship process perspective	28
3.1	Implementation of Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Method Design for Instrument Development and Validation	41
3.2	Phases and Steps of the Development and Validation of the Co-worker Support Scale	42
3.3	Quota sampling technique based on types of sector	54
3.4	Description of the sample in EFA	56
3.5	Quota sampling technique based on types of sector	61
3.6	Description of the sample in CFA	62
3.7	Determination of the Goodnes of the CWS scale	66
4.1	Conceptual Model of Co-worker Support	68
4.2	Illustration of Theme, Code and Category of Co-worker Support based on the Interview Findings	91
4.3	Scree Plot	108
4.4	Initial CFA Model of Factor 1 (Assisting Co-worker)	131
4.5	Modified CFA Model of Factor 1 (Assisting Co-worker)	132
4.6	CFA Model for Factor 2: Providing Companionship (without modification)	134
4.7	Initial CFA Model of Factor 3 (Protecting Co-worker)	135
4.8	Modified CFA Model of Factor 3 (Protecting Co-worker)	135
4.9	Initial CFA Model of Factor 4 (Guiding Co-worker)	136
4.10	Modified CFA Model of Factor 4 (GuidingCo-worker)	137
4.11	CFA Model for Factor 5: Recognizing Co-worker (without modification)	138

4.12	Initial CFA Model of Factor 6 (Respecting Co-worker)	139
4.13	Modified CFA Model of Factor 6 (Respecting Co-worker)	139
4.14	Overall Measurement Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	143
4.15	First-order Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	150
4.16	Second-order Model of the Co-worker Support Scale	151
5.1	Research Flow of the Development and Validation of a Co-worker Support Scale	164



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moments Structures
HR	Human Resource
GLC	Government-linked Company



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter primarily introduces the background of the study, statement of the research problem, research questions, as well as the research objectives. It also presents the significance of the study, the scope of the study and also the limitation of the study.

1.1 Introduction

“ . . . Relationships with other humans are both the foundation and the theme of the human condition: We are born into relationships, we live our lives in relationships with others, and when we die, the effects of our relationships survive in the lives of the living, reverberating throughout the tissue of their relationships.”

(Berscheid, 1999, pg. 261)

The statement above, made by an American social psychologist who studied interpersonal relationship, was quoted by many researchers and scholars to emphasize the importance of relationships. As an employee, we develop interpersonal relationships at the workplace, not only with managers, supervisors, subordinates and clients but also with our ‘co-workers’ who are the closest and the most frequent people we interact with at our workplace. The interpersonal relationship at the workplace has significant effects which often spill over into our personal lives, and the impact could be felt by our family and friends (Sloan, 2012).

As we spend most of our time in the workplace, the relationship that we develop there should not be undermined and disregarded. This is because one of the vital components in fostering a harmonious working environment is a good relationship among employees at the workplace (Liu, Nauta, Yang & Spector, 2017). According to McMillan, Morris and Atchley (2011), the word harmony comes from a musical metaphor. They further proposed the idea of work harmony as an “individually pleasing, congruent arrangement of work and life roles” (p.15). The need for creating a harmonious working environment is becoming more crucial as the organizations are faced with numerous challenges to survive and remain competitive in the current global competition (Liu et al., 2017). In this challenging environment, employees are expected to assume greater responsibilities in or to adapt to the changing environment successfully. Such a challenging environment can be strenuous to employees. In order to cope in such an environment, employees often seek support from their social relationship at work.

The concept of social support has been discussed for over than 30 years in various contexts, including social support in the workplace (Boyar, Campbell, Mosley & Carson, 2014). Social support has been proven by previous research as a fundamental factor that contributes towards the health and well-being of individuals (Ducharme &

Martin, 2000; Sloan, Newhouse, & Thompson, 2013; Sloan, 2012). Social support in the context of the workplace has also become a central discussion among scholars and researchers who believed that a supportive working environment could create organisational harmony (Liu et al., 2017).

A harmonious condition in the workplace can be achieved if the co-workers take charge of their roles as a source of help, source of knowledge and information (Robinson & O'Learly-Kelly, 1998; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Boh & Wong, 2015), to come role models (Robinson & O'Learly-Kelly, 1998), give support to one another to enhance their psychological wellbeing, provide encouragement, reduce conflict and alleviate the negative effects of their jobs. Becoming a role model is not only about giving inspirations but also becoming an individual's referents. Lawrence (2006, p.84) defined an individual's referents as "the set of people that an individual perceives as belonging to his or her work environment that defines the social world of work in which he or she engages." She also mentioned that the individual's referents tend to be the people with whom one frequently communicates, people who are in similar roles, and people who occupy high-status positions. When employees regard their co-workers as their individual's referents, they will not only gain benefits in terms of knowledge sharing, but the individual can provide encouragement, thus bolster their efforts to perform the best for the organization (Lawrence, 2006). Besides, motivation given by co-workers can encourage deeper commitments, increase job satisfaction, and stimulate organizational citizenship behaviour (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016).

According to Sloan (2012), co-workers may be a beneficial source of support for workers as they share many similar experiences with their fellow co-workers compared to their superior. These shared experiences can create a close relationship among employees, and this relationship could influence their conduct in many ways. Previous research also reported benefits of co-workers support such as increased job satisfaction and enhanced employee well-being (Sloan, 2012). It is imperative to have supportive co-workers because if they play their role appropriately, they can create a positive environment in the workplace. However, if the employees feel that their co-workers are unsupportive, the workplace may become a miserable place for them. Ladd and Henry (2000) mentioned that the way to assess relationship is by examining how much individuals feel that they are supported. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the co-worker support in order to assess the relationship as well as to strengthen the relationship among employees.

1.2 Background of the Study

Since the 1970s, Fred Fiedler had initiated the intellectual discussion about the importance of co-worker support at the workplace. Fiedler was one of the leading scholars in industrial and organizational psychology. He was most known for the contingency model theory. He was also among the first scholars who developed an instrument related to co-worker's attributes known as the Least Preferred Co-worker Scale (LPC). The LPC scale was used by Fiedler to identify a person's dominant leadership style by asking the co-workers instead of directly asking the leader. Based

on the co-workers' point of view, it is believed that the answer could be more genuine rather than the answers given by the leader himself. Fiedler, however, did not provide a clear definition and conceptualisation of the term co-worker support.

Abundant pieces of evidence from recent research exist to suggest that co-worker support is influential in many ways. For example, Chiaburu and Harrison (2008) conducted a meta-analytic study based on 161 independent samples, which consisted of 77 954 employees. They reported that co-worker support influenced role perceptions, work attitudes, withdrawal behaviours, as well as interpersonal and organizational effectiveness. They also theorised that co-workers would be more influential in jobs and occupations with high-intensity social requirements. In other words, co-workers would be more influential when the work setting requires frequent interactions among employees.

According to a recent study conducted by Brummelhuis, Johns, Lyons and Hoeven (2016), employee behaviour is influenced by team norms, especially in the context of the influence of co-workers. To be specific, they examined why team members imitate each other's absence behaviour and under what condition the imitation of absence behaviour is more or less likely. The findings of this study suggested that the respondents were more likely to call in sick when their co-workers were often absent. However, under the conditions of high cohesiveness and task interdependency among the employees, co-worker absence is less strongly imitated. In this situation, the employee likes to help co-workers, care about them, and always support them. Therefore, the employees are more likely to disapprove of absenteeism because of the supportive environment provided by their co-workers. In other words, such findings suggested that under a favourable situation where co-workers are supportive of each other, absenteeism problem in the workplace can be reduced.

Apart from that, it has been reported that co-worker support has a direct effect on burnout (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). Charoensukmongkol et al. (2016) measured the effects of co-worker support on the three components of burnout which included emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment among employees from two state universities in South Texas, United States. They found that co-worker support was negatively associated with the first two components of burnout. It meant that co-worker support could help reduce emotional exhaustion and lower depersonalisation. In addition, their analysis confirmed the direct and indirect effects of co-worker support on job satisfaction. They theorised that when the employees receive adequate support from their co-workers, it does not only lower depersonalisation, it also tends to be the factor that strongly explained the level of job satisfaction.

In the Asian context, studies have shown that co-worker support is related to knowledge sharing (Boh & Wong, 2015), organizational commitment (Limpanitgul, Boonchoo & Photiyarach, 2014) and job performance (Fadzilah, Artinah & Rahmat, 2013). A recent study by Boh and Wong (2015) argued that co-workers' behaviour could serve as a benchmark and standard behaviour to follow. In their study of 2117 employees from an emergency response services organization in Singapore, they

concluded that co-workers were such important social referents who can provide cues based on their experience in handling risks and emergency situations. Furthermore, in their interviews with senior managers and junior employees, Boh and Wong (2015) identified several types of situation-related and job-related knowledge that employees typically share with their colleagues such as lessons learned from past experiences of handling difficult tasks and situations, procedures and tips for regular job tasks, actions to be taken to avoid mistakes and possible solutions to problems that they experienced in the past while doing their jobs. This kind of job-related knowledge is not only very crucial to those who work in emergency services, but also applicable in other professions such as Human Resource (HR) practitioners. Co-workers are the best person who can share this kind of knowledge as they have experienced it.

In a recent comparative study, Limpanitgul et al. (2014) examined the influence of co-worker support on the three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) amongst flight attendants from Thai and American airlines. The researchers found significant differences in the influences of co-worker support on organizational commitment amongst the two sample groups. The researchers also discussed the different types of commitment found to be influenced by co-worker support, and such relationships are moderated by the organization's culture.

Besides, co-worker support was also found to be associated with stress (Mukosolu, Faisal, Lekhraj & Normala, 2015). Mukosolu et al. (2015) in their study involving 511 academic and non-academic staff of Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, identified six predictors of stress, and one of them is the lack of support from co-workers. The findings revealed that stress caused by role ambiguity in a job could be reduced if the employees received adequate co-worker support. In another study which was based in the Malaysian context, Fadzilah et al. (2013) reported that co-worker support is strongly related to job performance among front-line employees. Taken together, these results suggested that our culture really recognizes the importance of co-worker support.

Although past research reported a considerable amount of the benefits and outcomes of co-worker support, either it is direct or indirect effects, the results were often based on confounded measures of support or unclassified types of support (Boyar et al., 2014). The concept of co-worker support should be measured based on the nature of the job because different types of jobs require different types of co-worker support (House, 1981). Therefore, it is essential to develop a job-specific measure of co-worker support that emphasizes the multidimensional type of support.

1.2.1 Importance of Co-worker Support for Human Resource Practitioners

Along with rapid industrial and societal transformations, Human Resource (HR) profession is one of the professions that play a pivotal role in the organizations to keep abreast with the changes. Transformations will be accompanied by the changes in values, thus requiring HR practitioners to make constant revisions in the employment

law and practices (Wooten, 2001). HR practitioners not only have to cope with new organizational demands and expectations; they also have to face new employee demands and expectations.

Wooten (2001) highlighted five types of dilemmas that occur among HR practitioners. First, HR practitioners who portray themselves as knowledgeable about employment law, yet do not have sufficient knowledge about it. Second, as HR practitioners have access to employee records and confidential information about the organization, the information tends to be violated and not be handled confidentially. Third, HR practitioners usually have resistance to settle employees' demands due to lack of understanding or inability to solve the problem. Fourth, HR practitioners have to confront the incongruence between organizational concerns and professional values. Lastly, technical ineptness among HR practitioners such as their lack of knowledge and skill to effectively diagnose HR issues, formulate and implement HR strategies.

To date, these dilemmas still occur among HR practitioners as they need to cope with continuous demands to enhance their professionalism. In dealing with these dilemmas, HR practitioners cannot work alone. They need not only support from the organization, but the most vital source of support is their 'co-workers'. The co-workers may help them to lessen the effect of such dilemmas; however, the worst case is when the co-workers may become the source of such dilemmas. Crouse, Doyle and Young (2011) conducted a study among HR practitioners, they found that co-workers support acts as an important facilitator for workplace learning to occur. Typically, HR practitioners spend more time working with their co-workers compared to their superiors. Thus, the co-workers' behaviours at the workplace may influence the HR practitioners, physically and psychologically. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand the phenomenon of co-worker support among HR practitioners.

There are three reasons that motivated the researcher to choose HR practitioners as the sample for the study. Firstly, the study intends to understand the dilemma faced by HR practitioners regarding co-worker support. Second, the findings of the study will be a significant contribution to the HR field as they deal extensively with humans, and the issues related to employee relations is never-ending. Third, research regarding co-worker support among HR practitioners globally is limited. Specifically, in the context of Malaysia, to the researcher's knowledge, there is no study that has been done among HR practitioners regarding co-worker support. Most of the past research that examined co-worker support usually chose service employees, such as teachers, lecturers, and nurses, as their sample study.

1.2.2 Co-worker Support as a Catalyst in Strengthening Employee Relations

Employee relations is one of the main concerns in the field of Human Resource Development (Swanson & Holton, 2001). In order to strengthen employee relations at the workplace, various perspectives need to be considered to explain the distinct characteristics of employee relations. These consist of the relationships between

employee and superiors/managers, employee and co-workers, employees and clients, and employee and subordinates. These relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

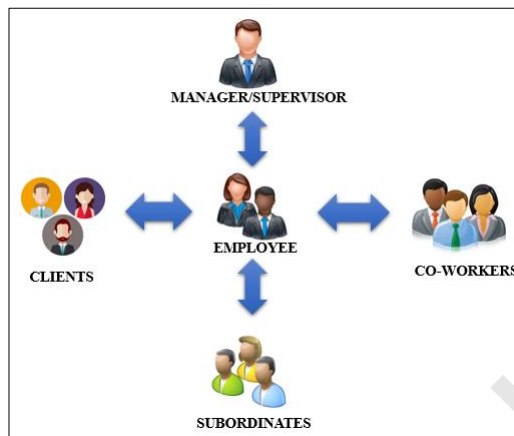


Figure 1.1: Employee Relations at the Workplace

At the workplace, aside from the time spent working with their superiors, employees spend a considerable amount of time with their co-workers. Therefore, numerous experiences are acquired from interacting with their co-workers. This interaction also allows for developing closer relationships with co-workers compared to superiors and others. The influence of co-workers is a prevalent issue among employees, where some of the co-workers can be regarded as good, while some of them can be ‘toxic’. To emphasize this point, Curnow-Chavez (2018) mentioned in an article published in Harvard Business Review that “one bad apple is all it takes to destroy a high-performing team.” She asserted that the impact of having toxic co-workers is more destructive compared to having good co-workers. Co-workers play important roles not only by ensuring a healthy environment to work in but also in strengthening employee relations as they are the source of support at the workplace. Therefore, in order to strengthen employee relations at the workplace, the relationship between employee and their co-workers should not be disregarded. Provided that a harmonious workplace is a key component of a successful organization, cooperativeness and supportive behaviour among employees is required.

1.2.3 Why Co-worker Support, not Supervisor Support?

In the context of the workplace, both supervisors and co-workers are often described as two important sources of social support because their supportive behaviour can help employees cope with job stress, promote employee well-being and enhance the professional growth and career development (Vera, Martínez, Lorente, & Chambel 2015). This study focuses only on co-worker support because prior research have shown that workers develop a close relationship with their fellow co-workers as they spend more time with them compared to their superior (Sloan, Newhouse & Thompson, 2013; Ducharme & Martin, 2000). Because of this closer relationship, the researcher believed that by examining this unique relationship, many questions related

to work-related problems could be answered. In fact, previous studies have shown that the characteristics of an individual who has close relationship tend to shape the quantity and quality of his or her social relationships on the job (Sloan, 2012; Sloan, Newhouse & Thompson, 2013).

In addition, the nature of both co-workers' roles and supervisor's role are unique. In assessing co-workers' roles, it involves a dyadic and lateral relationship in which both parties may hope for supportive behaviour from their coworkers, and they also play their role to be a supportive co-worker to others (Sloan, Newhouse & Thompson, 2013). Such a dyadic relationship may require reciprocity in supportive behavior. Ladd and Henry (2000, p.2044) asserted that "interpersonal reciprocity generally be more conditional than organizational reciprocity, meaning that we expect reciprocity from individuals but not from the institution. Another possibility is that helping one's co-workers is more discretionary than helping the organization".

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Based on the critical review, there are four major problems regarding the topic of co-worker support. Firstly, there is the lack of concrete or precise instrument to measure co-worker support available in the academic literature (e.g., Boyar, Campbell, Mosley & Carson, 2014; Kokoroko & Sanda, 2019; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2019). Second, incoherent understanding of conceptualizing co-worker support (Collins, 2014; Ding & Chang, 2019). Third, the absence of an intervention framework in strengthening the relationship among co-workers due to the utilization of generic measurements (not job-specific measurement) in previous research (e.g., Nakata et al., 2014; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2016). Fourth, there is a lack of cultural emphasis in the previous instrument measuring co-worker support (e.g., Limpanitgul, Boonchoo & Photiyarach, 2014; Mukosolu et al., 2015; Choo, 2017).

The topic is not only crucial, but it also requires a systematic and scientific study to theoretically understand the topic. The following sub-sections provide a detailed explanation about the research problems.

1.3.1 Lack of concrete and precise instrument about co-worker support

There are many instruments available in the academic literature, but if we assemble them together, most of the instruments measured co-worker support as a unidimensional measure or generic measure (e.g., Kokoroko & Sanda, 2019; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2019). Ducharme and Martin (2000) provided empirical evidence that workplace social support is not merely a unidimensional measure. According to Boyar et al. (2014), many researchers have combined social support measure into a unidimensional measure of support (e.g., Rooney & Gottlieb, 2007) and this also happened in prior research measuring co-worker support (e.g., Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Kokoroko & Sanda, 2019; Mukosolu e al., 2015; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019). The inability to distinguish the types of co-worker support will limit the ability to identify the unique attributes of co-

worker support. House et al. (1985) and Cohen and Wills (1985) argued that specific measure might have varying effects on relevant work outcomes because it depended on a particular situation and work stressors.

1.3.2 Incoherent understanding in conceptualizing co-worker support

Past research had focused primarily on the beneficial effects of co-worker support (e.g., Ducharme & Martin, 2000; Kokoroko & Sanda, 2019; Park et al., 2019; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2019). However, most of them had neglected the most vital aspect, which was the concept itself. No single definition which was all-encompassing to really explain the concept of co-worker support has been offered. Since 1981, House reported that burgeoning literature had not produced a clear definition of social support. Theorists had strived to define social support. As a result, it had been conceptualized in multiple ways. House (1981) made a significant contribution to the body of knowledge by suggesting four main dimensions of social support (emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, appraisal support). These dimensions, however, had also not been properly used to measure co-worker support because some of the previous research tend to utilize generic measure of support rather multidimensional measure (e.g., Maume & Sebastian, 2007; Minnotte, 2012a; Mukosolu e al., 2015; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019). Previous research was largely based on the deductive approach and theoretical discussions which only aimed to provide generalized definitions. The reliance on quantitative, hypothesis testing investigations of the concept, limits research and inhibits important theoretical discussion. As a result, the concept and dimension of co-worker support are still grey and inconsistent (Collins, 2014).

As explained earlier, there are various definitions of co-worker support in the literature. However, a stable definition that can fit with the initial concept of social support has yet to be achieved (Collins, 2014; Ding & Chang, 2019). In addition, those researchers seemed to only offer a tautological definition when they kept repeating the term ‘support’ without specifying the meaning of support. Even though numerous empirical research on co-worker support is continuously conducted and because the researchers did not question the acceptance of many inaccurate definitions and measurement tools that are currently available in the academic literature, the inconsistency of results can be seen in many studies of social support. As a consequence, a concern about the validity of research attempting to study a concept is not fully understood (Williams, 2005).

1.3.3 Absence of intervention framework

Third, the absence of an intervention framework in strengthening the relationship among co-workers is due to the utilization of general measurements in previous research (e.g., Nakata et al., 2014; Vera et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2016).. Thus, the practitioners are unable to identify essential types of co-worker support that need to

be considered while planning for intervention because prior research provided impractical data. Available literature had often focused on the importance of workplace relations between employer and employees and had focused extensively on organizational and supervisor support (Boyar et al., 2014; Charoensukmongko et al., 2016). Yet not much importance had been made to examine the close relationship that people develop with their co-workers and the supportive role of co-workers to employees' well-being. The relationship among co-workers is very crucial because besides working with their superiors, employees share many experiences with their co-workers and there is a high possibility that employees develop a closer bond with their fellow workers compared to with their superior. According to Sloan, Newhouse, and Thompson (2013), social relationships that employees develop with their co-workers may enhance their well-being through perceptions of increased availability of social support. In order to strengthen this unique relationship among employees and their co-workers, we need a precise and systematic intervention framework to be implemented. Failure in crafting a good intervention will result in poor operation and management.

1.3.4 Lack of cultural emphasis in the previous instrument that measuring co-worker support

Numerous studies about co-worker support have been conducted in the Asian context. However, most of the researchers adopted the definitions and instruments developed from the Western studies without acknowledging the cultural differences (e.g., Limpanitgul et al., 2014; Mukosolu et al., 2015; Choo, 2017). Being an Asian country, there are different sets of beliefs and cultures in order to define co-worker support. As the Asian culture tends to practice collectivism rather than individualism (Hofstede, 2011), co-worker support could be more prominent in the collectivist culture. According to Cohen and Swerdlik (2009), culture teaches us something about what we can expect from other people and what we can expect from ourselves. They further asserted that an individual's thoughts and behaviour are strongly influenced by culture to some extent. Researchers who were involved in instrument development have indicated increased sensitivity to the role of culture in many different aspects of measurement (Cohen & Swerdik, 2009). Moreover, most studies on workplace support used the terminology coined by House (1981) to define the concept of support (e.g., Ding & Chang, 2019; Yang et al., 2019). With the changes that often take place in the business environment, there may be possibilities of new forms or domains of support that may emerge that require studies to be conducted. Geoff Mulgan (2010) in a workshop 'The Importance of Common Metrics for Advancing Social Science Theory and Research' held in Washington D. C. in 2010, emphasized that cultural norms have a strong impact in terms of how people present their levels of well-being. Therefore, cultural perspectives should be considered while measuring the concept of co-workers support.

Considering all of these pieces of evidence, it is imperative that the topic of co-worker support to be investigated. The phenomenon itself needs to be explored and the measurement of the concept needs to be revised, developed and validated in a strategic and systematic manner. This can only be done through systematic scientific research that the researcher of this study had attempted to conduct.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The general objective and specific objectives are as follows:

1.4.1 General objective

The overall objective of this study is to explore the concept of co-worker support and to develop a co-worker support scale for Human Resource practitioners.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

Specifically, this study aims;

1. To develop a framework conceptualizing co-worker support among HR practitioners.
2. To develop a multidimensional measure of co-worker support for HR practitioners.
3. To test the validity and reliability of the co-worker support (CWS) scale.
4. To determine the level of co-worker support among HR practitioners.

1.5 Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes co-worker support?
 - What is the definition of co-worker support?
 - What are the dimensions of co-worker support?
 - How the participants experience co-worker support?
2. What are the indicators to measure co-worker support?
3. Is the co-worker support scale valid and reliable?
4. What is the level of co-worker support among HR practitioners?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study will provide a clear conceptualization of co-workers support and co-workers support scale based on the local culture of Malaysia. The 'Co-workers Support Scale' will be useful in identifying the employee's supportive behaviour that functions as a coping resource as well as strengthening workplace relationship. This scale also will indicate the frequency and quality of interactions among employees. This scale will help HRD practitioners or counsellors to pinpoint unsatisfactory dimensions of support or deficits in the employees' roles as co-workers. This scale will serve as a platform in determining appropriate interventions in strengthening employee relations at the workplace.

The outcome of this study will add to the body of knowledge, guides policy formulation and implementation and serve as a guide in the field of practice. The sections below provide in details the significance of the study to theory, policy and practice respectively.

1.6.1 Significance to the Body of Knowledge

The findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in terms of providing a clearer conceptualization of co-workers support as well as an instrument that can measure the concept. Furthermore, this study will generate a new meaning of care and concern among members of the organization. The study is expected to clarify the concept of co-workers support as an enabling phenomenon to create a harmonious relationship in the workplace. In other words, a harmonious relationship at the workplace cannot be achieved without adequate support among employees, especially from their co-workers.

Through this study, the idea of co-workers support will be seen as an organizational phenomenon which could create intellectual consciousness among scholars, researchers and practitioners. For instance, in a study conducted by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986), they examined perceived organizational support (POS). Since their study was published, the idea of perceived organizational support had received a considerable amount of attention among scholars and researchers, thus making the theory prevalent and it also becomes a reference in predicting a number of organizational outcomes, absenteeism, performance and innovation (Ladd & Henry, 2000). However, we should bear in mind that what build up an organization is the employees. Without employees, there is no such thing of organizations and the so-called 'organizational support'. It is incomplete to examine perceived support from the organization without examining it from the perspective of the employees. Therefore, the idea of co-worker support will contribute to the body of knowledge as a theory that helps in understanding social behaviour and social relationship in the organizations.

1.6.2 Significance to the Policy

The finding of this study will serve as an important input for policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. As this study aims to develop an instrument, this instrument can provide indicators that serve as an essential feedback system to guide the decision in making policy. The government or any other authorities will benefit from the findings of this study in the process of developing the employees, organizations, country and other related development programs. In addition, by exploring new dimensions and level of consciousness about the phenomenon of co-workers support, the outcome of the study would provide relevant data for the formulation of strategies that will help to increase organization brand value. As this study aims to develop an instrument based on the Malaysian context, this instrument can also be standardized in an Asian country as we share some common values. This standardization will become added-value to the policy because the standardization of

measures can help the accumulation of evidence because it permits valid comparisons across time, place, or units of observations (e.g., persons, settings, localities, organizations). Standardization also can create common understandings, when measurement intersects with policy (Hauser, 2010). Mulgan (2010) stated that “in the context of democratic politics, there is a drive to humanize data to make measure better for human experience, including addressing issues like relationship” (p. 36).

1.6.3 Significance to the Practice

The findings of this study are very useful for practitioners who are involved directly or indirectly in the fields related to the concern of this study. The administrators, managers, and trainers will benefit from this study in guiding their work. For instance, this new comprehensive measure of co-worker support will be beneficial to human resource practitioners who want to identify the causes and outcomes associated with particular types of co-worker support. For organizations, in particular, the findings on profiling and projections of how co-worker support works will be useful in steering the program for greater impacts and contributions to the organization and employee wellbeing. In addition, the finding of this study will provide a logic model or pathway that will act as an indicator of the level of co-worker support, thus will initiate needed interventions in order to lead the desired outcomes for the organizations. The pathway will also help to show various ways in which co-worker support is expected to significantly influence, both directly and indirectly, to the different targeted outcomes for employees and organizations.

In the Human Resource Development (HRD) field, there are three major areas which included training development, organizational development and career development. As far as the supportive co-workers in the workplace are concerned, this phenomenon should receive greater attention from the HR practitioners because co-worker support can act as an enabling factor in developing human potential which ultimately it can help in developing the organization. The impact of understanding this phenomenon will provide directions in nurturing positive attitudes among workers (indirectly contributes towards career development of the employees) as well as organization development as a whole. HR practitioners often overlooked this phenomenon because it seems indirect and irrelevant to the field. Due to the importance of dealing with others at the workplace, by understanding the phenomenon of co-worker support, this study can be psychologically beneficial in helping HR practitioners to increase the sense of belonging and self-esteem among employees towards their organization. On the other hand, HR practitioners who are involved in training development can utilize the findings of this study by planning training modules for support-related issues at the workplace.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Scope of the study refers to the parameters under which the study will be operating (Simon & Goes, 2013). Therefore, the scope of the study is described in three perspectives, as follows:

The phenomenon of interest:

As the study focuses on co-worker support at the workplace, both supportive and unsupportive behaviours were included in understanding the concept of co-worker support.

Sample of the study:

The study explores the concept of co-worker support among HR practitioners. The HR practitioners refer to those working in the HR department or HR unit, or those who are involved directly with HR activities. The study does not limit the selection of industry as the nature of the HR's jobs are similar regardless of types of industry and sector.

Location:

The study collects data in the Klang Valley, Malaysia which comprises of Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya and Selangor. These areas are the centre of economic activities in Malaysia. As many headquarters (HQ) are located in these areas, it becomes more accessible for the researcher to meet HR practitioners and to get their cooperation to participate in the study.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

Although this study follows established scale development methodologies, the data gathered was cross-sectional. Thus, it limited the ability to assess the causal relationship. Moreover, as the study conducted interviews and distributed survey at one point in time, it may have a potential bias among respondents. Therefore, cautionary steps were taken to reduce the potential bias, such as ensuring the anonymity of the responses and identity of the organizations involved in the study.

Besides, it is quite challenging to acquire a large number of sample that involves HR practitioners. For small organizations, they may have one to six HR employees, whereas for large organizations, they may have 10 to 150 HR employees. Therefore, the researcher has to obtain permission from many organizations to achieve an adequate number of sample study.

In terms of the sample of the study, the study did not limit any specific sub-groups of the respondents. For example, sub-groups of respondents either based on position level (e.g., managerial level vs technical level, top-level vs low level), location (rural vs urban) or ethnic group (e.g., Malay, Chinese, Indian). This is to ensure that the co-worker support scale that is developed through the study is generic as possible and applicable to any organizations in Malaysia. Therefore, generalization to any specific sub-groups would not be made. Future study may use the co-worker support scale to assess co-worker support among sub-groups as mentioned above.

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