

EXAMINING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING, PERCEIVED  
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES  
IN VIETNAMESE SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effect of employee engagement in the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and employee performance outcomes in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Using a cross-sectional survey design on a sample of 425 employees, four salient findings have been reported from the study. First, employee perceptions of organizational learning and organizational support were related to their citizenship behaviors through their engagement. Second, employee perceptions of organizational learning were related to their organizational citizenship behaviors, controlling for organizational support. Third, employee perceptions of organizational support were related to turnover intention, controlling for organizational learning. Fourth, employee perceptions of organizational learning and organizational support were not related to their intent to turnover through their engagement. Important theoretical implications include the combination of self-determination theory and job demands-resources model to account for the employee engagement phenomenon in Vietnam's business context and systems thinking in designing for organizational effectiveness and employee development. Research implications and recommendations are given in regard of research substantiveness and possible alternative research designs and methods. The current study makes a two-fold contribution to practice. First, drawing primarily on system dynamics, learning, citizenship and engagement together frame a different way to view Vietnam as a society and SMEs as business organizations. Second, human resource

development as a field of study and practice is suggestive of innovative approaches in its domains to developing and promoting SMEs in Vietnam. To wrap up, the original value offered by this dissertation is that of the first study on discovery of Vietnam's SMEs on organizational learning, employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior in the unique Vietnamese business context.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my lifelong beloved. First, I dedicate this to my mother, whose unconditional love and support have made me the person I am today. She has always been beside and behind me in my life decisions. Second, I dedicate this to my husband, Chí, for his care and love as well as compliments in every stage of my marriage life with him, especially the doctoral journey. My sons, Minh and Huy, are the persons I dedicate this next to because they are supportive and fun during my parental life with them. They are a deep source of my aspirations and achievements. Special dedication goes in loving memory of my father-in-law who always encouraged us to study and progress further in life. I remember him with a kind smile and a gentle spirit. Now my mother-in-law continues the legacy of her husband with their strong cravings for diligence, kindness, and integrity. Last but not least, I dedicate this dissertation to my father, brother, and sister-in-law, for their continued support and love, in their own way, that keep me moving on in my learning journey and life. Above all, it is my home country Vietnam that I am whole-heartedly dedicated to, for its betterment and prosperity; my doctoral home destination America, for having nurtured me professionally.

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(Huyen Thi Minh Van)

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*"Learning is a journey, not a destination."* (Anonymous)

## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### **Contributors**

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professor Nafukho [advisor] and Professor Dirani and Professor Irby of the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development and Professor Kwok of the Department of Educational Psychology and Professor Welch of the Center for Executive Development and the Department of Management.

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## NOMENCLATURE

CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EE	Employee Engagement
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSO	General Statistics Office of Vietnam
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRDS	Human Resource Development Strategy (of Vietnam)
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam
OCB	Organizational Citizenship Behavior
OL	Organizational Learning
POS	Perceived Organizational Support
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SEDS	Socio-Economic Development Strategy (of Vietnam)
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TI	Turnover Intention
WB	World Bank

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The chapter includes the background of the study, followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, and significance of the study. Next, definitions of terms, theoretical framework and conceptual model, research questions and hypotheses are discussed. Last, limitations, delimitations, and organization of the study are provided.

#### **Background of the Study**

Vietnam firmly aspires by 2035 to be a modern and industrialized nation moving toward becoming a prosperous, equitable, and democratic society (Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Article 3, 2013). These aspirations and the supporting policy and institutional agenda stand on three pillars: balancing economic prosperity with environmental sustainability, promoting equity and social inclusion, and bolstering the state's capacity and accountability (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016). Among the key transformations that will help Vietnam achieve its goals for 2035, the transformations that relate to the first pillar of balancing economics and environment focus on the private sector, the country's technological and innovation capacity, and reforms of human resource training and development (WB & MPI, 2016).

In the private sector, the dominance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is noticeable. They account for approximately 97% of all businesses, 51% of employment, and 40% of gross domestic product (GDP) (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2017). SMEs are the backbone and driving force of the Vietnamese economy. However, they

are facing challenges such as stagnant labor productivity, lack of long-term vision, low skills of human resources, and an increasing turnover rate, among others (WB & MPI, 2016). Noticeably, the quality of Vietnamese human resources ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in 12 Asian countries, with a score of 3.76 out of the World Bank's 10-point measure (WB, 2018). Locating SMEs in the general context of Vietnam aiming to become modern and industrial in 15 years, the above difficulties of key economic organizations like Vietnam SMEs certainly would hinder the development of the country and achievement of the grand 2035 aspirations.

Organizations including SMEs are always on a constant path to achieve organizational excellence through improved effectiveness and performance, thereby creating perceived value for customers, promoting employees' profound commitment, and gaining competitive advantage (Thor & Johnson, 2011). In essence, human resources play a critical role in deciding the success or failure of organizations, be it profit or non-profit, service or manufacturing, big or small. Human resources, thus, are considered indispensable capital for businesses; the attention in growing human capital through training and development initiatives has become the norm for all organizations, particularly the private sector (Becker, 1993).

In the context of SMEs in a developing country like Vietnam, long-term human capital development is not only important but also challenging in a dynamic economy worldwide. According to Barbour-Lacey and Hoang (2014), Vietnam firms are facing increasing turnover rates due to fierce competition in the job market, apart from shortage in acute skills and talent. While businesses in Vietnam have come to accept high



turnover as a cost of doing business, they still work hard to find ways to increase employees' stay time. In so doing, higher salary is certainly an attraction; yet more importantly, long-term strategy should be geared toward building employee loyalty and engagement (Barbour-Lacey & Hoang, 2014).

In alignment, Nguyen (2015a, 2015b) has proposed the concept of “*Tâm thế*”, where the underlying philosophy, principles, and practices could be a potential driver for growing human capital in Vietnam. “*Tâm thế*” is a state of mind that involves two types of deep understandings (two *thấu*) and one attitude (one *ý*). Two *thấu* are understandings that employees work to bring benefits for themselves and that genuinely doing their work leads to enhancement of thinking capacity and working ability. *Ý* consists of good awareness, work ethics, and attitude that shed light on such *thấu*. Lack of “*Tâm thế*” in workforce would result in failure to achieve positive employee outcomes. The conceptualization of “*Tâm thế*” has a role to do with the current study's theorized constructs.

The current study's constructs are developed in the West and are going to be explored in the East, specifically in an Asian context like Vietnam. Whether these constructs have been culture-variant is not the focus of this study. Nevertheless, to the observation of the researcher of this study, the concept of “*Tâm thế*” above has potentially and importantly covered the shades of meaning of several theorized constructs, such as the interaction and togetherness of learning, engagement, and citizenship, which is either understudied or under-explored in Vietnam. The succeeding

sections are the brief descriptions of the key constructs concerning the nature and makeup of the current study.

### *Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement is a construct that is believed to have started with Kahn's (1990) qualitative theory-generating article on psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). From the practitioners' perspective, Macey and Schneider's (2008) discussion about the meaning of employee engagement covered the two facets, individual sense of purpose and focused energy, seen in the eyes of others in the form of specific behaviors like adaptability, effort, and persistence. Shuck (2010) examined a hypothesized employee engagement model by exploring the associations between various organizational antecedents and outcomes. Employee engagement has been studied as an independent variable, a dependent variable, or a mediator having effect on work-oriented relationships, thus forming close connection with organizational performance and employees' extra-role behaviors (Kim et al., 2013; Kwon et al., 2016; Saks, 2006). All of these above studies emphasize the importance of having an engaged workforce for organizations.

Among many studied antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement, organizational learning and perceived organizational support have been assumed to have an impact on employee engagement and employee performance outcomes, namely

organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention; with employee engagement mediating these relationships.

### *Organizational Learning*

Organizational learning refers to a process and mechanism whereby learning of an organization and by an organization takes place in a collective and organized way (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000; Sun, 2003). Interestingly, researchers on organizational learning attest to the considerable interest engendered by ‘organizational learning’ and ‘learning organization’. While learning occurs in the organization which is a social entity composed of more than one person, the learning organization centers on continuous learning and improving of an organization (Marsick & Watkins, 1994; Senge, 1990; Sun, 2003). The two concepts combine to make the study of learning organization possible in the sense that organizational learning encompasses collective learning and improvement aiming to construct a learning organization (Marquardt, 2011). Organizational learning requires different mechanisms to convert information to actionable knowledge at systemic levels of individuals, teams, and organization (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000). Team performance in a learning organization is improved when assessing the mediating effect of employee engagement (Song et al., 2014). The ultimate goal of an organization is to create an engaged workforce, not just engaged individuals (Macey et al., 2009); thus, organizational learning enables interactions and dynamics among the three levels of individuals, teams, and the organization.

### *Perceived Organizational Support*

Perceived organizational support, along with organizational learning, is considered an independent variable in the current study's theorized model. This concept is thought of as employees' perception about the organization's valuation of employees' contribution and care for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Based on organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), it is assumed that the employee-organization relationship is strengthened through the trade of positive outcomes between the employees and their organizations. Perceived organizational support was seen to be related to extra-role performance of employees: When employees perceive a high level of organizational support, they tend to go the extra mile in their work (Chen et al., 2009). In the current study, perceived organizational support is hypothesized to be a resource to engage employees, thus they tend to exhibit more citizenship behaviors and lower their turnover intention.

### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Organizational citizenship behavior is a complex phenomenon and an important aspect of human behavior at work characterized by altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and courtesy (Organ, 1988). A good organizational citizen goes out of his or her way to help peers and develop themselves into a supportive team member. In Somech and Drach-Zahavy's (2004) research, it was hypothesized that organizational learning would be positively related to citizenship behaviors toward the organization (OCB-O) and the ones toward other individuals in the organization (OCB-I); the findings confirmed these hypotheses. On a similar note, Islam, Khan, and Bukhari

(2016) conducted their study in the banking and insurance sector in Malaysia and found the association between organizational learning culture and organizational citizenship behavior as well as turnover intention. As for the employee engagement –organizational citizenship behavior relationship, engagement (the investment of an individual's self into a role) mediated the relationships between the independent variables and job performance dimensions including organizational citizenship behavior (Rich et al., 2010).

#### *Turnover Intention*

Turnover intention (TI) has been thought to be related to OL and EE. TI refers to an employee's voluntary intent to leave the organization (Saks, 2006) and is more predictive of the actual quitting action in the workforce than any other variable (Berry & Morris, 2008). The reasons for employees not to stay with their jobs could come from uncontrollable factors (economic recession or industrial structural changes); yet more often, the factors within the realm of an organization (internal working environment, conflict with peers and supervisors, poor corporate climate) (Allen, 2008; Berry & Morris, 2008; Lockwood, 2007). These studies also indicated a negative relationship between TI and EE. On the other hand, Joo (2010) investigated the impact of perceived organizational learning culture on organizational commitment and eventually TI. While organizational learning influenced organizational commitment, organizational commitment in turn affected TI negatively, in which organizational commitment was defined as the psychological connection between the employees and their organization.

Similarly, TI was found to be negatively influenced by organizational learning culture and job satisfaction (Egan et al., 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since Kahn's (1990) foundational work on personal engagement and disengagement at work was published, research on employee engagement has become abundant, being studied by academicians and proprietary organizations. Bailey et al. (2017) in their narrative analysis of 214 articles about the meaning, antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement uncovered six definitions of employee engagement and nine validated scales, five antecedents, and two main outcomes. Among these variables, organizational learning construct has not been researched as much as learning at the individual and team levels (Bailey et al., 2017). In the business setting in Vietnam, it holds true that both organizational learning and perceived organizational support have received much less scholarly attention than other variables.

Furthermore, employee engagement studies have been conducted across different countries and cultures around the world, as well as in various industries. However, employee engagement research in Vietnam has been limited to the Gallup engagement survey, which is more of a measure of management practices (Saks & Gruman, 2014). An employee engagement measure more inclined to perceptions of the employees would be of immediate need for Vietnam at present. A secondary objective of the current study is to reflect the true meaning of employee engagement from Vietnamese employees' perspectives juxtaposed to employee engagement in global research.

As for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam, organizational learning, perceived organizational support, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention have not received due attention with respect to research rigor. Actually, research on turnover intention has a comparatively larger amount than the other variables. It might have been that turnover rate in Vietnamese businesses is soaring and becomes a prominent tendency (Barbour-Lacey & Hoang, 2014). However, studies on organizational learning and citizenship behavior are scant, whereas employee engagement-labelled research focuses mainly on work motivation, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, or job involvement. These constructs are considered distinctively different from the construct of employee engagement despite superficial similarities (Macey et al., 2009). By and large, development of a conceptual model grounded on a solid theoretical foundation where employee engagement mediates the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organization support and employee performance outcome variables (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention) in business organizations in Vietnam has not been in existence.

From the background perspective, the reality facing Vietnamese SMEs include low efficiency, high turnover, and insufficient HR quality. Moreover, current SMEs studies in Vietnam focus more on analyzing them as economic rather than social units. When SMEs are put in a broader social context, they are operating in a country being considered a learning society (Pham, 2013), and they can aim to become learning organizations. Investment in developing human resources and human capital in Vietnamese SMEs is aligned with the global tendency. More specifically, employee

engagement and citizenship behavior, along with learning at the organizational level, would serve as a solution to current challenges faced by the Vietnamese SMEs.

With all the reasons mentioned above, this study is intended to fill out the knowledge gaps that have created a void of information to guide research and practice relating to employee engagement, organizational learning, and organizational citizenship behavior in business organizations, particularly SMEs, in Vietnam.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating effect of employee engagement (EE) in the relationships between organizational learning (OL), perceived organizational support (POS) and employee performance outcomes including organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following two research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:



*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

These above hypotheses will be revisited with supporting theoretical foundation in Chapter II.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the context of Vietnamese small and medium enterprises (SMEs), employee engagement was studied. The advantages of SMEs encompass the ability to learn and adjust quickly, high level of operational flexibility, and a national economic driving force (Wilde, 2011). However, being equipped with learning capability is not sufficient; employees need to be engaged for all cognitive, emotional, and most importantly behavioral levels at their work, with peers, and to the organization as a whole. Deep employee engagement would lead to more organizational citizenship behaviors and lower turnover intention. Therefore, employee engagement is the focus of this study.

Overall surveying of literature regarding antecedents and consequences of employee engagement in Vietnam revealed several insightful results. First, there have existed studies on similar constructs of employee engagement, not the employee engagement construct itself. Second, employee engagement research in Vietnam is limited to the Gallup-Q12 survey. Third, the antecedents in engagement studies have covered other constructs, but not yet learning-focused; while the consequences of engagement dominantly centered around turnover rate, not even turnover intention.

The findings of this study would be considered novel because they emphasized organizational learning and perceived organizational support as organizational resources and employee engagement as a mediator in the relationship between the organizational resources and employee performance outcomes. Specifically, Vietnamese SMEs could benefit from the findings by focusing on creating an engaged workforce, via cultivation of organizational learning capability and perceived organizational support, to result in positive employee outcomes such as tangible organizational citizenship behaviors and decreased turnover intention. Thus, the SMEs that apply the recommended approach from this study would be able to create an engaged workforce at the individual employee level and the organizational level. The learning and supportive SMEs with high level of employee engagement contributed to social development via corporate citizens who are willing to go an extra mile for the common good. In terms of research, this study would help uncover critical areas in human resource development and management that have not been explored deeply, one of which is employee engagement especially in Vietnamese context.

These proposed solutions would change the current practice of Vietnamese SMEs in operation. Employee engagement embedded in the cultural and work-related context of Vietnam could be proposedly defined by the author of the current study as *“the work-oriented combined cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy of employees aimed at the organizational success and personal development, as a result of individual self-determination and organizational resources”*. An engaged workforce as a result of organizational resources and individual self-determination would result in declined

turnover intention and more apparent organizational citizenship behaviors. Therefore, such organizational workforce would be developed for intended productivity and quality in societal and economic terms in Vietnamese SMEs.

Researchers, especially in Vietnam, would have an opportunity to explore and strengthen their scholarship on employee engagement, organizational learning and perceived organizational support and related employee performance outcomes in the Vietnamese business settings. Employee engagement was supposed to intervene in the relationships among organizational learning, perceived organizational support and expected outcomes of employees. Job-related outcomes involve higher discretionary effort and lower intent to turnover. Furthermore, more citizenship behaviors at the organizational setting incur. Such novel scholarship has informed practice for Vietnamese SMEs to invest in promoting learning and support from the organizational perspective and in enhancing engagement in their employees.

### **Definitions of Terms**

In this section, the researcher defined all the key terms central to her study, which are used throughout the study. Both the constitutive and operational definitions are utilized for easier direction of understanding the terms.

#### *Employee Engagement*

This term refers to as “an active, work-related positive psychological state (Nimon et al., 2016; Parker & Griffin, 2011; Shuck et., 2016; Shuck & Reio, 2014) operationalized by the intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional and behavioral energy (Shuck & Wollard, 2010)” (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 2).

To realize the grand purpose set forth in this study, EE is defined as the *active work-oriented* combined cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy of employees aimed at the *organizational success* and *personal development*, as a result of individual self-determination and organizational resources.

#### *Mediator*

Mediator, or mediating variable, or intervening variable, carries the causal effect of a predictor on an outcome variable. The researcher attempts to estimate “the extent to which the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is direct or indirect via the mediator” (Iacobucci, 2008, p. 2).

In this study, employee engagement (EE) is assumed to be a mediator in the relationships among organizational learning (OL), perceived organizational support (POS) and employee performance outcomes in the context of SMEs in Vietnam. These outcomes take the form of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI).

#### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is understood as intentional employee behaviors that are extra-role and discretionary in nature. Such behaviors help improve the functioning of the organization, whether typically recognized or rewarded or not (Dalal, 2005; Organ, 1988; Organ, 1997; Schnake, 1991).

In this study, OCB refers to a specific behavior or a set of behaviors displayed by the employees in SMEs in Vietnam, which are basically work or non-work related and voluntary in nature, toward other co-workers and the organization. These behaviors are

not contractual tasks of the employees; instead represent their willingness to make the workplace a helpful community. OCB is made possible as a result of the embedded organizational learning and support prevalent in the SME and the employees themselves being deeply engaged at work.

### *Organizational Learning*

Organizational learning (OL) is defined as “the capability of an organization to process knowledge ... and to modify its behavior to reflect the new cognitive situation, with a view to improving its performance” (Jerez-Goméz et al., 2005, p. 716).

Organizational learning is seen as a dynamic process based on knowledge, which moves along the different levels: from the individual to the group level, and then to the organizational level and back again (Jerez-Goméz et al., 2005).

Organizational learning is operationally understood as the ability of an SME to continuously involve members in the learning and behavioral change process. OL covers aspects like managerial commitment, systems thinking, openness and experimentation, and knowledge transfer and integration. The act and process of learning at the organizational level contribute to transform such an SME into a learning organization perceived as a supportive business entity.

### *Perceived Organizational Support*

This concept is thought of as employees’ perception about the organization’s valuation of employees’ contribution and care for their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986).

Operationally defined as support from the organization perceived by an employee in an SME in Vietnam, this concept covers different activities and initiatives of the SME to appreciate the employee's contribution and attention to their welfare. The ultimate purpose of such support is to make their employees engaged and show positive outcomes at work.

#### *Turnover Intention*

Turnover intention is referred to as an employee's voluntary intent to leave their organization (Saks, 2006) and predicts the actual turnover much more than any other variables (Berry & Morris, 2008).

In this study, turnover intention reveals an employee's intention to leave an SME to work for another company, possibly because of the lack of support resources and/or their being less engaged at work.

### **Theoretical Framework**

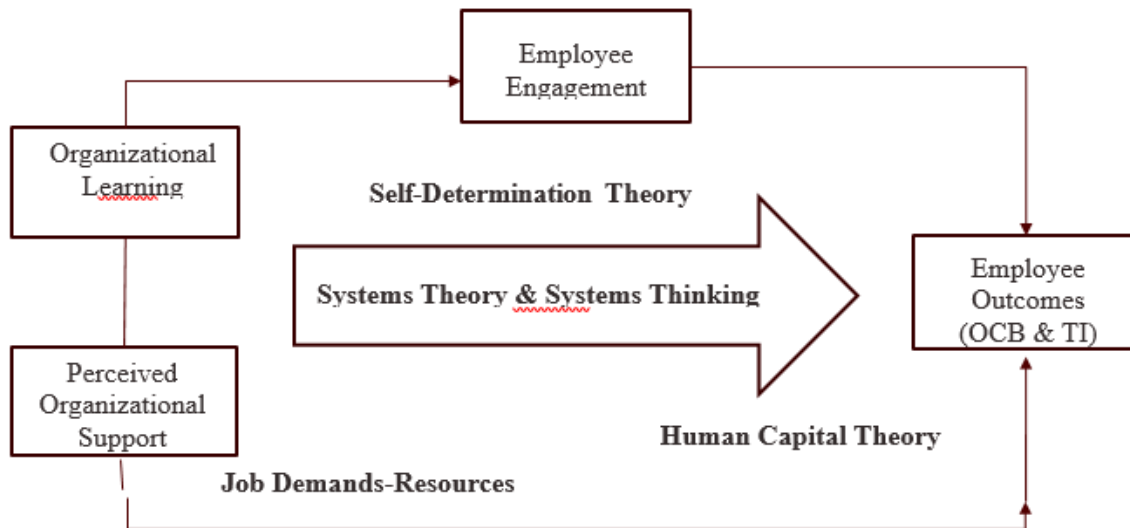
All of the constructs and their relationships proposed above are conceptualized on a firm theoretical foundation. Four theories are adopted to inform the study including the Systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968) and Systems thinking (Senge, 1990), Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), Job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), and Human capital theory (Becker, 1964). The first two theories primarily provide the rationale for the selection of systems thinking in an organizational context and subsequently organizational learning capability (OL) to be the independent variable. Self-determination theory proposes two forms of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, that account for the EE construct. Job demands-

resources (JD-R) model posits that organizational support (POS) can act as job resources to create conditions for meeting increasing job demands. Human capital theory, with focus on human as capital and the role of investment in education and training for employee improved performance, lays the background for connecting OL and POS to the three outcome variables. Details on the four theories will be analyzed in Chapter II.

On the basis of extensive literature review and firm reliance on the mentioned theoretical framework, the researcher developed the following conceptual model. Each construct and their possible relationships will be briefly described. Then a series of other relevant research issues will be addressed.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*



*Source.* Compilation by the researcher of the current study

Theoretical integration has informed the hypothesized conceptual model connecting systemic support mechanism via self-determined engaged employees to



unleash human potential for better organizational effectiveness and intra-and-extra role performance. In particular, the theories of Systems and Systems thinking (Senge, 1990; von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968), Self-Determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), Job Demands-Resources, and Human Capital (Becker, 1964) have formed a theoretical background for the emergence of a conceptual model of organizational learning (OL) – perceived organizational support (POS) - employee engagement (EE) – organizational citizenship (OCB) and turnover intention (TI).

### **Limitations**

There are potential limitations that are not under the researcher's control in this study including generalizability level and self-report data. Firstly, the researcher utilized cluster sampling techniques for the SME population in the capital city, Hanoi. These enterprises were grouped pertinent to business sectors: a) agriculture, forestry and fishery, b) industry and construction, and c) trade and service. Because of limited access, the future findings may be generalized but just suggested to a larger population of SMEs in Vietnam (Babbie, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Secondly, the sole use of single source self-report data (perceptions of Vietnamese SMEs' employees) presents a potential limitation due to common method variance (Avolio et al., 1991). It means the overlap of variance between constructs as a result of using the same method leading to the inflated relationships among the variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A possible solution to reduce this limitation is link self-report measures with objective measures (i.e. linking turnover intention with actual turnover absences) to resist more to biases (Spector, 2006).

## **Delimitations**

Based on the purpose and scope of this study, the researcher imposed a boundary on the population choice and variables of interest. First, only Vietnamese SMEs, not all for-profit organizations in general, were chosen to be investigated because the SME population's characteristics suit the purpose of the study. Second, the selection of organizational learning, perceived organizational support, employee engagement and the two employee performance outcomes are variables of interest for two reasons. The researcher selected them first through the literature review screening and second on the researcher's intention to put in practice – Vietnamese businesses – research on learning and performance, the two key domains in human resource development (HRD) – the researcher's major and focused interest.

## **Organization of the Rest of the Study**

This chapter included the background to the problem, problem statement, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and definition of terms. The theoretical framework, conceptual model, research questions and hypotheses, methodology and methods, limitations and delimitations were also discussed. A review of literature that supports this study is provided in Chapter II. Chapter III is to be focused on the research methods that were used to conduct the study. Chapter IV will be the results. Chapter V wraps the dissertation up with summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE\*

Since the research concerning organizational learning, perceived organizational support, employee engagement, and the selected employee outcomes in the Vietnamese small and medium business setting remains scant, this study would be of good contribution in relation to the purpose of this study. This study aims at examining the extent to which employee engagement (EE) mediates the relationships between organizational learning (OL) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) in Vietnamese SMEs. Therefore, this chapter will provide a succinct synopsis of the current literature that establishes the relevance of the study problem. A brief explanation of review strategy is given. Then a thorough review of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement is provided, based on which a theoretical framework is formulated. From that a conceptual model connecting the variables of interest is hypothesized. These variables are studied in the context of the Vietnamese SMEs and relevant research. Major themes from the stages of literature review emerged from review critique.

#### **Introduction to Literature Search Strategy**

Overall, the literature review process for the study is divided into two main stages. The first round involves the search for the antecedents and outcomes for

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employee engagement (EE). The second-round review sought all the relevant literature concerning the variables selected in the first stage and their relationships. The rationale for these review rounds goes back to the problem statement and research purpose of - examining the effect of EE mediating the relationships between and among the other variables – organizational learning (OL), perceived organizational support (POS), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) - with regard to the local context of Vietnamese SMEs.

*Screening for Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement\**

In the first round, an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2005; York, 2008) was conducted to obtain an overall summary of the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement. The researcher utilized her affiliated university's library database of Business Source Complete and a common search engine Google Scholar to search for scholarly peer-reviewed journals, research reviews, and articles. The key search terms and combinations of search terms included *employee engagement OR work engagement OR worker engagement AND antecedents AND consequences*. Time frame for the research ranged from 1990 to 2016 because Kahn (1990) published an article being regarded as foundational for employee engagement research focusing on personal engagement. The overall results received was 235 articles. After sieving those articles through their abstracts and conclusions, some via recommendations for future research also (i.e. help the researcher of the current study find certain alignment for her own

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study), 54 articles served right for the current study's research problem and purpose. The 54 articles were selected because they were directly or indirectly related to the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement.

*Selecting Theories and Model with Related Variables to SMEs in Vietnam*

The transitional stage marked the selection of four relevant theories to inform the hypothesized conceptual model that has two independent (organizational learning and perceived organizational support) and two dependent variables (employee performance outcomes of organizational citizenship behaviors and turnover intention). In particular, the researcher of the current study resorted to other widely used databases such as EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, and PsyINFO, etc. to grasp the relevant literature on a wider scale. Further, the researcher of the current study used other primary sources like dissertations and books (i.e. Proquest Dissertations and Theses Global, Google Books, etc.) to ensure validity of the research gap that the current study aims to target. Obviously, key search terms could also encompass *job engagement*, *organizational engagement*, and *social/intellectual engagement* because they might provide some comparative background for which *employee engagement* has an opportunity to show its unique focal point.

In the second round, via ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global and Google Scholar and based on the contextual factors both in practice and research on Vietnamese SMEs, the researcher selected four variables: organizational learning, perceived organizational support, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention. Organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS), the

independent variables, were understudied as research constructs for Vietnam. The two dependent variables included organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) – a prominent trait of collectivistic cultures like in Asia (Qureshi, 2015; Wang et al., 2013) and turnover intention (TI) – being studied to a relatively adequate level in Vietnam. More importantly, research on the relationships among these variables are to be analyzed and synthesized to obtain insights on the relationships hypothesized in Vietnamese SMEs' circumstances.

### **Literature Review Results and Critiques\***

As the strategy has been set for literature review process above, this section will cover the results along with critiques of such reviews. The researcher of the current study will analyze the antecedent and consequence groups of employee engagement; then related theories will be described, based on which a hypothesized conceptual model is proposed.

#### *Antecedents of Employee Engagement*

Antecedents of employee engagement are categorized into three main groups: internal environmental elements, job-related factors, and the employee-related aspects.

#### **Internal Environment**

The literature describing determinants of employee engagement belongs to this category because they unfold the corporate supportive environment as enabling resources for learning, growth and voice opportunities, business culture and strategy, and

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internal relationships. First for learning environment, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) proposed a process model of employee engagement in a sample of 625 employees and their supervisors throughout various organizations in Israel. In this model, those participants were engaged in their work since a learning climate, defined as corporate activities benefiting employees to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge, was made possible for subsequent extra-role behaviors to occur (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). At the organizational level, opportunities for learning was also considered a strong factor leading to employee engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011) when the authors listed out in their structured review article 42 antecedents, individual- and organization-wide. On a similar vein, Sarti (2014) accounted greater learning opportunities as a job resource to engagement at work for 167 caregivers in nine long-term care facilities in Italy. Second for advancement opportunities, Newman et al. (2011) and Rothman and Rothman (2010) found them to be one of the best predictors for employee engagement/work passion and more specifically three work engagement dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption), respectively. Third, perceptions of direct voice practices can increase work engagement, which is a finding of a conceptual paper by Kwon et al. (2016). Therefore, a corporate environment whereby enhanced learning, growth and voice practices exist is important for employees to engage in their work.\*

More profoundly, the shared culture and relevant business strategy play a role of promoting engagement, as evident in a series of research articles. In Reis et al. (2016)

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paper, four types of cultures (hierarchical, clan, market, and adhocracy) were studied for a sample of 208 professionals working in a variety of industries in Brazil. Results indicated that cultures emphasizing stability, order and control (hierarchical and market cultures) were negatively related to authenticity at work, which in turn led to more engaged employees at work (Reis et al., 2016). Other articles mentioned corporate social responsibility (CSR) to be a business initiative that was highly related to engagement (Valentine et al., 2015) and a sustainable business strategy, especially internal CSR – CSR within the organization, that has more influence on engaging employees as compared to external CSR – CSR practices outside of the organization (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). CSR and culture were two of the 21 organizational antecedents cited in Wollard and Shuck’s (2011) review, too. Another strategy via the implementation of balanced scorecard indirectly brought about enhanced employee engagement (Upadhyay & Palo, 2013). Here comes conclusively a close relationship between corporate culture and strategy and employee engagement.\*

A more dominating trend in the literature review on the antecedents of employee engagement involves the internal relationships, which also overlap to some extent the previous tendency for corporate culture and strategy. By “internal relationships”, sometimes being termed “psychological climate”, the researcher meant employees constantly receive help from their leaders, supervisors, and co-workers – the relationships and interaction between members of the organization. Like in Saks (2006),

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under the light of social exchange theory, perceived organizational support predicted both job and organization engagement in a study of 102 employees working in different jobs and organizations. Besides, Agarwal's (2014) paper examined the impact of social exchange relationships on innovative work behavior, in which perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange were found to be positive associated with work engagement as a mediator. Moreover, psychological safety climate was supportive for engagement of the organization's members meaning it preceded job resources to have an impact on organizational performance via motivational pathway (i.e. work engagement) in a sample of 291 Malaysian employees (Idris et al., 2011). There are other studies advocating the positive relationships between psychological climate and employee engagement. For example, George and Joseph's (2015) paper on a sample of 433 employee working in travel organizations in Bangalore (India), Shuck et al.'s (2011) survey of 283 employees in six industries in the U.S., and Bakker et al.'s (2011) conceptual paper.

### **Job-Related Factors\***

Another group of predictors for employee engagement relate closely to the job itself, from umbrella category of job characteristics to a specific aspect of job autonomy. First, in his study of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, Saks (2006) came up with two dimensions of engagement, organization engagement and job engagement and found that job characteristics was associated with job engagement.

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Wollard and Shuck (2011) also listed this factor in organizational antecedents to employee engagement. Such a relationship between job characteristics and employee engagement existed in another study of 250 respondents in the IT sector in Jordan (David & Bose, 2014).

More specifically, job autonomy is one the five core characteristics of any job (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) that are often mentioned in relation to the common term of “job resources”. Job autonomy referred to “the freedom and independence” that people have in deciding how to implement their jobs (as cited in Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011, p. 92). According to the authors, job autonomy was linked to work engagement in a positive manner when they investigated 279 hospitality frontline employees in two types of service organizations in Norway (Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). Similarly, Newman et al. (2011) asserted job autonomy as an antecedent to measure work passion/engagement that Nimon et al. (2010) developed in their Work Cognition Inventory.

### **Employee-Related Aspect\***

Personal resources are aspects of the self that generally linked to resiliency and refer to the individuals’ sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully (Hobfoll et al., 2003). Using data from three Romanian organizations (n=259), Sulea et al. (2012) hypothesized that conscientiousness, an important personal resource, was positively related to work engagement. Specifically,

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conscientious employees characterized by strong responsibility, organizational skills, and steadiness were more likely to drive their energy into their work (Sulea et al., 2012). Authors of other research and conceptual papers have also postulated dispositional characteristics (i.e. conscientiousness and other personalities) as a common driver of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Christian et al., 2011).

Another aspect of employee-related dimensions for engagement, still unexplored deeply in employee engagement research, lies in its connection with spirituality. Roof (2015) conducted a cross-sectional study to examine self-reported individual spirituality with 124 usable surveys collected from a snowballing convenience sample. He found that spirituality was associated with the vigor and dedication, but not absorption, dimensions of the UWES-9 engagement scale by Schaufeli et al. (2006). Before Roof's (2015) empirical research, Saks (2011) proposed a model of workplace spirituality and employee engagement, in which he described the importance of workplace spirituality for meaningfulness at work and for engagement maintenance and generalization.\*

In conclusion, drivers of employee engagement through the first stage of literature review include three categories of internal environment of the organization, factors relating to the job itself, and employee-related aspects. In relation to Kahn's (1990) pioneering research about personal engagement at work, these antecedent groups have developed what he termed "psychological conditions" of meaningfulness, safety, and availability to account for personal engagement or disengagement in the workplace.

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Subsequent research has explored the interplay of these conditions and conceptual connections in different organizational and national contexts.

### *Consequences of Employee Engagement\**

Engaged employees have brought about significant changes in the workplace in the forms of outstanding intra-role behaviors, extra-role behaviors, and personal development and career growth (Saks, 2006). These broad categories of employee engagement consequences will be delineated further below.

#### **Intra-Role Behaviors**

When it comes to behaviors related to employees' roles, performance tops the list as the bottom line for corporate survival and development. In the context of quality management, quality performance was the dependent variable in Wickramasinghe and Perera's (2014) investigation on the engagement-quality performance association using a random sample of 255 shop-floor workers in manufacturing firms in Sri Lanka. Three dimensions of quality performance were technically inclusive of manufacturing performance, conformance, and first-time pass rate as manifested in the attitudes and expectations of employees. They concluded that fully engaged employees would enhance quality performance on the condition that extra-role behaviors were deployed. In their research, Idris et al. (2011) also emphasized a positive association between engagement and work performance, reasoning that the positive emotions, physically healthy, and the level of focus and energy possessed and experienced by engaged

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workers had made them to explore novel situations and new skills in problem solving as well as be able to perform tasks better.

To cope with changes inherent in business operation, innovation is essential to stay profitable and competitive for any business organization. Being a state of well-being at work, work engagement enhanced innovativeness of individual employees from the job demands and resources perspective (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007). In particular, employee innovativeness was a complex behavior of idea generation, promotion, and realization aiming at meeting organizational goals in novel ways (Kanter, 1988; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Since innovativeness is so context- and problem-specific, organizations were increasingly dependent on their employees' willingness and voluntary effort to go to great lengths needed for creative and innovative solutions an engaged workforce must possess (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007).

Intention turnover (or the opposite intent to stay) is a common organizational intra-role outcome often associated with employee engagement. Intention to turnover is a powerful predictor of an employee's future behavior (Carmeli & Wiesberg, 2006) and more directly related to the job. Several engagement models suggested an empirical link between engagement and turnover intention, meaning an engaged employee would be less likely to leave an organization than a disengaged one (Burke et al., 2013; Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2011; Taewon et al., 2011).\*

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### **Extra-Role Behaviors\***

Eldor and Harpaz (2016) studied 625 employees and their supervisors in Israel and found employee engagement, as “simultaneous and holistic investment in the self (physical, emotional, and cognitive)” (p. 217) resulted in extra-role performance including proactivity, knowledge sharing, creativity, and adaptivity. Moreover, extra-role behaviors were analyzed in the positive and negative groups (Sulea et al., 2012); the positive group consisting of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was associated with engagement. OCB is also one of the most common outcomes of engagement at work in a lot of research (George & Joseph, 2015; Kataria, Garg, & Rastogi, 2012; Saks, 2006, Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2014). In higher education field, with a sample of 275 academics in two universities in Egypt, the findings supported this positive relationship, too (Shusha and Abdelkader, 2016).

### **Personal Development and Growth**

Once employees are engaged, they will find ways to reduce levels of family-work conflict, as shown in (Burke et al., 2013) when they sampled 549 frontline service employees in top 15 hotels in Turkey. They found that higher work engagement led to lower conflict between work and family. Another important outcome for employees being engaged was the amount invested in their individual psychological capital (Barnes, Collier, & Robinson, 2013). Data were collected from service employees working across high (395 people) and low (319) customer contexts. The results illustrated how engaged

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service providers could create their personal resources, as psychological capital was regarded these resources and characterized people's efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. The review also indicated an important result of EE as job satisfaction (Saks, 2006) linked to career commitment (Barnes & Collier, 2013). Specifically, job satisfaction was a common outcome of EE in a lot of research including Saks (2006) when the author studies 102 employees working in different jobs and organizations. Further, Barnes and Collier (2013) connected such satisfaction at work to long-term career commitment when engagement was in account. Again, in the frontline setting, employees experiencing engagement would subsequently have the ability to strengthen attachment with their career, which was proved on a sample of 413 service providers.

In summary, the consequences of employee engagement include intra-role behaviors, extra-role behaviors and the individual employee development and growth. When digging deeper into behavioral outcomes of employee engagement, the boundary between "intra-role" and "extra-role" in some situations is not clearly defined. Let take innovativeness as an example. It refers to inter-role behaviors to realize the organizational goals in a novel way (Kanter, 1988; Scott & Bruce, 1994); yet, at the same time, it requires employee to practice extra-roles, out of their effort and dedication, in order to bring innovation for organization (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007).\*

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## **Description of Theories**

Based on literature review, the researcher has developed the theoretical framework that informs and grounds her study. The researcher will elaborate on the four theories that inform the development of her study's conceptual model and the relationships of the constructs selected for this study. Tangibly, they are Systems and Systems Thinking, Self-Determination, Job Demands-Resources and Human Capital theories. Each theory will be described in terms of that theory's origin, summary, applicable underpinnings, research based on such a theory, and implication of the current study.

### *Systems Theory and Systems Thinking*

In the following section, the researcher analyzed Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1956, 1968) from the origin, summarize the theory, describe the major paradigmatic application (Systems Thinking, (Senge, 1990), mention research based on this theory, and implication for the current proposal study.

### **Originality of the Systems Theory**

Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1956, 1968) first developed in his biological work *The General System Theory*, and as Blauberger et al., (1977) summed up, it is “a set of elements standing in interrelations” (as cited in Arnold, 2013, p. 10). Systems theory has a mixed history with major figures impacting in fields as varied as information theory, cybernetics, biology, sociology, history, literature, and philosophy. Along with other cyberneticists, Bertalanffy (1968) expressed the hope to integrate varying disciplines into one megasystem (Arnold, 2013). Systems theory is concerned with systems and



their interdependent relationships. In the management area, systems theory has shown its significant impact since organizations are treated as systems with interconnected subsystems.

### **Summary of the Theory**

“Each thing and everything can be viewed as a system” (Vornberg, 2013, p. 805). A “system” is defined as a boundary containing many sub-systems to separate the system from its environment (McLean, 2006). A system is not just a collection of parts but an organized structure of mass and energy. At the core, systems theory directs us to discuss system connectedness with context, inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback (McGuire & Jorgensen, 2011). Moreover, it informs us of the reality of the open systems in contrast to the closed ones, and that system engineering (expanding the system design for goal attainment in larger settings) focuses on the less dynamic aspects of the organization, as well as of the limitations of a single personality theory in predicting human behavior (Swanson & Holton, 2006).

### **Application of the Theory**

Systems theory has had an essential role in various theoretical and operational applications within the social sciences and the field of management. Systems thinking could be considered one of the most important broad applications of systems theory. (Vornberg, 2013). Peter Senge (1990) popularized systems thinking in management drawn on systems theory through his book *The Fifth Discipline – The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Vornberg (2010) depicted the systems model for education embracing the whole of instructional activity being integrated by many

subsystems. Using the image widely known as the Three-Legged stool by Richard Swanson (1998), the theoretical foundations of Human Resource Development as a discipline has been established.

In the context of business organizations where the bottom line is external customer satisfaction and profitability, systems thinking has been applied accordingly to align learning subsystems at the individual, team, and organizational levels with performance outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) through engagement (EE) of “internal customers” – employees (Senge, 1990). The grand purpose of organizational learning (OL) is to harness personal mastery and people-to-people interactions applicable in the workplace for in-role and extra-role performance of the employees, leading to higher performance for the enterprise as a whole (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Senge, 1990).

### **Research based on the Theory**

The systemic perspective holds that a holistic approach is required to fully comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety (Mele et al., 2010). Systems elements need to be studied with their interactions and connection toward a shared purpose to understand the regularities of behavior; each element should not be seen in its elementary part. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) posited that the firm as a learning system possesses the skill and competence set that enables it to produce its own knowledge. The concept of open system is also applicable to the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1966), whereby the organization is built by energetic input-output and the energy from the output reactivates the system. Emery and Trist (1960) addressed organizations as socio-

technical systems consisting of a social component – people, and a technical one - technology and machines (as cited in Mele et al., 2010). To sum up, everything associated with organizations should be reflective of the systems thinking perspective.

### **Implication for This Study**

For this study, systems theory was used to frame systems thinking with regard to OL. With systems theory and system thinking in mind, companies adopting learning can enhance employee engagement to achieve organizational effectiveness and individual performance. To the researcher’s understanding, after a thorough literature review for the research, OL is understood as a process in which managers cum leaders develop their employees to attain and sustain individual and organizational outcomes in their best conditions (Byrne, 2015). Therefore, a management and development construct namely OL, perceived by the employee, plays a role of an independent variable in the conceptual model being developed underneath.

### *Self-Determination Theory*

The following section will briefly mention the history of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), summarize the theory, review some significant research based on the theory as well as analyze how it informs the current study.

### **Originality of the Self-Determination Theory**

Being categorized as a motivation theory, self-determination theory (SDT) was about the nature of people and the factors that give impetus to actions. It was influenced by the works of Heider (1958) on the construct of “perceived locus of causality”, White

(1959) about effectance motivation, and deCharms (1968) about actions being caused by either internal or external perceived locus of causality, as well as other psychological studies (as cited in Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determination is “a quality of human functioning that involve the experience of choice ... rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives, or any other forces or pressures” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38). Self-determination, competence, along with other processes and structures that relate to those needs are integrated to develop a broad, organismic theory of human motivation. (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

### **Summary of the Theory**

Self-determination theory proposes two types of motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing things for enjoyment and interest while extrinsic motivation is about doing things for instrumental reasons. The latter type is divided into four subtypes labeled external regulation (a desire to gain rewards or avoid punishment), introjection (boost one’s ego or avoid feeling of guilt), identification (attain a valued personal goal), and integration (express one’s sense of self). External regulation and introjection form controlled regulation, whereas identification, integration and intrinsic motivation together make autonomous regulation (Meyer & Gagne, 2008). In organizational settings, as far as the meaning of employee engagement was concerned (Macey & Schneider, 2008), autonomous regulation overlaps with state engagement and behavioral engagement.

## **Research Based on the Theory**

The notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one, and SDT has guided a great deal of relevant research and practice. Research by Kahn (1990) was believed to be the first study that coined the term engagement as “a person’s “preferred self” in task behaviors” (p. 700) in which the author attributed such a state to several sources including intrinsic motivation in Deci’s (1975) study. In Macey and Schneider’s (2008) study on the meaning of employee engagement, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) was used to inform work motivation: in the existence of work motivation along with goal consistency between the individual and the organization, the level of employee state engagement would be higher. Intrinsic motivation as part of self-determination was also used as a mediator to measure job engagement (another type of engagement) and job performance (Rich et al., 2010).

## **Implication for This Study**

In this study, SDT was used to frame the construct of employee engagement in the conceptual model. As explained above, the authors of this theory intended to develop it into a truly organismic one, something in agreement with systems theory and thinking where parts are interconnected so that a rigorous whole system is to be created. Additionally, when self-determination is defined as a quality of human functioning, it can either be supported or hindered by organizational learning and perceived organizational support (to be also seen as employee development approaches), that enhance or limit organizational effectiveness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When individual

employees are “engaged” in what they are doing, both task performance and organizational effectiveness are positively affected (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

### *Job Demands–Resources Model*

Originality of Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001), its summary, application of the model, research based on the model, and most importantly, how the model informs this current study are briefly described in the following sections.

#### **Originality of the Job Demands-Resources Model**

The Job Demands-Resources Model, or JD-R model, (Demerouti et al., 2001) can be traced back to some balance models of the job stress, like Karasek’s (1979) demands-control model, in which job stress was claimed to result from imbalance between high job demands (heavy workload) and low job control. The demand-control model (Karasek, 1979) focused on only one type of job demands (psychological workload) and one type of job aspects (job control), which presented an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. Simplicity might be appealing as an advantage (a balance in job demands with job control may lead to low job stress). However, that model failed to account for the complex working reality by limiting to only two variables. Therefore, the JD-R model was introduced as an alternative to previous models.

#### **Summary of the Model**

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) came into being to take one step further from Karasek’s (1979) demands-control model to include two specific sets of working conditions, job demands and job resources. Job demands “represent characteristics of the jobs that potentially evoke strain, in case they exceed the employee’s adaptive

capability” (Bakker et al., 2007, p. 275). Job resources, on the contrary, refer to working conditions that provide resources for the individual employees. They are “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may (a) reduce job demands ..., (b) are functional in achieving work goals, and (c) stimulate personal growth, learning and development” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Job demands and job resources combine in predicting employee well-being, regardless of occupational groups.

### **Application of the Model**

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), job demands and resources are negatively correlated because high job demands may lead to difficulty in pooling job resources. Therefore, the JD-R model proposes that high job demands and a lack of resources may procreate a ground for potential burnout and diminish engagement at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). On the other end, when more abundant job resources in relation to a high or low level of job demands are prevalent, employees tend to reduce stress and thus be motivated and engaged more at work. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

### **Research Based on the Model**

The JD-R model’ dual process based on availability of demands and resources at work has provided a firm ground for empirical research on burnout, well-being, and engagement at work. Since the model’s inception in 2001 till 2010, there were about 20 studies published that tested the assumption of the dual processes of motivation and health impairment (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). To present day, more research effort has been done to verify the model with engagement as a potential mediator between job

resources and specific outcomes. In Schaufeli and Tarris's (2014) review, 12 studies confirmed the mediating role of burnout in the stress process and of engagement in the motivational process, while four studies partial mediation was found for either burnout or engagement. Out of the eight longitudinal studies among workers of various countries recently reviewed, they found five of them supported the causal relationships between job characteristics (i.e., demands and resources) and employee well-being (i.e., burnout and work engagement). Two studies supported the causal relationships partly, and one found no longitudinal relationship.

### **Implication for This Study**

As for the current study, the JD-R model was utilized to account for the assumption that learning as an organizational capability (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) could be job resources to enhance employee engagement (EE) in the context of increasing job demands in SMEs in Vietnam. Moreover, through the mediation of EE, positive employee outcomes, such as increased citizenship behavior and lower turnover intention, would be made possible with OL and POS.

#### *Human Capital Theory*

As one of the four theories guiding this study, Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) is going to be analyzed in terms of origin, main contents, basis for other research, and implication for the current study in order to connect with the other theories and inform the conceptual model associated.



## **Originality of the Human Capital Theory**

Human capital is defined as “the skills the labor force possesses and is regarded as a resource or asset” (Oxford English Dictionary, as cited in Goldin, 2016, p. 1). Adam Smith was believed to initiate the concept of “capital in person” through “acquisition of talents ... during education, study, or apprenticeship” (Smith, 1776; as cited in Goldin, 2016). Then, the term “human capital” became formal in economics probably by Irving Fisher in 1897 and was popularized after Jacob Mincer’s (1958) article. Theodore Schultz’s (1961) article demonstrated the importance of the concept of human capital in explaining various economic anomalies. Human capital was formalized to be a theory, starting with the 1962 article and the 1964 book *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (second and third edition in 1975 and 1993, respectively). Human capital theory (HCT) can be traced back to two sources. One related to the findings about substantial income growth in the United States due to physical capital and labor increase. The other was some economists’ emphasis on the importance of education in promoting economic development. Back to the 1960s and 1970s, there was difficulty in accounting the economic growth in terms of the traditional factors of production. Human capital was then identified as the hidden asset that strongly supported the American economic surge (Nafukho et al., 2004). Along with other dimensions of ‘capital’ such as organizational capital, financial capital, social capital, and so on, human capital became the topic for economic, educational and human resource development studies.

## **Summary of the Theory**

As noted by Nafukho et al. (2004), the principle underpinning the HCT was “the belief that people’s learning capacities are of comparable value to other resources involved in production of goods and services” (pp. 545-546). If organizations utilize this capital effectively, they can benefit many stakeholders including the employees, the organizations themselves and the society. Becker (1993) used the quote by the economist Alfred Marshall that “the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings” (p. 27) and also stated that “education and training are the most important investment in human capital” (p. 17). Truly, the education and training aspect of human capital development remains central in educational and human resource development research.

## **Research Based on the Theory**

Some salient research on human capital and the associated theory has been of interest in this particular section. Nyberg et al. (2014) presented a systematic and multidisciplinary review of literature examining human capital resource, as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. They realized the impact that education, training, and experience exert on organizational effectiveness. In contemporary virtual work environment, human capital has specially been harnessed through technology for promotion of workplace learning as basis for performance improvement (Nafukho et al., 2010). On a macro-scale in a service-driven economy, human capital planning within organizations has become critical for competitive business strategy and a model and process for human capital planning is introduced by Zula and Chermack (2007).

## **Implication for This Study**

The HCT and its implications for education and training in organizational conditions have guided the forming of the dependent variables in the current research. Human resource development in general and corporate education in particular are “not only tasked with human resource optimization but improve the interaction between human capital and the overall system” (McGuire & Jorgensen, 2011, p. 37). Along with systems theory and systems thinking and self-determination, the HCT provided the theoretical guidance for this research. On such a basis, a conceptual model of OL, POS and OCB and IT via the mediating effect of EE has been established. In the field of human resource development, the researcher of the current study argued that EE initiatives can be regarded as non-training interventions, while OL and POS provide both training and development approaches.

## **Hypothesized Conceptual Model**

The current study was developed in response to two research questions. The first question asked if employee engagement could mediate (whether none, partially, or fully) the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and one employee performance outcome (i.e. organizational citizenship behavior). The second question asked if employee engagement could mediate (whether none, partially, or fully) the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and the other employee performance outcome (i.e. turnover intention). These two grand research questions guide the eight research hypotheses on the relevant relationships, which are categorized into two groups. The first group contained four

hypotheses (*Hypotheses 1-4*) about the predictive relationships between the independent variables (OL and POS) and dependent variables (OCB and TI), without the mediator (EE). The second group consisted of four mediation hypotheses (*Hypotheses 5-8*). These evidence-based eight hypotheses provided premises to form a hypothesized conceptual model.

### *Direct Relationships*

In the hypothesized model, organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) were considered the interventions from the organization to affect employee performance outcomes (OCB and TI). It was supposed that OL and POS would predict OCB and TI. Substantively, when employees in Vietnam's SMEs perceived a high level of OL and POS in their organizations, they would tend to exhibit more OCB and lower their intention to leave the organization. These propositions were made possible by reviewing relevant literature. First, the conceptualizations of the theorized constructs were explored. Second, the relationships between them were delineated, as basis for forming the current study's hypotheses.

### **Individual Constructs Explored**

Organizational Learning (OL) is defined as "the capability of an organization to process knowledge ... and to modify its behavior to reflect the new cognitive situation, with a view to improving its performance" (Jerez-Goméz et al., p. 716). In the following sections, OL is broadly defined to include similar terms used interchangeably in relevant literature: learning culture, culture in the learning organization, organizational learning culture, learning capability/capacity (at the organizational level), and organizational

learning process. All of them elicit parts of the culture that an organization continuously strives to develop and sustain at the organizational level for knowledge sharing and innovation.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is the extent to which an organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being, as perceived by the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS increases employees' affective commitment to the organization and results in behavioral outcomes such as raised intra-role and extra-role performance as well as decreased absenteeism and turnover.

Because OL and POS were supposed to be organizational interventions, their relationships with the two employee performance outcomes are surveyed more closely.

### **Direct Relationships Explored**

In the following sections, the direct relationships between OL and OCB, POS and OCB, OL and TI, and POS and TI were inspected, based on which relevant hypotheses were developed.

#### *Organizational Learning and Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Organizational Learning (OL, learning mechanisms and learning values) was positively related to OCB in Somech and Drach-Zahary's (2000) study on a sample of 31 schools. In another perspective, Islam et al. (2016) used OL culture (OLC), the term defined by Garvin (1993) as "an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (p. 80). With a sample of 500 Malay-Chinese in Western Malaysian insurance and banking sector, Islam et al. (2016) found OL to be positively related to affective

commitment and OCB. It means employees who perceive learning culture existing in their organizations would exhibit more OCB when they attach to their workplace emotionally. An integrative literature review on OCB in human resource development context also revealed the relationship between OCB and learning and development, such as formal training, mentoring, and knowledge sharing (Rose, 2016).

#### *Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Moorman et al. (1998) explained that POS prompted employees to reciprocate with OCB using a sample of civilian subordinates and their supervisors from all departments of a large military hospital located in the Midwest of the U.S. Results suggested that procedural justice influenced POS, which in turn fully mediated its relationships to three of four OCB dimensions. Similarly, Chiang and Hsieh (2012) also confirmed the POS-OCB relationship in a study of 513 employees in Taiwanese hotels, where OCB partially mediated POS and job performance.

#### *Organizational Learning and Turnover Intention*

Islam et al. (2016) found that OL culture negatively related to turnover intention (TI) in 500 Malay-Chinese working in the insurance and banking sector of Western Malaysia. In a similar vein, Joo (2010) investigated the role of perceived OL culture and leader-member exchange quality on organizational commitment and eventually employee TI for a sample of 516 employees in a conglomerate headquartered in Korea. Although no direct relationship between OL culture and TI was found, such association was indirect via organizational commitment. Hsu (2009) studied 418 R&D professionals' perceptions on the role of OL culture on job satisfaction, organizational commitment,

and TI. Again, no significant effect was found on OL culture and TI; they could be related via the mediation of either job satisfaction or organizational commitment.

#### *Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention*

By analyzing a sample of 346 individuals in a manufacturing firm, Dawley et al. (2010) found out that POS is a predictor of TI and that personal sacrifice partially mediates the POS-TI relationship. Using a sample of 304 full-time employees working for insurance companies in Turkey, Tuzun and Kalemci (2012) revealed that employees who perceived low levels of POS (organizational support in general) would report high level of TI. It happened although those employee recognized high levels of supervisor support.

Based on the above analysis of the relevant literature, in the assumed combined organizational effort as interventions of OL and POS on OCB and TI, the following hypotheses are stated:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

#### *Indirect Relationships*

The current study centers on the mediation role of employee engagement in the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention in Vietnam's SMEs. Then the following sections will focus of two groups of indirect relationships: between the antecedents and the mediator and between the mediator and the consequences.

#### **Antecedents and Mediator**

Organizational Learning and Perceived Organizational Support will be studied in relation with Employee Engagement the mediator, with support from literature.

#### *Organizational Learning and Employee Engagement*

Eldor and Harpaz (2016) claimed learning climate to be a predictor of EE in a sample of 625 employees and supervisors in Israeli organizations. Sarti (2014) described learning opportunities as a job resource to increase engagement at work in the context of long-term care facilities in Italy with 167 caregivers. Hussain and Ishak (2017) examined the relationship between OL (training, mentoring, and coaching dimensions) and EE (employees' positive emotional attachment to the job, colleagues, and the organization) in 100 young employees in Malaysian commercial banks and found a positive relationship.



### *Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Engagement*

Saks (2006) maintained that perceived organizational support (POS) predicted both job and organization engagement in a survey research on employee engagement's (EE) antecedents and consequences in 102 employees working in different jobs and organizations. Rich et al. (2010) also echoed the mediating role of job engagement, defined as the investment of an individual's complete self into a role, in the relationship between POS and some performance dimensions, in their study of 245 firefighters and their supervisors.

### **Mediator and Consequences**

Literature supporting the relationships between employee engagement and the two outcomes - Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Turnover Intention - are synthesized below.

### *Employee Engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) tested a mediation model linking charismatic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) via work engagement (WE) on 91 participants. Two of the findings were a significant positive relation between WE and OCB and a full mediation of leadership effects on OCB via WE. Similarly, Ariani (2013) administered 507 participants on scales of employee engagement (EE), organizational OCB and counterproductive work behavior (CWB), and indicated a positive association between EE and OCB.

### *Employee Engagement and Turnover Intention*

Based on the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) data of 1940 respondents in 2003, Jones and Harter (2005) studied the interaction of employee engagement (EE) and the racial compositions of supervisor-employee dyads in predicting intent to remain (IR) in the organization. At low levels of EE, different-race dyads reported a lower IR tendency than same-race dyads whereas higher EE levels were associated with greater IR for different-race dyads.

Takawira et al. (2014) found significant relationships between job embeddedness, work engagement, and turnover intention, in a sample of 153 academic and non-academic staff in a South African higher education institution. Conclusively, organizational links and dedication negatively predicted TI. Studies by Bhatnagar (2012), Shankar and Bhatnagar (2010), and Van Schalkwyk et al. (2010) also supported the relationship between EE and TI, in mediation analyses.

Since Saks' (2006) first study on antecedents and consequences of EE in academic literature (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014), the construct has been researched in great depth as a mediator. In the preceding sections of this proposal study, a narrative review on EE's antecedents and outcomes has been conducted. Furthermore, the preceding sections of hypothesis setting reported organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) relate to EE and selected employee outcomes. Therefore, drawing on the self-determination theory (SDT) and job demands-resources model (JD-R), it was argued that OL and POS relate to OCB (organizational citizenship behavior) and TI (turnover intention) but indirectly, through EE.

The above arguments suggested the following mediation hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

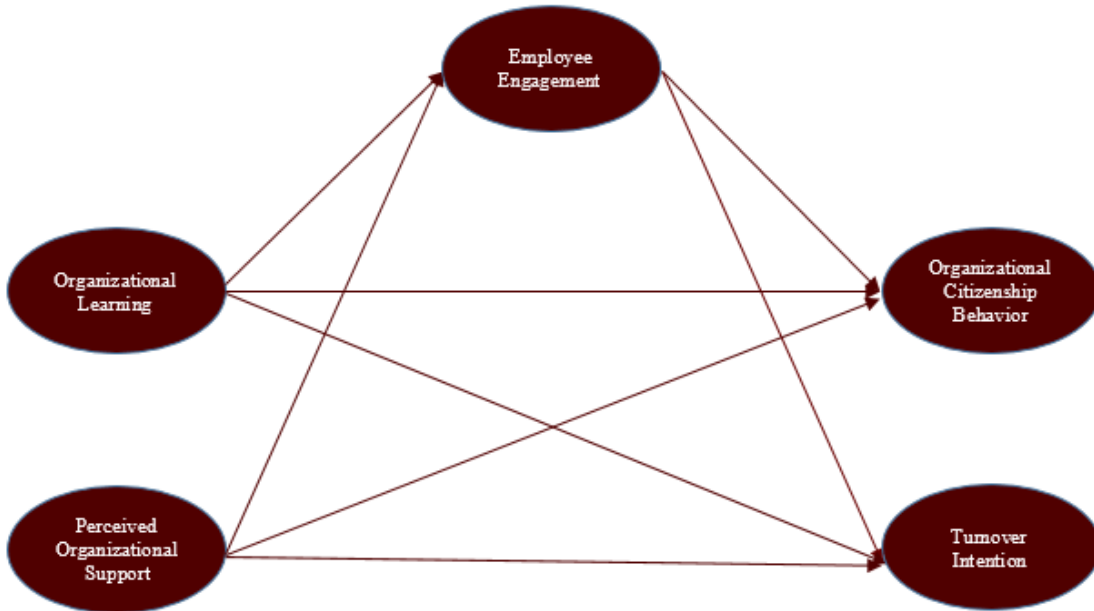
*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

With all the hypotheses being stated, the conceptual model was developed on the theoretical background mentioned above and as a result of the literature review, in which the constructs are hypothesized to be related to each other. Figure 2 below depicts the hypothetical relationships among the model's variables. They were organizational OL and POS as the independent variables connecting to two dependent variables OCB and TI with presence of the assumed mediating variable EE.

**Figure 2**

*Hypothesized Conceptual Model*



*Source.* Developed by the author of the current study

Despite not yet being showed in the general model, each construct could be further seen in dimensions. OL has four dimensions including management commitment (MC), systems perspectives (SP), openness and experimentation (EX), and knowledge transfer and integration (TR), which make up the learning capability of an organization. In the center of the model is the intervening construct EE that consisted of three dimensions: emotional engagement (Ee), behavioral engagement (Ee), and cognitive engagement (Ce). The right-hand section of the model represents the outcomes of OL, POS, and EE: organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and turnover intention (TI). POS, OCB and TI at this stage had no dimension; they were uni-dimensional. OL and

POS are hypothesized to be positive related with EE and OCB, yet negatively associated with TI. Similarly, EE is supposed to be connected to OCB in a positive manner, but to TI negatively.

The section below is going to be a discussion on each construct in the conceptual model in terms of conceptualization, brief history, popular measurement instruments and the measures that were applied in this study. Then they will be situated in the Vietnamese context in terms of research and practice.

### **Insights into Model Constructs with Contextual Reference to SMEs in Vietnam**

Starting with the construct of employee engagement (EE) as the global concept with its meaning, research history, and brief comparison with similar concepts, the researcher of the current study will relate the construct in the context of Vietnam. Then organizational learning capability (OL) is studied to be a driver of EE in the organizational condition; three selected employee outcomes including citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) are hypothesized to be the dependent variables.

#### *Employee Engagement*

Under the heading of employee engagement, the following section will delineate into its conceptualization and historical research development and study on similar concepts of employee engagement, reflecting the multidimensional and dynamic character of the concept.

## **Conceptualization and Historical Development**

According to Saks and Gruman (2014), there are two primary definitions of engagement in the academic literature by Kahn (1990) and by Schaufeli et al. (2002). In particular, engagement as the preferred self-perception was believed to start its formal journey since Kahn's (1990) grounded theory research on psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. Personal engagement was defined as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). He emphasized the three psychological conditions – meaningfulness, safety, and availability - that facilitate the employment and expression of such engagement states of individuals at work.

Being derived from Maslach et al.'s (2001) developmental theory of engagement as antithesis to burnout, Schaufeli et al. (2002) referred to engagement as "a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior" (p. 74). To them, such engagement is characterized by vigor (high activation), dedication (high identification), and absorption (high concentration). These hypothesized engagement dimensions were opposite to burnout three-factor structure of exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy introduced before Maslach et al. (2001).

A little ahead of time to the introduction of engagement as antipodes to burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and from management perspective, an American research-based global consulting company, Gallup Inc. published "*First, Break All The Rules*" by

Buckingham and Coffman (1999). Gallup defined engaged employees as “those who are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace” (The Gallup Organization, 2017). They introduced the Q12 – Gallup’s employee engagement survey – that has been widely used nowadays in the business world. However, some engagement researchers claimed Q12 to be more of a measure of management practices (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

In line with “do more with less” perspective in the early millennium, employee engagement was studied in the context of challenging economic conditions after 9/11 and linked to the organization’s bottom line of profitability and discussion of employee satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). The term employee engagement referred to “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (p. 269). This meta-analysis study (Harter et al., 2002) used the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) instrument to measure employee satisfaction-engagement level in business units to associate with profitability and other organizational key performance outcomes.

Saks (2006) was the first academic research into antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (as cited in Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). The author did not define employee engagement; instead, he listed out and described different understandings of the concept from both practitioner and academic literature. The study distinguished meaningfully two types of engagement: job engagement was directly related to the work and role performed by an employee, while organization engagement to the workplace and unit that they belonged to. Their drivers included all organizational and job factors; the consequences were more individual-centered (Saks, 2006).

The year of 2008 marked the linkage between learning and employee engagement (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014) firstly by the then American Society of Training and Development (now the Association of Talent Development, ATD, since 2015). ASTD's researcher Czarnowsky (2008) conducted and disseminated empirical evidence of engagement's connection. Accordingly, engaged employees were "mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer's success" evident by "are willing to go the extra mile, speak well of their company, and make sure that customers are satisfied" (p. 4). Although the study investigated how organizations addressed employee engagement and identified strategies and organizational factors predicting an engaged workforce, particular emphasis was given to the role of learning on engaging employees at work ([www.td.org](http://www.td.org)).

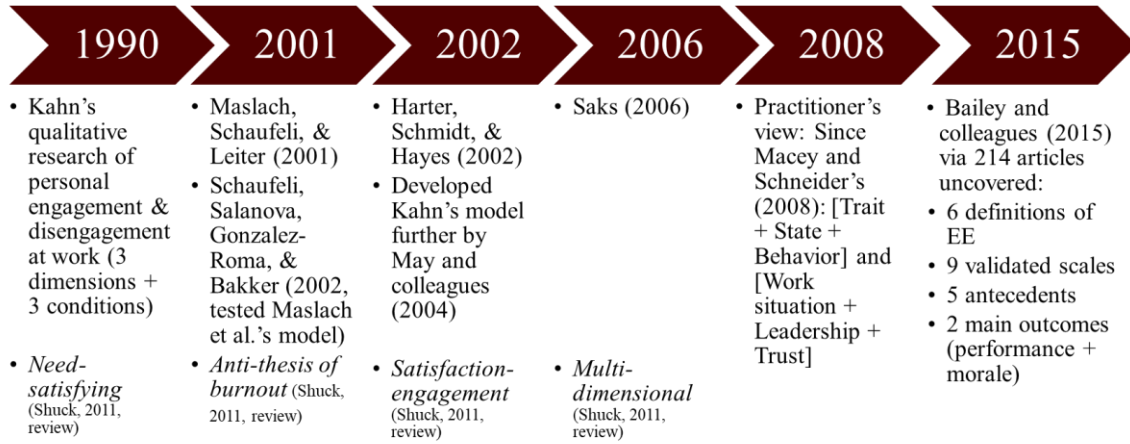
In the practitioner community, Macey and Schneider (2008) and Macey et al. (2009) focused on the notion that employee engagement is "a desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioral components" (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 4). In other words, engagement was "an individual's sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals (Macey et al., 2009, p. 7). They offered a series of propositions about engagement as a psychological state, behavior, and trait, being affected by work situation, leadership and trust (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In the view of practitioners, employee engagement was a multi-faceted construct being tightened down to organizational effectiveness (Erickson, 2005).



The evolution of employee engagement research until now has continued to attach great importance to employee “going above and beyond” for organizational effectiveness, largely presented by consulting firms and academic research on the topic (Bailey et al., 2015). Countless studies on employee engagement have been done by researchers in different organizational settings and in diverse cultures as well as by firms in search of measurement and interventions for creating or improving engaged workers (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). In this tendency, Shuck et al. (2016) in their definition of employee engagement as “an active, work-related positive psychological state operationalized by the intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy” came up with an EES measure (Employee Engagement Scale) after a confirmatory study package. As for the practical world, the most frequently used instrument, the UWES-9 (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale), was also developed and has been validated in different cultures (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The figure below depicted the landmarks in employee engagement research and practice.

**Figure 3**

*History of Employee Engagement Research*



*Source.* Figure created by the researcher of the current study via literature review

*Note.* Study by Bailey and colleagues was first published online in 2015 and officially in 2017.

In summary, the evolution of employee engagement research and practice since Kahn's (1990) study has developed from the preference of self-expression of individual employees in their role performance to broader spectrum covering the organizational bottom-line and extra-role performance and more. Such development has reflected the changes in organizational behavior and management studies based on contextual changes in economics, society and organizational environment.

**Similar Concepts to Employee Engagement**

There are similar terms to employee engagement such as job satisfaction, job involvement, job commitment, etc. because they measure the same general construct and belong to the traditional attitudinal variables (Harter & Schmidt, 2008). In a meta-analytic review, Christian et al. (2011) found that engagement was a distinct construct

from the likes of job satisfaction, job commitment and job involvement. In another review by MacLeod and Clarke (2009), they found over 50 definitions of employee engagement. Other authors also claimed the distinction between employee engagement and similar concepts [e.g., Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006, Saks & Gruman, 2014].

For the purpose of this study, Table 1 provides content that is based primarily in a study by Shuck et al.'s (2016) research. The table summarizes concepts which are used interchangeably in research on employee engagement, along with their instruments. They are work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, and social engagement.

**Table 1***Concepts Used Interchangeably in Employee Engagement Research*

Construct	Focus	Definition	Comparison to EE
Work Engagement (WE). The most common tool is UWES-9	Work activity and work itself	“positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 4). Three dimensions: Vigor (vs. exhaustion), dedication (vs. cynicism), and absorption (vs. professional efficacy)	EE reflects an active psychological state and includes the whole immediate work experience
Job Engagement (JE) - JES	Job activity and job	“multi-dimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual’s physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance” (Rich et al., 2010, p. 619). JE describes the level of engagement of an employee to their job only.	EE focuses on the fuller experience of employees’ active roles in experiencing their work, job, team, and organization
Organizational Engagement (OE) - OES	Toward organizational identification and presence	“the extent to which an individual is psychologically present in a particular role” (Saks, 2006, p. 604) OE describes how captivating and cheering a person experiences their organization (cf. Saks, 2006)	EE is inclusive of a connection-like state to the organization, but is not specifically defined by it – a limitation of the OES
Social Engagement (ISA – intellectual, social, and affective engagement)	Toward social engagement	– component often being overlooked that is related to the engagement experience (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). Work activity and alignment with colleagues	EE encompasses people’s experience and response to their peers and a series of other important areas. This is a unique construct in conceptualization.

**Table 1** Continued

Construct	Focus	Definition	Comparison to EE
Employee Engagement - EE (Shuck et al., 2016)	<b>Definition:</b> Active role + full spectrum work experience	EE is an active, work-oriented positive psychological state, evident by the intensity and direction of combined energy from cognition, emotion, and behavior (Shuck et al., 2014; Shuck & Wollard, 2010).	
	<b>Dimension 1 -</b> Cognitive engagement ( <b>Ce</b> )	Concentration of mental energy displayed toward positive organizational outcomes (Rich et al., 2010; Shuck et al., 2014).	Attentive, concentrated Dispense mental energy
	<b>Dimension 2 -</b> Emotional engagement ( <b>Ee</b> )	Employees' intensity and willingness to invest their emotions toward good outcomes for their organizations (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck et al., 2014).	<b>Ee</b> employees believe in their organization's mission and purpose, they think the organization means a lot to them as a person.
	<b>Dimension 3 -</b> Behavioral engagement ( <b>Be</b> )	The intention to behave that emphatically affects performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich et al., 2010). <b>Be</b> is not action-related (it differs from performance or other related constructs like OCB - extant behavior).	Willingness to go to great lengths for their team and organization; to do more than is expected. Work harder + willingness to give more + extra forward movement.
	<b>Scale</b> to measure EE - EES	Being developed to assess each aspect of the EE experience and serves as a higher order factor for three factors at lower level: <b>Ce</b> , <b>Ee</b> , and <b>Be</b> . Their total is supposed to frame the full EE experience.	

*Source.* Adapted from Shuck et al. (2016)

## **Contextualizing Employee Engagement in Businesses in Vietnam**

In the second round of narrative review (Irby & Lara-Alecio, 2012; Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016), relevant constructs have been picked up, which were believed to be related to one another with EE being in the center of the model with its assumed mediation effect. Therefore, this section contextualized EE in the Vietnamese business setting. The section began with the introduction to Vietnam and the non-state sector, followed by elaboration of Vietnamese SMEs and research on employee engagement in Vietnam.

### *Introduction to Vietnam and the Non-State Sector*

Vietnam (officially Socialist Republic of Vietnam) is located in Southeast Asia and borders to Cambodia, Laos and China in the north and the west. It also borders to the Gulf of Thailand, the Gulf of Tonkin, and the South China Sea in the south and the east. Long and narrow on a north-south axis, Vietnam has a total area of 330,967,300 km<sup>2</sup> (205,653,546 mi.<sup>2</sup>) with a population of more than 97.2 million people (United Nations, 2019). The biggest city is Ho Chi Minh City, followed by Hanoi (capital) and Haiphong in the north and Da Nang in the middle.

As reported by the World Bank, the GDP per capita in Vietnam was USD 2,566.597 in 2018 (WB, 2018), equivalent to 9% of the world's average. The GDP annual growth rate was around 7.1% for 2018, and GDP - composition by sector were agriculture 15.3%, industry 33.3%, and service 51% (2017 est.). State-owned enterprises accounted for about 40% of the GDP. Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization in January 2007, which has promoted more competitive, export-driven industries. A young

populated growing country, Vietnam's unemployment rate of labor force in working age in 2018 was 1.89% while labor force participation rate for ages 15-24 for 2018 was 58.08% (Macrotrend, 2020). Labor force participation for ages 15-24 is the proportion of the population the age brackets that is economically active; in other words, they are all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specific period.

According to Kim (2014) – World Bank Group President, since Renovation (Đổi mới) reforms in 1986, the country has allowed the emergence of private enterprise, and the Law on Enterprises (enacted in 1999) has eliminated quite a few limits on private sector activity. In order to sustain its present rate and gear toward a higher growth, one important strategy is to boost the private sector as an engine of innovation and hence productivity and efficiency. Estimated by McKinsey, a global management consulting firm, one additional unit of capital in the private sector in Vietnam produces three times additional revenue compared to state-owned enterprises (Kim, 2014). On a similar vein, Paswan and Tran (2012) emphasized that entrepreneurial private business organizations play a crucial role in the economic well-being. Trung et al. (2014) concluded that what private companies need is not financial capital, but human capital. Developing human resources and talents in the non-state business sector will, therefore, be crucial to fully unlock the country's economic growth potential.

**Table 2***Number of Acting Enterprises Having Business Outcomes (as of Annual 31 December)**by Types of Enterprise*

	Unit: Enterprise				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
TOTAL	373,213	402,326	442,485	505,059	560,417
State-owned enterprise	3,199	3,048	2,835	2,662	2,486
100% state owned capital	1,590	1,470	1,315	1,276	1,204
Over 50% state owned capital	1,609	1,578	1,520	1,386	1,282
Non-state enterprise	359,794	388,232	427,710	488,395	541,753
Private	49,203	49,222	47,741	48,409	45,495
Others	310,591	339,010	379,969	439,986	496,258
Foreign investment enterprise	10,220	11,046	11,940	14,002	16,178
100% foreign capital	8,632	9,383	10,238	11,974	14,015
Joint ventures	1,588	1,663	1,702	2,028	2163

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The above table records the number of acting enterprises in terms of ownership in the 2013-2017 period. A “private” enterprise is a firm owned by an individual as its legal representative while “others” include limited liability companies, shareholding companies, and partnerships. As is described, non-state enterprises account for an average of 96% of all the Vietnamese enterprises and the number is increasing for both non-state and foreign-invested enterprises over the years. However, state-owned enterprises reduce in number as several of them were turned over to become non-state or other types partnered with private capital and diversified ownership. The trend reflected in Table 2 proves the increasing role of the non-state sector in Vietnam.



**Table 3***Number of Employees in Enterprises (as of Annual 31 December) by Types of Enterprise*

Unit: Thousand Employees

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
TOTAL	11,464.9	12,048.8	12,856.9	14,012.3	14,512.2
State-owned enterprise	1,559.2	1,451.4	1,371.6	1,285.9	1,201.8
100% state owned capital	985.9	874.5	779.1	745.1	704.6
Over 50% state owned capital	573.3	576.9	592.5	540.8	497.2
Non-state enterprise	6,854.8	7,148.4	7,712.5	8,572.4	8,800.3
Private	503.1	483.1	470.2	472.5	393.5
Others	6,351.7	6,665.3	7,242.3	8,099.9	8,406.8
Foreign investment enterprise	3,050.9	3,449.0	3,772.7	4,154.0	4,510.1
100% foreign capital	2,782.7	3,163.4	3,469.7	3,817.9	4,180.0
Joint ventures	268.2	285.6	303.0	336.1	330.1

Reprinted from Statistical Summary Book of Vietnam 2018 (GSO, 2018)

Table 3 depicts the structure of workforce allocated to each sector. As it is shown here, non-state enterprises accounts for more than half of the workforce and on a gradual increase over the years. However, overall the employees working in the non-state enterprises take up nearly 60% of the whole country's working population.

*Vietnam's Small and Medium Enterprises in Close-up*

In Vietnam, at present there are about 500,000 enterprises being in operation, of which about 97% are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Phan et al., 2015). They account for more than 50% of the workforce and around 40% of the nation's GDP (Le, 2011). They also play an important role in creating more employment opportunities,

maintaining high mobility of the labor market, and narrowing development gaps among localities of the country (Tran et al., 2008). According to Decree No. 56/2009/ND-CP issued by the Government of Vietnam on June 30, 2009 on Development support for Vietnamese SMEs, they are business establishments having registered by law. They are divided into three segments: micro, small, and medium businesses on the basis of total capital (total assets identified in the enterprise’s balance sheet) or the average workforce per year, specifically described as in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

*Definition of Small and Medium Enterprises in Vietnam*

Sector	Micro enterprises	Small-sized enterprises	Medium-sized enterprises		
	No. of employees	Total capital (\$)	No. of employees	Total capital (\$)	No. of employees
Agriculture, Forestry, & Fishery	< 10	< 1 mil.	10 - 200	1 – 5 mil.	200 - 300
Industry & Construction	< 10	< 1 mil.	10 - 200	1 – 5 mil.	200 - 300
Trade & Service	< 10	< 0.5 mil.	10 - 50	0.5 – 2.5 mil.	50 - 100

*Note.* \$1 mil. ≈ VND 24 bil.

*Source.* Decree 56/2009/CP-ND. “CP” is short for “Chính Phủ” meaning the “Government” (of Vietnam); “ND” is short for “Nghị Định” meaning “Decree”. The source means the Decree number 56, issued in 2009, by the Government of Vietnam.

Since the Vietnamese government implemented an economic renovation (Đổi mới) policy in 1986, SMEs in Vietnam have tremendously contributed to a rapid growth of the national economy (Tran et al., 2008; as cited in Lee, 2014). Gradually with time, Vietnam has seen a robust growth of SMEs with many vital roles and benefits associated with, namely job creation, income enhancement for employees, encouragement of social resources for investment and development, poverty reduction in localities, and positive effect on large enterprises' growth. In particular, SMEs created more than 0.5 million new jobs each year and increased tax and fee payment to the country by 18.4 times over period 2000-2010 period (Phan et al., 2015).

Based on a survey of 2,551 Vietnamese SMEs conducted by Scientific and Social Association, Vietnam Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, Phan et al. (2015) has found three main factors, among others, which affect the performance of the Vietnamese SMEs. They included human resource, educational level of entrepreneurs, and training costs. From the perspective of the government, human resource support policies are in need for the development of SMEs. Some of them could be listed as follows: a) Decision 143/2004/QĐ-TTg<sup>1</sup> (for 2004-2008) for improving competitiveness, b) Decree 108/2006/NĐ-CP<sup>2</sup> providing guidelines for implementation of the Investment Law to foster SMEs, c) Decision 236/2006/QĐ-TTg<sup>3</sup> (2006-2010 Development Plan) to mobilize all internal and external resources for investment in development, and d)

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<sup>1</sup> Decision 143/2004/QĐ-TTg, meaning Decision No. 143, issued in 2004, by the Prime Minister.

<sup>2</sup> Decree 108/2006/NĐ-CP, meaning Decree No. 108, issued in 2006, by the Government of Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> Decision 236/2006/QĐ-TTg, meaning Decision No. 236, issued in 2006, by the Prime Minister.

Decision 1231/QĐ-TTg<sup>4</sup> (2011-2015) to increase the number of SMEs in 2015 from 250,000 to about 600,000 focusing on labor skills among others. Despite various SMEs support policies, Vietnamese SMEs are still weak in terms of internal and external networking, competitiveness, innovativeness, human resource, and readiness to globalization. One of the reasons would be the poor quality of human resource (Le, 2011; Phan et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2008). The following sections will address hypothetical issues, both academically and practically, concerning human resources and organizational behavior in Vietnamese businesses, specifically relating to the SMEs.

*Research on Employee Engagement in Vietnam\**

There have been research papers regarding engagement topics in businesses in Vietnam being done by independent scholars, international organizations, and consulting agencies. Huynh (2012) investigated the relationship between leadership behaviors and employee engagement in private and foreign-owned enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. Surveying a sample of 320 full-time employees in retailing and financial service industries, he found out that transformational leadership behaviors have a positive relationship with affective employee engagement. Although the construct was termed “employee engagement”, the research measured “affective engagement” denoting the employee’s “feelings of commitment to their immediate supervisor and to the organization ... the most important form of commitment” (p. 21) and “a positive feeling

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<sup>4</sup> Decision 1231/QĐ-TTg, meaning Decision No. 1231, issued in 2012, by the Prime Minister.

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about doing a good job” (p. 22). Becker’s (1960) and Meyer and Allen’s (1997) organizational commitment were the two measures utilized. In short, the author viewed engagement from the commitment perspective.

In a similar vein, Khuong and Yen (2014) empirically researched leadership styles on EE, via a mediator of sociability, on a sample of 269 employees in five dominant industries in Binh Duong province, south of Vietnam. Results showed that among the five types of leadership, ethical and visionary leadership related positively with EE; transactional one had a negative relationship. EE in this study referred to job engagement, unlike what has been discussed recently about EE as covering both the job aspect and orientation to the organization that employee is working in.

For leadership in the model relevant to EE, Khuong and Nhu (2015) investigated the effects of ethical leadership and organizational culture on employees’ sociability and organizational commitment in 300 official employees working in the tourism sector in Ho Chi Minh City. The results indicated that employee sociability, involvement and mission culture had positive relationships with employees’ organizational commitment. Employee sociability was positively affected by ethical leadership and adaptive culture. Therefore, ethical leadership and adaptive culture indirectly affected organization commitment through the sociability of employees. EE is understood in the form of organizational commitment which will be dealt with in sections to come.\*

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A conceptual paper by Ehambaranathan et al. (2014) explored competencies needed for Vietnamese managers to carry out employee engagement policies and practices, preparing Vietnamese organizations against globalization challenges. In their proposition, there has been no research published about EE in Vietnam, particularly from globalization perspective. They understood that an engaged worker is “fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work, and thus will act in a way that further their organization’s interests” (p. 71). Basically, research and opinion leaders could refer to EE as “the increased emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has towards their employer, supervisor, and co-workers that result in an increased output of effort” (Thompson, 2009; as cited in Ehambaranathan et al., 2014, p. 72). They cited Gerard and Crim (2006) on seeing EE in Asian multinational companies as employees’ high level of holding to do things for internal and external customers’ satisfaction and organizational benefits; on McBain’s (2007) suggestion about EE as a function of human resource practices and composed of satisfaction, commitment, and motivation with human resource management (HRM). Ehambaranathan et al. (2014) mentioned a Ruge’s (2011) finding that current EE level in Vietnam was higher than other countries in the Asia Pacific region (78% vs. 74%). Although this research did not lodge its own definition of EE in Vietnam, the authors attached the importance of connecting EE with organizational goals of productivity, quality, and innovation via managerial competencies. In the long-term, investment in human resources pays off.\*

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A series of studies have used similar concepts to connote EE. First, job satisfaction was studied by Trang (2014) in her empirical research on the relationships between career plateau, job satisfaction, and turnover intention in 225 employees in state-owned (SOEs) and private enterprises (PEs). Career plateau was negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively related to intention to leave. Interestingly, career plateau was the same in both SOEs and PEs, but job satisfaction was lower in PEs leading to higher intent to leave for employees in the same type of organizations. Despite having no mention of EE, the research has provided evidence to readers that converges, to some extent, with a lot of global research on EE using job satisfaction for substitution.

Second, deeper into job satisfaction concept, job characteristics (job autonomy and task interdependence) and job attitude (job satisfaction, affective commitment and attitude toward change) were assumed to have a relationship with the behavior intention of employees (Gam, 2008). She conducted a study on 265 employees in three regions: North, Central, and South of Vietnam. Part of the results indicated that general the job characteristics, except for task interdependence, statistically affected on job attitude. The relationship within the variables of job attitude itself also indicated the job satisfaction has a significant relationship to affective commitment, but attitude toward change was not related with the two others. Again, these concepts gained their familiarity with EE and left readers with ambiguity.\*

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Third, Khuong and Vu (2014) proposed that a higher level of job satisfaction, would lead to a higher level of organizational commitment. Job satisfaction that played the intervening role was determined factors such as fringe benefit, working environment, technological innovation, relationships with managers, and relationships with coworkers. They did their research on 300 drivers in Ho Chi Minh City. Now that both job satisfaction and organizational commitment were brought into play, the question of the true meaning of EE was challenged.

Another concept, “employees’ organizational commitment” was adopted as a dependent variable and job satisfaction as a mediator by Nguyen et al. (2014) when they studied 201 banking staff in 11 banks in Ho Chi Minh City. Among five high-performance HR managerial practices, relationship with management, working environment and conditions, and teamwork spirit showed relationships with organizational commitment. However, in their conclusion, they switched the terms EE, job satisfaction and organizational commitment which confused the audience if they meant organizational commitment to be EE.\*

A set of commitment constructs in Vietnam business environment in Hung’s (2008) analysis has bestowed with an overall picture of the theory and model regarding the topic. Based on a sample of 502 employees in Vietnam, the author used the three-component commitment model to measure organizational and occupational commitments, which was later proved and supported the mediation of such commitment

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components between their antecedents and work outcomes. Surprisingly, no commitment component had a significant effect on job performance although some aspects of commitment had a negative effect on turnover intention - another work outcome. In a nutshell, this study focused totally on commitment, as supposed to be EE alike.

Seeing EE from the reverse burnout perspective, Nguyen (2014) explored that job demands, role conflict, lack of career opportunity, and role ambiguity affected emotional exhaustion (part of burnout syndrome) contrarily. Nevertheless, supervisory and peer support reduced the effect of emotional exhaustion leading to lower intention to leave. The research context was the information technology (IT) with 194 IT employees in the areas of Ho Chi Minh City in a survey research, after 9 IT employees were interviewed in the previous stage for validation of the survey. It was assumed by the author that burnout was the opposite of EE, which was aligned with burnout and EE literature (e.g. González-Romá et al., 2006). Likewise, it is worth noting another burnout literature by Pham (2012). She verified the causal relationships between different factors of job demands and burnout and between burnout and turnover intention of salespeople in electronic industry. Though EE was not discussed, such a connection between burnout and turnover intention has given the researcher of this dissertation an interesting insight into one of the hypothetical associations: EE and turnover intent.\*

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In conclusion, there has been research on similar constructs of EE in Vietnamese business context, but not EE itself as defined by majority by the research community in the world. Heavy attention was paid to commitment and job satisfaction, commonly referred to as alike, but not the same, with EE. Determinant-wise, leadership and HR practices as well as organizational culture were common. Outcome-wise, turnover intention was the most dominant, among several other performance variables.

#### *Antecedents of Employee Engagement in Vietnam*

Two antecedents of employee engagement in Vietnam – organizational learning and perceived organizational support – will be investigated. As organizational learning is more complicated in nature and connects to other related terms, it will be studied in more detail within the context of Vietnam. The other variable, perceived organizational support, will be discussed afterwards. However, since perceived organizational support is more explicit and self-explanatory than organizational learning, the description will be concise and succinct.

#### **Organizational Learning**

Organizational learning situated in the Vietnamese context as an organizational determinant of employee engagement is embedded with Vietnam as a learning society. Then the learning perspective is zoomed in at Vietnamese organizations, including definition of organizational learning and learning organization in global research as well as in Vietnam.

### *Vietnam – A Learning Society*

Historically, Vietnam used to be a learning society under the influence of Buddhist learning and Confucian way of thinking. Other countries in the region which are also impacted heavily by the doctrines of Confucianism included China, Korea, and Japan (Merriam et al., 2007). Through Buddha's teachings to learn is to understand, practice, and prove the way toward enlightenment. Buddhism is actually continuous learning and a whole-human practice for a final and complete freedom. Similarly, the goal of learning under Confucianism is to focus totally on spiritual things, meaning paying attention to development of becoming fully human and cultivation of ethics. It can be seen from the focus is on individual learning; such individuals are equipped with learning principles in the adult learning process. With these learning adults, a learning society has been built.

In modern society, individual learning is still appreciated; yet the learning society has born with its new characteristics to suit social changes. Vietnam has approved a decision to build a Learning Society by the year 2020. The country established a Lifelong Learning Center namely SEAMEO and UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning. Vietnam also aims to carry out and develop lifelong learning activities libraries, museums, and cultural center clubs (Hossain, 2015). Learning now has moved toward community and society orientation.

### *Learning in Organizations in Vietnam*

On the firm ground of a learning society development into the future, organizations could be considered small-scale learning societies, or learning

organizations. They should have the primary traits of a learning society; yet bear the special characteristics in the organizational context, especially in business organizations.

#### Definition of Organizational Learning

Organizational learning (OL) refers to a process and mechanism whereby learning of an organization and by an organization of takes place in a collective and organizational way (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000; Sun, 2003, as cited in Sunalai, 2015). Interestingly, researchers on OL attests to the considerable interest engendered by ‘organizational learning’ and ‘learning organization’. While learning occurs in organization which is a social entity composing of more than one person, learning organization centers on continuous learning and improving of an organization (Marsick & Watkins, 1994; Senge, 1990; Sun, 2003).

The two concepts combine to make the study of learning organization possible in the sense that organizational learning encompasses collective learning and improvement aiming to construct a learning organization (Marquardt, 2011). Organizational learning requires different mechanisms to convert information to actionable knowledge at systemic levels of individuals, teams, and organization (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000). Team performance in a learning organization is improved when assessing the mediating effect of EE (Song et al., 2014). The ultimate goal of an organization is the creation of an engaged workforce, not only engaged individuals; thus, organizational learning enables interactions and dynamics among the three levels.

As for the researcher of the current study, organizational learning (OL) refers more to the process occurring in organizations, while and learning organization (LO)

implies a state that organizations wish to become. However, the distinction between organizational learning (OL) and learning organizations (LO) is not contrastively cut across because even though an organization after having been labelled a learning organization still continues their organizational learning process. Therefore, for the purpose of this dissertation, the researcher selected the concept of organizational learning capability established by Jerez-Goméz et al. (2005) to denote multidimensional ability of an organization to learn and strive.

### Organizational Learning Research in the World

Organizational learning has been studied in a variety of nuances. Learning has always gone on in organizations (Merriam et al., 2007). Conceptually, organizational learning (OL) and the learning organization (LO) have embedded one in the other, yet “OL preceded that of the LO” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 42). Sun (2003) also distinguished OL, a LO, and the LO from a linguistic perspective. OL was described by Argyris and Schön (1978) to occur “when members of the organization act as learning agents ... responding to changes in the internal and external environments ... their enquiry in private images and shared maps of organization” (p. 16).

OL is so flexible a concept spanning across disciplines and perspectives that it is impossible to capture with a single definition. Leavitt (2011) analyzed two distinctive schools of thought concerning OL. The cognitive school highlights the thinking element of OL, represented by Kolb’s (1984) thinking-based learning model. The behavioral school focuses on the “doing” element of OL, represented by Senge’s (1990) action-oriented patterns of thinking.

Senge (1990) is also believed to make the notion of the LO become a popular concept capturing the imagination of organizations worldwide (Merriam et al, 2007) after his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Watkins and Marsick (1993) viewed the LO more broadly, not only taking place with individuals but in teams, the organization and the community where that organization operates. Örtenblad (2002) found four types of understanding of the term LO in the literature and by practitioners. They are “organizational learning”, “learning at work”, “learning climate” and “learning structure”. In human resource development (HRD) literature, the term “organizational learning culture” has often been used (i.e. Egan et al., 2004; Joo, 2010; Islam et al., 2016) or another variation such as “learning organization culture” (i.e. Dirani, 2009) or simply “LO” (i.e. Ellinger et al., 2002). Therefore, it seems that now OL literature adopting an interpretive paradigm has attained dominance (Örtenblad, 2002).

#### Organizational Learning Research in Vietnam

Organizational learning has been discussed by a number of Vietnamese scholars in the educational context. Pham and Tran (2016) empirically addressed OL in higher education by examining the impact of employee participation on the OL process and performance of a public university in Vietnam. They defined OL process as having four components: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. They surveyed 136 employees, including managers, lecturers and researchers having more than five years of experience, in a public university in Hanoi. The findings showed that OL process was positively influenced by

employee participation in decision making. OL was also associated with the university performance which consisted of academic results and economic results.

In the context of a design industry in Vietnam, Pham and Swierczek (2006) studied the influence of organizational factors on learning outcomes assessed by performance improvement and organizational climate. The sample covered 339 designers in Vietnam construction firms via a survey research. They found that among the three organizational factors selected for this study, only leadership commitment was significantly related to both performance and climate outcomes; incentives (another organizational factor) were only associated with performance and staff interaction (the last organizational factor) impacted organizational climate positively.

Jones (2006) looked into the impacts of entrepreneurial strategies and OL on firm performance in transitional environment comparing China and Vietnam. According to the author, for developing countries like Vietnam and China in transition, challenges and opportunities were inherent for development. The author examined if firms could utilize entrepreneurial strategies to cope effectively with the changing environment and better understand the role of OL and knowledge management in the process. Data were gathered from 168 executives from China and 74 from Vietnam via a survey instrument.

As a result, OL was found to have a positive and significant influence on entrepreneurial orientation and also had a greater impact on firm performance. Chinese managers perceived their environment to be more threatening, while Vietnamese executives indicated that entrepreneurial strategic postures and organizational learning were more prevalent in their economy.

## **Perceived Organizational Support**

Perceived organizational support (POS), being informed in the current study, is the extent to which an organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being, as perceived by the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The widely used measure of POS so far has been the short uni-dimensional 8-item version by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002). POS is believed to raise employees' affective commitment to the organization and results in positive behavioral outcomes and decrease withdraw behaviors Kurtessis et al., 2015; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

### *Perceived Organizational Support Research in Vietnam*

Giao et al. (2020) investigated the moderating effect of POS on the impact of emotional intelligence on TI. The research team collected data from 722 full-time employees working in Vietnam's banks. POS was defined as "the general belief by an employee that support will be readily available from the organization when stressful situations arise, and urgent needs are addressed" (p. 3). Giao et al. (2020) adopted Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) measure but kept only seven items after doing a pilot study. The results of their study indicated that POS could decrease TI of employees; at the same time, POS would moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-family conflict.

Although He et al.'s (2014) study on POS and organizational identification did not link directly to the current study's domain of research, the results of their study would provide some meaningful implications in Vietnamese business organizational setting. Drawing on social exchange theory, He et al. (2014) proposed that POS on



organizational identification was stronger for employees with stronger exchange ideology. Moreover, employee investment would moderate the effect of POD and organizational identification and enhance the effect of exchange ideology on that relationship. The sample was 502 white-collar employees from Vietnamese organizations in several sectors. The POS was measured using Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) scale, with six items.

### *Employee Performance Outcomes in Vietnam\**

In the hypothesized conceptual model, the two employee performance outcomes on interest were organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI). The researcher of this dissertation deliberately put these variables in an order based on the assumption that the frequency of research results found in the first round on literature as well as hypothetical relationships with OL, POS, and EE. However, the second round of literature review has proved an interesting result when the order was reverse: TI was the most dominant employee outcomes in Vietnamese business literature, followed distantly by OCB. That explained why the following sections were structured as follows.

#### **Turnover Intention**

Turnover intention (TI) referred to an employee's voluntary intent to leave the organization (Saks, 2006) and was more predictive of the actual quit behavior in the workforce than any other variable (Berry & Morris, 2008). The dominance in TI research in the Vietnam business context, especially SMEs, could be attributed to the

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high turnover rate of 54% in Vietnamese organizations in reality (Ruge, 2011; as cited in Ehambaranathan et al., 2014). Reviewing nearly 20 papers of relevant literature about Vietnamese business in terms of employee engagement above has proved it clearly: two thirds of them mentioned TI.

Turnover intention was the topic of study and comparison between different economic sectors. According to Trang (2014), TI as a result of career plateau and job satisfaction was compared between state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private enterprises (PEs) and was surprisingly higher in PEs than SOEs. In the discussion of the results, since career plateau affected job satisfaction negatively and TI positively, the same feeling for career plateau resulted in lower satisfaction by the employees, making their leave intention stronger in PEs than SOEs. Whereas, Gam (2008) looked into the impact of job characteristics and job attitude on behavior intention represented by TI. The author found the relationship between job affective commitment (job attitude component 1) and job satisfaction (job attitude component 2) on TI, except for attitude toward change (job attitude component 3). Further, there was a significant difference in TI score between group of SOEs and PEs, and between FIEs (foreign invested enterprises) and SOEs.\*

There were also studies on TI in different industries in Vietnam. In the banking industry, Le (2011) enlisted organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work engagement as important reasons related to employee TI. The researcher came up with

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appropriate actions to curtail voluntary turnover and to control the turnover process more effectively. Regarding the pharmaceutical industry, Ha (2010) paid attention to determinants that affected TI among medical sales representatives in HCM city. Despite a steady growth in this sector (VNS Youth, 2010; as cited in Ha, 2010), higher turnover rate become a serious problem. Ninety responses from medical sales reps helped discover the factors impacting organizational commitment and satisfaction as well as the correlations of them and TI. Findings included the negative relationship between these factors and TI. Of further interest was Tran's (2015) thesis on job satisfaction of preventive medical workers in northern Vietnam. The lack of studies in the health care industry in Vietnam on job satisfaction and work performance psychological well-being, and employee turnover urged the researcher to do the task. Focus was placed on job satisfaction, but the author's thorough research process (four phases with mixture of methods) helped produced reliable results, particularly the positive relationship between job satisfaction and TI.\*

Turnover intention could be the result of intensity at the workplace. Heavy job demands in the IT industry also made IT employees in Vietnam reluctant to stay in their organizations (Nguyen, 2014). In particular, drivers of TI included hectic work, role conflict and ambiguity as well as absence of career opportunities by increasing emotional exhaustion while inhibitors of TI were supervisory support and peer support

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via reduced emotional exhaustion. Also, Pham (2012) saw TI one of the major consequences of burnout and tried to prove the causal relationship between various aspects of job demands and burnout.\*

Nguyen (2010) directly unearthed the turnover literature and zoomed in on job embeddedness – a multidimensional construct meaning the combined forces that tend to keep an employee from leaving their job. The author studied 304 employees working in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Hanoi. Results proved job embeddedness to be negatively associated with TI: the richer job embeddedness, evident by favorable HR practices, job characteristics, and perceived organizational support, the lower the turnover intention was for SOEs employees. In continuance of the same research line, five years later, Nguyen (2015) added job characteristics to job embeddedness in their relationships with TI. The results indicated that job characteristics not only directly influenced job embeddedness, but also affected TI via the mediation effect of embeddedness. The author kept the same population of SOEs employees but did a survey research on a large sample of 473 (325 returned, 292 valid).

Although targeting a medium-sized foreign invested company that located in Ho Chi Minh City and focusing on the actual turnover, Lee's (2015) gave some meaningful implications for TI. Lee studied turnover from talent management perspective and wished to know if talent management strategies would explain the high turnover rate in that company. Using Pareto 80/20 rule, the author explored the four main factors of

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talent management: employee compensation and benefits, training and career prospects, employee relationships and employer branding. Effectiveness of these strategies impacted employee turnover negatively.

In summary, turnover intention in Vietnamese business organizations seemed to be studied on a much more extensive scale than the other two outcome variables in the model. Results of the literature review have revealed that TI was contemplated from different corporate ownerships, various economic sectors to more in-depth conceptual studies, connecting to TI to its driving or straining forces as well as actual turnover.

### **Organizational Citizenship Behavior\***

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was an arsenal of extra-role behaviors which were intentional and discretionary in nature helped improve the functioning of the organization (Dalal, 2005; Organ, 1988; Organ, 1997; Schnake, 1991). Interestingly enough, this concept was rarely noticeable in organizational research in Vietnamese business context. In Them (2012), the author inspected the relationship between work stressors and OCB directed toward individual (OCB-I) and its mediating role in the link between work stressors and individual task performance. The sample contained 53 teams with a total of 53 supervisors/team leaders and 184 subordinates. Results indicated that at the individual level, challenge and hindrance stressors were significantly related to OCB-I, which in turn mediated the positive relationship between challenge stressors and employees' task performance.

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If turnover intention was abundantly analyzed in Vietnam, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) captured a very humble image. The only study about OCB found in relevant research about Vietnamese businesses might present a wide gap of research in Vietnam in the global circumstances of research mass on the same topic. Such a fact may present a highly potential possibility of the current study to fill out the OCB research gap in Vietnam.\*

*Potential Mediation of Employee Engagement in SMEs in Vietnam*

The intention to explore the mediating role of EE between OL, POS and TI, OCB originated from the review of the antecedents and consequences of EE in the business world (the first review). Other countries including Asia have been doing more and more research on EE as a mediator. The researcher of this dissertation would explain that this tendency indicated wide recognition of the increasing importance of EE. EE is not for the sake of EE; people study it not out of self-interest. There should be a close linkage between creating an engaged workforce for the organizational performance, individual performance and human development. Clearly, there should also exist conditions and environment for employees to engage in their jobs and with their organizations.

The review on EE research in Vietnam (Second review) clearly showed that similar concepts to EE have been done in Vietnam, regardless of the depth. In several papers, the scholars have used such similar concepts as mediators to imply a causal relationship between the antecedents and consequences of them (Ehambaranathan et al.,

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2014; Nguyen et al., 2014; Pham, 2012). If EE was used as a mediator in the conceptual model, it would help prove the causal relationship between OL, POS and two employee performance outcomes.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter II consisted of brief description about literature review strategies and critique of relevant literature. In particular, the first review outlined major themes in the literature including antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (EE). Antecedents were categorized into internal environment, job related factors, and employee-related aspects. The consequences of interest were intra-role behaviors, extra-role behaviors, and personal development and growth. Based on review in the first stage, a theoretical framework was formulated with three major theories of Systems and Systems Thinking, Self-Determination, and Human Capital. After that a hypothesized conceptual model was developed. Then the hypothetical constructs were delved deeper in the context of Vietnamese business (Second review).

In the second review, in the Vietnamese context, EE concept was situated, organizational learning (OL) was studied and selected employee performance outcomes of turnover intention (TI) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) were analyzed. Research gaps could be filled because there has not been a research on EE against the global research development of the construct; just research on similar concepts such as commitment or job satisfaction existed. For the rest of the variables on the hypothetical conceptual model, very few studies have been done: OL and OCB research were scant while POS was limited and more recent. Therefore, a comprehensive model connecting

all these five constructs in the Vietnamese business, especially SMEs setting would be hoped for a great academic and practical contribution. Further transitional material to connect the gap in the literature to the methods are going to be described in Chapter III. This research is expected to fill out the gaps on EE, OL, and OCB research individually as well as their associations, hoping to inform research and practice further.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

In this chapter, the methods utilized to study the relationships among organizational learning, employee engagement, and selected employee outcomes in Vietnamese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are explained. The purpose of this dissertation study was to examine the extent to which employee engagement (EE) mediates the relationships between organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) and performance-related outcomes including organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) in Vietnamese SMEs. Being addressed in this chapter are the study design, population, sampling procedures, study sample, instrumentation, assumed data collection process, and subsequent data analysis.

#### **Study Design**

With a view to answering the research questions and testing the hypothesized conceptual model, a cross-sectional survey research was designed and structural equation modeling (SEM) was adopted as a statistical technique for data analysis. Such a design enabled the researcher to capture the perceptions of the participants in the sample group at a specific point in time (Babbie, 2013). SEM combined statistical methods for modeling the relations between variables in the hypothesized model that was obtained via a thorough literature review (Hoyle, 2012).

According to Hoyle (2012), SEM allow simultaneous examination of the measurement model confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the structural model (path

analysis). There are two components in an SEM technique. First, CFA allow examination of the relationships of the observed variables to the underlying constructs. Second, path analysis is used to measure the relationships among unobserved, latent constructs.

Related issues concerning the study design will be discussed to give an overview of research the process. Details will be developed in the data analysis section.

The questionnaire adopted in this study was administered via both paper and online formats. It was composed of five existing and validated instruments. On the left side of the model were two constructs - organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) – being measured by two instruments. They were the Organizational Learning Capability (OLC), Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005), and the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS-8, Eisenberger et al., 1986). The center of the model symbolized the mediator, employee engagement (EE), which was measured by the Employee Engagement Scale (EES), developed by Shuck et al. (2016). The outcome variables – organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention (TI) were displayed on the right side of the model. These outcomes were measured using the scales of the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (OCB-C) as developed by (Spector et al., 2010) and Turnover Intention (TI) developed by Colarelli, (1984) (see Figure 2 – *Hypothesized Conceptual Model*).

To create a close connection with the proposed study in point, the techniques above helped answer the following research questions and relevant hypotheses:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

To address these research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

### **Target Population**

Since there are widely divergent sources on SMEs in Vietnam, the data from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) were synthesized and tabulated in terms of types of ownership, industries, and locations as bases for the sampling frame. Other sources of information came from Vietnamese SME supporting agencies and international organizations as well as consulting firms. As a developing country, data had not been developed well into databases ready for use in research and other academic or professional purposes.

In order to collect data for this study, the researcher focused on Vietnamese small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the capital city, Hanoi, as the population. Vietnamese SMEs were chosen as the targeted population because of several reasons. First, the Vietnamese economy was made up of private SMEs. They were the engine for growth of the country in the future. Second, individual performance and organizational

productivity for Vietnamese enterprises in general were low given labor abundance and resource availability. Therefore, the country and business leaders had been seeking for ways to boost up individual performance and organizational productivity. Building organizational learning capability along with providing organizational support could have been potential solutions to the difficulty. Third, organizational performance was also affected by the increasing turnover rate of employees, which might have been attributed to a low level of employee engagement (Towers Watson, 2010). Finally, access to Vietnamese SMEs, as compared with big corporations, was easier for an individual researcher like the author of this current study.

### **Study Sample**

The following sections sketch out some important attributes of the sample for the current research. They included sampling frame, sample design, and sample size.

#### *Sampling Frame*

According to a report released in 2016 by the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam (MPI) on an SME survey in 2015, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the private sector continue to be central to the Vietnamese development process and growth of the Vietnamese economy. Vietnamese SMEs have seen exponential growth over the last decade. The MPI's General Statistics Office reported 49,203 registered private enterprises in 2013, which was twice higher than in 2003 when only 25,653 firms were registered (MPI, 2013).

### *Sample Design*

Based on study on target population, cluster sampling was adopted, and the method involved drawing a sample with elements in groups (Visser et al., 2014). The reason for this sampling choice holds in the geographic dispersion of the SME population and with accessible capacity of the author of the current dissertation study. Snowball sampling was also used to expand the sample size, meaning initial enterprises surveyed would recruit other enterprises. In theory, once the ball is rolling, it picks up more “snow” along the way and becomes larger and larger (Babbie, 2013).

At the first level of clustering, SMEs in Hanoi, the capital city, was selected. At the second level of clustering, since Vietnamese enterprises are categorized into three main sectors (agriculture, forestry and fishery; industry and construction, and trade and service), these was the basis for demographic segmentation of the current study.

One more criterion for sampling inclusion involved the years they were in operation. The SMEs selected had at least three years being in business, assuming they were established long enough to validate some of the hypothesized model’s variables. One of them was organizational learning, which was a process that required a more systemic organization to be in place. The number of companies investigated in the current study was 18 because SMEs usually do not have the workforce exceeding 300 employees per company (see Table 4 – *Definition of SMEs in Vietnam*).

### *Sample Size*

For the hypothesized conceptual model to run on structural equations, the critical sample size should be 200, meaning any number above 200 was understood to provide sufficient statistical power for data analysis (Hoelter, 1983, Garver & Mentzer, 1999, and Sivo et al., 2006; as cited in Hoe, 2008). The sample size reported for the current study was 455.

In this study, the unit of analysis and reporting in individual employees in SMEs. Because of such uniqueness, another basis for counting the sample in this hypothesized structural model was the number of survey questions, holding normality of the data and missing values constant (Wolf et al., 2013). Since the main section originally contained 49 questions (excluding eight demographic questions and two open questions), the sample should have involved approximately 400 – 450 respondents, in compliance with the suggested number in the literature. The data collected in the current study was 455. After manually refining for poor cases (ones who left answers blank or almost blank), 425 was used for final analysis. The process was detailed below in Table 5.

### *Sampling Procedure*

The target population of the dissertation comprised of employees working for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam. A self-reported survey was translated into Vietnamese using the backward-forward translation technique for ensuring accuracy of the content. To increase the sample size the most possible, both paper and online forms were capitalized. The survey was administered by the Human Resource personnel of each enterprise (via the contact of the researcher of this study). The timeline and other

information were described in Table 5. Participants who completed the survey would receive a financial incentive.

**Table 5**

*Data Collection Periods and Sample Size*

Period 1					Period 2				
Duration	n*	Percent	n**	Percent	Duration	n*	Percent	n**	Percent
Feb -	211	91.7	19	8.3	Jul -	116	51.5	109	48.5
Apr					Aug				
2018	230				2018	225			

*Note.* n\*: paper questionnaire, n\*\*: online survey

Through the two processes, a total of 455 responses were returned, with 230 from the first period and 225 from the second one. The sample size consisted of 327 (approximately 72%) responses via paper questionnaire and 128 (approx. 28%) via online survey. After removing the incomplete cases, 425 responses were utilized as the final data set.

**Constructs and Instrumentation**

Theoretically, there are three main types of instruments being used in quantitative research. According to Babbie (2013), an existing instrument (intact instrument) is what already established and has been used in the past. A modified instrument is the one revised wholly or partly by the user and needs permission for revision from the original developer(s). The third type is a brand-new instrument developed by the researchers themselves during their research process.



For the current study, the five instruments were all existing and validated. They were: (a) the Organizational Learning Capability (OLC; Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005); (b) the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS, Eisenberger et al., 1986), (c) the Employee Engagement Scale (EES; Shuck et al., 2016); (d) the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (OCB-C; Spector et al., 2010); (e) the Turnover Intention scale (TI; Colarelli, 1984). Respectively, these instruments measure the constructs of the current study, namely organizational learning, perceived organizational support, employee engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention.

These instruments were selected based on the following criteria: evidence of validity and reliability, practical use (short form upon availability), and cultural relevance based on expert experience. They were described in brief; specific items of each instrument were in Appendix A. The survey had a total of 49 questions as the main content, eight demographic questions, and two open questions.

### *Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement (EE) was assessed using the Employee Engagement Scale (EES), developed and validated by Shuck et al. (2016). This 12-item three-dimensional measure was developed for use in HR and management. Utilizing four independent studies, the EES dwelled in three subscales: cognitive engagement (Ce), emotional engagement (Ee), and behavioral engagement (Be); a higher-order factor of employee engagement (EE) represented the three above.

In particular, Shuck et al. (2016) explored the factor structure and reliability of the EES (initially 14 items) on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly*

*disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* in Study 1, out of four validation studies. The sample (N = 283) consisted of workers in different sectors including service, manufacturing, professional, and non-profit. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation. All of the related results suggested the data were suitable for EFA (Barlett's test of sphericity, the diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy). EFA results showed that the three factors Ce, Ee, and Be explained 58.93% of the common variance. Ee and Be had a moderate correlation of .49, Ce had a weaker correlation of .32 with Ee, of .29 with Be. Further, Cronbach's alphas were .89, .92, and .63 for Ee, Be, and Ce, respectively. Since Ce index was below the acceptable threshold, the team refined it by seeking updated literature.

Study 2 (17 items, same Likert scale) was designed to confirm the factor structure, improve the overall model, and establish initial levels of convergent and nomological validity of the revised scale. The sample (N = 241) were employees in the health care sector. First, convergent validity was tested by correlating EES scores to the Job Engagement Scale – JES, 18 items (Rich et al., 2010). Shuck et al. (2016) used Mplus 7.1 to test the confirmatory factor analysis model. Findings indicated that the three factors were statistically significantly, moderately, and positively related to one another (Ee and Be:  $r = .57$ ; Ee and Ce:  $r = .59$ ; Be and Ce:  $r = .73$ ). Moreover, a higher-order factor of EE demonstrated that they were statistically significant and strong (standardized regression weights for Ee, Be, and Ce were .68, .84, and .87, respectively). To manifest internal consistency reliability, all three final scales had strength: alpha for

Ce was .93, for Ee .91, and for Be .92. Second, nomological validity was inspected by correlating the EES scores to the Cognitive Work Appraisal Scale – CWAS, 11 items (Shuck et al., 2015). The internal consistency reliability was found to be strong at .87.

Study 3 (same Likert scale) was supposed to complete a final reduction from 15 to 12 items. Also, study 3 was conducted to confirm the structure of the shorter version and form additional evidence of reliability, nomological validity, and discriminant validity. The sample (N = 1,067) was composed of employees working in various units of the financial services. Applying the same procedures and protocol like in the previous studies, the overall scale was reduced from 15 to 12 items (4 items in each subscale) via factor and reliability analysis and expert review. Taking a step further, Shuck et al. (2016) checked nomological validity by connecting EE with other outcomes previously linked to EE. They were job satisfaction, discretionary effort, psychological well-being, and intent to turnover. CFA models indicated that the three factors Ce, Ee, and Be were statistically related to one another:  $r = .67$ ,  $.59$ , and  $.74$  for Be and Ee, Ee and Ce, and Be and Ce, respectively. Similar to Study 2, a higher-order factor model was scrutinized with EE as the higher-ordered latent construct. Meaningful results came when standardized regression weights were  $.81$ ,  $.73$ , and  $.92$  for Ce, Ee, and Be, respectively.

Study 4 (12 items, the same Likert scale) was to test for evidence of predictive incremental validity. The sample (N = 490) was taken from the education field. The Engaged Teacher Scale - ETS, 16 items - was used alongside the EES to explore incremental validity and alongside the CWAS-11 for predictive incremental validity. The CWAS-11 continued to show strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and acceptable

model fit. Then the research team examined the proportion of variance explained in the CWAS-11, the job satisfaction scale and the intention to turnover scale.

### **Rationale for Selection of the Instrument in the Current Study**

There have been at least five EE instruments available for use; each was seen from a different perspective (Bailey et al., 2017). The EES was selected for use in this study because of it was currently validated and applied in the organizational business setting. The EES has three dimensions: Ce, Ee, and Be. Details of each have been mentioned in chapter II (Table 1 – *Concepts Used Interchangeably in Employee Engagement Research*). It was argued in the current study that the EE phenomenon was informed by Self-Determination theory and Job Demands-Resources model. In particular, engagement could be the result of the employee's disposal to determine whether or not they would be engaged (via intrinsic motivation and/or extrinsic motivation). It could also be created thanks to the resources available at the organizational level. One such example could be an enabling environment for learning that helps ease heavy job demands. As one dimension, Ce measures awareness, the thinking, and decision of the employees themselves to invest in their work role to produce the best possible result for the organization. Another dimension, Ee, connects the employees with their current organizations, emphasizing the embedded interaction and dynamism within the organization. More importantly, the Be dimension elucidates demonstrated positive behaviors that are expected by any company from their employees, towards organizational and personal development. Any organizations, not just Vietnamese ones, are looking for such engaged employees.

In organizations, employee engagement looks like a combination of constructs and may result in outcomes that appear similar to engagement such as citizenship behavior, commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction, etc. (Byrne, 2015).

### *Organizational Learning*

Organizational learning (OL) is measured using the Organizational Learning Capability developed by Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005). This measurement scale identified the elements that could reflect the complex and multidimensional nature of OL: managerial commitment (*mc*), systems perspective (*sp*), openness and experimentation (*oe*), and knowledge transfer and integration (*kti*). Managers could use the information from the instrument to assess learning capability of their firms and find ways to improve it. Respondents (111 employees in Spanish manufacturing firms in the chemistry industry) were asked to select their level of agreement to the 16 statements using a Likert-type scale (1 representing “*totally disagree*” and 7 “*totally agree*”). Sample items included “Employee learning is considered more of an expense than an investment” (the *mc* dimension), “All parts that make up this firm are interconnected, working together in a coordinated fashion” (the *sp* dimension), “This firm promotes experimentation and innovation as a way of improving the work processes” (the *oe* dimension), and “In this firm, teamwork is not the usual way to work” (the *kti* dimension, reverse-coded).

Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005) addressed content validity of the instrument through (1) exhaustive literature overview and (2) preliminary test via personal interviews with five general managers and six human resource managers. They reported reliability by way of a factor analysis using principal components extraction with oblique rotation on

the 16 items. Each of the four factors had an eigenvalue over one, which provided an explanation for 63% of the total variances. These results revealed that the items corresponding to the same dimension loaded on a single factor.

Furthermore, to audit the model fit, a second-order confirmatory factor analysis was made after the 16 indicators were subjected to the multivariate normality test. LISREL 8 was adopted on the robust covariance matrix using the Generalized Least Squares method. To check the degree of internal consistency, both the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability index were calculated for each of the dimensions. The coefficient values for managerial commitment, systems perspective, openness and experimentation, and knowledge transfer and integration dimensions were .82, .78, .73, and .80, respectively; the whole scale was .88 (all above the limit of .70).

As for convergent and discriminant validity, correlations among the four learning subscales were significant (.01) which corroborated the existence of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was tested by comparing the correlation between the items within each learning subscale (managerial commitment, for example) with the correlations between the items of one subscale (systems perspective) and the items of each of the remaining subscales (openness and experimentation and knowledge transfer and integration). All cases of correlations were satisfied, except for the EX4 and TR1. Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005) took a step further for inspection of discriminant validity - conducting a principal components factor analysis for 16 items of the instrument and the 5-item measure of the firm's level of innovation - and concluded that the Organizational Learning Capability instrument and level of innovation were clearly differentiated.

## **Rationale for Selection of the Instrument in the Current Study**

Although there are several different types of OL measures, the Organizational Learning Capability instrument (Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005) was picked out generally because of the following explanation and hypotheses. In Vietnam, people are getting more familiar with the term “learning society” (xã hội học tập). However, it has been uncertain how familiar people are with the term “learning organization” (tổ chức học tập) and how this concept should be operationalized in the small and medium business context. It is highly possible that there exists a lack of empirical research being carried out to prove the essential role of OL in creating a competitive advantage for companies. This study assumed that competitive advantage came primarily from the organization’s employees. Good employee outcomes again derive from the ability of the organization to learn and engage, where the organization in this context was understood as the collective people and their interactions with-in and with-out in the business setting.

Looking more specifically into the Organizational Learning Capability instrument in relation to the Vietnamese business context, the author of this dissertation analyzed each dimension of the instrument. First, management commitment could be used to promote, or push, workers to be more engaged, go extra, behave more like organizational citizens, and reduce intention to quit, via human resources practices and empowerment initiatives. Vietnamese employees inherently were more inclined to be passive when it comes to working or being innovative at work.

Second, although taking a systems perspective could be challenging for SMEs due to their small scale, it certainly could be realized with management determination.

Also, such a systems perspective (individual – team – organization - inter-organization) could facilitate leaders in creating not only engaged individuals, but the whole engaged workforce. Engaged workforce results from positive discretionary effort or synergy of engaged individuals. Systems thinking assures a smooth coordination of corporate activities and effectiveness.

Third, openness and experimentation would be challenging to operate because of the Vietnamese culture generally and SME characteristics specifically. Regarding openness, Vietnamese employees were generally hesitant to open up about their opinions, even when being asked. They might have their own ideas but are not proactive enough to express them publicly. Openness is closely associated with experimentation as teams of employees would be open together for doing teamwork. Both of them is the source for innovativeness: innovativeness is nurtured via experimentation. Despite such difficulty, in the long-term, openness and experimentation is relevant to and indispensable for Vietnam businesses in terms of productivity, quality, and innovation (Vietnam Socio-Economic Development Plan, SEDP, 2011-2020).

The last dimension - knowledge transfer and integration - is essential as learning is scaffolding; without transfer and integration of knowledge through learning, creativity and effectiveness cannot be achieved and sustained among members. For small businesses in Vietnam, it is the bottom line for survival and development.

#### *Perceived Organizational Support*

Perceived organizational support (POS) was measured using the SPOS-8, which is short for Survey for Perceived Organizational Support. It has eight statements by



Eisenberger et al. (1986). They constructed the survey, originally with 32 statements (Eisenberger et al., 1986). They conducted two studies, namely Globality of POS (Study 1) and Effects of POS and Exchange Ideology on Absenteeism (Study 2), in which Study 1 has its implication for the current dissertation. Study 1 asked 361 employees in a credit bureau and a telephone company 36 commitment statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The analysis resulted in a reliability coefficient of .97, with all good factor loadings. A sample item was “The organization values my contribution to its well-being”. The findings indicated that employees develop global beliefs concerning the degree to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being.

### **Rationale for Selection of the Instrument in the Current Study**

Popularity and practical use were rated for selection of SPOS-8. First, the scale was widely used. There were relatively few studies on perceived organizational support until the mid-1990s; after the year 2000, research on the topic began to burgeon. Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) meta-analysis showed the number of 70 studies throughout 1999 and well over 700 at the time of their study. Recent studies found a clear and consistent relationships of POS with its predicted antecedents and consequences (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Second, the shorter 8-item version (SPOS-8) contains high-loading items and “because the original scale is unidimensional and has high internal reliability, the use of shorter version does not appear problematic” (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 699).

### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is estimated using the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (OCB-C) originally developed by Fox et al. (2007). This experiment was built up in response to Dalal's (2005) call for reexamination of CWB (counterproductive work behavior – behavior that harms) and OCB (behavior that helps). Participants were 274 employees (259 valid) and their supervisors (dyads) at a large university in the southeastern United States. This OCB-C had 10 items and 5-point summated rating scales, either in agreement (1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*) or frequency (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Everyday*) format. Descriptive statistics and coefficient alphas as measures of internal consistency reliability were good (more than .70).

#### **Rationale for Selection of the Instrument in the Current Study**

The rationale for OCB-C choice was related heavily to the population of this study. The units of study are Vietnamese small and medium businesses. OCB is a new construct of study in the Vietnamese context, so the instrument adopted with short and straightforward statements has an advantage. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted the 5-point frequency scale. The frequency scale reflected the actual demonstration of such citizenship behaviors, which are considered extra-role employee outcomes from the organizational perspective. Although there is a potential for OCB to be noticeable in the Asian culture (Qherich, 2015), hardly does any research about Vietnam or by the Vietnamese have their studies relating to OCB (see Chapter II of the current study). A straightforward instrument OCB-C is believed to work well for measurement of the OCB tendency in Vietnamese SMEs.

### *Turnover Intention*

Turnover intention (TI) was measured by a scale developed by Colarelli (1984). The field experiment sampled 164 full-time entry-level bank tellers. The experiment aimed to examine the effectiveness of two methods of presenting realistic job previews (RJPs) to teller applicants: One group received RJPs from an incumbent teller; another received RJP brochure; the third was a control group. Fewer people left the first group after two or three months than the brochure and control groups, while there was no significant difference in turnover between the last two groups. The TI measure used for this study had three items: “If I have my own way, I will be working for (name of bank) one year from now” (reverse coded), “I frequently think of quitting my job,” “I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months”. The items were anchored from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* with internal consistency reliability  $\alpha = .75$ .

#### **Rationale for Selection of the Instrument in the Current Study**

The Colarelli’s (1984) scale was selected because of practicality (3 items) and extensive usage that has been proved via the literature review. Moreover, the author of this dissertation anticipated that it would be challenging to collect data concerning this instrument. The intention to leave an organization could be a sensitive issue for participants to respond to when being asked. Or worse, the responses could be distorted from reality. The TI data collected via a channel of contacts (company’s leaders, HR contacts, and the employee’s direct report) might affect participants’ genuine opinions,

thus negatively influenced the reliability of such a TI measure. Therefore, to overcome the challenge, a three-item scale would be of convenience.

Below is the summary of the constructs, measures, and the authors of the related studies.

**Table 6**

*Summary of Constructs, Measures and Original Authors used in Current Study*

Construct	Measure	Author(s)
Employee Engagement	Employee Engagement Scale (EES)	Shuck et al. (2016)
Organizational Learning	Organizational Learning Capability (OLC)	Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005)
Perceived Organizational Support	Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS)	Eisenberger et al. (1986)
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (OCB-C)	Fox et al. (2007)
Turnover Intention	Turnover Intention scale (TI)	Colarelli (1984)

*Source.* Compilation by the author of this dissertation

### **Data Collection**

A cross-sectional survey was designed to collect data for this research. Cross-sectional surveys are non-experimental in nature that help provide a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, opinions of a population by studying a sample of

that population, via the means of questionnaire or structured interviews (Creswell, 2014). This survey questionnaire correlated variables or described responses to the independent variables (OL, POS), mediating variable (EE) and dependent variables (OCB and TI). Creswell (2014) also had a relatively comprehensive checklist for a survey method plan that could be useful for survey researchers. Dillman et al. (2014) detailed instructions to do surveys over the Internet, phone, mail or a mixture of them. Fowler (2014) identified the following tools to collect data: mail, telephone, the Internet, personal interviews, or group administration.

For the current study, a questionnaire was developed to obtain data for the research. Since all the five scales were validated and administered in English, it was then translated into Vietnamese following the forward-backward procedure (Behling & Law, 2011). To increase the response rate, both paper and online survey formats were used.

#### *Paper-and-Pencil Questionnaire*

For the target respondents, a paper questionnaire was administered in the SMEs in the capital city of Vietnam - Hanoi. Adopting the paper questionnaire approach helped increase the response rate, yet more time was spent on having direct contact with the enterprises. Time was also needed for entering the raw data into forms necessary to run a certain statistical test (Fanning, 2005).

#### *Online Survey*

Using an Internet survey and administering it online was discussed extensively in the literature (e.g. Creswell, 2013). The Qualtrics survey platform is useful for designing a survey online. The major strengths of online surveys include wider coverage and

economy, but the response rate may not be as what we expect. For data processing later, it could be a little faster provided missing data are handled tactfully.

#### *Instrument Translation*

The adopted instruments in the survey were originally developed in English. The questionnaire was then translated into Vietnamese because it surveyed the opinions of Vietnamese employees working for SMEs in Vietnam. Translating took place using the forward-backward technique to ascertain content validity. It means the English version was translated into Vietnamese in the first place by a translator. Then the translated version was transferred back into English by another translator. The two translators were certified language specialists who understood both cultures to an adequate level. The dissertation author, who is also a certified language specialist, compared the original English edition to the back-translated English and resolved any differences until both versions matched.

#### *Supplementary Qualitative Data*

The survey was supplemented by two open-ended questions on employee engagement and organizational learning. The reason for that integration was to explore further about the two phenomena via the perceptions of the employees working in the investigated SMEs. The first question was about the ways their organization could enhance employee engagement. The second question was about what organizational learning was. The responses will be briefly analyzed in Chapter IV and discussed further in Chapter V for research and practical implications.

## **Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2014), three criteria for data analysis that should be taken into account include the following: (a) Avoid going native - disregarding data that proves or disproves personal hypotheses that the quantitative researcher may hold, (b) Avoid disclosing only positive results - the quantitative data analysis process should reflect the statistical tests and not be underreported, and (c) Respect the privacy of the participants - survey researchers should disassociate names from responses during the coding and recoding process. For this study, there are eight hypotheses to be tested. They were described in both Chapters I and II.

Analysis of the descriptive statistics were completed using SPSS Version 26.0 (IBM, 2017). Exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and structural equation modeling was completed using Mplus 8.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Mplus is one of the SEM softwares; it uses a simple set of commands to specify and test different types of SEM models.

### *Preparing the Data - Missing Data*

For analysis of descriptive statistics carried out in SPSS, the default listwise deletion of missing data was used. Listwise deletion means a case with any missing variables is deleted from analysis; only cases with complete data on all variables are counted in for analysis (Geiser, 2013).

For exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and structural equation modeling, the Mplus software has capabilities for dealing with missing values via full information maximum likelihood [FIML] and multiple imputation (Enders,

2010; Geiser et al., 2012). Listwise deletion is also an option in Mplus. Therefore, no effort was needed to delete missing values in the raw data set before analyzing them in Mplus (Geiser, 2013). In the current study, confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling FIML procedures were used to estimate missing data.

### *Statistical Tests*

The following sections will explore the statistical tests in several vignettes. First, the scenario of structural equation modeling (SEM) was analyzed, with the relevant stages having visual illustrations. Second, mediation analysis approaches were explored, with Baron and Kenny's (1986) traditional convention in relation to the more contemporary approach (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Finally, a summary of the interested constructs of the current study and their statistical tests was provided.

### **The Structural Equation Modeling Scenario**

There were several kinds of statistical test for analysis depending on the research design, the distribution of data, and the type of variables (Coolidge, 2006; Tolson, 2015). The current research relied on structural equation modeling (SEM) as a statistical method for data analysis. SEM combined statistical methods for modeling the relations between variables in the hypothesized model that was obtained via a thorough literature review (Hoyle, 2012). Technically, SEM allowed simultaneous examination of the measurement model (CFA: confirmatory factor analysis) and the structural model (path analysis). First, CFA allowed examination of the relationships of the observed variables to the underlying constructs. Second, path analysis necessitated the measurement of the relationships among unobserved, latent constructs.



More importantly, the key phenomenon of interest in the current study was employee engagement (EE). Specifically, the current study explored EE mediating effect on the relationships between organizational learning and perceived organizational support and performance-related outcomes. The SEM technique permitted the analysis of mediation more efficiently when EE simultaneously played the role of a dependent and an independent variable in those relationships.

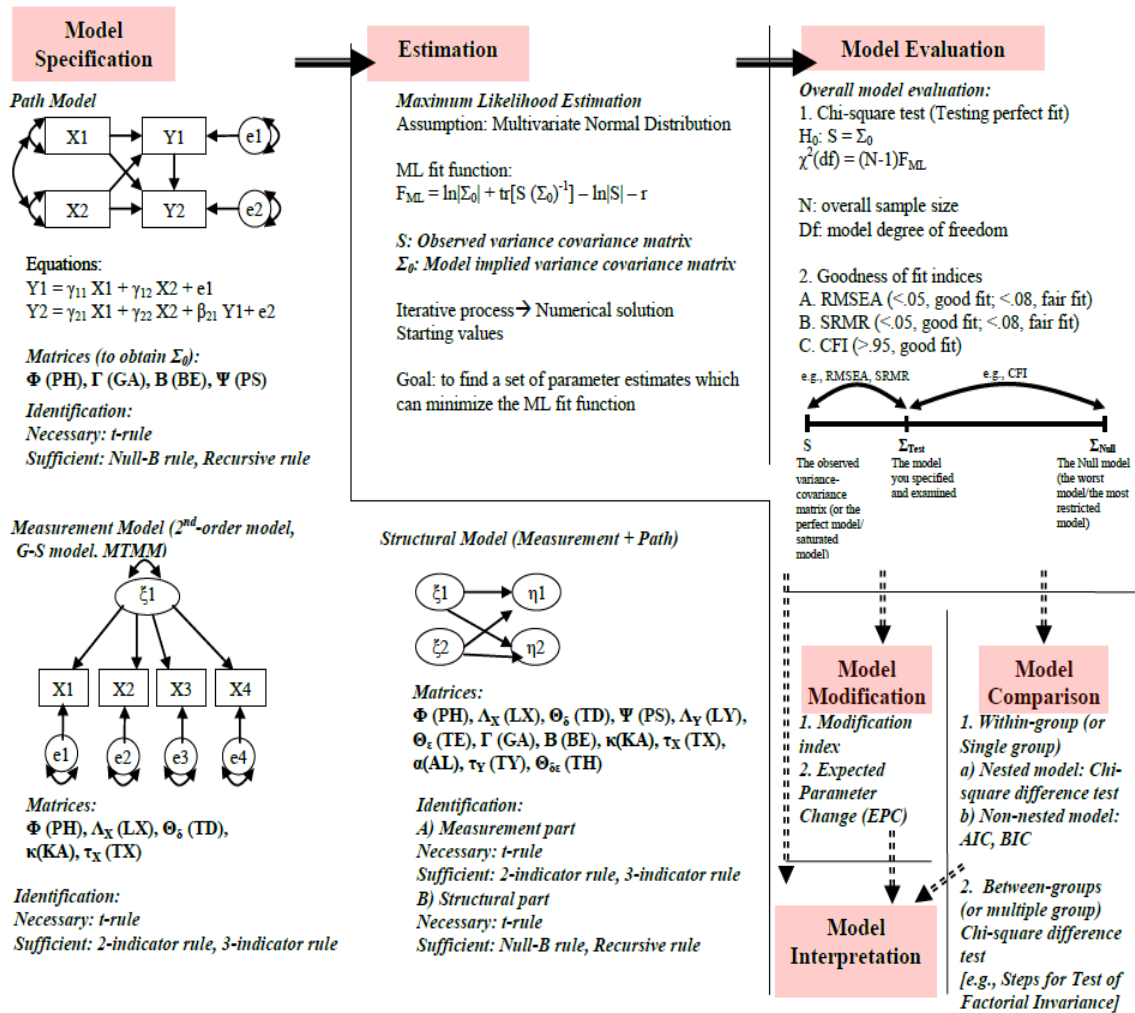
#### *Structural Equation Modeling Stages*

There are three main stages in SEM modeling: model specification, model estimation, and model evaluation, as shown in Figure 4 and Table 7. In addition, two possible steps of SEM after testing the model were also described, including model modification and model comparison. A table following the figure detailed these stages, with relation to the application of the current dissertation study in the main ones.

Figure 4 below gives a visual picture of the main stages of the SEM procedure, describing the key steps and relevant mathematical functions and symbols as well as the correlation-covariance matrices. Each pink-colored stage will be described in Table 7.

**Figure 4**

*A Big Picture of Structural Equation Modeling*



Reprinted from Class material, Oi-Man Kwok, A1-1 A Big Picture of SEM, EPSY 653's materials, Fall 2017 - August 30, 2017

Table 7 below is the description of the Big Picture of SEM figure above. Along with the stage, there are the descriptions and application in the current dissertation study.

**Table 7***Description of the SEM Stages*

Stage	Description	Application in the current study
Model specification	Developing a theoretical to test based on all of the relevant theory, research, and information available. <i>Model identification:</i> Determining whether a unique set of parameter estimates can be computed given the sample data contained in the sample covariance matrix $S$ and the theoretical model that produced the implied population covariance matrix $\Sigma$ .	The theoretical framework that informed a conceptual model were described in detail in Chapters I and II.
Model estimation	Obtaining estimates for each of the parameters specified in the model that produced the implied population covariance matrix $\Sigma$ . The intent is to obtain parameter estimates that yield a matrix $\hat{\Sigma}$ as close as possible to $S$ , our sample covariance matrix of the observed or indicator variables. When elements in the matrix $S$ minus the elements in the matrix $\hat{\Sigma}$ equal zero, $(S - \hat{\Sigma} = 0)$ , then $\chi^2 = 0$ , indicating a perfect model fit to the data and all values in $S$ are equal to values in $\hat{\Sigma}$ .	Model in the current study was estimated using maximum likelihood [FIML]. Details were scripted in the exploratory factor analysis section of Chapter III.
Model evaluation/testing	Determining how well the sample data fit the theoretical model. In other words, to what extent is the theoretical model supported by the obtained sample data Global omnibus tests of fit of the model are available as well as the fit of individual parameters in the model.	Chapter IV has the results of the model fit
Model modification	Changing the initial implied model and retesting the global fit and individual parameters in the new specified model. To determine how to modify the model, there are a number of procedures available to guide the adding or dropping of paths in the model so that alternative models can be tested.	Chapter IV has the results of the model modification
Model comparison	Comparing an implied model with a null hypothesis (independence model). The null model could also be any model that established a baseline for expecting other alternative models to be different.	N/A

Source. Adopted from *A Beginner's Guide to Structural Equation Modeling* (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016, p. 314)

## **Mediation Analysis**

A variety of procedures for mediation analysis have been developed (Baron & Kenny, 1986; James & Brett, 1984; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). The most popular procedure among researchers is the causal steps outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). When the following four conditions are met, mediation is established.

- (a) the independent variable (IV) is related to the dependent variable (DV)
- (b) the IV is related to the mediator
- (c) the mediator is related to the DV
- (d) when the mediator is statistically controlled, the IV is no longer related to the DV

However, the approach has some limitations that may affect the quality of inferences (Williams et al., 2009). They referred to the work by Kenny et al. (1998) to reinstate that the first and fourth conditions are not necessary. The second and third conditions are necessary and sufficient to establish mediation. As a result, the method for testing the mediated effect (the product of the effect from the IV to the mediator and from the mediator to the DV) was refined and modified so that researchers can test this effect using non-parametric procedures such as the bootstrap (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Therefore, the current study used these procedures to estimate the mediation effect of employee engagement.

## **The Four-Step Approach**

To modeling in SEM in this dissertation study, the analysis was conducted through the following (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016):

- (a) Use exploratory factor analysis to establish a meaningful theoretical model
- (b) Conduct a confirmatory factor analysis with a new sample of data
- (c) Conduct a test of the structural equation model, where mediation was established and tested
- (d) Test planned hypotheses about free parameters in the model

All the information concerning the hypotheses to be tested, variables types and measurement, and statistical tool of analysis is summarized in the following table, provided the two research questions along:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

The above questions and hypotheses will be integrated in terms of constructs studied and the statistical test, as shown in Table 8 below.

**Table 8**

*Summary of Variables and Statistical Tests*

Antecedent Variables		Mediating Variable		Consequent Variables		Statistical Analysis	Corresponding Research Questions and Hypotheses (H)
Variable	Measurement	Variable	Measurement	Variable	Measurement		
						SEM (Path Analysis)	<p><b>No-mediation case</b></p> <p>H1: OL → OCB</p> <p>H2: POS → OCB</p> <p>H3: OL → TI</p> <p>H4: POS → TI</p>
<b>OL</b>	Continuous	<b>EE</b>	Continuous	<b>OCB</b>	Continuous		<p>Research Question 1</p> <p>OL, POS → EE → OCB</p> <p><b>Indirect effect</b></p> <p>H5: OL → EE → OCB</p> <p>H6: POS → EE → OCB</p>
<b>POS</b>	Continuous			<b>TI</b>	Continuous		<p>Research Question 2</p> <p>OL, POS → EE → TI</p> <p><b>Indirect effect</b></p> <p>H7: OL → EE → TI</p> <p>H8: POS → EE → TI</p>

*Note.* The SEM statistical test allowed all the four mediation analyses to take place simultaneously.

OL: organizational learning, POS: perceived organizational support, EE: employee engagement, OCB: organizational citizenship behavior, and TI: turnover intention; H: hypothesis

## **Summary**

This chapter consisted of description of study design, target population, sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and issues regarding international studies. More development is needed for the target population section and subsequently sampling. Findings and discussion will be the topic of chapter IV.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In this chapter, the researcher presents the results of a study which explored the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationships between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and two performance-related outcomes of organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention. The chapter is organized into five main sections. First, selected demographic characteristics of the sample are described and presented in a frequency table. Second, descriptive statistics for the items of the survey as well as for the five latent constructs are presented, along with checks on reverse-scored items, univariate normality, measurement scale, and centrality and variability. Third, reliability and validity of the theorized constructs in comparison with values from previous literature, consisting of reliability and original measurement model, are described. Fourth, exploratory factor analysis is done with two of the study's constructs while adjustment is made for one construct. Fifth, reliability of the theorized constructs is rechecked after revision and adjustment in the previous step. Then, in step six, correlation analysis of the theorized constructs is obtained. As the last and very important step, structural equation modeling is detailed, with confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement model and path analysis for the structural model. Hypothesis testing is also performed in this step, in relation to the overarching research questions and the underlying hypotheses. The chapter is concluded with a brief summary of the results.

## Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the participants included gender, age, working time, and work role. As per research questions and the relevant hypotheses, the demographic data were not included in the analysis of this current study. Nevertheless, their information helped the interested readers to capture an overall picture of the participants involved in the survey questionnaire.

Table 9 recorded the employee demographic characteristics. Only the percentages of the participants who responded to the questions were considered valid as to be described in detail; those who did not respond had their record in the table only. As it was shown, of the valid 420 participants who chose to respond to the gender question, 50.48% were male, 49.05% were women, and 0.48% chose others for gender. There were 418 participants responding to the age question, of which two thirds (66.99%) fell in the over 25-40 age range, followed by the employees who were from 18 to 25 years old (24.40%) and over 40-49 and over 49 years old combined (8.62%). In terms of working time, out of the valid 423 responses, 33.33% of the participants spent less than a year in their organizations, 32.15% from 1-3 years, 21.04% had more than five years of working experience, and 13.48% worked between 3-5 years. When being asked about their work role, nearly two thirds (65.53%) of the employees had non-managerial role while one third (34.47%) were managers of some kind, in 409 valid cases.

**Table 9***Employee Demographic Characteristics*

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	212	50.48
	Female	206	49.05
	Other	2	0.48
	<i>Not reported</i>	5	1.18
	Total	425	100
Age	18-25	102	24.40
	Over 25-30	156	37.32
	Over 30-40	124	29.67
	Over 40-49	31	7.42
	Over 49	5	1.20
	<i>Not reported</i>	7	1.65
Total	425	100	
Working time	Less than a year	141	33.33
	1-3 years	136	32.15
	Over 3-5 years	57	13.48
	Over 5 years	89	21.04
	<i>Not reported</i>	2	0.47
Total	425	100	
Work role	Managerial role	141	34.47
	Non-managerial role	268	65.53
	<i>Not reported</i>	16	3.76
Total	425	100	

*Source.* Compilation by the author of this dissertation

Table 9 provides a useful picture of the sample respondents. First, the sample represented relatively equal voices of both the female and male workers in the small and medium enterprises in Vietnam. According to the World Bank (2019), female workers accounted for 47.8% of the total labor force of Vietnam in 2019. Although specific percentages vary with industries, the statistics from this study interestingly reflect the tendency. With regard to age, the majority of the participants aged between 18 to 40 years, which overlaps importantly with the biggest segmentation (25 to 34 years of age in both male and female populations) of the age structure of Vietnam (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). In terms of working time, more than half of the participants worked from less than one year to three years in their organizations; a third of them had from three to five years of working experience. This fact may represent the reality of labor force in Vietnam small and medium businesses. At the same time, it may affect the results of a study where organizational learning and employee engagement are of major interest. These phenomena may take longer time to be grounded in the business and therefore reflected in the employees' perception. The sample participants were a combination of the ones in management and leadership (one third) and non-management roles (two thirds), which can present a diversity in perceptions prevailing in Vietnam small and medium enterprises.

In conclusion, the employee characteristics provided an overview of the sample respondent in the current survey research. These characteristics may well represent the small and medium business section of the economy in particular and the business community of Vietnam in general. Although such information was not directly fed into

the main analysis of this study, it was helpful in forming an overall sketch of the study results because the employees' perceptions were reflected.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

SPSS Version 26.0 (IBM, 2017) was used to obtain two types of descriptive statistics, at the indicator variable and latent variable levels. Specifically, mean, standard deviation, and range, along with skewness and kurtosis values for the original 49 items of the survey instrument were reported. Then the five summated latent scales (organizational learning – OL, perceived organizational support – POS, employee engagement – EE, organizational citizenship behavior – OCB, and turnover intention – TI) covering the individual items were delineated.

#### *Descriptive Statistics of the Indicator Variables*

The current study's instrument had originally 49 indicator variables altogether. These items were investigated in several aspects. Table 2 provides the detailed description of the items, descriptively.

#### **Reverse-Scored Items**

Out of the original 49 items, seven of them were reverse coded, labelled *r* at the end of the corresponding statement in the description column in Table 2. This table only listed the reversed-coded items in their readily reverse-coded values, not the original ones. The TI construct had one reverse-coded item, ti\_3. The OL construct had two reverse-coded items, ol\_2 and ol\_15. The POS construct had four, pos\_2, pos\_3, pos\_5, and pos\_7. Before running reliability check or any data analysis, the researcher needed

to re-scale these reverse-coded items to ensure consistency in value with the rest items in the scale.

Specifically, the third item of the three-item TI construct, ti\_3, read “*If I have my way, I will be working for this organization one year from now*” was reverse scored. The TI construct was measured using the five-point Likert scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*). If the first two items complied with this structure for measurement of response value, the third item followed in an opposite direction. Now the values for the third items were recoded: 1 converting to 5, 2 to 4, 3 to 3, 4 to 2, and 5 to 1, to ensure a high value indicated the same type of response on every item. Therefore, for the TI items, 1 would indicate the least intention of an employee to leave his or her organization, and 5 would indicate the most intention to do so.

Similar procedures were conducted with the reverse-coded items from the OL and POS scales. Items 2 and 15 in the OL construct were reverse-scored that read “*Employee learning is considered more of an expense than an investment*” (ol\_2r, in the sub-scale of management commitment) and “*In this organization, teamwork is not the usual mode of operation*” (ol\_15r, in the sub-scale of knowledge transfer and integration). The two constructs were measured in the six-point Likert scale (between 1 – *totally disagree* and 6 – *totally agree*), so the data values for those reverse-scored items were literally reversed: 1 becomes 6, 2 becomes 5, and so forth. The purpose was to retain their distributional characteristics, only the distribution was reversed (Hair et

al., 2010). Higher scores on the scales meant higher level of learning and greater support from their organization, as perceived by the employees.

### **Univariate Normality Check**

To check univariate normality/non-normality of the individual indicator variables, skew and kurtosis were taken into account. They can occur either separately or together in a single variable (Kline, 2011). Skew implies that the shape of a unimodal distribution is asymmetrical about its mean. Kurtosis indicates the sharpness of the peak of a frequency-distribution curve, essentially measuring the presence of outliers. Several ways to measure skew and kurtosis exist. However, the more commonly accepted values for data to be considered normal are when skewness is between -2 and +2 and kurtosis is between -7 to +7 (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). For the current data, the absolute skew values of all the 49 variables were less than 2, ranging from -1.558 (ee\_4) to 1.629 (ti\_1). The absolute kurtosis values were less than 7, ranging between -.080 (ti\_3) to 5.942 (ee\_4).

### **Measurement Scale Check**

Most of the items were scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 6 (1 – *totally disagree* and 6 – *totally agree*), which were different from the original scales from 1-7. There was no safe “neutral” or “neither disagree nor agree” option. This modification was called forced-choice rating scale (Zavala, 1965). It was intentional by the current study’s researcher to have the respondents express an opinion or attitude on the statements being addressed. Such items included the 12 variables in the EE construct (from ee\_1 to

ee\_12), the 16 items of OL (from ol\_1 to ol\_16), and the 8 items of POS (from pos\_1 to pos\_8).

A five-point Likert scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*) was adopted for the three items belonging to the TI construct (from ti\_1 to ti\_3). It was also different from the original scale not in terms of scale point, but in terms of scale description (1- *strongly disagree* to 5- *strongly agree*; Colarelli, 1984). The modification was made based on two reasons. First, since it was sensitive for employee participants to discuss their intention to leave their organization; the question gave them the neutral option. Second, the likelihood scale could indicate the probability of their intention; the employee participants did not have to answer directly. Lower score on these items meant employees have a lower intention to leave their firm.

The ten items belonging to the OCB construct (ocb\_1 to ocb\_10) were measured on a five-point frequency scale (1 – *never*, 2 – *once or twice a year*, 3 – *once or twice a month*, 4 - *once or twice a week*, and 5 – *every day*). The verbs in all the statements were used in the past form to examine the reflective thinking of their behaviors toward other individual employees and the organization as a whole. The original instrument used a 5-point summated rating scales, depending on the condition to resort to either frequency response (“Never” to “Every day”) or an agree/disagree format (“Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”). Higher scores on the scale indicated higher ratings on the OCB behaviors of interest. The current study selected the first format because the researcher was interested in the actual OCB behaviors taking place in the workplace than the participants’ perception on the OCB behaviors.



## Centrality and Variability Check

Although there were variations in the ratings for all the scales that have made up the current study's instrument, they were taken into account when the results of this study were interpreted across items. The means and standard deviations for each construct were presented with the differences in scale ratings being taken into careful consideration for interpretation.

As shown in Table 10, the individual score was reported in relation to the valid sample of each corresponding item. First, EE items' mean scores reported the lowest for ee\_9 ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) and highest for ee\_3 and ee\_8 ( $M = 5.27$ ;  $SD = .712$  and  $.721$ , respectively), meaning the participants were on the *agree* range (5 points) when it comes to their engagement at work.

Second, OL items' mean scores were lowest in ol\_2r ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) that read "Employee learning is considered more of an expense than an investment", and highest in ol\_5, ol\_9, and ol\_11 ( $M = 4.91$ ;  $SD = .992$ ,  $.921$ , and  $.747$ , respectively), meaning the participants in the enterprises surveyed did not perceive that organizational learning was strongly ready. The highest score had not reached the *agree* point of 5 yet.

Third, the three TI's items had roughly similar mean scores: ti\_1 ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), ti\_2 ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ), and ti\_3r ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). One thing to note about the TI scale was that the lower the score, the less employee participants intend to leave their jobs. Another attribute worth noticing was the number of participants responding to these TI question was much smaller than other questions in the survey, approximately two thirds of the size as much. The researcher of this study anticipated

that people might have felt reluctant to respond to such questions. Overall, the statements concerning employees' intention to quit indicated that they were less likely to do so in the organizations surveyed, yet the individual responses deviated quite significantly from the mean.

Fourth, POS items' mean scores were lowest in pos\_3r ( $M = 4.18, SD = 1.16$ ) and highest in pos\_4 ( $M = 4.50, SD = .940$ ). It could be inferred that employee participants perceived the support from their organization as between *somewhat agree* (4 points) and *agree* (5 points). They did not rate high about the current status of organizational support in their firms. The bigger variability took place in the reverse-coded statements (pos\_2, pos\_3, pos\_5, and pos\_7) than the rest.

Fifth, OCB items' mean scores were lowest in ocb\_10 ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.34$ ) that read "*I gave up meal and other breaks to complete work*", and highest in ocb\_4 ( $M = 4.42, SD = .823$ ) that read "*I lent a compassionate ear when someone had a work problem*". The scale for these 10 items were from 1 to 5 (1 – *never*, 2 – *once or twice a year*, 3 – *once or twice a month*, 4 - *once or twice a week*, and 5 – *every day*). Thus, the mean results reflected the behaviors of citizenship at the organizations investigated were shown as often as nearly *one or twice a month* to nearly *every day*.

**Table 10***Descriptive Statistics of the Observed Indicators in the Current Study*

Item	Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
ee_1	I am really focused when I am working.	422	1	6	5.11	.796	-1.247	3.424
ee_2	I concentrate on my job when I am at work.	422	1	6	5.00	.792	-1.133	2.815
ee_3	I give my job responsibility a lot of attention.	420	1	6	5.27	.712	-1.558	5.942
ee_4	At work, I am focused on my job.	419	1	6	5.07	.727	-.932	2.760
ee_5	Working at my current organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	424	2	6	5.00	.834	-.698	.598
ee_6	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job.	424	2	6	5.00	.747	-.574	.538
ee_7	I believe in the mission and purpose of my organization.	425	1	6	4.99	.831	-.729	1.066
ee_8	I care about the future of my organization.	421	2	6	5.27	.721	-.869	1.041
ee_9	I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me.	422	1	6	4.44	1.05	-.605	.216
ee_10	I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked.	420	2	6	4.89	.847	-.728	.848
ee_11	I often go above what is expected of me to help my team be successful.	424	1	6	4.75	.858	-.465	.427
ee_12	I work harder than expected to help my company be successful.	424	1	6	4.87	.854	-.933	1.998
ol_1	The managers frequently involve their staff in frequent decision-making processes.	425	1	6	4.52	1.02	-.930	.895
ol_2r	Employee learning is considered more of an expense than an investment. (rs)	420	1	6	3.71	1.39	-.098	-1.004
ol_3	The organization's management looks favorably on carrying out changes in any area to adapt to and/or keep ahead of new environmental situations.	418	1	6	4.61	.954	-.917	1.009
ol_4	Employee learning capability is considered a key factor in this organization.	421	1	6	4.76	.976	-.952	1.334
ol_5	In this organization, innovative ideas that work are rewarded.	422	1	6	4.91	.992	-1.152	1.749

**Table 10** Continued

Item	Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
ol_6	All employees have generalized knowledge regarding this organization's objectives.	425	1	6	4.76	.962	-1.098	1.607
ol_7	All parts that make up this organization (departments, sections, work teams, and individuals) are well aware of how they contribute to achieving the overall objectives.	425	1	6	4.74	.857	-.817	1.158
ol_8	All parts that make up this organization are interconnected, working together in a coordinated fashion.	424	1	6	4.70	.971	-1.027	1.687
ol_9	This organization promotes experimentation and innovation as a way of improving the work processes.	423	1	6	4.91	.921	-1.181	2.316
ol_10	This organization follows up what other organizations in the sector are doing, adopting those practices and techniques it believes to be useful and interesting.	421	1	6	4.62	.917	-.899	1.318
ol_11	Experiences and ideas provided by external sources (advisors, customers, training organizations, etc.) are considered a useful instrument for this organization's learning.	424	1	6	4.91	.747	-.987	2.812
ol_12	Part of this organization's culture is that employees can express their opinions and make suggestions regarding the procedures and methods in place for carrying out tasks.	425	2	6	4.86	.830	-.934	1.093
ol_13	Errors and failures are always discussed and analyzed in this organization, on all levels.	421	1	6	4.43	1.01	-1.021	.986
ol_14	Employees have the chance to talk among themselves about new ideas, programs, and activities that might be of use to the organization.	422	1	6	4.77	.862	-1.015	1.627
ol_15r	In this organization, teamwork is not the usual way to work. (rs)	420	1	6	3.90	1.33	-.176	-.919

**Table 10** Continued

Item	Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
ol_16	The organization has instruments (manuals, databases, files, organizational routines, etc.) that allow what has been learnt in past situations to remain valid, although the employees are no longer the same.	422	1	6	4.51	.996	-.910	.712
ti_1	I frequently think quitting my job.	291	1	5	1.65	1.00	1.629	2.110
ti_2	I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months.	278	1	5	1.79	1.18	1.420	.978
ti_3r	If I have my own way, I will be working for this organization one year from now.	269	1	5	1.97	1.30	1.097	-.080
Pos_1	The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	424	1	6	4.46	.972	-.988	1.122
pos_2r	The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (rs)	424	1	6	4.42	1.21	-.802	.067
pos_3r	The organization would ignore any complaint from me. (rs)	422	1	6	4.175	1.17	-.590	-.103
pos_4	The organization really cares about my well-being.	425	1	6	4.50	.940	-.871	.808
pos_5r	Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice. (rs)	421	1	6	4.19	1.23	-.461	-.389
pos_6	The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.	422	1	6	4.36	.932	-.822	.583
pos_7r	The organization shows very little concern for me. (rs)	422	1	6	4.476	1.19	-.740	.015
pos_8	The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	421	1	6	4.48	.950	-.744	.594
ocb_1	I helped co-worker learn new skills or shared job knowledge.	420	1	5	3.97	1.02	-.751	-.222
ocb_2	I put in extra effort when I find it necessary.	421	1	5	4.10	1.02	-.888	-.204
ocb_3	I helped new employees get oriented to the job.	421	1	5	4.27	1.02	-1.344	.976
ocb_4	I lent a compassionate ear when someone had a work problem.	425	2	5	4.42	.823	-1.337	1.029
ocb_5	I offered suggestions to improve how work is done.	418	1	5	3.64	1.11	-.356	-.829
ocb_6	I helped a co-worker who had too much to do.	423	1	5	4.25	.941	-1.085	.299
ocb_7	I volunteered for extra work assignments.	421	1	5	3.91	1.14	-.812	-.220
ocb_8	I worked weekends or other days off to complete a project or task.	423	1	5	3.70	1.20	-.578	-.609

**Table 10** Continued

Item	Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
ocb_9	I volunteered to attend meetings or work on committees on own time.	423	1	5	3.73	1.23	-.663	-.547
ocb_10	I gave up meal and other breaks to complete work.	421	1	5	2.89	1.34	.143	-1.120

Note. ee - Employee engagement: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

ol - Organizational learning: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

ti - Turnover intention: 1-5 Likert scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*)

pos - Perceived organizational support: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

ocb - Organizational citizenship behavior: 1-6 frequency scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*)

r – reverse-scored items

In summary, employee respondents in the sampled Vietnam small and medium enterprises indicated that they were engaged at work, with means well above the midpoint of the scale (see Table 11 below for specific construct scales). However, their perceptions of the presence of organizational learning and organizational support were fluctuating between *partially agree* to *agree*. Interesting results deriving from the means score of turnover intention and organizational citizenship behaviors shown that the employees were less likely to leave their firms and frequently exhibiting citizenship behaviors towards other employees and the organization.

#### *Descriptive Statistics of the Latent Variables*

The original 49 items of the instrument were loaded on the five latent variables, as hypothesized in the conceptual model that was informed by the overarching theories. The model of interest was hypothetically made up of two predictors, one mediator, and two outcomes. The predictors were organizational learning (OL), measured by the Organizational Learning Capability scale (16 items; Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005), and perceived organizational support (POS), measured by the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support scale (8 items; Eisenberger et al., 1986). The mediator was employee engagement (EE), measured by the Employee Engagement Scale (12 items; Shuck et al., 2016). The outcome variables were organizational citizenship behavior, measured by the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (10 items, Fox et al., 2007), and turnover intention (TI), measured by Turnover Intention scale (3 items; Colarelli, 1984).

Originally, the hypothesized model consisted of two second-order latent variables – EE and OL and three first order latent variables – POS, OCB, and TI. The EE construct had 12 items loading on three dimensions – cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. The OL construct had 16 items loading on four dimensions: management commitment, system perspective, openness and experimentation, and knowledge transfer and integration. The rest constructs POS, OCB, and TI were all uni-dimensional, having 8, 10, and 3 items, respectively.

The 49 individual variables belonging to the five latent constructs were reported in Table 10 above. They were also described in great detail in terms of reverse scoring strategies, univariate normality, measurement scales, and centrality and variability. In this section, the descriptive statistics of the latent variables were chronicled.

Existing, validated instruments were adopted in the study model. It meant that the researchers using these instruments had already assessed each instrument's dimensionality with exploratory and/or confirmatory factor analysis. Thus, summated scales were to be created (Hair et al., 2010). Summate scales is a method of combining several variables that measure the same concept into a single variable in an attempt to increase the reliability of the measurement through multivariate measurement (Hair et al., 2010). In most cases, the separate variables are summed and then the average score is used in the analysis. For the current study, the means of the observed variables that were loaded on their respective latent constructs were obtained as summated scales.

The researcher presented the sample size, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of these summated scales in Table 11. The sample's respondents were



engaged at work ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = .517$ ; 1-6 Likert scale), perceived a good level of learning readiness at the organizational level ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = .556$ ; 1-6 Likert scale) and an acceptable level of organizational support ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = .729$ ; 1-6 Likert scale). They also expressed low intention to leave their organization ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = 1.024$ ; 1-5 Likert likeliness scale) and exhibited citizenship behaviors towards other employees and the organization on a frequent basis ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .745$ ; 1-5 frequency scale). The variability indices (skew and kurtosis) of the summated responses were within the acceptable range (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 11**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Latent Variables Using Summated Scale*

Construct	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
EE	425	2.83	6.00	4.97	.517	-.483	1.039
OL	425	2.19	6.00	4.60	.556	-.874	1.523
TI	302	1.00	5.00	1.80	1.024	1.325	1.104
POS	425	2.25	6.00	4.38	.729	-.241	-.622
OCB	425	1.70	5.00	3.89	.745	-.511	-.433

*Note.* EE - Employee engagement: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

OL - Organizational learning: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

TI - Turnover intention: 1-5 Likert scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*)

POS - Perceived organizational support: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

OCB - Organizational citizenship behavior: 1-5 frequency scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*)

In conclusion, at the latent variable level that was related to the research questions and hypotheses, the theorized constructs of OL, POS, EE, and OCB had the means well above the mid-point of the corresponding scales, meaning the participants agreed with the presence of these phenomena in their organizations. The TI construct did not comply with the common tendency but made sense because the lower score reflected the employees' less intention to leave their organization. The skewness and kurtosis indices of the summated scales mirrored an acceptable level of variability from the central tendency (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010).

### **Reliability and Validity of the Theorized Constructs**

As the current study's survey instrument was developed based on a host of established and validated constructs, its reliability was first examined in relation to the previously used instruments' level of internal consistency. After that, the constructs' goodness of fit was explored via the measurement model in order to inspect the constructs' validity. Doing so helped situate the reliability and validity of the current instrument in the new context of Vietnamese small and medium enterprises, as compared with how they were theorized and validated in the literature.

#### *Reliability*

In the following section, the researcher is going to report the Cronbach's alpha - a measure of the internal consistency of the theorized constructs, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group (Cronbach, 1951). In the case of an already established instrument, typically, a Cronbach's alpha is the acceptable way to assess reliability. These alpha coefficients were acquired using SPSS 26.0 and presented in

Table 12. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five constructs indicated good reliability, ranging from  $\alpha = 8.08$  (for TI) to  $\alpha = 8.74$  (for OCB). The reliability of the entire instrument was .912.

**Table 12**

*Reliability Coefficients of the Theorized Constructs*

Construct	Abbreviation	Items	Cronbach's alpha
1. Employee engagement	EE	12	.862
2. Organizational learning	OL	16	.854
3. Turnover intention	TI	3	.808
4. Perceived organizational support	POS	8	.833
5. Organizational citizenship behavior	OCB	10	.874
Total instrument		49	.912

*Source.* Compilation by the author of this dissertation

Internal consistency of the theorized constructs was relatively inconsistent for the study data as compared to that reported by the researchers whose instruments were referenced in the current study. As for the employee engagement, Shuck et al. (2016) reported the Cronbach's alpha of the subscales of the construct, namely cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement, being .94, .88, and .91, respectively. However, the study data demonstrated a lower internal consistency for the corresponding subscales, despite the whole scale' reliability was good ( $\alpha = .862$ ). Alpha for cognitive engagement was .734, for emotional engagement was .824, and for

behavioral engagement was .786. Those reliability coefficients were not consistent with the original study's ones although they were within acceptable level.

With regard to organizational learning, Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005) relayed both the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each of the four dimensions and the whole scale. The coefficient values for management commitment (*mc*), system perspective (*sp*), openness and experimentation (*oe*), and knowledge transfer and integration (*kti*) were subsequently .82, .78, .73, and .80. The whole scale was at .88 for internal consistency. Notwithstanding, the current study's data painted a different picture in terms of Cronbach's alpha from the original research. Although the whole scale of OL was good ( $\alpha = .854$ ), the four dimensions scored much lower and varied. The coefficient for the *mc* dimension was .526, for the *sp* dimension was .828, for the *oe* dimension was .758, and for the *kti* dimension was .483. The *sp* and *oe* dimensions had an acceptable to good degree of internal consistency, while the *mc* dimension was poorly consistent and the *kti* dimension had an unacceptable level of reliability.

In terms of turnover intention, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .75 in the original research (Colarrelly, 1984), while the present study's TI construct reliability was higher ( $\alpha = .808$ ). However, one thing worth considering for alpha coefficient difference between the original research and the current one was measurement scale. The original research used the 1-5 Likert strongly disagree-strongly agree measure; the present research relied on the 1-5 Likert likelihood scale. Since the construct had only three observed indicators, no subscales were reported.

Regarding perceived organizational support, the 8-item Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS-8, Eisenberger et al., 1986) was referenced by the current study. The SPOS-8 was composed of the high loading items of the 16-item questionnaire (SPOS-16) that was originated from the 36-item SPOS. The latter had a Cronbach's alpha of .97, and the former .93. Therefore, the SPOS-8 followed the recommendation of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), "Because the original scale is unidimensional and has high internal reliability, the use of shorter versions does not appear problematic" (p. 699). The original reliability coefficients of POS were higher in than the one obtained for this study ( $\alpha = .833$ ).

Finally, organizational citizenship behavior that was referenced for the current study was the OCB-C (OCB-Checklist; Fox et al., 2007, as cited in Spector et al., 2010). In the study by Fox et al. (2007), the 10-item OCB-C was mentioned along with the other 20-item OCB scale. For the purpose of the current study, only the OCB-C was described in terms of coefficient alpha. The OCB-C has a mean coefficient alpha of .80 for the two employee forms and of .86 for the supervisor forms. By "forms", Fox et al. (2007) meant agreement and frequency. The researcher of the current study was specifically interested in the OCB-C for employee frequency form. It showed in the original study by Fox et al. (2007) that Cronbach's alpha was .84, which was a bit lower than the current study's OCB scale ( $\alpha = .874$ ).

#### *Original Measurement Model*

Having determined on the reliability of the theorized constructs, the researcher continued to audit the goodness of fit of the measurement model using Mplus 8.1

(Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The measurement model, or factor model, specifies the relationships among measured (observed) variables underlying latent variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). By investigating the measurement model, an assessment of convergent and discriminant validity, thus construct validity, can be provided (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Lomax, 1982).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is performed to examine the fit of the measurement model. The global fit indices are Chi-square goodness of fit ( $\chi^2$ /degree of freedom ratio,  $p < .05$ ) to check perfect model fit, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) to check comparative model fit, and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) to explore residual estimations. RMSEA values less than .06, CFI and TLI values equal to or greater than .95, and SRMR values equal to or less than .05 are desired for a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). TLI and CFI values greater than .90, and SRMR values equal to or less than .08, are considered to be acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). Despite chi-square being reported, fit indices and residuals were the deciding factors of good fit. Chi-square is sensitive to sample size and model complexity (Kline, 2011). Given a quite good sample size of the current study for structural equation modeling, statistical significance was not used as the sole indicator of poor fit.

The measurement model for the theorized constructs is displayed in Figure 5. Theorized constructs and their first-order latent variables/factors are represented with circles and measured/manifest/observed indicators are represented with squares. Lines with an arrow in one direction show a hypothesized direct relationship between two

variables. Technically, there were two types of relationships seen in the current study's measurement model. First, it was the second order – first order latent variable relationship. They were EE with its three latent variables, *ee\_cog* (cognitive engagement), *ee\_emo* (emotional engagement), and *ee\_beh* (behavioral engagement). They were also OL with its four latent variables, *mc* (management commitment), *sp* (systems perspective), *oe* (openness and experimentation), and *kti* (knowledge transfer and integration). To illustrate each relationship, a one-direction arrow pointing from the second order to the first order variable was marked, with a standardized path coefficient (factor loading) and a standard error along the line. Each first order latent variable also had one arrow pointing to it with an unexplained residual variance and a standard error along the line. The variance of the second-order latent variable was set at 1.000.

Second, it was the first order latent variable – indicator relationships. They were POS with eight indicators, OCB with ten indicators, and TI with three indicators. Similar to the second order – first order latent variable relationship, each first order latent variable – indicator relationship was displayed by a one-direction arrow from the first order latent variable to the indicator, with a standardized path coefficient (factor loading) and a standard error along the line. Each indicator also had one arrow pointing to it with an unexplained residual variance and a standard error along the line.

Lines with an arrow in both directions should be curved (double headed arrows); they demonstrate a bi-directional relationship (i.e., a covariance). Covariance arrows should only be allowed for exogenous variables, which were OL and POS in the current study.

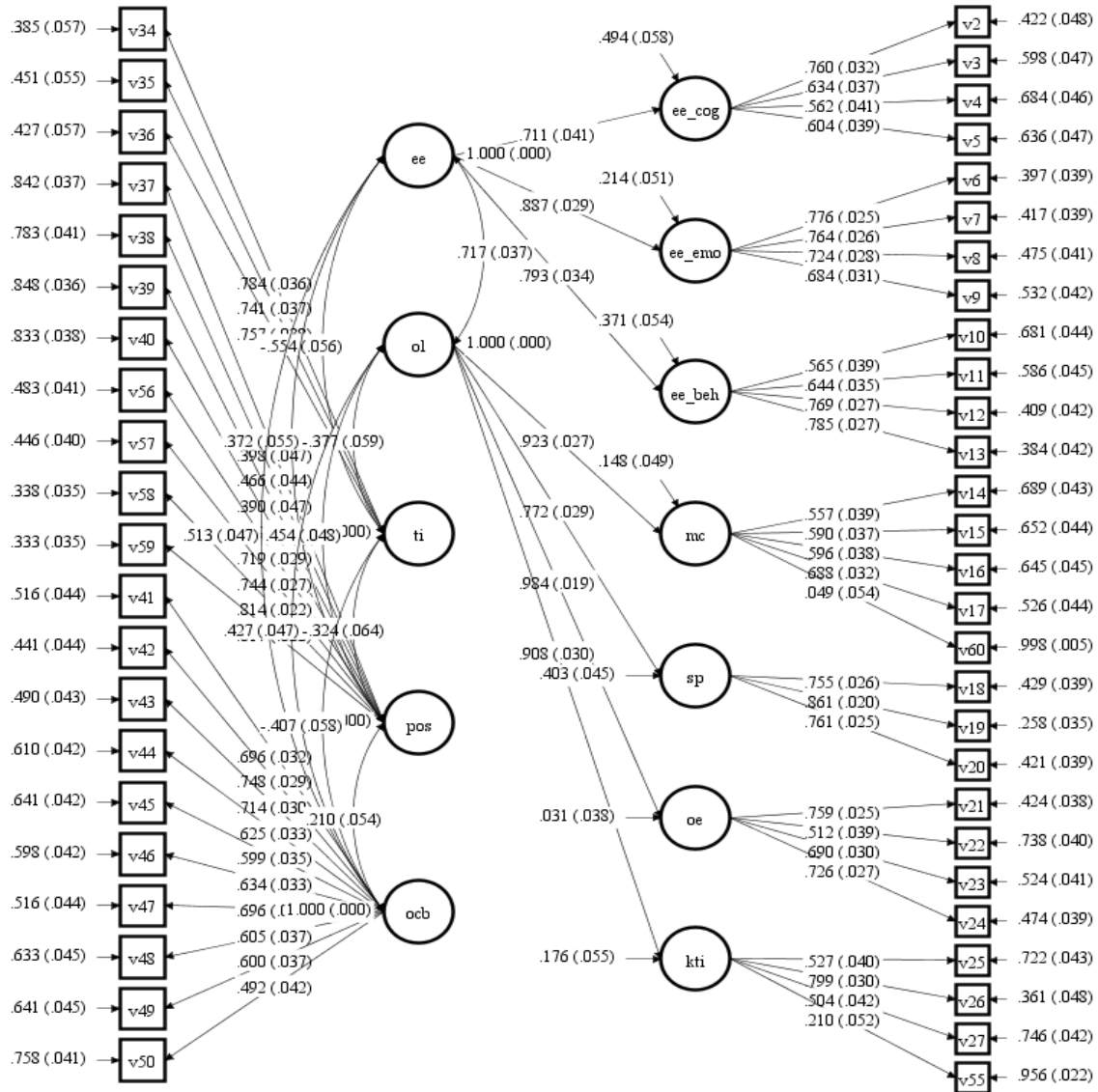
For the two second-order latent variables EE and OL, factor loadings (standardized path coefficient) ranged from .711 to .984 for the first order latent variables with cognitive engagement as the lowest (.711) loaded onto the EE construct, openness and experimentation as the highest (.984) loaded onto the OL construct. Within the indicator level, the factor loadings' range were from very low .049 (ol\_2 statement, loaded on the management commitment sub-construct) to .861 (ol\_7 statement, loaded on the system perspective sub-construct). For the three first-order latent variables POS, OCB, and TI, factor loadings at the indicator level ranged from .390 (pos\_6 statement) to .817 (pos\_7 statement). Despite almost all of the indicators and latent variables had substantial loadings ( $> .20$ ; Kline, 2011) on the corresponding constructs, the model's goodness of fit was below the acceptable level ( $\chi^2(1110) = 3134.843, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.774; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.096).

Particularly for the OL construct, item 2's loading (.049) and item 15's loading (.210) were too low on corresponding dimension of management commitment and knowledge transfer and integration, respectively. At the same time, item 2's loading was not significantly different from zero ( $p = 0.364$ ). Thus, the researcher decided to drop these two items off the OL scale.



**Figure 5**

*Original Measurement Model*



*Note.* \**ol* stands for organizational learning, including:  
 1. *mc* - management commitment  
 2. *sp* - systems perspective  
 3. *oe* - openness and experimentation  
 4. *kti* - knowledge transfer and implementation

\**ee* stands for employee engagement, including:  
 1. *ee\_cog* - cognitive engagement  
 2. *ee\_emo* - emotional engagement  
 3. *ee\_beh* - behavioral engagement

\**ocb* stands for organizational citizenship behavior  
 \**pos* stands for perceived organizational support  
 \**ti* stands for turnover intention, first-order latent variable consisting of three indicators

Because the measurement model's fit indices were far from the designated acceptable level suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999) and Kline (2011) mentioned above, and several modification indices suggested EE, OL and the management commitment, sub-factors of OL to be measured by v37 (representing pos\_1); the researcher resorted to exploratory factor analysis. By doing so, the researcher could explore the underlying factor structure for the items in the context of the study. As the current measurement model showed a poor fit with the current data, the items that were loaded well on the original constructs may have not been steady on the theorized constructs of this study. Specifically, the OCB and POS constructs would have been explored further. Then their possible new structures would be put back along with the other three constructs to check the goodness of fit of the modified measurement model.

### **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a standard statistical technique for evaluating a measurement model (Kline, 2011). In the current study, EFA was performed using Mplus 8.1 for the OCB and POS constructs because the original model did not have a good fit with the data. The annotated Mplus output resulted for the EFA procedure was described in detail. The major sections of the output covered summary of analysis, summary of model fit information, specific exploratory factor analysis with model fit information, and modification indices. First, summary of analysis was yielded, particularly including number of observations, number of dependent variables, observed dependent variables, estimator, rotation, type of rotation. Second, summary of model fit information had information on each model requested in terms of type, number of

parameters, chi-square value, degrees of freedom, and  $p$ -value. Then each model requested has goodness of fit indices and factor loadings information. Last, modification indices were suggested for each model requested.

#### *Exploratory Factor Analysis for the OCB Construct*

In the current study, EFA was executed first for the OCB construct. The number of observations was 425 as Mplus, by default, included all cases that have at least partial data on the variables in the analysis. The number of dependent (outcome) variables in the model was 10 because Mplus classified the factor indicators as dependent variables. They were also the 10 continuous observed dependent variables listed in the output. The estimator was maximum likelihood (ML), as defaulted by Mplus, to estimate the model. Rotation method used in the model was geomin, while the type of rotation that allowed the factors to be correlated was oblique. So, the default geomin rotation for the OCB construct was oblique.

Apart from summary of data and covariance coverage of data, the major interest was held for results of EFA. As the researcher requested models for 1 factor to 3 factors, the results came out with eigenvalues for sample correlation matrix and tests of model fit. An eigenvalue is the variance of the eigenvector, which is a linear combination of the observed variables where all the weights are not zero. An eigenvalue is the unstandardized proportion of variance explained by the corresponding eigenvector, and the variance of that composite (its eigenvalue) cannot be logically less than zero (Kline, 2011). The eigenvalues for the OCB variables satisfied this condition. In terms of fit indices, the 3-factor model showed the best fit among three models ( $\chi^2(18) = 46.402, p <$

.001; CFI = 0.986; RMSEA = 0.061; SRMR = 0.018), thus it was analyzed in detail below.

Geomin rotated loadings are the linear combination of variables that make up the factor (Muthén & Muthén, 2018). Geomin factor correlations was reflected through the factor correlations matrix that gives the correlations between factors. For the current OCB data, three factors emerged, significant at the 5% level: OCB items 1 to 3 were loaded on one factor, OCB items 5 and 7 to 10 on another factor, and OCB items 4 and 6 on the third factor. As the third OCB construct had fewer than three indicators, it should be removed (Hair et al., 2010). So, the new OCB now had two factors being loaded on, with eight indicators. The correlation between factor 1 and factor 2 was 0.487, provided factor 3 was in the model.

In sum, the EFA procedure had changed the theorized OCB construct from unidimensional in the original study into a two-factor construct in the current study. When the OCB items were looked at in more detail, the items (1 to 3) loading on factor 1 represented citizenship behaviors toward other individual employees, thus the factor was named *ocb\_i*. The rest five items (5, 7, 9, 0, and 10) represented citizenship behaviors toward the organization, then the factor was named *ocb\_o*.

#### *Exploratory Factor Analysis for the POS Construct*

A similar EFA procedure was performed for the theorized POS, which was unidimensional in the original study. The output was pulled out with sections that could be applied the same line of explanation like the OCB construct, except for the unavailability of the three-factor model. Then the two-factor model was analyzed

further. This model had a better fit than the one-factor model, with the following fit indices being captured ( $\chi^2(13) = 44.707, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.978; RMSEA = 0.076; SRMR = 0.020). Although other fit indices were in a good range, the RMSEA of the residual variation was within the .06 - .08 range, the two-factor model had an acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011).

For the current POS data, the two factors were emerged at the 5% significance level: POS items 1, 4, 6, and 8; POS items 2, 3, 5, and 7. Studying the two groups of items more closely, the researcher named the first factor as *pos\_a* and the second *pos\_c*. The *pos\_a* factor referred to perceived organizational support in regular/average situations/conditions, while *pos\_c* in challenging situation/conditions. So, the new POS for the current study had two factors being loaded on, with eight indicators. The correlation between factor 1 and factor 2 was 0.336. In sum, the EFA procedure had changed the theorized POS construct from unidimensional in the original study into a two-factor construct in the current study.

### **Reliability of the Revised Constructs and the Instrument**

After the theorized construct were revised, their reliability coefficients were obtained and so was the whole instrument. The three revised constructs included organizational learning OL, organizational citizenship behavior OCB, and perceived organizational support POS. Each construct was analyzed at the level of its dimensions and subsequently the indicators, the number of items after revision, loading coefficient range, and reliability coefficients for both the dimensions and construct. All of the information is detailed in Table 13.

First, OL had 14 items left after revision and was arranged into four dimensions management commitment (*mc*), systems perspective (*sp*), openness and experimentation (*oe*), and knowledge transfer and integration (*kti*). The dimension *mc* had four indicators, symbolized as “v” (variable) with a number indicating its order in the final Mplus data set for analysis. For example, the *mc* dimension included four variables v14, v15, v16, and v17, representing the ol items in the OL scale: ol\_1, ol\_3, ol\_4, and ol\_5 in the original SPSS data set. The *sp* dimension included three variables v18 to v20, representing ol\_6 to ol\_8. The *oe* dimension consisted four variables v21 to v24, representing ol\_9 to ol\_12. The last dimension *kti* was composed of four variables v21 to v24, representing ol\_13, lo\_14, and ol\_16. As compared with the original OL scale of 16 items, the new one had 14 items, two items ol\_2 and ol\_15 were removed. The 14 items were loaded on the four dimensions with the range of loading coefficients from .516-.862, which is within acceptable to good magnitude, at the first-order level. Then the four dimensions were loaded strongly on the OL construct, within the range of .776-.972, at the second-order level. The Cronbach’s alphas for *mc*, *sp*, *oe*, and *kti* were .705, .828, .756, and .635, respectively; for OL construct was .893. Thus, *sp* had good internal consistency; *mc* and *oe* had acceptable internal consistency while *kti* has questionable consistency; yet the OL construct had good internal consistency.

**Table 13***Revised Constructs with Item Loading Range and Reliability*

Construct	Item Abbreviations	Number of Items	Range of Loading Coefficients	Reliability Coefficient (at dimension & construct levels)
Organizational Learning - OL	*mc: v14, v15-v17 (representing ol_1, ol_3-ol_5) *sp: v18-v20 (representing ol_6-ol_8) *oe: v21-v24 (representing ol_9-ol_12) *kti: v25-v27 (representing ol_13, ol_14, ol_16)	14	.516-.862 (1 <sup>st</sup> order)  .776-.972 (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)	*mc: .705 *sp: .828 *oe: .758 *kti: .635 (dimension)  OL: .893 (construct)
Organizational Citizenship Behavior - OCB	*ocb_i: v41-v43 (representing ocb_1-ocb_3) *ocb_o: v45, v47-v50 (representing ocb_5, ocb_7-ocb_10)	8	.539-.924 (1 <sup>st</sup> order)  .718-.740 (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)	*ocb_i: .867 *ocb_o: .823 (dimension)  OCB: .854 (construct)
Perceived Organizational Support - POS	*pos_a: v37-v40 (representing pos_1, pos_4, pos_6, pos_8) *pos_c: v56-v59 (representing pos_2, pos_3, pos_5, pos_7)	8	.634-.853 (1 <sup>st</sup> order)  .416-.1.000 (2 <sup>nd</sup> order, pos_a fixed at zero)	*pos_a: .799 *pos_c: .878 (dimension)  POS: .833 (construct)

*Note.* \*ol stands for organizational learning, including:  
1. mc - management commitment  
2. sp -systems perspective  
3. oe – openness and experimentation  
4. kti – knowledge transfer and implementation

\*v stands for variable, with number denoting the order of the variable in the Mplus data set

\*ocb stands for organizational citizenship behavior, including:  
1. ocb\_i – behaviors towards individual employees  
2. ocb\_o – behaviors towards the organization

\*pos stands for perceived organizational support, including:  
1. pos\_a – support in regular/average situations  
2. pos\_c – support in challenging situations

Second, the Organizational Citizenship Behavior construct had eight items loading on to two dimensions after exploratory factor analysis, from the original unidimensional 10-item construct. The two dimensions revealed after the EFA procedure included *ocb\_i* and *ocb\_o*. The *ocb\_i* dimension consisted of items that reflected the citizenship behaviors toward individual employees. It had three variables, from v41-v43, representing *ocb\_1* to *ocb\_3*. The *ocb\_o* dimension had items that reflected the citizenship behaviors toward the organization. It had five variables, v45, v47 to v50, representing *ocb\_5* and *ocb\_7-ocb\_10*. Two variables being removed from the Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale were *ocb\_4* and *ocb\_6* with reasons mentioned in the previous section. The eight items were loaded on the two dimensions with the range of loading coefficients from .539-.924, which is within acceptable to excellence internal consistency, at the first-order level. Then the two dimensions were loaded strongly on the Organizational Learning construct, with .718 and .740 at the second-order level, for *ocb\_i* and *ocb\_o*, respectively. The Cronbach's alphas for *ocb\_i* and *ocb\_o* were .867 and .823, respectively; for the Organizational Citizenship Behavior construct was .854. Therefore, both dimensions and the whole Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale had good internal consistency.

Third, the Perceived Organizational Support construct had eight items and was originally unidimensional. After EFA, the Perceived Organizational Support construct had two dimensions: organizational support in normal situations (*pos\_a*) and in challenging situations (*pos\_c*). The *pos\_a* dimensions had four variables, from v37 to v40, representing *pos\_1*, *pos\_4*, *pos\_6*, and *pos\_8*. The *pos\_c* dimension contained four



variables, from v56 to v59, representing *pos\_2*, *pos\_3*, *pos\_5*, and *pos\_7*. The eight items were loaded on the two dimensions with the range of loading coefficients from .634 to .853, at the first-order level. At the second-order level, *pos\_c* was loaded rather weakly to the Perceived Organizational Support construct, at .416 magnitude. The other dimension, *pos\_a* was fixed to zero to load at 1.000 because it had a negative residual variance, meaning the model resulted in an inadmissible parameter estimate (“Heywood case”; Chen et al., 2001). Therefore, the two dimensions of Perceived Organizational Support could be seen in the present data as rather heterogeneous (Geiser, 2013). The Cronbach’s alphas for *pos\_a* and *pos\_c* were .799 and .878, respectively; for the Perceived Organizational Support construct was .833. Thus, both dimensions and the whole Perceived Organizational Support scale had good internal consistency.

### **Correlation Analysis**

Intercorrelations were obtained by performing a correlation analysis, in the form of a correlation matrix. Computing a correlation matrix aid researchers in their next stage of doing CFA or SEM and other applications. The data were checked for absence of outliers and influential, then the calculation of Pearson’s correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used with significance of the correlations being tested at the .01 alpha level ( $p < .01$ , 2-tailed). Table 14 summarized the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study’s constructs after three of them were revised. The range of score for each construct was also accompanied to help interpret the mean, as the constructs varied in their Likert and frequency scales.

**Table 14***Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of Theorized Constructs after Modification*

	1	2	3	4	5
Score Range	2.83-6.00	2.19-6.00	2.25-6.00	1.70-5.00	1.00-5.00
Mean	4.97	4.60	4.38	3.89	1.80
SD	.517	.556	.729	.745	1.02
1. EE	1.00	-	-	-	-
2. OL	.593**	1.00	-	-	-
3. POS	.414**	.596**	1.00	-	-
4. OCB	.411**	.362**	.243**	1.00	-
5. TI	-.386**	-.326**	-.344**	-.350**	1.00

*Note.* The constructs' range, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson *r* correlations were reported in the table. For all constructs except the TI, low scores indicated disagreement; high scores indicated agreement, with survey items.

1. EE - Employee engagement: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

2. OL - Organizational learning: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

3. POS - Perceived organizational support: 1-6 Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*)

4. OCB - Organizational citizenship behavior: 1-6 frequency scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*)

5. TI - Turnover intention: 1-5 Likert scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*)

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

It was shown in Table 14 that all coefficient correlations of the constructs involved were significant. Cohen (1988) recommended that that 0.10 to 0.30 be interpreted as a weak correlation, 0.30 to 0.50 as a moderate correlation and greater than 0.50 as a strong correlation. The absolute correlations between Employee Engagement and the other four constructs ranged from moderate to strong ( $r = -.386$  to  $r = .593$ ).

Organizational Learning was also moderately ( $r = -.326$  and  $r = .362$ ) to highly correlated ( $r = .593$  and  $r = .596$ ) with the other variables. Perceived Organizational Support was weakly correlated with Organizational Citizenship Behavior ( $r = .243$ ), moderately related to Turnover Intention and Employee Engagement ( $r = -.344$  and  $r = .414$ , respectively), and strongly correlated with Organizational Learning ( $r = .596$ ). Organizational Citizenship Behavior was moderately related to Employee Engagement, Organizational Learning and Turnover Intention ( $r = -.350$  to  $r = .411$ ). Turnover Intention was associated with other construct within the lower end of moderate correlation (all  $r$ 's were less than 0.4).

All correlations were positive related to the other constructs, except those for the Turnover Intention that were consistently negative. Negative correlations between each of the other constructs and Turnover Intention were hypothesized in prior research, so was in the current research. Therefore, the researcher of the current study anticipated that employees perceived a good level of organization learning capability and organizational support would be more engaged and exhibit more citizenship behaviors and tend to reduce their turnover intention, in the small and medium enterprises in Vietnam.

### **Structural Equation Modeling**

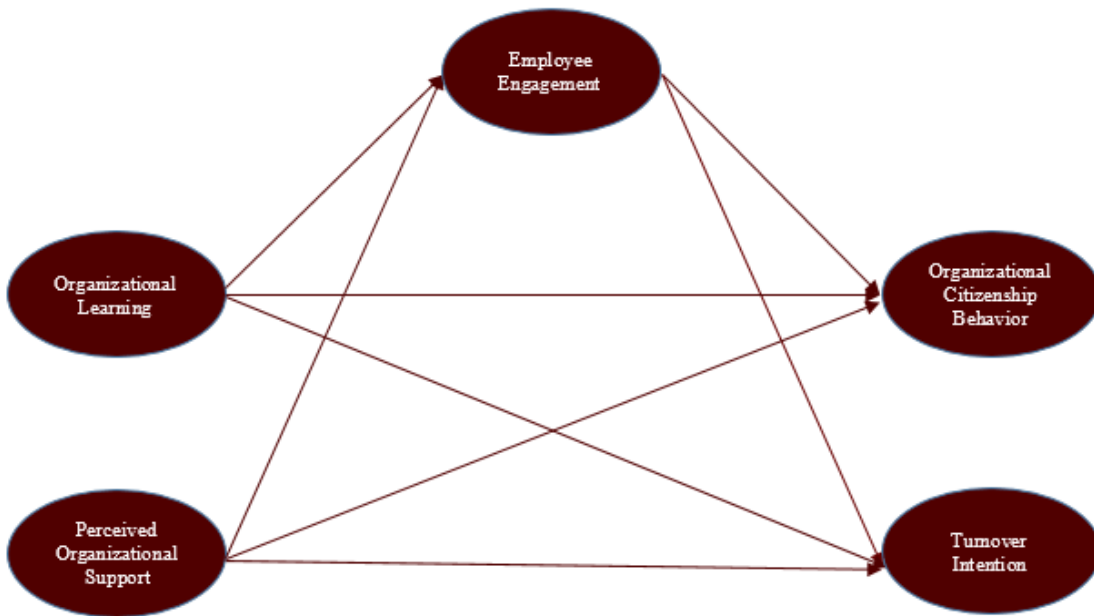
The section below will describe the hypothesized model along with the research questions and hypotheses as well as the analysis approach. The analysis was started with measurement model in sequential modification stages for goodness of fit. Then the structural model was developed with particular attention paid to analyzing the mediation effect.

*Brief Description of the Hypothesized Model*

The hypothesized model was developed based on relevant past research and a theoretical framework detailed in Chapter I and Chapter III. Employee Engagement was hypothesized to mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning and Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Turnover Intention as well as between Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Turnover Intention, all perceived by employees working in small and medium enterprises in Vietnam. Figure 6 below depicted such structured relationships.

**Figure 6**

*Hypothesized Conceptual Model*



*Note.* Figure 6 is a repetition of Figure 2 for ease of reference.

The researcher developed the model based on previous research and aimed to answer two research questions along with eight underlying hypotheses. The two research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

In substantive terms, the meaning of this model encompasses the assumption that the combined organizational learning and organizational support perceived by the employees (OL and POS) have both a direct (non-mediated) and an indirect (mediated) effect (via EE) on OCB and TI. The mediation is caused by the fact that when organizations try their best to offer support and/or implement systematic learning at the organizational level, employees will be more engaged at work that, in turn, exhibit more citizenship behaviors and reduce their intention to leave the organization. By fitting the path model to our data, we can examine whether OL and POS indeed have both a direct and an indirect effect on OCB and TI, or whether the effect of OL and POS on OCB and TI are partially or fully mediated by EE.

### *Analysis Approach*

A variety of procedures for mediation analysis have been developed (Baron & Kenny, 1986; James & Brett, 1984; MacKinnon et al., 2002). Although the most popular procedure among researchers is the causal steps by Baron and Kenny (1986), the approach has some limitations that may affect the quality of inferences (Williams et al., 2009). Williams et al. (2009) referred to the work by Kenny et al. (1998) to reinstate that the first and fourth conditions are not necessary; the second and third conditions are necessary and sufficient to establish mediation.

To modeling in SEM in this study, the analysis was conducted through the following (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016), with a little modified procedure:

- (a) Use exploratory factor analysis to establish a meaningful theoretical model and further define some constructs hypothesized in the model to fit the research situation.
- (b) Conduct a confirmatory factor analysis with the sample data (measurement model)
- (c) Conduct a test of the structural equation model, where mediation was established and tested (structural model)
- (d) Test planned hypotheses about free parameters in the model.

As Step (a) was performed partially in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) section above, for the Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support constructs, the researcher is going to delineate the next three sequential stages of the mediation analysis in more concrete detail.

## Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to examine the fit of the measurement model. The global fit indices are  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) for perfect model fit, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) for comparative model fit, and two types of residual estimations RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error Approximation) and SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Residual). To evaluate competing models, the researcher compared these indices with reference to the cut-off values for goodness of fit: RMSEA (<.05, good fit; <.08, fair fit), SRMR (<.05, good fit; <.08, fair fit), and CFI (>.95, good fit).

### *Sequential Stages of Modifications*

As it was shown in Table 15, the original model (labelled M0) was the one that the theorized constructs were untouched, as proposed based on previous research. The model had the following indices:  $\chi^2(1110) = 3134.843$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.774; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.096. All the indices were out of the acceptable range for acceptable fit, let alone good fit.

The next model, labelled M1, was the revision of the original model. The two constructs, Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support, were explored further via EFA while two Organizational Learning items were dropped off the scale. M1 model came with these fit indices:  $\chi^2(925) = 1626.543$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.915; RMSEA = 0.042; SRMR = 0.052. Although the fit was much improved as compared with the original model, the SRMR was not yet good enough. Interventions was in need for a better fit. The approach for obtaining improved fit was based on modification indices (M.I.), where paths could be added or removed. Kline (2011)



strongly recommended that paths should be added or removed in single steps. After each change, the model should be re-evaluated for fit before attempting the next possibility.

Looking at the M.I. in model M1, the researcher took the recommendation to correlate the Turnover Intention construct with the emotional dimension of Employee Engagement (ti WITH ee\_emo). Such a correlation was possible given prior investigation. Shuck et al. (2016) defined emotional engagement as “an employee’s intensity and willingness to invest emotionality toward positive organizational outcomes” (p. 5). When employees are emotionally engaged, they believe in the purpose of their organization and that the organization has a great personal meaning to them, thus it is likely that they will stay longer with the organization. The modified model, labelled M2, where the turnover intent – emotional engagement was recommended, had a better fit than the M1 model, with  $\chi^2(924) = 1608.018$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.917; RMSEA = 0.042; SRMR = 0.051. It was noted that the SRMR was a bit higher than the recommended cut-off. Then further change could be made for improved fit.

The M3 model was developed based on the additional modification index to correlate Organizational Learning with the cognitive dimension of Employee Engagement (ol WITH ee\_cog). Cognitive engagement was defined as “the intensity of mental energy expressed toward positive organizational outcomes” (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 4). This relationship was viable provided earlier research on the existence of organizational learning culture leading to employees being engaged mentally (Eldor and Harpaz, 2016; Hussain and Ishak, 2017; Sarti, 2014). The model’s fit indices were

obtained, with  $\chi^2(923) = 1596.677, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.919; RMSEA = 0.041; SRMR = 0.050.

Still aiming for improved fit as SRMR was just exactly at the 0.050 level, the researcher built a modified model namely M4. The M.I. recommended the correlation of two indicators of the behavioral dimension of Employee Engagement (v11 WITH v10), meaning the item 10 (ee\_10) and item 9 (ee\_9). Item 10 read *“I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked”*; item 9 read *“I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me”*. They both belong to behavioral engagement, which was referred to as “the psychological state of intention to behave in a manner that positively affects performance” (Shuck et al., 2016, p. 5). The two items could be related since the description of the two states of behavioral engagement was about the employee was trying his or her best at work without being asked or expected. Correlating them had brought in a better fit for M4, with  $\chi^2(922) = 1569.743, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.041; SRMR = 0.050. It could be seen that CFI increased quite a lot, while SRMR stayed the same, as compared to M3.

As the final attempt to improve fit for the model, M5 was created, with fit indices showing good results:  $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040; SRMR = 0.049. The model was modified based on the M.I. index suggestion to correlate the two indicators of Perceived Organizational Support in critical situations (*pos\_c*). The two items were reverse-scored item 57 (*pos\_3*) and reverse-scored item 56 (*pos\_2*). Item 57 read *“The organization would ignore any complaint from me”*; item 56 read *“The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me”*. They could be related

because they might present the failure of the organization to recognize the effort or complaints from its employees.

The table below summarized all the models being experimented for goodness of fit, from M0 before any revision to M1 after the revision. M2 to M5 were the models developed based on the modification indices, one step at time. With each modified model, the improvement was incremental but better. The final measurement model, M5, showed the best fit, among the six models.

**Table 15**

*Summary Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Original and Modified Models*

Models	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Note
M0: original model	1,100	3134.843	2.85	0.774	0.066	0.096	Pre-revision
M1: modified model 1	925	1626.543	1.76	0.915	0.042	0.052	Post-revision
M2: modified model 2	924	1608.018	1.74	0.917	0.042	0.051	mod index 1
M3: modified model 3	923	1596.677	1.73	0.919	0.041	0.050	mod index 2
M4: modified model 4	922	1569.743	1.70	0.922	0.041	0.050	mod index 3
M5: modified model 5	921	1550.123	1.68	0.924	0.040	0.049	mod index 4

*Note.* M0 was the original model before any intervention.

M1: modified model 1 as EFA was performed with Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

M2-M5: modified models each time the modification index was recommended.

\*Referenced cut-off values for goodness of fit: RMSEA (<.05, good fit; <.08, fair fit), SRMR (<.05, good fit; <.08, fair fit), and CFI (>.95, good fit).

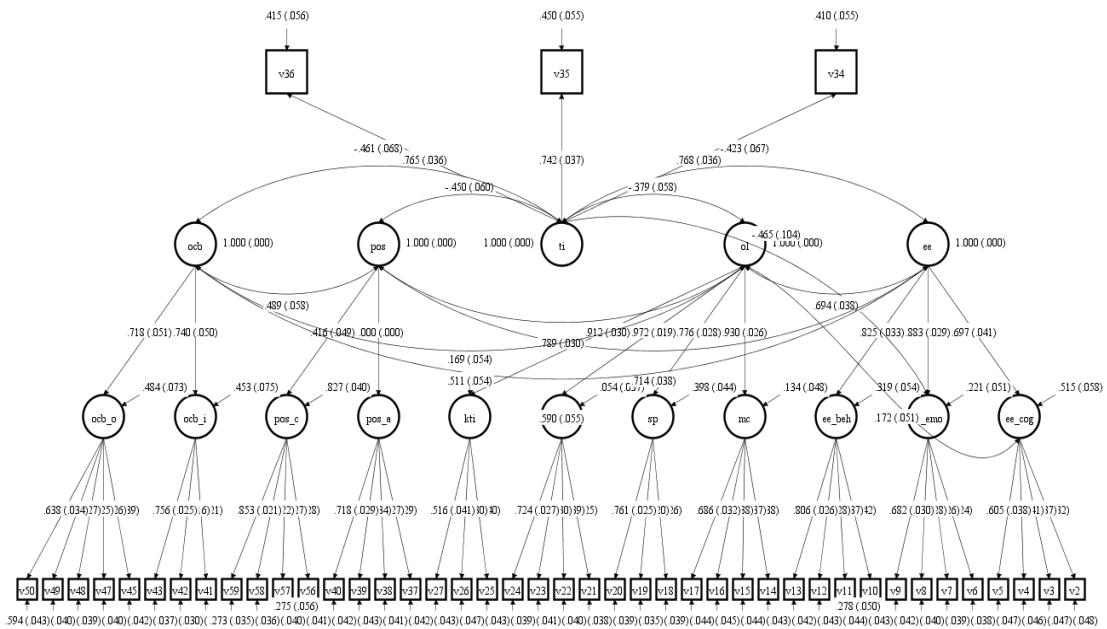
## Description of the Final Measurement Model

As the fifth model M5 was retained as the best measurement model so far, with fair fit ( $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123, p < .001; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040; SRMR = 0.049$ ).

Below was the graph of the final measurement model as presented Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

### Final Measurement Model



*Note.* \*ol stands for organizational learning, including:

1. mc – management commitment
2. sp – systems perspective
3. oe – openness and experimentation
4. kti – knowledge transfer and implementation

\*pos stands for perceived organizational support, including:

1. pos\_a – support in regular/average situations
2. pos\_c – support in challenging situations

\*ee stands for employee engagement, including:

1. ee\_cog – cognitive engagement
2. ee\_emo – emotional engagement
3. ee\_beh – behavioral engagement

\*ocb stands for organizational citizenship behavior, including:

1. ocb\_i – behaviors towards individual employees
2. ocb\_o – behaviors towards the organization

\*ti stands for turnover intention, first-order latent variable consisting of three indicators

Of the five constructs of interest in this study shown in Figure 7; OL, POS, EE, OCB, and TI, the first four constructs were at the second order level; only TI was at the first-order level. First, OL had four latent variables with 14 indicators. They were management commitment (*mc*), systems perspective (*op*), openness and experimentation (*oe*), and knowledge transfer and implementation (*kti*). Second, POS has two dimensions with eight observed indicators altogether. They were perceived organizational support in regular/average situations/conditions (*pos\_a*) and in critical situation/conditions (*pos\_c*). Third, EE had three dimensions with 12 indicators, including cognitive engagement (*ee\_cog*), emotional engagement (*ee\_emo*) and behavioral engagement (*ee\_beh*). Fourth, OCB had two factors with eight indicators, including citizenship behaviors towards other individual employees (*ocb\_i*) and towards the organization (*ocb\_o*). Last TI was estimated by three indicators as manifest variables.

Applying to the study's primarily second-order factor model, multiple fit indices,  $\chi^2$ , RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI were used to assess model fit. The measurement model had an acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040; SRMR = 0.049). The model had this fit after four modifications. TI was correlated with the emotional dimension of engagement (ti with *ee\_emo*), then OL was correlated with the cognitive dimension of engagement (ol with *ee\_cog*). After that, at the indicator level, item 10 and item 9 of the behavioral dimension of EE were related; then item 57 and item 56 of the *pos\_c* dimension of POS were associated. Regarding the parameter estimates, all freely estimated factor loadings were significantly different from zero.

Moreover, almost all of the standardized loadings in the measurement model were substantial (range: 0.516-0.972) and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

For the model featuring the study's dataset, the dimensions of OL showed particularly high standardized loadings (range: 0.776-0.972) meaning they were homogenous and highly reliable. The dimensions of EE were loaded highly onto the construct, too (range: 0.697-0.883). Both TI and OCB's loadings were strong (range: 0.742-0.768 for TI and 0.718-0.740 for OCB).

Except for POS, the two factor loadings *pos\_a* and *pos\_c* were of further attention. The first-order factor *pos\_a*, which is perceived organizational support in average/regular conditions or situations, was fixed to zero because it had a negative residual variance meaning the model resulted in an inadmissible parameter estimate ("Heywood case"; Chen et al., 2001). The other first-order factor *pos\_c*, which is perceived organizational support in challenging situations, was a rather weak factor loading, statistically significant at 0.416. Therefore, the two dimensions of POS could be seen in the present data as rather heterogeneous (Geiser, 2013).

The results of the CFA showed that this selected model confirmed an acceptable level of construct validity (Kline, 2011; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010) based on the values of model data fit indices.

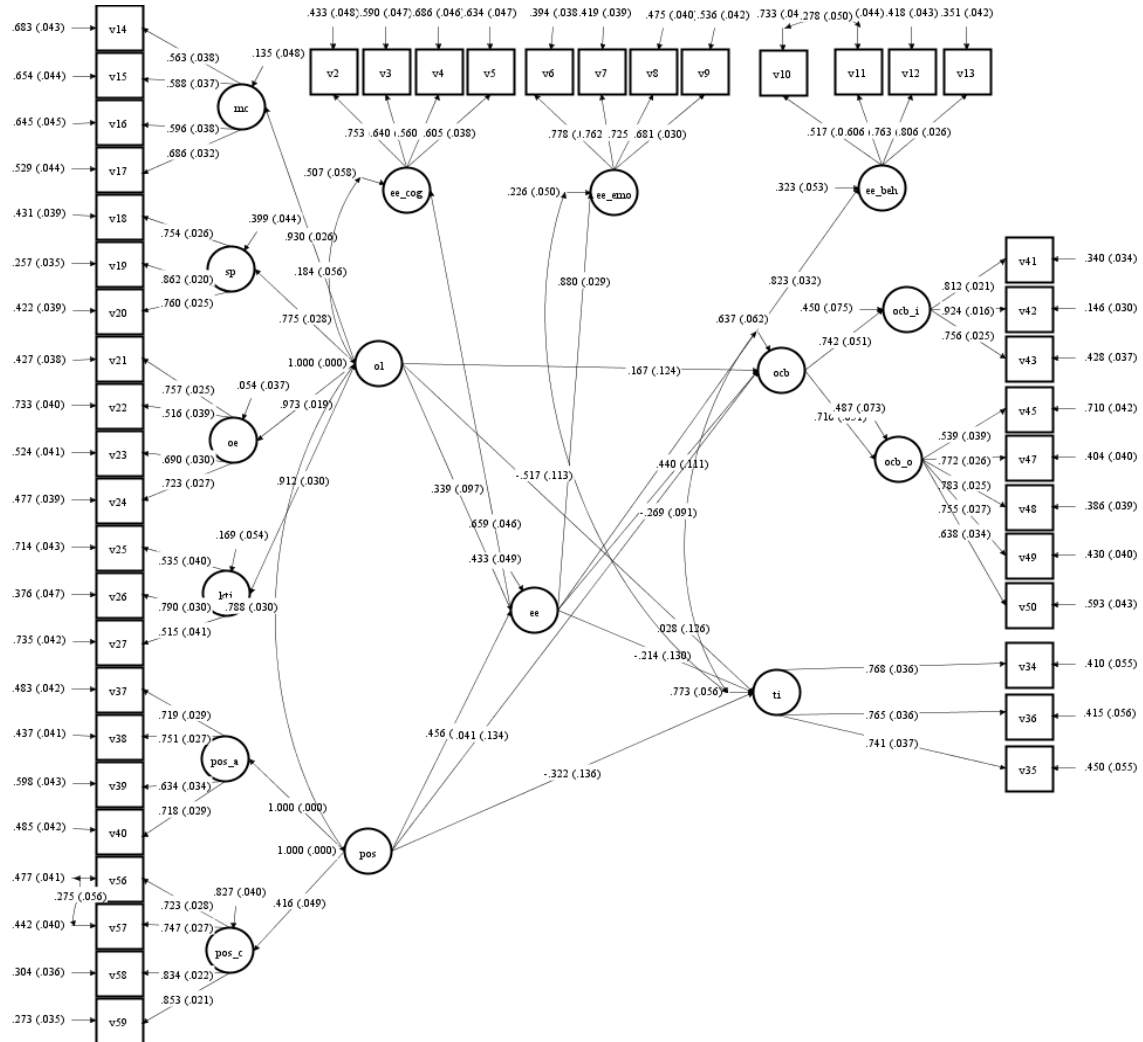
### **Structural Model**

After several modification efforts for the measurement model using CFA, the structural model was estimated by putting all the constructs simultaneously into Mplus 8.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) in their proposed hypotheses. To investigate the

mediating effect that Employee Engagement exercised on the relationship between Organizational Learning and the two outcomes of Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Turnover Intention as well as the relationships between Perceived Organizational Support and these two outcomes, all of these relationships were analyzed in the software. The analysis resulted in an acceptable fit of the model with the study data, with  $\chi^2(921) = 1551.140$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = 0.040, SRMR = 0.050, and CFI = 0.924. The structural model is presented in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**

*Structural Model*



*Note.* \**ol* stands for organizational learning, including:  
 1. mc - management commitment  
 2. sp -systems perspective  
 3. oe – openness and experimentation  
 4. kti – knowledge transfer and implementation

\**ee* stands for employee engagement, including:  
 1. ee\_cog – cognitive engagement  
 2. ee\_emo – emotional engagement  
 3. ee\_beh – behavioral engagement

\**ocb* stands for organizational citizenship behavior, including:  
 1. ocb\_i – behaviors towards individual employees  
 2. ocb\_o – behaviors towards the organization

\**pos* stands for perceived organizational support, including:  
 1. pos\_a – support in regular/average situations  
 2. pos\_c – support in challenging situations

\**ti* stands for turnover intention, first-order latent variable consisting of three indicators



Figure 8 portrays the hypothesized structural model. This model was developed after several attempts of modifications of the measurement model. The structural model had approximately an exact fit ( $\chi^2(921) = 1551.140, p < .001, RMSEA = 0.040, SRMR = 0.050, \text{ and } CFI = 0.924$ ) with the measurement model ( $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123, p < .001; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040; SRMR = 0.049$ ). The rationale for a slightly different fit indices between the measurement model and the structural model could be that the structural part was basically saturated when the model had four latent variables. In Figure 8, all the paths between latent variables were shown, regardless of significant or non-significant. The four modification attempts for the measurement model were also reflected accordingly.

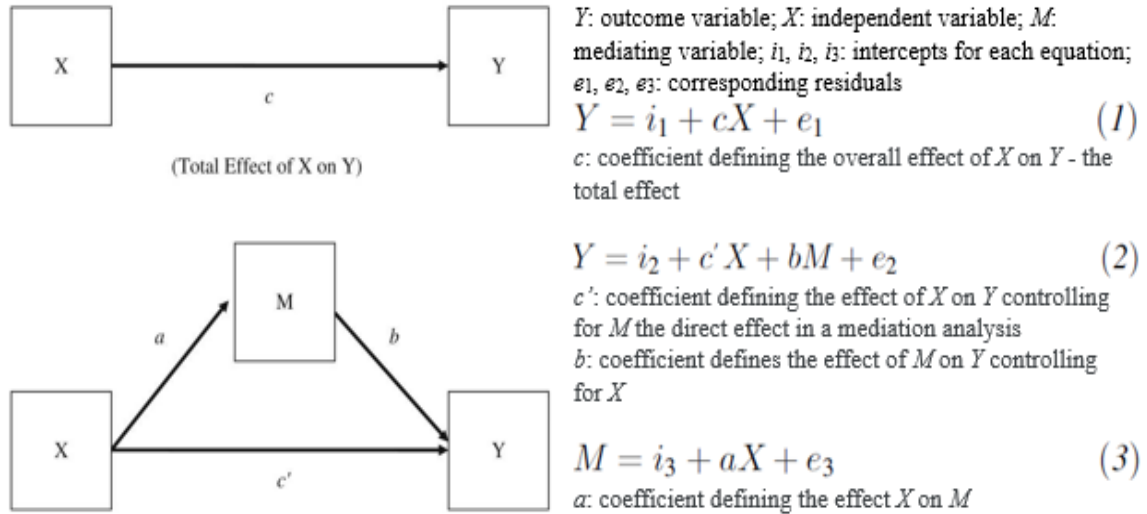
As mediation analysis was central for this study, the structural model is going to be closely looked at and the mediation effect to be decomposed in the following sections.

#### *Decomposing the Mediation Effect*

Figure 9 decluttered the effects of a mediation analysis generally. The estimated total effect is the sum of the estimated direct effect from X to Y and the estimated indirect effect, which is the product of the direct effect from X to M and the direct effect from M to Y. The estimated indirect effect is also called the total indirect effect.

**Figure 9**

*Decomposing the Mediation Effect*



In principle, the total effect ( $c$ ) of the mediation can be decomposed into direct effect effects ( $c'$ ) and indirect ( $ab$ ) effects, so that  $c = c' + ab$ . Applying to the current study, the direct effects included the ones from  $OL \rightarrow OCB$ ,  $POS \rightarrow OCB$ ,  $OL \rightarrow TI$ , and  $POS \rightarrow TI$ , with EE. It means the researcher is also interested in the magnitude of the indirect relationships between the antecedent variables ( $OL$  and  $POS$ ) and the consequent variables ( $OCB$  and  $TI$ ) via the mediating variable ( $EE$ ). The following section will dissect these effects.

*Estimating the Direct Effects*

From the Mplus output, the effects from the four mediation analyses could be obtained. First, with regard to the first outcome Organizational Citizenship Behavior, the direct effect from  $OL$  to  $OCB$  was not significant with  $\beta = 0.167$ ,  $p = 0.177$ , while the total effect was significant at  $\beta = 0.316$ ,  $p < .01$ . It means the effect of  $OL$  on  $OCB$  was

removed when EE was mediating this relationship. However, the overall relationship was significant from zero.

Second, the direct effect from POS to OCB was not significant with  $\beta = 0.041$ ,  $p = 0.759$ , while the total effect was significant at  $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < .05$ . It means the effect of POS on OCB was removed when EE was mediating this relationship. However, the overall relationship was significant from zero.

Third, with regard to the second outcome Turnover Intention, the direct effect of OL on TI was not significant  $\beta = 0.028$ ,  $p = 0.826$ , while the total effect was not significant, either, at  $\beta = -0.045$ ,  $p = 0.710$ . The indirect effect from OL to TI via EE was not significant, either, at  $\beta = -0.073$ ,  $p = 0.142$ . It means both the direct and indirect relationships from OL to TI as well as the overall model were not related. It would suggest no mediation ever existed.

Finally, the direct effect of POS on TI was significant with  $\beta = -0.322$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , while the total effect was also significant, at  $\beta = -0.419$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . However, the indirect effect from POS to TI was not significant, at  $\beta = -0.098$ ,  $p = 0.110$ , which would suggest no mediation exist. One could attribute the non-significant indirect effect in this case to the non-significant EE-TI relationship. Nevertheless, it could be a chance for specific direct effect, i.e. POS-TI, to be meaningful.

The section that follows examines the specific direct effect of all the variables in the model, in both unstandardized and standardized terms.

### Specific Latent Paths in the Model

In terms of OCB, it can be seen that there was significant positive direct effect of EE on OCB (direct effect from EE to OCB, unstandardized estimated  $\beta = 0.684$ ,  $z = 3.583$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , standardized estimated  $\beta = 0.440$ ). For every one-unit increase in EE, the expected increase in OCB was 0.684, controlling for OL and POS. However, both the OL-OCB and POS-OCB relationships were not significant.

Regarding TI, it can be seen that there was significant negative direct effect of POS on TI (direct effect from POS to TI, unstandardized estimated  $\beta = -0.350$ ,  $z = -2.323$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , standardized estimated  $\beta = -0.322$ ). For every additional POS attempt, the expected decrease in TI was -0.350, controlling for EE and OL. However, both the EE-TI and OL-TI relationships were not significant.

EE was significantly positive related to OL and POS (for OL: unstandardized estimated  $\beta = 0.250$ ,  $z = 3.231$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , standardized estimated  $\beta = 0.339$ ; for POS: unstandardized estimated  $\beta = 0.258$ ,  $z = 4.191$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , standardized estimated  $\beta = 0.456$ ). For every additional OL attempt, the expected increase in EE was 0.250 while every one-unit increase in POS attempt resulted in EE expected going up by 0.258 units.

The estimated  $R^2$  values for EE, TI, and OCB, as endogenous variables, were also taken into consideration. With the present model, approximately 56.7% (estimated  $R^2 = .567$ ), 22.7% (estimated  $R^2 = .227$ ), and 36.3% (estimated  $R^2 = .363$ ) of the variability of EE, TI, and OCB, respectively, could be explained by both OL and POS in the model. The information about unstandardized parameter estimates were summarized in Table 16.

**Table 16***Unstandardized Parameter Estimates – Latent Path Analysis*

Parameter	Variable	Estimate	SE	z-score
Coefficient	EE → OCB	0.684	0.191	3.583**
	POS → TI	-0.350	0.151	-2.323*
	OL → EE	0.250	0.080	3.231**
	POS → EE	0.258	0.062	4.191**
Variance	EE – explained variance	0.567	0.049	11.529
	TI – explained variance	0.227	0.056	4.034
	OCB – explained variance	0.363	0.062	5.882

*Note.* \*\*. Significant at the 0.01 level; \*. Significant at the 0.05 level

OL: organizational learning, POS: perceived organizational support, EE: employee engagement, OCB: organizational citizenship behavior, and TI: turnover intention

*Estimating the Indirect Effects*

The magnitude and significance of the indirect effect from OL and POS to OCB and TI were estimated in the model. The indirect effect was estimated for significance using two approaches: the product of the latent path coefficients and the bias-corrected bootstrap using confidence intervals. The results from both methods were summarized in Table 17.

The Product of the Latent Path Coefficients

In the present model, the estimated total effect from OL to OCB was 0.363, which was the estimated direct effect from OL to OCB plus the product of effects from

OL-EE and from EE-OCB. This product of effects, also the total indirect effect, was 0.171; it was the regression coefficient of the OL-EE relationship (0.250) multiplied by the regression coefficient of the EE-OCB relationship (0.684). The standard error for the indirect effect was 0.069 ( $z = 2.538$ ). The indirect effect was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) according to this test.

Similarly, the estimated total effect and total indirect effect from POS to OCB, from OL to TI, and from POS to TI were also outputted. Also, their standard errors were obtained. Only the indirect effect from POS to OCB was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ); the other indirect effects from OL to TI and POS to TI were not.

The standardization solutions from the Mplus output listed the same effect in fully standardized form, which was summarized in part in Table 17. As seen from the result output, the indirect effects from OL to OCB, from POS to OCB were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), controlling for EE as a mediator. Whereas, the indirect effects from OL to TI and POS to TI were not significant, when EE was included in the model.

#### The Bias-corrected Bootstrap Using Confidence Intervals

In addressing a growing concern on the conventional tests of significance for testing indirect effects, MacKinnon (2008) and MacKinnon et al. (2004) recommended the use of asymmetric confidence intervals based on bootstrap methods. They argued that testing indirect effects by the product of two or more regression coefficients violated the normality assumption; each term was normally distributed, but the product was not (MacKinnon, 2008). The alternative method was called bias-corrected bootstrap, which

is a statistical mediation analysis using confidence intervals to test mediated effects (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

For the current model, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals estimated based on 1,000 bootstrap draws for both the unstandardized and standardized parameter estimates that were pulled out from the output. The output listed out lower .5%, lower 2.5%, lower 5%, estimate, upper 5%, upper 2.5%, and upper 5%, in symmetric pair corresponding to the 99%, 95%, and 90% confidence intervals (CI), respectively. In order to confirm significance of the mediated effect, one should check if the values around the mediated effect based on different CIs do not include the value of zero.

Applying the tests in this model, the mediated effect of the OL-OCB did not contain zero at neither the 99% CI [0.000, 0.483], nor the 95% CI [0.034, 0.366], nor the 90% CI [0.049, 0.330], so the mediated effect was significant at the 1% level. The same hold true for the significant mediated effect of the POS-OCB relationship, at the 99% CI [0.040, 0.372], the 95% CI [0.064, 0.312], and the 90% CI [0.081, 0.286].

On the contrary, the mediated effect in the OL-TI relationship was not significant because the 95% CI [-0.271, 0.053] contained zero. The mediated effect of the POS-TI relationship was not significant, either, because the 95% CI [-0.282, 0.050] contained zero.

The same tendency applied to the standardized indirect effects, which was summarized in part in Table 17 below.

**Table 17***Bootstrap Estimates of the Mediation Effect in the Model*

Path: IV → MV → DV	Product of Coefficients			BC 95% CI*	
	a	SE <sub>a</sub>	z-score	Lower	Upper
OL → EE → OCB	0.149	0.074	2.008*	0.028	0.317
POS → EE → OCB	0.201	0.069	2.888**	0.076	0.346
OL → EE → TI	-0.073	0.058	-1.259	-0.194	0.037
POS → EE → TI	-0.098	0.077	-1.271	-0.256	0.046

*Note.* IV = independent variable; MV = mediating variable; DV = dependent variable; a = standardized estimate of the mediating effect; SE<sub>a</sub> = standard error; BC = bias-corrected bootstrap; CI = confidence interval;

\*\* . Significant at the 0.01 level; \* . Significant at the 0.05 level

OL: organizational learning, POS: perceived organizational support, EE: employee engagement, OCB: organizational citizenship behavior, and TI: turnover intention

Table 17 showed the standardized estimates of the mediation effect of EE in two approaches: product of latent path coefficients and bias-corrected bootstrap using confidence intervals. Controlling for EE in the model, the relationship between OL and OCB, between POS and OCB were significant [(0.149,  $p < 0.05$ ) and (.201,  $p < 0.01$ ), respectively]. The bootstrap coefficients for these relationships were also significant at the 0.05 level: [(0.028; .317),  $p < 0.05$ ] for OL-OCB indirect effect and [(0.076; .346),  $p < 0.05$ ] for the POS-OCB indirect effect. As for EE exercising the mediation effect in the relationships between OL and TI as well as POS and TI, it was not significant in both product of coefficients and bootstrap confidence intervals. The results, therefore,

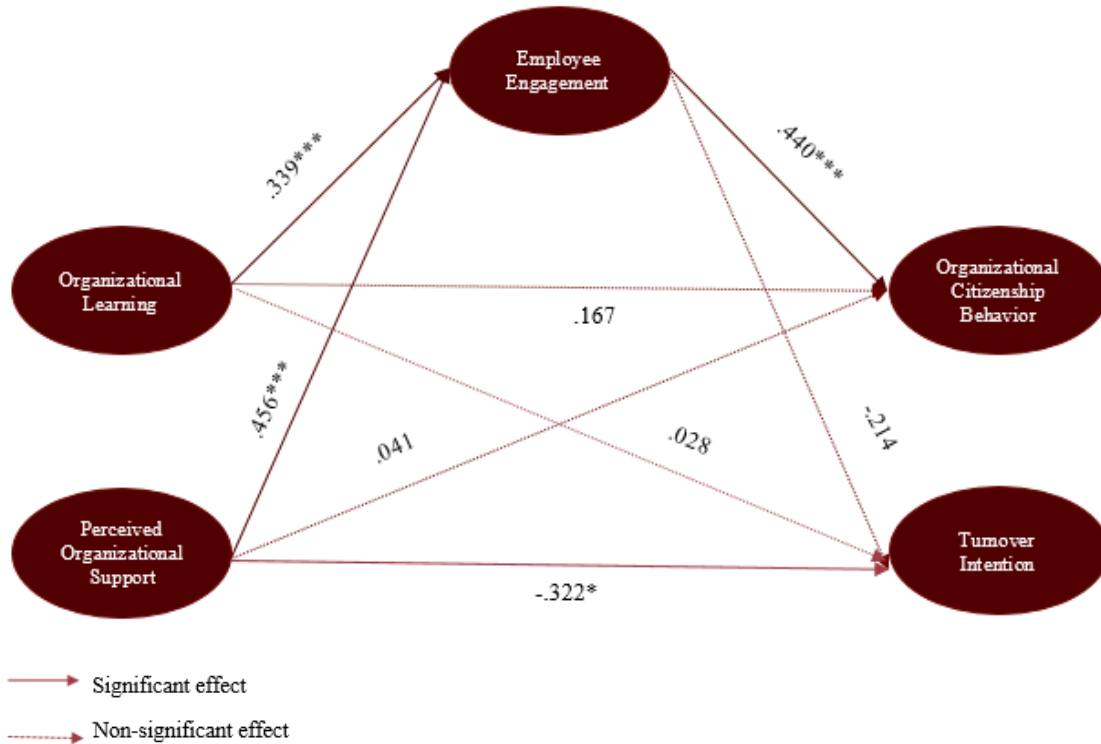


indicated that OL and POS had significant direct effects, as well as significant indirect effects on OCB, controlling for EE in the model. In other words, EE was proved to be mediating the relationships between OL, POS and OCB; but not between OL, POS and TI.

Figure 10 below depicted the full path model with standardized coefficients for the hypothesized significant paths ( $p < .05$  and  $p < .001$ ). Half of the paths were significant, including OL-EE, POS-EE, EE-OCB, and POS-TI. The other half of the paths were not significant, i.e. OL-OCB, POS-OCB, OL-TI, and EE-TI.

**Figure 10**

*Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients*



*Note.* \*Correlations significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlations significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Based on path analysis, out of the eight path relationships hypothesized in the model, only four were significant; the last four were not.

Standardized path coefficients were ranged from  $\beta = .028$  (a non-significant path from Organizational Learning to Turnover Intention) to  $\beta = .456$ ,  $p < .001$  (a path between Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Engagement). For significant effects, Organizational Learning served as a significant predictor of Employee Engagement ( $\beta = .339$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Employee Engagement was, in turn, significantly predicted

Organizational Citizenship Behavior ( $\beta=.440, p<.001$ ). Perceived Organizational Support was also a significant predictor of Turnover Intention ( $\beta= -.322, p<.05$ ).

From the magnitude of the above significant effects, it can be interpreted as follows. First, in the POS-EE relationship, if POS increased by one standard deviation from its mean, EE would be expected to increase by 0.46 its own standard deviation from its own mean while holding all other variables in the model constant. Second, as for the OL-EE path, when OL increased by one standard deviation from its mean, EE would be expected to increase by 0.34 its own standard deviation from its own mean while holding all other variables in the model constant. Third, for the EE-OCB path, if EE increased by one standard deviation from its mean, OCB would be expected to increase by 0.44 its own standard deviation from its own mean while holding all other variables in the model constant. Finally, in POS-TI path, if POS increased by one standard deviation from its mean, TI would be expected to decrease by 0.32 its own standard deviation from its own mean while holding all other variables in the model constant.

On the other hand, holding other variables in the model constant, the paths between POS-OCB ( $\beta=.041$ ), OL-TI ( $\beta=.028$ ), OL-OCB ( $\beta=.167$ ), and EE-TI ( $\beta= -.214$ ) were not significant.

The model explained approximately 56.7% of the variance in EE, 22.7% of the variance in TI, and 36.3% of the variance in OCB, when both OL and POS were in the model as exogenous variables.

*Estimating the Magnitude of Mediation Effect*

In deciding whether EE the mediator is a partial or full one, comparing models using chi-square difference test could be an approach. A  $\chi^2$  difference test was meaningful to the models of interest because they were nested models. Nested models occur when one model can be obtained simply by fixing/eliminating parameters in the other model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). The  $\chi^2$  difference test was used to select a better model between the two in this study.

The nested model was estimated and resulted in an acceptable fit  $\chi^2(927) = 1599.596, p < .001, RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.051, \text{ and } CFI = 0.919$ . This alternative nested model postulating the mediating effect of EE was created controlling the direct path between OL and OCB to be zero and the direct path between OL and TI to be zero, as compared with the hypothesized model.

**Table 18**

*Comparison of the Nested Model*

Indices	Hypothesized model	Constrained model
$\chi^2$	1551.140	1554.807
<i>df</i>	921	923

*Source.* Compilation by the author of this dissertation

A smaller model had fewer parameters and therefore more *df*, which was also called a constrained model. A larger model with more parameters and therefore fewer *df*,

which was called the hypothesized model, in the research context. Then the chi-square difference test was measured using the following formula:

$$\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = \chi^2_{\text{constrained}} - \chi^2_{\text{hypothesized}} \text{ and } df_{\text{difference}} = df_{\text{constrained}} - df_{\text{hypothesized}}$$

which is equivalent to:

$$1554.807 - 1551.140 = 3.667 \text{ and } df_{\text{difference}} = 923 - 921 = 2.$$

This  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}$  value was distributed with  $df_{\text{difference}} = 2$ . When they were checked manually for significance using a  $\chi^2$  table, the  $p$ -value was  $0.10 < p\text{-value} < 0.20$ . In this case, the  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}$  was not significantly different from zero. Therefore, both models fit equally well statistically, so the parameters of interest could be eliminated from the model (fixing OL-OCB relationship to zero) and the constrained model could be accepted just as well. When the two models did not differ significantly, there was significant mediation. However, the hypothesized model indicated a better fit because it had lower (non-significant) chi-square value, then EE was a full mediator in the OL-OCB and POS-OCB relationships.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

In the current study, the researcher aimed to examine the mediation effect of Employee Engagement among Organizational Learning and Perceived Organizational Support and selected performance outcomes, namely Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Turnover Intention, as perceived by employees working in small and medium enterprises in Vietnam. Specifically, the researcher explored two research questions and eight underlying hypotheses. The two research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

From the above analysis, the hypotheses were rechecked and summarized in Table 19.

**Table 19***Hypothesis Testing Results*

Corresponding Research Questions and Hypotheses (H)	Hypothesis Testing Results
<b>No mediation</b>	
Research Question 1 (check extent of mediation)	H1: OL → OCB Supported
	H2: POS → OCB Non-supported
Research Question 2 (check extent of mediation)	H3: OL → TI Non-supported
	H4: POS → TI Supported
<b>Indirect effect</b>	
Research Question 1 OL, POS → EE → OCB	H5: OL → EE → OCB Supported, full mediation
	H6: POS → EE → OCB Supported, full mediation
Research Question 2 OL, POS → EE → TI	H7: OL → EE → TI Non-supported
	H8: POS → EE → TI Non-supported

*Note.* OL: organizational learning, POS: perceived organizational support, EE: employee engagement, OCB: organizational citizenship behavior, and TI: turnover intention

*Source.* Compilation by the author of this dissertation.

Based on the research question to examine the extent of the mediation effect of EE in the relationships between OL, POS and two outcomes OCB and TI. The research questions themselves had two elements: 1) Does the mediation effect exist? and 2) What is the extent of mediation effect given its existence?



To address these two research questions, two set of hypotheses were established. One set included the first four hypotheses (H1 to H4) when there was no EE mediation, set as a basis for comparison. The other set included the second four hypotheses (H5 to H8) when EE was in the model as a mediating variable.

In the case of no mediation, H1 and H4 were supported. Respectively OL would predict OCB (H1), controlling for POS. POS would predict TI, controlling for OL (H4). The two supported relationships (H1 and H4) were interpreted as when employees in small and medium enterprises perceived organizational learning as good, they would tend to exhibit more citizenship behavior, with perceived organizational support being available. They also tended less to turnover when they perceived good level of organizational support, provided availability of organizational learning.

On the other hand, H2 and H3 were not supported meaning POS would not predict OCB, controlling for OL (H2); OL would not predict TI, controlling for POS (H3). No such relationships were present for this sample of the current study.

In regard of the indirect effects, H5 and H6 were supported, while H7 and H8 were not. Specifically, the first research question was raised about the mediating effect of EE on the relationships between OL, POS and one outcome variable, OCB. As a general response to this research question, EE fully mediated the relationship between OL and OCB and between POS and OCB. In other words, when EE was put in the model, the direct effects between OL and OCB, between POS and OCB were not significant from zero. In substantive terms, as perceived by employees in small and medium enterprises, even when organizations strive to build a high level of learning

readiness or support level, employees will only be likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors if the employees are engaged in the workplace.

The second research question was raised about the mediating effect of EE on the relationships between OL, POS and the other outcome variable, TI. As a general response to this research question, EE did not prove mediation in the relationships between OL, POS and TI (H7 and H8). Therefore, this research question remained unanswered.

### **Qualitative Data on Employee Engagement and Organizational Learning**

Although the current study was quantitative in nature, the end of the survey was filled with two open questions about employee engagement and organizational learning. Apparently, the researcher of this dissertation did not adopt the mixed method in her research. The text answers provided were considered qualitative data only, not qualitative research method. The researcher's rationale for integrating qualitative data in the current study was to explore at some deeper level on employees' perceptions about employee engagement and organizational learning in Vietnam's business context. The researcher expected the qualitative data might provide interesting insights and potential implications for practice.

The respondents were asked in the first question about listing at least two ways they thought their organization could do to enhance employee engagement. In the sample of 425, about one third of the employees decided to respond to this question. A long list of ideas was probed, from which general themes were surfaced. Most of the themes were centered on human resource practices such as remuneration policies

concerning salary and benefits, working environment, work schedules, among others. Noticeably, more opinions on internal community building and organizational culture as well as the role of leadership and management were voiced. Interestingly, some employees referred to the responsibility and passion of the employee as a way to enhance employee engagement.

In the second question, the participants were asked what they thought about organizational learning. It was uncertain whether this question was more implicit than the first one that only less than one fifth of the participants were responded. Some skipped this question while they responded to the first one. Some noted they did not understand the concept of organizational learning. A lot of them left the answer box blank. The ones responded had various opinions. The key words that seemed to center around organizational learning included training, process, problem solving, systematic, knowledge, learning, develop, productivity, etc. Two participants swapped between organizational learning and learning organization; the latter is of more popular use in Vietnam. There were several cases reporting organizational learning in detail, which was almost conceptually overlapped with the organizational learning concept used in this dissertation.

Despite being tapped into at a superficial level, the participants' understanding concerning employee engagement and organizational learning has offered an interesting inspection of the concepts. Some of the research and practical implications will likely be developed from these findings.

## **Summary**

Chapter IV captured the important results of the current study. Descriptive statistics on the sample were described after demographic characteristics were provided. Reliability and validity of the theorized constructs were also detailed. Then exploratory factor analysis was performed for several constructs, followed by correlation analysis. An important portion of the chapter was about structural equation modeling, initially with measurement model and then structural model. The mediation effect of employee engagement was manifested allowing for elaboration of responses to the two research questions and confirming and/or contrasting the eight research hypotheses. In addition, initial findings from qualitative data on employee engagement and organizational learning were explored. The summary of the findings, discussion, conclusion and recommendations for further research will be dealt with as part of Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vietnam has set the target to be a modern industrial country by 2035. The common criteria for reaching that goal include GDP per capita growth, urbanization rate, contribution to GDP of major economic sectors, GDP share of private sector, and human development index improvement (WB & MPI, 2016). Vietnam now in 2020 is positioned quite far from these 2035 targets. To make these targets attainable within this time frame, concerted efforts from all stakeholders must be pooled, under the national strategy and guidance from the Government of Vietnam (GoV) and the related agencies. Among them, the private sector plays an essential in leading the implementation process as it is the backbone and driving force of the Vietnamese economy (Kim, 2014).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) accounts for nearly 98% of the business population of Vietnam. They contribute to 40% of GDP and more than 50% of employment (GSO, 2018). The GoV has supported this SME sector with favorable policies and programs (Decree No. 56, 2009, the latest). Among 700,000 SMEs operating in Vietnam, the vast majority of the SME body include small and micro enterprises, while medium ones just account for 1.6% (Vietnam Association of SMEs - VINASME, 2019). Like other businesses in Vietnam, SMEs are faced with low productivity and high turnover rate, among other business problems. Due to the small scale and informal nature of SMEs, the above challenges have been much more pronounced, as are solutions for better performance and organizational effectiveness.

The current study is a vigorous attempt of the researcher to explore the mediation effect of employee engagement in connecting organizational learning, perceived organizational support and two employee performance outcomes of organizational citizenship and turnover intention in Vietnam's SMEs. The researcher would argue that for long-term development of Vietnam's SMEs, learning and systems thinking are key. However, lack of people development, especially absence of an engaged workforce, would lead to SME organizations having the weakest chain of human element, or human capital. In addition, organizational support could provide immediate answer to the turnover issue prevalent in SMEs.

This chapter is divided into several sections. First, a summary of the study is provided, including the purpose, research questions along with underlying hypotheses, and methodology. Second, the Discussion section, gives an account to the test of measurement model and the test of structural model and study hypotheses, in which the hypotheses were analyzed with reference to prior literature and the results of the data. Following the conclusions regarding the individual constructs and their relationships is the section about the limitations and strengths of the study. Importantly, implications and recommendations for research, theory and practice are given, integrating with future directions. Finally, the chapter is wrapped up with a final summary of the dissertation.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the mediation effect of employee engagement (EE) on the relationships between employee perceptions of organizational

learning (OL) and organizational support (POS) and two employee outcomes, citizenship behaviors (OCB) and turnover intention (TI).

To realize the purpose set forth in this study, two research questions were formed below to explore these relationships:

1. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

2. To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?

A review of the literature led to the development of a theoretical framework, based on which a conceptual model was developed, with the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support positively predicted their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Employee perceptions of Organizational Learning negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee Perceived Organizational Support.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Employee Perceived Organizational Support negatively predicted their Turnover Intention, controlling for employee perceptions of Organizational Learning.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of Organizational Learning and their Turnover Intention.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* Employee Engagement would mediate the predictive relationship between employee Perceived Organizational Support and their Turnover Intention.

By assuming the four theories could be linked – systems theory and thinking, self-determination, job demands-resources, and human capital – a conceptual model was developed to examine the mediation effect of employee engagement in the relationship between perceived organizational learning and support and the employee outcomes of organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention.

A 49-item instrument was constructed from previously established instruments. The study instrument was distributed to a sample of 455 employees working in small



and medium enterprises in Vietnam, particularly those located in Hanoi and the nearby areas. Data from the final sample of 425 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics (SPSS 26; IBM, 2017) and exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (Mplus 8.1; Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

An initial screening took place for the measurement model of the five theorized constructs, namely Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support, Employee Engagement, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, and Turnover Intention. The model came with poor fit with the study data. An intervention was made on exploring some of the constructs further: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed for the Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support constructs because they were unidimensional in the original instrument. The Organizational Learning construct was adjusted as two items in the instrument showed very low loadings on the corresponding dimensions and/or not significant. As a result, EFA for Organizational Citizenship Behavior revealed two valid factors while one factor was not eligible because it contained two indicators; thus, the construct then had eight items, not ten. EFA for Perceived Organizational Support revealed two factors; the number of indicators/items were the same at eight. After several modifications, the instrument then had 45 items.

The newly formed measurement model was then running through stages of modification via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) until goodness of fit was achieved satisfactorily. The measurement model had an acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123, p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040; SRMR = 0.049), before a structural model was

developed. The structural model had approximately an exact fit with the measurement model ( $\chi^2(921) = 1551.140, p < .001, RMSEA = 0.040, SRMR = 0.050, \text{ and } CFI = 0.924$ ). The rationale for a slightly different fit indices between the measurement model and the structural model could be that the structural part was basically nearly saturated when the model had four latent variables. At the same time, the measurement model had been adjusted to achieve the most fit possible in several attempts.

### **Discussion**

This section is a detailed account of the test of the measurement model and the test of the structural model and the study hypotheses. The test of the measurement model was the description of the processes of confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory factor analysis necessary for some constructs, with a view to achieving the model fit required in the next stage. Then the test of the structural model was discussed in terms how the study hypotheses were analyzed and concluded.

#### *Test of the Measurement Model*

Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the test of the measurement model was performed with the initial theorized constructs, specifically Employee Engagement, Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, and Turnover Intention. The goodness of fit was not effectuated ( $\chi^2(1110) = 3134.843, p < .001; CFI = 0.774; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.096$ ), meaning the model was not supported by the data. To explore the factor structure potentially existing in the model and improve the fit of the measurement model, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed (Thompson & Daniel, 1996). The two constructs, Organizational

Citizenship Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support, were further looked into via EFA using Mplus software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The reason of doing so was that they were unidimensional as used in the original research that the current study referred to. The other constructs, Employee Engagement and Organizational Learning were additionally studied for refinement. The last construct, Turnover Intention, was not explored because it was measured by three manifest variables.

Doing EFA on Mplus 8.1 software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) for the Organizational Citizenship Behavior construct revealed three factors, one of which was not eligible with only two indicators (Hair et al., 2010), thus two factors remained, and two indicators were removed (Items 4 and 6 of the OCB construct in the original instrument). The new scale had only eight indicators loading on two factors. The researcher studied them carefully and labelled one factor ocb\_o to refer to citizenship behaviors towards to the organization, the other ocb\_i to allude to citizenship behaviors towards individual peers in the organization.

Performing EFA on Mplus 8.1 software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) for the Perceived Organizational Support constructs disclosed two factors. Interestingly all the four reverse-coded items load on one factor, and the rest four items loaded on another. After careful study, the researcher named one factor pos\_a to label the organizational support that an employee perceived in average situations and the other factor pos\_c (reverse-coded items) to imply that the support was given extra, in some non-average situations, as perceived by the organization's employee(s).

The initial CFA attempt gave the researcher an opportunity to look at the Employee Engagement and Organizational Learning constructs, particularly the loadings of all the indicator items. The Employee Engagement construct had three dimensions: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement; all the loadings of the indicators were within a good range (.517-.806) in magnitude, which was satisfactory. As for the Organizational Learning construct, there were two indicators - Items 2 and 15 - that were loaded very low on the corresponding factors, management commitment and knowledge transfer and integration. Specifically, Item 2's loading coefficient was .049; Item 15's was loaded on at .210 and not significantly different from zero ( $p = 0.364$ ). The rest of the items were well loaded from .504 to .861. After Items 2 and 15 were removed from the OL scale because of being disqualified, the construct changed from having 16 to 14 indicators.

With a view to improving goodness of fit for the measurement model, five modification attempts had been made. The first one was described above when EFA was conducted for two constructs and items were removed from one construct. Based on the modification indices suggested at the end of each Mplus output, four other attempts were made, one after another. The end result was a much better fit of the measurement model, from untouched model originally to the best possible model. Specifically, the indices were significantly changed towards big improvement in goodness of fit, from  $\chi^2(1110) = 3134.843$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.774; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.096 for the original untouched model, to  $\chi^2(921) = 1550.123$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.924; RMSEA = 0.040;

SRMR = 0.049, as the final measurement model before the structural model was going to be developed.

### *Test of the Structural Model and Study Hypotheses*

After a good fit of the modified measurement model was achieved, the structural model would be developed and tested then the hypotheses evaluated along, in relation to relevant literature. Out of the eight hypotheses, four of them were supported (Hypotheses 1, 4, 5, and 6).

Each hypothesis was then analyzed in detail and concluded based on prior research and the results of current data.

#### **Hypothesis 1: Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning Positively Predicted Their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Controlling for Employee Perceived Organizational Support**

Hypothesis 1 was formulated to investigate the effect from employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), with perceived organizational support in place. Somech and Drach-Zahary (2000) found that OCB had a significantly positive relationship with OL, which they defined as learning mechanisms and learning values. In another study, OL was organizational culture encompassing the skill to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge, as well as modify its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Islam et al., 2016). The OL culture was found to be positively related to affective commitment and OCB. Rose (2016) in a review of OCB also posited that OCB and learning and development were associated. Based on these research studies, it was assumed in the current study that employee

perceptions of OL was significantly and positively related to OCB in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises. Precisely, as readiness and availability of management commitment, systems perspective, openness and experimentation of knowledge sharing as well as knowledge transfer and integration at work would be more likely to induce employees with more citizenship behaviors in their organizations. Hypothesis 1 was supported by the study results. Employee perceptions of OL was positively associated with OCB ( $r = .362, p < .01$ ). The path between OL and OCB in the structural model was significant ( $\beta = .328, p < .01$ ), controlling for perceived organizational support (POS), indicating more citizenship behaviors were shown when the employees perceived that the organization's level of learning was higher and so was organizational support. More organizational interventions in place, particularly higher level of OL provided along with more organizational support tended to increase citizenship behaviors in that organization.

**Hypothesis 2: Employee Perceived Organizational Support Positively Predicted Their Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Controlling for Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning**

This hypothesis was set out to examine the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), controlling for employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL). Moorman et al. (1998) claimed that POS prompted employees to reciprocate with OCB, specifically when POS fully mediated its relationships with three out of four OCB dimensions. Chiang and Hsieh (2012) also confirmed the POS-OCB relationship, where OCB partially mediated

POS and job performance. Despite the previous results, hypothesis 2 was not supported in the current study. Although POS had a positive association with OCB ( $r = .243$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the path between POS and OCB, given OL in the structural model, was not significantly different from zero ( $\beta = .231$ ,  $p = .060$ ). Conclusively, with OL in the model, POS did not significantly predicted OCB, meaning Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

**Hypothesis 3: Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning Negatively Predicted Their Turnover Intention, Controlling for Employee Perceived Organizational Support**

Hypothesis 3 assumed that as long as employees perceived OL operating well in their workplace, they would tend less to leave the organization, holding employee perceptions of organizational learning constant. Several studies by Hsu (2009), Islam et al. (2016), and Joo (2010) supported a negative association between OL culture and employee turnover intention (TI), either directly or indirectly through a mediating variable, such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment. However, in the current study, the data did not prove this OL – TI relationship, controlling for the POS.

Although OL were negatively related to TI ( $r = -.326$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the path between OL and TI, given POS in the structural model, was neither negatively associated nor significantly different from zero ( $\beta = .004$ ,  $p = .974$ ). In sum, with POS in the model, OL did not significantly predict TI, meaning Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

**Hypothesis 4: Employee Perceived Organizational Support Negatively Predicted Their Turnover Intention, Controlling for Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning**

Hypothesis 4 was constructed to prove that more organizational support perceived by the employees would be likely to decrease their turnover intention (TI), controlling for employee perceptions of organizational learning. Perceived organizational support (POS) was a predictor of TI through a mediator (Dawley et al., 2010); employees perceiving lower levels of organizational support would report high levels of TI, despite high levels of supervisor support (Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012). Consistent with prior literature, our hypothesized model confirmed that POS was a predictor of TI, with a significant negative correlation ( $r = -.344, p < .01$ ) and a significant standardized regression weight ( $\beta = -.489, p < .001$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

**Hypothesis 5: Employee Engagement would Mediate the Predictive Relationship between Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning and Their Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Hypothesis 5 was formulated to investigate the mediation effect of employee engagement (EE) on the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) and their organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The first indirect effect was exerted between OL and EE. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) and Sarti (2014) described learning as a climate and job resource to opportune engagement at work while Hussain and Ishak (2017) found a positive relationship between OL (training, mentoring,



and coaching dimensions) and EE (employees' positive emotional attachment to the job, colleagues, and the organization). The second indirect effect was assumed for EE-OCB association, which were proven by Ariani (2013) and Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010). They found a positive association between EE and OCB, as well as a significant full mediating role of EE between leadership and OCB, respectively.

On such basis, from a simple mediation analysis conducted using path analysis, employee perceptions of organizational learning indirectly predicted their organizational citizenship behaviors through their engagement at work. As can be seen from Figure 10 and Table 17, employees who were engaged because of the organizational learning attempts ( $a = 0.339$ ) would be more likely to exhibit citizenship behaviors in their organizations ( $b = 0.440$ ). A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $ab = 0.149$ ) based on 1,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero: 95% CI [0.028, 0.317]. There was no evidence that employee perceptions of organizational learning predicted employee citizenship behaviors independent of its effect on employee engagement ( $c' = 0.167$ ,  $p = .177$ ). It can be concluded that employee engagement would play a complete mediation role in the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational learning and their citizenship behaviors, in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

### **Hypothesis 6: Employee Engagement would Mediate the Predictive Relationship between Employee Perceived Organizational Support and Their Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Prior research demonstrated the mediation of employee engagement (EE) linking to the association between employee perceived organizational support (POS) and their citizenship behavior (OCB). First, the indirect effect from POS to EE was recognized in studies by Rich et al. (2010) and Saks (2006). Despite the denomination of job engagement, which was defined as the investment of an individual's complete self into a role, or organization engagement, the researchers claimed that POS predicted these types of engagement, in the role of dependent or mediating variable. Second, the indirect effect from EE to OCB has been evidenced by Hypothesis 5 above.

Accordingly, the researcher postulated in Hypothesis 6 that employee engagement, as a mediator, intervened in the predicted relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior, holding organization learning constant. This hypothesis was not supported in the aspect of the predictive POS-OCB relationship (Hypothesis 2); it was opposing to the literature, either. Nevertheless, perceived organizational support indirectly predicted employees' citizenship behaviors through an engaged workforce. Employees who were engaged with their work because they clearly perceived support from their organization ( $a = 0.456$ ) would be more likely to exert citizenship behaviors in their organizations ( $b = 0.440$ ). A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $ab = 0.201$ ) based on 1,000 bootstrap samples was entirely above zero: 95% CI [0.076, 0.346]. There was no evidence that employee

perceptions of organizational support predicted employee citizenship behaviors independent of its effect on employee engagement ( $c' = 0.041, p = .759$ ). It can be concluded that employee engagement would play a complete mediation role in the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational support and their citizenship behaviors, in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises. In other words, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

**Hypothesis 7: Employee Engagement would Mediate the Predictive Relationship between Employee Perceptions of Organizational Learning and Their Turnover Intention**

As for mediation analysis, the indirect effect of the antecedent variable on the consequent variable through the mediating variable were partitioned into two: one from the antecedent to the mediating variable, the other is from the mediating variable to the consequent variable. In this study, the indirect effect was a product of the correlation coefficients a) of employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) and employee engagement (EE) and b) of employee engagement (EE) and their turnover intention (TI). Hypothesis 5 above had the literature support for the OL-EE link. Thus, Hypothesis 7 focused on the EE-TI effect, which was substantiated by Albrecht and Andretta (2011), Jones and Harter (2005), and Van Schalkwyk et al. (2010). These studies highlighted the role of EE in making employees stay longer in their organizations, or in mediating the relationships between leadership empowerment behavior and TI.

In the current study, from a simple mediation analysis with employee engagement in the model, employee perceptions of organizational learning were

presupposed to indirectly predict their turnover intention. However, the data analyzed did not support such a claim. Employees would be engaged because they perceived that OL prevailed in their organization ( $a = 0.339$ ), yet that level of EE would not lead to less TI ( $b = -0.214$ ). A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $ab = -0.073$ ) based on 1,000 bootstrap samples did contain zero between the lower and upper values of the 95% confidence interval: 95% CI [-0.194, 0.037]. There was no evidence that employee perceptions of organizational learning predicted employee turnover intention independent of its effect on employee engagement ( $c' = 0.028, p = .826$ ). It can be concluded that employee engagement would play no mediation role in the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational learning and their turnover intention, in Vietnamese small and medium enterprises. Hypothesis 7 was then not supported.

**Hypothesis 8: Employee Engagement would Mediate the Predictive Relationship between Employee Perceived Organizational Support and Their Turnover Intention**

Extant literature has shown the indirect effect of employee perceived organizational support (POS) on their turnover intention (TI) through employee engagement (EE). The POS-EE relationship has the evidence in Hypothesis 6 above. The EE-TI association has the evidence from Hypothesis 7 above. However, when using the data of the current study, the statement that EE would mediate the predictive relationship between employee POS and their TI was not backed up empirically. Despite the partitioned effects from POS to EE ( $a = 0.456$ ) and from EE to TI ( $b = -0.214$ ) as well as the resulting total indirect effect ( $ab = -0.098$ ), the 1,000 bootstrap samples

contained zero between the lower and upper values of the 95% confidence interval 95% CI [-0.256, 0.046]. However, controlling for EE in the mediation model, although the direct effect was significantly different from zero ( $c' = -0.322, p = .018$ ), the indirect effect was not, evidenced in the above results of bootstrapping. It is concluded that EE would have no mediation role between the POS and TI, according to employees working for the Vietnamese small and medium enterprises. Hypothesis 8 was then, surprisingly in relation to current literature, not supported by the study data.

In summary, the data in this study only supported four out of eight hypotheses proposed. Specifically, Hypotheses 1, 4, 5, and 6 were supported; the rest Hypotheses 2, 3, 7, and 8 were not supported. Detailed conclusions are going to be presented the succeeding sections.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions section is having the research unfold conclusions on this study's individual theorized constructs and the relationships between and among them. The conclusions about the individual constructs are going to be discussed with reference to the research context of Vietnam SMEs. Whereas, the conclusion regarding the relationship between the constructs are based on the four key findings of the study, ranging from supported to non-supported hypotheses.

### *Conclusions Regarding the Study Constructs*

As the key phenomenon of the current study is the mediation effect of employee engagement in Vietnam SME, the researcher is delineating the conclusions into that of the antecedents constructs of organizational learning and perceived organizational

support, then of the mediator employee engagement, and finally of the consequent variables of organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention.

### **Constructs Representing the Antecedents of Employee Engagement**

When studying these individual constructs in relation to the current research context of Vietnam's small and medium enterprises, several conclusions could be made. First, regarding the antecedents of employee engagement, OL has not been a studied variable in research relating to Vietnam, while POS has been investigated in nuances different from the one used in the current study (Van & Nafukho, 2019). In the current study, both OL and POS were assumed to predict the relationships with other variables. However, the researcher has not observed that such covariance existed between OL and POS when reviewing prior research, despite presence of three antecedent clusters including internal (organizational) environment, job-related factors and employee-related factors (Van & Nafukho, 2019).

#### *Organizational Learning*

In extant literature, OL has been explored in relation to, and sometimes in comparison with, 'learning organization' and 'a learning organization' (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Marquardt, 2011; Merriam et al., 2007; Senge, 1990; Sun, 2003; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). It also takes various descriptors at the end of the term, such as 'OL culture', 'OL capability', etc., to broaden the organizational context of OL not only as a process but also as knowledge acquisition and sharing (Egan et al., 2004; Jerez-Goméz et al., 2005). The concepts of 'organizational learning', 'learning organization', and 'a learning organization' are thought of by some people as interchangeable. However, Sun

(2003) attempted to clarify the fuzziness around the use of the three terms, from a linguistic point of view, as well as explored the broader implications of three conceptual clarifications. Accordingly, ‘organizational learning’ is defined as ‘a process’; it is collective learning and improving process for the purpose of building a learning organization. The term ‘learning organization’ is a concept and a subject for study and research, while the term ‘a learning organization’ refers to a ‘living’ representative of the image of ‘learning organization’.

In research about Vietnam, under the same construct labelled OL, the OL process adopted by Pham and Swierczek (2006) was measured by determining how learning activities occur within the firm, which included three phases: knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing and knowledge utilization. Pham and Tran (2016) defined OL as having four components: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. Jones (2006) recognized OL as being a multiphase process that consisted of acquiring, disseminating, interpreting, and storing information; they used the Tippins and Sohi’s (2003) OL research instrument with five different subdimensions - information acquisition, information dissemination, shared interpretation, and two types of memory (i.e., declarative and procedural).

Organizational learning, as used in the current study, is in line with the above conceptual clarification points. It refers to the process, prevailing in the Vietnam’s SMEs surveyed, toward growing readiness level or capability needed to transform the organizations into learning organizations. In this OL process, management commitment, systems perspective, openness and experimentation, and knowledge transfer and

integration are the key components that must be acquired. Employees in the small and medium enterprises surveyed in this current study perceived a good level of learning readiness at the organizational level ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = .556$ ; 1-6 Likert scale, disagree-agree format).

### *Perceived Organizational Support*

Perceived organizational support (POS), being informed in the current study, is the extent to which an organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being, as perceived by the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). From an original scale of 32 items, POS had the first short-form of 16 items and the second shorter 8-item version (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS increases employees' affective commitment to the organization and results in behavioral outcomes such as raised intra-role and extra-role performance as well as decreased absenteeism and turnover. Some meta-analyses (i.e. Kurtessis et al., 2015; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) found clear and consistent relationships of POS with its antecedents and consequences.

Regarding research on POS and its relationships in the Vietnam's context, few studies were found in the literature, including Giao et al. (2020) and He et al. (2014). In these studies, POS referred to the general belief by an employee that support would be readily available from the organization when stressful situations arose, and urgent needs were addressed (Laschinger et al., 2006). Other research studies about Vietnamese organizations, despite not directly addressing the POS construct, postulated that several forms of support, such as leadership, human resources managerial practices, or



relationship with managers, were available for employee performance or other outcomes (Van & Nafukho, 2019).

In terms of construct dimensions, POS research was dominantly utilized the unidimensional scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) because both facets of POS as valuations of employees' contribution and care about their well-being blended well together showing high internal reliability. For example, Vietnamese POS research found one study with six selected items (He et al., 2014) and another with seven selected items (Giao et al., 2020); both of them were unidimensional.

However, POS was also measured in its multi-dimensional nature – adjustment POS, career POS, and financial POS - developed and tested by Kraimer and Wayne (2004). Evidence of the dimensionality was also found in other studies (see Kawai & Strange, 2014). In the current study, although the eight-item version of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986) was used as measure, the model fit was poor through confirmatory factor analysis. Then exploratory factor analysis was performed, the POS constructs revealed two factors. Therefore, the POS construct in the current study was no longer unidimensional as it was consistently shown in other studies. In terms of the aggregate magnitude for the POS in this current study, there was an acceptable level of organizational support perceived by the employees working for the surveyed Vietnamese small and medium enterprises ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = .729$ ; 1-6 Likert scale, disagree-agree format).

In summary, the conclusions regarding the individual constructs involve several aspects. First, there existed slightly different conceptualizations of organizational

learning that have been taken on research globally and in Vietnam. The one adopted in the current study was measuring the process and readiness of organizational learning from management, systems, experimentation, and knowledge integration perspectives. Second, the perceived organizational support construct in the current study followed the popular conceptualization but was operationalized in multidimensional nature in the Vietnam's context of small and medium enterprises. Third, both organizational learning and perceived organizational support were combined to predict the employee outcomes, which are going to be delineated in the section, namely conclusions regarding the relationships among the study constructs.

### **The Construct of Employee Engagement**

In the current study, the term employee engagement and the Employee Engagement Survey (the EES) were adopted (Shuck et al., 2016) because this study was situated within the realm of the human resource development and human resource management. Research was focused on the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between organizational learning and support and organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention. Employee engagement exerted mediation in the first set of relationships of the antecedent variables with one consequent variable, no mediation in the second set of those with the other variable. Employee engagement constructs was analyzed in terms of varying measurements and in relation to other classically situated constructs that a lot of scholars have found overlap and also redundant.

### *Measurement and Conceptual Overlap*

Over the past few decades, the two important and emerging developments of employee engagement (EE) have taken place over measurement and overlap of the construct (Shuck, 2020). Although EE was believed to be unfolded by Kahn's (1990) qualitative ethnographic-grounded theory approach towards personal engagement, the literature on EE has been overwhelmingly dominated by quantitative approaches. The term *engagement* is rather new relative to others like *satisfaction* and *commitment*, so “measuring engagement has taken many forms and fallen under different umbrella terms” (Shuck, 2020, p. 55). Terms such as *work engagement*, *job engagement*, and *psychological engagement* have broadened the theoretical network of engagement into practice.

Several classic quantitative approaches to EE exist. First, the Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002) is by far the most frequently used scale and consists of three subscales of *vigor*, *dedication*, and *absorption*. Second, the Maslach burnout inventory general survey (MBI-GS; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) contains separate scales for *exhaustion*, *cynicism*, and *professional efficacy*; low scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and high scores on efficacy were believed to be suggestive of *engagement*. Third, the psychological engagement scale (May et al., 2004) was developed based on Kahn's (1990) measure of personal engagement, yet it has very limited use. The scale has three distinct dimensions of cognitive, emotional, physical engagement and an examination of the conditions of engagement (meaningfulness and safety).

Contemporary quantitative approaches to EE are exemplified by three scales. First, job engagement scale (JES; Rich et al., 2010) reconceptualized Kahn's (1990) personal engagement highlighting the context of work. The JES includes three distinct subscales: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and physical engagement; it was developed "as a specific deviation from Schaufeli's work and the UWES" (Shuck, 2020, p. 58). Second, the intellectual social affective scale of engagement (ISA; Soane et al., 2012) - a more condition-oriented construct with intellectual, social, and affective engagement - is focused on social engagement. Social engagement is part of the relational engagement experience that is often overlooked; yet the ISA's use is growing and broadened in measuring engagement grounded in Kahn's (1990) original conceptualization, especially in the UK. Lastly, the employee engagement scale (EES; Shuck et al., 2017) was developed to align theoretically and conceptually with the Shuck et al. (2017) definition of EE as "an active, work-related positive psychological state ... operationalized by the intensity and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy" (Shuck, 2020, p. 60). Presently, the EES remains the only tool available to measure the psychological state of employee engagement - not job engagement, work engagement, organizational engagement, or social engagement.

By reviewing the engagement literature in Vietnam's research context, the researcher has found a number of studies that were labelled *engagement* but focused on overlapping constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment or burnout as antithesis of employee engagement (Van & Nafukho, 2019). There have been so far very few studies on work engagement in Vietnam using the UWES by Schaufeli et al. (2002);

for example, research by Bui and Tran (2017) and Pham and Tran (2015). So far, the current study has been the only one prevailing about employee engagement, not work engagement or other classically situated constructs, in which the employee engagement survey (the EES; Shuck et al., 2016) was employed to measure engagement. The summated score for the EE construct in the current study suggested that the sample's respondents were engaged at work ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = .517$ ; 1-6 Likert scale, disagree-agree format).

### *Mediation Effect*

Mediation analysis is a statistical method used to evaluate evidence of a transmitting effect from a predictor variable to a criterion variable (Hayes, 2018). Depending on the field conventions, mediator variable can be called intervening variable, surrogate variable, intermediary variable, or intermediate endpoint. In the current study, employee engagement (EE) was hypothesized to mediate the effect of employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) and support (POS) onto their organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and turnover intention (TI). In other words, EE plays the role of channeling the effect (fully or partially) from OL and POS to OCB and TI.

Studies on engagement's mediation role has been popular, especially in experimental research, because there is an increasing interest in a possible causal mechanism in scientific phenomena. In the social, psychological or human resource management and development, growing attentiveness in mediation effect also takes hold. Examples included Chai et al.'s (2019) study on the mediating role of work

engagement in the international student sample, Joo et al.'s (2017) findings on cognitive engagement as a partial mediator, Scrima et al.'s (2013) study findings on engagement fully mediating the relationship between job involvement and affective commitment, Yalabik et al.'s (2013) finding on work engagement as a mediator between employee attitudes and outcomes, to name just a few.

The current study aimed to examine the mediation effect of employee engagement in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises and the EES (Shuck et al., 2016) was used to measure engagement. The conceptual model featured the hypothesized mediation of EE in the relationships between OL and POS and OCB, as well as between OL and POS and TI. The mediation effect of EE in the first relationship, not the second relationship, was supported. In the relationship between OL, POS and OCB, EE played a full mediation role. It means without engaged employees, the efforts of organizational learning and support from Vietnam's small and medium enterprises will not likely to result in their employees' organizational citizenship behavior. Nevertheless, the EE mediation effect for the OL-POS and TI relationship was not realized as hypothesized.

To sum up, it is concluded that in the current study, the EE construct was a full mediator in the OL-POS and OCB relationship, supporting part of the hypothesized conceptual model. The EES, among a variety of measures, was selected to measure engagement construct in the Vietnam's small and medium sample. Research on engagement in Vietnam was limited to the other constructs believed to be overlapped with EE.

## **Constructs Representing the Consequences of Employee Engagement**

The consequent variables, organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention, in this study's model are going to be concluded in terms of conceptualizations and measurements, as well as how they were manipulated to suit the overall model fit.

### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was first proposed to be composed of altruism and general compliance (Smith et al., 1983). The construct was later deconstructed into altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship (Organ, 1988). Another way of organizing the OCB construct was put forward by Williams and Anderson (1991). Two types of OCB were proposed based on whom the behaviors were directed at: OCBI were aimed at other individuals in the workplace and OCBO aimed at the organization. Those two dimensions are widely used in organizational behavior studies. Three characteristics of OCB included discretionary in nature, above and beyond the boundary of the job description, and pertaining to overall organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988). The OCB construct was also positioned within the performance sphere, more specifically the contextual performance - activities that contribute to the social and psychological core of the organization (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). According to Spector et al. (2010), the OCB literature supported the primary distinction between contextual performance and task performance in that the latter contributes to the technical core of the organization. Such a difference was vividly reflected in Borman and Motowidlo (1997) and endorsed in Organ (1997).

The OCB construct has been primarily measured using the agreement response format. However, Spector et al. (2010) recommended the use of frequency, rather than agreement, response format to assess how often individuals engage in OCB, in a scale labelled the OCB Checklist (OCB-C). Originally, the OCB-C had 42 items, then was refined and shortened to 36 items and then to the final 20 items (Fox et al., 2012). The 10-item version of the OCB-C was specifically designed by Fox et al. (2007) to avoid antithetical items. The ten antithetical items were developed based on OCB critical incidents provided by employed individuals, who were given a definition of OCB and then asked to generate examples.

For the sake of practicality, the researcher of the current study adopted the OCB-C (Fox et al., 2007) with the frequency response format to measure the OCB construct in the model used to analyze the Vietnam's small and medium enterprises. The original scale was unidimensional with 10 items. In the first encounter, it was discovered that the scale had three common types of behaviors. First, it had the *altruism* aspect, meaning helping others in the workplace without expecting anything in return (items ocb\_1-4). Second, it contained the *courtesy* aspect because one employee helps others that overload themselves with a certain project (item ocb\_6). Third, it had the *conscientiousness* aspect when the employees volunteer to take on more work (items ocb\_5 and ocb\_7, 8, 9, 10).

However, when confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, the model fit was poor. Then exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors; two items were suggested to be removed (items 4 and 6). The items were then investigated more carefully before the



factors were renamed OCB\_I and OCB\_O, based on meaning of the related items loading on each dimension and in alignment with proposal by Williams and Anderson (1991). The OCB scale, as a whole, suggested that in the surveyed Vietnam's small and medium enterprises, citizenship behaviors towards other employees and the organization were exhibited on a frequent basis ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .745$ ; 1-5 frequency scale).

### *Turnover Intention*

Despite turnover intention (TI) seldom being precisely defined in reported studies (Bester, 2012), some notable definitions were in adoption. Specifically, TI was defined as "... the conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization" (Tett & Meyer, p. 262). '*Anticipated turnover*' was described as "the degree to which [the nursing staff member] perceived they would terminate their position eventually at some unspecified time in the future (Hinshaw et al., 1987, pp. 9-10). Lacity et al. (2008) defined TI as "... the extent to which an employee plans to leave the organization" (p. 228). Many researchers (i.e. Horn et al., 1984; Mobley, 1982; Mowday et al., 1979; Steers, 1977) proposed that TI was the final step in the decision-making process before a person actually leaves a workplace.

Amid the indefinite boundary of the TI definitions, the current study claimed that TI is an individual behavioral intention to the employment of the organization, which in Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) framework such TI behavior was called *conation*. A *conation* (intention) was distinguished from the affective (emotion) and the cognitive (knowledge) components of psychological activities (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The scale adopted in the current study was originally from Colarelli's (1984) three-item

measure with 1- *strongly disagree* to 5-*strongly agree* response format. However, the researcher of the current study modified the response format to 1- *the least likely* to 5- *the most likely* to reflect the behavioral orientation of the turnover intention phenomenon in Vietnam's businesses and interpreted accordingly. The employee respondents of the surveyed enterprises expressed low intention to leave their organization ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = 1.024$ ; 1-5 Likert likeliness scale).

To conclude, the two outcome variables, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and turnover intention (TI), when being investigated individually, were better shaped after some modifications and in the full hypothesized conceptual model. The OCB construct was modified from the original unidimensional measure to multidimensional one through exploratory factor analysis. The three-item TI scale had the likeliness response format which differed from the original scale by Colarelli (1984). Both constructs had the means score within the range that favorably reflected their reflective measures.

#### *Conclusions Regarding the Relationships Among the Study Constructs*

The results of the current mediation analysis using structural equation modeling revealed four salient findings, in the context of Vietnam's small and medium enterprises surveyed in this study. First, employee perceptions of OL and POS were related to their citizenship behaviors through their engagement. Second, employee perceptions of OL were related to their organizational citizenship behaviors, controlling for POS. Third, employee perceptions of POS were related to turnover intention, controlling for OL. Fourth, employee perceptions of OL and POS were not related to their intent to turnover

through their engagement. These four primary findings are organized below into supported relationships and non-supported relationships, with reference to relevant literature. The researcher would discuss the implications of these findings in the Implications and Recommendations section.

### **Supported Relationships**

There were four relationships being supported in this study: two involved the mediation effect of employee engagement, and the other two touched upon the direct relationship between the antecedents - organizational learning and perceived organizational support - and the consequence – organizational citizenship behavior.

#### *Organizational Learning and Perceived Organizational Support Were Related to Organizational Citizenship Behavior through Employee Engagement*

Alternatively, this finding could be elaborated in full: Employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) and support (POS) were related to their organizational citizenship behaviors through their engagement (EE). This finding was a primary finding in the current study as it pertained to the first research question on mediation: “To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, in Vietnam’s small and medium enterprises?” The finding also was connected to the two hypotheses that were supported - Hypotheses 5 and 6 (see the Summary of the Study section above). Specifically, indirect relationships between OL and OCB and between POS and OCB were established through EE as a mediator. In both sets of relationships, EE was a complete mediator as the direct effects from OL to OCB ( $c' = 0.167, p = .177$ )

and from POS to OCB ( $c' = 0.041, p = .759$ ) have become not significantly different from zero when EE was put in the model. Such a finding has been in alignment with Saks' (2006) study on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. EE was a full mediator in the relationships between OL and OCB as well as between POS and OCB. Substantively, it means employee perceptions of OL and POS will not likely to result in employees exhibiting their citizenship behaviors if they are not engaged in the workplace of the small of medium enterprises of Vietnam.

*Organizational Learning Was Positively Related to Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Controlling for Perceived Organizational Support*

The finding was restated as: Employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) were positively related to their organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), controlling for organizational support (POS). It was a secondary finding of the current study and linked to Hypothesis 1. When OL was a predictor, holding POS as a covariate, the relationship between OL and OCB was positive and significantly different from zero ( $\beta = .328, p < .01$ ). With both OL and POS in the model, the variance explained in OCB was 28%. The result confirmed previous studies on the positive associations between OL and OCB (Islam et al., 2016; Rose, 2016; Somech & Drach-Zahary, 2000) as well as POS and OCB (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Moorman et al., 1998). With the availability support from the organization, the process and readiness of organizational learning in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises will likely yield more organizational citizenship behavior of the employees.

*Perceived Organizational Support Was Negatively Related to Turnover Intention  
Controlling for Organizational Learning*

The finding was fully restated as: Employee perceptions of organizational support (POS) were negatively related to their turnover intention (TI), controlling for organizational learning (OL). The finding was also a secondary one of the current study and attached to Hypothesis 4. When POS was a predictor, holding OL as a covariate, the relationship between POS and TI was negative and significantly different from zero ( $\beta = -.489, p < .001$ ). A percentage of 23.6 of variance in TI could be attributable to both POS and OL in the model. Previous literature has separately supported such a finding (Dawley et al., 2010; Islam et al., 2016). With the process and readiness of organizational learning, support from the organization in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises will likely lead to less turnover intention from employees.

**Non-Supported Relationships**

There were four relationships being non-supported in this study: two involved the no mediation effect of employee engagement, and the other two touched upon the individual relationship between the antecedents - organizational learning and perceived organizational support - and the consequence – turnover intention. Plausible interpretation and explanation for non-support were also attempted.

*Organizational Learning and Perceived Organizational Support Were Not Related to  
Turnover Intention through Employee Engagement*

A mediation hypothesis was developed to address the second research question: “To what extent does Employee Engagement mediate the relationships between

Organizational Learning, Perceived Organizational Support and Turnover Intention, in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises?" The finding was fully worded as: Employee perceptions of organizational learning and support were not related to their turnover intention through their engagement. That finding was primary and associated with Hypotheses 7 and 8 (see the Summary of the Study section above). Specifically, indirect relationships between OL and TI and between POS and TI were assumed to be established through EE as a mediator. However, the data did not support such mediation. In both sets of relationships, EE was not a mediator when the indirect effects through EE were not significant: from OL to TI through EE ( $ab = -0.073, p = .142$ ) and from POS to TI through EE ( $ab = -0.098, p = .110$ ). Along with the bootstrap 95% confidence interval containing zero within the lower and upper values for such indirect effects, no significant mediational effects were confirmed.

Dissecting the indirect effects of EE on the relationship between OL and TI and between POS and TI could provide a plausible explanation for these non-supported relationships. Regarding the OL – EE and POS – EE associations, they were significant, ( $\beta = .339, p < .01$ ) and ( $\beta = .456, p < .01$ ) for OL – EE and POS – EE, respectively. These results were backed up by literature (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Hussain & Ishak, 2017; Saks, 2016; Sarti, 2014). However, the other effect from EE to TI was not ( $\beta = -.214, p = .098$ ). Although such EE – TI was strongly supported by literature (Gallup Workplace Audit, 2003; Jones & Harter, 2005), the data of the current study did not suggest that relationship. One reason could be conceptually related to this relationship: The employees surveyed tended not to associate higher level of EE with lower level of

turnover intention to the extent that was significantly meaningful. Another reason could relate more statistically to the TI construct in this study. Despite the fact that TI's skewness was within an acceptable range (see Table 11), it was still a highly skewed distribution that might have affect the normality of data. Moreover, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were significant confirming the data for the TI construct was non-normal. In the context of the survey, such questions about employees' intent to leave the organization were considered unique in the sense that a lot more respondents tended to mark a low score on the 1-5 likeliness scale (1 = *the least likely*, 2 = *less likely*, 3 = *likely*, 4 = *more likely*, 5 = *the most likely*). The reason behind the respondents' choice tendency for a lower score could be counter-intuitive and understandable in this situation.

*Organizational Learning Was Not Related to Turnover Intention, Controlling for Perceived Organizational Support*

The finding could be comprehended fully as: Employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) were not related to their turnover intention (TI), controlling for organizational support (POS). This finding was secondary to the underlying research question 2 and linked to Hypothesis 2. With POS in the model, OL had neither significant nor negative relationship with TI ( $\beta = .004$ ,  $p = .974$ ), which contradicted previous literature represented by several authors (Hsu, 2009; Islam et al., 2016; Joo, 2010). Since this relationship was concerned with the TI construct, the explanation for the mediation relationship in the previous section could be applied.

*Perceived Organizational Support Was Not Related to Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Controlling for Organizational Learning*

The finding could be understood as: Employee perceptions of organizational support (POS) were not related to their organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), controlling for organizational learning (OL). The finding was secondary to the underlying research question 1 and connected to Hypothesis 3. Although such relationship was supported in prior research (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Moorman et al., 1998), the data of the current study did not. Holding OL constant in the model, POS was not associated with OCB ( $\beta = .231, p = .060$ ). A possible reason could hold. Since the POS had one dimension being fixed to zero (“Heywood case”; Chen, et al., 2001), the POS – OCB could be affected in a way that was not assumed from the beginning. Nevertheless, since the  $p$ -value was .060, not far away from the cut-off value of .05, increasing the sample size could result in a different relationship otherwise.

**Limitations and Strengths**

No research is without limitations. Any research comes with its own strengths. The current study follows the suit. There are three possible limitations with the current study. They are going to be analyzed in terms of what the limitations are, how they affect the study, and the rationale behind the selected approach despite its shortcomings. After that, the strengths were elaborated, highlighting the method adopted, the sample size, novelty of such research in Vietnam’s organizational context in the way the current study deemed to be conducted.



### *Limitations*

The first limitation of the current study concerned the research design of a cross-sectional, self-report survey. A cross-sectional study is an observational study that involves the analysis of data collected at one specific point in time and measures both the exposure and the outcome of interest simultaneously. The data of the current study were collected through a survey whose respondents were employees working in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises. The nature of this design may potentially result in the risk of common method variance (CMV), or overestimation, meaning the data for all the variables in the model, regardless of antecedent, or consequent, or mediating variables, were from the single source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The self-reported aspect of the design has some inherent shortcomings as far as generalizability is concerned, yet data from self-reporting helped minimize bias to a certain extent (Wall et al., 2004). Self-reporting has several other names such as perceptual measures, perceived measures, or subjective measures (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2018). There is good evidence that perceived measures compare well with actual happenings, and the conclusion of the research does not change (Geringer & Hebert, 1991; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2018). Therefore, perceptual measures were taken in the current study, as they are popular in other human resources, management and organizational research studies (Delany & Huselid, 1996; Youndt et al., 1996).

Another possible limitation involved the use of a pilot study. Pilot studies are essential in increasing the success chance of the main study, because they are considered the mini versions of a full-scale study and/or the specific pre-testing of a particular

research instrument like a questionnaire (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). In the current international study, the pilot study was not treated as a feasible study but more of pre-testing the questionnaire in terms of semantics and language. There were 49 participants from a small enterprise in Vietnam taking part in the pilot study. They did the survey and gave their comments on the survey statements that were difficult to understand or the unsuitable scale points, among others. Although the full purpose and procedure of conducting a pilot study did not strictly comply with the research standards, the approach employed in the current study was highly necessary. Doing an international study where the instrument was adopted from a Western point of view and applied in another Eastern organizational culture was obviously challenging. After all, such a pilot study despite being limited to the semantic purpose also assisted in smoothing out some of the language transfer and interpretation.

Lastly, the current study might have limited itself in the conceptualizations of the key phenomenon of interest - engagement. To the researcher's observations, the concept and operationalization of the engagement construct are still swinging, meaning relevant literature in the academic world and in Vietnam has seen a variety of similar constructs such as work engagement, job engagement, affective commitment, job satisfaction, etc. (see more in the conclusions section about individual constructs of this study). It is important because structural equation modeling (SEM) was adopted as a statistical technique in the current study. SEM is a priori meaning the investigator must think in terms of models and hypotheses as well as provide a lot of previous literature relating to the variables, their effects and directionality of effect. Variability in the

conceptualization of the central variable in prior research may have impeded the understanding of the term employee engagement being measured and its relationships with other variables in the model. Despite the conceptual clutter, the researcher of the current study selected the construct employee engagement, not other “peers”, based on her rationale and personal choice. Although employee engagement is more contemporary than other constructs, it has been studied more in the fields of management, human resource development, and organizational behaviors. Furthermore, the definition of employee engagement and the employee engagement survey (the EES) proposed by Shuck et al. (2010, 2016) were seen by the researcher as intuitively closer to the context of Vietnam’s organizational setting. Therefore, amid similar constructs, employee engagement and the EES was selected for effort to study the mediation effect of employee engagement in Vietnam’s small and medium enterprises.

### *Strengths*

Despite limitations, the current study has a number of strengths, including a good sample size. With structural equation modeling (SEM) employed as a statistical test, the sample size of 425 participants for final analysis was satisfactory for the model hypothesized (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2014). Vietnam has a population of 507,860 small, medium, and micro enterprises, which account for 98% of all businesses in operation, as of April 2017 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2018). SMEs employ 51% of the labor force and 40% of the gross domestic products. This study’s demographic characteristics, including gender, age, work tenure, and work role, were well represented in the sample, for the most part.

Most noticeably, another strength of the current study is the use of SEM to test the mediation effect of employee engagement between organizational interventions and employee outcomes in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises. SEM is a general, powerful multivariate technique, and a specialized version of other analysis methods. The major applications of the SEM technique in this study included path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. When conducting SEM in the Mplus software (Muthen & Muthen, 2017), the indirect function can be used simultaneously to test the mediation effect(s). So, a host of interested relationships of latent variables can be performed at the same time using the SEM technique. SEM not only limits Type I error, but also facilitates the modification process to improve a theorized model for better fit, via recommendation of modification indices.

To the excitement of the researcher, this study is the first of this kind being reported in Vietnam's organizational context concerning the mediation effect of employee engagement and the related relationships. The review in Chapter II revealed research in Vietnam was focused on similar constructs, but not employee engagement. As employee engagement is defined as the active positive work-related psychological state of the employees, the current study has provided an opportunity for the employees to explore themselves further. They could also express their opinions about possible organizational interventions affecting employee outcomes through engagement. The research context is small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are the driving force of the Vietnamese economy. Research on these businesses, with regard to aspects of perceived learning and support, engagement and citizenship of both the organization and

its employees, would represent the uniqueness of the current study. Previous researchers about the Vietnam's business context mainly investigated SMEs from the operational and efficiency considerations.

Finally, the findings of this study would be the basis for scores of implications that will contribute to advancing theory, research, and practice in the field of human resource development and organizational studies in the context of Vietnam's business. The emphasis on the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationships between perceived organizational learning and support and employees' organizational citizenship behavior would induce SMEs to attach great importance to learning and engagement at the organizational level in a systematic way. It could also be that SMEs' management pays more attention to organizational support as it goes along with learning readiness to make their employees declined intention to leave the organization and exhibit more citizenship behaviors. These would be the conditions necessary for long-term organizational and societal sustainability. The current study, at the same time, would be suggestive for future research and theoretical implications as well. These implications will be addressed in the following section.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Human resource development (HRD) is an academic discipline and a professional field of practice (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Like other fields of study, HRD is defined as "a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance" (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p. 4). Being a field of study, HRD is taught and researched at

the college or university level; being a field of practice, HRD is dominated by positive intentions for improving the expertise of organizational members, work processes, and the overall organization (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Practice and research go along with each other: Sound research guides practice; dynamic practice provides context for research (Hammons, 2013).

In principle, one of HRD theory's main purposes is to inform HRD practices (Raelin, 2007). Torraco (1997) claimed that theory "explains what a phenomenon is and how it works" (p. 115). Theoretical elaborations are judged by practitioners in numerous practical contexts, where absence of these connections would "effectively renders them closed to the majority ... working across the varied contexts in the field" (Brookfield, 1992, p. 86). While lacking a unifying theory, HRD as interdisciplinary relies on a multitude of theories from sociology, psychology, education, economics, and so on (Swanson & Holton, 2009; Weinberger, 1998). Theory plays a guiding role on the development of knowledge and practice in each field.

As HRD is challenged with pushing boundaries on theoretical application (Seo et al., 2019), the current study could provide insights into a unique research context of HRD in Vietnam SMEs through empirical evidence. Although learning, engagement, and citizenship behaviors have received considerable attention in HRD research (Wang, 2019), these aspects are still in the introduction stage the "research product" life cycle in Vietnam. As such, these aspects are worth further investigation, demonstrated by the current study.

The current study contributes to narrowing the gap between practical (organizational) and research needs, thus theoretical elaborations are signified. Integration of theoretical, research, and practice indications is aiming to achieve HRD-related synergy. Specifically, in the succeeding sub-sections, implications and recommendations for theory, research, and practices are probed.

#### *Implications and Recommendations for Theory*

The rationale for the implications and recommendations for theory corresponds to the research context of Vietnam's small and medium enterprises in the current study. More importantly, the theoretical implications and recommendations have been guided by the findings obtained from this study. Altogether, the study was informed by the aggregate theories of systems theory and thinking (ST&T), self-determination (STD), job demands-resources (JD-R), and human capital (HCT) to develop the theoretical linkages among the constructs in the conceptual model. Specifically, each and every finding underscores the relevance of a unique theory and/or their combined effect.

#### **Systems Theory and Thinking (ST&T)**

Systems theory, also known as general systems theory or systemics, is the theory underlying the study of systems (Yawson, 2013). System theory has a long history, but credit was given von Bertalanffy with this development of General Systems Theory (GST, 1956, 1968) as he has made it the core theory informing an academic discipline. Systems thinking is claimed to be one of the most important broad applications of systems theory (Vornberg, 2013). Senge (1990) popularized systems thinking in management drawn on systems theory in his renowned book *The Fifth Discipline – The*

*Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Swanson (1998) held systems theory and thinking as the foundational theory in HRD as a discipline, represented in the three-legged stool. Systems theory and thinking (ST&T) “has in several ways directed the way HRD has evolved as a discipline or field of study” (Yawson, 2013, p. 70).

The systemic perspective from ST&T would support the argument that a holistic approach is required to fully comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety (Mele et al., 2010). Applying the ST&T in the current study, several theoretical implications have surfaced. First and most importantly, the organization, in this particular study, is the small and medium enterprise (SME), should be viewed as a dynamic and non-linear system and an inseparable whole. The individuals, teams and the whole organization interact and connect in multi-relationships within the intricacies of leadership, power, politics, and culture in organizations (Bierema & Eraut, 2004). Placing the SME within Vietnam’s SME community and general businesses, that SME is an integral part operating for the development and growth of the Vietnamese business community and the society as a whole. Therefore, the cohesion and interaction of all systems and sub-systems within an SME and the overall SME community should align with the principles of ST&T.

Second, within an SME, systems thinking informs that learning systems should be aligned at the individual, team, organizational and inter-organizational levels to achieve performance and performance-related outcomes through engagement of “internal customers” – employees (Senge, 1990). Success in satisfying internal customers will likely lead to external customers’ satisfaction and business profitability.



Organizational learning harnesses personal mastery and people-to-people interactions applicable in the workplace, leading to higher performance for the enterprise as a whole (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Senge, 1990). In the current study, organizational learning combined with organizational support to systematically aid with employees to engage, display more citizenship behaviors, and thus intend to stay longer in their workplace. Knowledge creation that advances SME organizations by means of organizational learning, organizational support, and employee engagement now bears the characteristics of being more reflexive, non-linear, complex, and hybridized (Yawson, 2009).

Third, the ST&T aspect that was implied in the study's model and findings lies in the wholeness of all the constructs being in operation. Specifically, an SME learns "only through individuals who learn" (Senge, 1990, p. 140) that emphasized the systemic approach embedded. Systems thinking is the cornerstone of the learning organization that focuses on organizational learning. Involved in the organizational learning process not only individuals but also "teams, the organization, and even in the communities with which the organization interacts" (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p. 8). Moreover, an SME needs to provide support to their employees through different ranks of management, in a concerted effort to raise the level of engagement in the organization. To make the organization condition more solid, an SME should create an engaged workforce, not only engaged individuals. Outcome-wise, engaged employees with exemplary organizational citizenship practices like helping behaviors will positively affect other peers and tend to pass on these good deeds within the whole SME organization.

Turnover intention will, therefore, be likely to decrease in a favorable working environment where employees perceive more learning and support and practice more helping behaviors. To sum, everything associated with organizations should be reflective of the ST&T perspective.

### **Self-Determination Theory (STD)**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is categorized as a motivation theory. Tracing motivation back to its history, Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000) highlighted the importance of motivation types rather than motivation amount and proposed two types of motivation: autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation takes place when people do things with willingness, volition, and choice; they feel a real sense of interest, enjoyment, and value. On the contrary, controlled motivation occurs when people do things in order to get some reward or to avoid some punishment; they feel pressured, demanded, obliged to be doing them. The distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation was the first the authors made about SDT. They also differentiated intrinsic motivation from extrinsic motivation in considering what promotes autonomous motivation. Intrinsically motivated people do things because they find interesting and enjoyable. Otherwise, people internalize extrinsic motivation in such a way that they own it and when they do things, they understand the value of the activity that may be rewarded or requested of them (Deci, 2017).

Self-determination theory (SDT) was used to explore the phenomenon of employee engagement in the current study. It was intentional of this study's researcher

to dissect deeply the motivation types in SDT to analyze the trait of engagement represented by employees in Vietnam, particularly the ones involved in the surveyed enterprises. Drawing on SDT, employee engagement refers to positive feelings held by employees about their jobs and also the motivation and effort they put into work (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Employee engagement construct as used in the current study refers to the active positive work-related psychological state of an employee, operationalized by the intensity and direction of the cognitive, emotional, and behavior energy (Shuck et al., 2010, 2016). Despite using a slightly different conceptualizations of employee engagement, the point that this study's researcher wished to emphasize is the importance of self-determination of the employee regarding their work in their organization.

When most people think about motivation, they more often think about controlled motivation than autonomous motivation. It was reflective in the responses to open-end questions at the end of the survey in the current study. When being asked about what could increase engagement in their organizations, the employee participants mentioned all types of human resources practices or activities from their firms such as work environment, salary and rewards systems, or leadership, among others. Undoubtedly, these necessitate employee engagement (see more in Job Demands-Resources model below), and they are related more to controlled motivation as discussed above. However, this study's researcher would underscore the role of autonomous motivation embedded in employee engagement. Because the employees are autonomously motivated, their performance, wellness and engagement are greater than when they are otherwise controlled motivated (Deci, 2017). SDT is operationalized on a

set of basic psychological needs including competence, relatedness and autonomy: When employees feel competent, cared for and a sense of volition, they would be autonomously motivated, and the positive consequences will follow (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

It could be particularly exploratory and potentially feasible for the use of SDT as a theory to inform the phenomenon of employee engagement in Vietnam. The researcher would argue that employee engagement in Vietnam is closely related to motivation, particularly autonomous intrinsic motivation that explains engagement as a voluntary state. Having recourse to SDT could be novel as theoretical implications of this current research because little literature has been found on the psychological state of employees in Vietnam tied to personal and organizational development.

### **Job Demands-Resources Model**

Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) was developed by Demerouti et al. (2001) on the basis of Karasek's (1979) demands-control model. The JD-R model includes two sets of work conditions, job demands and job resources. Job demands are the characteristics of the job that elicit strain so that the employee cannot adapt (Bakker et al., 2007). Job resources are conditions that provide support for the employee; they may help the employee reduce job demands, achieve work goals, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development (Demerouti et al., 2001). High job demands and a lack of job resources would possibly cause burnout and diminish engagement at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources available in relations to high or low job

demands tend to reduce employees' stress and thus are likely to make them more motivated and engaged at work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

In the context of Vietnamese businesses, specifically SMEs as current research site, the phenomenon of employee engagement could be theoretically accounted for by two theories: SDT and JD-R. As SDT was already analyzed for informing engagement from the core of intrinsic motivation (see above), JD-R was the focus of this section to see how theoretical implications derive in the current study. In the relationships between organization learning and support and employee engagement, learning and support are considered job resources. Job demands include increased competition, challenging job requirements, arduous customer demands, and so on. With presence of learning and support from the SME organization, employees could be engaged at work. Moreover, the proven full mediation effect of employee engagement in the stated relationships between organizational learning and support and organizational citizenship behavior would once again confirm that engaged employees will be likely to exhibit citizenship behaviors in the workplace. The JD-R model operates in its extended form to justify the positive consequences of engaged employees and more citizenship behaviors, as a result of job resources of organizational learning and support.

In addition to the primary findings concerning the mediation effect of employee engagement, two other secondary findings of the current research were enlightened by the JD-R model. First, organizational learning, controlling for perceived organizational support, predicted organizational citizenship behavior of the employees in Vietnam's SMEs. Organizational learning is seen as a job resource to bring in more citizenship

behaviors from the employees. As long as the employees perceive presence of management commitment, systems orientation, good level of openness and experimentation for new knowledge, as well as knowledge transfer and integration, they would be willing to help other peers and the organization for smoother and more effective work environment. Second, perceived organizational support, controlling for organizational learning, predicted turnover intention of the employees in Vietnam's SMEs. The construct of support is in itself self-explanatory as a resource. Being aware of the high level of organizational support, the employees would intend to turnover less keeping the organization in a stable and sustainable condition for development.

Therefore, the JD-R model is implied in the existence of employee engagement mediating the relationships of learning and support with citizenship behavior, as well as learning-citizenship association and support-turnover intention connection.

### **Human Capital Theory**

As stated in Nafukho et al. (2004), the principle underpinning human capital theory (HCT) is "the belief that people's learning capacities are of comparable value to other resources involved in production of goods and services" (pp. 545-546). From a macro-level perspective, along with other dimensions such as organizational capital, financial capital, social capital, and human capital has become an indispensable source for development of the society and the business community. From a micro-level perspective of SME firms, human capital has seized the attention of management and leadership as the source for other sources or as human resources putting in a high

pedestal. To grow such invaluable human capital, investment in education and training remains crucial.

The HCT has informed the current study in a more holistic spectrum than the other three theories by not specifically directing any particular relationships stated. Instead, the HCT provides an overall approach for SMEs in particular and the whole business community and society, to interact within and outside the boundary of its activity for human capital development. For example, human capital is an important source of sustainable competitive advantage; investment in human capital via education and training benefits organizational effectiveness in the long run (Nyberg et al., 2014). Another illustration was about harnessing human capital through technology to promote workplace learning and performance improvement (Nafukho et al., 2010).

Tying more closely to the current study's research context, the HCT was used from the beginning to formulate the study's conceptual model. In the field of human resource development, it is argued that employee engagement initiatives can be regarded as non-training interventions because they are not directly related to the job, which is in line with the SDT theoretical implications analyzed in the previous section. Organizational learning and organization support can be categorized into the training and development approaches as they are more job-related. Citizenship behaviors and turnover intention should be the return on investment in human capital. Human resource development in general and corporate education specifically are "not only tasked with human resource optimization but improve the interaction between human capital and the

overall system” (McGuire & Jorgensen, 2011, p. 37) could be the connection between the ST&T and HCT avenues.

### **All in One**

In conclusion, theoretical implications and recommendations in the current study present the intertwinement of a host of theories. Putting together self-determination (SDT), human capital (HCT), and job demands-resources model (JD-R) under systems theory and thinking (ST&T) has formed an important theoretical framework of the current study. To delve into the phenomenon of employee engagement in Vietnam’s businesses, the SDT and JD-R can be combined. In order to excel in the competitive economy and develop the business internally, organizational learning and support should be made readily available. The employees themselves must be and can be engaged as a result of the SDT and JD-R, for personal and organizational development. Investing in people for an engaged workforce, increased citizenship behavior, and decreased turnover intention constitutes the domain of human resource development or human capital development as informed by HCT. When all learning, support, engagement, citizenship behavior, and turnover intention as constructs are combined under the ST&T, where parts are interconnected so that a rigorous whole system is to be created, the employees, the organization and the society all advance.

### *Implications and Recommendations for Research*

The implications and recommendations for research are made available due to relevant findings from the current research relating directly to the research context of Vietnam SMEs. There will be two types of research implications and recommendations.



One relates to the research design and method; the other refers the research substantiveness. Future research possibilities are also integrated in the recommendations.

### **Possibility of Research Design and Method**

The technical side of research has directed the first group of implications and recommendations for research. Possibility of an engagement validation study, alternative research designs, plausibility of qualitative research, and further exploration of the current study will be implied and recommended below.

#### *Validation Study of the Engagement Test*

In the current study, the phenomenon of interest is employee engagement, and the measure adopted is the Employee Engagement Survey (the EES, Shuck et al., 2016). Based on this study's literature review on the engagement construct both in global and Vietnam's research, the definitions and measures vary. The most widely used measure has been the Utrecht work engagement scale (the UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The researcher of the current study has found at least 15 existing validation studies of the UWES version in different languages and research contexts. Even though the researcher has not delved deeper into the content of those studies, such a big number of the UWES validation studies has demonstrated a fact that researchers worldwide take interest in the engagement's conceptualizations and measures embedded in their own culture.

The finding of the current study on the mediation role of employee engagement also raised the researcher's curiosity on the criterion-related validity of the engagement test, whether it is the UWES or the EES. Either test could be validated in the Vietnam's research context, for several reasons. First, in terms of conceptualization, research in

Vietnam mainly focuses on “similar” constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or the antithesis burnout (Van & Nafukho, 2019). The open-ended responses at the end of the current study’s survey also provided supporting evidence: Employee engagement is understood as organizational commitment or affective commitment. There is some important overlap in the meaning of these terms. If employee engagement is understood as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, then the “psychological” and the “active” characteristics of the term (Shuck et al., 2016), which could have been essential in the Western understanding of the term, have been overlooked.

Second, with regard to semantics, it is challenging to translate the word “*engagement*” into local languages, specifically in the current study the Vietnamese language. There is no such compatible translation that covers in the meaning of the term when it is uttered in English. To the observation of this study’s researcher, translation of the term is a common obstacle in different other languages such as Chinese, Spanish or Farsi, among others. The researcher used to be involved in a study regarding engagement of international students, where the UWES measure was adopted and translated into different languages. An immediate solution was to keep the term *engagement* in its English form (see Chai et al., 2019), although there might have been other challenging linguistic nuances associated with keeping the English term.

On the surface, it seems that study on employee engagement in Vietnam is infeasible given those challenges of culture, semantics, and research direction. However, a validation test of engagement still has the chance to be performed because the potential

participants could respond to specific full statements of the engagement instrument. The statements should be well translated and elaborated to a level that facilitates the respondents' understanding. A pilot study should be advisable, too. By responding to specific statements, participants' understanding of the engagement construct can be facilitated more easily.

#### *Experimental or Longitudinal Design for Mediation Analysis*

The phenomenon of interest in the current study is employee engagement exerting a potential mediating effect. The intent was clearly reflected in the research questions and based on a solid body of relevant literature on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Mediation analysis has gained a high status in the social domain, especially social psychology (Rucker et al., 2011). Research in social psychology accounted for 34% of all mediation tests in psychology more generally (MacKinnon et al., 2007); approximately 59% to 65% of the articles in several renowned personality and social psychology journals included at least one mediation test (Rucker et al., 2011).

Mediation analysis, in essence, is a group of methods that explore the causal mechanism by which a predictor affects an outcome (Hayes, 2018; Kline, 2016). Three criteria often described as necessary conditions for establishing causation include: 1) covariance, 2) temporal ordering, and 3) removal of competing explanations. A cross-sectional model establishes, at best, only covariance between variables in the causal system because all measurements were taken at the same time. Alternatives to cross-sectional studies are an experimental design or a longitudinal study. Future researchers

who are interested in a study similar to the current one could consider using these two designs to attain more persuasive causal inferences. They are described below.

First, experimental design refers to how participants are allocated to the different conditions (or independent variable levels) in an experiment. Let us analyze the current study's mediation of organizational learning (OL) and citizenship behavior (OCB) through employee engagement (EE). After experiencing OL, employees might more likely to be engaged, and as a result, they exhibit more OCBs. Probably the commonest way is to have two groups: one experiencing OL and the other not. For example, suppose OL was manipulated between the two groups, but the same results were found. Then the researcher would be in a much better position to argue direction of cause, at least in part. Random assignment to levels of OL experience would ensure that neither EE nor OCB could be affecting the perceptions of the participants. However, with reference to the temporal ordering of mediation, random assignment would not help establish such ordering of EE and OCB. To deal with this limitation of one-shot experiment, sequential experiment can help, to some extent. Attempt 1 would be for the OL → EE → OCB ordering. Attempt 2 followed when attempt 1 succeeded to establish that EE causes OCB rather than OCB causes EE.

Second, to a greater extent, longitudinal research offers some advantages over cross-sectional one when establishing causal association. A longitudinal design involves repeated observations of the same variables over time. It is similar to cross-sectional design in that both are observational studies. This means that researchers record information about their participants without manipulating the study environment. In the

current study for instance, rather than measuring employee experience only once, it would be informative to measure their experience of OL on multiple occasions, as well as their EE and OCB. If OL influences OCB through its effect on EE, then researchers would expect that people who experience more OL *than they did before* would exhibit more OCB *than they expressed earlier* as a result of experiencing more OL *than they were doing earlier*. However, covariance over time does not imply cause as well as the temporal ordering could have established more clearly in experimental design.

Even though cross-sectional nature of the current study can satisfy only the covariance requirement of mediation analysis, the researcher's viewpoint goes in line with Hayes' (2018) perspective that "establishing cause and effect is more a problem in research design and logical analysis than one in data analysis" (p. 17). Statistical methods are just mathematical tools that allow us to discern order from noise. The inference made about cause should be the products of the mind, not the mathematics underneath the modeling process. Researchers should hold themselves responsible for doing rigorous studies that allow them to make causal implications with clarity. To conclude, the position this study's researcher dedicates is that in order to increase validity for mediation studies, more experimental or longitudinal research should be conducted, in addition to cross-sectional research. Or combining cross-sectional data with qualitative data could be a possible approach.

#### *Qualitative Study on Interested Constructs and Their Relationships*

Employee engagement, organizational learning, and organizational citizenship behavior in the context of Vietnam are under-researched or, if available, lack research

rigor; thus, application and practicality are limited. It is the duty of interested scholars to find ways to explore them; one of which could be through qualitative research, either as a stand-alone research or in combination with quantitative research. The succeeding paragraphs are the explanation regarding the researcher's viewpoint in this respect.

Specifically, the current study was focused on the mediation effect of employee engagement in Vietnam's small and medium enterprises (SMEs), corresponding to the research questions on the extent of mediation. The starting point was the problem facing Vietnamese firms, including SMEs: high turnover rate. Based on the rationale of the researcher, prior studies (via two literature reviews), and the context of Vietnam businesses, the independent and dependent variables were selected after the researcher reviewing possible antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. These variables were linked to form hypotheses before data collection. The measurements were adopted from the Western research. During the research process, each stage was conducted so that everything was held to quantitative research standards, to the most extent possible, in order to ensure a rigorous study. In the end, some hypotheses were supported by the data, some were not. For example, while engagement mediated the relationship between organizational learning and support and citizenship behavior, no mediation existed between them and turnover intention. Engagement was not even related to turnover intention, against findings from relevant literature. A host of reasons can be attributable to these contradictive findings. Qualitative research has its own merit in exploring the phenomenon more deeply. On an important note, although the current survey has two open-ended questions on employee engagement and organizational

learning, such free text was actually qualitative data but did not constitute qualitative research.

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory. This research method is used to obtain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (Hammarberg et al., 2016). By means of interviews, group discussion, or analysis of texts and documents, qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the employees working in SMEs. When these employees are invited to talk about their reflections on experience, the researchers (of this possible future research) can sometimes learn more than they set out to discover. For example, employee participants may reveal how they conceptualize engagement, organizational learning, and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as how and why the meaning of those could change any combined relationship between and among the constructs. In-depth interview and small group discussion could play a big role in such exploration journey.

#### *Further Exploration from the Current Study*

The current study could have helped gained deeper insights on the interested phenomenon when being conducted utilizing other control variables in the survey. Specifically, the researcher could have used the information obtained from the demographic characteristics and SME firms' industry types. Comparisons could have been made between different groups of employees and/or different types of SME firms. To take a step further, multi-level structural equation modeling could have been

developed, instead of one-level test, where employees are nested within SME enterprises.

Again, there was rationale of the researcher for having not touched upon these research scenarios in the current study. The primary research question of interest is the mediation role of employee engagement in the relationship between the antecedent variables and consequent variables. In her view, in the context of Vietnam's SMEs and businesses in general, organizational learning and perceived organizational support are considered organizational interventions; organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention are both performance and performance-related employee outcomes. Employee engagement is assumed to connect these relationships. Therefore, the general model analyzed has attended to the key research interest of the researcher who majors in the field of human resource development where learning and performance are juxtaposed and complemented for personal and organizational development.

### **Possibility of Research Content**

The aim to make research substantive has guided the researcher to elaborate on the second group of implications and recommendations for research. They include suggestions to investigate the organizational citizenship behavior construct, study Vietnam small and medium enterprises as social and psychological units and attempt to research with other samples.

#### *Investigating the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Construct*

The two important findings from the current research would suggest further investigation on the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as one of the employee



outcomes in the study model. First employee perceptions of organizational learning (OL) and perceived organizational support (POS) were related to their citizenship behaviors through their engagement. Second, employee perceptions of OL were related to their OCB, controlling for POS. In the current study, the OCB construct has become an important employee outcome in those relationships, which needs to be explored further in the sociocultural context of Vietnam and SME organizational context.

The OCB construct was seen as employees' behavior and actions that are not specifically designated in their formal job duties (Dalal, 2005; Organ, 1988; Organ, 1997; Schnake, 1991, among others). The body of empirical research on OCB conducted in the West using Western employee populations as samples has outweighed one from Eastern researchers about the Eastern employees (Farh et al., 2004). A growing number of empirical studies on OCB in Asian countries being juxtaposed a Western, usually North American cultural context has revealed insightful results on OCB dimensions. For example, in Farh et al.'s (2004) comparative study found out common OCB dimensions between China and the West and extended OCB dimensions that were uniquely linked to China. At least one dimension was not evident at all in the Western literature; four did not figure importantly in established OCB measures. It was then concluded that Chinese formulation of OCB differed from that in the West, and that the differences were embedded in the country's unique sociocultural context. Becton and Field (2009) also highlighted the cultural differences in OCB between Chinese and American employees. Other studies in the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and India claimed the

role of national cultures in affecting OCB and other organizational factors (i.e. Rayan et al., 2017).

Undoubtedly, national culture has been tightly associated with OCB that account for OCB variations across cultures. If American culture is popularly known for individualism tendency, Asian culture is characterized more with collectivism. Vietnam has national and organizational culture significantly divergent from the Western organizations in terms of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and long-term/short-term orientation (He et al., 2014; Hofstede, 2003). These cultural variations would be the basis for conceptualizing and operationalizing the OCB construct differently across cultures. Therefore, the need to inspect the OCB construct in Vietnamese national and organizational contexts would be justifiable.

In organizational settings like the SMEs in Vietnam, organizational members see their organization an important in-group which is the extended family; the notion of companies as “a big family” or “a common home” is popular (Van, 2019). Exploring OCB in the Vietnamese SME organizational context would saliently provide a researcher with appropriate understanding of the citizenship behavior phenomenon, thus facilitating business practitioners to enhance OCB acts for the benefit of the organization. OCB has been proved to measure contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997) and promote dynamic teamwork and a healthy corporate culture.

*Studying Vietnam Small and Medium Enterprises as Social and Psychological Units*

The current study's interaction of organizational learning, employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior constructs would have introduced a new inquiry into Vietnam SMEs' operation and performance.

At present, despite a handful of studies using the engagement scale the UWES in organizational settings, research in SMEs, even large-scale funded research projects, was focused a great deal on performance of SMEs as an economic unit, not a social human-oriented one. Specialized business aspects very typical of SMEs included but not limited to credit accessibility, access to premises, entrance barriers to industrial zones, demanding loan procedures, administrative bureaucracy, or personnel recruitment (SME Survey 2006-2015). Key business performance covers income per worker, revenues (sales) per worker, and the ratio of revenues to income per worker. Other performance indicators of interest include return on assets (ROA), return on equity (ROE), and return on sales (ROS). Obviously, these indicators are essential for the survival and growth of corporations, especially SMEs with small scale. Yet, in the long run, they are not enough.

Although Vietnam firms are better managed than expected given the country's development level, they suffer from short planning vision and weak human resource policies (Bloom et al., 2015). Interviews with firm managers revealed that the managers are strong on monitoring to make sure their targets are met but fail to set long-term goals. They also emphasized that the principal objective of the business is profitability. Such findings are consistent with Newman et al. (2015), who reported that human

resources necessary for innovation was largely absent and “developing talent is ... expensive and often unnecessary ... [because] ... easy to replace workers and even managers” (p. 118). Here and there in other studies human resource practices have been mentioned, but to a very limited extent. It could be concluded that at the operational level and leadership levels, firms are just to ensure their operations more in the short-term. The contemporaneous firm performance criteria in Vietnam are more inclined to task performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994).

The current study so far has been the first one to perceive the SME organization divergent from the main themes of SME studies in Vietnam. The supported finding that employee engagement fully mediates the relationship between organizational learning and organizational citizenship behavior would probably direct scholarship in SMEs performance towards contextual performance where the social and psychological core of the organization is at the center of business strategy. Such a shift in inquiry on SMEs performance in Vietnam would present the contribution of the current study. Vietnam SMEs are perceived as social and psychological entities - not purely economic ones, where human being is underscored in the organizational learning process would make employee engage and exhibit more citizenship behaviors in the workplace.

#### *Attempt to Research with Other Samples*

The current study’s hypothesis on the mediation effect of employee engagement between organizational learning, perceived organizational support and turnover intention was not supported. However, the secondary finding that when SMEs’ employees perceived good level organizational support, they would be likely to turnover less, even

when engaged employees did not tend to be related to their intention to leave the organization. The surprising results would suggest a possibility to try the research model in other samples. One thing to note about the current study is that regional cluster sampling was adopted, meaning the researcher collected data from SMEs in Hanoi and the north of Vietnam. Opportunities for samples from other regions in Vietnam like the central and south areas are open. By doing so, the intention of exploring the possible causes of increasing high turnover rate in Vietnam SMEs, could be realized, hopefully in part, given turnover intention is the most indicative of turnover rate (Goodman et al., 2015).

#### *Implications and Recommendations for Practice*

The rationale for implications and recommendations for practice is in line with the findings of the current study in relation to the context of Vietnam as a society and the situation of Vietnam small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and businesses in general. Furthermore, the current study gives insights into the practice of human resource development (HRD) in Vietnam SMEs based on scholarly and practical experiences of HRD in SMEs in the world.

#### **For Vietnam as a Society: Learning, Citizenship, and Engagement on a National Scale**

Although this study's findings were about the interested relationships in an organizational setting, it would carry meaningful implications for the Vietnam society, taking a wider perspective on a national level.

### *Learning for Sustainable Development*

Globally, education and learning play an essential role in economic social and human development. Meanwhile, new scientific and technological advances bring about opportunities and challenges for countries and industries to evolve and stay competitive. To meet those challenges in the knowledge-based economy, people must engage in lifelong learning constantly acquire new skills, upgrade qualifications and are able to develop competencies, for individual and social development and prosperity. According to UNESCO, in essence, lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, in respond to a wide range of learning-related needs and demands (United Nations Institute of Lifelong Learning-UIL, 2018). In order to turn lifelong learning real in the society, a learning society needs to be created (Nafukho et al., 2005).

On her way towards sustainable development, Vietnam advocates for building a learning society. The paradigm change concerning a learning society takes place when Vietnam gears toward industrializing and modernizing its economy, unlike the Western world when they transitioned from industrial economy to knowledge-based economy (WB & MPI, 2016). To realize the vision of developing a learning society, the Government of Vietnam has issues supporting policies: a) to forge a close linkage between formal and non-formal education within the education system and b) to open more educational institutions to help people learn for life. It can be said that the vision to create a learning society to promote lifelong learning for the Vietnamese once again underscores the focus of the current study on the role of learning for the organization, and broadly, to the society.

### *Learning for Innovation*

Vietnam has set the goal in its Socio-Economic Development Strategy “to become a basic industrialized country with the foundation of a modern and industrial country by 2020.” By 2035, there is a firm aspiration that Vietnam will be a modern and industrialized nation moving toward becoming a prosperous, equitable, and democratic society (Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Article 3, 2013).

Compared with the goals set for 2035, Vietnam is positioned far. For a country to become modern and industrial, specific criteria must be met. They include a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, urbanization rate, share in GDP of industry and service and employment, a private-sector share in GDP, and United Nations’ Human Development Index. Table 20 below compared the expected and actual statistics of the Vietnamese economy and the gaps to fill in order to reach its goals by 2035.

**Table 20***Positioning Vietnam with Reference to the 2035 Targets*

Criteria for a Modern, Industrial Economy	2035 Targets	Current	Gaps to Fill
GDP per capita	\$18,000 (PPP, 2011)	\$8,066 (PPP, 2019 est.)	To increase 6% per year (per capita growth)
Urbanization rate	over 50%	40% (in 2019, by early 2020)	To increase 2% per year
Share in GDP of industry and service and employment	90% and 70%	-Service: 41.12% (share, 2018), 34.23% (employment) -Industry: 25.85% (employment, 2019)	Projected 2:1 for nonagriculture: agriculture ratio of growth rates
Private-sector share in GDP	at least 80%	38.6% (2016)	Involve a departure from the past. Public sector share stuck at 33% since 1986
United Nations' Human Development Index	a min score of 0.7	0.694 (in 2017)	Nearly at par

*Source.* World Bank and Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam (2016) and Compilations by the researcher of this dissertation

*Note.* GDP – Gross Domestic Product, PPP – Purchasing Power Parity

Among the ways that broadly define Vietnam's aspirations for 2035, learning and innovation for all citizens has been promoted when emphasis is placed on creating an open and free environment. Specifically, all citizens will be granted "equal access to development opportunities and the freedom to pursue their vocations" (Vietnam 2035, 2016, p. 14); at the same time, they fulfil their responsibilities without compromising



national and communal interests. The reform agenda in Vietnam, particularly reforms and investment with long-term impacts, rely heavily on spurring learning and innovation because it is learning and innovation that will sustain rapid long-run growth. To do so, the government of Vietnam should establish policies and programs to place enterprises at the center of innovation, improve enterprise capacity for technological learning, ensure relevant skills and knowledge reservoirs, as well as continuously improve the quality and relevance of skills.

*Learning as Essential Basis for Increased Labor Productivity*

In terms of economic development, Vietnam is among the economies in the transition phase from factor-driven (phase 1) into efficiency driven (phase 2) (World Economic Forum, 2016). Factor driven economy is the first stage of development, where competitive advantage is based on unskilled labor, physical capital and natural resources. Phase 1 economies are producing mostly basic products. Efficiency driven economy is the second stage of development, where efficiency in producing standard products becomes the main source of competitive advantage. The production process is more efficient, and product quality is increased; while phase 2 economies concentrate on manufacturing. The highest level of development is innovation-led economies (phase 3) with their ability to produce new innovative products through sophisticated processes. Using of the most advanced methods as the main source of competitive advantage, companies are more knowledge intensive and invest strongly in advanced skills and technology.

Vietnam's economic aspirations require it to increase its growth rate. As reflected in Table 20, GDP per capital will need to double between now and 2035, equivalent to sustaining an annual growth rate of at least 6%. The majority of new GDP will need to come from higher labor productivity being resulted from a labor force that works smarter with higher quality capital resources. Along with other important factors that provide the initial impetus for sustained, higher growth, productivity and growth need to be obtained through widespread, intensive concerted learning effort by workers in firms, farmers, and researchers, faculty and students at research institutes, universities, and colleges. They should bring new knowledge to apply in production. Employees are required to process the knowledge and skills to produce goods and services much more valuable than what they do today.

One of the foundations of an innovation-led economy that Vietnam aspires for 2035 is concerned with helping firms improve their capacity for “technology learning”. While Vietnam has numerous interventions and programs for accelerating technology learning in firms, few of them are effective (WB & MPI, 2016). Specifically, they are slow or bureaucratic, lack experienced, successful technology entrepreneurs and managers. In fact, Vietnam is not boosting firm learning and absorptive capacity. Therefore, the current study adds a voice to heighten the importance of learning for increased productivity, innovation, and sustainable development of Vietnam by 2035.

#### *Citizenship and Engagement*

Inductively, the supported relationship for organizational learning and organizational citizenship via employee engagement in Vietnam SMEs has led to

implications in the practice of Vietnam as a society. On a national scale, the roles of citizenship and engagement are underlined, with different conceptualizations yet coming from the same source of the two concepts. Here, the Vietnamese people are practicing their role as citizens of a nation-state and are engaged in what they do.

Historically, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as a construct comes from three sources, one of which follows from classic Greek philosophy on the concept of citizenship, as in Graham (1991) and Van Dyne et al. (1994). This perspective suggests “loyalty” and “boosterism” and also argues for the importance of challenges to the status quo (Farh et al., 2004). Given civic citizenship and OCB are culture variant, the core of citizenship exists across nations, including Vietnam. Good citizens are “compassionate, politically engaged, concerned for social justice and the environment, tolerant of others, willing and able to dialogue, and active participants in public life” (Schugurensky & Myers, 2003, p. 1).

In terms of engagement, the researcher of the current study would speculate that engagement is part of civic citizenship in that a citizen is not only motivated to do things extrinsically, but importantly intrinsically. Positioning a citizen in a social and national contexts, he or she should be self-determined and actively doing things for the good of the society.

Tying both engagement and citizenship understood above to education, citizenship education comes into being. Citizenship education aims to develop good democratic citizens and can be used as a tool not only for upholding the status quo, but also for “empowering individuals and groups to struggle for emancipatory change”

(Schugurensky & Myers, 2003, p. 1). These authors put forward several proposals for twenty-first century citizenship education, some of which include a change from passive to active citizenship (the engagement aspect of citizenship as implied from the current study) and from school-based citizenship to learning community (the premises of the current study).

The Vietnamese have exhibited the qualities of citizenship and engagement in their long history of wars against giant enemies. These qualities are also demonstrated clearly through their current fight in the global pandemic that hits the world the hardest over a century. The researcher of the current study has found this implication for practice spontaneous and meaningful for Vietnam as a society.

#### **For Vietnamese Small and Medium Enterprises and Vietnam Businesses in General**

The implications for practice are meant for both SMEs management and employees. They are based on the findings of the current research as well as the actual context of Vietnam's SMEs.

##### *For Business Owners and/or Managers*

The primary results of this study shed light on the role of employee engagement in the Vietnam business and SMEs context in promoting the relationship between employee perceptions of learning and support at the organizational level and their citizenship behaviors in the workplace. Moreover, the secondary finding on the predictive relationship between employee perceptions of organizational support and their turnover intention is a helpful insight into effective business operation. These are important practical implications for SME business owners and/or managers as these

implications may guidance the business in heading the way ahead. Most importantly, systems thinking and long-term vision would wield considerable influence on good management of SME businesses.

### Adopt Systems Thinking and Long-term Vision

Effective business decision making and learning in a world characterized by growing dynamic complexity require business managers to equip themselves with systems thinking, which is defined as “the ability to see the world as a complex system, to understand how everything is connected to everything else” (Sterman, 2002, p. 2). Unfortunately, empirical evidence suggested that the majority of business managers lack systems thinking skills (Ackoff, 2006). Senge (2006) used “the fifth discipline” to denote systems thinking and suggested 11 systems laws that help people understand systems better. There are many schools of systems thinking but all agree that a systems view of the world is still rare (Richardson, 1991; Sterman, 2002).

As for businesses, regardless of size, adopting a systems view is challenging. Small and medium enterprises have a higher barrier because they are facing every day and immediate problems for their survival that they may lose sight of a holistic view of their business. However, the researcher of the current dissertation would suggest that as long as businesses learn to see the organization systematically, they are attempting to approach systems thinking and doing. There must be a shift in their mental models around a shared vision, on the basis of personal vision and mastery and encouragement of team learning through dialogue. Then, the integration of these elements in organization will result in systems thinking.

Adopting systems thinking in SMEs requires a mindset change in the first place. At present, Vietnamese managers, despite being relatively good at monitoring and fulfilling short-term targets, are weak in adopting a long-term vision, introducing new technology, and reforming human resource policies (Brandt et al., 2016). Rand and Tarp (2012) also found 84% of firms surveyed had no technology adaptation or R&D programs as well as human resources for innovation. For example, firm owners viewed talent development was expensive and often unnecessary; they thought it was easy to replace workers and even managers. It is the absence of a long-term vision that these businesses risk losing long-run corporate sustainability and human capital development. Therefore, leaders' self-awareness on systems thinking (seeing their organization as systems) and a long-term vision should be heightened and is essential given SMEs' small scale and informal nature.

#### Realize Increasing Importance of Organizational Learning and Employee Engagement

Management of SME should be aware of the role of engagement and find ways to make their employees engaged. With that being said, the organizations' leadership should show their commitment, adopt systems perspective, be open-minded and willing to experiment new knowledge, and encourage knowledge exchange and integration; all providing with support to the employees at the organization level. Both organizational learning and employee engagement require need time long enough to be established and maintained in the organizational setting, apparently with considerable effort and strong determination from management and employees, to be established. Organizational learning is understood as a process or level of readiness or even a capability.

Concurrently, employees cannot be engaged overnight, without internal determination and external forces. The leader's or manager's role is to tap into the collective wisdom of the organization and provide the conditions and boundaries within which learning and engagement can happen (Saposnick, 2005).

#### View Employee Organizational Citizenship Behavior as Performance

As for SMEs and business organizations in general, it could be a new perspective that organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) being considered in measuring employee performance. Ordinary performance outcomes are related more to task performance which is required “activities that contribute to the organization’s technical core ...” (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, p. 73). Organizational citizenship behavior, on the other hand, is considered “extra-role discretionary behavior intended to help others in the organization or to demonstrate conscientiousness in support of the organization” (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997, p. 100). It could be seen that these contextual activities covering OCB support organizational functioning and contribute to shaping the organizational, social, and psychological context for task activities and processes. Without employees being voluntary to help their peers and organization, the catalyst for performing task activities is hardly existent. The distinction between task performance and contextual performance has an important implication for personnel selection research (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

The fact about Vietnamese business management having short-term orientation and focusing more on profitability implies a high possibility that task performance could be the employee outcome they are looking for. The researcher of the current study

could suggest that Vietnamese SMEs particularly should look for employees who exhibit the OCB characteristics to join the organization. Despite OCB's look for not being essential performance outcomes, employees with good citizenship behaviors prepare the organization to be an authentic one gearing towards overall effectiveness. In this sense, recruiting people with potential OCBs is also regarded as long-term human resource development strategy and contributes to creating a healthy corporate culture.

#### *For the Employees*

Participating in the survey of the current study would probably give an opportunity for the employees in the investigated SMEs to express their personal opinions about their job and the organization and develop or question their current thinking. Their voice on engagement and organizational learning could surface as meaningful implications. Raising employees' awareness of the importance of engagement and learning in an organizational setting could be attributable from the corporate community to Vietnam's development goals by 2035.

#### Employee Perception of Engagement

However overlapping or vague the term employee engagement might have been to the employees surveyed to a certain extent, they responded to survey statements with an average score nearly five out of six-point scale, indicating that they agreed they were engaged at work. Moreover, in the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational learning, organizational support and their citizenship behaviors, employee engagement played a full mediating effect. It was interpreted that organizational learning or organizational support, as perceived by the employees, would not be likely to result in



their organizational citizenship behaviors, without them being engaged at work.

Engagement completely accounted for the learning and citizenship and the support and citizenship relationships, in Vietnamese SMEs.

When the employees were asked what could enhance employee engagement in their organizations, responses were widely dispersed. However, majority of the responses tended to account for the role of the organization to lead to engaged employees. Notably, organizations should create more events organization-wide to build community for their employees, followed by stable salary and leadership and management commitment. Interestingly, scarcely available was the mentioning of employees' responsibility to engage themselves or their passion. Provided such qualitative data despite not yet dominant as a theme, the researcher of the current study would argue that employees should be engaged by both the firm they work for and by themselves. Such a premise linked to the combined influence of both the job demands-resources model and self-determination theory. If employees could be aware of the ramification of self-determination on their engagement, that level of engagement would be strong and influential.

#### Employee Recognition of Organizational Learning

In employee perceptions, organizational learning, along with organizational support, could predict their citizenship behaviors via engagement. While perceived organizational support is self-explanatory and their role in predicting employees' lower intention to leave, employees did not recognize the predictive influence of organizational learning on their leave intent. In the current study, organizational learning is seen as a

process and capability systematically existing in an organization to exchange and transfer knowledge, under management commitment.

In Vietnam, the concepts of learning, lifelong learning, or a learning society are widely used, yet how these concepts are operationalized in a societal setting has room to be explored. Similarly, employees may familiarize themselves with a learning organization term, but the ways to develop their organizations to a learning one through organization learning process are open. This proposition was partly evidenced by the qualitative data integrated in the survey. When being asked how they understood organizational learning, many expressed that they had no idea what organizational learning was. Some employees just responded that it was important and necessary but failed to elaborate further. Others cited training activities organized by an organization. A few people started to mention the systems and experimentation elements of organizational learning. Therefore, it would be suggestive that learning in an organizational setting should be given opportunity to be delved more deeply by the employees, possibly by appropriate means offered by the organization.

### **For the Practice of Human Resource Development in Small and Medium Enterprises in Vietnam**

#### *High Flexibility in Approaching Human Resource Development in SMEs*

There is a common challenge in applying human resource development (HRD) in SMEs. The unique characteristics of SMEs include small scale, limited investment, personal character/owner-management, informal nature, and small teams of employees, among others. Such uniqueness of SMEs might impede applying systems thinking and

long-term vision as well as formal learning and ambitious performance improvement approaches. These difficulties present a universal issue for SMEs worldwide, let alone the ones operating in a developing countries like Vietnam. Therefore, HRD practitioners should exercise a high degree of flexibility when working with SMEs.

As learning and performance are the two key domains in HRD (Swanson & Holton, 2001), Werner's (2014) view of HRD as "a process that stimulates learning and facilitates the emergence of individuals' knowledge" (p. 130) was suggestive of HRD implementation in SMEs. Drawing on Werner (2014), Mustafa et al (2019) recognized that learning in organizations could be unstructured and informal and include a variety of learning approaches such as experiential learning and/or non-institutional learning. Also, learning and development is a dynamic process that is strongly embedded within specific contexts (Stein, 1998).

HRD in SMEs is largely driven by the ideology and goals of the owner-managers (Saru, 2007). Even among SMEs themselves, governance structures and approaches to management vary observably (Mustafa et al., 2019). Therefore, HRD practitioners should start from the management levels when it comes to implementing learning and development in their SME organizations. Gaining management rapport from the beginning would signal successful HRD approaches in later stages.

In responding to Short and Gray's (2018) call for attention to the issue of HRD in SMEs, the current dissertation echoed their call to recognize the role of learning, engagement, and citizenship behavior in the Vietnam's SMEs context. As HRD is considered a new field of practice in Vietnam for now, HR practitioners instead should

exercise a proper extent of flexibility and creativity in assisting Vietnamese SMEs to prosper in learning and development as well as general performance. For instance, employee engagement could be developed through mentoring, not necessarily training. Organizational learning could be more challenging to be conducted informally, so creativity is required from HR practitioners. Favorable organizational support systems would promote employees to engage, and with time the employees internalize their engagement to exhibit more citizenship behaviors.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, Chapter V has arrived at four important findings. First, employee perceptions of organizational learning and organizational support were related to their citizenship behaviors through their engagement. Second, employee perceptions of organizational learning were related to their organizational citizenship behaviors, controlling for organizational support. Third, employee perceptions of organizational support were related to turnover intention, controlling for organizational learning. Fourth, employee perceptions of organizational learning and organizational support were not related to their intent to turnover through their engagement. All of them were studied and then applied in the context of Vietnam's SMEs.

Another meaningful conclusion concerns with systems thinking, which is applied to the conceptualization and operationalization of the key constructs in the model hypothesized in this dissertation. Organizational learning, perceived organizational support, engaged workforce, and organizational citizenship behavior all need the long-term vision and systems thinking of the SME owners or leaders and managers. Systems

thinking connects management acts in capitalizing personal mastery of individual employees, developing mental modes, building shared vision, and effectuating teamwork. However challenging it might be for SMEs, it is important that systems thinking should be embedded in the mindset SME management and systems thinking skills should be in their management toolbox.

One salient conclusion of the current study relates to drawing on two theories of job resources-demands and self-determination to inform the employee engagement phenomenon in Vietnam's SMEs. To advance the organization, employees should not only rely on the support granted by the organization to tackle their job demands. They should also decide on their own to engage in business activities, with good commitment and active psychology. Spillover effect can take place from engaged individuals, engaged teams, and an engaged workforce, as a whole, in the organizational and societal settings. Organizational citizenship behaviors are, therefore, created and maintained, leading to more employees staying longer with the organization. Management and employees' success in doing so, both organizational effectiveness and personal development could be resulted in.

A derived practical implications is the flexibility and creativity degree that should be exercised by human resource development practitioners when working with SMEs. SMEs are considered business units, but societal units at the same time, with informality and spontaneity as unique characteristics. HRD in SMEs should, therefore, be adjusted accordingly.

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN VIETNAMESE SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Dissertation Title: **Organizational Learning and Perceived Support on Employee Outcomes in Vietnamese SMEs – Employee Engagement as Mediation**

Howdy

My name is Huyen Thi Minh Van, a doctoral student in Human Resource Development, Texas A&M University, USA. I am also affiliated with Foreign Trade University, Vietnam, as a lecturer of business education.

I am conducting research on employee engagement in Vietnamese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In particular, I focus on the mediating role of engagement on the relationships among organizational learning and perceived support and employee outcomes (i.e. organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention).

As an employee in a Vietnamese SME organization, the information you provide will inform the organization to provide more support and to fortify learning capacity for the employees via engagement initiatives. The expected results would be better outcomes for the employees, the organization, and ultimately the society. Therefore, your participation in this survey is very important and highly valued!

Thank you

Sincerely yours

#### **Instructions**

Please read the instructions below before you begin this survey.

1. The estimated time to complete this survey is 12-15 minutes.
2. Your personal information will not be disclosed in any fashion.
3. Please respond to the statements based on your experience at your present organization. If you have not experienced such situations, please answer to the best you think you will do.

If you have any question or concern regarding this study and/or your rights as a participant, please contact Ms. Huyen Van (email: [huyen.van@tamu.edu](mailto:huyen.van@tamu.edu)) or Prof. Dr. Fredrick Nafukho (email: [fnafukho@tamu.edu](mailto:fnafukho@tamu.edu)).

Do you agree to participate in this survey?

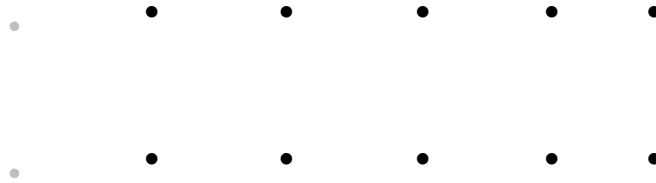
- Yes
- No

Please indicate your agreement respective to the context of your job and at your workplace

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
I am really focused when I am working.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I concentrate on my job when I am at work.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I give my job responsibility a lot of attention.	•	•	•	•	•	•
At work, I am focused on my job.	•	•	•	•	•	•
Working here has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I believe in the mission and purpose of my organization.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I care about the future of my organization.	•	•	•	•	•	•
<i>(For me)</i> I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me.	•	•	•	•	•	•
I am willing to put in extra effort without being asked.	•	•	•	•	•	•

(For teams) I often go above what is expected of me to help my team be successful.

(For the company) I work harder than expected to help my company be successful.



Please indicate to what degree you perceive learning capability in your organization at present.

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
The managers frequently involve their staff in frequent decision-making processes.	●	●	●	●	●	●
Employee learning is considered more of an expense than an investment.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The firm's management looks favorably on carrying out changes in any area to adapt to and/or keep ahead of new environmental situations.	●	●	●	●	●	●
Employee learning capability is considered a key factor in this firm.	●	●	●	●	●	●
In this firm, innovative ideas that work are rewarded.	●	●	●	●	●	●
All employees have generalized knowledge regarding this firm's objectives.	●	●	●	●	●	●
All parts that make up this firm (departments, sections, work teams, and individuals) are well aware of how they contribute to achieving the overall objectives.	●	●	●	●	●	●
All parts that make up this firm are interconnected, working together in a coordinated fashion.	●	●	●	●	●	●

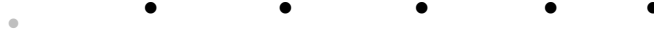
This firm promotes experimentation and innovation as a way of improving the work processes.



This firm follows up what other firms in the sector are doing, adopting those practices and techniques it believes to be useful and interesting.



Experiences and ideas provided by external sources (advisors, customers, training firms, etc.) are considered a useful instrument for this firm's learning.



Part of this firm's culture is that employees can express their opinions and make suggestions regarding the procedures and methods in place for carrying out tasks.



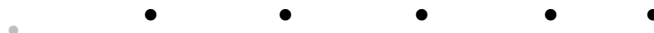
Errors and failures are always discussed and analyzed in this firm, on all levels.



Employees have the chance to talk among themselves about new ideas, programs, and activities that might be of use to the firm.



In this firm, teamwork is not the usual way to work. (rs)



The firm has instruments (manuals, databases, files, organizational routines, etc.) that allow what has been learnt in past situations to remain valid, although the employees are no longer the same.



Please indicate the level of your turnover intention

Least likely → Most likely

- I frequently think quitting my job ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
- I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
- If I have my own way, I will be working for this organization one year from now. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Please indicate your agreement on perceived organizational support

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The organization would ignore any complaint from me.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The organization really cares about my well-being.	●	●	●	●	●	●
Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.	●	●	●	●	●	●
The organization shows very little concern for me.	●	●	●	●	●	●

The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.



Please indicate how often you have done each of the following things on your present job.

	Never	Once or twice	Once or twice/month	Once or twice/week	Everyday
I took time to advise, coach, or mentor a co-worker.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I helped co-worker learn new skills or shared job knowledge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I helped new employees get oriented to the job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I lent a compassionate ear when someone had a work problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I offered suggestions to improve how work is done.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I helped a co-worker who had too much to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I volunteered for extra work assignments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I worked weekends or other days off to complete a project or task.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I volunteered to attend meetings or work on committees on own time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I gave up meal and other breaks to complete work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>



---

## Organization's Information

How many employees does your company have?

- 10 employees or fewer
- 11-50 employees
- 51-300 employees
- Over 300 employees

What line of business is your company in?

- Manufacturing
- Services
- Manufacturing and services
- Others

How long has your company in business?

- Less than 3 years
- 3-5 years
- Over 5 years - 10 years
- Over 10 years

Where is the company doing business primarily?

- North
- Central
- South
- Others

## Personal Information

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Others

Age

- 18 - 25 years old
- Over 25 - 30 years old
- Over 30 - 40 years old

- Over 40 - 49 years old
- Over 49 years old

How long have you been working in this company?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 - 3 years
- Over 3 years – 5 years
- Over 5 years

What do you do in the company?

- Managerial role
- Non-managerial role

Would you like to give at least two comments on how to enhance employee engagement in your company? (*Optional*)

—

How do you understand organizational learning? (*Optional*)

—

Please share your email in case you wish to join the raffle:

—

**Thank you for your participation!**