

**DOES OFFICE RELOCATION AND REDECORATION HAVE A
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?**



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SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?**

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.....
Miss Phitumpai Sungvannuch
Candidate

.....
Suparak Suriyankietkaew,
Ph.Ds.
Advisor

.....
Asst. Prof. Winai Wongsurawat,
Ph.D.
Chairperson

.....
Assoc. Prof. Annop Tanlamai,
Ph.D.
Dean
College of Management
Mahidol University

.....
Benjalux Sakunasingha,
D.B.A.
Committee Member

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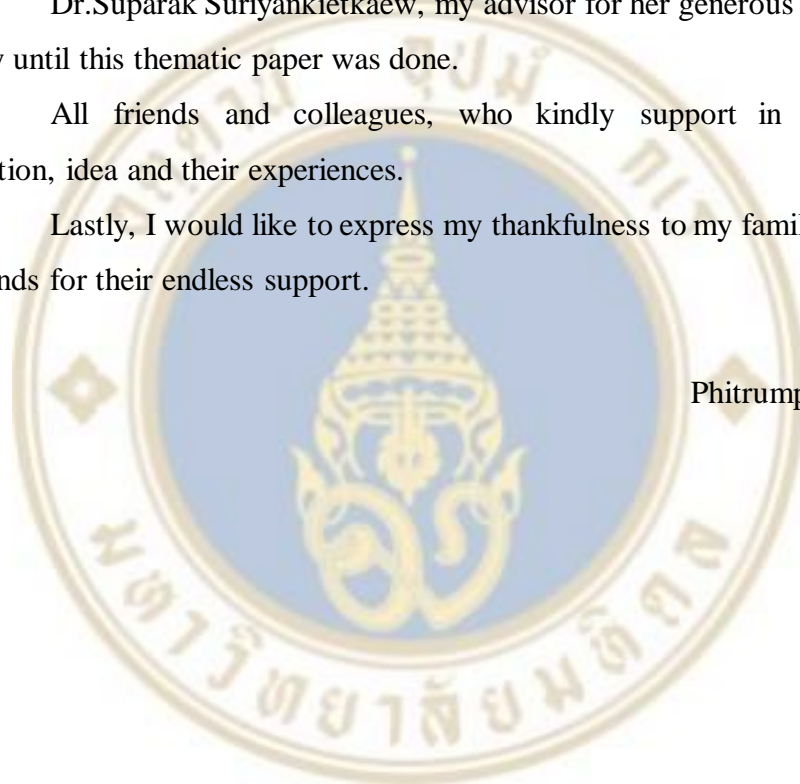
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Phitumpai Sungvannuch



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PHITRUMPAI SUNGVANNUCH 5749201

M.M. (MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT)

THEMATIC PAPER ADVISORY COMMITTEE: SUPARAK
SURIYANKIETKAEW, PH.DS., WINAI WONGSURAWAT, PH.D., ANNOP
TANLAMAI, PH.D., BENJALUX SAKUNASINGHA, D.B.A

ABSTRACT

An impact of office relocation and redecoration toward employee engagement by using a case study Unilever relocation. The information had been collected by qualitative method. A total of 10 Unilever's employees were interviewed. It was determined that relocation and redecoration of an office environment have small impact toward the level of employee engagement. The factor that have more impact on employee engagement level is colleagues and other intangible elements. The result suggest the need for future research to investigate more on the factors under work environment that might impact employee engagement level.

KEY WORDS: Employee Engagement/ Work Environment/ Relocation/ Redecoration

22 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Organization Background

Unilever was found in the 1890s under Lever-Brother name, then changed to Unilever after the merger with Dutch Margarine. Unilever is a well-known organization in FMCG or Fast Moving Consumer Goods industry. The products line consisted of Detergent, Fabric Softener, Soap and etc. Unilever had expanded their business to Thailand since the 1930s.

Unilever had divided into 3 organization operating in Thailand including:

1. Unilever Thai Trading Limited
2. Unilever Thai Service Limited
3. Unilever Thai Holding Limited

The organization had divided based on their scope of work and operation inside. Moreover, Unilever has 2 factories operating in Thailand, located in Bangkok and Minburi. These 2 factories not only produced the product for Thai market but also export to the nearby country e.g. Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

Unilever is operating their business under their core purpose which is Sustainable Living, by trying to reduce an impact to the environment from the production process till the product is in there customer's hands. The new office had been designed by following this concept. Most of the materials that had been used in the building are recycle, to reduce the number of waste. Moreover, to save the electricity, the designer decided to use the glass wall both outside the building and inside – this help in reducing electricity consumption.

1.1.1 Statement of Problems

Unilever Thailand currently relocated there headquarter from SCB Park to their own office building at Rama 9. The new office building was called “Unilever House” in order to create the branding. Unilever had invested over 2,600 million baht

in order to build this office building in Thailand. The designer got an inspiration from Lux bottle lid, so the building came out in the curvy shape.

In the first phase of moving to the new office building, there were lots of employee's complaint about the new location. Some had said that the traffic around the new office building are very bad and it very far from their house. After the moved, employee continuously complains about the facilities and design of the new office building.

Since Unilever's products are consumer products, it requires employees to work at the time in order to deliver products into the market. The speed is important in FMCG industry if you are faster than your competitor means that you have a higher chance to become number 1 in customer mind. Moreover, nowadays customer's preference had changed very fast, so it is crucial for us to have a deep understanding in customer mind. With all of these characteristics of the market and customer, Unilever's employees required to work hard and careful.

The work environment can be one of the factors that help to enhance employee's performance. By provided facilities that help employees work faster and easier. The work environment can also enhance the creativity of employees inside the organization and can also use to attract people to come to work. Unilever new office contained a bright color along with the open space, with this, it can reduce employees' stressfulness with can reflect in the work quality.

This paper is focusing on the impact of relocation factor toward employee engagement. Since employees are the most valuable asset in the organization. Especially in FMCG industry, that required working against time. The fastest you are, the higher chance to become the market leader in particular category or product.

1.2 Objective of the Independent Study

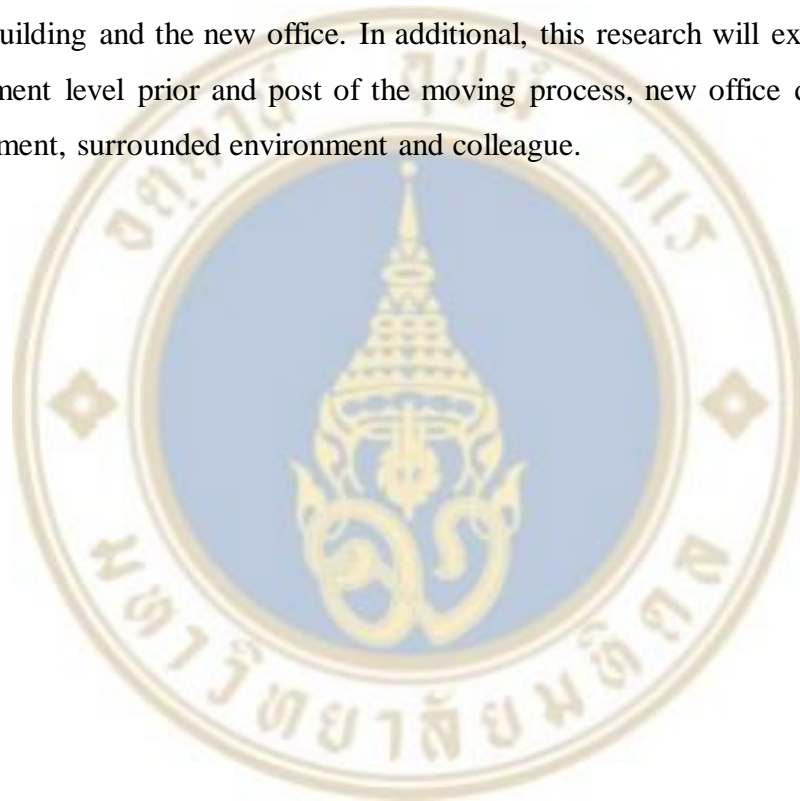
This research was designed to find out whether relocation of headquarter had a significant impact on employee engagement. Objectives of this research are as follow:

1. To find more information about the impact of relocation and work environment toward employee engagement.

2. To get an employee's insight about their feeling toward the new office building.
3. To discover the level of employee engagement after they had moved to the new office building.

1.3 Scope of Study and Time Frame

This research is focused on employees who had experienced on an old office not less than 6 months. Hence, they were able to describe the different between an old office building and the new office. In additional, this research will examine employee engagement level prior and post of the moving process, new office decoration, work environment, surrounded environment and colleague.



CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the amount of research paper that has been conducted on Employee Engagement, a various number of factors that affect Employee Engagement to the relationship between Employee Engagement and Employee Performance. However there are none or very few studies have been conducted focus on change in the workplace environment and relocation of headquarter.

2.1 Review of Literature

2.1.1 Employee Engagement

Gibbon (2006, p. 5) had described the concept of Employee Engagement as [...] a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-worker that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work. Many authors seem to agree that Employee Engagement involves the interaction of three factors: cognitive commitment, emotional attachment, and behavioral outcomes that arise from an employee's connection with his or her organization (Frank et al., 2004; Gibbons, 2006; Shuck and Wollard, 2010). Regarding the behavioral outcomes of Employee Engagement, three general behaviors occur in the academic and consulting literature:

- (1) Say – the employee advocates for the organization to co-workers and others, and refers potential employee and clients;
- (2) Stay – the employee has a strong desire to continue to work in the organization, despite chances to work elsewhere; and
- (3) Strive – the employee uses extra time, effort, and initiative for the organization when necessary (Looi et al., 2004; Baumruk et al., 2006; Heger, 2007; AON Hewitt, 2011).

From the New York Times (2014), Gallup study in 2013 had shown that 13 percent of employees feel engaged with their organization (Schwartz and Porath, 2014).

Researched by Miles (2001) and Harter et al. (2002), Holbeche and Springett (2003), May et al., (2004) and Rich et al. (2010) shown that various factors have an impact on the level of Employee Engagement. There also a study had found that Employee Engagement and organizational performance (employee retention, productivity, and profitability) have a positive relationship (Cataldo, 2011) Moreover, the level of Employee Engagement is also involved with the willingness to help an organization to achieve its goals, objectives and long-term sustainable competitive advantage (Little and Little, 2006). While many organization trying to increase their Employee Engagement by providing a training and development program, individual development plan and a work-life balance concept in order to increase the level of Employee Engagement in the organization. A high investment in each employee in the organization makes an organization would try as hard as possible to prevent them from resigning from the organization because the most valuable asset of an organization is people. Dubin, (1976) had introduced the model called Theoretical Model of Employee Engagement, that show factors that have an effect on Employee Engagement and the factors that get an effect from Employee Engagement.

The factors that affect Employee Engagement:

1. Job design and Characteristics can be described in the meaningful and challenging work also adequate compensation and rewards.
2. Supervisor and co-worker relationships consisted of supportive relationships and co-worker social support. Means that level of Employee Engagement is depending on how supportive work environment is. The more supportive environment the higher level of Employee Engagement.
3. Workplace environment can also affect the level of Employee Engagement e.g. physical resources, how supportive at the workplace climate, perceptions of safety and collectively engaged workplace.
4. HRD practices, a level of development program inside the organization e.g. Organizational Development, Training, and Development and Career Development.
5. Job Demand: workload and peer pressure.

6. Individual characteristics: how proactive there are, how they see the world, their self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

High level of Employee Engagement can show through high job performance, reduced turnover intention and high organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The challenging is how to increase or maintain the level of Employee Engagement at the high level which is the level that benefits to an organization the most. With all of an organization development plan, it requires a high amount of investment. Thus, an organization also need to keep them with the organization as a valuable asset that they have already invested in rather than keep investing in the new joiner or on the other hand we can say that to keep investing in the asset that might not stay in the organization can consider as a loss.

2.1.2 Work Environment

Work Environment is one of the significant factors that can be used to indicate the level of Employee Engagement. M. Brad Shuck Tonette S et al., (2011) had divided factor that affects environment into Intangible Elements and tangible Element. Which consist of people (colleagues and co-worker), policies and procedures, organization structure, physical layout and other tangible elements e.g. trust, cooperation and perceived levels of safety. Many organizations had introduced the work-life balance concept to its employees, in order to increase employee's happiness which will effect in a high performance.

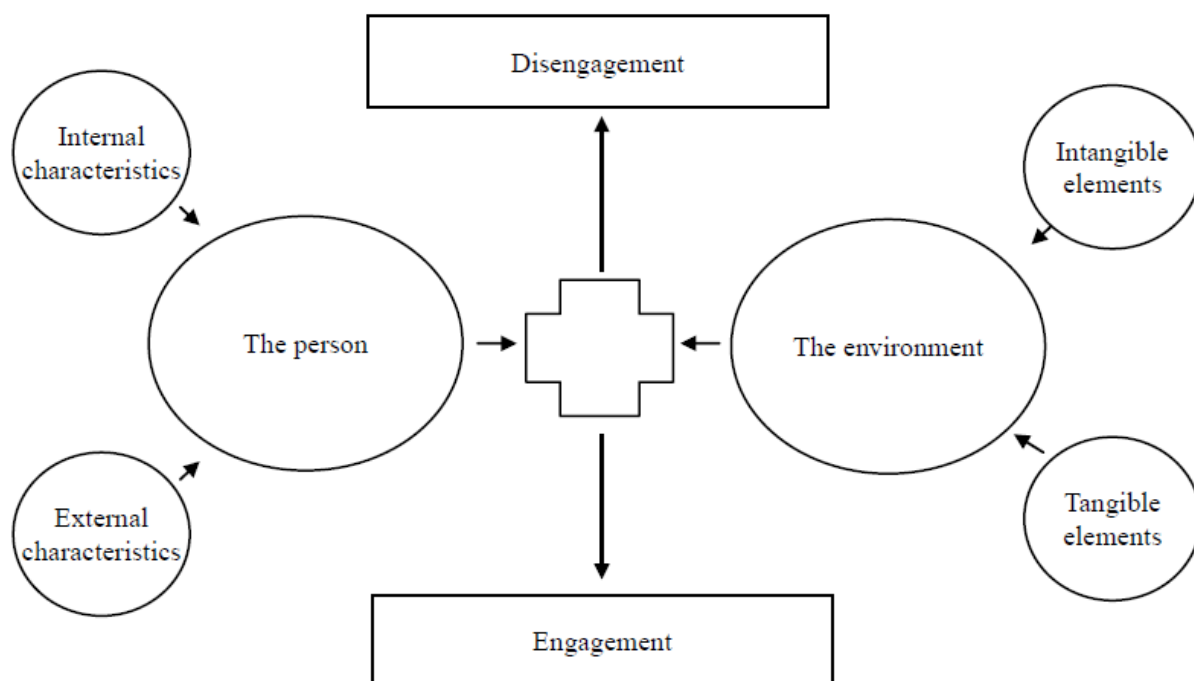


Figure 2.1 Emerging model of engagement and disagreement (M. Brad Shuck 2011)

Kristopher J. Thomas (2014) have concluded in his research that work-life balance and workplace technology interact and affect the lives of employees. With this conclusion, it had shown that the workplace environment can affect employees' emotional. The tidy environment is also one of the factors that have an effect on employees' performance. Ricardo Mateo et al., (2013) has described that a tidy environment can help reduce errors and also improve accuracy in employees' conscientiousness. However, we have to make sure that we had place conscientiousness employee in the tidy environment because this will be a good fit and can give the best result in work quality.

The work environment can also affect employees' creativity and the implementation of new ideas (Lene Foss, 2014). The good work environment can enhance employees' creativity and this benefit to an organization, especially in FMCG industry. Since the nature of FMCG industry required you to work fast and come up with the new innovation that can change people's life. Otherwise, you might lose your market share because it is hard to differentiate the consumer's good due to most of the

feature are the same. The different point is how it benefits to consumer's life? How effective the product is? And can it solve consumer's problem?



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

This research aims to study an in-depth information in both prior and post office relocation on how its affect employee engagement. To be able to observe their body language and gave them a chance to exposed their feeling toward the moving, the face-to-face interview was used to gathered information. Moreover to get many perspectives of thought, interviewees were identified based on their demographic background.

The interview question was started with the generic question, to make interviewees felt relax and familiar with the question. Hence, they were more comfortable to expose their feeling on more intense questions.

An in-depth interview had been done inside the office with total 10 interviewees. The author selected interviewees with the different background, so we are able to know the different perspective. Interviewees' profile that shown in Table 1 consisted of demographic detail, their work level and how they usually use to get to work.

Table 3.1 – Profile of Interviewees

No.	Age	Sex	Year of Service at Unilever	Work Level	How do they get to work?
1	33	F	7	Supervisor	MRT
2	36	M	12	Supervisor	Car
3	26	M	2	Staff	MRT
4	29	F	6	Staff	Public Trans
5	31	M	8	Support Manager	Car
6	25	F	3	Staff	Car
7	34	M	4	Support Manager	Car
8	48	F	27	Staff	Car
9	45	F	20	Staff	Carpool
10	30	F	4	Support Manager	Car

3.2 Frame of Thought, Population and Samples

This research was designed to discover the relationship between a level of employee engagement and work environment by focused more on the relocation of headquarter factors. This research use the relocation of Unilever headquarter in Thailand as a case study.

The interviewees had been divided into groups based on their work experiences at Unilever. Each group contained 3 employees except the last group which contained only 1 person. Grouping list is listed as following:

- 1.1 Less than 5 years of service
- 1.2 5-10 years of service
- 1.3 More than 10 years of service
- 1.4 Additional one person who had to leave the organization and then rejoined Unilever again.

In order to study the different between employees' generation and lifestyle, interviewees had been selected to cover all of the age group. Most of the Generation Y are committed to the organization by learning and development program, wages and benefit and work-life balance. While Baby Boomer and Generation X are more concern about the meaning of work. (Rodrigo et al., 2015)

3.3 Data Collection

An in-depth interview started by a generics question, asked interviewees to introduced themselves. Moreover, to help interviewees feels relax and familiar with an interviewer. Then followed by a more complicated question, asked them to express their feeling toward new office compared to an old office.

The interview questions were designed to find out more on the factors under work environment that have a high impact toward employee engagement level. The main factors under work environment that have been included in an interview question are Decoration, Location, Facilities, Surrounded Environment and Colleagues.

The data had been collected using questions as follow:

1. Could you tell me briefly about your background as Unilever's employee?
(E.g. year of service, currently position)
2. How do you feel when you were worked at the old Unilever's office (at SCB Park)?
(Decoration, Location, Facilities and Surrounded Environment)
3. How do you feel about the moving process? Does any problem occurred during the moved?
4. How do you feel about the new office building?
(Decoration, Location, Facilities and Surrounded Environment)
5. Please compare your feeling on working in an old office with working in the new office?
6. In your opinion, do you think work environment can affect your feeling toward organization? Does it increase/decrease your engagement with the organization?
7. If you are considered to change the job, is work environment one of the factors that you use to consider?
8. What do you like the most about old and new office? (1 for each place)
9. What do you dislike the most about an old and new office? (1 for each place)
10. What factor do you think it the most important in term of the work environment?

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the in-depth interview, the main factor under work environment can be identified as following: Decoration, Location, Facilities, Surrounded Environment and Colleagues.

4.1 Finding and Discussion

4.1.1 Decoration

Office Decoration does have slightly impact on employee's emotion but only in the beginning stage. After a while when employee get used to a new atmosphere and new environment, their emotion are back to the stable stage. No excitement about the new workplace. Decoration can help lighten up employee's mood whenever they are exhausted. Office decoration can also show the organizational culture, vision, mission and identity. It can create the first impression for the visitor. One of the respondents said that "I think office environment can show the culture of the organization and also shows how employees are live together. If their office is full of the document, paper piles, and stuff, it might not fit with my preference. I am using work environment as a factor to decide whether I want to work with them or not." While another respondent said "I think work environment is not a big issue if I want to consider to work with any organization. Because when you walked into an organization, you can see only a partial not all of it, thus it is very hard to make a judgment based on what you had seen." Even though the office decoration is not one of the important factors, it is the first stage that gets expose to an outsider the most. The first impression can be created only once.

With the open layout, a new office is more open and brighter. No more high partition between working desk. Generation Y employees like this idea, they said that it is easier for them to connect and chitchat with their colleagues. On the other hands,

Generation X employees thought that they have no privacy sitting at their desk and cannot pay full attention to their work.

The interviewer had asked further if the office decoration can be a motivation for them to do their work. One of the respondents said that “Yes, whenever I felt exhausted and tired with my work. I just look up or walk to vitality zone to relax. The Nice atmosphere helps me recharging so much faster.” However, another respondent said “I don’t think that office decoration can make me feel like I want to work more or can encourage me to work. It is based on my emotion whether I want to work or not.” me to work. It is based on my emotion whether I want to work or not.”

4.1.2 Facilities

The new office had designed under the concept agile work, employees are allowed to work everywhere they want with the wireless connection that covers all around the building. New building is also full with the working space apart from the normal working desk. Before the move to the new location, all of the employees have their own desk telephone. However to support agile work concept, Unilever decided to give all employees an organization mobile phone. Thus provided more convenient for employees to walk around and work wherever they want.

With the new facilities that help supported all employees, every respondent agreed that it make them work faster and easier. Since it is faster to contact both via phone and face-to-face. Nowadays, if an employee wants to talk with the colleague in another department, they just walk to his desk with their laptop and deal with their business.

While employees who goes to work by public transportation felt that it is more convenient to come to the new location, employees who drive to work do not feel so happy. Since the new parking lots are not enough for everybody in the organization. Unilever tries to persuade the employee to use more public transportation, so they had reduced the parking space by half. The result is that many employees complain about the parking space since not everyone can give a hand on public transportation.

Moreover, the new office uses an Air duct system this mean that the department that sits near the beginning of the air flow, the weather will be very cold compared to the department that sits at the end of the air flow. The cold weather had lots

of effect to employees, they found that it is very hard to work under the very cold weather and they cannot pay full attention to their work.

4.1.3 Location

Organization location is one of the factors that most of the respondents used as the main factor in order to choose the organization. Once Unilever had moved from an old location, many of employees got an effect from the moved. One respondent described that her traveled time is increased almost 2 times, at an old office, she uses only 30 minutes to an hour traveled from her home to an office. But after the moved her traveled times had increased to an hour and a half to two hours.

On the other hand for the respondents who travel by public transportation especially MRT, there travel time is reduce by half. Since the new office located near MRT station, while an old office if they had taken an MRT they need to take taxi or bus to an office building.

Moreover, surrounded environment is one of the factors that had an impact on the employees. By comparing an old office with the new one, an old location is near the market so it is easier for an employee to find where to eat and it also took less travel time. For the new office, if employees want to have low price meals, they have to travel by van or walk about 15 minutes from the office under the hot weather in Bangkok.

4.1.4 Relocation

The new building was called “Unilever House”, the name gave a warm feeling and want employees to feel that here is their home and all colleagues are their family. Generation X employees found that they are very proud of the new building, they feel like they are one of the owners of the building. Generation X employees are proud to tell everyone that this is their building, rather than told that we are located inside others building and using their name. While Generation Y employees’ do not feel more engage with the organization. They said that it just a building and the name of the building that have been changed but other factors are the same.

All respondents are agreed that one thing that goods in term of the relocation is they do not have to share office facilities with other organization. At an old office,

they have to share building facilities for example elevator, parking space and restaurant with other organization that rented the same building.

4.1.5 Colleague and Team Work

Unilever's culture and way of working are different from another organization. There is a low power of the distance between superior and subordinate. Thus, employees are so close and this creates a small community inside an organization. One of the interviewees had decided to left Unilever 2 years ago, and then rejoined after a year. She had said that "Unilever feels like home. When she had moved to another company, there is no community like at Unilever do. I felt a little bit uncomfortable working there. I can be myself when I am here at Unilever. So I had decided to rejoin Unilever again."

Respondents were asked to identify the most important factor under work environment. 8 out of 10 had selected Colleagues as the most important factors.

4.1.6 Employee Engagement

All of the work environment factors described above (Decoration, Facilities, Location, and Relocation), do have slightly impacted the level of employee engagement. For employees who got an advantage from the moving, they have less or none emotional effect from the moved. While those who got the negative effect from the moved, felt that they would leave the organization if they have a better chance. The factors that affect the most on employee engage is the colleague. All of the interviewees said that colleague has more emotional impact, whether to continue working with the organization or leave. While other work environment factors only play a minor role. Employee engagement level was affected during the first phase of the move but had been recovered after employees can adapt themselves to the new place.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In the first phase of the moved, employees' morale had dropped since they have to completely change their routine. Generation X employee or those who had been work for Unilever more than 10 years even said that if she has the option to leave the company, she will do. They found that it is tough to get used to the new environment and location. However, an author had found that work environment is slightly had an impact on employee engagement. Under work environment factor, Colleague is the most important of all. Employees do agree that no matter how their office look like if they have a good supervisor and co-worker, they are willing to continue working with the company. The work environment is not a solid reason for them to leave the company. Nice office decoration and facilities that have been given are the tools to make employees work faster and easier. They do feel that it have nothing to do with the level of dedication. However, colleague does, employees feel that they have to do their work well with quality so their colleagues do not need to waste an energy in correcting their work. Linked back to the figure 1, it turns out that Intangible elements are having more impact toward the level of Employee engagement. For that Tangible elements, it can have a temporary effect on employees' emotional which can be recover during the time.

By having an own office building, the employee does proudly with it but they do not feel more engage with the company. Factors that drives employee engagement are different in all generations. Generation Y is concern more about the development plan that given by the company, While Generation X do concern more about their work meaning, what they can contribute to the team under their name.

5.2 Recommendations

In case an organization would like to enhance or increase the level of employee engagement, an organization should come up with more individual development program or policies that related to an individual employee. If an organization want to enhance the level of employee engagement through relocation or redecoration, the return might not worthwhile. The relocation and redecoration should aim to solve or give the result as following:

- To improve the facilities so employees can work more effectively.
- Redecoration to create the first impression for visitors.
- To lighten up mood and tone of an atmosphere. So it can help lift up employee's mood. Especially, if they need to put some ideas or creativities into their work.
- Employees feel more relax and comfortable after the redecoration.
- Use the decoration to communicate company's value and identity to the visitor. Before Unilever had moved from an old office, they use to decorate an office with product's picture, company logo, and its meaning.
- To emphasize organization value to employees.
- To improve security systems

5.3 Limitations

The relationship between relocation of headquarter and employee engagement do not have a past study or cross check. Hence, the author decided to use qualitative methodology to discover an in-depth information how employees perceived about the relocation. This research was limited by the number of respondents, thus further research is necessary with greater sample amount.

Thus, this research provides initial insights on employees' perception of the change of work environment. Also, how relocation can have an effect on employee engagement. Therefore, this can be the fundamental step for further study and can be the benefit to the organization that consider to relocation their own office or even consider to redecoration their office building.

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