

Antecedents of employee alienation and its impact on individual work performance during post-merger integration (PMI)

Employee
alienation
during post-
merger

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this study was to examine the significant factors leading to employee alienation in post-merger integration (PMI).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 482 middle- and low-level employees in two organizations in the real estate and banking sectors in the United Arab Emirates. The analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Findings – Organizational justice, employee commitment, organizational trust, perceived effectiveness of human resource (HR) initiatives and employee communication strategy played an important role in developing or mitigating a feeling of alienation among employees during PMI. Employee tenure in the organization affected individual work performance.

Research limitations/implications – The study was limited to middle- and low-level employees and did not consider other organizational variables important in mergers. This study will help merger strategists to deliver appropriate HR practices during PMI, facilitating mitigation of uncertainties among employees and maximizing their trust and commitment.

Originality/value – The study results will help organizations understand employee trust, commitment and determinants in an emerging economy.

Keywords Employee alienation, Individual work performance, Mergers and acquisitions, Post-merger integration, United Arab Emirates

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Mergers are the most common ways for companies to expand strategically (Reynolds and Teerikangas, 2016). Organizations use mergers to improve their strategic position and performance and enter new markets, share costs and ensure against certain economic ambiguities (Buiter and Harris, 2013). Due diligence is taken during the process, though, only 25%–35% of mergers and acquisitions (M&As) accomplish their desired goals (Marks and Mirvis, 2010). Researchers have acknowledged that financial and strategic motivations do not provide comprehensive explanations of success or failure in M&As (Paul and Bhawsar, 2011; Graebner *et al.*, 2017). A Harvard Business Review report suggested that around 70%–90%



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of M&As fail (Business Review–Europe, 2015). Despite their popularity, M&As remain poorly understood and executed (Gomes *et al.*, 2013).

Bad target selections, irrationally high purchase price and tactically mismatched organizations are the main reasons for M&A failures (Quah and Young, 2005) and the mismanagement of the merger process (Schweiger and Lippert, 2005). This may be linked to a lack of planning for post-merger integration (PMI) management (Quah and Young, 2005). Some firms also underestimate the importance of psychological, cultural and people issues (Rees and Edwards, 2009). Mergers create uncertainty among employees about their future. For example, those from the acquired organization tend to experience difficulty in their role in the merged company (Weber *et al.*, 2012). This may cause alienation among employees, leading to low productivity and commitment, contributing to merger failure (Kraak *et al.*, 2017).

Previous studies have primarily focused on cultural clashes (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988), communication difficulties (Schweiger and Denisi, 1991), employee perceptions and reactions (Risberg, 2001) and conflict resolution (Blake and Mouton, 1985). Weber *et al.* (2013) studied the impact of human resources (HR) practices, such as development and training, during post-merger integration processes. Most of these studies focused on just one issue and were, therefore, quite fragmented (Chatterjee *et al.*, 1992). There has been some research on firm-level issues (Lipponen *et al.*, 2004), operating profits and the effect on shareholders' wealth (Chatterjee *et al.*, 1992) following M&As. These studies have taken very discipline-specific approaches in finance, economics, or strategy, and there remains a need for more holistic research (Bansal, 2017; Paul and Benito, 2018). Brannen and Peterson (2009) noted that there is a lack of research on individual-level outcomes in M&As.

Previous researchers have ignored workplace complexities, such as work context and the dynamics of employee relationships within contemporary organizations' economic and social structures (Conway *et al.*, 2018). Research on people management in the context of M&A is still in its infancy. Specifically, there still is an insufficient understanding of the critical organizational-level antecedents of effective and efficient human resource management (HRM) during PMI (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Negative perceptions of employees about organizational justice, commitment, trust, HR initiatives effectiveness and communication strategy may affect levels of alienation during PMI (Bansal, 2017; Bansal and Thakur, 2013; Gomes *et al.*, 2013; Thakur and Bansal, 2015). Scholars are often captivated by the progression of relating employees' attitudes during M&A's process, which can foresee the M&A's performance (Torres De Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; King *et al.*, 2020). In another study, Al Hosani and Jabeen (2019) revealed that strategy, business plan and budget are the key challenges encountered during the post-merger in UAE-based real estate companies. There are few studies on employee alienation during PMI in the Middle East, particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE's demographic structure and its locus as core for expatriate labor have stemmed from workplace diversity being a key HRM issue in all sectors. According to World Bank, in 2018 out of 9.54m UAE population, 88.5% of labor force are nonnationals and 11.5% are nationals. UAE is a multi-cultural society with more than 200 countries' nationals working in the most ethnically diverse sectors (Warner and Moonesar, 2019). The veracities of this different demography among the UAE labor force entails advancement and adoption of robust diversity management policies to ensure productivity.

Thus, there is a need to investigate problems and challenges post-mergers, especially focusing on HR issues, and provide solutions to overcome these challenges and problems and improve M&As' success rate. Hence, to fill this gap in the literature, this study considered the following research questions:

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- RQ1. Which factors play a role in developing alienation among employees during post-merger integration?
- RQ2. Is there any significant relationship between employee perceptions of organizational justice, commitment, trust, HR initiatives, communication strategy and employee alienation and individual work performance?
- RQ3. Does employee organizational tenure act as a moderator on the relationship between other variables and employee alienation after mergers?

The study findings should help classify post-merger challenges in companies and improve theoretical understanding of the main causes of mergers' failures. They may also help to reset employee-related priorities during mergers.

The paper will first briefly review literature that establishes the main constructs under study. It will then describe the study's methodology, followed by the research results and findings. The study concludes with its theoretical and practical implications, limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature review

The underlying meaning of the term alienation comes from the Latin word "*alius*", which means "other" and suggests parting or separation. Lang (1985) stated that alienation results from excessive behavior of one or more people to others. Hirschfeld and Feild (2000, p. 790) noted that "alienation represents the extent to which a person is disengaged from the world of work".

Affective events theory states that some situations at work, so-called "affective events", significantly affect human behavior in workplace environments (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Positive and negative emotions can be elicited by organizational changes (Bansal, 2016). Negative emotions can lead to alienation. When employees feel they have been treated fairly, they are more likely to be committed to their organization (Bansal, 2017). Equity theory emphasizes that employees' approach and feelings build in response to their perceptions of fairness (justice). Employees' perceptions of fair or just treatment result in supportive behaviors and recognition of changes (Bansal and Thakur, 2013; Greenberg, 1993) and increase support for the organization. Previous studies have emphasized the role of perceived fairness in building positive employee attitudes and behaviors like commitment, job satisfaction and job performance (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001). In another study, Bansal (2019) affirmed that the perception of justice influence employees' psychological outcomes and overall synergy realization. Adverse judgments about fairness, however, lead to negative attitudes, approaches and behaviors like work isolation, social alienation and powerlessness (Ceylan and Sulu, 2011).

2.1 Causes of employee alienation during post-merger integration

Mergers vary significantly in terms of their context and particularly the culture of the merging parties. However, some important issues are often either side-lined or overemphasized (Björkman *et al.*, 2007). PMI is rooted in coevolving processes. Four mechanisms (coordination, cohesion, disconnection and alienation) arise from the coevolution processes that either facilitate or impede integration (Rouzies *et al.*, 2019). M&As often have undesirable results for the merging entities and their employees because of cultural distance (Hofstede, 1980), cultural clash (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2007) and work alienation (Brannen and Peterson, 2009).

Usman and Hameed (2017) suggested that future studies should recognize work environments and leadership behaviors that can limit employees' feelings of alienation. Other studies (Bansal, 2017; Bansal and Thakur, 2013; Gomes *et al.*, 2013) reported that alienation

develops if employees feel cynical about organizational justice, HR initiatives and the communication strategy and have little commitment or trust in the organization.

3. Hypotheses formulation

3.1 *Organizational justice and employee alienation*

Managers of merging firms find it challenging to bring about and sustain trust among employees (Komodromos, 2013). Organizational justice theory offers a means to clarify and better comprehend employees' perceptions of trust, justice or fairness and manage change during tactical alliances (Komodromos, 2013). Bies (1986) developed the concept of interactional justice, which emerged as a tri-dimensional model with distributive justice and procedural justice. Colquitt (2001) concluded that interactional justice consists of two variables, informational justice and interpersonal justice. Perceptions of fairness, therefore, cover both the process itself and the information provided about the process. Informational justice is how people justify the procedures adopted and decisions made (Bies and Shapiro, 1988; Greenberg, 1993). Interpersonal justice focuses on employee perceptions of the interpersonal behavior shown during the representation of decisions made and procedures followed. Procedural justice can be defined as the extent to which the acquirer (of another firm in case of M&A) ensures fairness of procedures and processes in decision-making processes (Greenberg, 1987). Distributive justice implies perceived fairness of the amounts of reimbursement employees receive; procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the means used to determine those amounts (Folger, 1977). M&A presents a unique situation that poses the challenge of employees expecting equity, which would influence their fairness perceptions if they do not experience fair and equal treatment by their employers (Bansal, 2019). In a recent study, Bansal and King (2020) highlighted the importance of interactional justice and the importance of timely and clear communication at various stages of M&A to allay employees' fears and insecurities.

There is a positive correlation between the sub-dimensions of organizational justice and work engagement. Perceptions of increased organizational justice increase employee work engagement (Özer *et al.*, 2017). Ceylan and Sulu (2011) found that if employees were treated unfairly, they could experience alienation. However, perception of fair treatment encouraged cooperative behaviors and positive responses to changes (Monin *et al.*, 2013), leading to support for organizational authorities' acceptability. We therefore propose:

H1. Organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation.

H1a. Distributive organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation.

H1b. Procedural organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation.

H1c. Interactional organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation.

3.2 *Commitment*

Previous studies have suggested a positive association between employee performance and commitment (Ahammad *et al.*, 2016; Gomes *et al.*, 2011; Weber and Tarba, 2010). This underlines the importance of preserving loyalty and commitment post-M&A. Monin *et al.* (2013) noted "perceptions of organizational justice help people to accept the planned changes and their implications, whereas perceptions of injustice exacerbate organizational problems [during the post-M&A integration process]".

Meyer and Allen (1987) divided organizational commitment into affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment is the emotional attachment of an employee toward an organization (Meyer *et al.*, 2012). This can also be described as the employee's aspiration to achieve organizational goals (Breitsohl and Ruhle, 2013). Employee

satisfaction and affective commitment are mutually exclusive constructs, and it is important to study how these attitudes unfold during M&A (Bansal, 2017; Parish *et al.*, 2008). Kanter (1968) described continuance commitment as occurring when some reward or profit is arising from staying in the organization and some costs or losses involved in leaving. This situation encourages employees to remain. Normative commitment occurs when employees feel that they ought to stay with the organization. It can, therefore, be described as an obligation type of engagement (Wiener, 1982). These three types of commitment can be summarized as affection for the job (affective commitment), fear or expectation of loss (continuance commitment) and feeling of obligation to the organization (normative commitment). This disconnection from work has been predicted to prevail in the form of disengaged from one's work and organization. In line with this reasoning, researchers have posited that employee commitment is negatively associated with work alienation (Michaels *et al.*, 1996; Organ and Green, 1981).

Kraak *et al.* (2017) found that employees with a more pleasant organizational environment had more internal support, resulting in positive organizational commitment and improved organizational performance. This suggests that a lack of employee commitment may result in alienation. We therefore propose:

H2. Commitment is negatively related to employee alienation.

H2a. Affective commitment is negatively related to employee alienation.

H2b. Continuance commitment is negatively related to employee alienation.

H2c. Normative commitment is negatively related to employee alienation.

3.3 Organizational trust

Colquitt and Rodell (2011) pinpointed the significance of organizational trust in intraorganizational and interorganizational business practices. Trust was important in decision-making. They found trust played a role in experiences and interactions, creating affirmative or adverse, reciprocated interaction spirals. Perceptions of justice and honesty depend upon the relationship between two individuals: the trustor and trustee (Weber and Carter, 1998). Employees of a newly merged organization will not trust unless they feel that the new organization is working for their well-being (Weber and Carter, 1998).

There is a positive correlation between organizational trust, organizational justice and ethical leadership. The organizational trust also precludes the presence of organizational cynicism and organizational silence (Akar, 2018). Uzun (2018) confirmed the association between organizational support and trust. Therefore, a lack of organizational trust among employees causes alienation (Bansal, 2017), and we propose:

H3. Organizational trust is negatively related to employee alienation.

3.4 Perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives

After M&As, organizations face the challenge of PMI and the essential requirement to combine two sets of organizational HR procedures and methods into a single coherent form (Hopkins and Weathington, 2006). Perceived fairness of the new integrated practices is a vital element in employee trust during the transition (Hopkins and Weathington, 2006). Lind and Tyler (1988) reported that fairness is important during change, but the factor with the strongest effect is the merged firm's practices. Saunders and Thornhill (2003) concluded that a careful consideration of factors affecting personal and institutional trust during change situations would improve success. There is a strong positive relationship between the effectiveness of HR practices and employee satisfaction (Madanat and Khasawneh, 2018), and a lack of positive HR initiatives in merging firms can result in alienation among

employees (Bansal, 2017). The HR practices chosen in this study are those most likely to be used during PMI, i.e. training, talent management and workforce planning and distribution. All these have been described as essential integration initiatives (Bansal, 2017). We therefore hypothesized:

- H4. Perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H4a. Training is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H4b. Talent management is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H4c. Workforce planning and distribution is negatively related to employee alienation.

3.5 Employee communication strategy

The employee communication strategy is used to describe communication with employees by managers (Rhee and Moon, 2009). It is related to employee engagement, which in turn enhances supportive behaviors and reduces turnover intention (Kang and Sung, 2017). Mishra *et al.* (2019) found that the employee communication strategy is essential in filling the sociocultural and geographic gaps when organizations go global and expand in size.

Communication is a critical determinant of trust-building. Organizations that emphasize open communication will, therefore, probably be trusted more by their workforce (Jabeen and Isakovic, 2018). Ruppel and Harrington (2000) investigated the relationships between employee communication, ethical climate and trust and found that open communication intensified employee trust. Other studies (Currall and Inkpen, 2002; Ertürk, 2014) emphasized the importance of trust in trade environments. It strengthens effective communication and work association between managers and employees, particularly during transformation or change. The precise relationship between trust and communication is, however, not entirely clear. Some researchers have found that trust is the consequence of managers' effective communication practices, while others that trust brings about effective communication in the organization (Currall and Inkpen, 2002; Ertürk, 2014). Communication during periods of change is challenging, but if done efficiently, it can result in organizational excellence (Quach, 2013). Angwin *et al.* (2016) have reiterated importance of communication practices during post-merger and acquisition integration period.

However, there is very little research on the relationship between these two variables during M&As. Therefore, the lack of an effective communication strategy may result in alienation among employees during M&As (Bansal, 2017). We hypothesized:

- H5. Employee communication strategy is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H5a. Relevance of employee communication is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H5b. Frequency of employee communication is negatively related to employee alienation.
- H5c. Customization of employee communication is negatively related to employee alienation.

3.6 Organizational tenure

Organizational tenure is the length of employment in an organization (McEnrue, 1988). It is often used as a proxy for work experience or job-related knowledge because employees may gain a broader set of skills by remaining loyal to a firm for more extended periods (Quinones *et al.*, 1995; Sturman, 2003). Organizational tenure has frequently been studied, but few studies have examined situations in which organizational tenure affects behavior of individuals (Ng and Feldman, 2010). It is important to study the effects of organizational tenure in the context of organizational commitment as well as job performance because

greater tenure is likely to be positively related to both commitment and performance. Therefore, it may moderate the relationships between related variables and employee alienation (Wright and Bonett, 2002). We therefore propose:

- H6a. Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational justice and employee alienation.
- H6b. Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between commitment and employee alienation.
- H6c. Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives and employee alienation.
- H6d. Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between the effectiveness of employee communication strategy and employee alienation.

3.7 Individual work performance

Individual work performance is a performance measure used in studies in occupational settings (Koopmans *et al.*, 2013). Many studies in fields including management, occupational health and industrial-organizational psychology have explored the drivers and effects of individual work performance. Later, researchers defined the construct of individual work performance to understand its inherent structure (Dalal, 2005), moving away from the earlier focus on task performance or the proficiency with which individuals perform core or technical tasks (Campbell, 1990). Studies confirmed that individual work performance extends beyond task performance to cover work or contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior (see, e.g. Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Contextual performance can be defined as behaviors that support the organization's organizational, social and psychological goals, in which the technical core also functions (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). Guo *et al.* (2016) confirmed a relationship between the variety of tasks given to employees, the organization's social behavior and culture and the level of alienation among employees.

Rostiana and Lie (2019) concluded that work engagement plays the biggest role in mediating the relationship between perceived organizational support and individual work performance. Tummers and Dulk (2013) found that when employees had no control over their work tasks, felt that the organization did not require them or their work did not seem worthwhile (to themselves or their superiors), they could experience a feeling of alienation. This influenced the level of their commitment toward the organization, and their work performance declined. We therefore hypothesized:

- H7. Employee alienation is negatively related to individual work performance.

The conceptual model for this study is shown in Figure 1.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample and data collection procedure

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to employees of two companies, one in the real estate sector and one in the banking sector. The companies had undergone the most recent mergers in each sector in the last two years. Respondents were identified by each company's HRs department and selected through stratified sampling. The inclusion criterion was that the respondents had worked for the company for at least two years in total, including time both before and after the merger process. In total, 541 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 90.16%. Of these, 482 were complete and suitable for analysis.

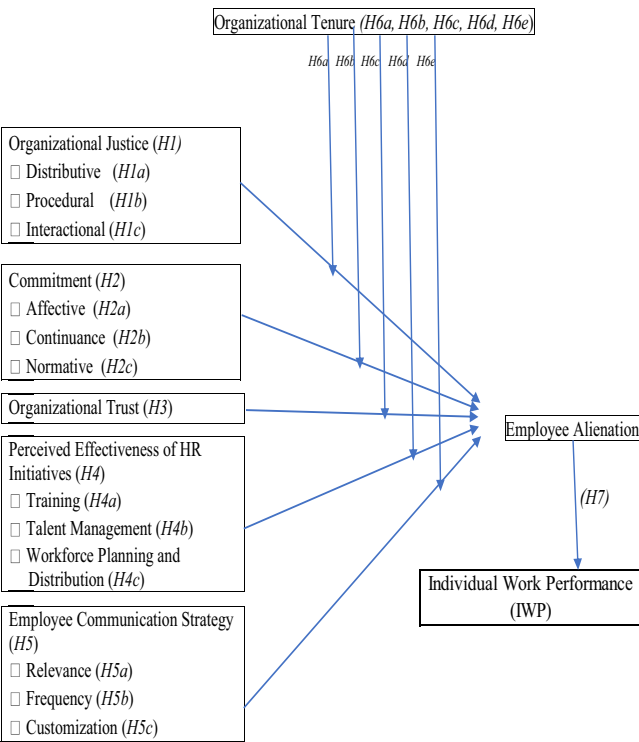


Figure 1.
Proposed
conceptual model

4.2 Sample characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents are shown in Table 1.

Of the 482 respondents, around 60% were male and around 23% under 30 years of age. In total, 44.19% had a technical education, 1.87% had only a high school education or less and 1.24% had a doctorate. Just under half (48.76%) were from the real estate company and the rest (51.24%) from the banking organization. The majority of the respondents (49.38%) were working in their current organization for the last 5–10 years, and 28.63% for more than 11 years.

4.3 Measures

The study used a questionnaire survey to collect data, which were then analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS-20. All the items used in the study were adopted from established scales in the literature. Organizational justice was measured through a twenty-item scale developed by Klendauer and Deller (2009). Commitment was measured through an eleven-item scale adopted from Gomes et al. (2017). Organizational trust was measured through a seven-item scale developed by Robinson et al. (1994); perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives was measured through a seven-item scale developed by Bansal (2016). Employee communication was measured through a twenty-one item scale developed by Rhee and Moon (2009). Alienation was measured through an eight-item developed by Nair and Vohra (2009). Individual work performance was measured through an eighteen-item scale developed by Koopmans et al. (2013). The content validity of the scale was checked using a focus group of M&A experts from academia and corporates. All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability as Cronbach's alpha values were all above 0.70. The details of the selected scales, including the source and Cronbach's alpha, are shown in Table 2.

Table 1.
Demographic
characteristics of the
respondents

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	287	59.54
	Female	195	40.46
Age (years)	18–20	18	3.73
	21–30	93	19.29
	31–40	203	42.12
	41–50	104	21.58
	51–60	64	13.28
Education	High school or less	9	1.87
	Technical education	213	44.19
	Bachelor's degree	196	40.66
	Master's degree	58	12.03
	Doctoral degree	6	1.24
Company	Real estate	235	48.76
	Bank	247	51.24
Tenure before merger	Less than 5 years	188	39.00
	5–10 years	211	43.78
	11 years or more	83	17.22
Total tenure	Less than 5 years	106	21.99
	5–10 years	238	49.38
	11 years or more	138	28.63
Respondent's ethnicity	Arab (Gulf)	63	13.07
	Arab (Middle East)	57	11.83
	Asian	212	43.98
	European	76	15.77
	Others	74	15.35

Table 2.
Measurement items

Factors	Number of items	Source of scale	Cronbach's alpha
Organizational justice	4	Klendaue r and Deller (2009)	0.92
	7		
	9		
Commitment	3	Gomes <i>et al.</i> (2017)	0.78
	2		
	6		
Organizational trust	7	Robinson <i>et al.</i> (1994)	0.974
Perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives	7	Bansal (2016)	0.978
Employee communication strategy	21	Rhee and Moon (2009)	0.962
Alienation	8	Nair and Vohra (2009)	0.878
Individual work performance	5	Koopmans <i>et al.</i> (2013)	0.965
	8		
	5		

5. Data analysis

The analysis of the results involved a two-step procedure (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In the first step, the constructs were validated. The second step used SEM with AMOS-20 to test the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables. This approach allows a series of hypothesized equations to be solved simultaneously.

The next step was to construct a structural equation model with a good fit. The latent variables were generated using confirmatory factor analysis, then used in a regression framework to see the impact of one latent variable on another.

Table 3 shows that the ratio of chi-square statistic to a degree of freedom (df) was below three, and root mean square residual and root mean square error of approximation (RMR and RMSEA) values were both below 0.05 for all the latent variables. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was above 0.90 (actual range 0.99–0.998), and the RMSEA was less than 0.08 (actual range 0–0.063) for all the latent variables. RMR values were between 0 and 0.037, giving a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

The high number of component variables means that the employee communication strategy model was estimated using the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) technique. The reliability statistics were nonparametric tests (NPAR) 19 and chi-square minimum discrepancy divided by degree of freedom 2.944.

5.1 Factors affecting alienation and its effect on individual work performance

The factors were constructed using factor score weights and used to estimate the model with maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). The estimated results are shown in Table 4.

The italic coefficients show where the effect was statistically significant, with a *p*-value below 0.05. Distributional and interactional justice negatively affected employee alienation. The third variable, procedural justice, had no significant effect. Of the three components of commitment, only normative commitment was significant, with a negative impact on alienation. Organizational trust and HR initiatives also both had a significant negative effect on alienation. Alienation negatively affected contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior. However, task performance was not significantly affected by alienation.

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for the latent variables. The three types of performance are shown in the last three columns. The lowest average level of performance was obtained for contextual performance (2.06), and the highest for counterproductive work behavior. This means that respondents “disagreed” (i.e. scale value 2) about contextual

Variables	Chi-square static to df	GFI	RMR	RMSEA
<i>Organizational justice (OJ)</i>				
Distributive justice (DJ)	<3	0.99	0.011	0.026
Procedural justice (PJ)	<3	0.996	0.014	0
Interactional justice (IJ)	<3	0.995	0.015	0.025
<i>Commitment</i>				
Affective commitment (AC)	<3	1	0	0.037
Continuance commitment (CC)	<3	1	0	0.043
Normative commitment (NC)	<3	1	0	0.041
<i>Organizational trust</i>	<3	0.993	0.02	0.041
<i>HR initiatives</i>	<3	0.993	0.021	0.041
<i>Employee communication strategy</i>	<3	NPAR is 19	CMIN/DF is 2.944	–
<i>Employee alienation</i>	<3	0.987	0.027	0.063
<i>Employee performance</i>				
Task performance	<3	0.998	0.02	0.056
Contextual performance	<3	0.988	0.037	0.062
Counterproductive work behavior	<3	0.997	0.011	0.02

Table 3.
Reliability testing of
the latent variables

Note(s): GFI = Goodness of fit index; RMR = Root mean square residual; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; NPAR = Nonparametric tests; CMIN/DF = Chi-square minimum discrepancy divided by degree of freedom (df)

Table 4.
Estimated model
values (using MLE)

	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Probability
<i>Determinants of alienation</i>				
Constant [C(1)]	7.614072	0.452898	16.81189	0.0000
DJ [C(2)]	-0.064738	0.016456	-3.934017	0.0001
PJ [C(3)]	0.025393	0.017231	1.473652	0.1406
IF [C(4)]	-0.057810	0.009647	-5.992504	0.0000
AC [C(5)]	-0.000201	0.006218	-0.032357	0.9742
CC [C(6)]	0.008960	0.006750	1.327533	0.1843
NC [C(7)]	-0.050671	0.013109	-3.865475	0.0001
OT [C(8)]	-0.403986	0.045351	-8.907983	0.0000
HR_Ini [C(9)]	-0.302924	0.030433	-9.953805	0.0000
EC_Stra [C(10)]	0.006738	0.006952	0.969207	0.3324
<i>Effect of alienation on task performance</i>				
Constant [C(11)]	4.162872	0.358224	11.62086	0.0000
Alienation [C(12)]	-0.071119	0.095654	-0.743504	0.4572
<i>Effect of alienation on contextual performance</i>				
Constant [C(13)]	3.754185	0.166768	22.51141	0.0000
Alienation [C(14)]	-0.489971	0.049112	-9.976580	0.0000
<i>Effect of Alienation on Counterproductive Work Behavior</i>				
Constant [C(15)]	9.229737	0.458458	20.13215	0.0000
Alienation [C(16)]	-1.271074	0.137677	-9.232311	0.0000
Log likelihood	-998.2320	Schwarz criterion Hannan-Quinn criterion	4.347118	4.347118
Avg. log likelihood	-0.517755		4.262937	4.262937
Akaike info criterion				
Determinant residual covariance		4.208431		
		0.000740		
Equation: ALIENATION = C(1) + C(2) × DJ + C(3) × PJ + C(4) × IF + C(5) × AC + C(6) × CC + C(7) × NC + C(8) × OT + C(9) × HRINI + C(10) × EC_STRA				
Observations: 482				
R-squared	0.210535	Mean of dependent variables		
Adjusted R-squared	0.195482	S.D. of dependent variables		
S.E. of regression	1.340524	Sum of squared residuals		
				3.454502
				1.494537
				848.1863
				(continued)

Table 4.

	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Probability
Durbin-Watson stat	1.134817			
Equation: TASK_PERFO = C(11) + C(12) × ALIENATION				
Observations: 482				
R-squared	−0.048433	Mean of dependent variables		3.917191
Adjusted R-squared	−0.050618	S.D. of dependent variables		1.057670
S.E. of regression	1.084108	Sum of squared residuals		564.1395
Durbin-Watson stat	1.572820			
Equation: CONTEXTUAL_PER = C(13) + C(14) × ALIENATION				
Observations: 482				
R-squared	−2.417556	Mean of dependent variables		2.061579
Adjusted R-squared	−2.424676	S.D. of dependent variables		0.350447
S.E. of regression	0.648533	Sum of squared residuals		201.8859
Durbin-Watson stat	1.283409			
Equation: COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIORS = C(15) + C(16) × ALIENATION				
Observations: 482				
R-squared	−2.711366	Mean of dependent variables		4.838811
Adjusted R-squared	−2.719098	S.D. of dependent variables		0.906699
S.E. of regression	1.748567	Sum of squared residuals		1467.593
Durbin-Watson stat	1.109342			
Note(s): ALIENATION = C(1) + C(2) × DJ + C(3) × PJ + C(4) × IJ + C(5) × AC + C(6) × CC + C(7) × NC + C(8) × OT + C(9) × HRINI + C(10) × EC_STRA				
TASK_PERFO = C(11) + C(12) × ALIENATION				
CONTEXTUAL_PER = C(13) + C(14) × ALIENATION				
COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIORS = C(15) + C(16) × ALIENATION				

Table 5.
Descriptive statistics

	DJ	PJ	IJ	AC	CC	NC	HRNI	EC_Stra	Alienation	Contextual per	CWB
N	482	482	482	482	482	482	482	482	482	482	482
Valid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	339	364	614	435	175	284	505	502	345	206	484
Mean	330	379	631	471	179	289	528	518	396	208	511
Median	388	433	674	595	250	330	584	582	086	175	553
Mode	053	068	108	154	081	063	096	114	149	035	091
Std. deviation	028	046	116	239	065	040	092	130	223	012	082
Variance											
Skewness	-044	-141	-119	-095	025	-084	-186	-090	-077	-112	-168
Std. error of skewness	011	011	011	011	011	011	011	011	011	011	011
Kurtosis	169	308	298	-017	-035	157	614	139	-095	405	505
Std. error of kurtosis	022	022	022	022	022	022	022	022	022	022	022
Minimum	102	098	125	053	009	040	000	100	086	032	029
Maximum	446	489	786	694	390	412	682	792	562	272	645
Sum	163249	175599	295916	209721	84417	136870	243623	242148	166507	99368	232331
Percentiles											
25	305	337	574	396	107	256	448	446	208	190	447
50	330	379	631	471	179	289	528	518	396	208	511
75	3882	4068	6738	543175	2495	3192	565	582	456225	2272	5526

performance on average. In other words, contextual performance is deficient. However, there were high counterproductive work behaviors, with an average of almost 5 (4.84). For task performance, the average response was 3.92.

Figure 2 shows the distribution plot for the three indicators of performance. All three distributions were negatively skewed, indicating an abnormal distribution. However, apart from contextual performance, the mode was more significant than the mean. A mode of 4.49 (i.e. approximately 5) for task performance shows that most respondents agreed on these indicators. A mode of around 2 (1.75) reflects disagreement for the components of contextual performance. A high pattern for counterproductive work behavior (5.52, i.e. approximately 6) shows that most people strongly agreed that there were counterproductive work behaviors.

The average for alienation was 3.455, i.e. close to 3, a value that suggests that respondents, on average, were not strongly affected by alienation. The mode for alienation was 0.895 (i.e. approximately one). The biggest group of respondents, therefore, had not seen alienation. The distribution of alienation is shown in Figure 3. The mode is around one, but another high bar near 5 shows that a substantial number of respondents had been affected by alienation.

The frequency distributions of factors affecting alienation are shown in Figure 4, with a normal curve superimposed upon the histogram.

6. Discussion

This research examines the effect of organizational justice, commitment, trust, effectiveness of HR initiatives and communication strategy on employee alienation and individual work

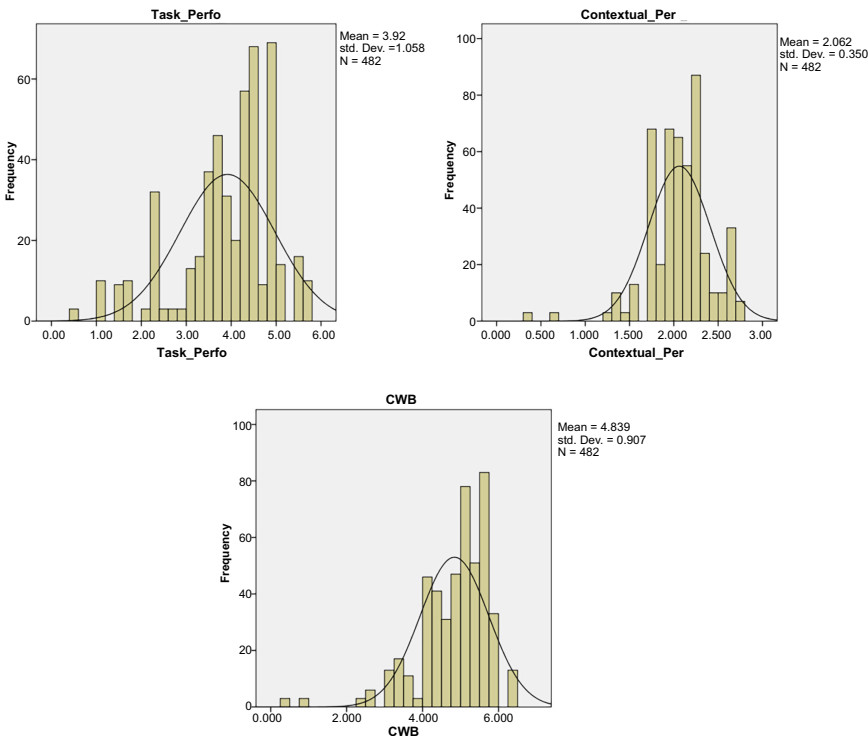


Figure 2.
The distribution of the
three indicators of
performance

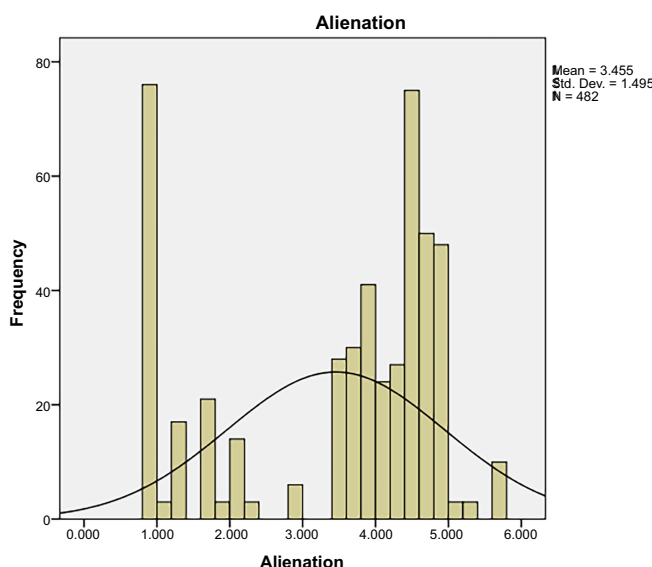


Figure 3.
The distribution of
alienation

performance during PMI, a subject that has not previously been examined in emerging economies. Mixed results were obtained, with procedural justice, and affective and continuance commitment do not affect employee alienation, but the other latent variables affecting. Prior researches (Asmussen *et al.*, 2019) have confirmed that the procedural justice culture within the firm can be detrimental. However, in this study the procedural justice did not affect employee alienation. This may be attributed to the fact that the current study focused on mergers within same national context and homogenous policy implementation. The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 6.

Mergers are generally considered as a threat to employee well-being because they lead to possible job insecurity and loss of trust in the merged organization (Bansal, 2017; Bansal and Thakur, 2013). The findings on organizational justice are consistent with the literature, mainly work by Klendauer and Deller (2009). Promoting organizational justice may be necessary during mergers because it was negatively related to alienation. Its promotion may, therefore, alleviate alienation among employees.

In other words, a positive feeling of organizational justice among employees mitigates alienation among employees. The same is true for distributive and interactional justices, but not found to be true for procedural organizational justice. If an employee has negative feelings about procedural justice, he may not experience alienation and vice-versa.

The results of this study indicate that a lack of commitment bring about feelings of alienation among employees, thus supporting the contentions by Gomes *et al.* (2017). Managers in merging firms should try to infuse the employees with commitment, especially normative commitment because strong commitment levels were negatively associated with employee alienation. If employees feel an obligation toward the organization and their work, this will eliminate alienation. Our findings suggest that this only applied to normative commitment and not affective and continuance commitment. This may be attributed to the reason that majority of the workforce in the UAE are expatriates, and for them, loyalty and duty are the main considerations for staying in the job. The study findings contrast with studies (Dash and Vohra, 2019), which reported that work alienation is likely to reduce affective commitment, as a person is less

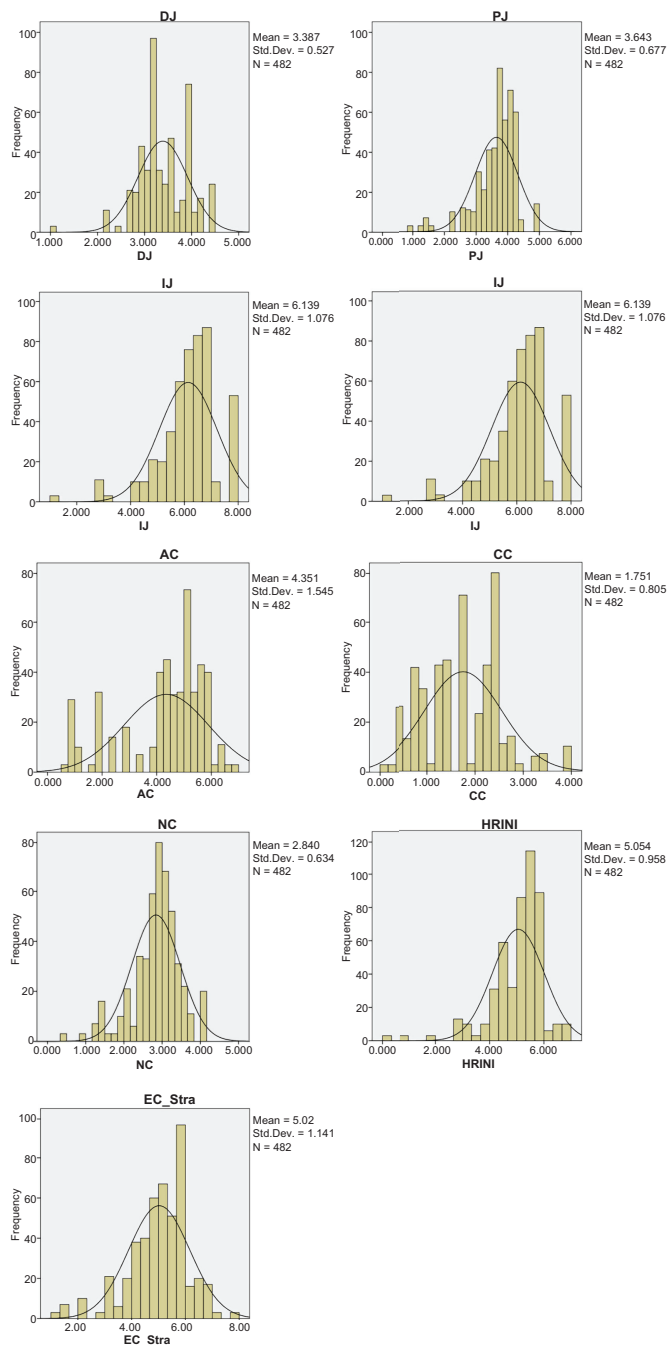


Figure 4.
Distribution of
determinants of
alienation

					Employee alienation during post- merger
Variable	Hypothesis		Standardized item loadings	Result	
Organizational justice	H1	Organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation	0.871	Supported	1101
	H1a	Distributive organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation	0.766	Supported	
	H1b	Procedural organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation	0.635	Not Supported	
	H1c	Interactional organizational justice is negatively related to employee alienation	0.784	Supported	
Commitment	H2	Commitment is negatively related to employee alienation	0.844	Supported	
	H2a	Affective commitment is negatively related to employee alienation	0.522	Not Supported	
	H2b	Continuance commitment is negatively related to employee alienation	0.581	Not Supported	
	H2c	Normative commitment is negatively related to employee alienation	0.717	Supported	
Organizational trust	H3	Organizational trust is negatively related to employee alienation	0.722	Supported	
Perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives	H4	Perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives is negatively related to employee alienation	0.898	Supported	
	H4a	Training is negatively related to employee alienation	0.767	Supported	
	H4b	Talent management is negatively related to employee alienation	0.822	Supported	
	H4c	Workforce planning and distribution is negatively related to employee alienation	0.748	Supported	
Employee communication strategy	H5	Employee communication strategy is negatively related to employee alienation	0.862	Supported	
	H5a	Relevance is negatively related to employee alienation	0.721	Supported	
	H5b	Frequency is negatively related to employee alienation	0.872	Supported	
	H5c	Customization is negatively related to employee alienation	0.712	Supported	
Organizational tenure	H6a	Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational justice and employee alienation	0.709	Supported	
	H6b	Organizational tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between commitment and employee alienation	0.849	Supported	
	H6c	Organization tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived effectiveness of HR initiatives and employee alienation	0.798	Supported	
	H6d	Organization tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between communication strategy and employee alienation	0.820	Supported	
Individual work performance	H7	Employee alienation is negatively related to employee individual work performance	0.768	Supported	
Note(s): **Significant at $p \leq 0.01$					

Table 6.
Hypothesis testing:
item loadings

likely to have an emotional attachment to an organization if he/she feels estranged from work and finds work painful.

Robinson *et al.* (1994) noted that organizational trust and employee alienation are negatively associated. Organizations should, therefore, try to win the trust of employees. Our findings also confirmed those of Bansal (2016) about employees' perceptions of HR initiatives. Positive attitudes of training, proper talent management and workforce planning and distribution are all associated with reduced alienation. This study found that training was negatively related to employee alienation, i.e. training will reduce alienation among employees. We also found that talent management, workforce planning and work distribution were also essential elements in reducing alienation.

Rhee and Moon's (2009) study on the importance of employee communication strategy was also consistent with our findings. Organizations need to communicate effectively with employees to eliminate any chance of miscommunication or misrepresentation. This will reduce alienation among employees. Important sub-factors were associated with the relevance, customization and frequency of communication.

This study's results underlined the significance of organizational tenure. Work experience includes all those "events experienced by an individual that relates to the performance of some job" (Quinones *et al.*, 1995, p. 890). Organizational tenure is considered a measurable indicator of (work) experience because employees who remain with a firm for longer can better develop a broader skill set and become more familiar with the organization (Bird, 1996). Managers should consider this, and particularly its relationship with other variables. The findings are consistent with Nair and Vohra (2009), who found that organizational tenure had a moderating effect on organizational justice and employee alienation. We also found that organizational tenure has a moderating impact on the relationship between commitment and employee alienation. More tenure helps give individuals a more positive perception of justice and a stronger commitment to the organization, reducing alienation. It also improves perceptions of the effectiveness of HR initiatives and communication strategy.

These factors should, therefore, all be considered during PMI to mitigate alienation among employees. Koopmans *et al.* (2013) concluded that alienation has an adverse effect on individual work performance, i.e. they have negative association between themselves, which was also confirmed by our findings. Negative emotions developed by an employee make him less dedicated to his work; thus resulting in poor performance. Minimizing or alleviating employee alienation could, therefore, improve individual work performance.

7. Implications

7.1 *Implications for theory*

The study increases our theoretical understanding of the leading causes of alienation in employees after mergers. It has developed a relationship model for factors contributing to employee alienation during mergers. The driving and dependence power of each variable associated with alienation provides a holistic understanding of the topic and enrich the growing body of literature on alienation among employees after M&As.

7.2 *Implications for practice*

The study has important implications for organizations undergoing mergers and provides constructive insights for merging firms and employees during PMI. Suppose managers appropriately understand the factors affecting employee trust, commitment and justice during mergers. In that case, it may be possible to support the change more effectively, and particularly to improve management of the situations that arise during mergers. Perceptions of employees toward HR initiatives also play an essential part in facilitating the management of change after mergers. The study results may also serve as guidelines for effective strategic

decisions that will help organizations reduce alienation among employees, which will lead to higher productivity and other positive outcomes and help make mergers successful. The study's findings might also provide specific insights to firms interested in mergers if they seek to avoid or mitigate the adverse effects of alienation in advance.

8. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study had several limitations. First, it was conducted in just two organizations, in two sectors, real estate and banking, and both organizations based in Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize findings to other sectors and regions. Second, the study was limited to middle- and low-level employees. Third, it did not consider other organizational variables that may be important in mergers. Future studies may want to address these limitations by incorporating more variables and using data from other countries to improve generalization.

There are also opportunities for undertaking future studies using new and novel methods, theories and variables. For example, prospect theory can be used as a theoretical lens in this area. There is also scope for theory development in this area. As regards the methods, quantitative studies using multilevel modeling techniques, Partial least square methods and neural networks and qualitative studies based on case studies are also likely to be appreciated. Furthermore, future studies may consider using multiple rating sources to avoid common-methods variance.

9. Conclusion

This study's objective was to examine the impact of organizational justice, commitment, trust and effectiveness of HR initiatives and employee communication strategy on employee alienation and individual work performance among employees during PMI. The results demonstrated that procedural justice, affective commitment and continuance commitment were found to be having no effect on alienation among merging firms' employees. Other latent variables do affect alienation feeling among employees and should be given due consideration during PMI. It hoped to be able to recommend actions to improve the success of the merger process. These findings have important implications. For example, based on such results, firms interested in mergers can take steps to avoid or mitigate the adverse effects of alienation, the leading cause of many failed mergers.

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