



Factors Affecting Employee Performance: A Case Study on Lynas, a Rare Earth Processing Company

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KEYWORDS

Employee Performance
Job Satisfaction
Employee Motivation
Employee Engagement
Employee Autonomy

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 November 2023
Received in revised form 18
November 2023
Accepted 2 December 2023
Available online 20 December
2023

ABSTRACT

Good employee performance keeps an organisation strategically competitive, yet organisations must continually attract and retain suitable employees to sustain peak performance. Lynas, a multinational rare earth processing company listed on the S&P/ASX 200 and operating in Pahang, Malaysia, employs approximately 900 people and benchmarks its salary and benefits against the oil and gas industry. However, the relationship between job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, autonomy, and employee performance at Lynas had not previously been established. This study examined these relationships using a quantitative, descriptive research design. A stratified random sample of employees was surveyed using a structured questionnaire adapted from established instruments, yielding 61 usable responses from a target population of 879 employees. Data were analysed using Minitab statistical software, including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability testing, and regression-based hypothesis testing. Four of the five constructs demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.846 and 0.868), while motivation showed low but retained reliability (alpha of 0.304). All seven hypotheses were supported at the 95 percent confidence level, with employee engagement showing the strongest effect on employee performance ($p = 0.000$) and employee motivation the weakest among performance-related paths ($p = 0.009$). The findings confirm that job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and autonomy each significantly and positively affect employee performance at Lynas, and that motivation, engagement, and autonomy each significantly affect job satisfaction. These results provide Lynas management with an empirical basis for refining human resource policy to strengthen retention and performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is widely regarded as a reflection of how well an organisation is managed, and organisations routinely benchmark themselves against one another on this basis (Nevianto et al., 2021). Employees are the backbone of an organisation, contributing physical and mental effort in exchange for salary and benefits, and organisations that care for employee wellbeing are better positioned to unlock full employee potential (Harshitha & Senthil, 2021; Tuffaha, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis intensified this challenge, forcing organisations worldwide to adapt working arrangements while human resource management (HRM) functions attempted to balance individual wellbeing against sustained performance, sometimes at the cost of increased exhaustion, stress, and burnout among the workforce (Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Van De Voorde et al., 2012). According to Tuffaha (2020), the rate and quality of work an employee produces depends heavily on

how enthusiastic they are about the organisation, which is in turn driven by factors such as a safe work environment, training, supervision, leadership, rewards, career progression, and bonuses. Prior empirical work has linked employee performance to reward systems, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Ismail et al., 2015), and has found a significant positive relationship between total compensation and employee performance in the services sector, with benefits, recognition, and appreciation identified as key compensation factors (Nzyoka & Orwa, 2016).

Lynas Corporation (S&P/ASX 200) is a multinational chemical manufacturer operating a rare earth processing plant in the Gebeng Industrial Area of Pahang, Malaysia. Its establishment faced considerable resistance from the local community and government, and the company has since struggled to recruit suitable staff due to public perception that the plant is hazardous, given that its feed material is a

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<https://doi.org/10.56532/mjbem.v2i2.263>

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radioactive concentrate imported from Australia. Lynas also faces a shortage of locally available staff with relevant experience in rare earth processing or hydrometallurgy, compounded by its location in Kuantan, a smaller city offering limited entertainment options for young professionals. The company has nonetheless attracted talent through a salary structure benchmarked against the oil and gas industry. This difficulty in staffing is of strategic concern because Lynas's Vision 2025 depends on the availability of skilled technical engineers to support global expansion, particularly into the United States. Understanding what drives employee performance and retention at Lynas is therefore directly relevant to the company's growth plans and to broader decision-making around employee satisfaction and retention.

This study set out to determine whether job satisfaction, employee motivation, employee engagement, and employee autonomy relate to employee performance at Lynas, and to establish the inter-relationships among these constructs. Specifically, the research asked: (1) does job satisfaction directly affect employee performance; (2) does employee motivation directly affect employee performance; (3) does employee engagement directly affect employee performance; (4) does employee autonomy directly affect employee performance; and (5) do employee motivation, engagement, and autonomy relate to employee job satisfaction? The findings are intended to give the Lynas human resource function empirical grounds for improving policies affecting employee happiness, workplace stress, leadership practices, and organisational culture, and to contribute to the broader literature on employee performance in a manufacturing and heavy-industry context distinct from the services-sector studies that dominate prior research.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond a single organisation. Lynas operates in a segment of heavy industry, rare earth separation and refining, that is simultaneously strategically important to global supply chains for high-technology components and reputationally sensitive because of its association with radioactive feedstock. This combination creates an unusual employment context: technically skilled staff are scarce, public perception of the workplace is often negative regardless of actual safety performance, and the surrounding labour market offers few comparable employers against which prospective staff can benchmark the role. Where most prior studies of employee performance are set in services industries, retail, banking, hospitality, or in light manufacturing, findings from a rare-earth processing plant provide a useful point of comparison for whether the same motivational, engagement, and autonomy mechanisms operate similarly in a heavy-industry, safety-critical, shift-based operating environment. Establishing this empirically at Lynas therefore serves both an immediate managerial purpose, informing near-term human resource decisions, and a broader academic purpose, testing the generalisability of an established conceptual model in an underexplored industrial setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical basis of this study is that employee performance is a function of job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and autonomy: the more an employee is motivated, engaged, granted autonomy, and satisfied with

their job, the better they are expected to perform (Okine et al., 2021; Pascariati & Krisna, 2021). Employee performance itself has been linked in the literature to organisational culture, job satisfaction, training and development, and stress, although Aboazoum et al. (2015) found the effect of stress to be statistically insignificant in their Libyan sample. Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2018) examined a broader set of environment-related factors (training culture, management support, environmental dynamism, organisational climate), job-related factors (job environment, autonomy, communication), and employee-related factors (intrinsic motivation, skill flexibility, proactivity, adaptability, commitment), finding that job autonomy in particular contributes strongly to performance. Atatsi et al. (2019), in a systematic literature review, synthesised organisational citizenship behaviour, leader-member exchange, learning, and innovative work behaviour as antecedents of employee performance.

On job satisfaction, Boye Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016) studied mining employees in Ghana and identified reward, training and development opportunities, working conditions, worker-employer relationships, and job security as satisfaction factors, concluding that good pay was the most effective driver of satisfaction, and that satisfied employees tend to be loyal employees. Satisfaction, in this stream of research, is treated less as an end state and more as a running assessment employees make of whether the job continues to be worth the effort they put into it, which is why pay, security, and relationship quality recur across studies as its principal drivers. On motivation, the literature commonly distinguishes intrinsic motivation, arising from the enjoyment, meaning, or personal growth an employee derives from the work itself, from extrinsic motivation, arising from non-monetary and monetary rewards and recognition bestowed by the organisation. U (2021) argued that unmotivated workers create substantial losses for businesses through reduced output and higher turnover, underscoring the importance of cultivating both motivation types rather than relying on compensation alone, while Manzoor et al. (2021) found that intrinsic reward and motivation affect worker retention among small and medium enterprises in Pakistan, with motivation acting as a mediating mechanism between reward and performance outcomes. Bahagia and Pratami Putri (2018) examined factors influencing employee performance during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified cost of living, ability, and family circumstances as the most significant among a broader set that included security, incentives, rewards, and work environment, suggesting that the relative weight of motivational factors can shift considerably under conditions of external crisis and economic uncertainty.

On engagement, increased competitive pressure and the need to respond to rapidly changing operational conditions have made it increasingly important for organisations to identify the factors that drive employee performance, with job autonomy shown to support job performance strongly (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018). On autonomy specifically, Lartey (2021) finding that employee autonomy affects performance among small and medium enterprises in North America, in combination with managerial recognition of employee engagement. Building on this body of work, the present study proposed a conceptual model in which

motivation, engagement, and autonomy act as independent variables affecting job satisfaction, which in turn mediates their combined effect on the dependent variable, employee performance. From this model, seven hypotheses were developed: H1, employee motivation significantly affects job satisfaction; H2, employee engagement significantly affects job satisfaction; H3, employee autonomy significantly affects job satisfaction; H4, job satisfaction significantly affects job performance; H5, employee motivation significantly affects job performance; H6, employee engagement significantly affects job performance; and H7, employee autonomy significantly affects job performance.

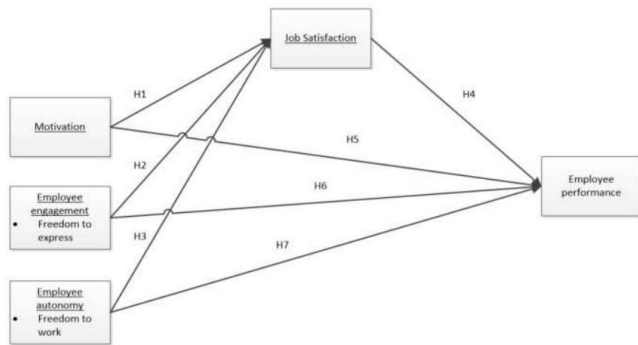


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive, quantitative research design intended to identify the factors affecting employee performance at Lynas. The target population comprised the full Lynas workforce of 879 employees, drawn from operational units (Cracking and Leaching, Solvent Extraction, Product Finishing, Offsite/Utilities/Residues, Engineering and Maintenance, Security, Central Laboratory, Cold Works, and Warehouse) as well as support functions (Human Resource, Finance, Procurement, IT, Sales and Marketing, Research and Innovation, Project, and Safety, Health, Environment and Security). The sample was drawn using stratified random sampling, with strata defined by executive versus non-executive status, following Frey (2018). A sampling target of 30 percent of the workforce (approximately 120 employees) was set, with an expected response rate of 30 to 50 percent; the study ultimately received 61 usable responses.

Data were collected via a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed as a Google Form through Lynas's internal Microsoft Teams channels and WhatsApp groups, allowing each respondent to submit one uniquely identified response. The questionnaire items measuring job satisfaction and autonomy were adapted from Saragih (2011), and the items measuring motivation and engagement were adapted from Abuhashesh et al. (2019). All items used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). Demographic data collected included gender, years of service, job area, position level (executive or non-executive), and employment type (permanent or contract staff). Job satisfaction, motivation, employee engagement, and employee autonomy were treated as independent (predictor) variables, with job satisfaction additionally serving as a mediating variable between motivation, engagement, autonomy, and the dependent variable of employee

performance; all five constructs were treated as latent variables measured through observed questionnaire items, each captured by between five and six indicator questions. Employee performance was measured with six items (Q8-Q13) covering output quality, safety, team contribution, target achievement, timeliness, and first-time-right execution; job satisfaction with five items (Q14-Q18); motivation with six items (Q19-Q24); engagement with six items (Q25-Q30); and autonomy with five items (Q31-Q35).

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and distributions) were computed for each item, and cross-tabulation was used to explore demographic patterns such as the relationship between years of service or position level and reported performance. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.7 considered highly reliable (Ursachi et al., 2015) and values below 0.35 considered to jeopardise reliability (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Inferential analysis used regression-based hypothesis testing to determine whether each hypothesised relationship was statistically significant, based on calculated p-values benchmarked against a 0.05 threshold corresponding to the 95 percent confidence level. Given a subset of 300 survey items collected from 100 target responses out of an approximately 1,000-person reference population, the design targeted a 95 percent confidence level with a 10 percent margin of error for population-level inference (Lucid, 2022). All statistical analysis, including the regression models underlying the hypothesis tests, was conducted using Minitab statistical software, chosen for its availability and the researcher's familiarity with the package.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey yielded 61 usable responses out of an initial sampling target of approximately 120, a response rate broadly consistent with the 30 to 50 percent range anticipated at the design stage. Respondents' average age was 35.44 years (SD = 10.27), ranging from 22 to 62 years, indicating a workforce skewed toward early- and mid-career employees but with meaningful representation of longer-tenured staff. Of the respondents, 62.3 percent were female and 37.7 percent were male, a gender balance somewhat more female-weighted than is typical for heavy manufacturing and chemical processing operations, and one that may partly reflect the mix of operational and administrative roles included in the survey population. In terms of position level, 70.5 percent identified as executive-level staff and 29.5 percent as non-executive, while by employment type 85.2 percent were permanent staff and 14.8 percent were on contract, suggesting the respondent pool was weighted toward more established, higher-tenure roles within Lynas relative to the full population distribution shown in the company's own headcount records.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results.

Hyp.	Path	p	Result
H1	Motivation → Job Satisfaction	.001	Supported
H2	Engagement → Job Satisfaction	.001	Supported
H3	Autonomy → Job Satisfaction	.007	Supported

H4	Job Satisfaction → Job Performance	.002	Supported
H5	Motivation → Job Performance	.009	Supported
H6	Engagement → Job Performance	.000	Supported
H7	Autonomy → Job Performance	.004	Supported

Note. All paths significant at $\alpha = .05$.

Descriptive statistics for the performance items showed generally favourable ratings on the seven-point scale: efficiency in generating quality work output averaged 5.656 (SD = 0.834), efficiency in working safely averaged 6.049 (SD = 0.865) and was the highest-rated item overall, efficiency in contributing to team performance averaged 5.984 (SD = 0.846), efficiency in exceeding department targets averaged 5.590 (SD = 0.864), completing work on time averaged 5.803 (SD = 0.946), and completing work right the first time averaged 5.164 (SD = 1.214), the lowest-rated performance item, with a wider spread of responses ranging from 1 to 7. Among job satisfaction items, overall satisfaction with the job averaged 5.131 (SD = 1.218) and general satisfaction with the kind of work averaged 5.426 (SD = 1.056), while the reverse-worded item on frequently thinking of quitting averaged 3.836 (SD = 1.781) and the item on colleagues thinking of quitting averaged 3.852 (SD = 1.569), both roughly at the scale midpoint and consistent with moderate, not acute, turnover intention. Motivation items were rated somewhat lower overall than the other constructs: 'I get rewarded for my commitment towards the work' averaged 4.426 (SD = 1.322), the lowest mean among all 28 substantive items in the survey, and 'I receive recognition for my work on a regular basis' averaged 4.525 (SD = 1.349), while 'I am learning new skills and growing personally' averaged higher at 5.475 (SD = 1.089). Engagement items averaged between 4.951 and 5.607, with 'I fulfil my task even if it takes more effort than minimum' the highest-rated engagement item (mean = 5.607, SD = 0.881), and autonomy items were consistently rated favourably, averaging between 5.311 and 5.541 across all five items, indicating that respondents generally felt they had latitude over how, and when, they carried out their work.

Regression-based analysis of the item distributions indicated approximately normal distributions across the response set, supporting the appropriateness of the parametric statistical tests applied. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha showed that four of the five constructs achieved high internal consistency: employee performance (six items) recorded an alpha of 0.8489, employee engagement (six items) recorded 0.8677, and employee autonomy (five items) recorded 0.8463. The job satisfaction scale, drawn from the same item set used for both the independent-variable and mediating-variable measures, also recorded an alpha of 0.8489. By contrast, the motivation scale (five items) recorded a comparatively low alpha of 0.3040; although below the conventional 0.7 threshold, this value remained above the 0.35 floor at which reliability is considered seriously compromised (Netemeyer et al., 2003), and was therefore retained for hypothesis testing while noting it as a limitation.

Regression analysis was used to test all seven hypotheses at the 95 percent confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Employee

motivation had a significant effect on job satisfaction (H1: $p = 0.001$). Employee engagement had a significant effect on job satisfaction (H2: $p = 0.001$). Employee autonomy had a significant effect on job satisfaction (H3: $p = 0.007$). Job satisfaction had a significant effect on employee job performance (H4: $p = 0.002$). Employee motivation had a significant effect on employee job performance (H5: $p = 0.009$). Employee engagement had a significant effect on employee job performance (H6: $p = 0.000$), the strongest result among all seven paths tested. Employee autonomy had a significant effect on employee job performance (H7: $p = 0.004$). All seven hypotheses were therefore supported at the 95 percent confidence level, with p-values ranging from 0.000 to 0.009, well below the 0.05 threshold. Ranked by strength of significance, employee engagement's effect on performance (H6) was strongest, followed by motivation's effect on satisfaction (H1), engagement's effect on satisfaction (H2), satisfaction's effect on performance (H4), autonomy's effect on performance (H7), autonomy's effect on satisfaction (H3), and motivation's effect on performance (H5), which was the weakest, though still statistically significant.

These results are consistent with the theoretical proposition that employee performance is jointly a function of job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and autonomy (Pascariati & Krisna, 2021), and they extend prior findings from services and small-enterprise contexts (Boye Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016; Lartey, 2021; Manzoor et al., 2021) into a heavy-manufacturing, rare-earth-processing setting. The particularly strong effect of engagement on performance ($p = 0.000$) echoes Diamantidis and Chatzoglou's (2018) finding that job-related and employee-related factors, including autonomy and commitment, meaningfully shape performance outcomes, and is broadly consistent with Nevianto et al.'s (2021) work linking engagement drivers to performance outcomes. The comparatively weaker, though still significant, effect of motivation on performance directly ($p = 0.009$), relative to its stronger effect on satisfaction ($p = 0.001$), suggests that at Lynas motivation may operate substantially through job satisfaction as a mediating pathway rather than acting on performance in isolation, aligning with the mediating role assigned to job satisfaction in the conceptual model. This pattern is also consistent with descriptive results showing that motivation-related items, particularly around reward and recognition, were rated lower on average than engagement or autonomy items, suggesting that while employees at Lynas may not feel strongly rewarded in a material sense, this shortfall is substantially buffered by high levels of engagement and autonomy, which together sustain both satisfaction and performance.

The demographic profile of respondents adds useful context to these findings. With 70.5 percent of respondents at executive level and 85.2 percent on permanent contracts, the sample likely reflects the experience of Lynas's more established workforce rather than its more transient or junior contract population, a group that prior research (Bahagia & Pratami Putri, 2018) suggests may weight cost-of-living and job-security concerns more heavily than recognition or autonomy. This raises the possibility that the strength of the engagement and autonomy effects observed here may not generalise fully to newer or contract staff, and reinforces the recommendation, discussed further below, that Lynas extend similar data collection with stronger institutional backing to

reach a more representative cross-section of its 879-person workforce.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the factors affecting employee performance at Lynas, a rare earth processing company facing distinctive recruitment and retention challenges tied to its location and the perceived hazards of its operations. Using data from 61 employees sampled through stratified random sampling, the study found that job satisfaction, employee motivation, employee engagement, and employee autonomy each had a statistically significant, positive effect on employee job performance, and that motivation, engagement, and autonomy each had a statistically significant, positive effect on job satisfaction. All seven hypotheses were supported at the 95 percent confidence level, with employee engagement emerging as the strongest predictor of both job satisfaction and job performance.

For theory, the findings reinforce the view that employee performance in a manufacturing and process-industry context is best understood as a multi-factor outcome shaped jointly by motivational, relational, and structural elements of work, rather than by compensation alone, corroborating and extending prior work conducted primarily in services and small-enterprise settings. For practice, the results suggest that Lynas management should treat employee engagement and job satisfaction as high-leverage areas for human resource intervention, since strengthening recognition, valuing contribution, and creating a supportive social environment for employees emerged as central levers connected to performance. Given the company's stated ambition to expand internationally under its Vision 2025 strategy, retaining and developing a satisfied, engaged, and appropriately autonomous technical workforce is directly material to that goal.

The study has notable limitations. It was conducted independently of the organisation, relying on voluntary participation distributed through informal internal channels, which likely constrained the response rate to 61 out of a targeted population of 879 employees; institutional support from Lynas HR could plausibly have improved response rates and representativeness. The motivation construct also showed comparatively weak internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.304$), which, while retained within an acceptable reliability floor, warrants caution in interpreting the motivation-related findings and points to a need for refined or expanded motivation items in future work. Future research should incorporate more granular motivational factors such as specific reward structures and career development pathways, and should benchmark Lynas against other companies within the same industrial park to better contextualise employee retention outcomes across the rare earth and broader chemical processing sector.

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