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Mediating role of perceived organizational politics in relating job characteristics to morale

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Organizational politics has been perceived to be an integral part of every work organization. Moreover, the perceptions of employees about the organizational politics are considered to have a significant influence on the morale of employees. However, the nature and degree of this influence may differ from job to job and individual to individual. Thus, the present study tries to investigate the mediating role of organizational politics in between the job characteristics and morale of the employees. Job characteristics included in the study are job ambiguity, skill variety, feedback and autonomy, whereas the morale is a composite construct of job satisfaction and affective commitment. The empirical evidence is based on the national level sample data collected through self administered questionnaires from executives of multitude of Pakistani industries such as health, manufacturing, energy, financial services, education, telecommunication and information technology. The sample comprised of 577 respondents. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the fitness of casual relationship. Several practical implications are drawn to benefit the practicing managers.

Key words: Job characteristics, morale, job satisfaction, affective commitment, organizational politics.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational politics is a common and integral feature of organizational life which stems out from the use of power, authority or influence. It has direct as well as indirect influences on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Politics in organization is time consuming, hamper sharing of critical information and creates barriers in communication (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988) which results in less involvement in job and lessen the satisfaction of employees. Political behavior is defined by the very nature of actions of employees or by their perceptions to what they perceive as political (Vredenburgh and Maurer, 1984) and their roles at job as well as work itself is very important to consider. Political behavior in organizations is mostly hidden and issue of differences in perception (Kacmar et al., 1999; Drory and Romm, 1988); and according to Lewin (1936), attitudes and behaviors of employees are determined frequently by their perceptions of reality and not reality per se. Research on organisational politics reveals that nature of task, independence to work and supervisor's or coworkers' feedback can enhance the morale of employees in terms of their commitment (Witt, 1998) and job satisfaction (Kacmar et al., 1999; Witt et al., 2000). Skill variety autonomy in job and feedback (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992), have been considered important variables to study in a work environment which is political in nature. The purpose of this study is to test the effect of job characteristics on morale of employees indirectly when perceptions of organizational politics are introduced as mediator. To the best knowledge of researchers there is no such study specifically in south Asian context in which all these variables have been studied simultaneously.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job characteristics

Job characteristics are much important in organizations

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Abbreviation: POP, Perceptions of organizational politics.

when considered in work environment that is highly politicized and where interdependencies are strong. Since the evolvement of job diagnostic survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1975), the researchers are studying dimensions related to the work of employees from various perspectives in organizations. A person who has various skills at the same time is more likely to involve in political behavior. Many aspects of our personality can be considered meaningful when variety of skills at work is obvious. Job ambiguity, feedback and autonomy are also important characteristics that can create such atmosphere which is the real source of nourishment of political behavior. In the next segment relevant literature has been summarized.

Job ambiguity

Job ambiguity is one of the job characteristics that is considered as an important antecedent of perceptions of organisational politics (POP) (Poon, 2003). Ambiguity related to task or job is such an organizational characteristics which foster the environment of political behavior, organizational politics perception and influence tactics (Ferris et al., 1991). The degree of equivocality in a work environment is the job ambiguity. High job ambiguity is present when roles and objectives are not clear and underpinning requirements of reward structure is ambiguous. Hsieh and Hsieh (2003) and Siegall (2000) argued that such type of ambiguity can lead to demotivation and contradictory demands in the working environment. This ambiguity becomes challenging when an individual is torn between the dissimilar expectations held by people that are in a higher position and authority. Poon's (2003) study established that high job ambiguity and low level of trust climate are antecedents of POP.

Autonomy

Job autonomy is the scope to which work allows the independence, freedom or discretion to make decisions, schedule work, or choice of methods used to perform work tasks (Hackman and Oldham, 1974, 1976). A focus exclusively on the characteristics of a job can miss the ways in which jobs are embedded in networks of relationships (Brass, 1981). The autonomy of the individual is affected by the surrounding structure of relationships. A densely connected group of work partners facilitates the development of trust and the monitoring and enforcement of norms of reciprocity (Coleman, 1990). Comprehensive summaries of the literature on job design and the job characteristics model provide supporting evidence that jobs regarded as challenging, meaningful, and autonomous are more satisfying and more intrinsically motivating (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Humphrey et al., 2007).

Autonomy is intrinsically motivating, tapping an employee's desire for a sense of control, responsibility and constructive change (Fuller et al., 2006), resulting in greater effort and persistence (Morgeson and Campion, 2003). Job autonomy also allows for one to more effectively leverage his or her existing knowledge and skills, fostering the development of new knowledge and contributions at work (Parker et al., 1997). Further, job autonomy allows employees to broaden the scope of responsibility and expand the view of their own work roles (that is role breadth), leading to extra effort, stronger identity with the job, and better performance (Morgeson et al., 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

Feedback

Feedback can be defined as the degree to which employees can obtain information on the effectiveness of their job performance. It is the degree to which employees obtain information as they are working which reveals how well they are performing on the job (Turner and Lawrence, 1965; Hackman and Lawler, 1971). Feedback concerning job performance is likely to be richer and more diverse to the extent that individuals' work connects them to people or groups who are not themselves working together. To the extent that the individual is constrained within a closed network of people whose work connects them to each other, then the individual is likely to receive redundant information concerning work performance and other aspects of tasks. A job that provides direct feedback on an employee's job performance will have a higher degree of feedback than a job that provides indirect or no feedback (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

Skill variety

Likewise, skill variety is likely to be affected by the extent to which the individual's personal network (of friends and acquaintances within the organization) resembles a closed network or an open network of relatively unconnected people. Turner and Lawrence (1965) and Hackman and Lawler (1971) defined skill variety as "the degree to which a job requires employees to perform a wide range of operations in their work and/or the degree to which employees must use a variety of equipment and procedures in their work". An open network can provide the individual with a variety of communications that can foster creative solutions to work-related problems, or lead to innovations in jobs (Burt, 2004). Such creative activity naturally increases skill variety.

Job satisfaction, organisational commitment and perceptions of organisational politics (POP)

Job satisfaction is a multi disciplinary concept and Locke
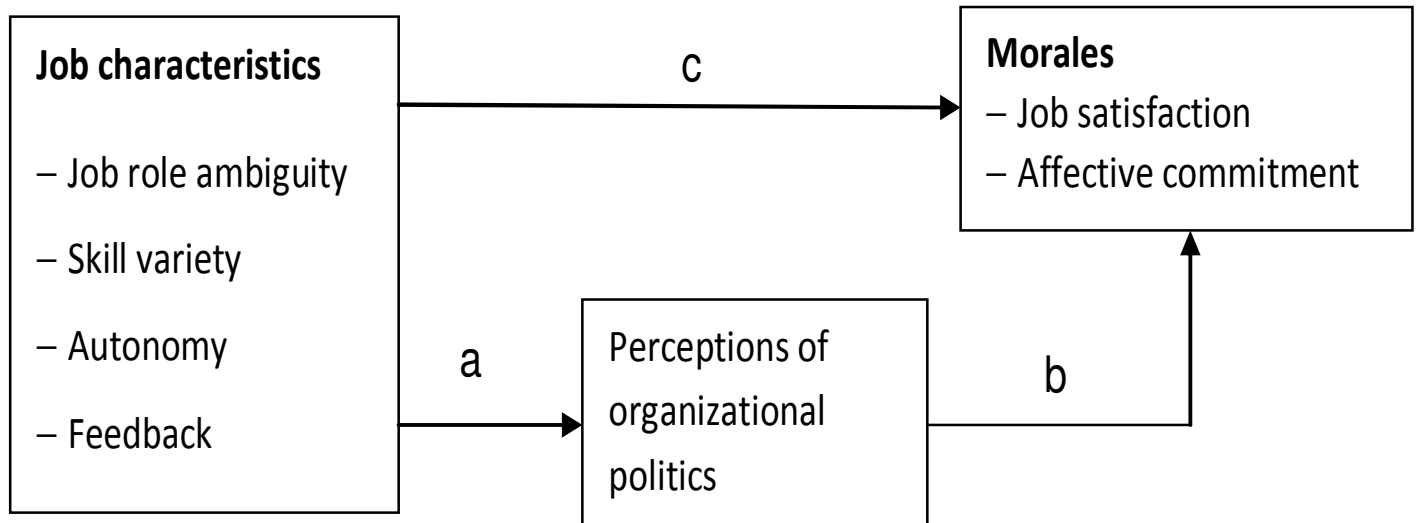
Figure 1. Proposed model of mediating role of perceptions of organizational politics.

(1969) presented acceptable definition of this concept which was later followed by many researchers. According to him, job satisfaction is an affirmative emotional situation that is the outcome of positive or favorable working conditions within an organization. Ferris (1989) observed that higher the perceptions of organizational politics lower the level of job satisfaction of employees. Gandz and Murray (1980); Ferris and Kacmar (1991) and Bodla and Danish (2009) also confirmed negative relationship between these two variables. Ferris and Frink et al. (1996) suggested that job satisfaction in general and satisfaction with supervision is more influenced by POP. However, Parker et al. (1995) found that organizational politics is not correlated with job in any considerable manner. Empirical studies have found that the core job characteristics are related to employee attitudes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention (Sainfort et al., 2005; Saks, 2006). Employee's job satisfaction and commitment is influenced by outcomes directly derived or by factors associated with the work itself such as achievement in the work, the nature of their jobs, chances for personal growth and recognition and promotion opportunities.

From aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses and model (Figure 1) can be proposed;

H_{1a}: Job characteristics (skill variety and autonomy) will be positively related to perceptions of organisational politics.
H_{1b}: Job characteristics (job ambiguity, feedback) will be negatively related to perceptions of organisational politics.
H_2: Job characteristics (job ambiguity, skill variety, autonomy, feedback) will be positively related to morale (job satisfaction, affective commitment).
H_3: Perceptions of organisational politics will be negatively related to morale (job satisfaction, affective commitment).
H_4: Perceptions of organisational politics will mediate the relationship between job characteristics and morale.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and sample

Purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from such employees who are well aware of the policies of organization and free to respond away from their respective organization. Part time executive class students, were chosen for this purpose were enrolled in MBA evening after fulfilling their routine duties. The empirical evidence is based on the national level sample data as collected through self administered questionnaires from executives of multitude of Pakistani industries such as health, manufacturing, energy, financial services, education, telecommunication and information technology. The sample comprised of 577 respondents. Overall 600 questionnaires were distributed among which 589 were returned, three were discarded due to multiple responses on the same items, 9 were rejected due to incomplete data reporting, thus comprising of 96% useable responses. The participation in this survey was voluntary ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Measurement of variables

Job characteristics

Although, many job characteristics have been reported by researchers but we have focused only on job ambiguity, skill variety, autonomy and feedback.

Job ambiguity

"Job ambiguity refers to the degree of equivocality surrounding the job environment. In high job ambiguity situations, employees are

unclear about their work objectives, roles and what they have to do to get rewarded" (Ashforth and Lee, 1990). Job ambiguity was measured by work method ambiguity, a scale developed by Breaugh and Colihan's (1994). 5 anchored likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Skill variety

To perform different tasks different skills are required. Skill variety is different from job enlargement in which might employees may require to perform more duties, but same type of skills are required. Skill variety has been defined by Hackman and Oldham's (1975) as "the degree to which a job requires a variety of challenging skills and abilities". Skill variety was measured by job diagnostic survey developed by Hackman and Oldham's (1974). 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Autonomy

Autonomy provides employees control and discretion over job related activities and decisions. For the purpose of this study Hackman and Oldham's (1975) definition will be used which state the autonomy as "the degree to which the job gives the worker freedom and independence in scheduling work and determining how the work will be carried out". Autonomy was measured by job diagnostic survey developed by Hackman and Oldham's (1974). 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Feedback

According to Hackman and Oldham's (1975), feedback is "the degree to which the worker gets information about the effectiveness of his or her efforts, either directly from the work itself or from others". Autonomy was measured by job diagnostic survey developed by Hackman and Oldham's (1974). 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Perception of organizational politics

Perception of organizational politics is the "degree to which respondents view their work environment as political and therefore unjust and unfair" (Ferris et al., 1989). A 9 items revised version of POPS was used which was developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) and has three subscales. 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Morale

Morale of the employees was measured through job satisfaction and affective commitment.

Job satisfaction

"Job satisfaction is a positive emotional state that arises when people appraise their job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976). Respondents were asked to respond on three items job satisfaction scale developed by Hackman and Oldham 1975. 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Affective commitment

"The strength of an individuals identification with and involvement in a particular organization characterized by three factors a) strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values, b) a readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and c) a strong desire to remain a member of organization" (Mowday et al., 1979). It was measured by using Allen and Meyer's (1990) 6 items version of affective commitment scale. 5 anchored Likert type scale was used in ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

FINDINGS

Among 577 respondents, males were dominant (about 90%), 62% were married and 28% within age group 30 to 39. 32% employees were from public sector. Most of the respondents were from financial services (36%). 24% employees were from large establishments where more than 500 employees were the part of that organization.

Mean standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficients are given in Table 1. Job Ambiguity has highest mean value (3.86) with standard deviation 0.73 and lowest value is for perceptions of organisational politics (M=3.00, SD=0.50). All the variables are strongly correlated with perceptions of organisational politics except autonomy which is not significant even at $p<0.05$. Job ambiguity, skill variety, feedback, job satisfaction and affective commitment are negatively correlated with perceptions of organisational politics.

Mediation tests

Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the fitness of casual relationship. The casual model has GFI =.94, AGFI=.90, CFI=.79, NFI .74, TLI=.70, RMR=.09, RMESA=.07 and Chi-square =236, df=56. The overall model is a good fit though not a perfect fit. Since the GFI (goodness of fit index) and AGFI (adjusted goodness of fit index) are greatly influenced by the sample size so the CFI (comparative fit index) and RMESA (root mean square error of approximation) are considered more appropriate for model explanation. The CFI, GFI and AGFI values close to one indicate good fit. The value of RMESA close to 0.00 indicates good fit. The results reveal that, intervening effects of organizational politics are prominent in relating job characteristics with morale.

Findings of Table 2 show the regression analysis results of independent variable (job characteristics), mediating variable (perceptions of organisational politics) and dependent variable (morale). Findings show regression coefficients, standard error of relationship and significance of relationship (p-value) between variables. Findings depict that there is significant relationship between job characteristics and morale (p=0.000<0.01). Considering relation between independent variable (job characteristics) and mediating variable (perceptions of organizational politics), strong relation was found

Table 1. Mean standard deviation and Pearson correlation among variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Job ambiguity	3.8608	0.73681						
Skill variety	3.5326	0.79843	0.428(**)					
Autonomy	3.4258	0.76674	0.383(**)	0.319(**)				
Feedback	3.6984	0.73148	0.473(**)	0.498(**)	0.348(**)			
Perceptions of organisational politics	3.0000	0.50210	-0.125(**)	-0.154(**)	0.005	-0.096(*)		
Job satisfaction	3.5829	0.67822	0.366(**)	0.289(**)	0.194(**)	0.299(**)	-0.333(**)	
Affective commitment	3.3744	0.59484	0.460(**)	0.380(**)	0.248(**)	0.383(**)	-0.266(**)	0.489(**)

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Regression analysis results.

Regression analysis results	
Reg coeff for the association between job characteristics and morale	0.2108
Standard error of c	0.0329
P value of c	0.0000
Reg coeff for the association between job characteristics and perceptions of organizational politics	-0.1591
Standard error of a (S_a)	0.0336
P value of a	0.0000
Reg coeff for the association between the perceptions of organizational politics and job characteristics on morale	-0.2534
Standard error of b (S_b)	0.0396
P value of b	0.0000

Significant at the 0.01 Level.

between both the variables (p=0.000<0.01) and relation between mediating (perceptions of organisational politics) and dependent variable (morale) is highly significant (p=0.000<0.01). Regression co-efficients of all the relations show how strong or weak association one variable has with other variable. Negative values with coefficients show the negative association between the variables. In all three cases the associations are significant.

Sobel test for mediation was used to judge mediation effects of perceptions of organisational politics on the relationship between job characteristics and morale. Findings suggest that, perceptions of organisational politics partially mediate relationship between job characteristics and morale. The mediation relationship value is also significant (p=0.000<0.01). Similarly Goodman test also show that perceptions of organizational politics strongly mediates

relationship between job characteristics and morale.

Table 3 shows the strength of mediation effect due to mediating variable. 19.13% of the effect of independent variable on dependent variable is caused by mediation. The ratio of indirect to the direct effect also shows that effect of independent variable on dependent variable through mediating variable is higher than the direct effect on dependent variable.

Table 3. Mediation analysis results.

Sobel	*p* value	% of the total mediated effect	Ratio of the indirect to the direct effect	Goodman test	*p* value	Goodman II test	*p* value
3.80699	0.00014	19.130548	0.236561	7.447488	0.00016	3.837367	0.00012

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find the relationship between various job characteristics and morale as well as to test whether POP mediates this relationship or not. We proposed a model on the basis of relevant review of literature and tested it through structural equation modeling. Mediation paths were also tested through regression analysis followed by Sobel and Goodman criteria for mediation testing. Four hypotheses were developed among which H2, H3, H4 were fully supported but H1 was partially supported. H1a and H1b were about the relationship of job characteristics with perceptions of organizational politics which was supposed to be positive for skill variety and autonomy and negative for role ambiguity and feedback. But we found that only autonomy was positively related to POP but this relationship is weak and not significant. Skill variety was negatively and significantly related to POP and these results are inconsistent with most of the previous studies of organizational politics (Poon, 2003; Ashforth and Lee, 1990; Ferris et al., 1996). However, we can also trace back to some evidences in which organizational politics is not correlated with job in any considerable manner (Parker et al., 1995). Feedback was also negatively correlated which is according to the Rosen et al. (2006) model. Job ambiguity scores were high which show that there is less job ambiguity in the organizations. The basic factor in relating job ambiguity with perceptions of organizational politics is uncertainty about getting things done but most of the people are certain about their roles and how to accomplish these.

In the absence of such uncertainty the roles are clear and every member of organization is aware of his or her job description. The procedures and policies in such organizations are well defined andclear. In other words, they know what is the best approach to go about to get the work done. The jobs of employees provide no variety and as such their work is monotonous and they are engaged day to day routine work. The use of new technologies is missing. Negative relationship with feedback is consistent with previous studies. When employees are given feedback how well they are performing on their work and how can they make their effort better. When there is rationale and just feedback on performance of employees, there is very little chance for the flourishment of politics perceptions. Hence the result is much in line with the hypothesized relationship. Communication with supervisor on different issues and recognition from them on good performance is very important to excel in a career. Moreover, coworkers also play very important role in providing the true appraisal of performance. Relationships with workers in diverse parts of the organization may provide the individual with a broader, enhanced perspective on how his/her job affects others in the organization.

Autonomy is positively related with perceptions of organizational politics which is quite consistent with the previous studies but this relationship is very weak contrary to the hypothesized strong relationship. Formalization and role clarity leave nothing with the employees to do by their own. Although, they may act independently but their supervisors are aware of their performance. However, self directed flexibility of working hours is such an opportunity which can be practiced widely to avoid absenteeism and keeping work and family life in balance.

Morale of the employees has been measured through their level of satisfaction and affective commitment. Employee's job satisfaction and commitment is influenced by factors associated with the work itself or by outcomes directly derived from it such as the nature of the jobs, achievement in the work, promotion opportunities, and chances for personal growth and recognition. H3 stated that there is negative relationship between morale and perceptions of organizational politics. Employees are generally satisfied with their work and with their job. They perceive their organization less politicized and hence more satisfied with promotion and pay policies, reward system and merit system. They do not want to quit from their existing jobs and willing to spend rest of their careers with that particular organization. They feel emotionally attached and a great sense of belonging with their organizations. Mean scores of job satisfaction and affective commitment are much higher (M=3.58, M=3.37) than perceptions of politics (M=3.00). H4 was about the mediating role of perceptions of organizational politics in relationship between job characteristics and morale. Different tests confirmed this hypothesized

mediation mechanism according to which job characteristics affect morale of employees through perceptions of organizational politics such that higher the perceptions lower the level of morale of the employees.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

There are various policy implications for managers based on this study. To perform his/her role at job, an employee must be aware of the expectations of management from him in terms of his rights, duties and responsibilities. Employee must be well communicated on how he/she can fulfill his responsibilities by obeying the formal line of hierarchy and command. Employee should have well equipped in his employee orientation program about his role and how he/she can achieve them. In other words he should be clarified what are the means and the ends. The managers must propagate how one can be beneficial for self, for others and for the organization. The job must provide a lot of variety so that employees may avoid monotonous environment at their workplace and ultimately their morale will increase. Job enrichment and job enlargement can play important role in this regard. New emerging technologies and devices must be installed and introduced to increase the interest of employees in any project. Feedback environment of the employees must be based on supervisor evaluation as well as peers. Managers can devise many strategies and reward plans to associate the feedback of employees in some encouraging ways like annual award to employee or unit. Job descriptions of the employees must be made in consultation with experienced employees in that particular unit roles of employee clearly stated. Although, independence at job is desirable but this autonomy should be allowable within the prescribed rules and procedures.

LIMITATIONS

The job characteristics used in this study are based on the previous literature in the area of organizational politics. We did not include task identity and task significance from job characteristics model which may also provide some insights into political environment. Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) also identified other characteristics such as physical demands and social support that may provide a much broader picture of the nature of job characteristics at the workplace. Other limitations of the present study include the cross-sectional nature of the design. With a cross-sectional study, one should be vigilant in making causal inferences from the results. The existence of common method bias could be another limitation because all of the information was collected from a single source. Since the study involves measuring employee attitudes, collecting information from multiple sources was not an option.

Guidelines for future research

Jobs that are perceived with a high degree of characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback are perceived as highly desirable (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Thus, future researchers may consider studying task identity, task significance, as important job characteristics to influence the attitudes of workers. Moreover we did not segregate contractual and permanent employees and in future it is required to treat them differently. Whereas the proposed direction of relationships among variables in the study is supported by existing theory and a number of published studies, it may be possible, for example, that employees in the sample were able to "craft" the boundaries and responsibilities of their jobs (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), altering the autonomy experienced at work. Future research in this area may use more comprehensive job design models. In the present research, we did not consider the mediating role of psychological states on the relationship between job characteristics and employee morale. Future studies may include this factor as the mediating variable in the research design.

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