

Perceived Organizational Support and Employees' Safety Consciousness: Mediating Role of Trust Ifzal Ahmad

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of perceived organizational support (independent) on employees' safety consciousness (dependent) with mediating role of trust. Data were collected from a large multinational bank in Islamabad, Pakistan and a sample size (i.e. N = 199) were recorded. Proposed hypotheses were tested via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique using AMOS 18. Results indicate a significant positive impact of perceived organizational support on employees' safety consciousness. Furthermore, the mediating role of trust between the independent and dependent variables was also supported from the results. Findings are discussed.

Key words: Perceived Organizational Support, Employees' Safety Consciousness, Trust

INTRODUCTION

The development of industrialization and service sector has increased the concerns for a healthy and safe workplace for employees in the past few decades. Occupational health & safety has always been leading challenge for workers, particularly, in developing countries. In countries like Pakistan, the situation of workplace safety is far worse than the developed economies. Among some of the recent workplace incidents in the country claiming precious lives and damages to properties are the famous incident of Karachi Baldia Town factory claiming 289 lives in 2012 and the collapse of factory in Lahore claiming lives of more than 45 laborers in 2015 while wounding several others (Effendi, 2015).

The economic cost of occupational safety is also enormous. According to the ILO report published in 2009, occupational safety costs 4% of the GDP of a country. It also strains further the health & care system of a country. Organizations also have to pay huge sums of money in compensations, medical assistance and health insurance policies etc. Therefore, the topic is of enormous importance for organizations in order to formulate various strategies and processes to tackle this menace and save precious lives and resources. To this backdrop, various researchers have attempted to study the notion, its predictors and its relationships with various policies and procedures of organizations (Abbas, 2015; Barling, Kelloway, & Loughlin, 2002; Puah, Ong & Chong, 2016).

Among the different predictors, we contend that Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is a key predictor which may impact employees' safety consciousness at

workplace. Research also suggests that POS from various members of the organization may enhance safety outcomes (Mearns & Reader, 2008). In line with this research, this study focuses on studying the impact of perceived organizational support on employees' safety perception at workplace. My contention is that various organizational supporting policies will positively impact employees' safety consciousness. However, this relationship has seldom attracted researchers' attention (Puah, 2016) particularly, from Pakistani perspective.

Furthermore, employees' trust over the organization plays a key mediating role in predicting employees' attitudes and behaviors (Hansen, 2011). It is defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trust is the key determinant between employees and organization's relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Therefore, we contend that trust will also mediate the relationship between POS and employees' safety consciousness. However, this assertion also needs empirical investigation. While utilizing the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), I am attempting to fill these research gaps identified above i.e. the impact of POS on employees' safety attitude with mediating role of trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organization support (POS) is the perception of employees about the support from their organizations. It is defined as the employees belief that organization takes care of their needs and requirements and valuing their contributions (Krishnan and Mary, 2012). Other authors like Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) termed the notion as the eminence of reciprocal exchange between and employee and employer. Past studies suggest that employees observe their organization's approach toward them. They form their judgments based on treatment that they receive from them. If their organization's values their contributions, appreciates and rewards it, positive judgment will be formed as reciprocity (Balu, 1964; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986).

Social exchange theorists suggest that employee observed their employers' behavior and make judgments based on the same. The notion of reciprocity associated with the social exchange comes into play in such

relationships. If employees believe that their organization values their contributions and taking care of their physical and emotional needs at work, they will reciprocate similar response in the form of positive judgments (Balu, 1964) such as enhanced POS. Among the various examples of POS is their inclusion in various decisions making processes, providing opportunities for growth and development, adequate rewards for their achievements and taking care of their workplace health & safety. Hutchison, (1997) similarly, behavior and style of leadership and manager with employees also affect their POS (Eisenberger, 1986). Studies suggest that POS is cherished as guarantee that support to the employees will be available for working effectively on the job and at the time of need too (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

POS and Employees' Safety Consciousness

Past studies suggest that perception of safety climate predicts occupational health & safety motivation, safety knowledge and safety behaviors (Griffen & Neal, 2000). Barling (2002) suggested that "safety consciousness focuses on individuals' own awareness of safety issues". The authors further argued that safety consciousness exist both at cognitive and behavior levels. This means that employees awareness about general safety as well as the knowledge of the required behaviors to ensure safety (Barling, 2002). Utilizing the social exchange theory, I predict that employees' safety consciousness will be affected by POS.

My contention is that if employees experience various supportive policies and practices at the workplace such as training and development opportunities, career growth, active grievance resolution and fair treatment etc., their safety consciousness will be enhanced. They will believe that their organization's orientation is towards their positive wellbeing and healthy work environment (Turner, Tucker & Chmiel, 2008). The social exchange theorists also argue that employees' evaluation of their organization's health & safety regulations will also be high if their POS is high in terms of their structure and meaningfulness (DeJoy, Della, & Vandenberg, 2010; Puah et al. 2016). Past studies have also predicted the relationship between POS and employees' safety performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore *H1: There will be a positive relationship between perceived organizational safety and employees' safety consciousness.*

Mediating Role of Trust between POS and Safety Consciousness

Organizational trust is among the most important antecedent of organizational sustainability (Cook & Wall, 1980). Past studies have termed trust as a key predictor of firm's performance (Darrough, 2006). Based on the definition of trust provided earlier, trust has three main antecedents i.e. integrity, benevolent and morality (Mayer, 1995). Integrity means the belief in second party's honest, truthfulness and fairness; benevolent means that the second party's attitudes are not based on selfish and instrumental

gains; whereas, morality means that the second party is an ethical person or organization which will uphold their promises (Bauman & Skitka, 2012; De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012).

Past studies suggest that trust is positively associated with job performance (Mishra, 1996); identification (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (Hansen, 2011) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) etc. Additionally, other studies have also noted positive association between support and trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Singh & Malhotra, 2015). Therefore, in line with these studies, we contend that trust will also mediate the relationship between POS and safety consciousness. Our contention is based on the social exchange theory where we argue that if employees POS is enhanced due to various factors noted above, then, employees trust over their organizations will be enhanced. They will perceive that their organizations are moral and do not renege on their commitments (Bauman & Skitka, 2012). An enhanced trust will consequently enhance employees' safety consciousness because employees will form positive judgments in response to the positive support (POS) as reciprocity. Employees would believe that moral and benevolent organization does not cheat with their employees (Bauman & Skitka, 2012) and hence they will also promote and advocate for a safe working environment i.e. enhancing employees' safety consciousness. Therefore *H2: Trust will mediate the relationship between perceived organization support and safety consciousness.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected by adopting a quantitative methodology. A questionnaire was designed for this purpose which comprised of scales measuring the three variables under study and demographic information. All the variables (except demographic information) were measured via Likert scale of 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. The focus of study was a large multinational bank operating across Pakistan where the data were collected via convenience sampling technique from Islamabad only. Participants were assured complete anonymity and confidentiality. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed among which, a total of 199 completely filled were shortlisted for final analysis thereby providing a response rate of 56.8%.

Among the total, 23.1% employees were between the age group of 26-30, 32.2% were in the age group of 31-40, 28.6% between 41 and 50 and 16.1% were in the age group of 51 and above. Similarly, 67.8% respondents were male whereas, 32.2% were females. Finally, 16.1% employees were having an education of intermediate/higher secondary school, 40.7% were having bachelor's degree and remaining 43.2% were masters or above qualified.

Measurement Scales

The scale for measuring perceived organizational support was adopted from the work of Colakoglu, (2010) who adopted it from the work of (Eisenberger et al. 1986). It is a five items' scale and a sample item was "My

organization strongly considers my values". The Cronbach reliability (α) for the scale was recorded as 0.97. Similarly, the scale for measuring safety consciousness was adopted from the work of (Barling et al. 2002). It is a seven point scale and a sample item is "I do not use equipment that I feel is unsafe". The value of Cronbach alpha (α) was recorded as 0.97. Finally, the scale for trust was adopted from (Pivato, 2008). It was a three items' scale with a sample item "I trust my organization" and a Cronbach alpha (α) was recorded as 0.95.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Measurement Model Results

The researcher used Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to measure the adequacy of the proposed model. The results (see Table 1) indicate that data fits our model well: $\chi^2 = 224.75$, ($p < 0.05$); $\chi^2/df = 2.5 (> 2)$; NFI = 0.95 ($> .90$); CFI = 0.97 ($> .90$); RMR = 0.02 (< 0.1); RMSEA = 0.08 (= 0.08). Similarly, standard factor loading (SFL) for each item were well above the minimum value of 0.5. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) also satisfied its minimum requirements i.e. 0.7 and 0.5 respectively. Hence, the data satisfied all the requirements for convergent and discriminant validity too (see Table 1 for complete results).

Table 1

Factor Loadings, Reliabilities and Validity Results

Item number	SFL*	Alpha (α)	CR*	AVE*
Perceived Organization Support (POS)				
POS1	0.91	0.97	0.68	0.87
POS2	0.94			
POS3	0.92			
POS4	0.96			
POS5	0.94			
Employees Organizational Trust (EOT)				
EOT1	0.95	0.95	0.68	0.86
EOT2	0.91			
EOT3	0.92			
Safety Consciousness (SC)				
SC1	0.89	0.97	0.69	0.83
SC2	0.92			
SC3	0.92			
SC4	0.91			
SC5	0.91			
SC6	0.93			
SC7	0.91			

$\chi^2 = 224.75$, ($p < 0.05$); $\chi^2/df = 2.5 (> 2)$; NFI = 0.95 ($> .90$); CFI = 0.97 ($> .90$); RMR = 0.02 (< 0.1); RMSEA = 0.08 (= 0.08)

*SFL = Standard Factors Loading, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Following the CFA, the next step was to measure the structural equation model (SEM) for our proposed hypothesis. We tested a model comprised of indirect link from dependent to independent variable only as well as compared the same with the one with having direct paths too. The model with having the direct paths was found to be significantly better than the one without direct path i.e. $\chi^2 = 224.75$, ($p < 0.05$); $\chi^2/df = 2.5 (> 2)$; NFI = 0.95 ($> .90$); CFI = 0.97 ($> .90$); RMR = 0.02 (< 0.1); RMSEA = 0.08 (= 0.08). Therefore, this model was retained.

The results for my proposed hypothesis can be seen in figure 1. In hypothesis H1, a direct impact of POS

of safety consciousness was proposed. The results supports this hypothesis i.e. $\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$. Similarly, in hypothesis H2, a mediating role of employees' organizational trust was proposed between POS and employees' safety consciousness. The findings supports this hypothesis too i.e. $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$. Since, both the direct and indirect paths were significant therefore, a partial mediating role of employees' organizational trust was supported.

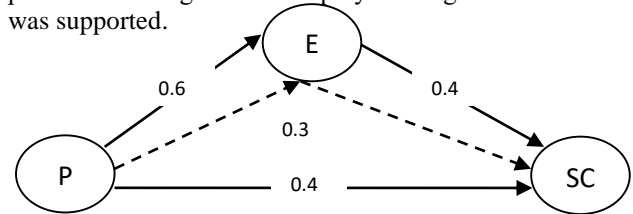


Figure 1: Results for Hypotheses

Dotted line represents indirect effect

** denotes < 0.01 . EOT = Employees Organizational Trust, POS = Perceived Organizational Support, SC = Safety Consciousness.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the impact of perceived organizational support on employees' safety consciousness (H1) with mediating role of employees' organizational trust (H2). The results support both the proposed hypotheses which mean that POS does have an impact on the employees' safety consciousness. This means that if POS enhances, the safety consciousness enhances and if POS reduces then it will also reduce the safety consciousness of employees. This is a novel finding in the extant literature of occupation health and safety particularly, from the developing country i.e. Pakistan's perspective. To the best of researcher knowledge, such study is the first one. Past studies on POS have findings closely related to my results which suggest that POS of various organizational representatives may enhance employees' safety and health related outcomes (Mearns & Reader, 2008).

This finding is in line with the previous studies where author suggested that POS leads to enhanced commitment, organizational identification and organizational citizenship behavior (Rhoads & Eisenberger, 2002), job satisfaction, organizational commitment i.e. affective, normative and continuance (Colakuglo, 2010). Therefore, I argue that POS is also a key predictor of occupational health and safety.

Furthermore, this study contributes additional knowledge by testing the mediating role of trust between POS and employees' safety consciousness. Researchers in the past studied the mediating role of trust between POS and organizational silence (Singh & Malhotra, 2015). My study was novel in a sense that the dependent variable employees' safety consciousness instead of silence as well as, the study settings i.e. country's cultures were also different from each other. Therefore, this surely is a valuable contribution of my research in the extant literature of POS, occupational health & safety and organizational trust. Past studies also suggest that trust is a strong predictor of various organizational outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Hansen et al. 2011; Mayer, 1995).

Our findings are also in line with these previous studies and hence we also conclude that trust is a strong predictor in enhancing or reducing employees' safety consciousness. Hence, we suggest that the higher the evaluation of POS the higher the employees' organizational trust because they will feel honored, protected and valuable (Singh & Malhotra, 2015). They will think that organization is supporting their employees. This support can be from the direct managers and supervisors, co-workers or senior management etc. Researchers argue that no matter the support is coming from any person in the company, it will be perceived as an organizational support because managers/supervisors are the faces of their organizations (Means & Reader, 2008).

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