The Mediating Role of Employee Commitment on the Relationship between Perceived Supervisor Support and Role Reversal

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Abstract

The concept of employee commitment is acquiring greater significance among academic circles and practitioners in India. Even though literature on employee commitment has blossomed progressively over the past two decades, there is a relative shortage of empirical studies in this area, especially in Indian context. The objective of the present study is to extend the research on the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal by examining the mediating role of employee commitment. Respondents to the survey were 200 employees working in three SPVs (Special purpose vehicle) in Kerala, India. Correlation & regression analysis were used to test the research hypothesis. Specifically Baron & Kenny’s method was used for testing the hypothesis of mediation. Results indicate the significant relationship exist between perceived supervisor support and employee commitment, perceived supervisor support & role reversal. Employee commitment was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal. This study provides insight into the influence of perceived supervisor support and employee commitment on role reversal. An important contribution of this paper is positioning employee commitment as a means through which organizational resources are linked to employee outcomes.

Keywords: India, Employee Commitment, Supervisor, Role Reversal, Mediation

Introduction

Employee commitment is a desirable condition and it has been extensively discussed in the research literature. Organization realizes that committed employees play a crucial role in achieving sustainable success and competitive advantage. Committed employee is the one who is optimistic, highly focussed on his work, enthusiastic and willing to go an extra mile to contribute to sustainable organizational success. Hence much research is going to uncover the antecedents of employee commitment.
Enhancing employee commitment is a challenging task. Research studies have shown the positive effects of supervisor support on employee commitment. Williamson (2005) argued that not everything can be written into a contract. Ever since his argument, scholars have acknowledged the role of trust and informal relationships in formal agreements. This stream of research is otherwise known as relational governance research. Over the past decade, understanding the determinants of commitment has become the utmost concern to human resource managers, business leaders, and academic researchers because of the widely held belief that committed workforce produce superior organizational outcomes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Partnership requires a commitment to a common goal through the joint provision of complementary resources and expertise and the joint sharing of risk involved. The relationship between the employee and the supervisor is essential to motivate workers for excellent performance. Meta-analysis of Meyer et al. shows negative correlation between role states (Role ambiguity: -0.39, role conflict: -0.30, and role overload) and contract commitment. This study examines the influence of perceived supervisor support on role reversal.

Positive relationship is shown between perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational commitment. One of the important variables for POS is supervisor support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002 meta analysis). According to Loi et al. (2006) there is a positive correlation between perception of organizational support (r=0.67) and organizational commitment. A special reference to social exchange theory which speaks about the reciprocal relationship based on moral norms. Employees will be committed to the extent they perceive fairness in the exchange process between them and their organization (Gouldner, 1960). This paper also examines the influence of role reversal on employee commitment in the Indian context. Here role reversal is considered as a mediating variable. The study also examines the effect of role reversal as a means through which perceived supervisor support influences employee commitment towards the contract. Although role reversal is posited to play a mediating role, empirical studies examining role reversal as a means through which organizations create competitive advantage is scarce. This research proposes role reversal as a mechanism through which perceived supervisor support influences employee commitment towards contract in the Indian context.

**Literature Review & Hypothesis Development**

**Employee commitment**

Commitment involves willingness of employees to exert higher efforts on behalf of the organization, a strong desire to stay in the organization and willingness to accept major goals and values of the organization (Porter 1968). Organizational commitment is the strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization, characterized by three psychological factors: desire to remain in the organization, willingness to exert considerable effort on its behalf, and belief in and acceptance of its goals and values (Porters, Steer, Mowday & Caldwell, 1974). There is an identification of three distinct themes in the definition of commitment: commitment as an affective attachment to the organization
(Affective commitment) commitment as a perceived cost associated with leaving the organization (Continuance commitment) and commitment as an obligation to remain in the organization (Normative commitment)(Meyer & Allen (1991). Commitment refers to a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets (Cohen 2003).

Perceived supervisor support, Role reversal and employee commitment

Perceived supervisor support is defined as the degree to which employees form impressions that their supervisors care about their wellbeing, value their contributions and are generally supportive (Eisenberger et al. 2002). Direct supervisors are usually the closest organizational link to the employee and they have the ability to communicate the organizations intentions directly to their subordinates (Levinson, 1965). According to Levinson (1965) as supervisors act as agents of the organization, perceived supervisor support should facilitate positive attitudes towards the organization in general. When the relationship between the supervisor and the employee is characterised by trust, obligations and socio emotional resources and a long term orientation, the employees should perceive the exchange relationship as social (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2012). Thus employees who experience good treatment by their organization are likely to “give back” with more favourable attitudes towards their employer (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Empirical studies have shown that supervisor support have a consistent positive relationship with commitment (Walumbwa et. al, 2005). Based on the social exchange theory we expect that perceived supervisor support is positively related to employee commitment (Gouldner, 1960). The leaders of successful organization emotionally relate with their employees. A supervisor helps subordinates realize that the job they are doing is important and each of them can contribute to the success of the organization. Studies signify the positive impact of supervisory support on role reversal (Elango, 2007). Therefore it is likely that perceived supervisor support is positively related to role reversal

Based on social action theory, it is proposed that commitment to a social system will be influenced by the way the system is organized (Kanter, 1968).

Employee commitment & Role reversal

Research examining the relationship between role states and organizational commitment says that correlation between role states and organizational commitment in general has been found to be moderate. No theoretical framework to expound this relationship (Mathieu & Hamet, 1989, Meyer, 2001). It has been postulated that employees will be committed to the extent they perceive fairness in the exchange process between them & their organization (Social exchange theory, Gouldner 1960 & Blau 1964). The core tenets of relational exchange theory suggest the inclusion of the participants of both the sides of the exchange relationship and the importance of the perceptions that impact on social relationship (Styles et. al 2008). Role reversal is a situation in which someone adopts a role the reverse of that which they normally assume in
relation to someone else, who typically assumes their role in exchange. Therefore based on the previous literature we propose that employee commitment is positively related to role reversal.

**Mediating role of employee commitment**

The postulation of EJP (Employee justice perception) model of commitment is that organizational resources (here it is perceived as supervisor support) are linked to positive outcomes through employee commitment. The presence of organizational resources help employees experience positive emotions. Mathew & zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen 1997 observed that commitment mediated the relationship between organizational resources & turn over intentions. Hamel, 1989 found negative correlation between organizational commitment & role strain. In this line it is expected that employee commitment mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support & Role reversal.

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

![Research framework diagram]

**Research framework**

Based on the above discussions the following hypothesis are posited

H1: Perceived supervisor support is positively related to Employee commitment

H2: Employee commitment is positively related to role reversal

H3: Perceived supervisor support is positively related to role reversal

H4: Employee commitment mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal

**Measures**

Three main instruments derived from the literature are used to measure the variables. Perceived supervisor support is measured by the four item scale adapted by Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli (2001) from the survey of perceived organizational support. Employee commitment is measured using 21 item OCS (Organization commitment scale) developed by Meyer & Allen. To measure role reversal three approach scale is used.
Method
The target population of the research is comprised of 200 employees working in three selected SPVs (Special purpose vehicle) in central Kerala. Data is planned to be collected through structured questionnaires.

Data Analysis
To test the study hypothesis, correlation & regression analysis is planned to utilize with the help of SPSS 21.0. Baron and Kenny’s (1986) is using for testing the mediation effect of employee commitment on the relationship between perceived supervisor support and role reversal. Sobel z test (Sobel, 1982) is used as a means of further testing the mediation.

Result Analysis
Mean, standard deviations and inter-correlations between the study variables are shown below. Reliability coefficients are given in the brackets.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived supervisor support</td>
<td>3.721</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td>(.756)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee commitment</td>
<td>3.723</td>
<td>.666</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>(.881)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role reversal</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.690</td>
<td>.466**</td>
<td>.729**</td>
<td>(.713)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**correlation significant at 0.01 level

Table 1 shows that all the study variables are significantly and positively correlated with each other (p<.01). Thus hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are supported.

Employee commitment as a mediator
Baron & Kenny’s (1986) technique was used for testing the predicted mediation of employee commitment on perceived supervisor support-role reversal relationship. According to this method there is a support for mediation if (i) independent variable (PSS) relates to dependent
variable (RR) (ii) independent variable (PSS) relates to mediating variable (EC) (iii) Mediating variable EC related to dependent variable (RR) (iv) the relationship of the independent variable with dependent variable is reduced significantly (Partial mediation) or remains no longer significant (Full mediation) when controlled for mediator. All these conditions were tested by performing three separate regression analysis. Role reversal (Dependent variable) was regressed on perceived supervisor support (Independent variable). This relationship is significant & positive ($\beta=0.466$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.217$). Role reversal was regressed on employee commitment (mediator) and the relationship was significant & positive ($\beta=.729$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.528$). Employee commitment was regressed on perceived supervisor support and it was significant & positive ($\beta=.415$, $p<.05$, $R^2=.172$). Finally role reversal was regressed on perceived supervisor support while controlling for employee commitment. The model was significant. Perceived supervisor support & employee commitment together explained 55.8% variance in role reversal. Result show that employee commitment was found to be a significant predictor of role reversal ($\beta=.647$, $p<.01$) and the relationship between perceived supervisor support and role reversal weakened (from $\beta=.466$, $p<.01$ to $\beta=.197$, $p<.01$), but still remained significant when controlling for the effects of the mediating variable, employee commitment. Hence it can be concluded that employee commitment only partially mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal. Thus hypothesis H4 was partially supported.

In addition, Sobel z-test (Sobel, 1982) was conducted as a means of further examining the evidence for mediation. Results of Sobel z-test supported the mediation effect of employee commitment. The Sobel z-test was significant for the sample ($z=5.54$, $p<.05$). This implies that the indirect effect of perceived supervisor support on role reversal through employee commitment is significant.

**Discussion**

The main role of the study was to examine the relationship between perceived supervisor support, employee commitment and role reversal. This study extends the previous studies by examining the mediating role of employee commitment in the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal. The results of this study provide support for the positive relationship between perceived supervisor support & employee commitment, Perceived supervisor support & role reversal. Perceived supervisor support predicted employee commitment and role reversal. Also employee commitment partially mediated the relationship between perceived supervisor support & role reversal. The findings of this study are in line with the assumptions of organization commitment model of Meyer & Allen (2001).

**Conclusion**

The study establishes the significant influence of supervisor support on commitment & role reversal. It was also observed that employee commitment partially mediated the relationship
between perceived supervisor support and role reversal. The present study therefore stimulates thinking about the importance of perceived supervisor support and employee commitment in enhancing role reversal. This study has implications for human resource managers as it provides an understanding in two factors that facilitate role reversal. The findings also help them to realize the importance of employees’ perception of perceived supervisor support as it is linked with two important employee outcomes: Employee commitment & role reversal. This study is not free from limitations. Since all the measures were based on self reports common method bias could be a problem. This study included only a cross sectional information on the relationships between perceived supervisor support, employee commitment and role reversal. So inferences on causality could not be drawn. Longitudinal studies may be carried out in future to establish causality between the variables. Sample size could be increased in future to further improve the generalizability of the results.

References


