



Supporting Culture as Transformational Strategy in Call Centres in India: Examining its impact on Job Satisfaction with Stress and Career Advancement as Mediators

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Abstract

The volatile, uncertain and challenging global business environment has resulted in organizations adopting innovative strategies to enhance their performance and sustain their competitive advantage. Organizations are trying to develop and sustain a culture which can provide them a strong foundation. This paper tries to examine the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction mediated by stress and career advancement by using the data collected from women employees of call centres located in Delhi and NCR. Multiple regression is used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. The findings indicate the significance of supportive culture in enhancing the satisfaction of women employees in call centres in India.

Keywords: Culture, Job satisfaction, Women, Call centres, Stress, Career advancement.

Introduction

Organizational culture has been widely acknowledged as the critical factor in determining the success of organizations. It is considered as an important parameter of sustainable competitive advantage (Schein, 1990, Zheng, et al., 2010). The effectiveness of strategies and systems implemented in the organizations are explained by the culture adopted (Prajogo and Sohal, 2001). Culture consisting of values, beliefs, norms, communication, relationships and practices, etc lays the foundation of any organization. Organizational culture can be strong or supportive or weak. Strong and supportive culture leads to development of good systems and right structures which acts as a transformational strategy to achieve organizational effectiveness.

The objective of the study is to provide insights on the effect of supportive culture on job satisfaction of women employees in call centres in India with stress and career advancement acting as mediating variables. The scheme of the paper is as follows. The next section describes the theoretical framework to gain a more detailed overview of existing research on the topic. Section 3 deals with the research methodology employed and data analysis. Then, in section 4, the results of the study are reported. Results are discussed in section 5. Finally, the paper concludes with an overall outlook which is included in the last section.

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Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Supportive Culture

Culture consists of a collection of fundamental values and belief systems which gives the basis for existence of an organization (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985; Sackmann, 1991; Hatch, 1993). It exists as a combination of attitudes, values and assumptions (Moran & Volkwein, 1992) and is influenced by both internal and external environment (Alvesson, 1991). There are innumerable studies discussing the importance of culture in organizations (Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Brown, 1995). In fact, it is said that human resource strategies and work environment of an organization are influenced by its culture (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990).

When talking about supportive culture, work of Litwin & Stringer (1968) finds relevance. They have established a link between attitudes and behaviours of employees and the work environment of an organization. Out of the nine sub-scales of a 50 item questionnaire developed by them, two sub-scales, ie, 'support' and 'warmth' explain supportive culture. By support, they mean to state that mutual support and help extended by superiors to subordinates and by peers and colleagues have a positive influence on employees. They feel happy and satisfied, and hence, are motivated to perform effectively and be more committed to the organization. Similarly, warmth refers to good interpersonal relationships among employees developing a congenial work environment. Such a warm work environment results into happy, satisfied and stress-free employees and are motivated to work more efficiently and effectively in the organization.

A number of studies (Flowers & Hughes, 1978; Huo & Randall, 1991) have developed several important value dimensions relevant for the organizations. Taking clue from the work of Flowers & Hughes (1978) who have identified comprehensive set of 12 discrete organizational values, one value of 'teamwork' supports our concept of supportive culture. Teamwork implies the culture of working in teams and positive and work teams have a positive influence on its members.

Similarly, Jones & James (1979) identified six dimensions of climate, out of which, leadership facilitation and support, workgroup co-operation, friendliness and warmth, professional and organizational esprit, and mutual trust can be related to supportive culture. These dimensions have a profound influence on motivation and behaviour of employees (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Bowers, 1976) and on organizational effectiveness (Likert, 1961; Mudrach, 1989). Supportive work culture of team spirit, mutual trust and support, friendliness and warmth, and caring attitude help in developing positive perception and attitudes of employees and relieve them of stress. Employees are motivated to work harder in the organization and improve their performance, indirectly affecting their growth avenues which find support from literature. Friendly, supportive and strong peer cohesion environment is likely to motivate employees to stay in the organization (Hong & Kaur, 2008) Enjoyment and positive emotions in work have subsequently lower intention to quit jobs (Sherman, 1989; Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000). On the other hand, unsupportive or negative organizational culture may trigger negative reaction among employees and may result into adverse consequences for the organization.

Researches in the past have linked employee job satisfaction with a number of cultural factors like, rewarding employees for good performance, providing growth opportunities, involving employees in decision-making, support of supervisors, etc (Arnold & Spell, 2006; Chang & Lee, 2007; Mckinnon, 2003 and Rad, 2006). Employees in a supportive culture understand the values, norms and requirements of their organizations and perform accordingly. On the other hand, organizations having weak organizational cultures do not have values, systems, norms, structures etc in synchronization with each other and thus might lead to chaos and confusion and dissatisfaction of employees.

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With reference to call centres, the interviews with women employees revealed that call centres work in teams. Employees are allocated different teams, headed by a team leader. Team leader gives directions to his or her team members and is entirely responsible for the performance of the team and its members. Building upon the above mentioned literature, it can be inferred that if the team is positive and has good relationships among members and the leader, then it might have positive influence on its members who will be motivated to work more efficiently and effectively in their teams. Moreover, a number of call centres understand the family-related issues of women and thus, have taken initiatives, such as, career break schemes, flexible work arrangements, crèche facilities, etc to motivate and encourage women to stay in the organization and focus on organizational activities (Scholarios & Taylor, 2010). Thus, on the basis of the review of the literature, it can be conjectured that:

H1: Supportive culture is positively related to job satisfaction.

H2: Supportive culture is negatively related to stress.

H3: Supportive culture is positively related to career advancement.

Stress

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19) define stress as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.” Parker and DeCotiis (1983, p. 164) emphasize on “psychological and physiological reactions to uncomfortable or undesirable conditions” as leading to stress. Stress, also refers to the emotional and situational perception of people (Pearlin, 1989). Also, it may be conceptualized as any condition that has an adverse impact on the well-being of the individuals (Crank, 1991). Stress can be stimulated by a large number of factors related to the environment, the organization and the individual (Robbins & Judge, 2007). For instance, the work stress increases due to a) lack of support from seniors and/or subordinates, b) less challenging job, c) prevalence of biasness by giving preferences to male peers d) favouritism, e) lack of recognition / appreciation of a job well done, f) office politics or g) high competition (Shikari, 2010). The climate of the organization also plays a major role in creating job stress (Hemingway & Smith, 1999; Zeffane & McLoughlin, 2006). Employees experience lower stress if they perceive the work environment favourable and vice versa. However, call centres are generally described as stressful and hence, we hypothesize that:

H4: Stress acts as a mediator between supportive culture and job satisfaction.

Career Advancement

Career advancement is an important feature that employees look for in all organizations. Its significance in an organization cannot be underestimated. Various researchers have explained career progression or advancement in different ways but the underlying meaning remains the same. Kaine (2010) defined career progression as a systematic approach which helps in ringing out a match between the goals of employees and the organization. According to him, organization undertakes initiatives for the development of its employees, enabling them to look for future job opportunities who in turn benefit the organization with their dynamism and effectiveness. Such initiatives of the organization tend to enhance job satisfaction of employees. Similarly, Donaldson (2010) was of the view that lack of new challenges, bring job dissatisfaction. He further added that people leave jobs because of lack of career progression in their organizations. Any employee who joins an organization wants advancement in his career and would like to achieve success in his profession (Mayo, 2008). This research is further supported by Lingham (2008) who highlighted the role of career progression in developing and preparing people for taking up

higher responsibilities in the organization. He further stated that career advancement provides a certain level of autonomy to employees which in turn provides a sense of professional satisfaction and security to them. On the other hand, lack of career progression leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction among employees. Thus, on the basis of above literature, we hypothesize that:

H5: Career advancement acts as a mediator between supportive culture and job satisfaction

Mediator Model

According to Baron & Kenny (1986), a variable functions as a mediator when it meets the following conditions:

- Condition 1: Independent variable leads to dependent variable
Drawing analogy to our proposed model, supportive culture leads to job satisfaction.
- Condition 2: Independent variable leads to mediating variable
In our model, supportive culture leads to stress and career advancement.
- Condition 3: Mediating variable leads to dependent variable rendering the previously significant relationship between independent and dependent variables no longer significant
In our model, stress and career advancement lead to job satisfaction rendering the previously significant relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction as non- significant.

The conceptual model based on Baron & Kenny (1986) model is given as under:

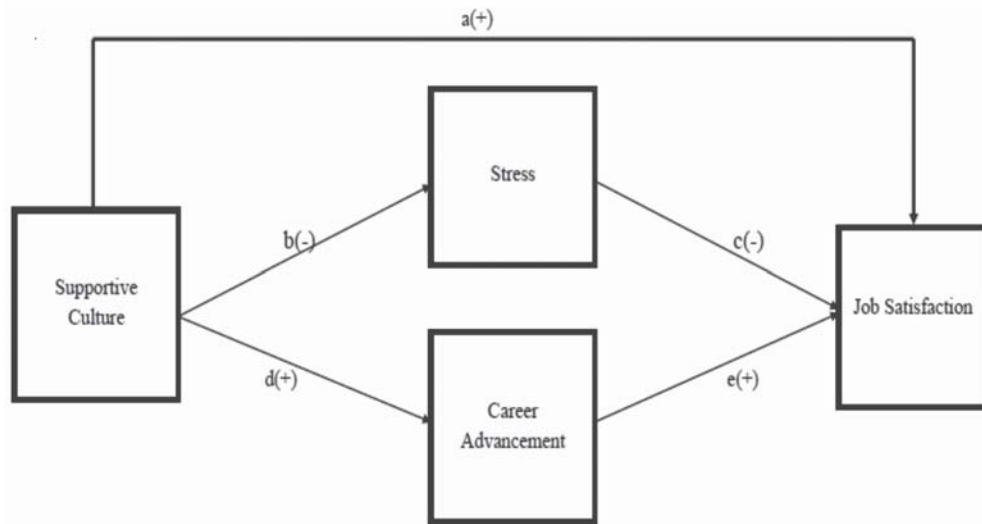


Figure 1: Model of Supportive Culture and Job Satisfaction with Stress and Career Advancement as Mediators (a indicates direct path, b-c and d-e indicate mediated paths)

Methodology

Participants

A total of 302 employees from 8 different call centres participated in the study. The participants of the study were female executives serving both international and domestic clients. International clients included clients from US, UK and Australia. For data collection, human resource managers of the call centres were contacted. Only two managers gave a positive response and agreed to conduct survey in their organizations. 117 data was collected through these two call centres. The rest of the data was collected through snowball sampling method, wherein contacts were used to identify respondents. Nearly 400 questionnaires were distributed through acquaintances/ contacts out of which 261 were returned, and 179 were found fit for analysis. Six questionnaires (fit for analysis) were obtained from the online portal surveymonkey.com.

The age of the respondents varied from 18 years to 53 years. The mean age of the respondents was 21.7 years. The educational qualification ranged from graduation to technical, professional and post-graduation. 299 respondents reported their qualification and the most of the respondents (47.8 %) were post graduates. Most of the employees were in the lower levels as is evident from their reported work experiences. Demographic data shows that 72.2 percent of women had 0-3 years of experience. 301 respondents reported their marital status and majority of the respondents (77.4%) were unmarried. Majority of the respondents (75.6%) lived in a nuclear family.

Scales Used

A brief description of the scales used is as given below:

Supportive Culture

The scale for supportive culture was developed by adapting items from the questionnaire used by NASSCOM-IIM (A) study (2009) on 'Crossing the Digital Barriers'. The scale consisted of five items with one item as reverse coded item. The sample items are: my organization has a frank and open environment, all employees work with a team spirit in my organization, etc. The items were rated on a five point rating scale (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Stress

Stress was measured with four burnout and anxiety related items (eg. I feel emotionally drained by my job, I feel tense at my job) adapted from the scale developed by Tate, Whatley, & Clugston (1997). Participants indicated on a six-point scale the degree to which they experienced each of these symptoms.

Career Advancement

The scale for career advancement was developed for this study consisting of four items. One, out of four items was reverse coded. The construct validity was established by taking the views of a group of people. Five point rating scale was used to rate the items (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "I have got substantial growth in my career during my stay in this organization."

Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction was assessed through a six item scale developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951). Out of the six items, three items were reverse coded. The respondents were asked to rate the items on a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "I feel fairly well satisfied with my job".

Analysis and Result

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test hypotheses. Using the enter method, a significant model emerged: $F = 7.883$, $p < 0.001$ (condition 1 in both tables 3 and 4). Thus, results offer support for hypotheses H1. Supportive culture is found significantly related to stress ($\hat{\alpha} = -0.260$, $p < 0.001$) (table 3), thus offering support to H2. Similarly, there is a significant relationship between supportive culture and career advancement ($\hat{\alpha} = 0.453$, $p < 0.001$) (table 4). Hence, our third hypothesis (H3) is also accepted.

We used regression based mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to test hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 4 suggests that stress mediates the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction. A significant model emerged ($F = 25.784$, $p < 0.001$) depicted in table 3 (condition 3). Stress was found to be significantly related to job satisfaction ($\hat{\alpha} = -0.450$, $p < 0.001$) rendering partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\hat{\alpha} = 0.143$, $p = 0.007$). Thus, the results partially support H4. In all the cases, age and marital status had no relationship with job satisfaction. The partially mediated values are shown in table 3.0.

Table 3.0: Partial Mediation between Supportive Culture and Job Satisfaction (Stress as a mediator)

Baron & Kenny's (1986) conditions	Variables	Beta values	F Change	R ²	P value
Condition 1	Age	0.077	7.883	0.075	0.277
	Marital Status	0.059			0.105
	SC	0.260			0.000
Condition 2	Age	0.094	8.365	0.080	0.182
	Marital Status	-0.090			0.204
	SC	-0.260			0.000
Condition 3	Age	-0.034	25.784	0.263	0.588
	Marital Status	0.018			0.772
	ST	-0.451			0.000
	SC	0.143			0.007

Note: Independent Variable: Supportive Culture (SC), Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction (JS), Mediating Variable: Stress (ST)

The table 4.0 below shows the partially mediated relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.141$, $p < 0.05$) by career advancement. This implies that results partially support H5. However, before partial mediation, the relationships between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.001$) and between supportive culture and career advancement ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < 0.001$) are significant. None of the control variable is found to be significant to job satisfaction.

Table 4.0: Partial Mediation between Supportive Culture and Job Satisfaction (Career Advancement as a mediator)

Baron & Kenny's (1986) conditions	Variables	Beta values	F Change	R ²	p value
Condition 1	Age	-0.077	7.883	0.075	0.277
	Marital Status	0.059			0.405
	SC	0.260			0.000
Condition 2	Age	0.041	7.853	0.075	0.565
	Marital Status	0.045			0.528
	SC	0.263			0.000
Condition 3	Age	-0.095	26.100	0.265	0.132
	Marital Status	0.039			0.540
	CA	0.453			0.000
	SC	0.141			0.008

Note:Independent Variable: Supportive Culture (SC), Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction (JS), Mediating Variable: Career Advancement (CA)

Discussions

The study partially supports our research model which shows stress and career advancement as mediating variables between supportive culture and job satisfaction. Our findings suggest several conclusions. Firstly, supportive culture is positively related to job satisfaction. Supportive culture comprises of interpersonal relationships between employees and the warmth and support extended by employees to each other (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). All these have profound effect on the attitude and reactions of employees towards their organizations. If the culture and climate of the organization are favourable to the employees, they will be happy and satisfied in the organization and if the same is adverse to them, they may develop negative attitude towards the organization. Similarly, if the value system of an organization matches with the values of an individual, he/she feels satisfied and may result in positive work outcomes. Secondly, there is a strong negative relationship between supportive culture and stress. An organizational culture where superiors take care of their subordinates and there is mutual trust and support between employees, is positively accepted by employees and motivates them to develop positive attitude towards the organization. Employees are more likely to stay in the organizations, if they are working in a perceived friendly, supportive and strong peer cohesion environment (Hong & Kaur, 2008). Such a supportive work environment is likely to reduce stress levels and provide satisfaction to employees and when employees are satisfied, they are likely to concentrate on their performance in the organization, which might result into growth of their careers providing support to our third finding where supportive culture is positively related to career advancement.

Other significant results that emerge out of the study are partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction by stress and career advancement. Results clearly indicate the strong significance of supportive culture in call centres for women employees. There is a perception that women in call centres feel stressed, as the call centre work is stressful (Mitter, Fernandez, & Varghese, 2004; Sharma, 2005). But, our results indicate that stressful environment

of call centres only partially mitigates the strong relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction. Similarly, career advancement also only partially mediates the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction which otherwise is considered a strong mediator. This implies that in a call centre women consider supportive culture more important and seem to have a more profound impact on job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The study contributes significantly to the literature of call centres by developing theory about how supportive culture has a strong relationship with job satisfaction and stress and career advancement only partially mediate their relationship. This clearly indicates that women in call centres feel that even career growth cannot provide that much job satisfaction to them, as the supportive culture can give. Similarly, stress caused by other factors cannot shake the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction. This implies that the culture of an organization which is favourable to its employees plays an important role in determining their satisfaction and can be utilized in bringing about transformation in the organization. Zairi (1997) very rightly stated that having good structures and systems only will not help organizations to achieve effectiveness and efficiency, rather they should focus on their cultural aspects.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The entire sample was drawn from Indian call centres located in Delhi and NCR. Therefore, the findings can be most reliably attributed to employees from ITES sector only. Future researchers are advised to include a larger, and geographically diverse sample to improve generalizability (external validity) of our findings.

Next, the conclusions of the study are based solely on self reported data, collected at one point in time, causing common method variance which can be reduced in future researches by using a variety of tools.

Finally, in the study supportive culture is taken with reference to the relationship with the boss or the supervisor and open and frank environment whereas researches have taken supportive culture as consisting of many dimensions. Future studies might take up supportive culture including all dimensions and then study the impact of each dimension on job satisfaction.

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