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BEYOND HR PRACTICES: THE EMOTIONAL BOND BEHIND EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT:

This study evaluates how affective commitment functions as a mediator in the relationship between human resource (HR) practices and employee behaviour. Based on the Social Exchange Theory, the study finds that good HR practices foster affective commitment, or the emotional bond between employees and their employers, which in turn promotes positive employee behaviour. Using a quantitative approach, 100 employees of medium-sized (auto and auto components) enterprises in Punjab were surveyed. SEM (structural equation modelling) was used to analyse the direct and indirect correlations between variables. The results demonstrated that HR practices strongly influence affective commitment, which in turn leads to more positive and less disruptive workplace behaviour. The study advances the theoretical knowledge of the relationship between HRM and employee behaviour and provides useful advice for businesses looking to improve employee outcomes through strategic HRM.

Keywords: HR practices, affective commitment, employee behaviour, Social Exchange Theory

INTRODUCTION

In modern organizational environment, employee behaviour plays a crucial role in determining the competitiveness and performance of the company. From performance management and recognition programs to training and development, organizations use a range of Human Resource (HR) practices in an effort to influence employee behaviour. These practices not only fulfil practical needs but also influence workers' opinions of the company, impacting their views and behaviours (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Jiang et al., 2012).The ways in which HR procedures influence workplace behaviour are still a subject of research attention, despite their accepted significance. Affective commitment, or the emotional bond an employee has with their company, is one important mechanism (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Numerous good behavioural outcomes, such as improved job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour(OCB), and decreased turnover intentions, have been linked to affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002).

This study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that when employees perceive favourable treatment and support from their employer through strategic HR practices, they reciprocate with positive attitudes such as affective commitment and constructive behaviours. This reciprocal relationship highlights affective commitment as a psychological bridge that connects HR practices to desirable employee behaviours (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Guest, 2017).Although previous studies have found a strong association between employee behaviour and HR practices, as well as between affective commitment and behaviour, very few have examined the mediation function of affective commitment in this relationship, especially in non-Western cultures. Understanding this mediating role is essential for efficient human resource management in rising nations like India, where workplace dynamics are frequently influenced by socioeconomic and cultural issues (Singh, 2020).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate empirically how affective commitment functions as a mediator in the relationship between employee behaviour and HR practices in the Indian environment. In addition to offering practical advice for HR professionals looking to promote positive work behaviours through supportive HR tactics and emotional involvement, the findings will further the theoretical framework of HRM research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The key to improving employee outcomes is implementing effective HR procedures. Positive effects on employee behaviour have been repeatedly demonstrated by practices like performance reviews, training and development, employee involvement, and recognition programs (Guest, 2017; Jiang et al., 2012). These methods not only enhance practical results but also create a psychological atmosphere that encourages loyalty

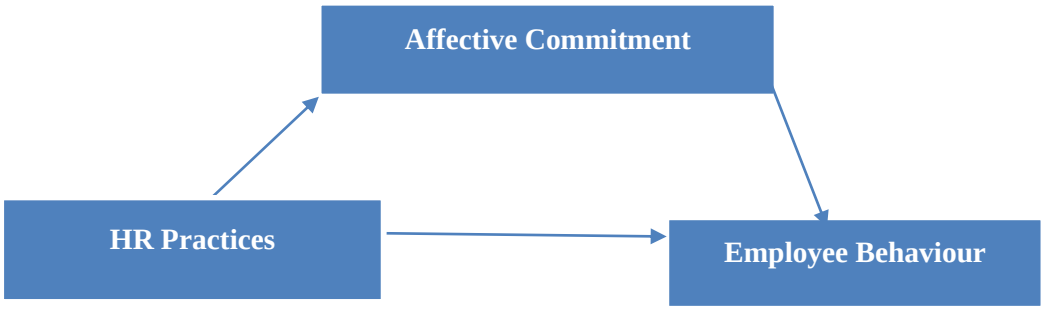
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and emotional involvement (Kehoe & Wright, 2013).Meyer and Allen (1991) defined affective commitment as an employee's emotional connection to, identification with, and participation in the company. Affective commitment is strongly linked to favourable behavioural outcomes, such as improved job performance and lower turnover, as numerous research have shown (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002).

This dynamic can be theoretically explained using the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). SET claims that when workers see organizational support in HR procedures, they feel compelled to return the favour by adopting positive attitudes and actions. Higher degrees of affective commitment frequently serve as a manifestation of this reciprocity (Eisenberger et al., 2001). It is supported by empirical research. For instance, Alfes et al. (2013) discovered that HRM practices use affective commitment to predict employee engagement and OCB. Likewise, Nawaz and Pangil (2016) verified that the association between employee performance and training is mediated by affective commitment. Singh (2020) showed how affective commitment mediates the relationship between employee productivity and perceived HR practices in the banking industry in India.

A solid theoretical and empirical basis for investigating the mediation function of affective commitment between HR practices and employee behaviour is thus suggested by the literature. But more empirical support is required, particularly in the Indian organizational and cultural setting. The following objectives and hypothesis of the research, as stated in the literature, form the basis of this study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Research Objectives

- To examine the relationship between HR practices and employee behaviour.
- To explore the impact of HR practices on affective commitment.
- To analyse the mediating role of affective commitment between HR practices and employee behaviour.

Hypothesis

- H1: HR practices positively influence employee behaviour.
- H2: HR practices positively influence affective commitment.
- H3: Affective commitment positively influences employee behaviour.
- H4: Affective commitment mediates the relationship between HR practices and employee behaviour.

Research Methodology

The proposed relationships were investigated in this study using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The target population consisted of full-time workers employed by Punjab's medium-sized businesses (MSMEs). To make sure each area was adequately represented, a stratified random sampling technique was used. 100 valid responses were obtained from the 150 surveys that were sent out.

Data Collection Instrument: In order to create a structured questionnaire, validated scores from previous studies were used. Training, performance evaluation, involvement, and recognition were among the variables covered by the 16-item scale that was modified from Jiang et al. (2012) to measure HR practices. The 6-item Meyer and Allen (1991) scale was used to measure affective commitment. Measures of employee behaviour were taken from Bennett and Robinson (2000) and Podsakoff et al. (1990), respectively. The Likert scale included five points, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree."

Validity and Reliability: After conducting pilot research with 40 participants, the necessary adjustments were made in response to their feedback. All constructs' Cronbach's alpha values were higher than the permissible

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cutoff of 0.70, suggesting great internal consistency. To evaluate construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used.

Data Analysis: The data were analysed using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analyses were first conducted to understand the distribution and relationships among variables. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships and mediation effects. Model fit was assessed using standard indices including CFI (>0.90), RMSEA (<0.08), and Chi-square/df (<3.0). The significance of the mediation effect was further tested using bootstrapping procedures with 5,00 resamples.

Results and Discussion

The results of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed all hypothesized relationships. The model demonstrated a good fit with the data: CFI = 0.936, RMSEA = 0.052, and Chi-square/df = 2.41, indicating acceptable model adequacy (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Direct Effects: Employee behaviour was found to be significantly improved by HR practices ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$), confirming H1. This result is consistent with other research by Kehoe and Wright (2013) and Jiang et al. (2012) that highlights the importance of strategic HRM in promoting pro-organizational behaviours. Likewise, H2 was supported by the significant positive impact of HR practices on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < .001$). Meyer & Allen (1991) and Eisenberger et al. (2001) both claim that supportive HR policies strengthen workers' emotional ties to the company.

Indirect Effects and Mediation Analysis: Employee behaviour was found to be highly influenced by affective commitment ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$), confirming H3. A significant indirect influence of HR policies on employee behaviour through affective commitment was found by the bootstrapping (5,000 sample) mediation analysis ($\beta = 0.21$, CI [.14,.30]), supporting H4. This partial mediation supports the findings of Alfes et al. (2013) and Nawaz & Pangil (2016) by showing that affective commitment serves as a critical mechanism through which HR practices influence behavioural outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The study provides empirical support for the idea that thoughtfully planned HR practices develop affective commitment, which in turn improves employee behaviour by increasing positive workplace conduct and decreasing deviant behaviour. Employees return organizational support with positive workplace behaviour, which is in line with the fundamental ideas of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). These findings support the findings of Riketta (2002) and Meyer et al. (2002), who found that affective commitment is a powerful predictor of conduct outside of one's function. Additionally, Singh (2020) found similar results, indicating that affective commitment mediates the association between perceived HR procedures and productivity in Indian banking personnel. This further adds complexity to the literature in the Indian setting. In addition to putting formal HR policies into place, HR professionals need to establish an atmosphere that promotes trust, equity, and acknowledgment—all of which are important precursors to affective commitment. Employees' intrinsic motivation to constructively contribute to the organization is increased by this emotional connection.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms how important affective commitment is in moderating the relationship between employee behaviour and HR procedures. The findings highlight the importance of well-designed HR procedures, both in terms of directly affecting employee performance and in creating emotional connections that result in beneficial behavioural outcomes like decreased workplace deviance and corporate citizenship behaviour. Employees are more likely to respond to perceived organizational support with affective commitment and good conduct, according to the findings, which are based on Social Exchange Theory. Practically speaking, companies that want to enhance employee outcomes need to implement a comprehensive HR strategy that takes into account both the practical and emotional facets of the employee-employer relationship. To improve emotional commitment, interventions including ongoing training, equitable performance reviews, staff appreciation, and participatory decision-making ought to be given top priority.

The study also adds to the body of knowledge in HRM by confirming this mediation model in the setting of India, a developing nation where studies on the psychological underpinnings of HR procedures are not yet complete. Future studies should look at additional variables including psychological safety, job satisfaction, or perceived organizational support, as well as use longitudinal designs to monitor changes over time. Cross-cultural research could also help clarify how these processes change depending on the socioeconomic setting.

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