Mediating Role of Work-Family Psychological Contract in the Relationships between Personality Factors and Job Satisfaction

Mardhiah Mat Jusoh
Aminah Ahmad
Zoharah Omar

Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education
Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that personality factors and psychological contract could influence job satisfaction among employees. However, few studies have examined a mediation model encompassing personality factors, psychological contract and job satisfaction, and in psychological contract studies, the work-family interface aspect of the contract has been neglected. This article proposed a mediation model which includes personality factors (self-esteem and locus of control) as antecedents of job satisfaction and work-family psychological contract fulfillment as the mediator. This model is developed based on the conservation of resources theory and previous relevant literatures.

Keywords: self-esteem, locus of control, work-family psychological contract, job satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Conspicuous demographic changes of the workforce including the increase in the number of women (Baral & Bhargava, 2010) have resulted in more couples having to juggle both work and family roles (Zoharah & Aminah, 2010). Consequently, employees may expect their organization to assist them in integrating work and family roles (Conway & Briner, 2005). Hence, an organization should provide support to its employees to reduce the possible threat of unbalance involvement in work and family domains that may cause negative organizational outcomes (Poelmans, Chinchilla & Cardona, 2003). Employees who are not be able to manage their work and family roles because of insufficient support may experience less job satisfaction (Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2005) which can affect their productivity (Böckerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Therefore, the need to provide support through work-family policies becomes important (Kelly, Kossek, Hammer, Durham, Bray, Chermack, Murphy & Kaskubar, 2008).

Since the past decade, many organizations are providing work-family policies as one of their obligations in helping employees integrate work and family roles (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Richman, Civiana, Shannona, Hillb & Brennan, 2008; Mätzke & Ostner, 2010). Unfortunately, the adoption of work-family policies in Malaysia is still at its early stage (Aminah, 2007). Subramaniam and Silvaratnam (2010) reported that only 16 percent of private organizations in Malaysia provided work-family support to their employees. It can be argued that employers and their employees may depend on psychological contracts rather than the legal contracts in dealing with work-family issues.
Rousseau (1989) defined psychological contract as an individual’s expectations regarding mutual obligations in an employment exchange relationship. Previous studies have found that psychological contract is an important mechanism that could help understand employees’ expectation of work-family benefits (Smithson & Lewis, 2004). However, most studies on psychological contract only focused on traditional circumstances of the exchange relationship and have neglected the work-family interface aspect (Conway & Briner, 2005). To accommodate this aspect we therefore introduce the concept of work-family psychological contract which considers work-family benefits as the content of the psychological contract. Work-family psychological contract in this paper refers to employees’ expectations of employers’ obligations on work-family benefits.

The violation of a psychological contract may affect job satisfaction (Raja, Johns & Ntalianis, 2004). Thus, there is a need to reconsider the resources that might help to develop a strong psychological contract in order to increase employee job satisfaction. Personality factors are part of the resources that could contribute to the development of a strong psychological contract which consequently would increase job satisfaction (Raja et al., 2004).

Most studies on personality factors have focused on the direct effects of these factors on job satisfaction. Although psychological contract plays an important mediating role in explaining employee-employer relationships (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson & Wayne, 2008), there is still lack of studies examining mediation models on job satisfaction which has included work-family psychological contract as the mediator. Based on this argument, we develop a conceptual model that includes personality factors as the independent variables, job satisfaction as the dependent variable, and work-family psychological contract as the mediator. The conceptual model is as shown in Figure 1. This model provides a useful mechanism to understand how the differences among individuals may affect the individuals’ perceptions on the exchange relationship which in turn may affect their attitudes at the workplace.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Work-Family Psychological Contract as a Mediator in the Relationships between Personality Factors and Job Satisfaction**

**The Conservation of Resources Theory**

The conservation of resources (COR) theory, introduced by Hobfoll (1989), suggests that individuals will strive to protect their resources from any loss. Generally, the COR theory focuses on the gain and loss of resources. In the COR theory, resources refer to objects, conditions, personal characteristics, including
personality, and energies which are considered as valuable to an individual (Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane & Geller, 1990), and loss of valuable resources may evoke a stress condition to the individual. Individuals are motivated to protect, preserve and expand their resources to reduce stress (Hobfoll, 2002). The COR theory has been used to study and understand the impact of individual resources on organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction (Odle-Dusseau, Britt & Greene-Shortridge, 2012).

**Self-Esteem and Job Satisfaction**

Individuals high in self-esteem are individuals who ‘love’ themselves whereas individual with low self-esteem are individuals who look down on their self-value (Burton, Mitchell & Lee, 2005). Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have positive thoughts about their surroundings (Hui & Lee, 2000) and hence may also have positive thoughts about their organizations. The higher the level of self-esteem, the greater the individual will feel satisfied with his or her job. Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs (2003) reported that self-esteem correlate positively with job satisfaction. Employees with high self-esteem are viewed as employees who are confident in resolving difficulties or problems and this eventually drives them to achieve satisfaction with their jobs (Baumeister et al., 2003). Thus, it seems reasonable to postulate that employees with high self-esteem will be satisfied with their jobs.

**Self-esteem and Work-Family Psychological Contract**

Self-esteem could influence perceptions on psychological contract breach or fulfillment (Raja et al., 2004). Hui and Lee (2000) suggest that individuals with high self-esteem tend to perceive that their existence as important and precious to an organization, thus they believe that organization will fulfill their demands and needs. Therefore, individuals with high self-esteem believe that their organizations will reciprocate obligations mutually agreed. It can therefore be expected that self-esteem is positively correlated to psychological contract fulfillment.

**Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction**

Locus of control is an aspect of personality that describes a person’s perceived control over his or her own behavior and the classification internal locus indicates that the person feels in control of events while external locus indicates that others are perceived to have that control (Rotter, 1966). Raja et al. (2004) and Bruk-Lee, Khoury, Nixon, Goh & Spector (2009) found that internal locus of control was significantly correlated to job satisfaction. Individuals with internal locus of control are individuals who believe that they are in control of every event and hence out of their own actions they can generate the satisfying feelings towards their jobs. Meanwhile, individuals with external locus of control tend to believe that real power resides in forces outside themselves such as organizational rules and supervisor’s authority and they tend to depend on such forces to feel satisfied. Hence, it is expected that employees’ locus of control has an effect on their job satisfaction.

**Locus of Control and Work-Family Psychological Contract**

The relationship between locus of control and psychological contract has been demonstrated by Raja et al. (2004) who found that individuals with external locus of control are more likely to expect contract breach since believe that they are not able to control outcomes. Therefore, they tend to perceive that an organization would more likely fail in fulfilling its obligations as have been promised. On the contrary, it can be postulated that individuals with internal locus of control are more likely to believe that organizations will fulfill their obligations, including obligations on work-family benefits.
Work-Family Psychological Contract and Job Satisfaction

Previous studies on psychological contract and job satisfaction have shown that these two variables are positively correlated (Allen, 2001; Gordon, Whelan-Berry & Hamilton, 2007). Baral and Bhargava (2010) reported that a strong psychological contract would have an impact on employees’ job satisfaction. A strong psychological contract is generated by employees’ positive perception towards their organization on fulfillment of obligations. When employees believe that their organizations have fulfilled their obligations, employees tend to experience greater job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

A model is proposed on the mediating role of work-family psychological contract fulfillment in the relationships between personality factors and job satisfaction. The proposed model implies that individual resources, namely personality attributes of employees have the potential to affect expectations on mutual obligations in the employment exchange relationship which could consequently affect employee job attitude.

REFERENCES


