

A Review of Causes and Consequences of Workplace Isolation

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the relationship of servant leadership, workplace isolation, job satisfaction and job performance along with the moderating effect of self-efficacy of teleworkers of State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC). Workplace isolation is a critical challenge of remote work settings. Perceptions of isolation originate due to reduced chances of casual interaction with supervisors and coworkers. The current study has series of contribution on the most significant and emergent problem arising in remote work settings that is workplace isolation. Servant leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping employees attitudes and behaviors. Keeping in view, this study will also extensively contribute to the current literature of workplace isolation and it will stimulate important research questions for future endeavors. Literature review has highlighted number of theoretical and practical implications in remote work settings of state life insurance corporation of Pakistan (SLICP). Limitations and future avenues will help the managers to make coping strategies for the teleworkers who feel isolated in the workplace.

Keywords: Workplace isolation; servant leadership; self-efficacy; job satisfaction and job performance; teleworkers

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there have been greater advancements in technology to a point whereby currently we entirely rely on World Wide Web (www), Social Networks and Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) and smart phones. On the other hand, many organizations are adjusting to these technological changes and are reaping the rewards of these advancements.

Nilles (1998) introduced the term 'telework'- which was a work arrangement where employees could choose to work from the comfort of their home or other locations so as to reduce commuting time. Moreover, telework was a system that was being employed by organizations to ensure that operation costs are minimized while at the same time offering employees an opportunity to manage their work and families better. In the current corporate world, this form of work arrangement has been made much easier by technological advances such as PDAs, laptops, smart phones and wireless internet. Due to increased use of technology as well as globalization, the world of work has really changed such that there is collaboration of professionals in different parts of the world through various means of communication. The teleworking world has provided face-to-face communication to professionals through video and teleconferencing using some web applications such as WebEx and Skype. Despite the effectiveness of teleworking, technology has its own challenges that should be noted with a lot of concern. For example, Chamakiotis (2013) deduced that social interaction and lack of face-to-face contact among employees in a teleworking environment leads to a feeling of workplace isolation. Prior studies have been undertaken to determine the advantages and drawbacks of teleworking. In a few studies, researchers have focused on the effects of workplace isolation on the feelings of employees.

2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 Workplace Isolation

Workplace isolation is reckoned as the psychological construct that identify the employees perception of being separated and lack of opportunities for emotional and social interaction with the manager and team (Marshall *et al.*, 2007). According to social exchange theory, employees struggle to attain group membership and support of coworkers as a response of essential need of survival and security (Verbeke *et al.*, 2008). According to Kupka and Cathro (2007) lack of support from friends and family is viewed as a significant contributor of stress. It has been observed that virtual employees develop a sense of isolation when they come across that their counterparts and supervisors are unsupportive (Marshall *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, fewer opportunities for emotional and social interaction with peers might increase feelings of isolation. Virtual employees perceived they are not considered for major projects of the organization and even they do not have equal career support or promotion plans as compared to their traditional office colleagues (Pinsonneault & Boisvert, 2001) Virtual employees considered themselves as out-of-sight employees and have fear concerning their consideration for rewards (Kurland & Bailey,

1999). Virtual employees feel that their efforts are not acknowledged up to the level and they have fewer chances of promotion plans as compared to conventional colleagues (Kurland & Cooper, 2002).

2.2 Servant Leadership

According to Graham (1991) and Farling *et al.* (1999), servant leadership is synonymous with Burn's (1978: 20) transforming leadership, since empowerment between leaders and followers is the essence of the two approaches. There is, however, conceptually distinct difference between servant leaders and Bass's (1985) transformational leaders. First, servant leaders are inclined to serving marginalized people more than transformational leaders. According to Bass, transformational leaders are inclined to empowering and elevating followers instead of keeping the followers weak and dependent; better motivation and commitment may not, however, benefit followers since the followers are not obliged to follow orders from transformational leaders (Graham, 1991, p. 110). Conversely, servant leadership is similar to Clercq *et al.*, (2014) transformational leadership in that it requires leaders to lead for the ultimate benefit of the follower. Second, contrary to the transformation leadership, the order of priorities in servant leadership is: followers, organization, and own needs. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) reported that servant leaders should play the role of serving followers while transformational leaders should inspire followers towards organizational goal. Servant leadership, therefore, is mainly focused on followers whose importance prevails the organizational objectives.

Golden *et al.* (2008) summarizes the rationale behind the intense focus on followers by asserting that organizational goals can only be achieved through the long-term empowerment of every individual in the organization. Transformational leadership is primarily based on sensational performance, which is a clear contrast to the primary concern of servant leadership of general development. As conceptualized earlier, servant leadership is basically considerate of moral and ethical development of both leaders and followers (Greenleaf, 1977). As affirmed by Harpaz (2002) and Alanazi, Khalaf and Rasli (2013) there is similarity between servant leadership and authentic leadership as both recognize the significance of self-awareness, moral perspective, self-regulation or authentic behavior, focus on developing the follower and positive modeling for effective leadership. Awareness of own and others' values and the context of operation as well as a good positive outlook are among the great characteristics of authentic leaders (Harpaz 2002; Jaramillo *et al.*, 2005). This is also the philosophy of servant leadership, though Igbaria and Guimaraes (1999) expressed that self-regulation and self-awareness miss out from servant leadership. This perspective overlooks more recent servant leadership studies that have addressed the missing components (Harpaz (2002; Dennis, 2004; Laub, 2003; Wong and Page, 2003). For example, servant leaders use positive modeling to: encourage followers to be consisted of doing what they say, promote transparency and to engage followers in moral reasoning.

2.3 Job Satisfaction

The construct job satisfaction remained a favorite topic for researchers since its inception. Organizational psychology has given considerable attention to the construct of job satisfaction in literature (Dormann, and Zapf, 2001). Besides organizational psychology, business literature also focused on job satisfaction (Naumann, 1993). Job satisfaction can be measured through its various dimensions, but it should be studied as a construct because of its ability to benefit the organization (Schmidt, 2007; Khalaf *et al.*, 2013).

Although, the history of job satisfaction started with the introduction of the Hawthorne studies in late 1920s, but it is backed by satisfaction and motivational theories, i.e. process, content and situational theories (Brashear *et al.*, 2003). Herzberg's two factor theory, Maslow's hierarchy of need and Aldefer's ERG theories are known as content theories. Whereas, Vroom's expectancy theory and Porter and Lawler's five factor model comes under process theories, while Lock's goal setting theory and equity theories are known as content theories.

Job satisfaction is defined as "the attitude of workers toward the company, their job, their fellow workers and other psychological objects in the work environment" (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Job satisfaction is a person's positive approach towards his job (Rutherford *et al.*, 2009). Many researchers have reported dispositional factors and their importance to job satisfaction. For example, (Boles *et al.*, 2003) reported, "The feeling of monotony depends much less upon the particular kind of work than upon the special disposition of the individual" (Arani 2003). This concept was also presented by (Bowling, 2006) in a similar way, showing more signs of dispositional factors and job satisfaction.

Employee job satisfaction has become an important issue in today's competitive environment because of its ability to benefit the organization in terms of performance and enhancing positive job related outcomes. Therefore, HR practitioners are continuing to enhance their employee's level of satisfaction with their jobs. So far, a number of antecedents of job satisfaction have been identified by the researchers which can be summarized in following job and environment related characteristics (Naumann, 1993; Resick *et al.*, 2007; Bavendam, 2000; Faris *et al.*, 2010; Sourdif, 2004). These characteristics include an organizational image, Superiors, co-workers and social cooperation, communication among peers, working condition and organizational vision.

2.4 Job Performance

Job performance is defined as the ability of an individual to behave in such a manner that enables an organization to achieve its objectives (Motowidlo, 2003). In this literature, job performance is divided into two categories; contextual performance or organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) also referred as extra role performance, and task performance which is referred as in-role performance (Riketta, 2008). In-role performance involves fulfillments of duties as established by description of formal jobs. OCB or extra-role performance on the other and involves behaviors that goes beyond formal requirements of job but are beneficial to the organizations such as; giving suggestions for improvement, working for extra hours and assisting colleague's workers (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). Moreover, Organ *et al.* (2006) argues that OCB is characterized by discretionary behavior of individuals which are not explicitly recognized by reward system that is formal, but are useful in promotion of effective and efficient functioning of an organization. Psychological, social and organizational contexts are shaped by contextual activities and helps in task processes and duties (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). According to (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997) OCB can be divided into two categories: OCBO- behaviors that directly benefit an organization such as giving prior notice when one fails to report to work, the other category is OCBI which are behaviors that directly benefit an individual but also

indirectly benefit an organization such as helping carry out work for the isolated employees. According to Borman and Motowidlo (1997) OCBs can be considered as role responsibilities for employees. This argument is in line with the previous findings about the employees and managers Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006) who also believe that OCBs form some of the role responsibilities for employees. Beehr *et al.* (2000) found that feeling of isolation is influenced the job performance at workplace. However, individual wellbeing influences to a higher extent the job performance as compared to the job performance (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Rating on supervisory and employee performance can be predicated through the use of psychological wellbeing of individuals. In addition, it was noted that psychological wellbeing influences significantly job performance even when factors such as job tenure, age, education level and gender of employees in different work settings which have been studied by many management scholars (Wright and Cropanzano, 2004).

2.5 Self-Efficacy

A fundamental aspect of the social cognitive concept is self-efficacy. It is defined as the trust that individuals have on their ability to competently achieve the requirements of a job and take control of their future. The employees that possess self-efficacy are confident in their ability and aptitude to strategize and achieve the organizational objectives and goals (Bandura, 1991). The belief in self-efficacy also determines the amount of effort directed towards a given task and the level of consistency possible. Employees that have self-efficacy believe in persistence to achieve their goals (Bandura and Schunk, 1981). The theory of self-efficacy indicates that individuals judge their belief in self-efficacy based on four kinds of information (Md Athar Imtiaz & Nurazeen Maarop (2014). Experiences of how a similar activity was performed in the past are the most powerful tool for judging self-efficacy. Where the experience was as a success higher expectation of mastery is expected or vice versa (Gist and Mitchel, 1992). In the context of teleworkers, these judgments hold special significance as competent sales persons have high levels of self-efficacy (Jaramillo and Mulki, 2008). Self-efficacy is the second, and it is the judgment of an individual influenced by actual observation of successful actions of others. These factors motivate the actions of an individual in applying the lessons learnt through observation of others' success (Gist and Mitchel, 1992). Self-regulation theory is identified as a source related to self-efficacy of individuals and it involves constructive feedback and suggestions that help in effective management of one's activities, through increased self-confidence (Gist and Mitchel, 1992). Organizations that handle teleworkers are well suited with self-efficacy perspective theory. In this perspective, employees are expected to work with minimal feedback and suggestions from supervisors as it is common in traditional offices. Staples, Hulland and Higgins, (1999) noted that work outcome is influenced by motivation and abilities of employees who are guided by increased self-confidence. Self-efficacy is also influenced by emotional or psychological factors, which act in the same way as isolation. There is limited interaction of remote workers to other organizational members in terms of their psychological dimensions (Marshall, Michaels and Mulki, 2007). Work settings, which is remote working, is significantly dependent on believes of self-efficacy. Staples, Hulland and Higgins, (1999) reported that connectivity among virtual employees in an organization increases self-efficacy.

3.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Social Exchange Theory

The majority of the scholars has examined social exchange theory as the conceptual foundation of organizational isolation (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). Because social exchange theory discusses interdependence and interrelations among individuals which secure their self-interest (Erdogan, B., and Liden, R. C. 2002). According to Blau (1964) social exchange theory exists when individuals have expectations from others and attract people for self-interest. Furthermore, such interests liable for social rewards which draw people from one association to another (Coyle *et al.*, 2004).

High quality exchange and mutual reciprocity are two essential suppositions associated with social exchange theory which is characterized by trust earned. It is emphasized that the worldwide obligation of governing the values and norms of contributors who receive rewards to compensate social exchange proces (Cropanzano, (2002). Moreover, it is the parsimony of the exchange process and social relationship which are considered as the focal determinants (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). An exchange process among people depends on their voluntary actions in the form of returns which they expect (Blau, 1964, Ensher *et al.*, 2001). For instance, social exchange theory based on the tendency of expectations of people and it is also referred as the expectations of future return on giving benefits (Blau, 1964). Moreover, in management studies, social exchange theory deals with the nature of social exchange among employees and it's consequences on work attitudes and behaviours For example, social exchange theory has been used to explain justice, mistreatment like incivility, bullying, undermining, turnover intentions. Similarly isolation is characterized as a negative attitude which is the result of poor social exchange among employees. Particularly, Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003) pointed out that isolation is the reaction of distributive and procedural violations among social exchange of employees. In addition, according to this philosophy isolation is the result of a violation expectation of benefits that employees expecting and violation of employment related issues in organizations.

3.2 Leadership Theory

Different types of leadership as well as leadership models have been examined and employed. Bass (1990) explained the drive of leadership model as a path to define the causes of growth of leadership, pattern of headship as well as its importance. As pointed out by Russell (2000), presently the servant leadership model is a prevalent theory of headship. He also showed that a number of researchers bore the same conception that the servant leadership is an efficient pattern of leadership in institutions of this generation. The idea of servant leadership was defined by Laub (2004) as he put forward the significance of schemes for leading. Laub recommended that heads should think about the problem of aiding to one's own concern or meeting a requirement in order to aid others. He also described, how the two kings of Israel, King Saul and King David, led the country through two different leading patterns. However, the difference lies in the effect of such leadership patterns; where Saul was perceived as a totally self-oriented king with concerns only about him-self, King David was

perceived as a king with a heart as big as the God. Finally Laud inferred that the servant leadership model was always there and every head had the regular option to aid the wellbeing of others or to meet his/her own wellbeing.

The idea of servant leadership was first proposed by Greenleaf (1970) in his primary writing, *The Servant as Leader*. His work included seven more essays in which he explained the notion of servant-leader and stressed on the social influence of servant leaders. As per Greenleaf, it was a deficiency of idea of leaders in educational, religious and other institutions that causes deterioration in their performance. To define the work of Greenleaf (1970), Jaworski (1997) said that, Greenleaf had evolved an efficacious structure for realizing leadership. Greenleaf further defines servant leadership as the necessity to aid others while holding the ability of leading through taking care of everyone's needs and not of his/her own.

■4.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE AVENUE

Isolation in the workplace is becoming so popular in the current era. Despite of several advantages this working environment has some emergent problem like workplace isolation that need to be considered. This study is an attempt to enlighten the important factors that contribute in teleworker's isolation perceptions. Workplace isolation is a thread for the organizational effectiveness as it is predictor of employee job performance. Managers use this study to enhance their understanding that right leadership styles should be adopt for successful functioning of employees work and overcome perceived isolation. Leaders dilute feeling of detachment by providing timely responses. This study put emphasis on development of psychological empowerment and servant leadership because this relation has greater impact in creating positive attitudes and behaviors. Manager should carefully recruit employees for companies work and consider individual characteristics to mitigate isolation perceptions (Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk, & McPherson, 2002). This study has some limitations that should be consider while interpreting the results. Large sample size should consider for in-depth analysis. Future research should conduct to analyze whether experiences would influence in coping telework environment and workplace isolation. Correlations among variables are inflated due to common method variance bias when self-reports and using same method to assess all variables is used. However, majority surveys of behavioral research have this limitation. Several steps took to control this problem like adding reverse questions in surveys and ensuring anonymity.

Researcher has analyzed perceptions of workplace isolation of company's employees and we expect same results would applicable to other field salespeople and pharmaceutical companies. There is need to explore isolation perception of teleworkers in other sector. Researchers interested in workplace isolation should test this model in other work setting that require team selling like in buying centers. There is also need to explore impact of personality characteristics like Diligence and Extraversion on workplace isolation. There is also need to explore society's culture have any impact on employees isolation perceptions. Future research should be conduct to analyze which leadership quality a telework leaders possess to be successful in remote work settings.

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