Psychological Empowerment and Employee Engagement: Testing the Mediating Effects of Constructive Deviance in Indian IT Sector

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing interest in investigating antecedents of employee engagement at workplace. The present article examines the role of psychological empowerment as an antecedent of employee engagement in organizations and simultaneously explored the mediating role of constructive deviance. Data was collected from 233 Indian IT sector employees. A mediation effect was documented through multiple regression analysis suggested by Barron and Kenny. Findings suggest that both psychological empowerment and constructive deviance positively affect employee engagement while constructive deviance acts as significant mediator between them. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

constructive deviance, employee engagement, organizational norms, positive deviance, Psychological empowerment

INTRODUCTION

As talented employees are a competitive advantage that cannot be duplicated by the rival firms, the engagement of these employees has become an important concern for organizations (Anitha, 2014). A growing body of literature in the past few decades has given significant attention to study employee engagement in organizations. Kahn (1990) defined engaged employees as professionals who express themselves emotionally, physically and cognitively through their job performance. Engaged employees help improve organizational processes and operations and give direction to better organizational performance (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Engagement gap or ‘the number of employees not engaged/not fully engaged’ in US alone costs $300 million in lost productivity (Bates, 2004). Therefore, it is vital for organizations to identify the factors that lead to employee engagement and find ways to improve it has been recognized as a critical factor for business success (Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). But despite the above notion the antecedents of employee engagement are little known (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Growing evidence indicates a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction (Laschinger et al., 2002; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003). Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment as a motivational concept exhibited through four cognitions: meaning,
impact, competence and self-determination. Within organizational psychology framework, there
is evidence that empowering employees at workplace leads to job enrichment and hence affect
employee loyalty in future (Niehoff, Moorman, Blakely & Fuller, 2001). Further it has been observed
that psychological empowerment enhances employee engagement in organizations (Albrecht &
Andrefta, 2011; Jose & Mampilly, 2014). This present study aims to increase our understanding of
this relationship between psychological empowerment and employee engagement by testing the
mediating role of constructive deviance which is an untested variable within this relationship.

Robinson & Bennett (1995) defined employee deviance ‘as a voluntary behavior that violates
significant organizational norms and in doing so threatens the well-being of an organization, its
members or both’. A majority of employee deviance related research today are based on the above
definition of deviant behaviors (Such as Sackett & DeVore, 2001; Kidwell, 2005; Sharma & Singh,
2016; Sharma, 2018 etc.) and thus explains the various negative consequences of deviant behaviors at
workplace. While employee deviance is generally looked upon as a negative set of behaviors aimed to
harm the organization, its people and society at large; it may sometimes also save them from disastrous
consequences (Warren, 2003). This type of deviant behavior exhibited by the employees is termed
as constructive deviance or positive deviance. Constructive/positive deviance is an unauthorized
organizational behavior exhibited by employee(s) that helps an organization to meet its financial and
economic goals (Appelbaum, Laconi & Matousek, 2007). Unfortunately, researchers studying deviance
at workplace often overlook these positive set of behaviors that help organizational functioning and
productivity (Spreitzer & Sonenshein 2004). Such behaviors may include unique work methods,
criticizing incompetent bosses and non-compliance with dysfunctional directives (Galperin, 2002).
Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) for instance are one such kind of constructive deviance
that would otherwise lie outside the work requirements of an employee; actually, encourage efficient
functioning of an organization (Applebaum, Laconi & Matousek, 2007). To support its contribution
to employee productivity, it was argued by Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) that constructive
deviance may foster ‘sense of well-being’ in employees and in general contributes in ‘advancement
of organizational norms’ (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003) which in turn results in better employee
engagement for the organization. This relationship is not researched previously and thus leaves a
significant research gap for studies concerned with employee engagement and employee deviance.
If the existence of such relationship is established; new vistas for above research areas will be open
and its practical/managerial implications shall be beneficial for the concerned organizations.

Gallup (2013) established that employee engagement is key predictor for vital job creations in
South Asian organizations. However, a majority of the empirical work on the relationship between
psychological empowerment and employee engagement were conducted in western settings and
such empirical studies from India are very few (Sharma & Garg, 2017). The present study attempts
to replicate the research on psychological empowerment and employee engagement to establish
its grounds in context of Indian IT sector organizations thus establishing a cultural validity for the
variables. Using this as a foundation, this research further extends previous research by developing
and validating a mediation effect of constructive deviance on employee engagement which is an
untouched research area in its field for both developed and developing countries.

Few researchers in the past have established the relationship between employee engagement and
constructive deviance claiming it is the former which leads to the later. Present study however aims to
prove otherwise i.e. the said relationship may also be inverse in nature. In course of this development,
it also examines and validates the effect of psychological empowerment on positive deviant behaviors
of employees. Thus, present study makes both theoretical and empirical contribution to available
literature pertaining to employee engagement and psychological empowerment.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Employee empowerment is vital to survive in dynamic business environment (Jose & Mampilly, 2014).
The term ‘‘psychological empowerment’’ has been discussed extensively in several western researches.
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