Does gender moderates the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, cynicism and workplace withdrawal: A neural network and SEM approach

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A B S T R A C T
Organizational politics and workplace victimization are social stressors with significant implications on the wellbeing of employees. Applying Job Demand Resources framework, this study examines the impact of favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility on employee cynicism, and work withdrawal, and the moderating role of gender. Utilizing a cross-sectional design, data were gathered from frontline employees working in 3-star hotels in Northern Cyprus. Results from structural equation modeling and artificial neural network revealed that: (1) favoritism/nepotism has a positive impact on employee cynicism and work withdrawal; (2) employee cynicism has a positive impact on work withdrawal; (3) employee cynicism mediates the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, and work withdrawal; (4) the impact of employee cynicism on work withdrawal was about 6.7 times stronger for men; (5) the impact of favoritism/nepotism on work withdrawal was about 2.1 times stronger for women. Strategies to reduce this unwanted practices and how to keep employees productive are discussed.

1. Introduction

Today, organizations are continuously looking for ways to encourage, satisfy and keep effective employees (Gripentrog, Harold, Holtz, Klimoski, & Marsh, 2012). It is not only desirable to have skillful employees who work hard, but keeping and taking advantage of their human capital contribution is more important (Murphy, 1986). The retention of employees is a strategic issue that is widely accepted by practitioners, top level managers and researchers (Karatepe & Nkendong, 2014; Paliaga & Strunje, 2011; Yirik, Oren, & Ekici, 2015). This is not surprising, because of the fact that employees have one to one relationship with customers. Nevertheless, the existence of favoritism and nepotism send an undesired signal to employees, that the organization does not care about their human capital; as a result of unfair distribution of resources, promotions, and others (Abdalla, Maghrabi, & Raggad, 1998; Arasli, Ali Bavik, Ekiz, & E, 2006). It is also very important for employees to have the perception of mutual respect from their supervisors. Prior scholars asserted that cynicism is contingent upon supervisor–subordinate relationship (Chaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, & Lomeli, 2013), a sour relationship with supervisors simply demoralizes employees. This is because a supervisor can jeopardize an employee’s future in the organization, as such employees tend to become cynical (Abubakar & Arasli, 2016); logically supervisor incivility is an inclusive category. Researchers have indicated that hotel employees are very sensitive to uncivil behaviors from supervisors; both interpersonally and informational (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Erdogan, 2002).

Employee cynicism refers to employee’s negative attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Koçoğlu, 2014). Dean, Brandes, and Dhawadkar (1998) described cynicism as a negative attitude toward one’s employing organization, including three dimensions: (1) to believe that the organization is deficient in integrity, (2) negative effects on organizational processes and productivity (Aslan & Eren, 2014), thus employees may choose to engage in loafing rather than accomplishing tasks, duties and other organizational functions (Croppanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Equally this is a first step toward work withdrawal (Cole, Bernerth, Walter, & Holt, 2010).

Hanisch and Hulin (1990) defined work withdrawal as a “behavior that dissatisfied employees take to reduce the time spent on their specific work tasks”. It subsume actions like lateness to work, absenteeism, taking long breaks, fake sick leave, and eventual turnover (Berry, Lechzoek, & Clark, 2010). It is reported that turnover in the hospitality
industry is “nearly twice the average rate for all other sectors” (Deloitte, 2010, p. 35). As a result, this incur recruiting and training costs for organizations (Panwar, Dalal, & Kaushik, 2012), and the loss of organizational knowledge (Hinkin & Tracey, 2008). Davidson and Timo (2006) found that in the Australian hotel industry, the average employee turnover rate was 39.1%; and the related annual cost to replace them was $109,909.00. Therein, it has become a pressing issue and there is a need to examine the antecedents of work withdrawal.

The Job Demand Resources (JD-R) model subsumes two job facets: (1) **job demands** entails the “physical, psychological, social and organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). (2) **job resources** which entails the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that either/or (i) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (ii) are functional in achieving work goals, and (iii) stimulate self-development, personal growth and, learning” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

With few exceptions (e.g., Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2008; Chen, Yen, & Tsai, 2014; Karatepe, 2011, 2015). Most of the studies utilizing the JD-R model have been conducted in different work settings like call center services, manufacturing, health care services, pension funds, and transportation (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Moreover, job demands are strongly associated to negative work outcomes such as impaired health (i.e., cynicism, burnout) and deviant behaviors through energetic process. On the other hand, job resources are related to positive work outcomes through motivational processes (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). In this view, this paper argues that job resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands and to ‘get things done,’ but they also are important in their own right (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

This article argues that supervisor incivility and favoritism can deplete employees’ mental and psychological energy. The energetic process links job demands with negative outcomes via cynicism, as it offers a cognitive–emotional framework for understanding human performance under stress and politics. While the motivational process links job resources to intrinsic motivational (i.e., growth, learning and development) or extrinsic motivational that are instrumental in achieving work goals. Therein, absence of justice resulting from favoritism and the presence of workplace mistreatment incivility absorb resources that are deem important by employees.

Thus, uncivil behaviors alongside favoristic/nepotistic practices may inflict cynic attitudes, and employee’s turnover intention or turnover (Kwon, 2006). Further, the effects of cynicism on work withdrawal and turnover has been proven empirically by (Jung & Kim, 2012; Dolen, de Cremer, & D. & de Ruyter, K., 2012). This article incorporates favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, employee cynicism and work withdrawal into a single model. According to a report “The Travel and Tourism Economy” in 2017 shows that Republic of Cyprus as a whole earns around $1.2 m annually. An important part of this sum goes to Northern Cyprus, this makes it an important industry that requires professional HRM practices. In doing so, we extend the domain of investigation both conceptually and theoretically into the hotel industry in Northern Cyprus.

Social role theory is a social psychological theory that pertains to sex differences and similarities in social behavior (Eagly, 1987; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The theory posits that women shaped by culture and tradition are more likely to adopt a relationship-oriented position, and attempt to use problem-solving techniques when confronted with problems than men (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Empirical evidence also proved that there are gender differences in the kinds of strategies that men and women employ when confronted with organizational conflict. For example, gender has been found to moderate the relation between procedural justice and intent to stay with an organization (Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997); job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Hitlan, Cliftton, & DeSoto, 2006). The aforementioned findings also received support from a meta-analysis conducted by Rotundo, Nguyen, and Sackett (2001). Henceforth, exploring the role of gender in the interplay between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, employee cynicism and work withdrawal will provide additional insight to our existing knowledge.

### 1.1. Purpose and contribution of the study

Drawing on JD-R model as a theoretical framework and the aforementioned empirical associations, this study aim to test an empirical model which investigates the mediating role of employee cynicism in the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility and work withdrawal in the hotel industry. To do so, the research has the following objectives:

- Prior findings suggest that there is a link between supervisor-caused stressors and turnover intention (Kao, Cheng, Kuo, & Huang, 2014), a relationship between favoritism/nepotism and turnover also exist (Arasli & Tumer, 2008; Kwon, 2006). However, researchers have ignored the potential relationship between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility and work withdrawal, as work withdrawal is a station that precedes turnover. This paper attempt to advance our knowledge concerning other unknown reactive responses to organizational politics (i.e., favoritism/nepotism) and workplace mistreatment (i.e., supervisor incivility).
- Despite the existence of studies exploring the relationship between organizational politics and employee cynicism, research exploring the relationship between favoritism/nepotism and cynicism with incivility are limited. In particular, incivility and cynicism were found to result in lesser job satisfaction and commitment (Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009). Further, employee cynicism mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational identification (Kurt, 2016). In fact, favoritism/nepotism and supervisor incivility are stressors from the above. Therein, employee cynicism is likely to play a mediating role in the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility and work withdrawal. In doing so, the study strives to extend the number of antecedents of work withdrawal.
- Over the past 10 years, research pertaining to the consequence of organizational politics, workplace incivility and their adverse health and organizational outcomes paid comparatively less attention to race and gender disparities (Escartín, Salin, & Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011). It is important to understand the dynamics of gender in the hospitality context, Magley, Bauerle, and Walsh (2010) argued that women have relatively little organizational power compare to men, this limits their political power. As such women response to injustice more likely to display direct, overt retribution against their instigators (Loi, Loh, & Hine, 2015). This empirical study tries to improve the understanding of gender’s moderating effects on the relationships between favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, employee cynicism, and work withdrawal in the hospitality industry.
- Finally, this study aims to deepen our understanding on how favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility and employee cynicism interacts using the JD-R framework when structural equation modeling (SEM) and artificial neural network (ANN) analyses are employed. The methods provide significant methodological contribution, as the non-compensatory ANN is able to complement the weaknesses of compensatory linear SEM (Shmueli & Koppius, 2010). Apart from addressing the aforementioned gaps in the literature, the findings in this study provides several answers for practitioners.
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