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The Impact of Meaningful Work on Employee Identity and the Mediating Role of Employee Resilience

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Abstract

The current study focused on the impact of meaningful work on employee identity with a mediating role for employee resilience. Data was collected from a sample of 154 employees currently working in the service sector (call centers) of Lahore, Pakistan. The study was quantitative and the data was analyzed using AMOS software. For this purpose, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to check the model fit statistics and the mediation effect of employee resilience was analyzed using Preacher and Hayes' (2004) median analysis. Convergent validity was measured through factor loading and AVE value verification of indices; whereas reliability was approved through Cronbach's alpha. The findings of the current study revealed that meaningful work plays a significant role in enhancing employee resilience, which enables them to cope with challenging situations and thus maintaining their identity. In the service sector, where employees continuously deal with customers, resilience becomes the key to attract and retain potential customers, which allows them to deliver exceptional client service with confidence. This research is among a limited number of studies available on this topic and it will be an important addition to research literature highlighting the impact of meaningful work and employee resilience on employee performance in the context of call centers employees working in Lahore, Pakistan.

Keywords: employee identity, employee performance, employee resilience, meaningful work, service sector

Introduction

In today's dynamic environment, organizations have to maintain their identity to attain competitive advantage over others. For this purpose, they need to focus on their professional growth by giving value to their resources. Identity is the process of differentiating oneself from others on the basis of capabilities and effective outcomes (Ybema et al., 2009). Organizations should adapt to the changing environment for their long-term sustainability and resilience. It helps to cope with

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external changes and benefits the respective organization through revamping in accordance with environmental variations (Malik & Garg, 2017).

Resilient employees are the prime resource of an organization, as they withstand the challenging situation and perform better for an organization (Cooke et al., 2016; Maddi & Khoshaba, 2005). Employee identity is related to an individual's point of view about how s/he views herself / himself as part of an organization in the long term (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Different researchers have examined different variables regarding their relationship with employee resilience, such as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), work engagement, job security and stress (Cooke et al., 2016; Malik & Garg, 2017). Resilience can be important outcome of maintaining a good relationship with others, being positive and meaningful (Fit for WorkTeam, 2017). Meaningful work also prompts positive self-evaluation of one's life and eventually helps to cope with the emergent changes and challenges (Gableet al., 2004; Nezlek & Gable, 2001).

Employees in the service sector of Pakistan are quite concerned about their personal appreciation and identity of their work. As service providers, they face competition so they expect that their role should be rewarded or admired in both financial and non-financial terms. Through meaningful work, they perform valuable services, handle negative events and become resilient against uncertain situation. Employees put an extensive effort against crises or challenging situation for the sake of an organization and expect their recognition in return. Few research studies have been conducted which explain the phenomena of maintaining employee identity at organizational level. In this way, the present study will be helpful in filling the existing gap in the literature.

The main objective of this study is to determine the effect of meaningful work on employee identity via the mediating role of employee resilience. Researchers have suggested that work meaningfulness plays a vital role in improving the employees' affective commitment (Johnson & Jiang, 2017) and enhance their ability of innovativeness (Cai et al., 2018). Coutu (2002) also directed researchers to observe the correlation of meaningful work with resilience in future studies.

Scope of the Study

This study highlights the effect of meaningful work on maintaining employee identity. The results of the current study offer directions for organizations that will help them to maintain their employees' resilience and positive work outcomes in order to gain competitive advantage. Work outcomes can be improved by providing

meaningful work for employees to enhance their resilience, which will ultimately affect employee identity as well.

Statement of the Problem

The current researchers and practitioners suggest that resilience plays a positive role in developing and maintaining a good relationship with employer and helps employees to perform meaningful work in an organization. Employee identity is related to an individual's point of view about how s/he views himself / herself as part of an organization in the long term (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The question arises that how does meaningful work help employees in the service sector to gain their identity by being resilient.

Research Questions

- Is there any relationship exist between meaningful work and employee resilience?
- Is there any relationship exist between employee resilience and employee identity?
- To what extent employee resilience mediates the relationship between meaningful work and employee identity?

Literature Review

Meaningful Work

Pratt and Ashforth (2003) defined meaningful work as the extent to which an individual gives importance to his/her work. Meaningful work refers to work condition that a staff member, that is generally productive, and worth the time spent on it (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Arnold et al. (2007) argued that employees prefer work productivity over job security as they want to grow in their profession. Arnold et al. (2007) further reported that employees who have a personal and emotional attachment with their profession, they do not easily quit their jobs. They usually prefer professional development over the monetary outcomes and benefits.

Steger et al. (2012) mentioned three levels of work productivity including personal level, interpersonal level and leadership/organizational level. Grant (2007); Pratt and Ashforth (2003); Rosso et al. (2010) argued that for each individual meaningfulness has its own sense and it's directly proportional to their respective work productivity. Organizations encourage meaningfulness at work, which adds value to what employees' actually do and change the context of the work performed (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The prevailing trend reveals that

organizations promote meaningful work and employee identity for both employees and their respective organization (Deloitte, 2017). Meaningful work is significant for organizations and yields positive results (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2010). Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) postulated four foundations of meaningful work including, developing the inner self, joining hands with others for teamwork, providing assistance to others, and self-expression to bring attention to the organizational problems.

Employee Resilience

Crane (2017) defined employee resilience as a positive outcome of being capable enough to face risk and making effective decisions in adverse circumstances. According to Davies (2016), employee resilience is the ability of employees to persist during challenging conditions. Resilience is defined as the response in the situations where an individual is facing a risk or threat; it constitutes positive adaptation and the ability to continue routine functioning even under that risk or threat of harm (Bardoel et al., 2014). Fit for Work Team (2017) also supported the above arguments and further stated that resilience is a two way function in which employees and employers play their respective roles. Hence, employers provide a healthy psychological environment and employees remain resilient towards the situation (Fit for Work Team, 2017). Besides being a personality trait, employee resilience has been categorized as an employee's workplace behavior, the ability of organizations to support and influence resilient workplace behavior and the development of resilient behavior even in the absence of crises or adversity (Näswall et al., 2015).

Shin et al. (2012) argued that employee resilience can be developed and influenced by well-being interventions. They also found that employee resilience imparts organizational resilience. Thus, by promoting employee resilience, organizational resilience can be achieved. Scholars have studied the relationship of employee resilience with other variables such as organizational citizenship behavior (Paul et al., 2016) and learning organization (Cooke et al., 2016; Malik & Garg, 2017). Developing employee resilience can be helpful in reducing job insecurity, stress and interpersonal but counterproductive work behaviors (Shoss et al., 2018).

Employee Identity

Identity is the process of differentiating oneself from other individual's and it adds value to organizational structure (Deetz, 1994; Ybema et al., 2009). For this purpose, organizations pursue employee identity, which eventually is beneficial for

both employer and employees (Barker, 1998). Based on literature review, it can be understood that identity refers to those values that organizations possess and employee identity is concerned with the individual's interests and perspective shared by stakeholders (Dutton et al., 1994). Organizations might attempt to control their employees' identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), however, employees can nullify this effect by handling the situation cognitively (Symon & Clegg, 2005).

Theory and Hypotheses

We took theoretical support from the Social Identity Theory to explain our research model, which stated that social groups give a strong sense of pride and self-esteem to individuals and they give them a sense of social identity. Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004) was used to explain the mediation of employee resilience between meaningful work and employee identity.

Figure 1

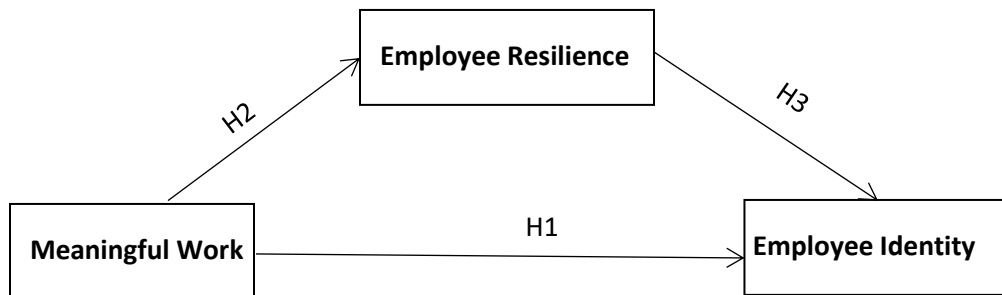*Linking Meaningful Work and Employee Identity through Employee Resilience (Conceptual Framework)*

Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual framework in which meaningful work permits staff members to know their worth and to groom themselves accordingly in order to achieve success. Hence, meaningful work makes individuals realize that their actions have consequences and it makes them understand that these actions are significant in the social aspects of life (Elliott et al., 2005). Hackman and Oldham (1976) proposed that it is task variety that develop the ability to achieve meaningful work and it provides recognition and importance as well as the opportunity of self-governing.

In the above discussion, employee resilience is the specific behavior of employees which they show when they respond to the available alternatives of policies and practices at the workplace (Fit for Work Team, 2003). Discussion and

hypotheses developed based on literature review about meaningful work, which play a positive role in boosting employee resilience, are given below:

Hl: Meaningful work is positively related to employee resilience.

Resilience is the ability of an individual to respond to uncertain changes, and it shows a direct link with employee identity. As changes take place in an organization, increased resilience is helpful to cope with changes, effectively (Näswall et al., 2013). On the other hand, employee identity can be built from within an organization. It means that internal sources are responsible to generate employee identity.

H2: Employee resilience is positively related to employee identity.

Mediating Role of Employee Resilience

Researchers have argued that resilience plays an important role in adapting to challenging situations. It helps to boost employees' behavior in dynamic and stressful working conditions. It has been considered as the quality to "bounce back" in adversity (Malik & Garg, 2017). Torres and Fyke (2013) proposed that it can be developed through contextual and iterative processes. Thus, meaningful work has the positive impact of boosting individuals, making them recognize their strengths and build themselves accordingly to achieve success and to construct their identity.

It enables individuals to recognize that their actions have consequences and they are important in the social aspects of life (Elliott et al., 2005; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). When employees feel confident they can cope with external changes. Following Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004), we propose that resilient employees can perform better, develop their identity and impart their role successfully to meet organizational goals. Internally resilient human resources can be effective in coping with external changes and performing in a better way, which eventually creates competitive advantage for the organization.

H3: Meaningful work is positively related to employee identity.

H4: Employee resilience mediates the positive effect of meaningful work on employee identity.

Research Design

Research Strategy

All three constructs were measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. The variable *Meaningful Work* was measured through the Ashmos and Duchon (2000) scale, which consists of seven

items. An example of an item is "I experience joy in my work. "The value of Cronbach's alpha for seven items was 0.860. The variable *Employee Resilience* was measured using the Fred Luthans scale. Its item includes "When I have a setback at work, I have trouble recovering from it, moving on. "The reliability of this scale was achieved after removing item 1 which was reverse coded. The value of Cronbach's alpha for these five items was 0.713. The variable *Employee Identity* was measured using Selenta and Lord (2005) self-concept scale. An example of its item is "I often compete with my friends." The value of Cronbach's alpha for five items was 0.896.

Sample and Sampling Method

Convenient sampling technique was used in this study, which is a non-probability sampling technique. It includes a heterogeneous mixture of individuals. Using the rule of thumb to multiply the number of questions with 5, a sample of 154 employees from the service sector of Lahore was selected, since the questionnaire included at least 28 questions (Hair et al., 1998).

Data Collection

Primary data was collected for this study through the questionnaire, for this purpose respondents were directly approached in their offices. The data was collected through questionnaire, as it is a cost effective and an efficient way to obtain generalizable results (Stacks, 2010), for which pre-planned appointments were made for collecting information and filled questionnaire were taken.

This research survey was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, Participants were requested to provide demographic data about Gender, age, and program to identify his / her background. The second stage was intended to measure the participants' responses which they needed to give on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 =strongly disagree and 5 =strongly agree). A cross-sectional research strategy was chosen in which data was collected to fulfill the objectives of this research (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009).

Organization Overview

Globally, the service sector is vast and remains the fastest growing sector of the developed economies. This research was conducted on the call centers (which are a part of the service sector) of Lahore, Pakistan. Data was collected from national and international call centers, including TRG, MCB Islamic Bank, and other call centers, which are directly involved with customers and represent their respective organizations. This direct coordination plays its role in building up employee resilience and eventually in building employee identity. Organizations need to

focus on an employee who is directly involved in customer service to drive better results through meaningful work.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Before data analysis, we conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to check the model fit using AMOS 21 as shown in Figure 2. We also used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21 for data analysis. In order to confirm the mediating effect of employee resilience, Preacher and Hayes' (2004) mediation analysis was used. Convergent validity was measured through factor loading and AVE value verification of indices, whereas reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha. The results are shown below in Table 1. It can be observed from the respective table that the values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE are higher than 0.7. Hence, both validity and reliability were approved.

Figure 2

CFA Output

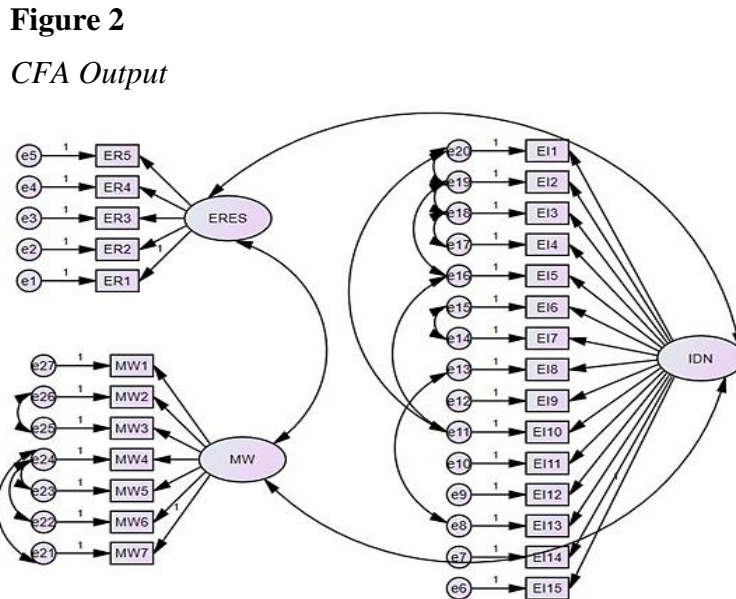**Table 1**

Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Employee Resilience	.71	.73	.50
Employee Identity	.89	.90	.52
Meaningful Work	.86	.86	.51

The overall reliability of our variables was .769, which shows good internal consistency of items. The reliability values of individual variables are as follows:

Table 2

Reliability Statistics of the Study Variables

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
Meaningful Work	.860	.860	7
Employee resilience	.713	.712	6
Employee identity	.896	.897	15

The purpose of this study was to investigate the mediating role of employee resilience in the relationship between meaningful work and employee identity. Table 2 indicates the reliability statistics of meaningful work, employee resilience and employee identity.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
RES	154	1.00	5.00	3.7052	.71882
MNW	154	1.00	5.00	3.7004	.77247
IDNT	154	1.00	5.00	3.7805	.66601
Valid N (listwise)	154				

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the constructs. Means of all three constructs are above the scale's mid-point. In general, employee identity has the highest mean, followed by employee resilience and meaningful work.

Table 4

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Unstandardized Residual	.043	154	.200[*]	.989	154	.287

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 5

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.612[a]	.375	.371	.52823	1.752

a. Predictors: (Constant), MNW
b. Dependent Variable: IDNT

Table 6

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.827	.209		8.742	.000		
	MNW	.528	.055	.612	9.551	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: IDNT

Table 7

Correlations

		RES	MNW	IDNT
RES	Pearson Correlation	1	.381[**]	.610[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	154	154	154
MNW	Pearson Correlation	.381[**]	1	.612[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	154	154	154
IDNT	Pearson Correlation	.610[**]	.612[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	154	154	154

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

We conducted the analysis to check the assumptions of regression, normality, multicollinearity, and Autocorrelation. The results indicated that the data were

normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk = 0.287) as shown in Table 4. Moreover, the analysis indicated that there was negligible multicollinearity among the predictor variables as the value of the variance inflation factor (VIF=1.00) between 0 and 10 was negligible as shown in Table 6. These results also highlighted that there was negligible Autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson=2.017) between observations, such as Durbin-Watson value between 1.75 and 2.25 remained in an acceptable range. Table 5 explains the regression analysis, which is statistically significant with R^2 for the overall model (0.357). Based on prior research (Ojode et al., 2013), we conducted a CFA analysis to evaluate model fit.

The result of the model fit measures indicated a good fit. Model fit measures such as x2 statistics to calculate the degree of freedom, CFI, GFI, and RMSEA were used. Model fit is achieved when the values of CFI and GFI are greater than 0.90, while RMSEA is less than 0.60 and the degree of freedom (df) is less than 3. The results of CFA analysis indicated a good model fit to data ($\chi2/df$= 1.420; CFI=0.923; GFI=0.820; RMSEA=0.052). Hence, correlation was found in accordance with the hypothesis.

The PROCESS add-on for SPSS developed by Preacher and Hayes ([2004]) (version 2013) was used to test the mediation effect.

Table 8

Mediation Analysis

	Effect	SE	P Value
IV → Mediator → DV			
Total effect	.53	.05	.00
Direct effect	.38	.05	.00
Indirect effect	.14	.04	*Sig*

For indirect effect, LLCI and ULCI values are stated below.

|	L.C.L	U.C.L
Indirect effect	.79	.24

The results revealed that meaningful work was positively and significantly associated with employee resilience (β=0.35 and p<0.05) as stated in H1 and this hypothesis was accepted. H2 stated that employee resilience has a significant positive impact on employee identity (β=0.38 and p<0.05) and it was also accepted.

H3 proposed that meaningful work is positively related to employee identity (β=0.52 and p<0.05) and this hypothesis were also accepted as shown in Table 8.

The findings of the mediation showed that employee resilience mediated the positive effect of meaningful work on employee identity. The results also supported the fourth hypothesis (H4). The mediating role of employee resilience between independent and dependent variables was positive and statistically significant (.1445 and LLCI=.0786 and ULCI=.2383). As zero did not fall between LLCI and ULCI, so we can conclude that mediation exists in the model and employee resilience mediates the positive effect of meaningful work on employee identity. Thus, H4 is supported. Mediation results are also shown in the figure below.

Figure 3

Mediation Output
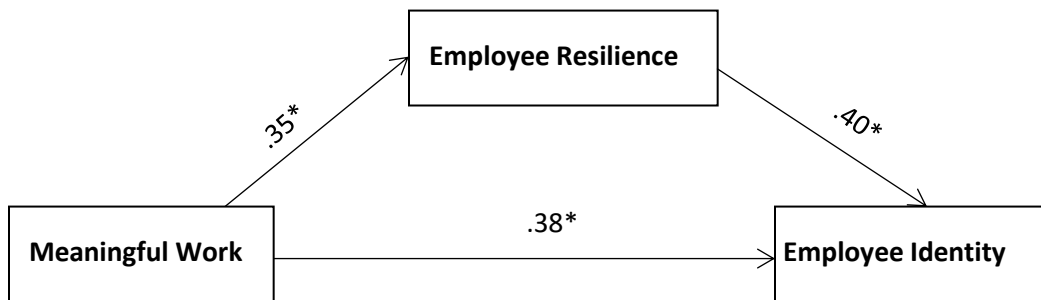
Conclusion and Discussion

The current study focused on the effect of 'meaningful work' on 'employee identity' with the variable 'employee resilience' mediating between them. The findings of our study contributed to the existing literature by explaining the mediating effect of employee resilience. The results indicated that meaningful work played a significant role in enhancing employee resilience, which enabled employees to cope with challenging situations and thus maintaining their identity. In other words, if an organization focuses on providing meaningful work, it makes employees resilient and their behavior leads to positive outcomes.

Resilience is becoming an important factor in today's challenging and versatile work environment (Blasdel, 2015; Winwood et al., 2013). It has become essential for organizations to focus more on meaningfulness at work. It has been revealed that resilience is essential for survival in a chaotic work environment. In the service sector, employees continuously deal with customers and fulfilling their needs is essential for organizations. In this scenario, resilience becomes the key to attract

and retain potential customers. If employees are satisfied and confident enough to cope with stressful conditions, they feel proud of themselves and self-confidence develops in them.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research work was limited to the study of call centers in Lahore, Pakistan and other cities in the country were not included in this survey. Research limited to Lahore only cannot be generalized; therefore, to achieve the desired benefits this research should be replicated in other cities and countries. Firstly, we suggest that future studies should be conducted in other developed countries. Cross-sectional analysis was used in the current research but it is recommended here that similar research should be conducted in a longitudinal mode. Secondly, only limited constructs were examined and sample size were also small for this study due to the shortage of time. Hence, more information should be collected through future studies to verify the reliability of the data. Sample size was small for this study. We also faced some other limitations, such as issues like truthfulness and subjectivity. This research was quantitative in nature and future researchers can do further studies in a qualitative manner.

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