Chapter 10
Supportive Culture: A Transformational Strategy

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Abstract The volatile, uncertain and challenging global business environment has resulted in organizations adopting innovative strategies to enhance their performance and sustain their competitive advantage. Organizations are trying to develop and sustain a culture which is flexible and can provide them with a strong foundation. This chapter tries to examine the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction mediated by stress and career advancement by using the data collected from women employees of call centres located in Delhi and NCR. Multiple regression is used both for analyzing the data and testing the hypotheses. The findings indicate the significance of supportive culture in enhancing the satisfaction of women employees in call centres in India.

Keywords Call centres · Career advancement · Culture · Job satisfaction · Stress · Women

10.1 Introduction

The presence of an agile environment has forced organizations to design, develop and adopt flexible management systems to have sustainable solutions. These flexible management systems comprise of various types of flexibilities related to organizations, operations, people, information, marketing, etc. (Sushil 2016) and nowadays form a part of the overall culture of any organization.

The culture of an organization is widely known to have a strong impact on the success of organizations. It is considered as a vital parameter of achieving competitive advantage which is sustainable (Schein 1990; Zheng et al. 2010). The effectiveness of strategies and systems implemented in the organizations are explained by the

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culture adopted (Prajogo and Sohal 2001). A culture consisting of values, beliefs, norms, communication, relationships, and practices, etc., lays the foundation of any organization. The culture of an organization can be supportive or strong or weak. Supportive and strong culture leads to the development of good systems and right structures which acts as a transformational strategy to achieve organizational effectiveness.

This chapter is written with the objective of providing insights on the impact of supportive culture on the satisfaction level of women employees concerning their jobs in call centres in India with stress and career advancement acting as mediating variables. The scheme of the chapter is as follows. The next section describes the theoretical structure to gain a more detailed overview of existing research on the topic. Section 10.3 talks about the methodology employed in collecting and analyzing the data. Then, Sect. 10.4 reports the results of the study. Results are discussed in Sect. 10.5. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overall outlook which is included in the last section.

10.2 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

10.2.1 Supportive Culture

Culture can be defined as a set of values and beliefs and acts as a strong foundation for the existence of an organization (Pettigrew 1979; Schein 1985; Sackmann 1991; Hatch 1993). It consists of different proportions of attitudes, values, and assumptions (Moran and Volkwein 1992) and is influenced by both internal and external environment (Alvesson 1991). There are innumerable studies discussing the importance of culture in organizations (Alvesson and Berg 1992; Brown 1995). It is said that human resource strategies and work environment of an organization are influenced by its culture (Kerr and Slocum 1987; Kopelman et al. 1990).

When talking about supportive culture, work of Litwin and Stringer (1968) finds relevance. They have established a link between attitudes and behaviors of employees and the work environment of an organization. Out of the nine sub-scales of a 50 item questionnaire developed by them, two sub-scales, i.e., 'support' and 'warmth' explain supportive culture. By support, they mean to state that mutual support and help extended by superiors to subordinates and by peers and colleagues have a positive influence on employees. They feel happy and satisfied, and hence, are motivated to perform effectively and be more committed to the organization. Similarly, warmth refers to good interpersonal relationships among employees developing a congenial work environment. Such a warm work environment results in happy, satisfied and stress-free employees who are motivated to work more efficiently and effectively in the organization.

A number of studies (Flowers and Hughes 1978; Huo and Randall 1991) have developed several important value dimensions relevant for the organizations. Taking a clue from the work of Flowers and Hughes (1978) who have identified a comprehensive set of 12 discrete organizational values, one value of 'teamwork' supports our concept of a supportive culture. Teamwork implies the culture of working in teams and positive work teams have a positive influence on its members.

Similarly, Jones and James (1979) identified six dimensions of climate, out of which, support by the leader, cooperation and friendliness among group members at the workplace, professional and organizational esprit, and mutual trust can be related to supportive culture. These dimensions have a profound influence on the way employees behave and their motivation levels (Litwin and Stringer 1968; Bowers 1976) and on organizational effectiveness (Likert 1961; Mudrack 1989). The supportive work culture of team spirit, mutual trust and support, friendliness, and warmth, and caring attitude helps in developing positive perception and attitudes of employees and relieve them of stress. Employees are motivated to work harder in the organization and improve their performance, indirectly affecting their growth avenues which find support from literature. Employees are likely to be motivated to stay in the organization when they find the work environment friendly and supportive with strong cohesion among peers (Hong and Kaur 2008). Employees who enjoy and have a positive attitude towards work are less likely to leave their jobs (Sherman 1989; Connolly and Viswesvaran 2000). On the other hand, unsupportive or negative organizational culture may trigger negative reactions among employees and may result in adverse consequences for the organization.

Researches in the past have linked employee job satisfaction with a number of cultural factors like rewarding employees for good performance, providing growth opportunities, involving employees in decision-making, support of supervisors, etc. (Mckinnon 2003; Arnold and Spell 2006; Rad 2006; Chang and Lee 2007). Employees in a supportive culture understand the values, norms, and requirements of their organizations and perform accordingly. On the other hand, organizations having weak organizational cultures do not have values, systems, norms, structures, etc. in synchronization with each other and thus might lead to chaos and confusion and dissatisfaction of employees.

With reference to call centres, the interviews with women employees revealed that call centres work in teams. Employees are allocated in different teams, headed by a team leader. Team leader gives directions to his or her team members and is entirely responsible for the performance of the team and its members. Building upon the above-mentioned literature, it can be inferred that if the team is positive and has good relationships among members and the leader, then it might have a positive influence on its members who will be motivated to work more efficiently and effectively in their teams. Moreover, a number of call centres understand the family-related issues of women and thus, have taken initiatives, such as, career break schemes, flexible work arrangements, crèche facilities, etc. to motivate and encourage women to stay in the organization and focus on organizational activities (Scholarios

and Taylor 2010). In fact, in the last few years, organizations have designed and implemented a large number of flexible work practices such as flexi-time, flexible compensation (Sushil 2016), work from home and many others with the objective of motivating their workforce. Research suggests that flexible working arrangement help in reduction of occupational stress and demonstrate a greater commitment to the organization (Ivanauskaite 2015; Clarke and Holdsworth 2017). Flexible work schedules give a signal to the potential employees that the organization takes care about the well-being of employees and hence, are attracted towards the organization (Onken-Menke et al. 2018). Thus, taking reference from the above-mentioned review of the literature, it can be conjectured that:

H1: Supportive culture is positively related to job satisfaction.

H2: Supportive culture is negatively related to stress.

H3: Supportive culture is positively related to career advancement.

10.2.2 Stress

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19) define stress as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being." Parker and DeCotiis (1983) emphasize "psychological and physiological reactions to uncomfortable or undesirable conditions" as leading to stress. Stress also refers to the emotional and situational perception of people (Pearlin 1989). Also, it may be understood as any situation or condition that has a negative impact on the well-being of the individuals (Crank 1991). There are myriad factors such as environmental, organizational and individual which can stimulate stress (Robbins and Judge 2007). For instance, the work stress increases due to (a) lack of support from seniors and/or subordinates, (b) less challenging job, (c) prevalence of biases by giving preferences to male peers (d) favouritism, (e) lack of recognition/appreciation of a job well done, (f) office politics or (g) high competition (Shikari 2010). The climate of the organization also plays a major role in creating job stress (Hemingway and Smith 1999; Zeffane and McLoughlin 2006). Employees experience lower stress if they perceive the work environment favourable and vice versa. However, call centres are generally described as stressful and hence, we hypothesize that:

H4: Stress acts as a mediating variable between supportive culture and job satisfaction.

10.2.3 Career Advancement

Career advancement is an important feature that employees look for in all organizations. Its significance in an organization cannot be underestimated. Various researchers have explained career progression or advancement in different ways,

but the underlying meaning remains the same. Kaine (2010) defined career progression as a systematic approach which helps in ringing out a match between the goals of employees and the organization. According to him, organization undertakes initiatives for the development of its employees, enabling them to look for future job opportunities, who in turn benefit the organization with their dynamism and effectiveness. Such initiatives of the organization tend to enhance job satisfaction of employees. Similarly, Fanimehin and Popoola (2013) were of the view that lack of new challenges brings job dissatisfaction. He further added that people leave jobs because of lack of career progression in their organizations. Any employee who joins an organization wants advancement in his career and would like to achieve success in his profession (Mayo 2008). This research is further supported by Linghan (2008) who highlighted the role of career progression in developing and preparing people for taking up higher responsibilities in the organization. He further stated that career advancement provides a certain level of autonomy to employees, which in turn provides a sense of professional satisfaction and security to them. On the other hand, lack of career progression leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction among employees. Thus, the above-mentioned literature helps us to hypothesize that:

H5: Career advancement acts as a mediating variable between supportive culture and job satisfaction.

10.3 Mediator Model

Baron and Kenny (1986) gave the following conditions for the variable to act as a mediating variable:

Condition 1 Independent variable leads to dependent variable
Drawing analogy to our proposed model, supportive culture leads to job satisfaction.
Condition 2 Independent variable leads to mediating variable
In our model, supportive culture leads to stress and career advancement.
Condition 3 Mediating variable leads to dependent variable rendering the previously significant relationship between independent and dependent variables no longer significant
In our model, stress and career advancement lead to job satisfaction, rendering the previously significant relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction as non-significant.

The conceptual model based on Baron and Kenny (1986) model is given as under (Fig. 10.1).
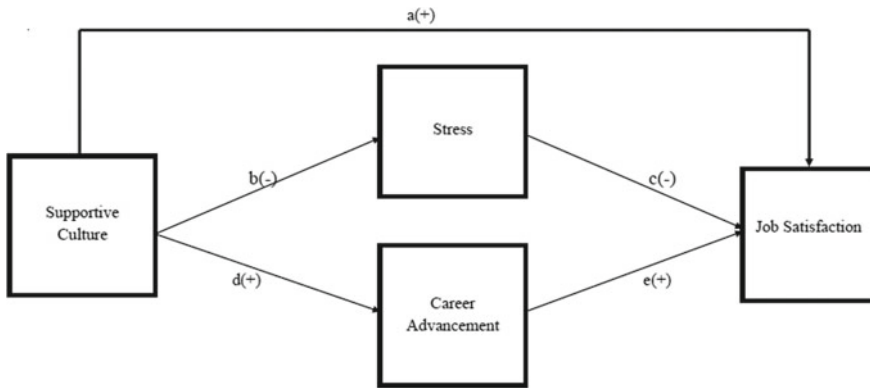
Fig. 10.1 Model of supportive culture and job satisfaction with stress and career advancement as mediators (**a** Indicates the direct path, **b–c**, and **d–e** indicate mediated paths)

10.4 Methodology

10.4.1 Participants

A total of 302 employees from 8 different call centres took part in the study. The participants of the study were female executives serving both international and domestic clients. International clients included clients from the US, UK, and Australia. For data collection, HR managers of the call centres were contacted. Managers from only two call centres agreed to conduct a survey in their organizations. A total of 117 questionnaires were collected through these two call centres. The remaining data was collected through the method of snowball sampling, wherein contacts were used to identify respondents. Nearly 400 questionnaires were distributed through acquaintances/contacts out of which 261 were returned, and 179 were found fit for analysis. Six questionnaires (fit for analysis) were obtained from the online portal surveymonkey.com.

The respondents were in the age group of 18–53 years with an average age of 21.7 years. The educational qualification ranged from graduation to technical, professional and post-graduation. A total of 299 respondents reported their qualification and most of the respondents (47.8%) were post graduates. Most of the employees were in the lower levels as is evident from their reported work experiences. Demographic data shows that 72.2 % of women had 0–3 years of experience. A total of 301 respondents reported their marital status and the majority of the respondents (77.4%) were unmarried. Majority of the respondents (75.6%) lived in a nuclear family.

10.5   Scales Used

Both standardized and self-developed scales were used which are as given below:

10.5.1   Supportive Culture

The scale for supportive culture was developed by adapting items from the questionnaire used by NASSCOM-IIM (A) study (2009) on 'Crossing the Digital Barriers'. The scale consisted of five items with one item as a reverse coded item. The sample items are: my organization has a frank and open environment, all employees work with a team spirit in my organization, etc. The items were rated on a five-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

10.5.2   Stress

Four items related to anxiety and burnout were used to measure stress (e.g., I feel emotionally drained by my job, I feel tense at my job) adapted from the scale developed by Tate et al. (1997). Participants marked their experience with each of these symptoms on a six-point scale.

10.5.3   Career Advancement

The scale for career advancement was developed for this study consisting of four items. One, out of the four items was reverse coded. The construct validity was established by taking the views of a group of people. Five-point rating scale was used to rate the items (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "I have got substantial growth in my career during my stay in this organization."

10.5.4   Job Satisfaction

A scale developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) was used to assess job satisfaction. It consisted of six items with three items as reverse coded. The respondents rated the items on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "I feel fairly well satisfied with my job".

10.6 Analysis and Result

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test hypotheses. A significant model emerged: $F = 7.883, p < 0.001$(Condition 1 in both Tables 10.1 and 10.2) after using the enter method. Thus, results offer support for hypotheses H1. Supportive culture is found to be significantly impacting stress ($\beta = -0.260, p < 0.001$) (Table 10.1), thus offering support to H2. Similarly, there is a strong positive relationship between supportive culture and career advancement ($\beta = 0.453, p < 0.001$) (Table 10.2). Hence, our third hypothesis (H3) is also accepted.

We used regression-based mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny 1986) to test hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 4 suggests that stress mediates the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction. A significant model emerged ($F = 25.784, p < 0.001$) depicted in Table 10.1 (condition 3). Stress was found to be significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.450, p < 0.001$) rendering partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.143, p = 0.007$). Thus, the results partially support H4. In all the cases, age and marital status had no relationship with job satisfaction. The partially mediated values are shown in Table 10.1

Table 10.2 shows the partially mediated relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.141, p < 0.05$) by career advancement. This implies that results partially support H5. However, before partial mediation, the relationships between supportive culture and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.260, p < 0.001$) and between supportive culture and career advancement ($\beta = 0.263, p < 0.001$) are significant. None of the control variables is found to be significant to job satisfaction.

Table 10.1 Partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction (stress as a mediator)

Baron and Kenny's (1986) conditions	Variables	Beta values	F change	R^2	p value
Condition 1	Age	0.077	7.883	0.075	0.277
	Marital status	0.059			0.105
	SC	0.260			0.000
Condition 2	Age	0.094	8.365	0.080	0.182
	Marital status	−0.090			0.204
	SC	−0.260			0.000
Condition 3	Age	−0.034	25.784	0.263	0.588
	Marital status	0.018			0.772
	ST	−0.451			0.000
	SC	**0.143**			**0.007**

Note Independent Variable: Supportive Culture (SC), Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction (JS), Mediating Variable: Stress (ST)

Table 10.2 Partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction (career advancement as a mediator)

Baron and Kenny's (1986) conditions	Variables	Beta values	F change	R^2	p value
Condition 1	Age	−0.077	7.883	0.075	0.277
	Marital status	0.059			0.405
	SC	0.260			0.000
Condition 2	Age	0.041	7.853	0.075	0.565
	Marital status	0.045			0.528
	SC	0.263			0.000
Condition 3	Age	−0.095	26.100	0.265	0.132
	Marital status	0.039			0.540
	CA	0.453			0.000
	SC	**0.141**			**0.008**

Note Independent Variable: Supportive Culture (SC), Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction (JS), Mediating Variable: Career Advancement (CA)

10.7 Discussions

The study partially supports our research model which shows stress and career advancement as mediating variables between supportive culture and job satisfaction. Our findings suggest several conclusions. Firstly, a positive relationship exists between supportive culture and job satisfaction. Supportive culture comprises of interpersonal relationships between employees and the warmth and support extended by employees to each other (Litwin and Stringer 1968) and the flexible work arrangements such as flexi-time, work schedule, etc. All these have a profound effect on the attitude and reactions of employees towards their organizations. If the culture and climate of the organization are favourable to the employees, they will be happy and satisfied in the organization, and if the same is adverse to them, they may develop a negative attitude towards the organization. Similarly, if the value system of an organization matches with the values of an individual, he/she feels satisfied and may result in positive work outcomes. Secondly, there is a strong negative relationship between supportive culture and stress. An organizational culture where superiors take care of their subordinates, and there is mutual trust and support between employees, is positively accepted by employees and motivates them to develop a positive attitude towards the organization. A perceived friendly and supportive work environment is more likely to influence employees to stay in the organization (Hong and Kaur 2008). Such a supportive work environment is likely to reduce stress levels and provide satisfaction to employees which may help them to concentrate on their performance in the organization, which might result into the growth of their careers providing support to our third finding where supportive culture is positively related to career advancement.

Other significant results that emerge out of the study are partial mediation between supportive culture and job satisfaction through stress and career advancement. Results clearly indicate the strong significance of supportive culture in call centres for women employees. There is a perception that women in call centres feel stressed, as the call centre work is stressful (Mitter et al. 2004; Sharma 2005). But, our results indicate that stressful environment of call centres only partially mitigates the strong relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction. Similarly, career advancement also only partially mediates the relationship between supportive culture and job satisfaction which otherwise is considered a strong mediator. This implies that in a call centre women consider supportive culture more important and seem to have a more profound impact on job satisfaction.

10.8 Conclusion

The study contributes significantly to the literature of call centres by developing a theory about how supportive culture has a strong impact on the job satisfaction of women employees and stress, and career advancement only partially mediate their relationship. The results of the research work have useful implications for practitioners also. The findings clearly indicate that women in call centres feel that even career growth cannot provide that much job satisfaction to them, as the supportive culture can give, a culture that is flexible and positive. Similarly, stress caused by other factors cannot disrupt the strong cohesion between supportive culture and job satisfaction. This implies that the flexible and positive culture of an organization which is favourable to its employees plays an important role in determining their satisfaction and can be utilized by policy makers and practitioners in bringing about transformation in the organization in the form of increasing the motivation levels and lowering the attrition rate of employees. Zairi (1997) very rightly stated that having good structures and systems only will not help organizations to achieve effectiveness and efficiency rather they should focus on their cultural aspects.

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