Full Length Research Paper

An assessment on the impact of leader apologies on followers" positive work attitude

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A detailed model of leader apologies and its impact on followers work attitude was presented in this study. The focus of the current study is to assess the impact of leader apologies on followers work attitude such as job satisfaction and affective organization commitment with a mediating role of followers' well-being and a moderation of leader member relationship quality supported by leader exchange theory. Data were collected from the 225 followers working in the 3 private multinational banks, but 150 questionnaires were gotten back yielding a response rate of 67%. Data were collected through a questionnaire using 5 point Likert scale and the study was cross sectional. Three hypotheses have been developed to see the impact of leader apologies on followers work attitude with a mediation of followers' well-being and moderation of leader member relationship quality and all of the hypotheses developed for study are accepted and it is proven through statistical mean. Implications and recommendations are discussed in the study.

Key words: Leader apologies, leader member relationship quality, followers" well-being, followers work attitude, leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management is an important function in an organization which aims at the management of organizational workforce. In the light of human resource, leadership in an organization aims at improving the performance of employees by giving them direction and motivating employees. Leadership has been an important factor in business world as it increases the efficiency and effectiveness of both employees and employer especially when there is a positive work attitude of followers but ethical leadership has gained considerable importance in today"s world. Leader"s ethical behavior is very much important especially when we talk about well-being of followers. The apology culture is the recent emergence in context of organization particularly as it benefits the relationship between leader and follower. Thus, leader apology is of considerable importance in order to have a quality relationship with their followers and vice versa. Basically, leader apology is another behavior of leadership which reflects the ethical code of a leader.

Ethical leadership basically provides strong ground to this phenomenon, leader apology, as offering apology signifies the extent a leader is ethical in his behavior and his behavior is a positive sign for his followers. Apologizing never mean that you are letting yourself down but you gain more respect in the eyes of others.

According to Sandel (2009), there are three major historical approaches to ethical leadership which are utilitarianism approach, libertarianism approach and Kant"s ethical approach. One of its approach, utilitarianism approach, supports the apology behavior of leader which is about maximizing the welfare of followers. Leader apology indicates that it is an intention of improving leader and follower relationship (Fritz et al., 2011).

As the banking sector plays an important role in the economy of a country, hence this study was conducted in the banking sector of Pakistan mainly multinational banks such as Barclays, Standard Charter and Burj banks. This study focuses on how leader apologies influence work attitude of followers in a positive manner. The aim of this

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study is to assess the impact of leader apologies on followers" positive work attitude such as job satisfaction and affective organization commitment.

Problem statement

This study investigates the dimension of leader apologies such as expression of remorse, acceptance of responsibility, display of empathy, offering some form of recompense and plans of action to avoid future transgression. The study is about the influence of leader apologies, and this study will assess the overall impact of leader apologies on followers work attitude when there is follower"s well-being and followers having quality relationship with their leaders.

Specifically, this paper emphasizes on measuring work attitude of followers in the banking sector of Pakistan particularly private multinational banks from twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, as follower"s positive attitude is very much important in banks in order to make them productive which will benefit both the parties.

Gap analysis

The gap identified from the literature is that influences of leader apologies go beyond that of well-being, it is not just limited to well-being but also we should examine how leader apologies can influence followers" work attitude such as job satisfaction, organization commitment (Byrne et al., 2013).

Secondly, we will see the impact of leader apologies on followers work attitude with moderating role of leader member relationship quality whether it moderates the relationship between leader apologies and followers work attitude (Yang, 2013).

Thirdly, in this study, follower well-being is taken as a mediator which was previously taken as a dependent variable but we will explore if FWB either mediates the relation between LA and FWA or not (Byrne et al., 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Followers' work attitude

In this study, followers" work attitude is measured in terms of job satisfaction and affective organization commitment (Yidong and Xinxin, 2013). According to Robbins and Judge (2009), job satisfaction is how good people feel about their job and how it has positive impact on their personality. Job satisfaction is "the attitude people holding for their jobs on the basis of the comparison of the expected outcome with the actual outcome" (Rad and Yarmohammadian, 2006).

According to Holtom et al. (2008) the number of articles they reviewed in which they came across leadership or supervision directly impact followers" job satisfaction. If leaders are fair and cooperative, their this attitude will positively impact followers job satisfaction and if leader attitude is not positive then definitely this will affect followers work attitude; so it is very much important for leaders to have positive attitude towards their followers. According to Toor and Ofori (2009), followers who have ethical leaders or one who work for them usually are satisfied from their leaders and organization, which also increase the moral conduct of followers. Followers where they feel their leaders are departing from their moral standards lower the job satisfaction so it is important on leaders" end that they reflect ethical behavior (Avey et al., 2012). Leaders should make sure that culture which they are promoting and in which they are leading is ethical. Employees that experience this kind of organization commitment such as affective organization commitment are more towards work related goals because they do not want to but they feel they have to (Leroy et al., 2012). According to Basford et al. (2013), affective organization commitment will enhance if followers will forgive their leaders in turn they will be committed to organization than those who fail to forgive their leaders. In this case, organization commitment and job satisfaction will increase at both ends as trust is the base of any relationship.

Job satisfaction and organization commitment will increase if ethical leadership is perceived in leaders/supervisors (Ruiz et al., 2011).

Leader apologies

Leader apologies reflect five components and these are the components which strengthen leader apologies, that is, expression of remorse, accepting responsibility, display of empathy, offering some forms of recompense and providing plan of action in order to avoid transgression in future (Byrne et al., 2013). A leader should have a strong character and his values should signify ethics in his behavior in order to have an ethical culture. Out of three historical approaches to ethical leadership, one of the approaches (Utilitarianism approach) supports this concept which states that leaders spend maximum of their time for the welfare of their followers (Sandel, 2009). It depicts that a leader is concerned about the well-being of his followers which is very important in order to have a positive work attitude of followers.

According to Byrne et al. (2013), apology culture is one of the cultures which benefit organization in different contexts specifically to the leader and follower relationship. This strengthens followers" relation with their leaders and thus, followers feel good about it which ultimately enhances their work attitude. Previously much work was not done in this regard, but now apology context has gained attention and apology is not just about expressing regret but it is more than that (Lewicki and Polin, 2012). Leader apology shows that leader is concerned about his follower, he is taking responsibility of his follower and above all he does not

want to ruin his relationship with his followers. A leader apology is an intention to improve existing leader and follower relationship and it is important for followers" well-being to have good working relationship with their leaders. In multiple studies, it has been seen that apology plays an important role in order to protect an organization image (Coombs and Holladay, 2008; Sheldon and Sallot, 2009). Thus, it is important for an organization to admit their mistake so that employees can be committed and sincere to their organization. Expressing regret in a context of organizational apology reflect that an organization feels bad for its action after committing the transgression (Pace et al., 2010). In the context of apology, the transgressor admits that an act was wrong, accepts responsibility for his action, express sympathy, offer to recompense and promising transgression will not occur in the future (Schmitt et al., 2004; Tucker et al., 2006). All these components together make up leader apologies and in order to apologize, one should take care of all these. Research has identified that apology has a positive impact on followers in terms of generating forgiveness, maintaining trust, enhancing future relationships, closeness and promoting well-being (Hodgins and Liebeskind, 2003). This is very important in order to have a positive work attitude of followers such as job satisfaction and affective organization commitment.

H-₁: Leader apologies have significant effect on followers" work attitude (job satisfaction and affective organization commitment).

Followers' well being

Followers" well-being is measured in terms of psychological health, positive emotions and negative emotions (Byrne, Dionisi, Barling, Bergenwall, Robertson, Dupre, Lys & Wylie, 2013). According to Ryan and Deci (2000: 142), well-being is "optimal psychological functioning and experience". According to Yang (2013), well-being plays an important role in one"s personal life as well as in an organization. Followers" well-being is very important in order to satisfy and motivate them and making their attitude positive towards their work.

Burke"s (2010) review of workplace stress and employee well-being states that leaders play an important role of work stressor because if leaders are not acknowledging their followers" effort and are not concerned about their followers, this will create a stressful situation for the followers. So, it is important for an employee that their ethical status should match with the status of their leadership style in order to have a high level of followers" well-being. If a follower is stressed out, he/she is not relaxed, and it shows that followers" well-being is not been acknowledged by their leaders (Schwepker, 1999; Viswesvaran and Deshpande, 1996; Dorfman et al., 1997). So leaders must take care of their

followers and should acknowledge them in order to make them committed and satisfied.

It has been seen that leaders at different levels of management play vital role in establishing and maintaining such culture which reflect that an organization is ethical in its action and so should their employees (Grojean et al., 2004). This shows that followers" well-being will be enhanced, thus, this will enhance followers positive work attitude which is ultimately good for an organization"s productivity.

According to Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009), if management is fair enough with its employees and fair procedures are being used in an organization, this will motivate employees to work more positively and will make them happy as well. So, it is important for management to take care of their employees because it is their duty to manage all of the human resource and not to make them feel bad because their act will directly impact on employees" work attitude.

Followers" well-being is of greater interest at work to leaders in recent years since well-being has been associated with organization commitment (Danna and Griffin, 1999) and workplace, where well-being is not being acknowledged there. Well-being is associated with lower job performance (Motowidlo et al., 1986) because well-being is important to take care of. If employees are not mentally satisfied they will never produce quality work which will ultimately impact employees" work attitude. This means employee well-being is important in order to have a job satisfaction and affective organization commitment which will nurture organization performance as well.

H-₂: Followers" well-being mediates between leader apologies and followers" work attitude.

Leader-member relationship quality

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien"s (1995: 225), leader member exchange is "relationship-based approach to leadership", and it especially focuses on the relationship between the leaders and the followers. Studies have shown that having high quality leader-member relationship will benefit overall organization in such a way that job performance will enhance job satisfaction to be high, organization citizenship behavior and their commitment towards organization (Ilies et al., 2007). This theory of leader member exchange is among one of the unique theories which focuses on the interaction between managers/leaders or their subordinates/followers (Fairhurst and Chandler, 1986; Deshpande, 1996). If leaders communicate effectively with their followers, this means that leader-member relationship is of high quality which depict that leaders trust their followers, he share his opinions with followers which signals positive side of a leader and thus, this enhance followers" well-being and work attitude as well which is very important for any
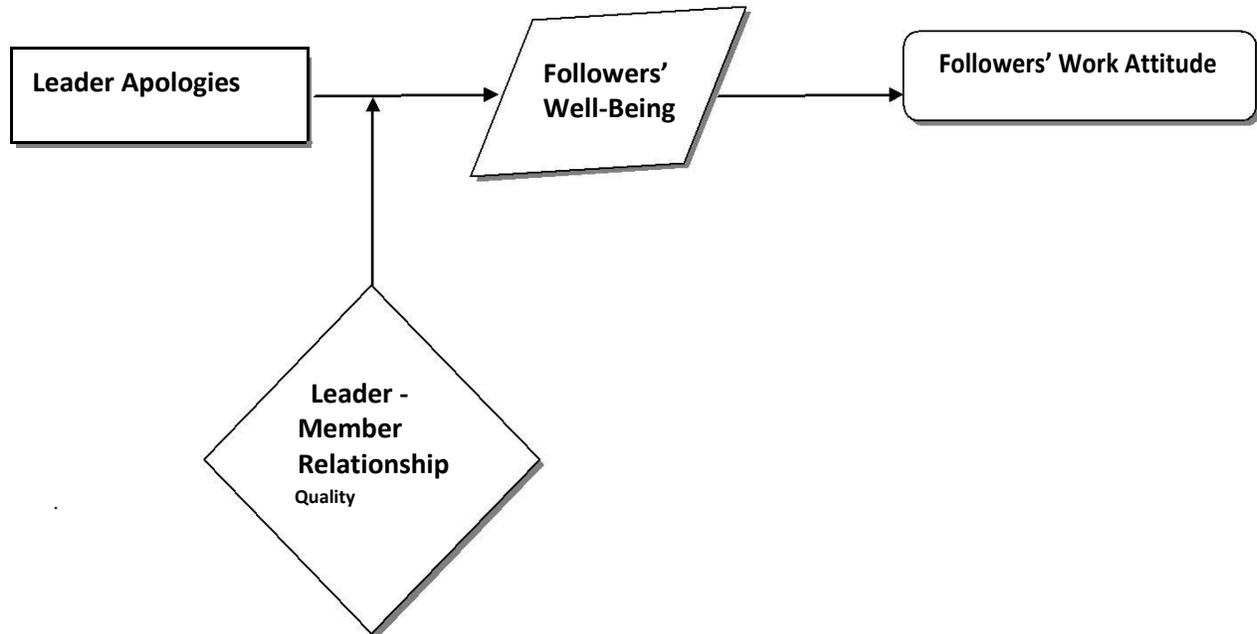
Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

organization.

According to Diener and Seligman (2002), psychological well-being of employee is mandatory at workplace in order to maintain a high quality leader-member relationship, hence it will positively impact job satisfaction as well as affective organization commitment. So it is the responsibility of leaders to take care of the well-being of employees so that they can be happy and relax at workplace because employees" mental satisfaction is really important in the work place as well as their physical satisfaction. Such environment should be promoted and it will be appreciated as well by their employees.

H-₃: Leader-member relationship quality moderates the relationship between leader apologies and followers" work attitude.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

Operational definition of concepts

LA (leader apologies)

It entails expression of remorse, accepting responsibility, display of empathy, offering some forms of recompense and providing plan of action in order to avoid transgression in future. All these make up leader apologies.

LMRQ (leader member relationship quality)

"Relationship-based approach to leadership", especially focuses on the relationship between the leaders and the followers.

FWB (followers' well-being)

Followers" well-being will be measured in terms of psychological health, positive emotions and negative emotions.

FWA (followers' work attitude)

Followers" work attitude will be positive if there is job satisfaction and organization commitment.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a cross sectional study conducted to explore the impact of leader apologies on followers" work attitude. The significance of the relationship is studied on the survey based on primary data. It will also examine the relationship of followers" well-being as a mediator between leader apologies and followers" work attitude. Leader-member relationship quality as a moderator either moderates the relationship of the independent variable or the dependent variable. Questionnaire compromises 23 items and all items were close ended using 5 point Likert scale, where 1 strongly disagrees and 5 strongly agrees. The questionnaire consists of demographics (gender, department and number of years) and 23 items, of which

Table 1. Pearson correlation with two tail level of significance.

Variable		LA	FWA	FWB	LMRQ
LA	Pearson correlation	1			
FWA	Pearson correlation	0.676**	1		
FWB	Pearson correlation	0.416**	0.504**	1	
LMRQ	Pearson correlation	0.242**	0.302**	0.486**	1

Table 2. Linear regression analysis (LA and FWA).

Model	Sig (p-value)	R^2	B	F	t-value
Regression	0.000	0.457	0.676	124.769	6.320

Table 3. Test of moderation on LA-FWA model (Moderator LMRQ).

Regression	Sig (p-value)	R^2	B	F	t-value
(LA) IV → DV (FWA)	0.000	0.457	0.676	124.76	6.320
(LMRQ) MV → DV (FWA)	0.000	0.091	0.302	14.81	9.208
IV × MV → DV	0.000	0.412	0.642	103.66	16.030

Table 4. Test for mediation by Baron and Kenny (1986) method.

Steps	Sig. value	R^2	B	F	t-value
(LA) IV → DV (FWA)	0.000	457	0.676	124.76	6.320
(LA) IV → MV (FWB)	0.000	0.173	0.416	31.00	10.040
(FWB) MV → DV (FWA)	0.000	0.254	0.504	50.480	5.590
(LA) IV (FWB) MV → DV (FWA)	0.000	0.517	0.564	78.827	2.429

6 belonged to leader apologies (Schmitt et al., 2004), 5 to followers" work attitude (Allen and Meyers, 1990; Valentine et al., 2006), 7 to followers" well-being (Makikangas et al., 2006; Katwyk et al., 2000) and 5 to leader-member relationship quality. However, LMX 7 scale was used to measure LMRQ developed by Graen and Ul-Bien (1995).

The researchers selected multinational private banks such as Barclays, Standard Chartered and Burj bank. The study focus was on the employees working there both male and female in the respected institutions to assess the impact of leader apologies on followers" job satisfaction and affective organization commitment.

The sample size of the present study consisted of 225 employees working in the private multinational institutions and data were collected from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The data were collected through questionnaires. All questionnaires were collected after 4 weeks; and out of the 225 responses, 150 responses were received back. The 150 questionnaires were included in the study.

However, data were collected through employees who were being supervised by their managers/leaders.

Confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach Alpha was used as a measure of reliability, whereas correlation, linear regression, mediation and moderation were done by Baron and Kenny (1986) method for data analysis as shown in Tables 1 to 4.

DISCUSSION

This paper examines the impact of leader apologies on followers" work attitude with mediating role of followers" well-being and moderation of leader relationship quality. Three hypotheses were developed for this study and all of the hypotheses were supported under this study. A model was developed which was significant as all hypotheses were accepted. All the results have shown that overall model developed for the research is significant. In this study, we have seen the significant effect of leader apologies on followers" work attitude and

thus, the effect was positive as p-value was less than 0.05%, whereas followers" well-being has partially mediated the relationship of leader apologies and followers" work attitude; though leader-member relationship quality moderates the relationship, it has weak impact on independent and dependent variable. The first hypothesis (H_1) was not rejected as it showed that leader apologies has significant effect on followers" work attitude as sig. value was less than 0.05%, F-value was 124.769, t-value was 6.320, R^2 was 0.457 and B was 0.676. Thus, leader apologies are important for both parties and if leaders apologize for their mistake or transgression they commit, this will have positive impact on followers" work attitude. The second hypothesis (H_2) in this study was also accepted. LMRQ has moderated the relationship as sig. value was less than 0.05% which means the results are significant but it has weakly moderated the relationship between leader apologies and followers" work attitude. So it shows that moderator does exist but in this context it has weak impact on independent and dependent variable because R^2 was not increased after the inclusion of the moderator. The third hypothesis (H_3) in this study was also accepted due to the fact that followers" well-being partially mediates between leader apologies and followers" work attitude because after introduction of mediator IV which was still significant, R^2 increased from 0.457 to 0.517 and B decreased from 0.676 to 0.564. So, all of the hypotheses developed for the study were accepted which shows that the study model is significant and the research questions conducted for this study are fully meaningful as the hypotheses are not rejected. Leaders" ethical behavior is very much important in order to have positive work attitude of followers but yes, it is impossible without having followers" well-being. Leaders must work for the well-being of their followers, they must acknowledge the work of their followers and should provide comfort zone to their followers so that they can have the mental and physical satisfaction which is very much important in the workplace, thus this will enhance their relationship quality and the followers" work attitude as well. A leader must adapt that behavior which is the demand of the situation and which best suits to their followers.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study findings have significant practical implications. As leaders are human beings and they will commit transgressions or mistakes, so one should not expect from them that they cannot commit mistakes, but if they do so, they should accept their responsibility by use of apology; hence apology offering by leaders will have a positive impact on followers and on their work attitudes as well. Thus leaders should adapt this behavior in workplace in order to satisfy their followers and their behavior will benefit both of the parties, the transgressor and the victim, which will have positive impact on the

overall organization. Apologizing never mean that you are letting yourself down but you will gain respect in the eyes of others. Leaders must promote this apology culture in workplace; this will increase followers" job satisfaction as well as their commitment towards organization. Such behavior from leaders depicts that they are giving importance to their relationship; they want to maintain their existing relationship with their followers which is positive at both ends. It is a leader"s responsibility to take care of the well-being of his followers. Leaders must be concerned about their followers and must acknowledge their efforts because this will have positive effect on their work attitude. However, leaders can only have high relationship quality with their followers if they know that they are being acknowledged for their actions.

ACADEMIC IMPLICATIONS

This study makes several contributions to the literature. In this study, followers" work attitude is seen from well-being perspective. Followers" work attitude is influenced by leader apologies, followers" well-being and leader-member relationship quality in workplace. Despite the plenty of knowledge on well-being, many research questions are still in need of proper examinations. As such, there is need for researchers to address those questions. Impact of leader apologies go beyond that of well-being which have been shown in this study by assessing the impact of leader apologies on followers" work attitude with mediation of followers" well-being and leader-member relationship quality as a moderator.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of this study are in different ways. Firstly, it is limited to twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Data were collected from 3 private multinational banks based on non-probability convenient sampling as it was easy to access data from these respected banks. In this study, the sample size is not too large hence respondents were also limited due to time constraint. Followers" work attitude was measured in terms of job satisfaction and affective organization commitment, though other dimensions were not taken into account like work engagement, normative organization, etc.

Conclusion

Leader apologies have positive effect on followers" work attitude in the banking sector of Pakistan. As shown by the hypotheses, H_1: Leader apologies have significant effect on followers" work attitude; H_2: Leader apologies along with leader-member relationship quality can lead to followers" work attitude but it is not strongly moderating in this context; H_3: Followers" well-being partially mediates between leader apologies and followers" work attitude. All hypotheses developed for this study were accepted

which has been statistically proven and which shows that the model developed for this study is significant. Followers" positive wok attitude is very much important in order to retain them in organization. If followers are being acknowledged and the organization is taking responsibility of their well-being, it depicts that the leaders are concerned about their followers which is good for both parties and it signifies that the leaders are holding a good relationship with their followers which again leads to followers" positive work attitude. So, it is important for leaders to adapt such behavior which increase followers" job satisfaction and affective organization commitment which will nurture both followers and leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue should be investigated further in Pakistan"s context again and below are some of the future directions which one may follow in order to get significant results. In future, other outcomes of leader apologies should be investigated as leader apologies go beyond that of followers" work attitude. As this study"s sample size was limited, it is suggested that future studies" sample size should be increased to make the study more detailed. In this study, non probability convenient sampling was used, but in future, researchers can go for probability sampling.

Future researchers should look for other mediating variables like personality traits because leaders personality is very much important and work can be done on public banks and other sectors can be considered as well, as this study was just limited to private multinational banks in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and for future research more cities should also be included. Furthermore, this study is a first stage study of leader apologies with its five dimensions such as expression of remorse, accepting responsibility, displaying empathy, offering some form of recompense and plan of action to avoid future transgression. In future, these dimensions of leader apologies should be unfolded and studied in depth.

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