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EXPLAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL COMPONENTS THROUGH ORGANIZATION'S ETHICAL CLIMATE COMPONENTS

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ABSTRACT

Organization's ethical climate and its components are among major factors affecting employee's different behaviors and emotions in work environments. Accordingly, the role of organization's ethical climate components (caring, laws, rules, services and independence) on psychological capital components (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation) was studied in this research. For this purpose, 267 employees of railway company, Isfahan, Iran, were selected and answered organization's ethical climate and psychological capital questionnaires in a correlation research. The hypotheses of this research were analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between some of the organization's ethical climate components and self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation. Results of the regression analysis indicated that service and independence can predict the self-efficacy and hope; laws and rules, and service can predict resiliency and caring, and service can predict life orientation.

Keywords: Organization's ethical climate, Psychological capital, Self efficacy, Hope, Resiliency, Life orientation, Work environments.

Contribution/ Originality

This research is an original article, which has been administered independently by authors in Esfahan, Iran. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the relationships between psychological capital components and ethical climate components. The paper's primary contribution is finding that organization's ethical climate components at individual level provide more empowerment of employees through strengthening employees' psychological capital.

1. INTRODUCTION

Searching for factors affecting the performance and behavior of employees began many years ago in different fields and scientific disciplines and still continues (Arnaud, 2010; Caldwell *et al.*, 2010). There is a clear reason for major causes of such a perseverance and continuation of attempts

to find different factors influencing employees' different behaviors. The clearest reason is that the efficient and powerful force for organizations enables them to survive with maximum potential and capacity just like a valuable asset (Arnold *et al.*, 2010; Arnaud and Schminke, 2012). Certainly, researchers and scholars' previous efforts have provided valuable information and services to date for all people, and this process will continue until human beings live on Earth. Furthermore, researchers and scholars at different periods have tended to some certain variables. For example, in the past two decades, many researchers have shown special attention to ethics-centered variables (Mayer *et al.*, 2009). Some believe that the major reason for this special attention is that nowadays rapid development of information and technology requires human beings to pay attention to ethics and morals more than before (Johnson, 2007; Yener *et al.*, 2012). One of the areas that need such attention is researches and theories on organization's ethical climate that began three decades ago (Wimbush *et al.*, 1997). In this regard, the current research is about the relationship between organization's ethical climate components and psychological capital components.

1.1. Organization's Ethical Climate

Ethical climate in an organization includes employees' significant and consistent psychological perceptions about ethical policies and procedures governing the organization and its departments (Cullen *et al.*, 2003; Tsai and Huang, 2008). Victor and Cullen (1987), leading researchers in the field of organization's ethical climate, believe that this phenomenon is a subcategory of a general climate governing the organization that directs the range of erroneous and correct organizational actions in each working environment. Available research evidence suggests that three factors of form, structure and historical developments in organizations are among the most important determinants of every organization's ethical climate (Fournier *et al.*, 2010; Tseng and Fan, 2011; Briggs *et al.*, 2012). Also, studies on organization's ethical climate components conclude that organization's ethical climate can have development of egoism, benevolence and principled tendencies just like people's moral development (Wimbush *et al.*, 1997). In egoism-based climate, people focus on themselves and their personal interests, while in benevolence climate the ethical climate governing the organization focuses equally on the maximum benefits for all people, and in the principled climate, following world principles and moral beliefs are seriously adhered to (DeConinck *et al.*, 2013). According to the report of Wimbush *et al.* (1997), organization's ethical climate based on the factors proposed in Victor and Cullen (1987) approach, has five main components including caring, rules, law, independency and instrumental tendencies.

People in an ethical climate based on ethical law-orientation believe that they should follow the ethical rules governing the organization. For this reason, all practices and behaviors of individuals are regulated and directed based on a set of ethical rules (Arnold *et al.*, 2010; Arnaud and Schminke, 2012). Also, in a rule-based ethical climate employees are still expected to follow organization's ethical and formal rules. In addition, the superiority of the organization or working group is emphasized in the rules (Umphress *et al.*, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky and Even-Zohar,

2011; Wang and Hsieh, 2012). In a caring-based ethical climate, employees should take care of each other's welfare and their working group in every possible way. Instead, in an independence-based ethical climate, employees are expected to follow their personal moral beliefs (Stewart *et al.*, 2011). And finally, in instrumental tendencies, the organization's ethical climate focuses on searching personal interests and achieving them at any price, even at the expense of the harm to others (Briggs *et al.*, 2012; Moore, 2012; DeConinck *et al.*, 2013). Considering organization's ethical climate, it can be said that two dimensions of moral independency and instrumental tendencies basically focus on personal moralization and three dimensions of rules, caring and service are considered as collective moralization. A variety of extensive evidence shows that there is a relationship between organization's ethical climate and its components and a diverse range of behaviors, attitudes and perceptions of employees (Cullen *et al.*, 2003; Tsai and Huang, 2008; Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Umphress *et al.*, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky and Even-Zohar, 2011; Wang and Hsieh, 2012). For example, Martin and Cullen (2006) meta-analysis demonstrated a relationship between organization's ethical climate and attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and with citizenship and counterproductive behaviors. Also, some other studies indicated that positive oriented constructs such as trust, self-efficacy and hope are also affected by organization's ethical climate components.

1.2. Psychological Capital and Organization's Ethical Climate

Psychological capital is a new construct originating from positive psychology approach in scientific texts (Peterson and Byron, 2008; Kluemper *et al.*, 2009; Peterson *et al.*, 2009; Luthans *et al.*, 2010). Theoretically, this positive variable is a higher order construct that embraces many previous concepts proposed in the field of positive psychology (Wagnild and Collins, 2009; McMurray *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011). According to Walumbwa *et al.* (2011), this form of psychological human capital has four major components including optimism on success in the present and future, perseverance and hope on the goals and success in achieving them, making sure of self-efficacy, ability and efforts for challenging assignments and success in achieving them and flexibility on dealing with the matters and the ways to achieve success. In short, it can be said that these four attributes include self-efficacy, resiliency, hope and life orientation (West *et al.*, 2009; Youssef and Luthans, 2010; 2011). Available evidence shows that psychological capital components are extremely important constructs to improve individual performance and effectiveness and also are factors for strengthening and increasing the level of employees' professional attitude in work environments (Luthans *et al.*, 2008; Clapp Smith *et al.*, 2009; Culbertson *et al.*, 2010; Dawkins and Martin, 2010; Rego *et al.*, 2010; Avey *et al.*, 2011; Larson *et al.*, 2013).

Despite the strong research evidence related to behavioral and attitudinal consequences of psychological capital, theoretically there are currently scientific gap in human knowledge about these components. One of the serious gaps in this area is that the past researches have not explicitly

specified which macro-institutional and situational factors including climate, culture, structure and administrative systems can strengthen self-efficacy, resiliency, hope and life orientation for employees. This gap exists while macro-situational and organizational factors such as organization's ethical climate in terms of their extensive and influential nature can have sustainable and significant effects on all levels of organization and especially on employees (Peterson, 2002; DeConinck, 2010; 2011; Shacklock *et al.*, 2011a). In this regard, organization's ethical climate, like meaningful and consistent psychological perceptions, has such a power regarding ethical principles and rules (Weber and Seger, 2002; Jensen and Richert, 2005; Lemmergaard and Lauridsen, 2008; Bulutlar and Ünler, 2009). When the organization's ethical climate components can be effective on the level of cognitions, perceptions, emotions and behaviors of employees, it is logical that self-efficacy, resiliency, hope and life orientation of employees are also affected by them. Likewise, some evidence shows a relationship between ethics and moralization and some psychological capital components.

For example, Parboteeah and Kapp (2008) have shown that there is a relationship between empowerment and ethical climate in the organization. Swanepoel and Innes (2011), and Shacklock *et al.* (2011b) also have shown that organization's ethical climate can have a relationship with self-efficacy and hope. Another research has shown that authentic leadership can have a positive relationship with psychological capital (Clapp Smith *et al.*, 2009; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011; Golparvar *et al.*, 2013). Evidence provided by these researchers indicates that ethical climate strengthens people in terms of hope and self-efficacy by facilitating implementation of individuals' functional and practical purposes. Furthermore, organization's ethical climate is able to enhance people's performance through support and caring (Peterson, 2002; Swanepoel and Innes, 2011; Simha and Cullen, 2012). This support and caring of performance can also have a central role in promotion of employees' psychological capital (Clapp Smith *et al.*, 2009; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011). However, this evidence cannot explain the manner of and reason for the relationship between organization's ethical climate components and psychological capital components. That is why it seems that currently there is lack of information about the functions of organization's ethical climate components for psychological capital components. Therefore, it is necessary this gap be removed gradually by conducting further researches. The present study was developed and conducted in this regard.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a relationship between organization's ethical climate components (caring, law and code, service and independence) and psychological capital components (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation).

H2: There is a multiple relationship between organization's ethical climate components (caring, law and code, service and independence) and psychological capital components (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants and Procedures

In the present study we have used a co-relational design. This design is suitable to explore the relationship between predictors and criterion variables. Sample group of current investigation was employees of railway company, Isfahan, Iran. From two hundred eighty distributed instruments, two hundred and sixty seven employees (95.3% response rate was very much acceptable in social science research and for regression analysis) completed the questionnaires. The participants were 95.3% male and 4.7% female. More than 90% of them were married (259 respondent or 93.2%), and others were single (20 respondent or 6.8%). With regard to educational level, 50% had secondary studies or diploma, and 50% had university studies. The range of participants' age was 26 to 60 years and the range of participants' organizational tenure was 1 to 30 years.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Organizational Ethical Climate (OEC)

Organizational ethical climate was measured using thirty six items scale adapted from Wimbush *et al.* (1997), which translated and validated in Iran by Golparvar *et al.* (2013). This questionnaire in Iranian form has five main subscales including caring (15 items), rules and law (8 items), service (4 items), independency (4 items) and instrumental tendencies (5 items). Responses were rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely false) to 7 (completely true). A sample item of this questionnaire is: The most important concern is the good of all the people in the organization (caring subscale). Research suggests that both the items and the scale of the Iranian version of organizational ethical climate questionnaire have good construct and concurrent validity (Golparvar *et al.*, 2013). Exploratory factor analysis in current research showed that, items of instrumental tendencies subscale distributed in another subscales of ethical climate questionnaire and have low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha). For this, instrumental tendencies subscale excluded from the current research. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the other subscales of organizational ethical climate questionnaire including caring, rules and law, service and independency in present study were 0.89, 0.85, 0.79 and 0.76 respectively.

2.2.2. Psychological Capital (PCQ)

Psychological capital was measured by means of using twenty six items questionnaire adapted from Mac Gee (2011), which translated and validated by Golparvar (2013) in Iran. A sample item is: I was able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself (self efficacy). Responses were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (often). Golparvar (2013) have reported the construct validity (on the basis of exploratory factor analysis) of this questionnaire. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the subscales of psychological capital questionnaire including

self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation in present study were 0.81, 0.86, 0.79 and 0.75 respectively.

3. RESULTS

Data were analyzed with SPSS-17 (Statistical Package for Social Science) to compute correlations, descriptive information and performing regression analysis. Mean and standard deviation of the research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table-1. Mean and standard deviation of the research variables

Research variables		M	SD
Ethical Climate	Caring	3.52	.73
	Rules & Law	3.69	.8
	Service	3.97	.97
	Independency	3.74	1.02
Psychological capital	Self-efficacy	4.37	.75
	Hope	4.44	.79
	Resiliency	4.33	.73
	Life Orientation	4.03	.67

Source: Results of current research

As can be seen from Table 1, results indicate that, for the ethical climate components, law with a mean of 3.97 was at its highest and caring with a mean of 3.52 was at its lowest. Based on the Table 1, results indicate that, for the psychological capital components, life orientation with a mean of 4.03 was at its lowest and hope with a mean of 4.44 was at its highest. Inter-correlation between ethical climate dimensions and psychological capital dimensions presented in Table 2.

Based on the Table 2, excluding the law which is not significantly correlated with life orientation ($p>.05$) and independency which is not significantly correlated with self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation ($p>.05$), the other components of the ethical climate are positively and significantly correlated with the entire components of psychological capital ($p<.05$ or $p<.01$). Thus, it is concluded that the first hypothesis (H1, there is a relationship between organization's ethical climate components and psychological capital components) is supported partially. The results of enter regression analysis presented in Table 3.

Table-2. Inter-correlation between ethical climate dimensions and psychological capital dimensions

Row	Research variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Ethical Climate	Caring	-						
2		Rules & Law	.66**	-					
3		Service	.58**	.49**	-				
4		Independency	-.27**	-.46**	-.12**	-			
5	Psychological capital	Self-efficacy	.19**	.15*	.25**	.07	-		
6		Hope	.22**	.18**	.29**	.05	.78**	-	
7		Resiliency	.22**	.24**	.27**	.01	.68**	.71**	-
8		Life Orientation	.21**	.17**	.03	-.02	.63**	.52**	.49**

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

Table-3. The results of enter regression analysis

Ethical Climate	Psychological Capital											
	Self Efficacy			Hope			Resiliency			Life orientation		
	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β
Caring	.05	.09	.07	.07	.09	.06	.04	.08	.04	.23**	.08	.25**
Rules & Law	.07	.08	.07	.09	.08	.09	.17*	.08	.19*	.1	.07	.12
Service	.15**	.06	.19**	.19**	.06	.23**	.13*	.05	.17*	-.11*	.05	-.16*
Independency	.11*	.05	.14*	.1*	.05	.13*	.09	.05	.12	.05	.04	.08
R^2	.086			.104			.099			.067		
F	6.09**			7.94**			7.47**			4.93**		

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

Based on the Table 3, of the ethical climate dimensions, service (β= .19 and β= .23 respectively) and independency (β= .14 and β= .13 respectively) are predictors of self efficacy (R^2 = 0.086, $F_{(3, 263)}$ = 6.09, p<.01) and hope (R^2 = 0.104, $F_{(3, 263)}$ = 7.94, p<.01); rules and law (β= .19) and service (β= .17) are predictors of resiliency (R^2 = 0.099, $F_{(3, 263)}$ = 7.47, p<.01); and caring (β= .25) and service (β= -.16) are predictors of life orientation (R^2=0.067, $F_{(3, 263)}$=4.93, p<.01). Thus, it is concluded that the second hypothesis (H2, there is a multiple relationship between organization's ethical climate components and psychological capital components), is supported partially.

4. DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to evaluate the relationship between organization's ethical climate components (caring, law and rules, service and independence) and psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation) and resulted in a number of correlations. These results are consistent with those of previous studies and theories on the possible relationships between organization's ethical climate and psychological capital components (Parboteeah and Kapp, 2008; Clapp Smith *et al.*, 2009; Swanepoel and Innes, 2011; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011; Shacklock *et al.*, 2011b; Golparvar *et al.*, 2013). The first finding suggested that no significant

relationship was observed between independence and four psychological capital components (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation). Based on the available research evidence and according to the contents about the moral independence, this dimension of organization's ethical climate is basically individual-centered (Peterson, 2002; DeConinck, 2010; 2011; Shacklock *et al.*, 2011a). This means that in moral independence, people emphasize their individual recognition of right and wrong and moral principles instead of paying attention to collective consciousness within ethical principles (Cullen *et al.*, 2003; Tsai and Huang, 2008; Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Umphress *et al.*, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky and Even-Zohar, 2011; Wang and Hsieh, 2012). From this perspective, there might be no significant relationship between individual moralization and psychological capital components in a workplace which is a collective environment, so individuals interact and communicate with others and obtain necessary opportunity to strengthen their psychological capital. This finding contains this important theoretical implicit result that individual's moralization in form of moral independence probably does not have a positive function for individuals' psychological capital in the workplace.

Instead, a positive relationship was observed between collective moralization components of organization's ethical climate, that is, caring, service, law and code (except service that did not have a significant relationship with positive life orientation) and self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and positive life orientation. This finding shows that psychological capital components in a workplace are considered as components with social orientation in that their changes in the working environment are more likely influenced by the social and ethical factors and procedures governing the organization (Peterson and Byron, 2008; Kluemper *et al.*, 2009; Peterson *et al.*, 2009; Luthans *et al.*, 2010). Regarding the history of theories and interpretations for components such as hope and self-efficacy, we understand that these variables have long been introduced as cognitive and social components that changed through relationships, interactions, feedbacks and social symptoms and signs provided by environment and other people (Wagnild and Collins, 2009; McMurray *et al.*, 2010; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011).

Therefore, from such a perspective, a relationship seems logical between collective components of organization's ethical climate which are based on social interaction and following moral and human regulations governing the organization climate and individuals' psychological capital. The mechanism of this relationship can be explained from several directions. First, when we talk about caring, service and adhering to moral law and rules in the organization climate, obviously we emphasize on pervasive and influence of these components. What do individuals experience in their interactions and experiences in a moral working environment based on caring, service and adhering to moral law and rules? Certainly, attention, positive feedback, support, confidence and human and moral values are integral components of such a climate (Victor and Cullen, 1987; Wimbush *et al.*, 1997; Martin and Cullen, 2006; Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Arnold *et al.*, 2010; Arnaud and Schminke, 2012; Yener *et al.*, 2012). For this reason, people will have more sense of efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism by receiving and understanding these positive

experiences. This explanation is consistent with the findings of other researchers and show that organization's ethical climate has a relationship with confidence, value and empowerment.

In regression analysis, three combined models were obtained by two of four components of organization's ethical climate. Two components of service and independence had predictive power for self-efficacy and hope, law and rules and service had predictive power for resiliency and caring and service had predictive power for positive life orientation. There are several serious issues in these results. First, the component of service from the ethical climate is present for predicting four variables of self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and life orientation. This more likely suggests that humane and ethical service is one of the influential and important components for people's psychological capital in work environments compared to other ethical climate components. This serious influence may be attributed to the fact that among collective organization's ethical climate components, service is a variable with higher social and emotional support. Theoretically, support plays the role of empowering and encouraging factor for human. In other words, when one's perception on the environment in which he/she works is the perception of service and human and ethical support (and in return his service to others), he/she also performs with more ease and confidence in himself and his efforts (Martin and Cullen, 2006; Mayer *et al.*, 2009).

The next point that was revealed in regression analysis was that no significant relationship was found between independence and four psychological capital components at the level of simple correlations, but in regression analysis moral independence was present along with service to predict self-efficacy and hope. Along with other theoretical and research probabilities, as coefficients in regression analysis have semi-partial nature, one of the probabilities is that components of caring, service and law and rules can play an inhibiting role in relationship of independence with self-efficacy and hope. So, when the inhibiting role is relatively reduced (by calculation of semi-partial coefficients), the role of independence is revealed for self-efficacy and hope.

This part of evidence relatively indicates that if moral and humane service climate dominates in the workplace (notice standard coefficients of service and independence in table 2), a level of moral independence comes into action for the sense of self-efficacy and hope. This can be attributed to the fact that self-efficacy and hope are constructs focused on personal efforts and purposefulness that depend on independence to some extent. Instead, two components of resiliency and positive life orientation along with service depend on law and rules and caring. This finding implicitly indicates distinctions between self-efficiency, hope and resiliency, and life orientation. Probably, this distinction is such that self-efficacy and hope are service-independence-oriented constructs in the context of organization's ethical climate, while resiliency and life orientation are service-rule-oriented constructs and life orientation is service-caring-oriented construct. It is most likely that in relationships between organization's ethical climate components and psychological capital components, there are several forms of interactive roles between components of both variables. Conducting more studies will clarify this issue in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

The most important theoretical implicit result of this research is providing background for the expansion of the current human body of knowledge about functions and relationships between organization's ethical climate components and employees' psychological capital. Simply, it can be said that organization's ethical climate components at individual level provide more empowerment of employees through strengthening employees' psychological capital. The second theoretical implicit result is that based on the results of this research the ethical and humane service is the most essential factor in organization's ethical climate to strengthen psychological capital. For this reason, it is essential that in service organizations, like the organization studied here, promotion of ethical climate service be a priority. The third theoretical implicit result is that a combination of relatively different organization's ethical climate components may be essential for changes in self-efficacy and hope on the one hand, and resiliency and life orientation on the other. However, if this research is conducted in different organizations, more definitive conclusions can be proposed and followed. The limitations of this research including service nature of the organizations and correlation-based results should be considered in generalizing the results.

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