**Linking Organizational Dehumanization with Creative Performance through Threat to Self-Esteem-The Moderating Role of Locus of Control**

**Abstract**

Organizational dehumanization can be defined as “the experience of an employee who feels objectified by his or her organization, denied personal subjectivity, and made to feel like a tool or an instrument for the organization’s ends” (Bell & Khoury, 2011, p. 170). One such example is warehouse workers at Amazon who described their struggle to even find time to take restroom breaks during the workday due to strict requirements to meet productivity goals (Ghosh, 2018). Indeed, people want to feel valued, but being dehumanized may undermine one's sense of belonging. As a consequence, employees who perceive being treated like a tool by their organizations, are more likely to go through a burnout (Baldissarri et al., 2014) and physical strain (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2019). Despite dehumanization has negative consequences on work outcomes, but research seems to neglect its consequences on employees favorable work outcomes (Sarwar et al., 2020).

**Theoretical background:**

Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), researchers suggest that maltreatment from the organization increases deviant behaviors due to the norm of reciprocity (e.g., Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009). Specifically, employees who then feel mistreated by their organization engage in the process of revenge (Va ̈yrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018) leading them to show work behavior harmful in terms of decreased creativity.

Extending this line of research, we theorize as to “why and when” the detrimental effects of dehumanization extend to creative performance, whereby an employee decreases creativity at work which may be of interest to the organization through threat to self-esteem. We argue that employees who perceive that their organization consider them like a robot or treat them as a tool which can be replaced easily are more likely to decrease their self-esteem, which, in turn, is likely to contribute to decreased creative performance. Additionally, while organizations are required to take certain actions to provide a conducive environment to decrease the negative consequences created by maltreatment, it is hard eliminating the negative factors in the workplace (Sarwar et al., 2021). One possible option is to consider employees’ personality characteristics (individual differences) which may provide a protective shield against negative feelings at work (Roberts et al., 2011). We consider individual’s locus of control (LOC) which deals with general beliefs in the controllability in the events in an individual's life (Sweeney, McFarlin & Cotton, 1991; Rotter, 1990).

**Research Methodology:**

A multi-source time-lagged study was conducted where survey questionnaires were administered at two-time points (T1, & T2) with two-month gap. Questionnaires comprising organizational dehumanization, self-esteem, locus of control were completed by employees and the immediate supervisors reported the employee’s creative performance.

**Expected Results:**

In addition to means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients of all study variables and correlations between variables, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be conducted to confirm the discriminant validity of study constructs. The hypothesized moderated mediated model will be tested using Structural Equation Modeling. PROCESS macro as suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004) will be used to test the moderating role of locus of control.

We expect that organizational dehumanization directly influences creative performance as well as through the mediation of threat to self-esteem. Furthermore, we expect the significant moderating role of locus of control on the relationship between threat to self-esteem and creative performance. Study results will be available for presentation in conference.

**Limitations:**

Our study cannot check for causality due to unavailability of longitudinal data. Furthermore, the sample is from diverse industry so future research may test such models in specific industry. In addition to that, various our individual factors could be tested as possible moderators.

**Research/Practical Implications:**

In terms of implications, our study will guide organizations to treat their employees in more humane way and valuing them. More empowerment should be given to employees so that giving them an impression that their contribution is valuable to organization.

**Contribution:**

Our study makes three key contributions to the existing research on organizational dehumanization and workplace outcomes. First, by highlighting social exchange theory our research strives to examine the link between organizational dehumanization and creative performance, to which less attention has been paid. Second, we sought to explore and model the specific process by which organizational dehumanization impinges on employees’ creative performance, by integrating the threat to self -esteem. Third, our research responds to Caesens et al.’s (2017) call for studies that examine the nomological network of organizational dehumanization, by identifying new boundary conditions (i.e., individuals’ LOC).