



The significance of mutual recognition respect in mediating the relationships between trait emotional intelligence, affective commitment and job satisfaction

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 June 2016

Received in revised form 16 September 2016

Accepted 17 September 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Mutual recognition respect

Trait emotional intelligence

Affective commitment

Job satisfaction

ABSTRACT

There has been limited research to date exploring the significance of a form of respect referred to as mutual recognition respect within manager and subordinate relationships. Based on data collected from 203 manager-subordinate dyads within the Insurance industry in Malaysia, we examine the effects of mutual recognition respect on subordinate affective commitment and job satisfaction. As theorised, high and shared recognition respect in relationships (mutual recognition respect) was found to positively predict these workplace attitudes. In addition, both manager and subordinate trait emotional intelligence were positively associated with mutual recognition respect. In relationships characterised as having low mutual recognition respect, the model demonstrated a much poorer fit to the data and trait-EI was not found to have a significant effect in this model. Our findings suggest mutual recognition respect can have both organizational and individual benefits and selection methods that assess trait-EI may help to enhance mutual recognition respect within the workplace.

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1. Introduction

A number of studies have found respect to be associated with individuals' self-esteem and well-being, as well as physical and mental health in the workplace (Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010; Oore et al., 2010). Respect has also been found to be associated with important outcomes traditionally studied in organizational behaviour, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, citizenship behaviour and turnover (Faulkner & Laschinger, 2008; Sleebos, Ellemers, & De Gilder, 2006; Ulrich, Buerhaus, Donelan, & Dittus, 2005).

Lacking to date however, has been the incorporation of differing notions of respect as conceptualised within the ethics literature to inform research on respect more generally within the psychology literatures (Clarke, 2011; Grover, 2013). In the ethics literature, an important distinction has been highlighted between what is seen as recognition and appraisal forms of respect (Benditt, 2008). Few studies to date have investigated the recognition form of respect. In an experimental study, Renger and Simon (2011) found social recognition by group members as an equal was associated with the experience of respect. This was then associated with higher motivation and task performance mediated through collective identification. More recently, research investigating

the mutual recognition form of respect between managers and their subordinates has demonstrated that it is empirically distinct from the appraisal form of respect, and predicted employee well-being as well as job performance. By contrast appraisal respect was only found to predict job performance (Clarke & Mahadi, 2015). Of note, recent research suggests that the ways particular types of respect come about can differ, as well as independently predict a range of outcomes (Huo et al., 2010).

This paper takes this work forward in two ways. First we examine whether a form of respect referred to as mutual recognition respect predicts employee job satisfaction and affective commitment in the workplace. These relationships have not been looked at in research to date. Second, this is the first study to examine individual characteristics potentially predictive of mutual recognition respect. Specifically, we investigate the extent to which manager and subordinate trait emotional intelligence contribute to mutual recognition respect in these workplace relationships. On a practical level, our study suggests selection methods incorporating tests for trait EI could help improve recognition respect in the workplace.

2. Mutual recognition respect

Appraisal respect connotes the form of respect that originates in individuals' assessments of each others' capabilities or "worth" (Cranor, 1975). Liden and Maslyn (1998) are referring to appraisal respect when they define respect as, "mutual respect for the capabilities of the other". Delellis (2000) points out that the notion of appraisal respect

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has dominated Western conceptualisations of respect based upon attributes of an individual's "worthiness". Recognition respect is different in that it arises out of judgements we make based on some feature of the judgement target being morally correct, unbiased, or fair (Atwell, 1981). In contrast to appraisal respect, this form of respect has its origins in moral reasoning (Cranor, 1975).

Whereas appraisal respect denotes the idea that we need to prove our worthiness to others, recognition respect is due to an individual as a fundamental, unconditional human right (Kant, 1964). It suggests that people should be treated fairly as this is morally correct behaviour (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Research in interpersonal relationships has also suggested that it is the mutual quality of the relationship between people that is significant in bringing about feelings of self-validation and enhances social ties (Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992). We argue that mutual recognition respect is a relational property, and that there are important benefits that accrue to individuals as a result of the interdependence they feel from one another. This implies more than a social exchange based upon what is owed or what is received. Instead, it captures the notion that psychological growth occurs through the relationship (Miller, 1986). Genero et al. (1992) go as far as to suggest that relationships that are one-sided ultimately result in lower self-esteem or even shame. The mutual presence of this form of respect is argued to be a key condition in order for interpersonal relationships to grow and develop (Honneth, 1995). Thus, it is not only recognition respect, but the mutuality of recognition respect that we argue here serves an important function in the workplace.

3. Theory & hypotheses

3.1. Trait EI and mutual recognition respect

Emotional intelligence has been defined as an individual's capacity to process emotional information in an accurate manner and use that information both to inform their cognition and regulate their and others' emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). The construct has been viewed either as a set of abilities (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) or alternatively a set of personality characteristics or behavioural tendencies referred to as trait-EI (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009) argue that ability and trait conceptualisations of emotional intelligence may be complementary aspects of adaptive emotional functioning. Individuals with high levels of trait emotional intelligence have more rewarding interpersonal relationships and demonstrate more prosocial behaviours (Mavroveli, Petrides, Rieffe, & Bakker, 2007). This should predispose them toward showing recognition respect for persons. We now put forward a number of arguments to theoretically support this position. First, trait emotional intelligence has been found to be negatively associated with victimization and bullying (Mavroveli & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011), behaviours that are characterised by low levels of respect for persons (Morrison, 2006). Second, an important aspect of trait emotional intelligence is self-awareness (Schutte et al., 1998). Self-awareness involves "reflecting on one's unique values, identity, emotions, goals, knowledge, talents and/or capabilities" to gain a more in-depth understanding of the self (Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005, p349). Trait emotional intelligence may underpin recognition respect because it enables individuals to see that they are far similar to each other than previously thought, based upon a common humanity.

Next, supervisors with high trait emotional intelligence are more sensitive to the emotions of subordinates and more likely to treat them in ways which confers them psychological benefits such as acceptance and approval (Wong & Law, 2002). These are key aspects of recognition respect. Trait emotional intelligence also enables a supervisor to take the perspective of their subordinate to understand their point of view. This is also an attribute of recognition respect (Druskat & Wolff, 2002).

Finally, trait emotional intelligence has been found to be positively associated with empathy (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006). Empathy has been shown to convey unconditional positive regard and non-judgemental attitudes in therapeutic relationships (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Rogers, 1965). These are similarly aspects of recognition respect identified in the literature (Honneth, 1995).

Hypothesis 1. Manager and subordinate trait emotional intelligence will be positively related to mutual recognition respect.

3.2. Mutual recognition respect and affective commitment

Theories of self-construal suggest that positive evaluations of the self are fostered through the interactions one has with others (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). Mutual recognition respect indicates inclusion and acceptance which according to relational identity theory (Shapiro, 2010) satisfies basic needs for affiliation we derive from relationships. This promotes positive affect associated with feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1988). Based on social exchange theory, individuals respond to these intangible benefits by increasing their affective commitment to the organization. The increased self-esteem arising from mutual recognition respect promotes a positive psychological state and meets needs that will enhance subordinates' identification with the organization. Supporting this proposition, research has shown self-esteem to be positively related to affective commitment (Lee & Peccei, 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Hypothesis 2. Mutual recognition respect will be positively related to affective commitment.

3.3. Mutual recognition respect and job satisfaction

Drawing upon Judge and colleagues work on core self-evaluations (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), increased self-esteem is associated with greater optimism and perseverance in the face of difficulties. These make greater success and job satisfaction more likely (Dodgson & Wood, 1998). The positive self-evaluations arising from mutual recognition respect should therefore be expected to influence job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3. Mutual recognition respect will be positively related to job satisfaction.

4. Method

4.1. Sample and procedure

Data were collected from a large insurance organization with 615 offices in Malaysia using a self-administered postal survey. We contacted the general manager of the HR department, who then provided us with contact details of the senior manager located in each of the branch offices. Senior managers were then responsible for distributing a survey packet to one middle manager and one of their direct reports. Manager and subordinate dyad questionnaires were given matched codes so we could undertake appropriate data analyses. Participants were offered the opportunity to enter a lucky draw to win a local store voucher as an incentive. The questionnaire was translated into the Malay language by the researcher following the back-translation method (Brislin, 1980). A professional translator who was blind to this study was then hired to translate the Malay version questionnaire back into English. Then, a comparison was made between the back-translation and the original version of the questionnaire. This did not indicate any significant translation problems. In order to minimise problems associated with common method variance, we asked managers and their subordinates to complete measures of trait EI and mutual recognition respect first.

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