Linking Career Aspiration and Perceived Organizational Support: The Mediating Role of Proactive Career Behavior

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[Abstract] The purpose of this paper is to investigate the individual orientation of career development initiatives by exploring the mediator between career aspiration and perceived organizational support. There were 405 responses from public and private sector employees posted in Delhi and National Capital Region of India that were utilized for data analysis by applying structural equation modelling through Smart-PLS. The major findings of this work establish a positive association of career aspiration with proactive career behavior, which, in turn, affects perceived organizational support. The higher-aspiring employees may benefit from taking proactive career initiatives that will increase their chances of attaining better organizational support.

[Keywords] career aspiration, proactive career behavior, perceived organizational support, individual career development, Indian banking sector

Introduction

Proactivity is regarded as a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly in an immensely dynamic work environment (Crant, 2000). The Indian banking sector, being highly exposed to technological and economic changes (Roy & Vishwanathan, 2018), demands a proactive workforce to manage the instabilities caused by severe competition faced by banks in India, both from domestic as well as foreign banks, and the government initiative to merge the non-profitable banks (Kamath et al., 2003). To maintain their existence, banks direly require a specialized workforce that can maximize its customer base (Jyothi & Jyothi, 2008). Given such a dynamic work environment of the banks in India, not just for the organization, require a proactive workforce; but also, the employees need to remain proactive for maintaining their employability. The rapid technological advancements in banking activities require employees to actively upgrade their skills and knowledge accordingly (Trivedi, 2003). The existing studies on the Indian banking sector reveal major attention of researchers on identifying the current and upcoming challenges to be faced by the banks in India, such as the changing needs of customers, imposition of regulatory reforms, mergers and acquisitions, retention of talented employees, and keeping pace with technological advancement (Kamath et al., 2003; Bhatt, 2012; 8; Roy & Vishwanathan, 2018). The factors contributing to bank employees' productivity and overall bank performance. such as training (Karthikeyan et al., 2010), skill and knowledge enhancement (Jyothi & Jyothi, 2008), promotion, recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, and social welfare of employees (Kulkarni, 1988), development of intellectual capital (Kamath, 2007) have been investigated in several studies (Quresh et al., 2010). However, a study focussed on the career development of employees in the Indian banking sector from individual employees' perspective was not found in the literature. Therefore, we have examined the individual employees' proactive initiatives towards their career development.

Employees are supposed to remain proactive throughout their careers (Krishnan & Maheshwari, 2011) as they continuously face the challenge of obsolescence due to the relentless requirement of upgraded knowledge and skills in the banks (Kamath et al., 2003). Owing to the significance of proactivity, it is imperative to identify the variable that motivates the employees to engage in proactive career behavior (PCB). As O'Brien (1996) considered career aspiration as the desire to advance in one's career, career aspiration (CA) can be the possible determinant of PCB among employees. Therefore, in this study, we have attempted to investigate the impact of CA on PCB. Further, the Vroom's Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) suggests that the employees will anticipate rewards in return to their proactive initiatives. This study

tries to examine whether the bank employees in India perceive better organizational support as an outcome of their proactive efforts and further investigates if PCB acts as a mediator in channelizing their career aspirations into desired organizational support.

We have utilized 405 appropriately filled responses for data analysis collected from the employees of the banks located in Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was applied on Smart-PLS to evaluate the proposed model.

Our study significantly contributes to the organizational behavior literature by providing an insight into the dynamics of the career aspirations of the Indian banking sector employees and their individual initiatives towards their career development for achieving discernible career rewards in the form of organizational support, which is in line with the propositions of Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964).

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

In this study, a structural model has been developed to examine the antecedent and outcome of PCB and how PCB mediates the association of CA with POS.

Career Aspiration and Proactive Career Behavior

Career aspiration is the desire to advance within one's career (O'Brien, 1996). Career aspiration has been studied majorly as an outcome of several social and cognitive factors aligning with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Andreassen, 2016; Ismail & Ramly, 2010). Yun and Min (2015) revealed variations in career aspiration due to various demographic and social features. These previous studies investigated the antecedents of the career aspirations. However, our study focusses on the outcomes of career aspiration. Rojewski (2005) considered career aspiration as a better predictor of career behavior, reckoning career aspiration as a motivator. Hence, we believe that career aspirations among employees drive them to demonstrate proactive career behavior in the expectation that such behavior would assist them to achieve desired career goals. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate if CA has any significant impact on PCB among Indian bank employees.

H1: Career aspiration significantly affects proactive career behaviour.

Proactive Career Behavior and Perceived Organizational Support

Proactive career behavior refers to the deliberate actions that employees undertake to accomplish their career goals (De Vos et al., 2009). The fundamental proactive career behaviors that are significant in the boundaryless era include career planning, skill development, and networking (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). The concern about career transitions and uncertainties prompts career planning (Marko & Savickas, 1998), skill development initiatives, and networking behavior in the employees. Further, the organizational support theory argues that employees believe that their increased work performance will provide them better organizational support (Eisenberger et *al.*, 1986). Therefore, this study aims to explore whether highly proactive employees perceive better organizational support.

H2: Proactive career behavior significantly affects perceived organizational support.

Career Aspiration and Perceived Organizational Support

Career-aspiring employees have greater clarity of objectives and, therefore, they are in a better position to attain successful career (Hirschi, 2014). Further, POS is considered as a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their employee's contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, employees regard organizational support as a reinforcement necessary for sustaining their careers within their organization and considering their career successful. Hence, we have attempted to examine if career-aspiring employees perceive higher organizational support.

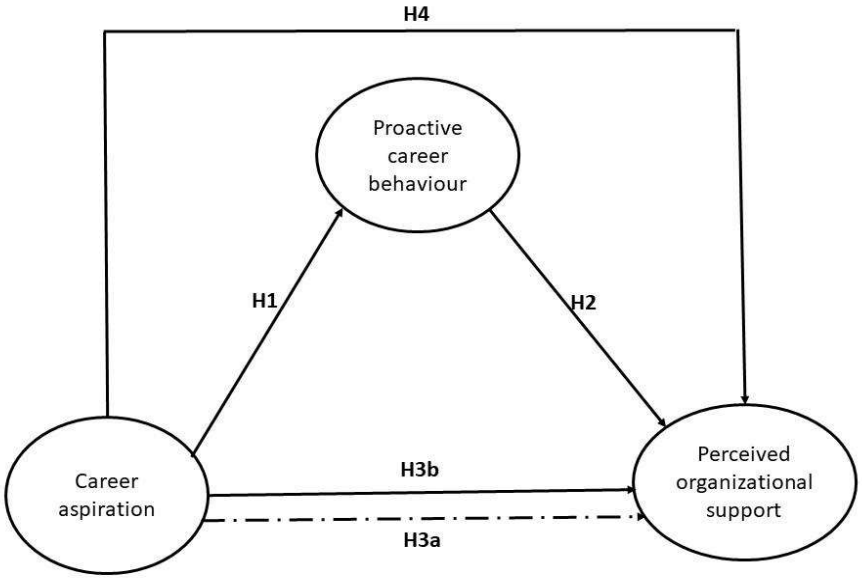
H3a: Career aspiration significantly affects perceived organizational support. *The mediating effect of proactive career behavior between career aspiration and perceived organizational support*

Underpinning the Vroom's Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), this study proposes that the intensity of proactive career behavior exhibited by employees depends on their career aspirations and the expectation that their proactivity will lead to desired organizational support. Organizational support has been significantly associated with career success (Guan et al., 2014), implying that employees attaining better organizational support perceive their careers to be successful. Further, as organizations consider proactive employees as valuable human capital (Caniëls et al., 2018), therefore demonstrating higher proactivity towards fulfilment of their career aspiration, can lead to better organizational support. Hence, we propose that CA has a significant indirect effect on POS mediated by PCB. Further, we have attempted to examine the direct effect of CA on POS in the presence of mediator (PCB), which enables us to determine whether the mediation by PCB is partial or complete.

H3b: Career aspiration significantly affects perceived organizational support in the presence of proactive career behavior.

H4: Proactive career behavior significantly mediates the association between career aspiration and perceived organizational support. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Method

Measures

The constructs in this study have been measured using the scales adapted from previous research studies, which have been modified to create relevance to the Indian Banking sector. All the measures include five-point Likert scales varying from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

- Career aspiration (three items): The items of CA construct have been adapted from the Career Aspiration Scale—Revised, developed by Gregor and O'Brien (2016).

- Proactive career behavior-- PCB is composed of three dimensions (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) and has been studied as a second-order construct with three reflective first-order constructs, namely- career planning, skill development and networking, which have been measured separately.
    a. Career planning (CP) (three items): The items to measure career planning have been adapted from the scale developed by Gould (1979).
    b. Skill development (SD) (three items): The items to measure skill development have been adapted from the scale developed by Penley and Gould (1981).
    c. Networking (NW) (three items): The networking items have been adapted from the scale developed by Taber and Blankemeyer (2015).
- Perceived organizational support (eight items): The items to measure POS have been adapted from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986).

Sample and Procedure

This study is conducted on the Indian Banking Sector targeting the branches of banks located in Delhi and NCR. Delhi, being the capital of India, has people from all parts of country, providing an essence of the entire nation with people of different demographic features residing here. Therefore, Delhi and the surrounding cities constituting NCR like Gautam Budhh Nagar, Gurugram, Faridabad, and Ghaziabad, have been targeted for data collection purposes. The data were collected from the employees of both public and private sector banks by visiting the branches in person and by Google forms. A total of 405 appropriately filled responses were utilised for data analysis.

Data analysis

The partial least square SEM technique was applied to analyze the data, utilizing the Smart-PLS 3. The Smart-PLS has been preferred due to the fact that the present study investigates proactive career behavior as a mediator, which is a second-order construct (Hair et al., 2016; Ringle et al., 2015). In order to determine the adequacy of the sample size for the study, the G*Power software was used (Faul et al., 2007). With the statistical power of 0.80 and a significance level of 0.05, the lower bound on sample size for the present study was calculated to be 311. Therefore, our sample size of 405 lies above the recommended minimum sample size, confirming sample adequacy.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The composition of the respondents includes 231 men and 174 women; 158 were unmarried, and 247 were married; 178 were graduates, and 227 were postgraduates; 155 of the respondents held clerical positions; 157 worked at junior management grade, and 93 worked at middle management grade.

Common Method Variance Test

Harman's single-factor technique was used to investigate the common method bias in this study. The common method variance appeared to be 23.60%, which is below the maximum limit of 50%, ascertaining the absence of common method bias in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model specifications were investigated by applying the internal reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity checks as shown in Table 1. This study consists of five first-order reflective constructs (three of which further create a second order construct in structural model assessment). The Cronbach's alpha values presented in Table 1(a) for all the constructs fall above the acceptable value of 0.60 (Ursachi et al., 2015), establishing internal consistency. The convergent validity shows "the extent to which different measures refer to the same conceptual construct" (Dinev & Hart, 2004, p. 417) and it holds true if their composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) value is above 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Hair et al., 2017). All the constructs, as shown in Table 1(a) fulfil the criteria of convergent validity.

Table 1
Measurement Model Assessment

(a) Internal Consistency and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CA	0.634	0.796	0.566
CP	0.711	0.838	0.633
SD	0.787	0.875	0.700
NW	0.884	0.908	0.553
POS	0.742	0.853	0.659

(b) Discriminant Validity- Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CA	CP	SD	NW	POS
CA	**0.752**				
CP	0.538	**0.795**			
SD	0.414	0.412	**0.811**		
NW	0.471	0.424	0.349	**0.837**	
POS	0.129	0.158	0.05	0.224	**0.744**

(c) Discriminant Validity- Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Criterion

	CA	CP	SD	NW	POS
CA					
CP	0.75				
SD	0.577	0.566			
NW	0.624	0.564	0.454		
POS	0.208	0.201	0.126	0.254	

The discriminant validity of the constructs was further examined using the traditional Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of correlations (HTMT) criterion. Table 1(b) presents the results of discriminant validity assessment according to Fornell-Larcker criterion, which indicates the square root of AVEs of the constructs located on the diagonal are greater than the inter-item correlation values, confirming a clear distinction between the constructs. The HTMT values presented in Table 1(c) for all the constructs lie below the permissible limit of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015) confirming discriminant validity among the constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

In the structural model assessment, we tested the hypotheses to examine the relationships between the constructs. Before hypothesis testing, variance inflation factor (VIF) values of each item in the construct were determined to be below 3.33, ranging from 1.114 to 2.114, ensuring absence of multi-collinearity (Diamantopoulos, 2008). The bootstrapping method with recommended 5000 subsamples was applied to examine the significance of the hypotheses formulated under this study (Hair et al., 2020). The structural model is composed of three constructs out of which PCB, being the second-order construct; its latent variable scores are used in the structural model evaluation.

Table 2
Structural Model Assessment

Hypothesis	Path	β	S.E.	p-value	Result
H1	CA -> PCB	0.607	0.033	0.000	Supported
H2	PCB -> POS	0.164	0.061	0.007	Supported
H3a	CA -> POS	0.183	0.04	0.000	Supported
H3b	CA -> POS (in presence of PCB)	0.04	0.072	0.583	Not supported
H4	CA -> PCB -> POS	0.100	0.038	0.009	Supported

The results of hypotheses testing presented in Table 2 support H1, indicating significant direct effect of CA on PCB (β=0.607, $p<0.05$). The H2, proposing significant impact of PCB on POS, (β=0.164, $p<0.05$) was also supported. Further, to assess the mediation of PCB between CA and POS, H3a was first examined, which proposes a simple cause and effect relationship (Hair et al., 2016) between CA and POS in the absence of a mediator and was found to be significant (β=0.183, $p<0.05$). Thereafter, the direct effect of CA on POS in presence of PCB as proposed in H3b was determined and found to be insignificant (β=0.04, $p>0.05$), while H4, which proposes an indirect effect of CA on POS mediated by PCB was found to be significant (β=0.100, $p<0.05$). The fact that the direct effect between CA and POS, which was significant (H3a) in the absence of PCB became insignificant in the presence of PCB (H3b) and denotes complete mediation by PCB between CA and POS.

Further, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was ascertained, which indicates that CA explains 37% variation in PCB, while CA and PCB collectively explain 4.4% variation in POS. Subsequently, the effect size (f^2) was ascertained to examine the change in R^2 if an exogenous variable is removed from the model. Here, CA (0.588) projected a very high effect size in explaining PCB. Further, with reference to POS, CA (0.001) exerted no effect, while PCB (0.022) indicated low effect (Cohen, 1988). The Stone-Geisser's Q^2 was also applied, utilizing the blindfolding technique to examine the predictive relevance of the model. The Q^2 values appeared to be above zero (Hair et al., 2013) for POS (0.023, weak generalizability) and PCB (0.364, high generalizability), thus, confirming the predictive relevance of the model. Finally, it is crucial to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model utilizing standardized root mean-square residual (SRMR), and it appeared to be 0.068, which is below the threshold value of 0.08, signifying that the model under this study has a good explanatory power (Henseler et al., 2016; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Discussion

In this study, we conceptualised PCB as the mediator between the CA and POS. The results of the hypothesis testing, as shown in Table 2, support the H1, indicating strong impact of CA on PCB among Indian banking sector employees. Our findings corroborate previous research findings where individual goal orientations have been identified as significant predictors of proactive behavior (VandeWalle et al., 2000). The proposition by Rojewski (2005) states that career aspiration is a significant driver of PCB, thereby strengthening our finding that career aspirations of employees serve as an intrinsic motivator to proactively develop their careers.

Further, Table 2 shows that H2 is supported by the results, signifying that PCB among bank employees significantly affects the POS. This can be attributed to the employees' belief that being proactive would enable them to strike a better career deal and organizational support (Sturges et al., 2010). These findings are further substantiated by the theoretical proposition by Vroom (1964) that employees make efforts with the expectation of achieving some rewarding outcomes. Further, the Indian organizations are known for being facilitators of reciprocal behavior, which adds meaning to our findings that banks in India acknowledge their employees' proactive efforts and consequently reward them (Budhwar & Sparrow, 1997).

We further examined the mediating effect of PCB between CA and POS, first, by testing the H3a, which proposes a direct cause and effect relationship between CA and POS; the results in Table 2 are found to be supportive of H3a. One of the probable explanations for this observed relationship is attributed to the previous research findings that self-directed career attitudes among employees is significantly important for their career success (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Enache et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be interpreted that POS, being a parameter of career success among employees, their aspirations for a successful career are positively associated with organizational support. However, CA, being an important motivating factor to attain rewarding career outcomes, must be complemented by career-oriented actions that channel employees' career aspirations to their desired organizational support.

Further, we assessed H4 to examine the specific indirect effect between CA and POS mediated by PCB, which is validated from results in Table 2. Previous study suggests that the proactive employees can be assured that the organization invests in them by providing adequate organizational support (Seibert et al., 1999; Sturges et al., 2005), which substantiates our findings. Further, to assess the degree of mediation, H3b, proposing the direct effect of CA on POS in the presence of PCB, was tested and was not supported. The fact that the significant effect of CA on POS in the absence of PCB becomes insignificant in its presence, and confirms PCB as the complete mediator to their relationship. Therefore, the career aspirations of banking employees must be followed by proactive efforts to maximize their chances of attaining better organizational support.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Our results have practical implications for employees, as well as organizations. The findings provide meaningful pointers that bank employees must proactively upgrade their banking knowledge and competencies to achieve their aspired-to career objectives and increase their chances of attaining better organizational support. Our findings suggest that bank management must identify the employees demonstrating higher proactive behavior and reciprocate their efforts in terms of appropriate organizational support. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of individual career development initiatives with the organizational support from the Vroom's expectancy perspective. Therefore, this study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by providing insights into the career development practices in a dynamic work environment.

Limitation and Directions for Future Research

Though this study possesses certain limitations, it provides directions for future research. The cross-sectional study design precludes the interpretation of causal conclusion; however, the theories on which the study is grounded support the causal relationships. Future researchers can undertake longitudinal study to test the validity of this model over a span of time. The model developed under this study suggests good generalizability among other demographic samples; hence, its applicability in other industries or countries can be tested by future researchers.

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