

Psychological Contract Breach, Psychological Capital and Work Alienation: A Case of Tourism Agencies of Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the impact of psychological contract breach on work alienation. The study also considers the intervening effect of psychological capital on the relationship. Theoretical framework developed based on assumption that mediation of psychological capital may reduce the negative effects of psychological contract breach. Data for current study collected from agents and employees of various tourist agencies working across Pakistan. Around 300 respondents participated in this study and selected through simple random sampling. Respondents contacted via social media. After a brief introduction of research and purpose of data collection, respondents participated voluntarily. Cross-sectional data then was analyzed using PLS-SEM via smart PLS 3.0 version. Current research is unique in its type as it determines the important cause of work alienation in organizations and provides solution for that. Results showed strong positive effect of psychological contract breach on work alienation. Psychological capital intervenes the said relationship. Research is helpful for both policy makers and private tourism agencies to take corrective actions to enhance tourism in Pakistan.

Keywords: Psychological Contract Breach, Psychological Capital, Work Alienation, Tourism Agencies in Pakistan

Introduction

Tourism industry is no doubt one of the growing industries in last decade. Countries with resources to attract people of different countries are focusing to develop their tourist departments as much as they can. This is because tourism contribute in economic factors both at individual and country level (Bazargani & Kiliç, 2021). For this reason, it considered as an important industry to gain revenue and develop living standards. With growing service sector, focus of quality services is also growing. Human capital in tourism industry is the most important factor in order to meet quality in services and customer satisfaction (Sibanyoni, Tshipala & Venter, 2024). People travel all around the world need diverse services related to food, accommodation, transportation and guides. Therefore, this diversity creates a need to attract and retain talented humans from all over the world. Tourism deal with diversity

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and diversity need to manage. Especially in global settings, managing diverse people from all around considered as challenge. Countries with tourist attraction and visitors considers this factor and take measures to ensure quality services to visitors of their countries. Like many other countries, Pakistani government has established Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) under the ministry of tourism to control and manage tourist agencies working all over Pakistan and to attract tourists to the country. Tourism agencies, in this regard, play an important role to grow tourism. These not only effect the perception of people visited their area but may affect perception of potential visitors also. Ingram, Tabari and Watthanakhomprathip (2013) confirmed this fact by arguing that behavior of tourism agencies not only affect visitors but it also influences the perception of those who even have not travelled to that area. Responsible behaviors of tourist agencies are important for visitors came across different areas of world (Prasongthan, 2023). Many tourism agencies in Pakistan are facing problem of work alienation form employees' side. This factor cause dissatisfaction from work and ultimately lowers job performance. Chiaburu, Thundiyil and Wang (2014) discussed antecedents of work alienation in a meta-analysis. These factors can be divided into individual, organizational and environmental factors. Individual factors are based on individuals' behavior like personality, emotions etc. Organizational factors affect based on decisions of organization e.g. change in policy, practice or contract. Environmental factors based on external influences like government policies and natural factors. Environmental factors are not controllable for organizations. At the level of organizations, individual and organizational factors are more important to consider. Focus of current study is organizational factors that causes work alienation. Organizational factors are basically macro-economic factors consist of cultural factors, physical and psychological conditions in organization, advancement opportunities and social support (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Shantz et al., 2015). These factors when employee perceive in organization decides their course of action in terms of efforts they are supposed to put at their work. Work alienation is an individual's experience-based variable. Thus, it is important to consider what an individual perceives in organization (Yuill, 2011). This is because work alienation caused by unsatisfied expectations.

Unsatisfied expectations may create feeling for employees that organization does not keep its promises. Although these promises not in written and are not in form of any kind of formal contract, but it creates with the appointment of employee to organization. If at any stage, this contract breaks from any side may result in negative outcomes. Feeling for organization do not meet expectations creates the same feeling in employees. This phenomenon in behavioral studies is known as "breach of psychological contract" (Bal et al., 2010). When employees feel breach of psychological contract, they became disappointed. Breach of psychological contract has attracted considerable attention of researchers in recent years (Shen et al., 2019). Current study proposes that if promises not kept by organization and expectations of

employees are not being met, causes work alienation. This study is important in two respects. Firstly, this phenomenon is important to study because travelers came across the world at a certain location with an expectation to serve well. Tourism agencies in this regard, play a vital role to attract further visitors. Secondly, this study focuses on presenting a model for tourism agencies to make their employees minimize their work alienation.

Objectives

Key objective of current study is to examine the effects of phenomenon when expectations of employees hurt by the organization. Specifically, this study emphasis on impact of breach of psychological contract on work alienation. Study also tried to find mediator that may reduce negative effects of breach of psychological breach (Unguren & Arslan, 2020). Specific aims of the study are as under;

- To analyze the impact of psychological contract breach on work alienation on employees of tourism agencies of Pakistan.
- To understand the intervening effect of psychological capital in relationship of breach of psychological contract and work alienation

Literature Review

This section builds theoretical support for the research model developed in current study. Study based on unwritten contract (psychological contract) between two parties along with formal agreement. Psychological contract based on oral communication and promises of different parties involved. In organizational settings, employees develop some expectations based on experience and information from other sources. If afterwards, those promises and expectations not met may result in negative outcomes form employees. One of those outcomes may be work alienation. Work alienation is detachment of employees from work. Breach of psychological contract and work alienation relationship discussed in this study. Three dimensions of psychological contract breach are considered i.e. unmet work characteristics contract, unmet work environment contract and unmet compensation contract (Topa et al., 2022). Two dimensions of work alienation (i.e. personal alienation and social alienation) are considered (Moyano et al., 2024; Saranya & Keerthi, 2021). Mediation effect of psychological capital also added which expected to minimize negative effects of breach of psychological contract. Meanwhile, the role of self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience show significant impact (Luthans et al., 2015; Talha et al., 2024).

Psychological Contract Breach - Work Alienation Relationship

By joining the organization, employee and employer develop certain expectations at their ends. These expectations provide basis for emotional and material attachment for employees with organizations. When these expectations are not met, employees hurts emotionally and this phenomenon is known as “breach of psychological contract” (Fettahliođlu, 2015). Parzefall and Jacqueline (2011) discussed that these are unwritten contracts may be violated due to three main reasons

i.e. incompatibility, disruption and retraction. Incompatibility refers to a form where employee and employer carry out psychological contract with good intentions but situations interpret these differently. In this phenomenon, situation is no compatible with psychological agreement of employer and employees. Disruption is a form where situations are correct but not capable to carry out liabilities of contract. This may arise due to misinterpretation of circumstances. Any of the party underweight or overweight the situational factors. In retraction, any of the party is not willing to carry out contract. In this form, bad intentions of one party become main reason for breaching psychological contract. Breach of psychological contract considered to distort psychological bond and satisfaction of employees in organizations. Satisfaction consider as an important variable for motivation (Hasan et al., 2013). On the other side, negative behaviors such as turnover intentions, absenteeism, neglecting the mission and work alienation also develop by psychological contract breach (Fan & Wang, 2022). Focus of current study is work alienation which is found to be ignored in past. Work alienation refers to person's isolation form job (Liao et al., 2024). It reflects a situation when employees do not put their maximum effort in the job and mostly they do not care about activities assigned in the job. Withdrawal behaviors and negative experiences are similar to work alienation (Isralowitz et al., 2012). Work alienation adversely affect performance of employees and organizations. When business keeps its promises, psychological contract remains effective (Alvi et al., 2024). Based on the arguments above, we hypothesized positive relationship of psychological contract breach and work alienation. Hence our hypothesis is:

H 1: There is positive relationship between psychological contract breach and work alienation.

Mediation of Psychological Capital

In order to diminish the adverse effects of breach of psychological contract, internal sources can be helpful to cope up with the negative psychological situation. Psychological capital is considered as one of the most important resource that provide internal strength to cope up even worst situations (Unguren & Arslan, 2020). Positive psychological state help person to achieve its goals and to cope up with difficult situations. It consists of four facets i.e. resilience, hope, optimism and self-efficacy. Resilience is person's ability to rebound after every success or failure. Mostly individuals have natural capacity to recover after even very difficult situations. People with high level of psychological capital have greater ability to recover in difficult situations. Self-efficacy is similar to self-confidence that refers to one's belief over his/her capabilities. This belief in self make them to behave in any situation as is required by situation. Optimism is positive thinking to interpret situations. This provide positive attitude regarding future outcomes of situations that refers positive motivation to attain goals. It provides expectation and desire to achieve goals. To understand how psychological capital works, Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2013) discussed agency, malleability and sociability in their research model. Agency refers

to interaction of individual and environment to control the behavior that shapes the resources and develop employees. Therefore, intentional act of employees to develop positive attitude even in worse situations. Reason for this is to achieve desired goals. These goals may be personal like personal development and growth. Psychological capital is relatively stable characteristics and encourage managers to focus on psychological capital (Terracciano et al., 2010). Organizations if focus to develop levels of psychological capital may have people with more desire to put their best in any situation. Sociability allows organizational resources to move for personal development and growth. Personal goals related to development of employees can also be beneficial for organizations. This is because employees with high psychological capital will put their best to achieve high growth and meanwhile, their efforts will contribute to organizational development as well. In a recent study DiFonzo et al. (2020) investigated that it is very likely that victims of breach of psychological contract forgive when positive emotions of offender replace negative feeling of breach. If with breach of psychological contract, apologizing behavior of organization is there, higher level psychological capital helps them to recover even after that situation. It is therefore, assumed that people with higher levels of psychological capital are supposed to have low negative outcomes than people with lower levels of psychological capital. Based on arguments above, we hypothesized that psychological capital can be a mediator in relationship of psychological contract breach and outcome relationship. For current study, it hypothesized that psychological capital mediates the relationship between breach of psychological contract and work alienation. Hence, our hypothesis is:

H 2: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between psychological contract breach and work alienation.

Psychological Capital - Work Alienation Relationship

Psychological capital always positively related to performance of employees. People with higher levels of psychological capital are supposed to put additional efforts to achieve their goals (Saleem et al., 2022). At the other side, evidence concerning effect of psychological capital on negative behaviors is very small. As an exceptional study, Wu (2025) found that people with high psychological capital never involve in any kind of deviant behaviors. This may be due to the fact that relationship of psychological capital and work alienation is neglected area. Idea that people with psychological capital do not involve in negative outcomes is based on the fact that people with high psychological capital are able to rebound themselves considering their self-efficacy and optimism. Following the same idea, Costa and Neves (2017) also tested the same idea and concluded that employee with high psychological capital absorbs even breach of psychological contract. Current study also focusses to empirically test that whether psychological capital reduces negative behaviors like work alienation even after breaching their psychological contract. Based on the arguments above, current study considers that people with high level of psychological

capital are supposed to avoid work alienation due to breach of psychological contract then then that of those who are at lower level of psychological capital. Hence, we hypothesized relationship as:

H3: People with high psychological capital are supposed to have less work alienation.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

Current study is quantitative in nature carrying cross sectional data. Variables measured through self-administered questionnaires, which distributed to the employees of tourism agencies in Pakistan. Data for this study collected from agents and employees of tourism agencies of Pakistan. From total of 300 employees were targeted as respondents. Questionnaires administered through multiple contacts mostly using social media. A total of 271 respondents returned questionnaires. Out of these 259 completed in all respects, which were finally decided to participate in this study. So total response rate was 86%. Both male and female employees contributed in the study.

Variance based structural equation modeling technique was used to analyze relationships of variables and mediating role of psychological capital in relationship of psychological contract breach and work alienation. Data analyzed through smart PLS 3.0 version.

Measures

Measurement of different variables discussed in this section. All the variables of study measured on 5 points likert scale. Likert scale ranges from 1 as strongly disagree, 2 as disagree, 3 as neutral, 4 as agree and 5 as strongly agree. Further scale development discussed as under.

Measure of Psychological Contract Breach

In order to measure the breach of psychological contract, a measure developed by Robinson and Wolfe Morrison (2000) was used. Scale consists of 5 items out of which 2 items are reverse scaled. This construct consists of three dimensions i.e. unmet work characteristics contract, unmet work environment contract, unmet compensation contract. It is exogenous variable in current study.

Measure of Psychological Capital

Psychological capital was measured through psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ) developed and validated by Luthans et al. (2007). Reduced scale consists of 12 items. Operationalization of psychological capital consists of four subscales i.e. resilience, self-efficacy, hope and optimism. It is mediator in theoretical framework of current study.

Measure of Work Alienation

Work alienation was measured through work alienation scale which is developed by Hirschfeld et al. (2000). Scale consists of 10 items. Originally, scale adopted by previous studies and validated afterwards. This construct consists of two dimensions i.e. personal alienation and social alienation. It is endogenous variable in theoretical framework.

Research Findings

Findings of current study based on primary data collected from employees of tourism agencies of Pakistan. Data collected through questionnaire and entered in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 version. After treatment of missing values, data was test for reliability. Analysis for outliers performed to make sure data is normal and no abnormality is present in data. Demographic characteristics and multiple correlation then assessed. After it confirmed that data is ready for further analysis, it then analyzed using Smart PLS 3.0 version. Smart PLS is second generation tool for structural equation modeling. This considered as one of the best tools for analysis of social data. It is non parametric variance-based technique which do not require normality of data. Results of Partial least square structural equation modeling as discussed below.

Demographic Characteristics

Researchers in current study tried to make participation of all possible categories of employees form tourism agencies. From total respondents 56% were male while 44% respondents were females, 18% respondents were bearing equivalent or higher than master's degree, 42% respondents were bearing bachelor's' or higher degree 20% respondents were bearing intermediate or higher education while 20% respondents were qualified below intermediate. Furthermore, 29% employees were above the age of 40 years or more, 46% employees were between 30 to 40 years, 35% employees were between age group of 20 to 30 years.

Reliability Test

Internal consistency of data was tested by using cronbach's alpha values. Cronbach alpha values was measured for each construct. Alpha value greater than 0.7 is considered as good value. Table below gives alpha values for each construct.

Table 1. Internal Consistency and Composite Reliability

Construct	No of items	Cronbach alpha	CR
Breach of psychological contract	5	0.855	0.913
Psychological capital	12	0.810	0.908
Work alienation	10	0.831	0.933

Based on the table 1, it can be concluded that instrument is reliable. Values of composite reliability are also shown in table. All the values of composite reliability

are within acceptable limit. Hence, we can conclude that instrument is reliable enough for further analysis.

Correlation Analysis

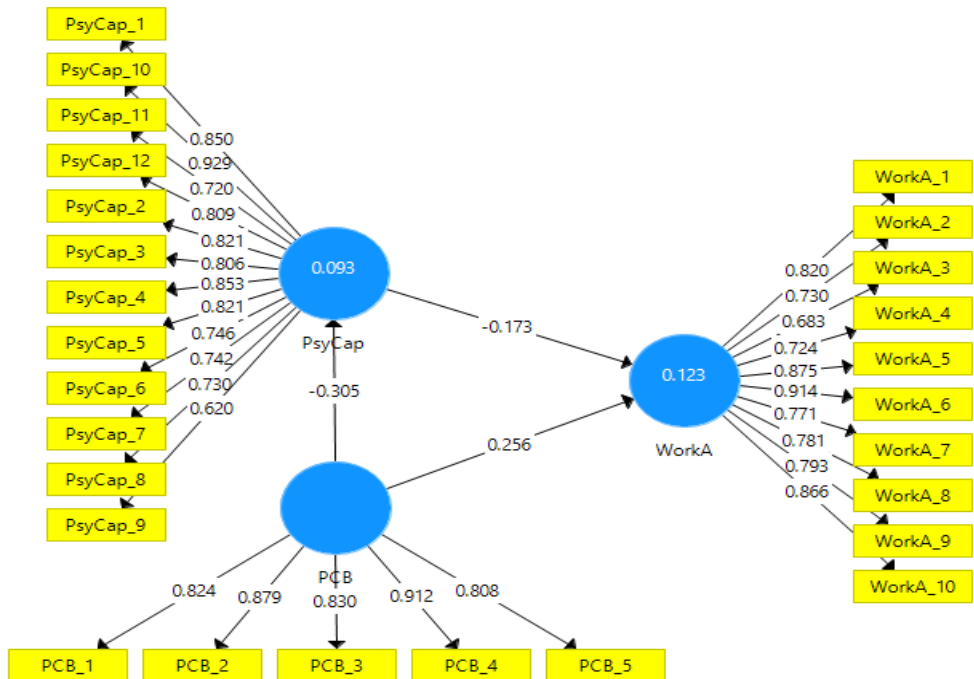
Correlation provides direction and strength of inter-relationship of variables. Pearson correlation technique was used to assess the degree and direction of relationship among variables of study. Table below shows the results of correlation analysis for all variables.

Table 2. *Correlations Analysis*

	1	2	3
1 Psychological contract breach			
2 Psychological capital	-0.356***		
3 Work alienation	0.425***	-0.342***	

Table shows all the relationships are significant at 0.05 level. Relationship of exogenous and endogenous variable is positive and significant. While, relationship of exogenous variable with mediator and endogenous variable with mediator are negative and significant.

Figure 1. *Measurement Model*



Measurement Model

PLS-SEM involved two model known as measurement model and structural model. Measurement model (also known as outer model) describes loading of factors for each construct of study. This is helpful in validating whether variables measure the construct in the way they supposed. Results of measurement model are discussed in table below.

Above figure show the results of measurement model. Detail of outer factor loadings based on measurement model is discussed in table.

Table 3. Outer Loadings

	Psychological contract breach	Psychological Capital	Work Alienation
PsyContBr_1	0.824		
PsyContBr_2	0.879		
PsyContBr_3	0.830		
PsyContBr_4	0.912		
PsyContBr_5	0.808		
PsychoCap_1		0.850	
PsychoCap_2		0.821	
PsychoCap_3		0.806	
PsychoCap_4		0.853	
PsychoCap_5		0.821	
PsychoCap_6		0.746	
PsychoCap_7		0.742	
PsychoCap_8		0.730	
PsychoCap_9		0.620	
PsychoCap_10		0.929	
PsychoCap_11		0.720	
PsychoCap_12		0.809	
WorkAli_1			0.820
WorkAli_2			0.730
WorkAli_3			0.683
WorkAli_4			0.724
WorkAli_5			0.875
WorkAli_6			0.914
WorkAli_7			0.771
WorkAli_8			0.781
WorkAli_9			0.793
WorkAli_10			0.866

Table values for each construct shows adequate loading for each factor. For psychological contract breach, maximum loading is 0.912 and minimum loading is 0.808, which are all in acceptable range. For psychological capital, maximum loading is 0.929 and minimum loading is 0.620, although minim loading is less than 0.7 but

still loadings are in acceptable range. Maximum loading for work alienation is 0.914 and minim loading for the same variable is 0.683, which are in acceptable range.

Structural Model

Current study used bootstrapping approach to measure structural model. Inner model (also known as structural model) of the study shows relationships and their effects. Bootstrapping result of the model are shown is figure below.

Figure 2. Structural Model

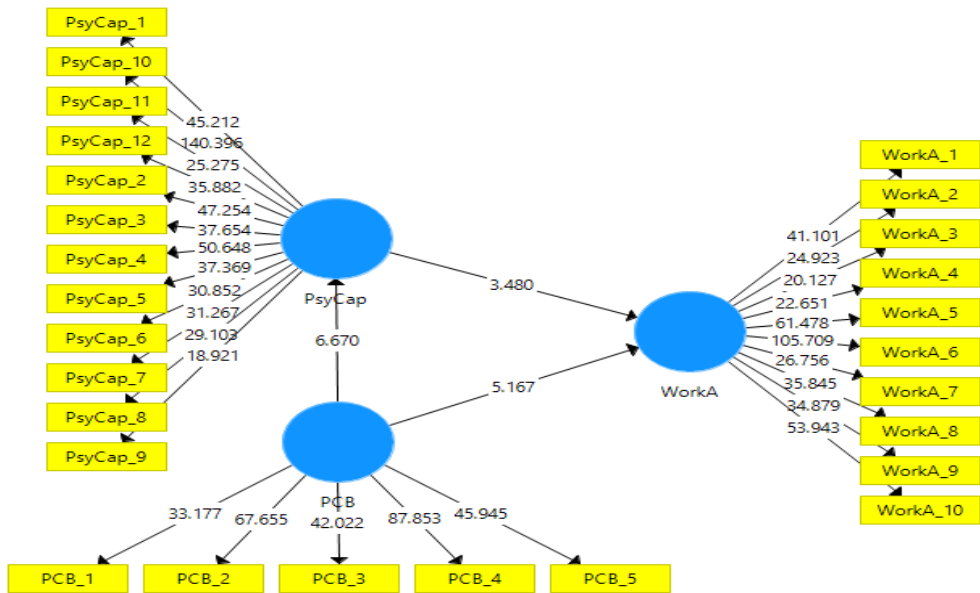


Figure above shows the results of structural model of the study. Details of these results is given in table below.

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing

Original Sample	Sample mean	S D	T value	Significance
PsyContBr -> PsychoCap	-0.305	-0.314	6.670	0.000
PsyContBr -> WorkAli	0.309	0.313	6.639	0.000
PsychoCap -> WorkAli	-0.173	-0.175	3.480	0.001

Table above show the results of direct relationships of variables. It is clear from results that all direct relationships are significant as hypothesized. Relationship of psychological contract breach with psychological capital is negative in nature. T-static for this relationship is significant. Relationship of psychological contract breach with

work alienation is positive which shows that breach of psychological contract causes work alienation. T-static for this relationship is also significant. Relationship of psychological capital with work alienation is also negative. T-static for this relationship is also significant. Hence hypotheses 1 and 3 are accepted on the basis of evidence provided in table.

Table 5. Indirect Relationship

Original Sample	Sample mean	S D	T value	Significance
PsyContBr -> WorkAli	0.053	0.055	2.833	0.005

Above table give the results of indirect relationship. It is clear from table that relationship of psychological contract breach with work alienation through mediation of psychological capital is significant. This shows mediation of psychological capital in relationship of psychological contract breach and work alienation. Hence hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

Discussions

First objective of the study was to assess the direct link of exogenous and endogenous variables. One hypothesis developed for this purpose. Empirical test the hypothesis, data was collected from tourists' agencies of Pakistan. Data analyzed by using Smart PLS 3.0 version. Results of study show significant relationship of psychological contract breach and work alienation. These results are consistent with the results of previous studies worked on the similar relations (Alvi et al., 2024; Bekaroğlu, 2011; FETTAHLIOĞLU & AFŞAR, 2016). Psychological contract breach is breaking of expectation of employees from their organizations. When organization break promises, employee being member of that organization feels like organization does not care for the benefits of workers. This feeling ultimately creates negative psychological states, which causes negative behaviors in workers.

Second objective of the study was to empirically test the mediating role of psychological capital in relationship of psychological contract breach and work alienation. For this purpose, two hypotheses developed by extensive review of latest literature. It is clear from results that psychological capital mediates the relationship between psychological contract breach and work alienation. Results of the study are consistent with previous studies (Costa & Neves, 2017; Terracciano et al., 2010). Employees with high level of psychological capital focus to achieve their personal goals. In their efforts to achieve their personal goals, they mostly ignore their broken promises and expectations. In short run, it seems that even negative attitude of organization does not affect their performance negatively. Meanwhile, it is important to note that in absence of psychological capital, breach of psychological contract may cause negative outcomes of employees.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the negative effects of breach of psychological contract in the form of work alienation. More importantly, this study suggested how negative

effects of psychological contract breach be reduced. Previous studies discussed about negative effects of psychological contract breach and mostly suggested that organizations should avoid breaking down promises and expectations of their workers. Very little research focused on the question that “Is there any possibility that negative effects of psychological contract breach be avoided?” Moreover, very few researchers focus on what an individual perceives and behaves if promises and expectations not met. This study tried to address all these problems to make it more understandable. It concluded that in the presence of psychological capital, negative effects of psychological contract breach reduced. Psychological capital creates strong desire to achieve the goals in employees. This desire to achieve goals makes them to avoid any kind of negative behavior in employees.

Implications

This study conducted for tourism agencies in Pakistan. After extensive review of tourist agencies and their working, researcher identified problem of psychological contract breach. Working through survey technique, solution to that problem tried to find out. Results of study, therefore, generalized to all tourism related companies in Pakistan. Organizations may focus on avoiding breach of any kind of psychological capital. It recognized by many studies that breach of psychological capital negatively affect outcomes of employees. However, by focusing the development of psychological capital, negative outcomes reduced. Organizations should focus on enhancing psychological capital in different areas.

Limitations and Future Research

This research conducted with certain limitations. In order to find deep relationships among variables, comparisons of different dimensions not made. These comparisons provide details of which are the factor that contribute more in development of employees’ behavior. These factors when focused by organization may be more effective than general results. Future studies may consider this limitation.

Furthermore, tourism companies of different countries assessed to find the difference of how tourism agencies are working as compared to Pakistani tourist agencies. Future studies may also be conducted to compare Pakistani tourist agencies with different other agencies in the world.

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