

An Empirical Understanding of the Faculty's Attitude towards Change in Higher Education

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Abstract: This article investigates organizational change by focusing on individual and contextual factors and how the interaction between them influences peoples' attitudes towards change. For this purpose a moderated-mediated framework was tested using empirical data to understand the underlying mechanism of employees' attitude towards change. Quantitative data were collected from 1137 faculty members from 6 public sector universities in Pakistan via stratified sampling. The hypothesized model was tested with the help of structural equation modelling using Amos. The results indicated that career ambition and competency development practices have positive relationships with employees' attitude towards organizational change. Almost all the conceptualized relationships in the given moderated-mediated model were supported, except for the conditional effect of supportive organizational culture on the indirect path between competence development practice and employees' attitude towards change. Limitations of the research include: possible contamination from common method variance as all measures originated from the same source and of cross-sectional design; restricting absolute generalization. We suggest that organizations need to hire career ambitious people and focus on investing in career development practices for better preparation for change adoption.

Keywords: Affective Commitment Attitude, Career Ambition, Competence Development, Higher Education, Organization Culture.

1. Introduction

Changing environment has challenged all professions (Carvalho, 2017). The academic profession is no exception (Musselin, 2007), resulting in revolution of academia and higher education (HE) (Strielkowski, 2020). However, the academic profession differs from many other professions in that it transmits and shapes knowledge that is utilized by other professions (Höhle&Teichler, 2013). Being knowledge creators has led to the classification of academia as a "meta-profession" (Carvalho, 2017). Global trends have been influencing all public organizations, including universities (Siekkinen et al., 2020). The academic profession

is dynamic by its nature (Siekkinen, Pekkola, & Carvalho, 2020), therefore to understand its nature, it is essential to explore how this profession is changing, acclimating, and/or resisting (Evetts, 2014).

The work of academia has become increasingly managed, evaluated, and measured using commercial techniques for profit maximization (NawzadSabir, Othman, Kake, & Rashid, 2019). Economic pressures on HE compel universities to build more entrepreneurial and corporate structures into their activities (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010). Many authors are concerned about the deteriorating impact of these new structures and practices and the organizational values they impose, which can also threaten the identity of academics and decrease the quality of academic work (Martin-Sardesai & Guthrie 2018).

In the new era of HE, the work roles and identity of academia are getting fuzzier and varied (Musselin, 2007). Academia is seeking careers in the HE sector (Bennett, Roberts, Ananthram, & Broughton, 2018), where career promotions are related more to the academia's performance in terms of meeting organizational targets rather than enhancing their occupational development (Siekkinen et al., 2020). The internal processes and practices are becoming more standardized and as a result the work of academic staff has also become more standardized, which has its pros and cons on academic work and career progression in universities (Siekkinen et al., 2020). However, the increased workload of the faculty in universities is taking its toll.

The contextual trends, such as the increasing complexity of academic work perceived by academics and financial constraints reinforce the need to improve the connection between institutional strategic goals and the work of individuals. Thus, any changes at the institutional level in the academic work has to take into consideration the career ambitions (CA) of the faculty, as to how these changes might affect it, and also invest in its competency development practices (CDPs) to better equip it for embracing change. Therefore, managing the human part of the organization becomes a major challenge in handling change processes in organizations, as it involves values, preferences, and attitudes toward a particular activity (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Rahman, 2004).

HE has profited from the steady flow of new and highly qualified personnel (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). However, the authors fear that the number of academic vacancies in colleges and universities have slowed to a trickle. Mathis (2000) along with others fears that HE may become a declining industry characterized by reduced options for maintaining quality. Assuming that creative, knowledgeable and enthusiastic faculty is an essential element of sustainable HE intuitions. One fundamental question that requires immediate attention is how HE institutions capitalize on the potential of their currently employed, highly qualified faculty while embracing change? HE literature is indicative of the fact that to become a sustainable industry, it has to change with the current demands of the market. Faculty's CA seems to be in the background and faculty development approaches seem to be misaligned with the needs of the academics and basic objectives of HE institutions (Blackburn, Behymer, & Hall, 1978).

Pakistani universities follow the global trends when HE has become more market-oriented in recent years. The funding formula for universities has changed many times since then, placing greater emphasis on efficiency and number of publications. Since the mid-2000s, the HEC has implemented many reforms with an aim to make the Pakistani HE system more reactive to global changes. These reforms made significant strides towards the adoption of a managerialistic culture in Pakistani universities. The career models in

Pakistani universities; both tenure track and basic pay scale have been criticized. The former relies heavily on research publications thus ignoring the teaching aspect; whereas the latter has ills in both research and teaching; creating new, blurred roles and identities (Musselin, 2007). The faculty is overloaded with academic and administrative work and the academia is often juggling the two domains to strike a balance. Thus, the changes in the HE system is not readily accepted by the academia for their individual and organizational related reasons, i.e., less time and initiatives for pursuing their career goals, publication is just a number game, bureaucratic processes to help universities ensure quality and standardization, constant monitoring of the HE Commission and frequent changes for universities accreditation and ranking achieved through the academia, securing funding for research with more emphasis on donors objective rather than autonomy in research, lack of investment in career development practices, etc. The academic careers have been linked to increased outputs and securing research grants/funds if these professionals want to be in the game (Siekkinen et al., 2020), which implies more time to be spent on preparing funding proposals (Kayrooz & Preston, 2002). To determine how universities could provide more profoundly managed professional work (Noordegraaf, 2015), the fundamentals and consequences of hybrid academic professionalism and hybrid academic work should be studied more (Siekkinen et al., 2020).

The current study has tried to answer certain questions keeping in mind the importance of employees' attitude towards change (ATC) as to whether CA and CDP in any way affect their ATC, while taking into consideration multiple mediation and moderation effects. The questions framed for the current study are: (1) Do CA and CDPs of the employees act as antecedents to their ATC in organizations? (2) Does affective commitment (AC) mediate between CA and CDPs employees ATC? (3) Does supportive organizational culture (SOC) moderate the direct and indirect effects, and if it does, is this conditional effect hampering or enhancing the indirect effects?

1.1 Literature Review

The current study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) proposed by Blau (1964), which centers on self-interest and interdependence between two parties. Employees receive a variety of benefits, i.e., economic, social and emotional benefits from the organizations. SET postulates that employees who have positive perception about the organization and benefit from the organizational resources will subsequently feel obliged to reciprocate the organization (Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019). The reciprocity can be demonstrated via positive attitudes and virtuous behaviors in the workplace (Greenberg, 1980).

CA expresses the motivation in an individual's mind to actively further one's career by having a strong focus on one's work life and career in combination with a high motivation to excel (Otto, Roe, Sobiraj & Vásquez, 2017). In the present study CA and CDPs are benefits that employees receive from their workplace and in return will develop positive attitudes towards any change that management tends to adopt that will be exhibited in their openness towards change. Thus, in the context of SET we can assume that when individuals get an opportunity to achieve their CAs and develop their careers, they will reciprocate by developing positive attitudes towards the organisational change processes.

ATC more generally consists of an individual's cognition, affective reactions, and the tendency to behave towards change (Elizur & Guttman, 1976). Researchers have therefore identified a range of responses from employees whenever they deal with change (Arifin, 2019). Positive attitudes to change are considered vital

in succeeding in a change programme and achieving organizational goals (Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000) and may be a precursor to actual acceptance of organizational change (Devos, Buelens, & Bouckennooghe, 2006). During change individuals experience anxiety and apprehensions about the potential failure to deal with the new situation (Silva, et al., 2019). Beer and Nohria (2000) have expressed their concern that most of the change initiatives in organizations do not succeed, primarily due to employees' hostile attitude and resistance to accept change. Employees are active participants of change initiatives (Yue, et al., 2019; Siddique & Yunis, 2018) therefore their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors substantially affect the change process and its outcomes (Nielsen, Dawson, Hasson, & Schwarz, 2021). According to Stouten, Rousseau and De Cremer (2018), employee openness to change is a necessary condition for successful planned change and organizational culture is a prerequisite for employees' perception of acceptance or resistance towards change. While openness to change can be an individual trait characterized by flexibility and novelty (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008), this study treats employees' ATC as a state that is determined by a combination of both; individual (CA and AC) and organizational factors (CDPs and SOC).

CA has been defined as an individual striving to develop his capabilities to be engaged in a meaningful way, to be able to earn a good salary, and to be able to combine work life and private life (Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006). Talented and ambitious employees are instrumental to providing competitive advantage to the organization (Oseghale, Mulyata & Debrah (2018). Contemporary employees look for employability rather than employment therefore they relate their career growth more to the former (Kundi, Ikramullah, Iqbal & Ul-Hassan, 2018). The ambition to advance in one's career may serve as a motivational basis of organizational and professional commitment (Desrochers & Dahir, 2000). Ambitious employees consider change as opportunities that will further their personal goals in organization and will therefore welcome any change that is directed at improving the organizational performance. Furthermore, ambitious employees like to relate themselves to their organization and therefore consider the organizational success as their personal success. Thus, we infer:

H1: Employees' CA is positively related to their ATC.

Affective or attitudinal commitment is an emotional attachment to, and involvement and identification with the organization (Agba, Ogaboh & Ushie, 2010; Meyer & Allen, 1991). AC is a state in which an individual wishes to remain a member of that organization to further his personal and organizational goals (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). AC in general often involves a reciprocal exchange relationship between the individual and the organization (Buch, Kuvaas, & Dysvik, 2019; Tahir, Hadi, & Awan, 2021) and is usually characterized by an individual doing his best to contribute to the development of the organization, be loyal to the employer, feels ownership of the organizational problems, feels a part of the organization's family, and takes pride in his organization. Thus, AC is determined by a range of personal characteristics that arise from organizational structural characteristics, work experiences of the individual and role related features. CA is significantly related to AC as ambitious employees want to excel their careers by trying to be the best at their work and to contribute to organizational development, and will therefore be more attached and committed towards their organization. We thus infer:

H2: Employees' CA is positively related to their AC.

ATC is a psychological tendency of employees in evaluating assessments of changes (Arifin, 2019). In studies that have examined the conditions in which employees support organizational change, researchers have focused on various attitudinal constructs that represent employees' ATC (Choi, 2011). Several authors have confirmed that AC holds a key position in forming employees' attitude towards change (Darwish, 2000) and their readiness for adopting change (Drzensky, Egold, & van Dick, 2012). A highly committed employee is more willing to accept organizational change if it is perceived to be favorable (Nazir, Qun, Hui, & Shafi, 2018). Commitment is considered one of the most critical factors involved in employees' backing up change initiatives (Thuy, Thi, Van, & Ngoc, 2020). Thus, we infer:

H3: Employees' AC is positively related to their ATC.

Employees develop relationships with an organization on the basis of reputation, recognition, future development and progression (Shah, Irani, & Sharif, 2017). However, the authors concur that employees' attitudinal approach is related to the psychological perspective and employees may show higher levels of expectation and requirement from the organization. As already indicated, a positive employee attitudinal approach can be developed on the basis of intrinsic satisfaction, which includes employees' opportunities for personal growth and development. (Mullins, 1999). Moreover, fulfillment of an employee's career aspirations in an organization will augment his intrinsic motivation, which is one of the vital and supportive elements of an employee's attitudinal approach towards an organization (Edwards & Peccei, 2010).

Literature shows that the employees' perceptions of career opportunity help in strengthening their affiliation with the organization, which may further result in employees' emotional attachment with their organization that in turn can potentially help in forming positive attitudes towards their organization (Lu, Sun, & Du, 2016). Emotionally attached employees have positive attitudes towards their organization and whenever faced with a change they will show lower or no resistance towards it. Individuals who are higher in ambition are more likely to translate their intentions to perform achievement-oriented tasks into practice (Rhodes, Courneya, & Jones, 2005). Thus, we infer:

H4: Employees' AC mediates the relationship between their CA and ATC.

Competency development is defined as a positive change or expansion in the level of individual competencies (De Vos et al., 2015). For organizations, focusing on the continuous development of their employees to drive competitive advantage, it is necessary to develop their personal, professional and social competencies (Siriwaiprapan, 2000). There seems to be near total agreement with the assertion that the notion of "core competences" is paramount to explaining competitiveness of the firm (Drejer, 2000) that can be gained through adopting changes from the environment.

Contemporary employees expect organizations to cater all their needs and provide them opportunities of continuing growth and advancement in their organizational settings to increase their readiness for adoption of change (Agba, Ogaboh & Ushie, 2010). Effective organizations need to focus on competence development practices, amongst other things (Ahammad, Glaister, Sarala, & Glaister, 2018). Career management researchers maintain that career ambitious employees look towards organization for their CDPs (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden, & Bravo, 2011) as these will not only help them in achieving their

career/personal goals but also help in developing a positive attitude towards the organization (Weng & McElroy, 2012); needed for adopting organizational change initiatives. We thus infer:

H5: CDPs are positively related to the employees' ATC.

According to Naim and Lenka (2017), today's employees are considered as ambitious, hard-working, result-oriented individuals and have affinity for technology and innovation. This socially conscious generation wants to make best use of its skills (Srinivasan, 2012), and are inclined towards carving opportunities for learning and development to meet their growth needs of self-esteem and self-actualization (Malik & Khera, 2014) well as their career progression (Srinivasan, 2012). This is primarily because of the changing nature of psychological contract, wherein they prefer learning and developmental opportunities to gain relevant competencies and stay marketable in turbulent talent markets (Lub et al., 2012).

There is compelling evidence that among different factors, such as supervisor support, recognition, performance management, organizational justice; learning and development is the most effective strategy to evoke positive employee outcomes (Hutchinson, Brown, & Longworth, 2012) and to spur affective commitment (Naim & Lenka, 2017). CDPs make employees more confident in their jobs and workplace. They get a sense of accomplishment and ownership in the organization, which can lead to improving AC of the employees towards their organization. Other investigations have also supported the proposition that there is a relationship between career-based variables and propensity to remain, which is an aspect of organizational commitment (De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2009). This can be translated that individuals who are ambitious will set challenging goals that will satisfy their sense of achievement and will therefore tend to show affective commitment at the workplace to satisfy their personal goals. We thus infer:

H6: CDPs are positively related to the employees AC.

Competent individuals can handle their job demands more effectively because they are personally more resourceful to invest in their work performance (Judge & Hurst, 2007). CDP through enhanced AC helps employees develop a positive ATC that the managers want to adopt in terms of new technologies, norms, values, new organizational forms, etc. When managers encourage employees' creativity and innovation, they are making employees ready for any change that might be adopted by the organization in the future. Employees without CDP will be alienated with the much needed changes in the organization due to their lack of readiness to deal with the risks that new practices or technologies entail and will pose negative attitudes towards change. We therefore infer:

H7: Employees' AC mediates the relationship between CDPs and their ATC.

Amongst other contextual factors, organizational culture is recognized to be one of the most important factors that could either foster or decrease employees' readiness for change (Weiner, 2020). Organizational culture can act as a driver or barrier to the implementation of new change initiatives (Blanco-Portela, Benayas, Pertierra, & Lozano, 2017). High level of organizational support positively influences employee attitudes (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and serves as a valuable input for desired behavior among employees and therefore develops the innovative work behaviour as well (Kundu & Lata, 2017).

Careers exist in a societal context that offers both constraints and opportunities for career actors (Andresen et al., 2020). Employees who currently work in a situation in which work tasks often change tend to reflect more on their capacities and competencies than employees who work in a more static work environment (Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006). Individuals usually join an organization where they can find a promoting environment where they can utilize their skills, knowledge, abilities and realize their expectations to achieve their personal needs and fulfill their goals (Vakola, & Nikolaou, 2005). According to the authors, the likelihood of individual commitment level increases when an organization can provide a positive and enabling environment. Within the ideas of the modern career, the employer is expected to promote the future perspectives and employability of the employee (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2000). A SOC will provide employees with greater opportunities where they can develop their skills, knowledge and abilities by encouraging them to take part in various professional development activities.

The significance of organizational culture emerges from the fact that by imposing a set of assumptions and values, it creates a frame of reference for the perceptions, interpretations, and actions of the organization's members (Schein, 2004). In this way it influences all the processes that take place in an organization, and even its performance (Janićijević, 2013). Supportive and more favorable organizational culture improves the employees' acceptability of change (Alfes, et al., 2019). Thus, we infer:

H8: SOC moderates the relationship between employees' CA and their AC such that the relationship is stronger for high levels of SOC than for low levels.

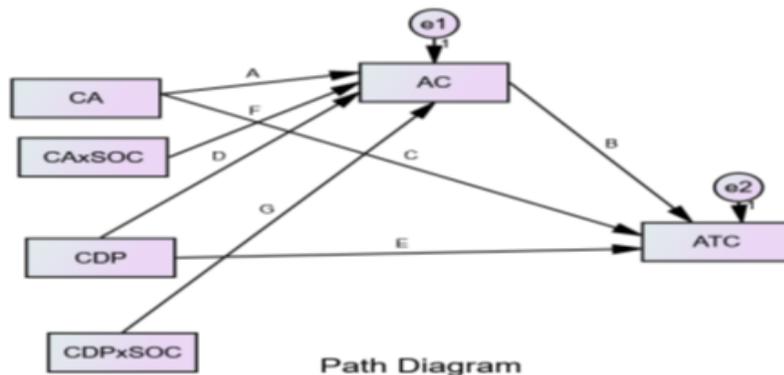
H9: SOC moderates the indirect effect of employees' CA on their ATC via AC such that the indirect effect is stronger for high levels of SOC than for low levels.

H10: SOC moderates the relationship between employees' CDPs and their AC such that the relationship is stronger for high levels of SOC than for low levels.

H11: SOC moderates the indirect effect of CDPs on their ATC via AC such that the indirect effect is stronger for high levels of SOC than for low levels.

The theoretical framework/path diagram has been provided in figure 1 in the appendix, which depicts all the hypothesized relationships between the study variables.

Fig. 1: Theoretical Framework/Path Diagram



2. Method

Surveys were sent to 2,500 employees from 6 public sector universities in KP Province, Pakistan. Stratified sampling was utilized for the research for proportionate representation of the population to avoid overloading in certain subpopulations (Wiersma&Jurs, 2005). A total of 1137 surveys returned were in usable form (response rate of approximately 46%).

Career ambition was measured using 5 items adopted from Derr (1986), which include items, such as “I have an ambition to get to the highest job that my career can give me”, “I would like to obtain a high level of job security in my career”, “I would like to establish a high standard in my job”, etc.

Competence development practice was measured via 6 items adopted from Pare and Tremblay (2007). Sample items include: “Employees can develop their skills in order to increase their chance of being promoted”, “Employees can rotate jobs to develop their skills”, “Proficiency courses such as specialized technical courses and professional certificates are encouraged by managers”, etc.

Affective commitment was measured using 8 items adopted from Meyer and Allen (1991). The items included were: “I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it”, “I feel as if this organization's problems are my own”, “I feel emotionally attached to this organization”, etc.

Attitude toward change was measured via 4 items adopted from Dunham, Gardner, Cummings, and Price (1989). Sample items include “Change does not affect my ability to control what goes on at work”, “I am usually eager with new ideas”, “I like changes at work”, etc. Change over here refers to changes in organizational structure, objectives and goals, technologies or any other changes.

Supportive organizational culture was measured using four items adopted from Eisenberger et al. (1986), which include: “My organization strongly considers my goals and values”, and “My organization shows a lot of concern for me”, etc. This shortened version has been used in previous studies (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, &Soane, 2013) and has shown a high reliability coefficient of 0.93. All these constructs were measured and assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.

3. Findings and Discussions

Out of 1137 participants 526 (46.26 per cent) were males and 611 (53.7 per cent) were females. A majority of the participants were between 23 to 39 years of age (63.8 per cent). Regarding their educational background, 244 (21.5 per cent) had a Master's degree, 549 (48.28 per cent) had an MS/MPhil degree, and 344 of them (30.3 per cent) were Ph.Ds.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out on 22 items/statements for the given constructs, followed by SEM, and a path model using AMOS. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics along with the alpha reliabilities for the constructs used in this study. The composite reliability score for CDP for 6 items is 0.88, CA for 5 items is 0.82, AC for 5 items is 0.85, ATC for 4 items is 0.77, and SOC for 3 items is 0.97, which shows internal consistency.

Table 1: Descriptive Statics

Construct	CA	AC	ATC	CDP	SOC	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std.Dev
CA	---					.816	5.88	.82
AC	.435**	---				.845	5.90	.90
ATC	.399**	.368**	---			.765	5.91	.83
CDP	.209**	.446**	.255**	---		.875	5.49	1.00
SOC	.139**	.358**	.183**	.522**	---	.957	5.27	1.10
N=1137								

To validate CMV, Harman’s single-factor test was also performed in SPSS. The model with a single factor explained only 33.76% of the variance, which was below the threshold level of 50%. This was followed by the common latent variable test, which confirmed common variance to be around 30%. Furthermore, a marker variable to the existing model, which further brought down the CMV from 30% to 28%. CFA testing revealed that the values of $\chi^2=6.049$ and $df=220$. The CFI=0.920 and GFI=0.902 were acceptable as anything close to 1 represents a good fit. Convergent validity was evident from high loadings of the items (above 0.50) on their respective factors as shown in figure 2. All other validity results showing composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and average shared variances (ASV) are given in table 2.

Fig. 2: CFA

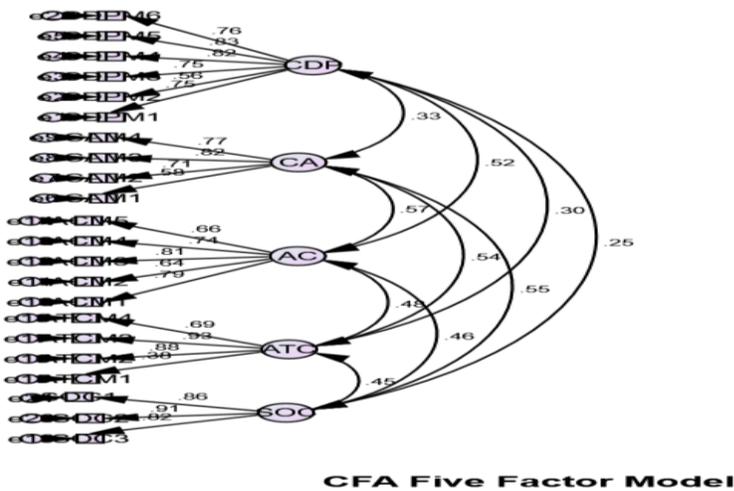


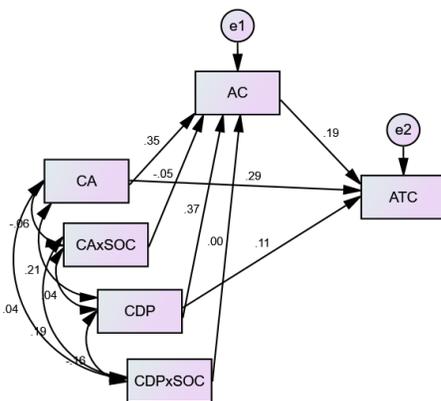
Table 2: Validity Results

	CR	AVE	ATC	CDP	CA	AC	SOC
ATC	0.824	0.560	0.748				
CDP	0.884	0.564	0.296	0.751			
CA	0.815	0.528	0.538	0.334	0.726		
AC	0.851	0.536	0.480	0.521	0.568	0.732	
SOC	0.895	0.740	0.450	0.251	0.549	0.458	0.860

Model fit and alternative model testing

The goodness-of-fit indices for the conceptualized five-factor model (baseline model) are: ($\chi^2=6.049$, $df=220$, $GFI=0.912$, $CFI=0.930$, $RMSEA=0.064$, $PCLOSE=.000$), which proved to be the best model out of alternative models, thus confirming the discriminant validity. Results of the SEM indicate both mediation and moderation effects of the given paths, except for the moderated-mediation path of (CDPXSOC). The path model with results has been shown in figure 3.

Fig. 3: Path Diagram with Values



The direct effects for different paths are: CA→ATC (*path C*) ($\gamma = 0.29$, $CR = 10.02$, $p < .01$), CA→AC (*path A*) ($\gamma = 0.35$, $CR = 13.97$, $p < .001$), AC→ATC (*path B*) ($\gamma = 0.19$, $CR = 6.02$), CDP→ATC (*path E*) ($\gamma = 0.11$, $CR = 10.02$, $p < .001$), and CDP→AC (*path D*) ($\gamma = 0.29$, $CR = 10.15$, $p < .001$), thus supporting H1, H2, H3, H5, and H6 respectively.

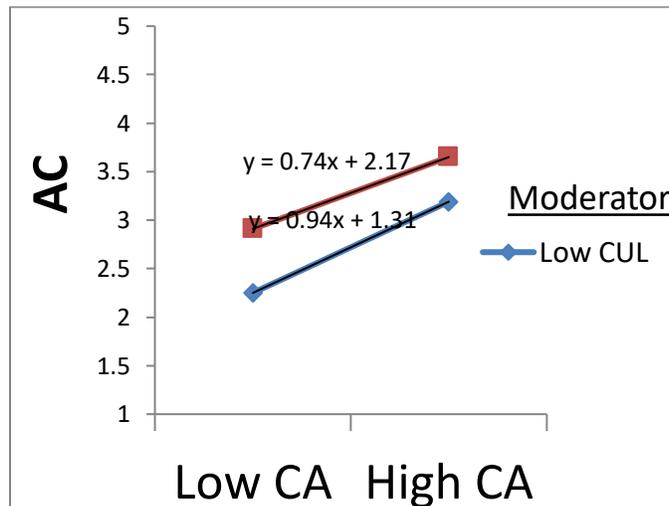
The indirect effects tested for the two paths CA→AC→ATC (*path AxB*) and CDP→AC→ATC (*path DxB*) were both significant, which confirm mediation in paths (*AxB*) and (*DxB*) with the given values ($\gamma = 0.10$, $CR=5.02$, $p < .001$), ($\gamma = 0.12$, $CR=5.73$, $p < .001$), respectively. Thus, supporting H4 and H7. For testing

mediation two models were tested separately, such as $CA \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ATC$ and $CDP \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ATC$, without including the moderator (SOC).

Moderation was evident in both the direct paths between $CA \rightarrow AC$ (*path A*) and $CDP \rightarrow AC$ (*path D*) as conceptualized. Moderation effects were tested at different values of SOC, such as mean (0) and (± 1) standard deviation. The direct conditional effects at mean and (± 1) standard deviation of SOC for $CA \rightarrow AC$ path (*path F*) were all significant with ($\gamma = 0.43$, $UCI=.32$, $LCI=.51$, $p < .05$), ($\gamma = 0.37$, $UCI=.31$, $LCI=.45$, $p < .01$), and ($\gamma = 0.32$, $UCI=.23$, $LCI=.44$, $p < .01$), respectively. Furthermore, the direct conditional effects at mean and (± 1) standard deviation of SOC for $CDP \rightarrow AC$ path are: ($\gamma = 0.26$, $UCI=.17$, $LCI=.35$, $p < .01$), ($\gamma = 0.26$, $UCI=.18$, $LCI=.33$, $p < .05$), and ($\gamma = 0.25$, $UCI=.15$, $LCI=.33$, $p < .05$), respectively. Thus, both *H8* and *H9* are supported.

Finally, moderated-mediation in path $CA \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ATC$ was confirmed with the values of ($\gamma = -0.008$, $UCI=-.018$ and $LCI=.000$, $p < .05$). The conditional indirect effect of CA on ATC via AC using SOC as a moderator is ($\gamma .008$) is weak, yet statistically significant, thus supporting *H10*. The graph for the interaction effects is provided in figure 4. However, moderated-mediation for path $CDP \rightarrow AC \rightarrow ATC$ the conditional indirect effect was not significant, thus *H11* was not supported. All of the hypothesized relationships were supported with empirical testing of the data, except for *H11*.

Figure 4: Interaction Effects



3.1 Discussion on Findings

The academic profession is undergoing changes due to the transforming environment of HE (Siekkinen et al., 2020). However, the blanket changes in HE practices have caused much confusion and criticism among the academics. These changes have increased the work of the academics manifold without much value addition to the organization. The focus of the academe has shifted from quality of the work to quantity, e.g., publication count, quality assurance work, and administrative tasks, etc., thus, hardly leaving any time to the academics for basic research, designing new courses to cater the market demands, for students' research supervision, etc. The increasing number of researches and publications has also led to a more

competitive, yet stressful environment. According to Naidoo (2016), the competition fetish occurs in all levels in HE, and its negative influences in the system have yet to be completely acknowledged.

The academics are juggling to integrate several aspects of their work to perform in a constantly changing environment with varying expectations. With more and more hybrid universities; meaning that the academics are operating in a dynamic environment with diversified functions (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2018), and the academic profession is reflecting this change by becoming ambidextrous (Musselin 2007). Organizations need integrated approaches to encourage systematic, constructive change, minimize resistance to change, and to overcome the negative consequences related to change (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

The main factors for organizational change are both the organizational factors (external factors) and the individual factors (internal factors) (Singh & Gupta, 2016). Whenever the management aspires to incorporate change in the organization, it has to involve all the stakeholders; particularly its employees to make them understand the nature of change for successful consequences of change. It is utmost essential that employees hold a positive ATC to engage in actions that would facilitate the change process (Singh & Gupta, 2016; Amit, 2018). Employees' ATC is a psychological tendency of the employees based on evaluative assessments of changes (Lines, 2005). Employees who have a positive ATC are those who can be relied on, while employees with a negative ATC will hinder the development of the organization (Singh & Gupta, 2016). Positive employee attitudes towards change can be shown from readiness and openness of the employee to accept changes in the organization, while negative attitudes towards change can be seen from resistance and cynicism about change (Bouckennooghe, Devos, & Van den Broeck, 2009). A good strategy is needed by the organizations to make changes in order to survive (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015) lest they will end up in disappointments (Pieterse, Caniels, & Homan, 2012). The attitude of the employees is essential for organizational changes because they are the main actors of implementation of change (Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012).

First, the empirical findings suggest that employees who are ambitious about their careers and who have availed CDPs will have high AC, which will in turn help in forming positive ATC. Ambitious employees want to achieve their personal career goals in the organization and will therefore engage in the change process of the organization because improvement in the organization will take them closer towards achievement of their career goal(s). Similarly, professional competencies are critical for effective performance in the present knowledge economy, which require employees to cope with the challenging contexts in which change occurs. Professional competencies are vital for all employees, irrespective of their role or position (Abraham, Karns, Shaw, & Mena, 2001). When employees receive proper professional development practices, it will increase their chances of promotions and also take them closer to attainment of their career goals. Such employees will tend to contribute to the development of the organization and would consider the organizational problems as their own problems. Moreover, when the management encourages employees' creativity they would try to come up with novel solutions to address organizational problems, which in itself inculcate feelings for change management. All such feelings will be converted into a positive ATC that will help the organization in change incorporation. According to Shah, Irani, and Sharif (2017), extrinsic motivators may lead to a greater initial attachment with the organization's change process but longer term engagement with change efforts continue to be based upon attitudinal behaviours,

such as intrinsic motivators. The authors have further stressed that identification of intrinsic factors may help managers, change agents, and academic researchers to develop a greater understanding of the change process and employees will show readiness for change adoption. Such assessments of employees of an organization should help managers to make targeted choices about planning, strategies and tactics that need to help foster employee enthusiasm for change.

3.2 Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution because there are several caveats that are worth mentioning. For testing causal models, it is preferred to collect longitudinal data and effects do not appear immediately and require time lapse for manifestation. Future studies can take this point into consideration for more comprehensive findings and confidence in the causal links between the given variables. Including a couple of variables or antecedents in models that depict real workplace situations is always frowned upon, as in reality there might be several antecedents, mediators and moderators that actually cause something to happen in the actual workplace. It is always advisable to look for more variables to provide, if not perfect, at least a somewhat comprehensive picture of the phenomena happening in organizations.

3.3 Recommendations

Building upon the strength of the above findings it can be recommended that managers need to recognize that employees are the organizations' most important and strategic asset and must educate them about any change that the organization wants to adopt. Gaining the employees trust is of paramount importance for making the change process a success. Employees should be provided with programmes for their personal and competence development to constitute a positive perception of organizational change. Employees are always risk averse and will always be apprehensive about organizational change. This implies long term planning for competence development practices by the organization that includes ways of securing employees' support. The managers need to regularly update employees on opportunities that exist within the company for job expansion and upward mobility because career goals act as motivators for the employees; particularly those who are ambitious. Moreover, the employees should be given exposure to varied experience to enable them for better performances and better equip them with job related skills for future challenging positions. It is further recommended that employers or management should place a high premium on career advancement, career counseling and career opportunities of their staff.

First, this study shows CA and CDP as important antecedents of AC and ATC, among public HE sector employees advances the SET by showing that employees who have ambition to get ahead and get along in their careers tend to lead to higher levels of AC and have a positive ATC. Also employees who get exposure to CDP have better AC and are more inclined towards organizational change. This, at least, reflects the case of Pakistani knowledge workers in the public HE sector.

Second, this study highlights the importance of CA and CDP as valuable inputs for developing employees' positive ATC, which is of paramount importance. This further emphasizes that for adopting change, managers should not always incentivize employees with extrinsic motivators, as intrinsic motivators have

equal importance for adopting change. Change can be successful in the longer run if it is readily accepted by the employees from their hearts and heads and not arbitrarily imposed upon them.

The findings from this study have major implications for guiding managers to nurture and inspire positive ATC in the public sector organizations. Research indicates that internally motivated employees seek out change because it commonly allows them to develop their personal skills (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe 1994) leading to a sense of intrinsic satisfaction (Houkes et al., 2001). With this in mind, managers may find that intrinsically motivated employees not only do well in change situations but also actually thrive in such situations. Employees who are extrinsically motivated look for jobs that are stable and are change aversive (Amabile et al., 1994). Such employees have lower AC and usually an attitude of indifference towards organizational change or even sometimes have hostile ATC. Managers need to be cautious placing such employees in positions where they will have to frequently deal with change initiatives. First, managers should recruit people who have higher CAs because such people are likely to display a high level of AC and positive ATC. Consequently, the resultant change implementation process will be an effective one. Second, providing employees opportunities to develop their competence will also have a profound effect on their AC and ATC. Finally and most importantly, managers should always take into consideration the organizational culture before developing expectations from the employees.

4. Conclusion

It is obvious today that employees want a career that expresses their interests, personality, abilities and harmonies with their total situation. To effectively understand notions of employee readiness, behaviours, attitudes and motivators, there is an opportunity to carefully and skillfully include a wider set of variables beyond traditional, normative business and management research components identified in the literature. In the wider context, an analysis of the process of change indicated that there may be a number of interconnected areas that affect individual actions. In sum, the changes occurring in our organizations and careers are exciting and challenging. Clearly, we have much to gain by expanding our conceptualizations of careers beyond the traditional models. It is hoped that this study encourages new research on the importance of antecedents on employees' attitude towards change to make it more successful.

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