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Does Supervisor Communication Styles Reduce Cyber loafing? Important Roles of Work Engagement and Psychological Capital

Abstract

Drawing from Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), the current research examined the direct and indirect relationship (PsyCap, work engagement) of perceived supervisor communication styles and cyberloafing. Data from 367 full-time employees working in 64 different firms were collected through a standardized scale. The findings revealed that assertive communication style has a negative relation with cyberloafing while passive and aggressive communication styles have positive associations with cyberloafing. Moreover, PsyCap partially mediates the relationship of supervisor communication styles (assertive, passive and aggressive) and cyberloafing. Additionally, employee work engagement partially mediates the relationship of supervisor communication styles (assertive, passive and aggressive) and cyberloafing. The study suggests that leaders can reduce employee's involvement in cyberloafing through effective supervisor communication and intrinsic motivation factors such as PsyCap and work engagement. Limitations, future directions, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are also highlighted.

Key Words: Cyberloafing, Perceived Supervisor Communication Styles, PsyCap, Work Engagement.

Introduction

From the past decade, an incremental increase in the usage of the internet was observed as new personal electronic devices like Android, iPad and iPhone were introduced ([de Vass et al., 2018](#)). Nowadays, these technologies are used for personal and organizational productivity as one may work on it everywhere, i.e. Traveling to the office, during a tea break, during a tour with family and gossiping with friends. Today's individual life, without the internet, is almost impossible as we get benefits by using these technologies. It makes the lives easy; we easily perform many activities from the home while surfing on the internet like online shopping, online car selling and purchasing, utility bill payments, land sales and purchase and many more. However, these latest technologies have a dark side too, as technology is considered a double-edged sword. In organization setting, the important misuse of the internet is cyber loafing. cyber loafing is the voluntary act of employees to surf non-job-related websites, i.e. Online shopping, online gambling, checking the headlines, viewing pornographic videos, accessing pirated materials and personal emails, during office hours by using organizations internet for their purposes ([Usman et al., 2019](#); [Koay, 2018](#); [Agarwal, 2019](#); Lim, 2002). It is considered a voluntary workplace deviance behaviour of employees and harm organizational as well as personal well-being. An employee involved in such activity openly violate organization's values and norms which ultimately affect organizational as well as individual productivity ([Mercado et al., 2017](#)). Employers paid high cost due to cyberloafing, and it has negative consequences for employees as it affects their performance ([Koay, 2018](#); [Hussain et al., 2017](#)).

Cyberloafing is more destructive for organizational performance in compression with other workplace deviance, such as long tea or prayer breaks and personal phone calls, as it is imagined that the person is working hard, but in reality, cyber loafers are involved in surfing other non-job activities

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([Sheikh et al., 2019](#); [Betts et al., 2018](#); [Akbulut et al., 2017](#)). To minimize cyberloafing, organizations nowadays clearly define policies and rules regarding cyberloafing, and what consequences an employee should face while involving in such activity ([Mercado et al., 2017](#); [Sheikh et al., 2015](#)).

To curb employees' involvement in cyberloafing, past researches add valuable contributions by highlighting the role of various formal control mechanisms like clear policies and internet surveillance systems (Ugrin and Pearson, 2013; [Khansa et al., 2017](#)). Researchers, though, argued that controlling cyberloafing activities through formal policies and rules is improbable as cyberloafing activities have low visibility (de-Lara and Viera-Armas, 2017). As rightly noted by [Koay, 2018](#) and de-Lara and Viera-Armas, (2017), that deterring cyberloafing through formal control mechanisms and punishments may increase cyberloafing practices because it's human psychology that individuals involved in those activities which are prohibited by laws or rules, use it as a means of counter-behaviour ([Hu and Hsu, 2015](#)). Thus, to effectively deter cyberloafing activities, organizations must focus on employees' intrinsic motivations, a possible tool for deterring cyberloafing activities ([Oosthuizen et al., 2018](#)). Regardless the apparent destructive upshots of cyberloafing for an employee as well as organizations and the importance of focusing on employee's intrinsic motivation for discouraging cyberloafing, only a few studies highlight the link between intrinsic motivation related factors and cyberloafing, (e.g. [Usman et al., 2019](#); [Agarwal, 2019](#); [Oosthuizen et al., 2018](#); [Luo et al., 2013](#); [Liberman et al., 2011](#); [Lim, 2002](#)). These studies show that meaningful work ([Usman et al., 2019](#)), psychological capital ([Agarwal, 2019](#)), organizational commitment ([Oosthuizen et al., 2018](#)), self-control ([Hu and Hsu, 2019](#)), and perceived organizational justice ([Luo et al., 2013](#); [Lim, 2002](#)) negatively affect cyberloafing activities.

A mounting body of research highlights the impact of immediate supervisor on employee workplace deviance behaviours (Rizwan et al., 2018; [Imran et al., 2019](#); [Khattak et al., 2017](#); [Mayer et al., 2009](#); [Penney and Spector, 2005](#)). Although, these studies contribute a lot to link supervisor behaviors with employee work outcomes but fail to examine this relationship from the broader perspective of leadership theories like authentic, ethical, servant and transformational leadership ([Liu et al., 2012](#)). Nowadays the focus from exploring the general aspects of leadership and their styles shifted towards day-to-day social interactions among leaders and followers, focusing on communication processes between leaders and subordinates need further examination ([Agarwal, 2019](#); [Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014](#)). [Morrison \(2011\)](#) argued that effective communication between leaders and subordinates is essential for organizational survival and growth.

In the view of conservation of resources theory (COR) ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)), the current research examines the relationship of supervisor communication styles (based on [Heffner's 1997](#) classification) with cyberloafing via psychosocial capital (PsyCap) and work engagement. As per COR theory, resources are scarce, and employees are encouraged to gain, uphold and capitalize valuable resources to effectively achieve their tasks and give focus to generate and utilize new resources and evade potential future depletion in resources ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). We theorize that perceived communication style of supervisor (PSCS) can be viewed as organization valuable resource, helping either to reduce work-related stress or restock the existing resources. The concept of PsyCap has been endorsed by researchers as positive organizational behaviour ([Luthans et al., 2007](#); [Avey et al., 2010](#)). PsyCap is an individual resource consisting of hope, optimism, efficacy and resilience. Past researches explored the explanatory mechanism of PsyCap in the link between resources and employee outcomes.

Our research offers several important contributions to the existing body of knowledge related to PSCS and Cyberloafing. We extend past research by empirically testing the direct relationship of PSCS and cyberloafing and indirect relationship via PsyCap and work engagement. We respond to the calls ([Usman et al., 2019](#)) for research on intrinsic motives that may deter employee cyberloafing activities as well as calls for further exploring PSCS ([Agrawal, 2019](#)). Furthermore, by examining PsyCap and work engagement as important mechanisms through which PSCS influence cyberloafing, extend our knowledge that why PSCS effect cyberloafing in organizations. Finally, our research contributes to the literature related to PSCS, work engagement, PsyCap and cyberloafing by investigating how supervisor behaviour/communication is related to personal resources and cyberloafing in the Pakistani context.

Literature Review

PSCS and Cyberloafing

Communication style (including verbal and non-verbal communication) is the cognitive process that demands micro behaviour to make a macro level judgement ([Raynes, 2001](#)). Verbal communication is the combination of words, volume, speech rate and tonality of the voice, on the other hand, non-verbal communication includes eye contact, body language, movements, gestures and posture (Cited in Agrawal, 2019). The main purpose of communicating with others is to achieve the desire, and accurate response or the receiver gets the point that the sender wants.

From the last few decades, researchers classified communication styles in many ways. Among them, [Heffner's 1997](#) proposed the most effective framework of communication style consisting of three styles, i.e. Assertive, passive and aggressive.

H₁: Assertive communication style is negatively related to cyberloafing

Passive CS: In this form of communication, the communicator is usually passive and normally follow the other suggestions with the notion to avoid conflict. Such communicators are unable to effectively convey their message. These communicators share limited information, enquire a few questions, and feel shy when expressing their opinion. The focus of this type of supervisors is to fulfill associated goals and sustaining harmony, which in turn causing rework, delays and irritation. Thus, we proposed that:

H₂: Passive communication style is positively related to cyberloafing

Aggressive CS: These are one-way communicators. They are poor listeners. These communicators violate other rights through their expression and feelings. Such leaders/communicators always give due importance and implementing their views. They are status and power-conscious and always impose their power on employees ([Newbold, 1997](#)). These communicators discouraged their followers from expressing their emotions ([Cooper et al., 2003](#)). Thus, the behaviour of such communicators may lead employees towards job dissatisfaction, turnover and deviance. Thus, we proposed that:

H₃: Aggressive communication style is positively related to cyberloafing

PSCS and PsyCap

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is an individual's positive psychological state for personal development with the features of hope, resilience, self-reliance, optimism and self-efficacy ([Luthans et al., 2007](#)). PsyCap is a positive organizational resource that impacts sustainable performance through cost reduction and mitigating negative influences in an organization ([Kapusuz and Cavus, 2019](#)). Usually, these five resources, i.e. Optimism, resilience, hope, self-reliance and self-efficacy, are theoretically independent and measured through different yards. Yet in the near past, researchers combined all these five dimensions and used it simultaneously ([Avey et al., 2010](#)). In the current, we also combined all these dimensions and used them simultaneously.

However, PsyCap is internalized social mechanism and is very based on contextual conditions ([Luthans and Yousef-Morgan, 2017](#)). Social support is an essential component for building personal resources. Past researches highlighted that support from immediate supervisor directly affect follower's perception of appropriate behaviour, feeling safety, enhance psychological capital and improve work performance. Based on COR, we tested the effect of PSCS and its types on cyberloafing through PsyCap. Assertive CS develops followers care, concern and support and increase hope in subordinates. Assertive supervisor guides subordinates' attitudes and behaviours, thus leading to strengthening employee self-efficacy beliefs (Agrawal, 2019). To become a part of the decision-making process may enhance employee sense of optimism (Carlson et al., 2012). Working with a supportive supervisor create a safe environment and encourage subordinates to effectively utilize organizational resources ([Khattak et al., 2019](#)). Thus, based on these discussions, we proposed that:

H₄: Perceived supervisor assertive communication style is positively related to PsyCap

H₅: Perceived supervisor passive communication style is negatively related to PsyCap

H₆: Perceived supervisor aggressive communication style is negatively related to PsyCap

H₇: PsyCap is negatively related cyberloafing

PSCS and Work Engagement

Work engagement is an individual motivational state of mind having major three dimensions, i.e. Vigor, dedication and absorption. An employee with a high level of work engagement may enhance extra-role behaviour and in-role performance (Rizwan et al., 2018). Past studies empirically examined that employee work engagement is enhanced through supportive leadership (Imran et al., 2019). [Khattak et al. \(2018\)](#) also argued that for a higher level of work engagement, employees need upper management support and encouragement. Thus, effective communication from the boss may positively motivate their subordinates to engage in their work. As the link between supervisor communication style and work engagement is missing in the literature, we for the first time, based on COR theory, explore this relationship. Based on the notion that supervisor support may positively affect work engagement, we proposed that:

H₈: Perceived supervisor assertive communication style is positively related to employee work engagement

H₉: Perceived supervisor passive communication style is negatively related to employee work engagement

H₁₀: Perceived supervisor aggressive communication style is negatively related to employee work engagement

Work Engagement and Cyberloafing

[Kahn \(1990\)](#) introduces the concept of employee work engagement. Employee work engagement (EWE) is the individual ability to engage in their work. EWE depends on organizational practices to achieve overall organizational goals (Wollard and Shuck, 2011). It is key to organizational success and important for organizational survival ([Khattak et al., 2017](#)). Engaged employee actively involved in performing their tasks and he/she have not enough time to spend on other activities. Such employees work beyond the stipulated time and always work for the betterment of organizations as well self-performance ([Khattak et al., 2018](#); Shantz et al., 2016). Thus, the engaged employee has no or less experience of cyberloafing. Based on the cited literature, we proposed that:

H₁₁: Employee work engagement is negatively related to cyberloafing.

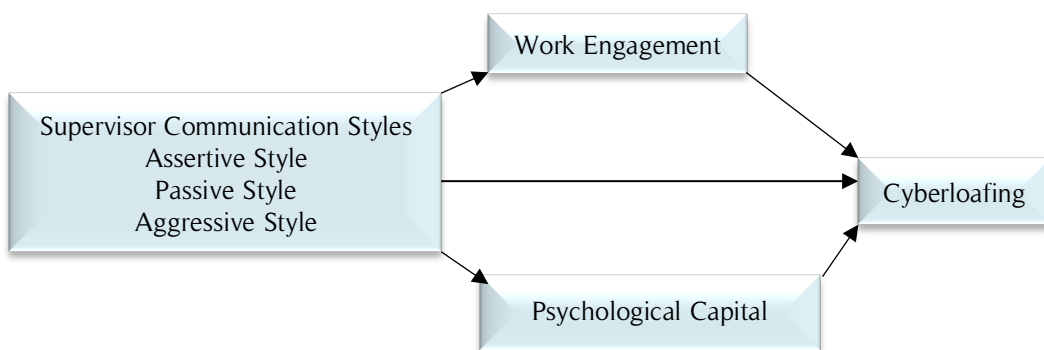


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Methods

Participants and Data Collection

We approached 20 HR heads of different organizations and gave a short presentation about the purpose and managerial implications of the current research. We got a positive response of 12 HR heads to conduct the survey in their respective organizations. These organizations belong to diverse nature,

including textile company, a telecom company, pharmaceutical company and Floor and Sugar Mills. We assured confidentiality to those employees who participated in this study. We distribute 640 questionnaires in these selected organizations and finally received 367 completely correct questionnaires from all aspects with a response rate of 57.34%. The participants' demographic shows that most of them were male (86%), their average age was 35 years, and the length of experience varies from 1-5 years (20%), 6-10 years (35%), 11-15 years (40%) and 16 and above (5%). Most of the respondents have BA/BS.C qualification (64%), followed by MA/MS.C (30%) and MS (6%).

Measurements

This research is survey-based, and the data from the respondents were collected through a standardized questionnaire. All variable scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale indicating 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. To measure perceived supervisor communication styles (aggressive, passive and assertive), we adopted an eight-item scale developed by Brigham Young University (2004). Past studies also used this scale (e.g. Agrawal, 2019). The sample is "My supervisor lets other people take unfair advantage of him/her". To measure psychological capital on its four dimensions (i.e. Hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy) a 12-item scale developed by [Luthans et al., 2007](#) was used. The sample item is "I feel confident helping to set goals in my work area". To measure cyberloafing 11 item scale originally developed by Lim, (2002) was used. The sample item is "Browsing investment-related websites". Employee work engagement was assessed through a scale developed by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale ([Schaufeli et al., 2006b](#)). This scale consists of 9 items. The sample item is "I totally focus on my work".

Results

Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model was assessed through CFA to know whether the constructs were different from one another. We expect that all items would be loaded only on their respective constructs. Model fitness was assessed through conventional fit indices: CMIN, RMR, GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI and RMSEA. Table 1 highlights the CFA results. As shown the values of GFI, AGFI, CMIN, RMR, CFI and RMSEA are in the acceptable range, indicating that the model is good fitted. The alpha value for all variables is above 0.6 ensuring the scale reliability.

Table 1. Alpha and CFA Statistics

Var	CMIN	df	χ^2/df	RMR	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA	Alpha
PSCS	43.234	23	1.879	.043	.912	.854	.926	.036	.903
PsyCap	102.112	56	1.823	.045	.956	.864	.948	.043	.856
EWE	104.324	58	1.798	.044	.902	.876	.921	.039	.837
CL	106.244	55	1.932	.047	.943	.872	.93	.045	.812

The data were gathered from the same respondents, and within one time period, so the common method bias (CMB) may be an issue. Thus, we calculate average variance extraction, composite construct reliability (CCR) and intercorrelation among the variables to know whether CMB exists or not. Based on Harman's one-factor test, the values of AVE and CCR are in the range suggested by past researches ([Hair et al., 2010](#); Lee et al., 2013) confirm that we have no CMB problem. The correlation among variables are significant, and CCR values are below 0.7.

Table 2. AVE, CCR and Correlation.

	CL	PSCS	EWE	PsyCap
CL	1			
PSCS	.654**	1		

EWE	.567**	.408**		
PsyCap	.534**	.416**	.386**	1
Mean	3.45	3.33	3.74	3.69
SD	.861	.834	.758	.713
AVE	.703	.791	.678	.743
CCR	.609	.596	.543	.679

Hypotheses Testing

The study hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping method through PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Model 4 of PROCESS macro was applied. We found that assertive communication style has a significant and negative relationship with cyberloafing (B = -0.306, p = 0.000), passive communication style has a positive relationship with cyberloafing (B = 0.412, p = 0.000), and aggressive communication style is also positively related with cyberloafing (B = 0.287, p = 0.000). Similarly, assertive communication style has a significant association with PsyCap and work engagement (B = 0.231, p = 0.000) and (B = 0.348, p = 0.001) respectively, passive communication style is also significantly related to PsyCap and work engagement (B = -0.116, p = 0.003) and (B = -0.254, p = 0.000) respectively. We also found that aggressive communication style has a negative, but significant association with PsyCap and work engagement (B = -0.163, p = 0.001) and (B = -0.233, p = 0.000) respectively.

To test whether PsyCap and work engagement fully or partially mediates the relationship of assertive, passive and aggressive communication styles with cyberloafing model 4 was applied. The results reported in Table 3 shows that both mediators partially mediate the relationship of communication styles and cyberloafing with 95% upper-level confidence interval.

Table 3. Indirect Effect

	Coeff	Boot se	t	LLCI	ULCI
ACS → PsyCap → CL	.49	.04	12.25	.38	.62
ACS → EWE → CL	.28	.03	9.33	.32	.56
PCS → PsyCap → CL	.54	.08	6.75	.24	.43
PCS → EWE → CL	.22	.12	7.33	.28	.49
AgCS → PsyCap → CL	.56	.12	4.66	.18	.27
AgCS → EWE → CL	.34	.07	4.85	.21	.29

Discussion

In line with the recent calls (Agarwal, 2019; Usman et al., 2019) to explore how to deter cyberloafing through intrinsic motives, we built on recent theoretical development in the concept of perceived supervisor communication styles and propose that PSCS has a significant effect on cyberloafing. Furthermore, we proposed that PsyCap and work engagement mediates the link of PSCS and cyberloafing. The results show that all of the study hypotheses are accepted. We found that assertive communication style has a negative relationship with cyberloafing. It means that when employees perceive that their supervisor attitude and behaviour is positive, supportive, listening to their views, and honest, they were less engaged in cyberloafing activities. We found that passive communication style has a positive association with cyberloafing, indicating that passive communicators have no influence over followers, and during office hours followers are bosses and do what they want, thus, increase cyberloafing activities. It is found that an aggressive communication style has a positive association with cyberloafing. Aggressive communicators disrespect their followers, don't listen to them and always

implement their own opinion; thus, due to their behaviour's followers may take revenge in the shape of deviance such as cyberloafing.

Moreover, we examined the underlying mechanisms of why PSCS has both positive and negative relationships with cyberloafing by introducing PsyCap and work engagement as intervening variables to the model. By examining the intervening roles of work engagement and PsyCap in the PSCS and cyberloafing relationship, our research adds to the positive organizational behaviour literature that was focusing on employee's psychological capital and performance ([Luthans et al., 2007](#)). Regardless of huge empirical literature available on PsyCap and work engagement, yet need much work to be done, that explore not only the effect but its antecedents too.

Theoretical Contributions

By examining the interrelations among communication styles, PsyCap, work engagement and cyberloafing led us to contribute to the existing theory. Past studies explored that intrinsic motivation factors, i.e. Effective commitment ([Usman et al., 2019](#)), organizational commitment ([Oosthuizen et al., 2018](#)), Psychological capital (Agrawal, 2019), and involvement ([Lieberman et al., 2011](#)) have negative associations with cyberloafing. Similarly, prior studies on supervisor behaviour show its positive effect on job outcomes, employee job satisfaction, work engagement, work performance, and followers' attitudes and behaviours, but up to the researcher's knowledge, the link between supervisor communication styles and cyberloafing is very rare. Further, exploring the intervening variable to this relationship (i.e. PsyCap and work engagement) adds a valuable contribution to the existing theory of psychological capital and work engagement. We, for the first time, examined how work engagement plays an intervening role to dissuade cyberloafing.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, exploring the predictors of cyberloafing can be helpful for managers to take corrective actions to manage such deviance behaviours effectively. Normally it is beyond the power of supervisors to influence organization policies, and their main task is to effectively manage and utilize human resources and have the rights how to treat their employees to get the desire tasks. Supervisors dealing their employees with dignity, truthfulness, and respect will yield a positive effect on employee's behaviours ([Scott et al., 2014](#)). Thus, to avoid negative outcomes, while interacting with employees, supervisors must be respectful in communication. Researchers argued that the psychological impact of negative events is long-lasting and strongly affects the individual state of mind as compared to positive events ([Agarwal, 2019](#)). Management should give immense importance to communication in an organization setting. We cannot ignore this important discourse "one should use words carefully as they don't have arms or feet of their own. A word can serve as a balm or become a scar". Our research recaps the two important management secrets, i.e. Pygmalion effect and Galatea effect. Pygmalion effect is the employee's expectation from supervisors, and their expectations are key factors to perform better at work, and the Galatea effect, is the power of expectations cannot be overestimated.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like others, our study is not without limitations. Using a cross-sectional research design is the major limitation, as in this design, we cannot determine the causality among variables. It would be better to conduct a longitudinal study on the same constructs to further elaborate on the relationships. Data was collected through self-reports, that may cause CMV, however, in our case, we assured that no CMV problem exists, but it may slightly affect the results. Thus, a longitudinal or experimental research design is the appropriate tools to conduct such nature of the study. We select a sample from Pakistan. For generalizability of findings, further research is needed in other contexts.

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