

PERCEIVED JOB IMAGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM: A STUDY OF POLICE PERSONNEL IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism. Data were collected from 208 police personnel working in Pakistan through personally administered questionnaires. Findings indicate that negative job image causes organizational cynicism among police personnel in Pakistan. However, power distance as a cultural dimension does not moderate this relationship. Implications for decision makers are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Policing is an integral component of public administration as it plays a vital role in society, being responsible for law enforcement, peacekeeping (Reiss, 1971), guarding the public from lunatics and psychopathic killers (Margarita, 1980), avoiding and combating crime (Fairchild, 1989; Martin, 1999). These activities make policing extremely intricate (Goldstein, 1990), demanding, challenging and stressful (Anshel, Robertson & Caputi, 1997; Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Wu, 2009). Because of these occupational hassles, a growing number of studies tried to analyze police personnel attitude and behavior (Goldstein, 1990) which include job satisfaction (Fields & Blum, 1997; Ganzach, 1998), employee motivation (Srivastav, 2006), workplace deviance (Henle, 2005), counterproductive work behavior (Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002) and organizational cynicism (Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010).

Defined as a pessimistic mind-set or attitude that an individual has towards one's employing organization (Davis & Gardner, 2004), cynicism among police personnel gained attention through seminal work by Niederhoffer (1967), and in the last few decades it has received significant attention in management literature. Recent years have witnessed a revival of researchers' interest in cynicism among police personnel. Caplan (2003) analyzed positive and negative aspects of cynicism among police personnel, while Mignone (2005) studied the level of cynicism among New York Police recruits by means of similar sample used by Niederhoffer (1967). Studies also confirmed that police personnel are more prone to organizational cynicism since they experience multiple stress factors. Long working hours and lack of organizational support caused

higher level of stress among officers of Australian state police service (Davey, Obst, & Sheehan, 2001), while Berg, Hem, Lau, and Ekeberg (2006) found that job pressure and lack of support were causing physical and mental health problems for Norwegian Police. All such frustrating situations at work place are a major source of cynicism among police personnel, which affect their normal course of duty (Graves, 1996).

On one side, policing is a profession having higher levels of stress, while on the other side studies report usage of oppressive and brute force by police personnel, and also existence of a high rate of corruption in the organization (Alpert & Dunham, 1997). Because of negative image of police among masses, the citizens are suspicious of police (Moon & Zager, 2007), and this image can even result in physical attacks on Police (Caplan, 2003). Being part of a profession having a repulsive image among masses, Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) lends support to the argument that this image can generate a wide range of attitudes among police personnel including organizational cynicism (Edwards, Nafziger, & Holland, 1974), which is conceptualized as a negative attitude (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). Same analogy was used by Yim and Schafer (2009) in a comprehensive analysis of perceived job image and police personnel job satisfaction, who recommended that the future studies should examine relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism.

A study by Nalla and Mamayek (2013) concluded with an important question, why countries like Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan have failed to change the image of their police as a para-militaristic culture reflective of their colonial heritage. This image is generally attributed to perception of police being a brute force.

The organization is also ranked very high in corruption (Bashir, Khattak, Hanif, & Chohan, 2011), generating mistrust among masses. Still, limited studies have examined specific relationships between perceived job image and its outcomes among police personnel in a non US/non western context like Pakistan. Culture affects attitude and behavior (Gelade, Dobson, & Gilbert, 2006); however, perceived job image and employee attitude holds different meanings in different cultures. Thus an important objective of the present study is to investigate this under researched area.

Perceived Job Image and Organizational Cynicism

Perceived job image is defined as a perception held by an employee about his/her job regarding the meaning of occupational association concerning the social status and competence (Birnbaum & Somers, 1986; 1989) or employees' perception of their profession's assessment by outsiders (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Lim, Teo, & See, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 1997), which can be made during employees' interaction with others (Kamasak & Bulutlar, 2008). If an employee feels that his/her job holds a negative perception among others, it can lead to negative attitude towards that job and employing organization. Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) described negative effect towards the organization as organizational cynicism, i.e. employee would feel that he is subject to this negativity by others as a result of holding that position in a particular organization.

Yates and Pillai (1996) suggest that police personnel's feeling about their job and organization is greatly influenced by the perception people have about them, and Friedrich (1980) suggests that cynicism among police personnel can be attributed to negative image about their job. Collins and Gibbs (2003) found that policing as a profession is a sufferer of blame culture which has increased stressful occupational exposure. Yim and Schafer (2009) suggest that police personnel are aware about the fact that citizens perceive them negatively. Lim, Teo, and See (2000) reported that "when members of the public treat police officers with lack of respect and perceived to be incompetent, such responses may serve as negative stimuli. Such stimuli may, in turn, evoke certain negative affective reactions" (p-741). The conceptualization of this negative reaction matches with organizational cynicism since it is an evaluative judgment materializing from an individual's experiences of employment (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006; Bedeian, 2007).

While negative job image can result in organizational cynicism, its reverse is equally true that positive perceived job image results in positive work behavior

and enhanced performance (Organ & Greene, 1974; Kamasak & Bulutlar, 2008). These findings provide us an evidence to develop first hypothesis of study relating perceived job image with organizational cynicism.

Hypothesis 1. Perceived job image of police personnel is negatively related to organizational cynicism.

The Present Study – Context: Police in Pakistan and role of culture

Pakistan inherited colonial system of policing which was developed way back in 1861 to rule over the colony (Awan, 2013). Though claims are made that it was replaced through Police Order, 2002; police is still viewed as a brute force in Pakistan. After decades of Pakistan's independence from colonial rule, even today a policeman in uniform is seen as representative of sovereign state (Imam, 2011). "Police in Pakistan have a terrible reputation. There appears to be across-the-board consensus that the institution of police is largely corrupt, often brutal and institutionally incompetent" (Abbas, 2008). Being elite and powerful agents in society, the actions by police personnel, even including extra judicial murders, are generally not questioned by masses in a country like Pakistan with a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1994); a culture defined as the measure of power disparity and is deemed normal by the people of that country.

Since culture shapes the behavior (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004), research shows that level of power distance significantly influences work patterns, attitudes and actions (Francesco & Chen, 2000; Vatrappu, 2002). Pakistan has a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1980); some studies with similar cultural orientation (e.g. Lim, Teo, & See, 2010) indicate that perceived job image is an important determinant of various organizational outcomes. I argue that Police personnel working in a low power distance orientation will be having different job attitudes and behaviors as compared to high power distance orientation. A larger number of studies have examined the relationships between perceived job image and police attitude and behavior in the US and Western contexts where low power distance culture prevails, as compared to examining these phenomenon in a high power distance cultures like Pakistan.

Thus this study intends to investigate the relationship in Pakistani cultural context. The second hypothesis of present study is:

Hypothesis 2. Power distance moderates the relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism.

METHODS

Measures

The data were collected using a five point likert scale with 1 representing (strongly disagree) and 5 representing (strongly agree). The exceptions were demographics (age, tenure, qualification and tenure) for which dichotomous and category scales were used.

Perceived Job Image

The questionnaire to measure perceived job image was originally developed by Lim et al., (2000); the same instrument was adopted for present study. Sample items read, "Police work is an occupation highly respected in the community", "Police officers are not as competent as they seem" and "Policing is dirty work". A higher score in this scale indicates positive job image and vice versa. Coefficient alpha for this measure was 0.966.

Organizational Cynicism

Organizational cynicism was measured using an instrument developed by Dean et al., (1998). This scale has been widely used and has shown acceptable psychometric properties. Sample items state, "I often experience irritation when I think about my organization", "I criticize my organization's practices and policies with others" and "I often experience anxiety when I think about my organization". Alpha reliability for this measure was 0.938.

Power Distance

The cultural dimension Power Distance was measured using an instrument developed by Brockner, Ackerman, and Greenberg (2001). Sample items read, "there should be established ranks in society with everyone occupying their rightful place regardless of whether that place is high or low in the ranking", "even if an employee may feel he deserves a salary increase, it would be disrespectful to ask his manager for it" and "people are better off not questioning the decisions of those in authority". Coefficient alpha for this measure was 0.801.

Sampling

Sample consisted of police personnel serving in the police agency of Pakistan. It encompasses all the departments that come under the umbrella of police force including traffic police, motorway police, highway police, and elite force etc. The access to sample was

gained through personal contacts and requests to different senior police officers to extend help in data collection. Many questionnaires were filled by the Police personnel on the spot while performing their official duty. The main focus of the study was to have an opinion by those who act as "street cops" having direct interaction with general public. Thus majority of respondents were working at lower level jobs like constables, assistant sub inspectors, while few were filled by senior level officers.

The questionnaires were personally administered to police personnel. A cover letter was attached with the questionnaire explaining purpose of the study, and it also assured respondents of strict confidentiality and that participation in study was voluntary. The confidentiality was ensured through anonymity as respondents were not asked to write their names, designations or anything through which they could be identified. Non-probability sampling technique was used, and initially 245 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 211 were received back and 3 questionnaires were incomplete and were excluded. Therefore 208 questionnaires were used for the research, representing a response rate of 85%.

The sample for the research was composed of 87.5% male and 12.5% female police personnel. This composition symbolizes the cultural and social norms of Pakistan, i.e. policing is viewed as a masculine profession by many (Schaible, 2006). In terms of qualification, 41.8% held a bachelors degree while 4.3% of the respondents had done Masters. In terms of age groups, major portion of the sample (about 34%) lied within the age level of 30-35 years, while 23% represented 20-25 years, 20% representing 26-30 years and 11% were above 40 years of age.

Results

TABLE 1
Correlation Analysis

		1	2	3
1	PJI	1		
2	PD	0.157*	1	
3	OCY	-0.486**	0.249**	1

** $p < .005$, * $P < .01$, $n = 208$, PJI = Perceived Job Image, PD = Power Distance, OCY = Organizational Cynicism

The Correlation analysis in table 1 indicates a significant negative relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism. This result is in line with first hypothesis i.e. perceived job image is negatively associated with organizational cynicism.

TABLE 2
Regression Analysis for Outcomes

	β	t	sig	R ²
Perceived Job Image	-0.569	-7.98	0.000	0.236

Adjusted R²=0.233, F = 63.73, Dependent Variable: Organizational Cynicism

Regression Analysis suggests that perceived job image is one of the significant contributors of organizational cynicism. The value $R^2 = 0.236$ shows that about 23.6% of variation in organizational cynicism is caused by perceived job image. As a whole, these results suggest that there exists a strong and significant negative relation between perceived job image and organizational cynicism, thus the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

TABLE 3
Moderated Regression Analysis

Predictor	Organizational Cynicism		
	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Power Distance			
Step 1			
Control Variables		0.136	
Step 2			
Perceived Job Image	-0.404**		
Power Distance	0.189**	0.317	0.181**
Step 3			
Perceived Image x Power Distance	-0.382	0.325	0.008

***p<.005, *P<.01, Control Variables: Gender, Age, Tenure, and Qualification*

Moderated Regression Analysis in table 3 shows that power distance does not moderate the relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism ($\beta = -0.382$, with insignificant value). Hence hypothesis (H2) is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study indicate that Police personnel in Pakistan perceive that they do not enjoy a positive image among masses. These findings are supported by Yim and Schafer (2009) while Tuohy and Wrennall (1995) found that perceived job image of police personnel was positive. These varying findings indicate that the issue of perceived job image cannot be generalized; it will depend on context where it is being examined. The specific context in which police operates in Pakistan can be a major factor. Thus, an important finding of present study is that perceived job image is a contextual phenomenon; context determines whether

police personnel have positive or negative job attitude. These findings substantiate argument by Johns (2006) that context affects every component of organizational behavior.

Examination of rarely studied relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism can be considered as a important contribution of the present study. Earlier studies related perceived job image with different organizational outcomes, but organizational cynicism remained unscathed. Attitude is the key component for predicting the intention and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The findings indicate that cynicism among police personnel can be an outcome of perceived job image. Studies with an occupational focus of organizational cynicism (Niederhoffer, 1967) consider that cynicism can be an outcome of being part of any specific occupation like police; I believe that perceived job image is also occupation specific. This analogy can easily explain the relationship between these two variables. For any occupation in which the employees are required to interact with public customers or general public, they will be concerned about the image they have among others. In case they are perceived less favorably by others, this will develop a negative attitude about that occupation and organization commonly referred to as organizational cynicism.

An unusual finding of the present study was insignificant moderating role of power distance in determining the relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism. Though Hofstede (1980) places Pakistan amongst those countries having high level of power distance, and since culture acts as software of mind (Hofstede, 1991), it was hypothesized that power distance can enhance the impact of perceived job image in determining organizational cynicism. However, contrary to expectation, the power distance does not moderate the relationship between perceived job image and organizational cynicism. Power distance as defined by Hofstede (1980) has an important characteristic that societies high in power distance not only have unequal distribution of power, but members of that society accept this unequal distribution of power. Like many public sector organizations of Pakistan, the police personnel consider unequal distribution of power as a matter of routine, i.e. they do not question this unequal distribution; people having power, status and authority are entitled to do whatever they like. Organizational members do not consider it necessary to question this unequal distribution; hence it has shown insignificant moderating effect in present study.

The findings of present study have important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical significance includes occupational conceptualization of perceived job image. Although the phenomenon is

important for all the jobs in public administration, but for those jobs involving direct interaction with general public like police, health, academics etc., perceived job image matters more, and is likely to have positive or negative effects on organizational outcomes. The important practical implication is that it helps to relate organizational identity with organizational attraction (job image). According to Attraction–Selection–Attrition frame work (Schneider, 1987), a positive image of the organization helps in attracting the most competent and talented individuals towards organization. The incompetency and non-professionalism in police force of Pakistan can be attributed to the fact that most of the brilliant and talented individuals do not prefer to work in police due to image or rather stigma associated with this profession. Thus the decision makers need to consider this important aspect as they should not expect a quality work force applying for jobs in their organization, unless the policing image in society is not improved.

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