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SOME HIDDEN TRUTHS ABOUT MANAGEMENT OF WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT**MUHAMMAD RIZWAN****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
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BAHAWALPUR, PAKISTAN****ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to present an empirical analysis of the managerial perspective and benefits of workplace environment. A primary rationale for workplace environment is the impact on employee performance and satisfaction. A questionnaire was employed to collect data from 600 employees working in public and private sector. Simple and hierarchical regression analysis was done to determine the relationships. The results of this paper elaborate the advantage of using gap approach for evaluating the workplace environment. The findings also support the hypothesized relationships between Locus of control and workplace environment. Finally, the current study also confirms the moderator role of workplace environment between job length and job satisfaction. With respect to the avenue of future research, empirical studies from other countries are required to comprehend the dynamic attributes of workplace environment with relation to employee satisfaction. The results suggest the usage of gap approach in developing more favorable workplace environment instead of only evaluating it. The workplace also plays an important role in the relation of locus of control with employee performance and job length with employee satisfaction. The concept presented in this paper tries to move towards forward stage i.e. prescription for the modification of workplace environment.

KEYWORDS

Workplace, Employee Satisfaction, Locus of control, Job length, Gap approach.

INTRODUCTION

At the workplace, a common understanding is that the employee satisfaction with the physical environment increases the likelihood of better work outcomes and the employees that are satisfied with the environment produce better results. Employee satisfaction is categorized as a vital aspect for the progress of an organization and very critical for the organizational performance. The basis for this proposition is on the fact that the satisfaction reduces the voluntary turnover and improves the morale of the employees (Dole and Schroeder, 2001). This means that if the organization ensures the favorable conditions for the employees, the employee's productivity, absenteeism and turnover can be controlled in the organization. These favorable conditions make the employees more relax and comfortable with the physical conditions and they can concentrate on their works. Evaluating employee's perception and demands of the physical working environment can provide an understanding to the management about the importance of critical aspects, objective properties and resultant outcomes. It was argued by (Stallworth and Kleiner, 1996) that the physical layout should be designed according to the employee needs so that can be effective for productivity maximization and employee satisfaction. They further argue that for sharing of information and networking across the departmental groups which allow networking and spontaneous communication, innovative workplace should be developed. So it is worthwhile to explore the perception of the employee about the characteristics of physical environment and their expectation about the workplace. In this way by asking the employees about the workplace and making improvements in the workplace design would increase the benefits and this should be done according to an employee perspective (Van der Voordt and Maarleveld, 2006; Preiser and Vischer, 2005). Sometimes the management goals to achieve high labor productivity and reducing cost affect the employee satisfaction. The process of redesigning workplace should be carried out according to the demand of employees. The application of the previous results to a specific environment is not always straightforward. Considering the nature of the employees for whom you are doing all

these efforts are also very important and always similar work setting does not relate to employee satisfaction in every context (Young and Cooper, 1995; Rees, 1995).

The primary purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of improving the workplace environment instead of only evaluating it. The impact of workplace on employee performance and satisfaction was confirmed by many previous researches but there is still a question that what management can do for improving the workplace environment. This paper suggests the use of gap approach to accomplish the respective task. Additionally, this paper also tries to theorize the impact of workplace in the relationship of locus of control and job length.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

To date, studies on the relationship between workplace environment and its impacts on employee's needs, behavior and satisfaction has been limited (Lee, 2006). The results of different studies on employee satisfaction with workplace environment are very complex and difficult to generalize. Previous researchers have argued that employee perception, attitude, performance and satisfaction are affected by the working conditions of the organization (Lee and Brand, 2005; Leather et al., 2003; Sundstrom et al., 1994; Ferguson and Weisman, 1986; Zalesny et al., 1985). Some researches highly support the association between the stress, job satisfaction and physical environment of the organization (Sullivan and Bhagat, 1992). These studies taken the workplace environment as a general and did not mention the major attributes which cause the given consequences. The perception and priority of the employees are different on the basis of their different characteristics. In this connection, it is very hard to develop a universal hierarchy of these physical attributes rather we have to study more deeply to explore further. Similarly, Brown (1996) claimed that the relationship between employees and the characteristics of workplace settings is not well understood. The same attributes of workplace are not constantly associated to stress and job satisfaction in every workplaces (Rees, 1995; Young and Cooper, 1995). The difference in the previous findings could be due to studies trying to develop general relationships instead of finding relationships in specific context. Similarly attitudes, cultural values and employee socio-demographic attributes manipulate perceived hierarchies of environmental dimensions, so influencing the association between the employee satisfaction and physical conditions (Varady and Carrossa, 2000; Bonnes and Secchiarioli, 1995). These changing relationship of employee satisfaction with their workplace environment specify that a common model of workplace environment is not useful in identification of employee satisfaction. We have to identify salient workplace attributes instead of using a broad brush approach while seeking employee satisfaction with the workplace.

EVALUATING WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Most of the working conditions satisfaction researches try to explore the significance of different attributes according to the employee's perception of environmental satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Some other studies specify more compound association between the employees and workplace environment. According to Lee (2006), the satisfaction can be best measured by comparing the gap between the perception of the employee and the actual situation of the workplace attributes. In most of the studies, they simply ask questions about the aspects of the work environment and measure the level of satisfaction with the particular aspect without knowing the importance of that aspect for the employee (Spreckelmeyer, 1993; Lantrip, 1993; Sundstrom et al., 1994). In perception base studies, it is difficult to give managerial direction from the results until or unless the workers show low satisfaction levels. Mostly these satisfaction results can be discussed according to the perspective of researcher instead of the original employee's viewpoint. Argued by (Vardy and Carrozza, 2000) that these controlled questions may restrict the results and create diverse interpretations. They also stressed that these straightforward results of satisfaction surveys are useless until or unless data would be compared to the results of other locations, subgroups and time.

H1. Gap approach is superior to perception approach due to its managerial implication

LOCUS OF CONTROL AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Different studies attempt to check the relationship of Locus of control with different aspects of work for example job satisfaction, job stress and job performance. Chen and Silverthorne (2008) revealed that in a Taiwan accounting firm employees having high internal locus of control shows relatively low stress as compare to externals and high level of satisfaction and performance as well. On the contrary, Gibbons (2007) reported in his study that locus of control was not predicting the level of satisfaction and stress. Locus of control is one facet of personality that defines "the degree of one's expectancies for either the need for external or internal control of reinforcement" (Rotter, 1966). People can be internal or external according to the extent they believe that the consequences of their lives are dependent on their own efforts or some external factors such as luck and chance control their life. People with a low score on LOC have an internal LOC (internals) and they perceive that their own attributes, capacities and behaviors determine the outcomes or results they attain. While people with high score on LOC have an external LOC (externals) and they perceive that these things are normally external to their control. A number of studies have been attempt to examine the LOC and its relationship with different job aspects such as job satisfaction, stress, job performance and organizational commitment (Chen, 2008 and Patten, 2005). Moreover, studies have acknowledged the linkage between LOC and job stress (Daniels and Guppy, 1994; Rahim, 1996), job satisfaction, and job performance (Judge et al., 2003). Thus, an employee's behaviors related to different job aspects as job stress, job satisfaction and job performance are associated with different personality attributes especially locus of control (Martin et al., 2005). This is not the universal case there are studies that unable to find straightforward relationship between these work outcomes and employee degree of locus of control. In a study by Reed et al., (1994) examining the impact of LOC on job satisfaction mentioned that the significance of explaining the relationship of employee locus of control with job satisfaction are critically gender related. Hyatt and Prawitt (2001) checked the relationship between auditor LOC and their job performance from four accounting firms. In two firms they find significant association between the auditor LOC and their performance but this was not the case in the remaining two firms, where they did not find any association between LOC and job performance.

H2: There is a relationship between employee's LOC and perception about workplace environment.

JOB LENGTH AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Regarding job length, the fundamental assumption appears to be that the employees who are satisfied with the job will stay with the organization and dissatisfied workers leaves or resign (Hom and Griffeth, 1995; Oshagbemi, 2000). Kuo and Ho (2010) found in his study that length of employment and experience significantly affects different outcomes of job performance. In a study, Oshagbemi (2000a) report job length is positively associated with the over all job satisfaction of university teachers. One of the possible explanation is that employees tend to adjust themselves according to the physical environment, which results in job satisfaction (Mottaz, 1987; Baldamus, 1961), or the workers who were not able to adjust themselves in the working environment were likely to experience dissatisfaction and leave the organization (Savery, 1996). Workers with longer job length may be satisfied because the job matches their need (Clark et al., 1996) or may be the employee find opportunities for promotion in the organization that increases the job satisfaction (Kalleberg and Mastekaasa, 2001). All these are the possible explanation for the relationship of job length with job satisfaction. But there are many studies that present the situation in quite different manner. Longer tenure may results in boredom and reduces satisfaction of the employee (Clark et al., 1996) and the phenomenon can be exacerbated by external labor market conditions and low job mobility (Trevor, 2001; Hom and Kinicki, 2001). Gibson and Klein (1970) found evidence for a linear negative relationship between tenure and satisfaction up to 12 years' tenure and after that it leveled out. A non linear relationship was reported by Bamundo and Kopelman (1980), Luthans and Thosman (1989) reported a curvilinear relationship of job length with job satisfaction and similar results was demonstrated by Snyder and Deitrich (1992). The results of the previous studies are very complex and make it very difficult to develop generalization. Researchers found extremely different or even opposite findings in their studies. Some studies argued a positive relationship where other observes negative relationship and even curvilinear or U shaped relationship was reported by these studies. These results create a paradox in the understanding of the association between job length and employee satisfaction. A possible explanation for this paradox is the impact of workplace environment. If the employees are satisfied with the workplace environment, we will observe a positive relationship between tenure and job satisfaction. Wickramasinghe (2009) argued a negative relationship between the tenure and job satisfaction in the employees of outsourced IT firms. The work environment in these firms is highly controlled and performance is closely monitored against targets. The employees worked during unconventional working hours to provide real-time services to western world. These irritating working conditions make socialization difficult and increase the level of stress and decrease job satisfaction. In these outsourcing firms employees face tough working time and issues related to work life balance (LIRNEasia, 2006). In a different study by Hwang (2008) to study the determinants of job satisfaction in police officers of South Korea reported that job length is negatively associated with job satisfaction. When the sample was divided into two categories i.e. in metropolitan cities

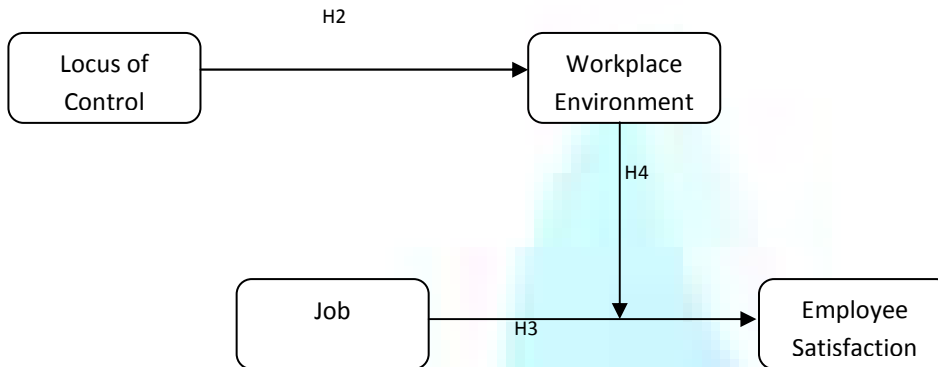
and rural area, it was found that the negative relationship was not observed in rural areas. The tenure was not important in rural areas and smaller cities in regards to job satisfaction. Sarkar (2003) conducted a research on the employees of Thailand hotel industry and found a positive relationship between tenure and job satisfaction. When we look at the working environment, it is quite favorable for the employees. In hotel industry, the best employee is often the one who efficiently facilitate the customer needs and creates a memorable and satisfying moment of truth. For the same reason the hotel employees are treated well and the environment for hotel employees are relatively better.

Therefore, we develop the following hypotheses.

H3: job length has a positive impact on employee satisfaction, such that employees with longer duration have more job satisfaction.

H4: Employees perception about workplace environment moderates the relationship between tenure and job satisfaction, such that employees who perceive favorable workplace report high level of job satisfaction with longer tenure compared to employees who perceive unfavorable environment with longer tenure.

PROPOSED MODEL FOR THE RESEARCH



METHOD

PILOT STUDY

To develop the questionnaire to judge the workplace and its impact on employee satisfaction a focus group of 35 employees were selected. By conducting face to face interviews, 16 items were finalized to include in the questionnaire.

For the reasons of correctness of measurement scale items, validity and clearing ambiguity 50 questionnaires were distributed among the employees of 5 different firms. The results show reliability and consistency when the extracted data was analyze in SPSS. The alpha value of 0.85 is more than the value of 0.60, recommended by Agarwal (2004).

LOCUS OF CONTROL

The second scale for locus of control is taken from the study of Rotter (1966). This scale was commonly used in previous researches and according to this the LOC score can be between 0-23. The low score is showing "Internal" qualities and high score showing "External" qualities.

JOB SATISFACTION

The scale for job satisfaction was taken from the work of Stringer (2006). The mean score of the 20 items was taken to analyze the level of job satisfaction of the employee with the job contents.

DATA COLLECTION

The population of employees used in this research consists of workers and managers from public and private sector of Pakistan. Three cities were selected Islamabad, Lahore and Bahawalpur. The pre tested questionnaire was distributed personally among the employees and 517 completed questionnaires were usable out of 600. The distribution of the employees according to their nature of job is given at table 1.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYEES

Type	Manager	Non Manager	Professional	Other	Total
Private	212	105	25	14	356
Public	84	32	11	34	161
Total	296	137	36	48	517

The questionnaire consists of different item related to physical workplace environment. Each item was asked under two sections. One for knowing the expectation of the employee and the second is for knowing the perception of the employee, similarly the method used by parasuraman et al. (1998). The items in the questionnaire include openness, flexible, privacy, temperature control, lighting control, personalization, decision control, meeting facility, working method autonomy, control over social contacts, flexible furniture, quality of equipments, openness, quiet environment, access to other workstations, undisturbed environment and appearance. These items were measured with a pair of statements like "My work environment should be quiet" to measure their expectation about the item and "My work environment is quiet" to measure their perception. These employees were asked to rate these statements on a five-point likert scale ranging from "1: Strongly Disagree" to "5: Strongly Agree" for each item. The gap was measured by the difference in the expectation score and perception score of the employees about each aspect of the workplace.

RESULTS

The present research tries to investigate two major things. First, finding the items of workplace, that is highly needed to improve for employee satisfaction. Second, the importance of gap approach while determining the satisfaction level of employees. Mean score of each item according to expectation and perception is presented at table 2. Standard deviation of these items is also presented in parenthesis.

TABLE 2: EXPECTATION, PERCEPTION AND GAP SCORES OF WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Items	Expectation	Perception	GAP
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Flexible	2.58 (1.17)	2.27 (1.32)	0.31
Privacy	3.54 (1.08)	2.48 (0.83)	1.06
Temperature Control	3.93 (1.14)	2.54 (1.37)	1.39
Lighting Control	2.69 (0.68)	2.63 (1.04)	0.06
Personalization	2.77 (1.35)	2.74 (1.12)	0.02
Decision control	3.82 (0.76)	2.78 (0.69)	1.04
Meeting facility	2.47 (0.32)	2.31 (0.77)	0.16
Working method autonomy	3.87 (1.14)	2.81 (0.86)	1.06
Control over social contacts	2.68 (0.97)	2.55 (0.91)	0.13
Flexible Furniture	2.47 (0.65)	2.45 (1.21)	0.02
Quality of Equipments	3.79 (0.93)	3.08 (0.85)	0.71
Openness	2.58 (1.30)	2.62 (0.89)	0.04
Quiet Environment	3.92 (1.26)	3.19 (1.32)	0.73
Access to other workstations	3.35 (1.35)	3.28 (0.68)	0.07
Undisturbed Environment	3.81 (1.36)	3.45 (1.10)	0.36
Appearance	3.81 (0.96)	3.62 (0.79)	0.19

In a simple approach, when we only asked the perception of employees about the workplace environment the results indicate that Quiet Environment, Access to other workstations, Undisturbed Environment and appearance are the most satisfactory factors for the employees. The mean score are 3.62, 3.45, 3.28 and 3.19 respectively. The mean score of Flexible (2.27), Privacy (2.48), temperature control (2.54) and lighting control (2.63) are low. Apparently, we think that these items are more important to improve in creating the satisfaction. On the other hand, by gap approach the results are not the same. The difference between the expectation and perception is showing some different picture. The highest differences are in Temperature Control (1.39), Privacy (1.06), Working method autonomy (1.06) and Decision Control (1.04). Gap approach suggests that these items are more important to improve according to the expectation and perception of the employees.

The second hypothesis attempts to determine whether the gap scores vary across LOC scores. The simple assumption behind this analysis is that the gap score of internal would be low as compare to externals because the gap score represent the difference between expectation and perception of the employees towards workplace. As we know the Internals are more dependent on their skills and competencies so their expectation for a more favorable workplace environment would be low as compare to externals. On the other side the perception score of Internals would be high due to their less dependency on external factors and low demand for more favorable working conditions. The actual scores of the participants ranged from 3 to 20 with a mean of 9.86. The classification of the employees as Internal or External is based on their scores relative to the mean score of the overall sample (Dennis, 2005). Employees with LOC score below 9.86 are classified "Internals" and employees having LOC scores above 9.86 are classified "Externals". Results of the study (table 3) show that gap score for the internal employees is lower than that for the external employees and the difference is statistically significant (at p=0.040; one-tailed).

TABLE 3: MEAN GAP SCORE FOR EMPLOYEES ACROSS LOC CLASSIFICATION

	Mean	t-stat	sig. ^a
"Internal" Employees having LOC score below 9.86			
Employee with Internal LOC (n=273)	0.367		
Employee with External LOC (n=244)	0.561		
		5.729	0.040

Note: ^aSignificance level is one-tailed

To test the third hypothesis, the tenure was regressed onto job satisfaction. Consistent with H3, statistically significant relationship was found ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$) between job tenure and job satisfaction such that as job tenure increase the job satisfaction also increases. To check the moderating effects of workplace environment on the relationship between job tenure and job satisfaction, we conduct hierarchical regression analysis in this research as described by Baron and Kenny (1986). In first step we entered the control variables (age and gender); in the second step, the independent variable (Job Tenure) was added; and moderating variable (workplace environment) was entered in third step. The interacting term (Job tenure x Workplace environment) was entered in the last step. The results of moderated regression analyses were presented in Table 4.

The results of Table 4 show that job tenure ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$) has a positive effect on job satisfaction (step 2), confirming that the employees with longer tenure have higher job satisfaction. Thus, the results support H3. The relationship between workplace environment and job satisfaction, the results show that workplace environment ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$) has positive impact on job satisfaction (step 3). That means, higher the perception about workplace environment, the higher the employee's job satisfaction. According to moderator hypothesis (step 4), results confirm that the interaction term for job tenure and workplace environment is significant ($r = 0.68, p < 0.01$).

By combining the results, we can interpret that job tenure has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction. Increase in job tenure impact positively on job satisfaction and this relationship is contingent on workplace environment.

TABLE 4: HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR MODERATOR HYPOTHESIS

	DV = Job satisfaction			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Age	0.24**	0.15**	0.14*	0.15*
Gender	-0.1	-0.1	-0.06	-0.05
Independent variable				
Job tenure		0.48**	0.46*	0.37*
Moderating variable				
Workplace environment			0.54**	0.63*
Interaction term				
Job tenure x workplace environment			0.68**	
R-squared	0.09	0.49	0.51	0.53
Adj. R-squared	0.08	0.47	0.5	0.52
Change R-squared	0.09**	0.39**	0.03*	0.01*
F	9.4**	151.4**	29.63*	32.89*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (Standardized beta coefficients)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A limited interest was observed in last decade on the topic of workplace environment and employee satisfaction. One of the reason may be the previous research was limited only to check the level of satisfaction of the employees with their workplace environment. These researches do not answer the question of how the satisfaction can be increased or more specifically which dimensions of the workplace environment need to be improved. We have two different methods by which we can measure the satisfaction of the employees with their workplace or physical environment. First is the simple one by which we simply measure the satisfaction and second, measure the gap between the expectation and actual situation according to the perception of the employee. In this paper, we try to explain that although the both approaches give the similar results but the gap approach is better due to its managerial implication. Perception base approach is simple and less time consuming but it did not give managerial direction. For example if we get the mean score for employee satisfaction with Quality of equipments and lighting control is 3.28 and 3.95 respectively (using 5 point likert scale). Apparently it seems that the employees are less satisfied with quality of equipments and it needs to be improved. If we are using gap approach and the mean score of expectation of the employees with quality of equipments and lighting control is 3.15 and 4.25 respectively. That clearly shows that the previous recommendations was leading to wrong judgment and still the item of lighting control need improvement. By performing the similar function i.e. developing the expectation of the employee and current performance of these items we can get the guide lines about what to do with these items to increase the satisfaction of the employees. In this way the purpose of research will change from "Measuring Level of Employee satisfaction with the workplace" to "How to enhance the level of employee satisfaction with the workplace". This method is superior in the term that it gives the practical guidelines to improve the workplace rather than only measuring the satisfaction level of the employees.

The second aspect of this paper is to highlight the importance of workplace environment for locus of control. Historically it was supposed that the internals are more productive as compare to externals. Many studies prove this philosophy and describe that the performance and satisfaction level of internals are high with respect to their counterpart. One of the possible reasons is the dependency of internals on their skills rather than the other factors. In this way they feel low stress with the adverse factors and likely to be more satisfied which in turn increase their productivity. Some studies did not support this argument and they found no significant difference in the satisfaction and performance among the externals and internals. As internals believes more on their own skills they are having the aptitude of defining the way the work will carried out. Externals need a structured type of environment and the work should be done in a patterned style. By accepting this argument, it is clear that the workplace environment is an important factor for the working of externals or internals. However, they need entirely different kind of working environment. In this study we find that the importance of workplace environment is different for Internal and Externals. Externals are more demanding for a favorable workplace conditions as compare to Internals.

With regard to the relationship between job length and employee satisfaction, workplace proved to be important in the current study. Results clearly indicate that the workplace environment is very important for employee satisfaction. Employees tend to adjust themselves in the firm during the early period of their job but with the passage of time they become unsatisfied with the job if the working environment is not so good. Workplace environment found to be a strong moderator between the relationship of job length and employee satisfaction.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The main objective of this paper is to provide a managerial direction for the organization to evaluate and redesign the aspects of workplace environment. In this process, the organization should use gap approach instead of simple perception approach. This would help them to analyze the physical environment and do necessary modification to increase the satisfaction level of the employees with the workplace. This would be more helpful when a company decides to alter their physical environment and want to bring some changes. Considering the results of gap approach, an effective program can be devised to attain the objective of employee satisfaction with the workplace and make it more favorable and enjoyable for the workers. Without such steps the organization would fail to provide a favorable working environment for the employees. Secondly, the organization should evaluate the current working environment and its degree of structuredness. In this way they can decide that whether they need internals or externals. That could be helpful for the organization when they are recruiting new employees. They will select the right kind of people who best match with their environment. Next, every organization tries to lower the rate of turnover due to the cost of hiring and training new employees that can replace the older ones. If they provide the environment according to the requirements of the employees, the employees not only satisfied with the working environment but also the job satisfaction will increase with the passage of time. The efforts and energy of recruiting new people can be used for the improvement of workplace environment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study has some limitations that should be addressed in the future. First, the study was conducted in three cities of Pakistan. Consequently, the results are difficult to apply on other countries. In future more studies should be conducted in other countries to verify the results. Second, the current research was conducted in short time period; some longitudinal studies can examine the workplace environment in more depth. Third, as we see the moderator role of workplace environment between the relationship of job length and employee satisfaction, future studies can explore some more variables that are important in the relationship of job length and employee satisfaction.

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