CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 GENERAL DISCUSSION

7.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

7.3 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

7.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH
7.1 GENERAL DISCUSSION

The aim of the research was to understand real life experiences of the loneliness of the employees in their workplace. Further, what could be possible factors that might impact the experience of workplace loneliness were explored. While doing qualitative analysis, possible outcomes (negative) of being lonely at work were found. Using mixed method approach, a qualitative grounded theory based exploratory study was done followed by a quantitative survey-based study. Since the study is exploratory in nature, the quantitative study was done in two independent set of samples. The independent variables included perceived organizational politics, leader-member exchange, work meaningfulness and core self-evaluations. The dependent variables in the study included workplace loneliness, intention to quit, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Core self-evaluations and gender were used as moderators in the study. It was hypothesized that perceived politics would positively impact workplace loneliness, leader-member exchange and work meaningfulness would negatively impact workplace loneliness. Further, it was hypothesized that intention to quit, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization would positively impact workplace loneliness. It was also hypothesized that core self-evaluations will positively affect the relationship between perceived organizational politics, leader-member exchange and work meaningfulness with workplace loneliness.

7.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This work bridges the gap between psychology and organizational sciences. The concept of loneliness has been borrowed from psychology and social psychology in this study and extended it to the field of organizational behavior. It was argued in this study that the concept of loneliness is not limited to individual being but also to the level of organization. The previous work on loneliness was extended and both individual and situational factors were considered, as received from the qualitative study. This study takes both individual and situational factors
into consideration. Since loneliness is a cognitive phenomenon, it is believed that this research lays a strong fundamental base as it is qualitative in nature. In this research, the inclination was to assess the phenomenon qualitatively where importance is given to individual cognition. This research is based on what individual participants have told us rather than based on some quantifiable features. This study can further help researchers to understand the phenomenon of loneliness at a workplace and provide them an understanding of various factors that play an important role in affecting workplace loneliness. To make it clear, the aim of this study is not that ‘what leads to loneliness?’ In this study, it was attempted to identify through qualitative study that ‘what factors can aggravate workplace loneliness’ or ‘what are the factors that should be taken care of to alleviate workplace loneliness’. Other than providing a direction to the field of loneliness, this study also attempts to enrich the literature of organizational sciences. Limited researches have studied this important phenomenon which impact lives of individuals at work. Loneliness is sufficiently studied in other fields of study (Wright, 2005) such as psychology, sociology etc., however highly ignored in organizational behavior. Drawing the arguments from the field of social psychology, this study has been attempted to be studied in organizational context. Hence, this study also contributes to enriching the broad domain of organizational behavior.

Though few other studies have tried studying loneliness at the workplace in recent years, none of the studies actually explored how people see their own state of being lonely. With the help of this study, how people attribute their causes of being lonely can be learned. Though no claim is made that this study covers all the aspects of workplace loneliness, however, it’s an early attempt to explore the highly required, yet neglected phenomenon of workplace loneliness. This study also contributes to various other fields of literature by linking the phenomenon of workplace loneliness with perceived organizational politics, leader-member exchange, and work meaningfulness. Researchers have previously argued that loneliness at
workplace impacts performance of the employees, however, what could impact an employee’s loneliness was still unknown before this study. Researchers have generally not paid attention to exploring the causes that might affect a person’s loneliness at the workplace. This is an early attempt to explore and test the factors affecting loneliness at work. This study also enriches the literature in CSE and gender differences. It finds support for the assertion that organizational context induces workplace loneliness. This study was conducted in two different independent samples and in both the samples, results were almost consistent, therefore ensuring the generalizability of the model in various other industries. Consistent results also ensure that the theoretical arguments were justified. So, broadly it contributes to the understanding of prevailing loneliness within organizations, what could be the possible causes that might affect the process of loneliness and further, lives of individuals.

7.3 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

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7.4 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Though this study has contributes in various domains and explores a very important issue, however, is not free from limitations. The limitations of both the qualitative and quantitative studies have been discussed here. First, for both the studies, qualitative and qualitative, a cross-sectional study was done and change in the loneliness of interviewed professionals hasn’t been taken into consideration. Taking a longitudinal approach, it could be examined how it changes over the period of time. However, the aim was to identify factors that impact the phenomena of workplace loneliness. So, keeping the agenda of the research in mind, this study provides sufficient evidence to fulfill the objectives of the research. Future researches might take into consideration the temporal changes in the feeling of being lonely at work. Second, the quantitative data has been collected from junior or lower level employees in both the samples.

There is a potential to study the same model among higher hierarchical level and analyze whether a change in the results exist or not. Third, though this study takes leader-member exchange into consideration and attempts to find gender differences, it doesn’t count dyadic composition. Dyadic composition plays a role as mentioned in the literature of leadership theories. Leader-member exchange development depends upon demographics of leader and the member such as the similarity between supervisors and subordinates such individual characteristics as age, sex, education, and tenure etc. (Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993). Future studies should also take the demographic factors of both leader and member into consideration while testing this model. Fourth, though the first sample participants belong to various private hospitals, the second sample participants belong to one large ITES multinational company in
India. However, four different branches were covered (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai) for data collection. There is a potential to cover various other IT/ITES companies to broaden the scope of the study. Fifth, though the individual, situational and cultural aspects impact the experience of being lonely (Peplau, 1988), this study hasn’t taken into account the cultural factors such as value incongruence, the upbringing of the individual, role of society etc.

Future studies can look into it and see if cultural factors impact an individual’s experience of being lonely. Sixth, though this study has explored moderating effects of core self-evaluation and gender, future studies can explore the role of various other moderators such social skills. Social skills include communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control (Crosby, 2011 p. 292). These social skills help the individual in adjusting with different situational demands and effectively influences and controls the responses of others (Ferris, Witt & Hochwarter, 2001). Finally, we used self-reported data. However, self-reported data might not be any issue. The reason behind is that loneliness is considered as a subjective experience, and hence, self-reported measurement of loneliness is reliable (Peplau, 1985).