

A Study on the Mediating Effects of Ego-Resilience on the Association between the Career Growth Opportunities and Withdrawal in Employees

Gon-cheol Ha¹, Byung-woo Kim²

¹63243 Doctoral Candidate, Dept. Business Administration, Graduate School, Jeju National Univ., Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, Republic of Korea

²63243 Ph.D, Dept. Business Administration, Jeju National Univ., Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, Republic of Korea

¹ hgc0605@naver.com, ² knbu12@jejunu.ac.kr

Abstract

The research on organizational behaviors has primarily focused on the promotion of employees' productive behaviors through positive attitudes and behaviors related to their organization and job and, ultimately, on the improvement in organizational effectiveness. This study was designed, taking into account the situation in which the relationships based on a psychological contract between an organization and an employee weakened as well as the issue of the decline in employment with the introduction of the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Specifically, it aimed to confirm the association between withdrawal, which is typical of unproductive behavior inhibiting organizational consolidation, and career growth opportunities in a situation characterized by increasing anxiety about job security and employability. It also verified the mediating effects of ego-resilience as a positive result of adjustment by employees perceiving the risk in the association between these two variables. A survey was conducted in employees at public and private enterprises in South Korea; a total of 293 questionnaires were analyzed. The career growth opportunities perceived by employees were found to be significant variables. In contrast, their ego-resilience partially mediated between career growth opportunities and physical withdrawal but had insignificant mediating effects on the association between career growth opportunities and psychological withdrawal. Lastly, the significance and limitations of this study and the issues for further research were discussed.

Keywords: career growth opportunity, ego-resilience, psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal¹

1. Introduction

With Klaus Schwab's introduction of the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, employees in corporate organizations feel more anxious about the issue of maintaining their job. Moreover, as the relationships based on the psychological contract between an organization and an employee weaken in the stream of the changes in the labor-employment market,

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employees are more concerned about job security and employability. In this context, a lot of research on the career growth opportunities has recently been conducted at home and abroad.

Given the labor-employment market of today, the career growth opportunities perceived by employees are expected to reduce unnecessary spending of time and economic costs at the organizational and personal levels. The opportunities are expected to contribute to attachment to an organization and to better performance through the belief in job security at the personal level and to reduce unproductive behaviors by making the organization more effective and substantial at the organizational level. It is necessary to pay attention to withdrawal, which is typical of unproductive behavior, as a concept contrasted with organizational commitment, which refers to psychological and physical loyalty to an organization.

Giving consideration to the situation where the relationships based on the psychological contract between individuals and organizations weaken as well as to the recent labor-employment market, this study made an approach to the career growth opportunities perceived by employees in organizational practice as preceding factors, which prevent job performance inhibiting organizational consolidation, and intended to determine their correlation with such resulting variables as employees' psychological and physical withdrawal typical of unproductive activity in contradiction to organizational commitment. It also intended to verify the association between them through the mediating variable of employees' ego-resilience as a concept differentiated from personality, which is individuals' internal trait, or as a positive result of successful adaptation to a dangerous situation.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis formation

2.1 Employees' career growth opportunity, ego-resilience, and withdrawal

Career growth opportunities refer to those opportunities for employees to improve and develop their career through education and training given by an organization as well as through job performance [15][7]. The opportunities need to be understood as employees' awareness or expectation, not as something practical they are given by an organization in organizational practice. It is therefore possible to regard career growth opportunities as important variables in determining what attitude employees will take toward their organization; they are more likely to believe that the pursuit of sustainable employment in the labor-employment market on the basis of their own career development and growth is more valuable [4].

Hanisch and Hulin [6] defined withdrawal as behavior employees use to minimize the amount of time necessary for job performance while maintaining their position as the employed. Withdrawal refers to unproductive job-related behavior damaging to an organization by avoiding or withdrawing from any effort for organizational contribution or job performance and includes being late, absence, laziness, and turnover [13]. Colquitt, LePine, and Wesson [3] contend that withdrawal can be divided into psychological and physical withdrawal. Psychological withdrawal refers to behavior of mental escape from one's own job or work environment. Physical withdrawal refers to behavior of making a full escape physically and behaviorally from the work environment. In this regard, Lee, Jang, and Lee [9] indicate that in many cases, physical withdrawal is regarded as more serious behavior because it is more easily revealed, compared with psychological withdrawal; however, psychological withdrawal can more adversely affect job performance because it is hardly visible. Withdrawal has adverse effects on organizational consolidation, consequently having economic costs and wasting time; for this reason, it is crucial to identify and control the preceding factors for withdrawal.

Ego-resilience means regulation to reinforce or weaken drive control without any emotional or behavioral problem in a stressful situation related to one's own conditions and an ability to cope flexibly with internal and external stressors [2]. Lee [8] described it from two perspectives: a positive result from successful adaptation to a dangerous situation and individuals' internal trait to help them with adaptation.

These studies can be supported by the logic of expansion and construction [1]. Specifically, the career growth opportunities employees perceive through job performance at the current organization are directly connected to the possibility of their career growth in the future and allow each of them to access positive resources. Here, the positive resources—relief of anxiety about the employment environment and stress and sustainable employability—are expected to reinforce attachment to their organization, facilitate behavior related to organizational commitment and improvement in performance, and reduce unproductive behavior against the organization. In the situation where diverse predictions as to a decrease in employment are reported due to the introduction of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, employees are expected to cope more flexibly with the situation they face through awareness of career growth opportunities. On the basis of these previous studies and reasoning, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: The career growth opportunities employees perceive would reduce their psychological withdrawal.

H2: The career growth opportunities employees perceive would reduce their physical withdrawal.

H3: The career growth opportunities employees perceive would increase their ego-resilience.

2.2 Mediating effects of ego-resilience

Ego-resilience refers to an ability to make a positive response to, cope efficiently with, and adjust to conditions causing stress or risks [12]. Folkman and Moskowitz [14] noted that people with higher ego-resilience are better at seizing and using positive emotions actively even in a psychologically dangerous or stressful situation. In contrast, those with low ego-resilience unsuccessfully adapt themselves to such a situation and have difficulty in controlling the stressful situation efficiently [5].

In this study, it was regarded as a mediating variable between career growth opportunities and withdrawal. On the basis of the concept of ego-resilience and literature review, through the positive resources of career growth opportunities, one is expected to become better at adjusting to the insecure situation caused by the job-related issue with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is also believed that ego-resilience will reduce withdrawal by controlling and coping efficiently with diverse stressors within an organization as well as the employment environment. On the basis of these previous studies and reasoning, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4: Ego-resilience would mediate between career growth opportunities and psychological withdrawal.

H5: Ego-resilience would mediate between career growth opportunities and physical withdrawal.

To put these hypotheses together, this study intended to verify the model shown in Figure 1.

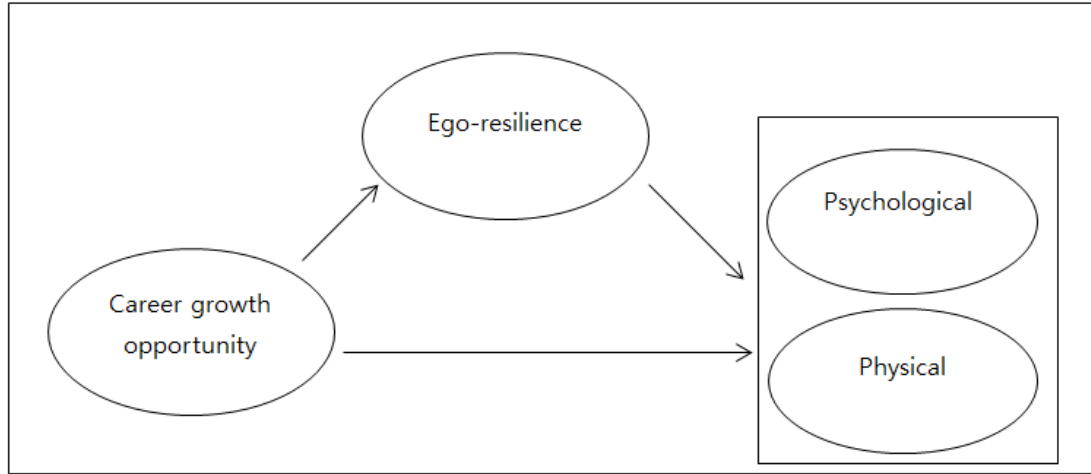


Figure 1. Research model

3. Methods and empirical analysis

3.1 Research and sampling

A survey was conducted for empirical research, with each variable measured on a five-point likert scale. Employees at public and private enterprises in South Korea were sampled. The researcher visited the enterprises and explained the purpose of the research before distributing and collecting the questionnaires.

3.2 Instrument validation and correlation

Exploratory factor analysis was performed for validation of the instruments; as a result, four factors were found in the model, as has been expected at the stage of research design. The results of the correlation analysis for the direction and intensity of the correlation among the variables are as presented in Table 1, along with Pearson's correlation coefficient and the mean and standard deviation among the variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and results of correlation analysis

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Gender	1.33	.471									
Age	1.99	.700	-.094								
Education	2.79	.675	-.177**	-.034							
Position	2.61	1.298	-.005	.606**	.108						

Occupation	1.76	1.11 ₈	-.109	.006	.005	.037					
Career growth opportunity	3.75	.679	.033	.019	.046	.008	-.151 ^{**}	(.916)			
Ego-resilience	3.55	.656	-.043	-.00 ₇	.016	-.08 ₉	.024	.428 [*]	(.909)		
Psychological withdrawal	2.33	.659	.051	.037	-.01 ₉	.118 [*]	.102	-.130 [*]	-.128 [*]	(.776)	
Physical withdrawal	1.65	.615	-.094	.043	-.03 ₇	.089	.070	-.318 ^{**}	-.260 ^{**}	.477 [*]	(.837)

N=293, *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$, () = Cronbach's α

3.3 Empirical analysis

The three-stage mediating effect analysis suggested by Baron and Kenny [11] was performed for the mediating effects of ego-resilience on the association between career growth opportunities and psychological and physical withdrawal in employees. First of all, the impact-related correlation between the independent and mediating variables was verified. As presented in Tables 2 and 3, standardized regression coefficient of career growth opportunities and ego-resilience was significant (.428; $p < .001$). Then, the correlation between the independent and dependent variables was confirmed. Career growth opportunities had an impact on psychological and physical withdrawal, with standardized regression coefficient estimated at -.130 ($p < .05$) and -.318 ($p < .001$), respectively. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were all adopted.

The mediating effects of ego-resilience on the association between career growth opportunities and withdrawal for the purpose of this study were established through the impact of the career growth opportunities and ego-resilience on withdrawal at the last stage.

As presented in Tables 2 and 3, when both career growth opportunities and ego-resilience were inputted, they had an insignificant impact on psychological withdrawal; therefore, hypothesis 4 was rejected. In contrast, both variables had a significant impact on physical withdrawal, with career growth opportunities being less influential; therefore, they had partially mediating effects. So hypothesis 4 was rejected and hypothesis 5 was adopted.

Table 2. Mediating effects of ego-resilience on association between career growth opportunities and psychological withdrawal

Variable		Dependent variable				
		Ego-resilience	Psychological withdrawal	Psychological withdrawal	Collinearity diagnosis	
		S· β (t-value)	S· β (t-value)	S· β (t-value)	Tolerance limit	VIF
Control variable	Gender	-.042 (-.779)	.057 (.956)	.054 (.899)	.934	1.070
	Age	.062 (.912)	-.045 (-.610)	-.040 (-.543)	.607	1.647

Independent variable Parameter	Education	.004 (0.70)	-.021 (-.356)	-.021 (-.351)	.933	1.072
	Position	-.134* (-1.985)	.146* (1.973)	.136 (1.817)	.600	1.667
	Occupation	.091 (1.687)	.085 (1.448)	.093 (1.565)	.954	1.048
	Career growth opportunity	.443*** (8.289)	-.119* (-2.023)	-.083 (-1.275)	.785	1.274
	Ego-resilience			-.080 (-1.235)	.795	1.258
R ²		.205	.043	.048	Judgment : No mediating effect	
Adjusted R ²		.188	.023	.025		
ΔR^2				.005		
F-value		12.303***	2.148*	2.063*		

*: $p < .05$, **: $p < .001$

Table 3. Mediating effects of ego-resilience on association between career growth opportunities and physical withdrawal

Variable		Dependent variable				
		Ego-resilience	Physical withdrawal	Physical withdrawal	Collinearity diagnosis	
		S· β (t-value)	S· β (t-value)	S· β (t-value)	Tolerance limit	VIF
Control variable	Gender	-.042 (-.779)	-.095 (-1.651)	-.101 (-1.777)	.934	1.070
	Age	.062 (.912)	-.032 (-.456)	-.023 (-.327)	.607	1.647
	Education	.004 (0.70)	-.053 (-.929)	-.053 (-.927)	.933	1.072
	Position	-.134* (-1.985)	.116 (1.631)	.096 (1.348)	.600	1.667
	Occupation	.091 (1.687)	.009 (.165)	.023 (.409)	.954	1.048
Independent variable Parameter	Career growth opportunity	.443*** (8.289)	-.311*** (-5.530)	-.244*** (-3.929)	.785	1.274
	Ego-resilience			-.152* (-2.456)	.795	1.258

R ²	.205	.119	.138	Judgment : Partially mediating
Adjusted R ²	.188	.101	.116	
ΔR^2			.019	
F-value	12.303***	6.456***	6.493***	

*: $p < .05$, ***: $p < .001$

Sobel [10] Z-test was used for indirect effects. Sobel Z-test applied non-standardized regression coefficient and errors of regression coefficient in the association between independent and resultant variables and non-standardized regression coefficient of the mediating variables and errors of regression coefficient.

Table 4. Results of Sobel test

Path	Z Statistics	Regression coefficient & error	
Career growth opportunity → Ego-resilience → Physical withdrawal	-2.39 ($P < 0.01$)	Coefficient (a) : 0.414	Coefficient (b) : -0.143
		Error (a) : 0.051	Error (b) : 0.057

4. Conclusion

The results of this study can be summarized as follows:

First, a career growth opportunity employees perceived was a significant variable that promoted their ego-resilience and reduced psychological and physical withdrawal. Second, employees' ego-resilience had significant partial mediating effects on the association between career growth opportunities and physical withdrawal.

This study is significant in that it has empirically analyzed the impact of career growth opportunities on the mediating and resultant variables and the predictors of withdrawal, which had not been reported by previous research. In particular, while previous research primarily made an approach to ego-resilience as a moderating variable through individuals' internal and personality trait, this study has expanded the research area by regarding it as a significant variable mediating between career growth opportunities and withdrawal. No significant mediating effect has been found on the association with employees' psychological withdrawal. This is probably because the sample included employees at public enterprises; however, it is necessary to perform additional literature review regarding the reasons for rejecting the hypothesis and such an expansion can make academic contributions.

Employees at corporate enterprises are expected to be concerned first of all about the issue related to employment due to the employment policies at the governmental level and the human resource management policies at the organizational level as well as the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Organizations need to develop a career learning program at the organizational level and induce their employees to participate in the program so that they can recognize job security.

Despite some theoretical and practical contributions of this study, the post hoc test confirmed little possibility of common method bias; however, it is unable to avoid common method bias due to the measurement based on the self-administered survey.

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