



Role of Employees' Job Satisfaction on the Relationship Between Organizational Identification and Job Autonomy

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Abstract

The present study explored the relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification, and the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship. A survey-based questionnaire was used to collect study data and the data was analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software programs. The results from the present study demonstrated that job autonomy is significantly and positively related with organizational identification, and job satisfaction plays a mediating role in such relationship. The findings of the present study are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: Job Autonomy; Organizational Identification; Job Satisfaction; Employee Behavior; Work Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Job autonomy is acknowledged as a key work characteristic and has been largely examined in the literature. Several studies have explored the relationship between job autonomy and particular work outcomes. As an important characteristic of job design, job autonomy is "the extent to which employees have a major say in scheduling their work, selecting the equipment they will use, and deciding on procedures to be followed" (Hackman & Lawler, 1971, p. 265). Employees who are provided autonomy can determine the speed, order and strategies throughout task execution.

Such attention to job autonomy results from its positive outcomes both for employees and organizations. Job autonomy leads to better performance since employees believe they are trusted to accomplish a task when they are granted autonomy at work. This belief makes employees have a greater sense of intrinsic motivation, which in turn leads to effectiveness. The autonomy perceived by employees as they perform their job is likely to influence employee satisfaction. Job satisfaction represents a complete assessment of an individual regarding his/her work. Greater satisfaction is expected when there is a higher extent of autonomy at work.

A further variable expected to relate with job autonomy and job satisfaction is identification with the organization. Organizational identification is "the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 293). It can be conceptualized as the perceived belongingness to an organization, driving employees to define themselves by their membership to that organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al., 2008). As a psychological bond with the workplace, organizational identification is related to greater job satisfaction, performance and organizational citizenship behaviors as well as lower absenteeism (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Riketta, 2005). Therefore, the mechanisms underlying this relationship between employees and organizations has theoretical and practical implications for management and organizational literatures.

In light of this theoretical background, the purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification, and the mediating effect of job satisfaction on this relationship.

2. Job Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the extent to which an employee can decide how to carry out his/her tasks. Job autonomy produces several positive outcomes, such as increased motivation at work. It is an essential component of both employee and organizational success since autonomy provides employees with the freedom to determine how to perform their job, which results in better effectiveness. Furthermore, autonomy allows employee training on the job. Autonomous employees are likely to develop a greater sense of responsibility and have enhanced job satisfaction. It has a direct influence on employees' sense of responsibility which is related with greater intrinsic motivation. Giving employees autonomy would make them feel individually responsible as they personally decide how to execute their tasks (Chelladurai, 1999). As a result of job autonomy, employees have more independent interactions and greater control over how they schedule and carry out their tasks (Langfred, 2000).

Autonomy can be viewed as a structural work characteristic because it empowers employees and also represents a subjective sense toward employees' desire to have greater control and less supervision while doing their job (Kiggundu, 1983). Therefore, autonomy is believed to be the most vital aspect of job design among managers. By allowing employees to act innovative and take initiatives, autonomy boosts the creativity and entrepreneurship of employees (Davis, 1994).

In professional life, employees need talent and competitiveness to succeed in their work, they should be familiar with the knowledge required to execute their profession and they have to be autonomous in decision-making processes (Öztürk, 2011). Autonomy comes with responsibility for work consequences and is related with better effectiveness and greater intrinsic motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Langfred & Moye, 2004).

Autonomy at work allows employees to choose how to plan the tasks and which methods to use, referring to a substantial degree of freedom (Hackman & Oldham 1975; Marchese & Ryan, 2001; Morgeson et al., 2005). Jobs providing a greater degree of autonomy are associated with employee performance and satisfaction (Spector, 1986). Therefore, autonomy and flexibility are considered common antecedents of satisfaction with the job (Chang & Cheng, 2014; Griffin et al., 2001).

The importance of job autonomy is not only because it is a valuable gain, but also because it determines several outcomes such as satisfaction and well-being (Rossenthal, 2004). Lee (1998) views job autonomy as one of the most significant work characteristics with direct influence on satisfaction levels of employees. The author's meta-analyses demonstrated that greater satisfaction with work is significantly correlated with perceived control and autonomy. Gellatly and Irving (2001) showed that situational factors restrict employees with high levels of autonomy at work to a lesser extent.

3. Organizational Identification

The relationship between employees and their organization has been examined in an increasing number of studies during the last decades. One of the conceptualizations of this psychological relationship discussed in such studies is organizational identification. Based on the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), organizational identification refers to "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him- or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). This theory stipulates that individuals define themselves and other people based on social categories and group membership in order to have a sense of belonging to the social world.

The social identity theory proposes that a society involves several social groups or categories based on certain attributes such as profession and nationality, which have different relations of power and status with each other, and people develop their social identities mainly from the groups they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accordingly, social identity is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). Furthermore, identification is a socio-cognitive process which individuals undergo as they categorize themselves and other people as members of certain groups since they need to simplify and make sense of the complicated social environment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals tend to identify themselves with specific groups primarily because of their desire to boost their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this context, group identification serves as a resource for positive social identity to foster their self-image as individuals are strongly motivated to achieve a positive self-concept (Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978).

Accordingly, an organization is likely to be the main source of social identity for an individual (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Organizational identification is related with significant employee and organizational outcomes. From the same perspective, organizational identification is a means to increase collective self-esteem (Ashforth et al., 2008). According to Dutton et al. (1994), employees who strongly identify themselves with their organization integrate the key, sustainable and unique characteristics of the organization into their self-concepts and their personal and organizational identities

become united. As a result, employees perceive organizational failures and successes as their own and act in favor of the organization to achieve organizational goals.

As organizational identification reflects the degree to which employees define themselves by the characteristics of the organization, employees are expected to identify themselves with organizations toward which they develop positive attitudes. Thus, positive experiences at work are believed to foster such attitudes and positive perception, thereby leading to a sense of identification with the organization (Pratt, 2001; Lievens et al., 2007). In this sense, autonomy at work has been found to relate with organizational identification in multiple studies (e.g. Apker et al., 2003; Bamber & Iyer, 2002). Drawing on the available literature and based on previous research, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Job autonomy has a positive effect on organizational identification.

4. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has a long history of research in the academic literature. As one of the most investigated concepts of organizational behavior, it is highly valuable both with economical and ethical implications (Balzer et al., 1997; Chelladurai, 1999).

Job satisfaction is a positive or an enjoyable state of emotions caused by one's evaluation of his/her job or experiences at work (Locke, 1976). Ellickson and Logsdon (2002) viewed job satisfaction as the extent to which an employee feel attracted by his/her job. Overall job satisfaction is characterized by satisfaction in multiple domains of the job such as pay, job security, promotional opportunities, benefits and the perceived importance of the job. Job satisfaction is related with many outcomes, driving economy scholars to be interested in this construct. Job satisfaction is shown to be a potent predictor of employee behavior and performance. For instance, job satisfaction is used to predict employee effectiveness and separations (Clark 2001; Shields & Price 2002). Moreover, overall well-being of an employee can be significantly predicted by job satisfaction (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza 2001; van Praag et al. 2003).

Job satisfaction is influenced by three key relationships: the relationship between an employee and the organization, the relationship between an employee and supervisor, and the relationship between an employee and colleagues (Tang et al., 2014). Some scholars (e.g. Edgar & Geare, 2005; Fila et al., 2014) believe that the relationship between an employee and supervisor has critical effect on job satisfaction. Accordingly, supervisor-related factors such as giving employees autonomy considerably affects how an employee evaluates his/her job since autonomy at work causes employees to feel a sense of pride in terms of their jobs (Mehmood et al., 2012). In this regard, the study by DeCarlo and Agarwal (1999) investigated how managerial behavior and job autonomy affect job satisfaction in Australia, India and USA, and found that perceived job autonomy is a significant precursor of job satisfaction in all three countries. The authors concluded that the extent of autonomy at work is significantly correlated with all five dimensions of job satisfaction. Likewise, Raza Naqvi et al. (2013) indicated that increased job autonomy leads to greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Ross and Reskin (1992) demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction with a more evident impact in individuals who have received higher education. Pousette and Hansen (2002) also showed a statistically significant relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction.

The relationship between an employee and organization, in turn, indicates the significance of employee's identification and attachment to organizational goals and strategy (Adams et al., 1996; Allen et al., 2003). An organization is likely to be more productive when it has satisfied employees (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Therefore, organizations should provide clear descriptions of their goals in order to enhance employee identification (Patterson et al., 2005). In this sense, Allen et al. (2013) argued that employees' job satisfaction can be explained by organizational identity and Bart et al. (2001) suggested that job satisfaction and organizational mission are related. Similarly, Gök et al. (2014) reported job satisfaction to have a positive correlation with perceived manager support, and organizational identification to have a partially mediating impact on such correlation. Accordingly, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: Job satisfaction has a positive effect on organizational identification.

H3: Job autonomy has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H4: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Goal

The present study aims to discover the relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification, and the mediating effect of job satisfaction on such relationship. Based on the model created in this regard, the present study assumes that job autonomy is positively related with organizational identification, and job satisfaction is partially or fully mediates this relationship.

5.2. Participants

The study sample included 202 employees from different sectors. Data were collected using a questionnaire-based survey. The study participants were selected using convenience sampling method. Of the study participants, %34,9 were female and %66.1 were male.

5.3. Measures

Job autonomy was measured using the 7-item autonomy subscale of the 21-item instrument developed by Ilardi et al. (1993). The overall instrument measures employees' three intrinsic needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) with respect to their job. The autonomy subscale used in the present research consists of 7 items (e.g. "I feel like I can be myself at my job"). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was 0.78.

Organizational identification was measured using the 6-item Organizational Identification Scale developed by Mael & Ashforth (1992). The instrument includes 6 items (e.g. "When someone praises this organization, it feels like a personal compliment"). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.87.

Job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire developed by Weiss et al. (1967). The instrument consists of 20 items rated on a five-point scale with 1 ("not satisfied") to 5 ("extremely satisfied"). The scale measures an overall job satisfaction with intrinsic (e.g. "Being able to keep busy all the time") and extrinsic satisfaction (e.g. "The way my boss handles his/her workers"). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.70.

6. Results

6.1. Statistical Analyses

SPSS for Windows 22.00 and AMOS 22.0 software programs were used to analyze and interpret the survey responses collected in the research. Factor analyses were applied to the questionnaires used in the research and the Cronbach's alpha values were calculated. The adequacy of three study scales for the factor analysis was assessed in SPSS program, and confirmatory factor analyses were performed separately in AMOS program. The path analysis of the model created using structural equation modeling was performed using AMOS software program.

6.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Scales Used in the Model

For each scale, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 22.0 to investigate whether measurement models were individually significant. The results revealed that the measurement models were acceptable. Then, the adequacy of the entire model was evaluated using goodness of fit indices.

With increasing sample size, especially in samples greater than 200, the Chi-Square (χ^2) value gets higher and the statistical significance level of the Chi-Square (χ^2) test gets lower¹. The confirmatory factor analysis of the study scales and the adequacy of the general models tested were assessed by using degree of freedom-adjusted Chi-Square (χ^2) value (Chi-Square value/degree of freedom), other goodness of fit indices and standardized residual covariance matrix values.²

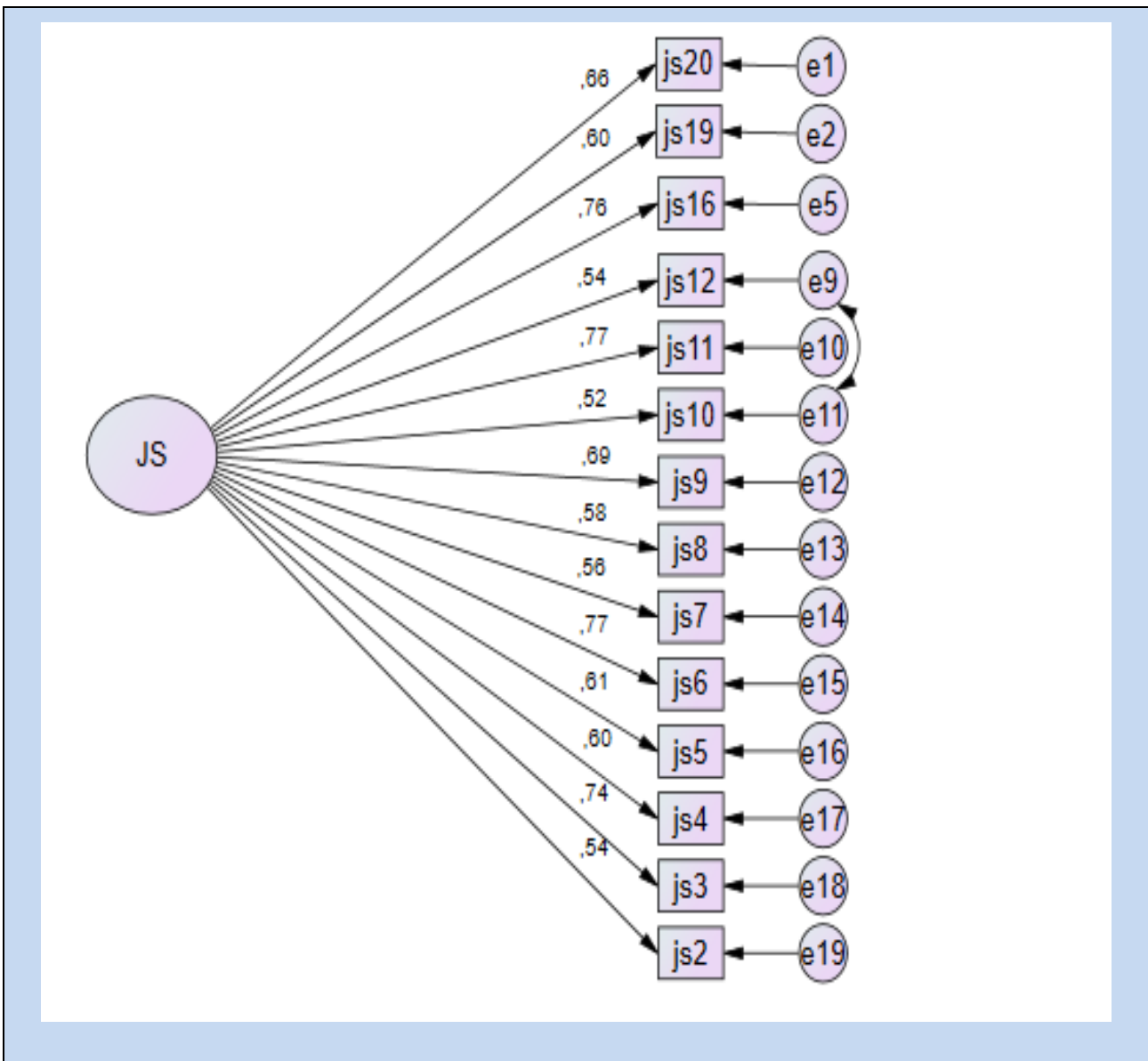
6.3. Factor Analysis of Job Satisfaction (JS)

The confirmatory factor analysis was performed with the 14 items remaining after 6 items were removed from the 20-item job satisfaction scale, and it revealed that the data had an excellent fit to factor analysis due to its single-factor structure, KMO=.911 and Bartlett's test p value ($p<0.05$). The variance explanatoriness rate was 66.719%. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.91, indicating a high reliability for the job satisfaction scale.

¹ Bollen, 1989: 256; Fornell and Larcker, 1981: 40; Bagozzi et al., 1999: 396

² Prof. Dr. Nuran Bayram (2013). Yapısal eşitlik modellemesine giriş Amos uygulamaları (p.71). Ezgi Yayınevi.

Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of Job Satisfaction (JS)

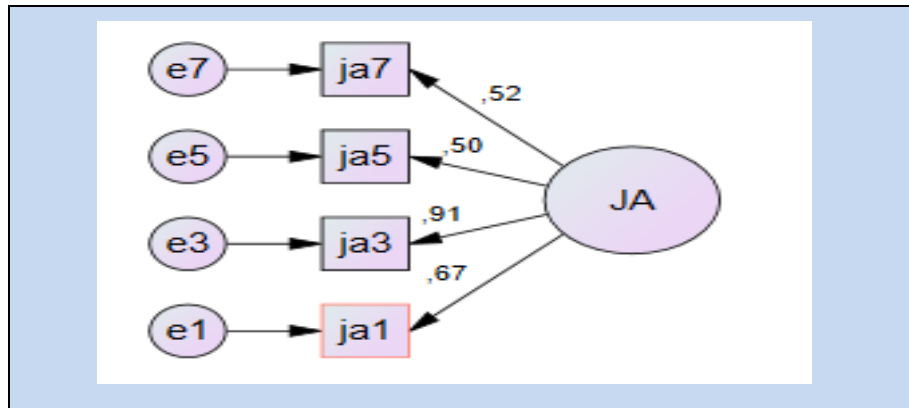


The confirmatory factor analysis was statistically significant since the model test values from the confirmatory factor analysis were χ^2 (66.537) and χ^2/df (2.772). The goodness of fit indices *GFI* (.941), *CFI* (.978) and *RMSEA* (.087) were within the acceptable limits, and therefore, the CFA result of the job satisfaction scale was applicable. Since the two-factor CFA model *RMSA* value was not within the acceptable limits, a single-factor Job satisfaction CFA was considered appropriate.

6.4. Factor Analysis of Job Autonomy (JA)

The confirmatory factor analysis was performed with the 4 items remaining after 3 items were removed from the 7-item job autonomy scale due to item factor loadings <0.50 , and revealed that the data had an excellent fit to factor analysis due to its single-factor structure, *KMO* = .861 and Bartlett's test *p* value ($p < 0.05$). The variance explanatoriness rate was 56.90%. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.877, indicating a high reliability for the job autonomy scale.

Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of Job Autonomy (JA)

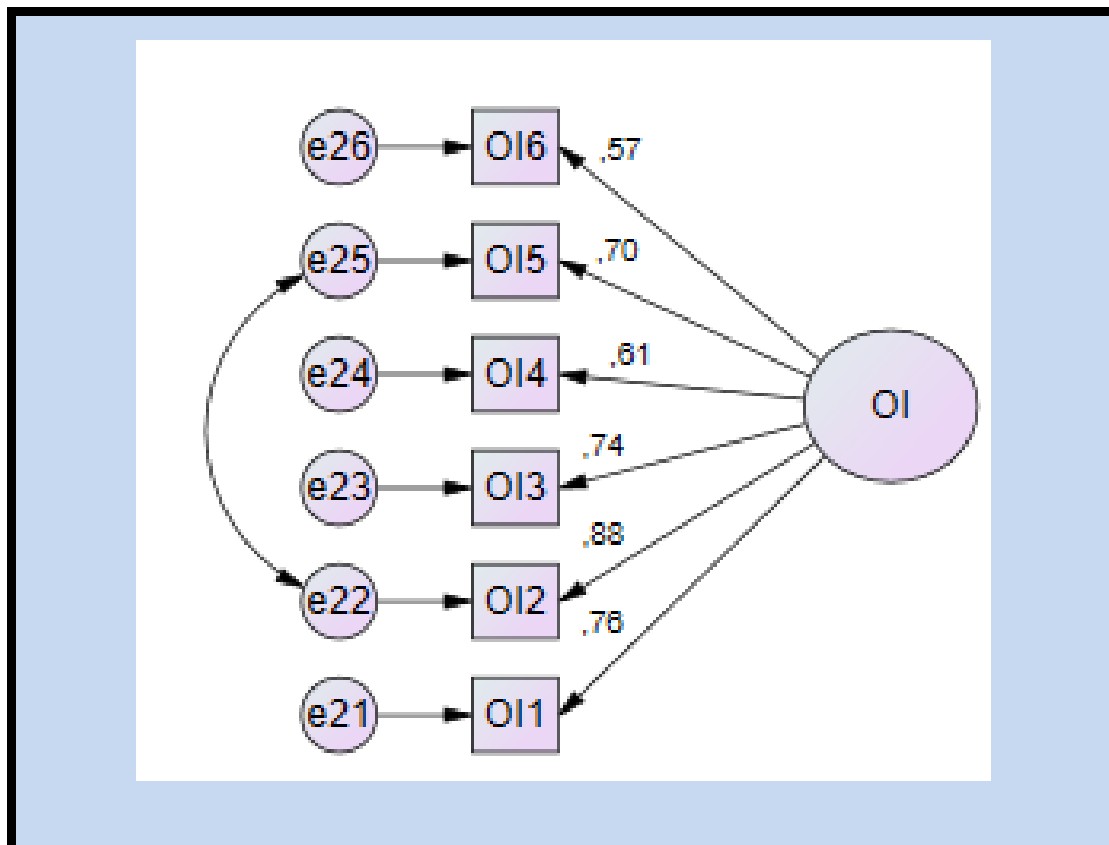


The confirmatory factor analysis of the job autonomy scale was found significant since the model test values from the confirmatory factor analysis were χ^2 (129.926) and χ^2/df (2.096). The goodness of fit indices [*GFI* (.912), *CFI* (.960) and *RMSEA* (.072)] were within the acceptable limits, and therefore, the CFA result of the job autonomy scale was applicable.

6.5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Organizational Identification (OI)

The reliability analysis of the 6-item organizational identification revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.865, indicating the high reliability of the scale. The data had an excellent fit to factor analysis due to its three-factor structure, *KMO*=.810 and Bartlett's test *p* value ($p < 0.05$). The variance explanatoriness rate was 67.096%.

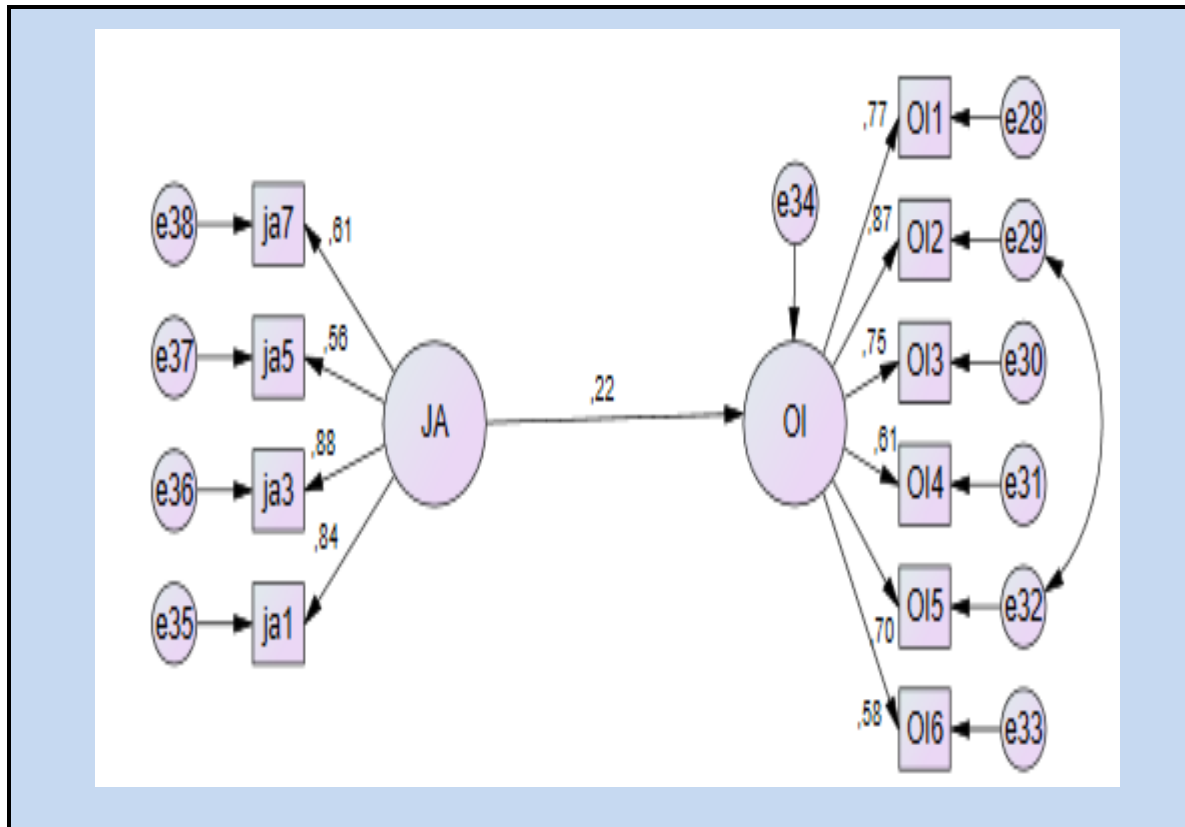
Figure 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of Organizational Identification (OI)



CFA was found significant since the model test values from the confirmatory factor analysis were χ^2 (74.361) and χ^2/df (2.656). Additionally, the goodness of fit indices [*GFI* (.935), *CFI* (.957) and *RMSEA* (.080)] were within the acceptable limits, and therefore, the CFA result was considered applicable.

6.6. The Effect of Job Autonomy on Organizational Identification (Model I)

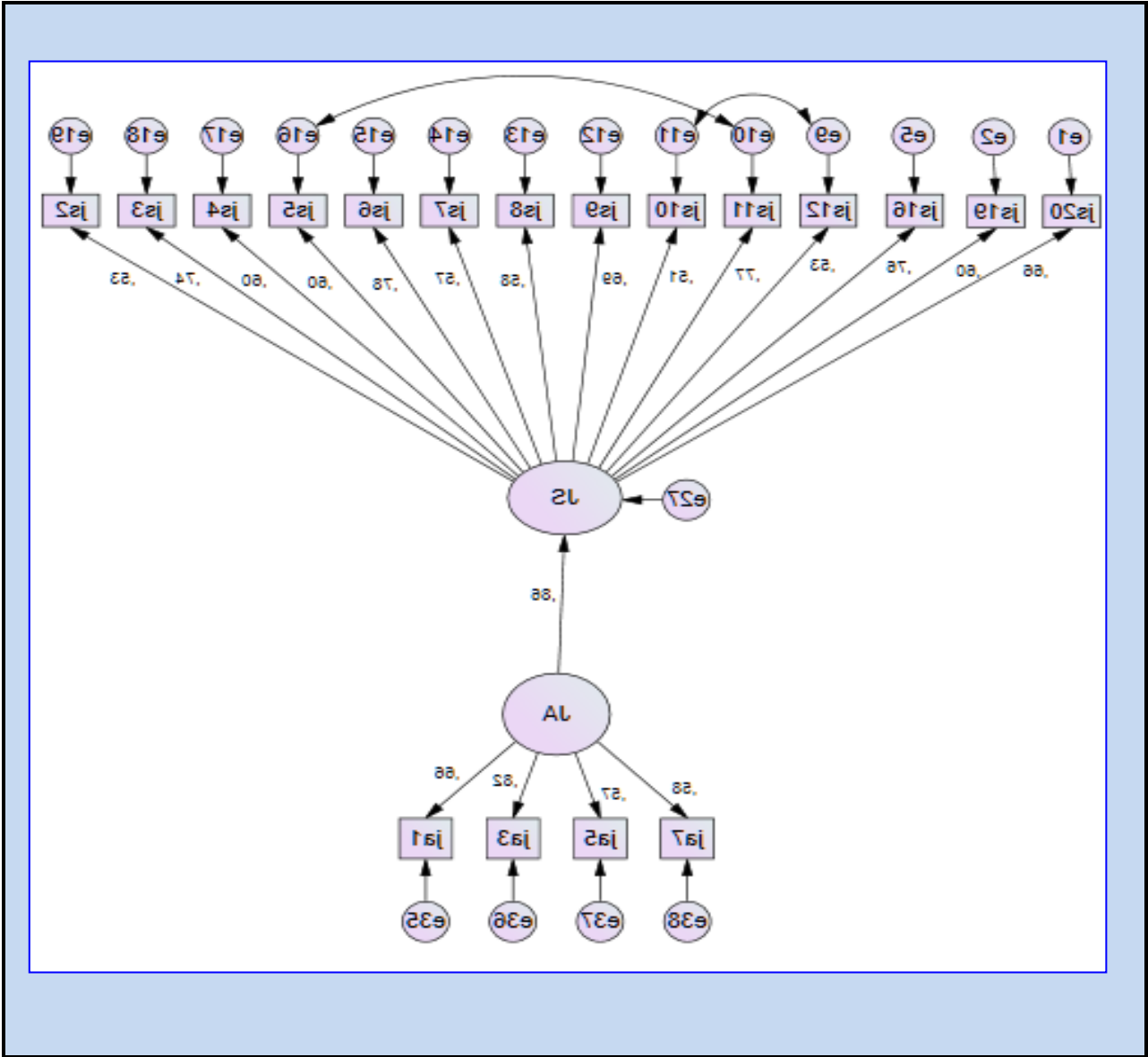
Figure 5: The Effect of Job Autonomy (JA) on Organizational Identification (OI)



The model for the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) was found significant since the model test values were χ^2 (80.900), χ^2/df (2.379) and $p < 0.05$. The goodness of fit indices were [*GFI* (.951), *CFI* (.961), *RMSEA* (.080) and *SRMR* (.0650)] within the acceptable limits, and therefore, the regression equation modeling the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) is considered valid.

6.7. The Effect of Job Autonomy on Job Satisfaction (Model II)

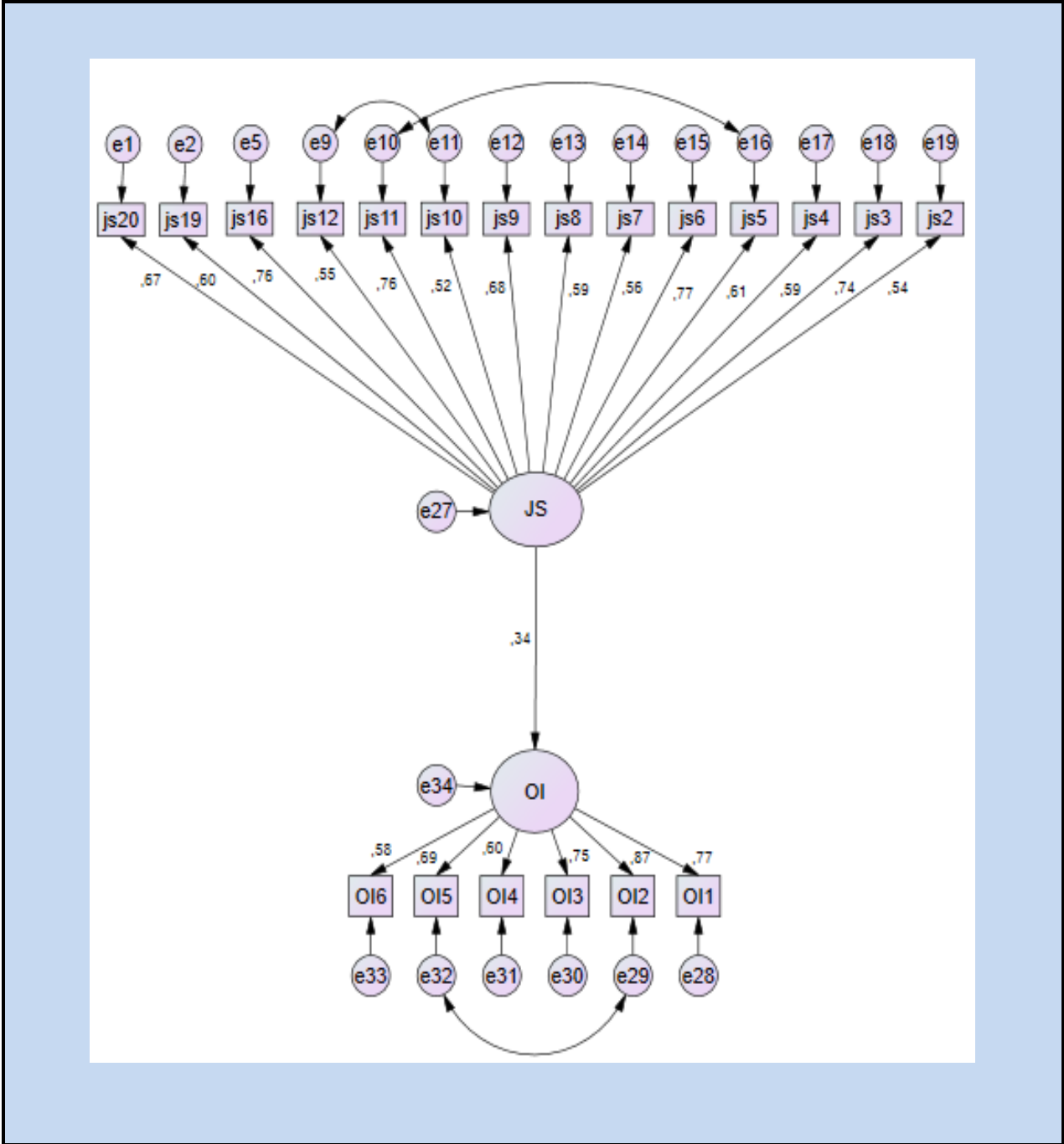
Figure 6: The Effect of Job Autonomy (JA) on Job Satisfaction (JS)



The model for the effect of job autonomy (JA) on job satisfaction (JS) was found significant since the model test values were χ^2 (174.874) and χ^2/df (1.410). The goodness of fit indices were within the acceptable limits [*GFI* (.951), *CFI* (.967), *RMSEA* (.056) and *SRMR* (.0589)], and therefore, the regression equation modeling the effect of job autonomy (JA) on job satisfaction (JS) is considered valid.

4.3. The Effect of Job Satisfaction on Organizational Identification (Model III)

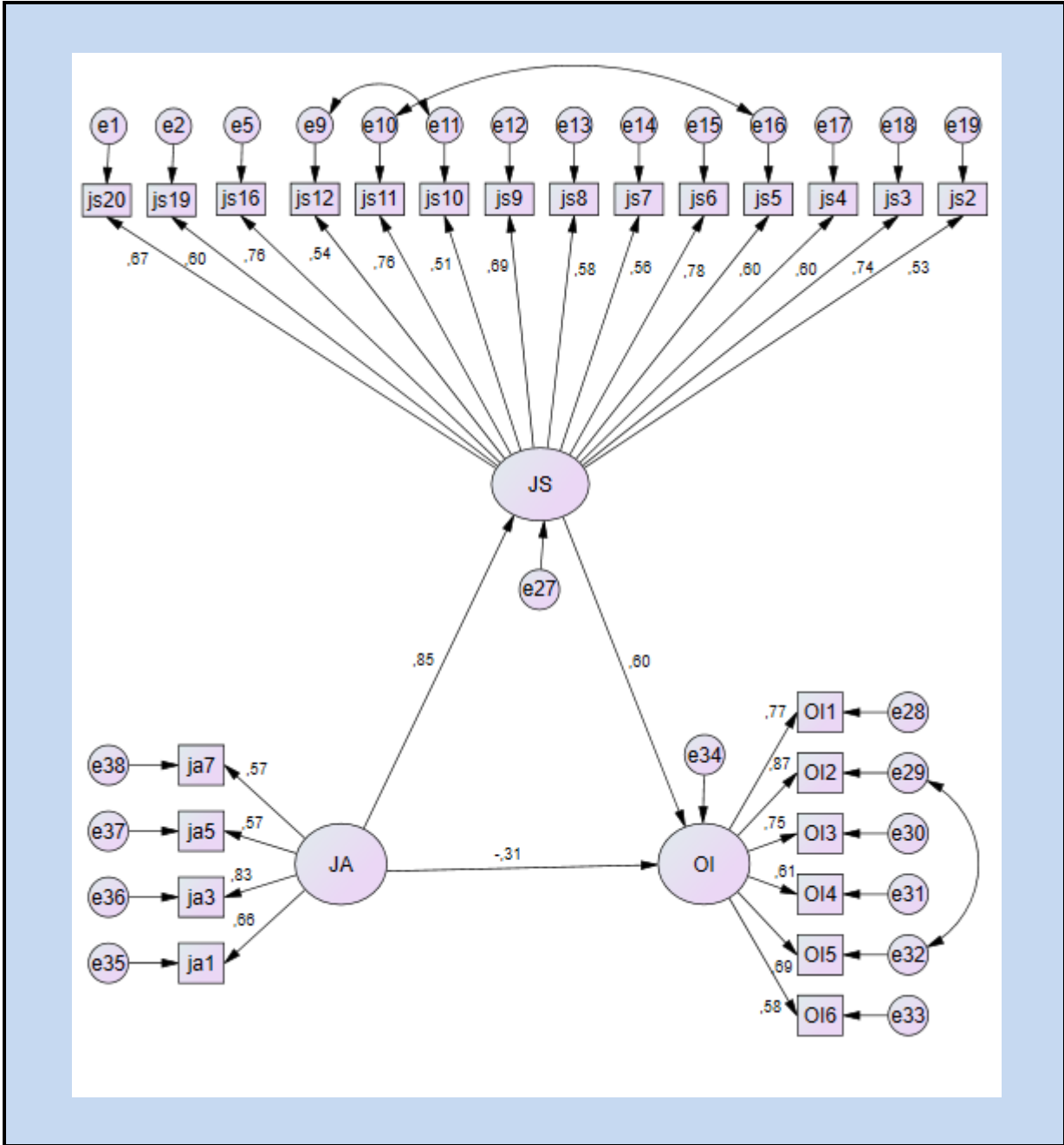
Figure 7: The Effect of Job Satisfaction (JS) on Organizational Identification (OI)



The model for the effect of job satisfaction (JS) on organizational identification (OI) was found significant since the model test values were χ^2 (231.743) and χ^2/df (1.467). The goodness of fit indices were within the acceptable limits [*GFI* (.945), *CFI* (.951), *RMSEA* (.059) and *SRMR* (.051)], and therefore, the regression equation modeling the effect of job satisfaction (JS) on organizational identification (OI) is considered valid.

4.4. The Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction on the Impact of Job Autonomy on Organizational Identification

Figure 8: The Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction (JS) on the Impact of Job Autonomy (JA) on Organizational Identification (OI)



The model for the mediating effect of job satisfaction (JS) on the impact of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) was considered significant since the model test values were χ^2 (356.376) and χ^2/df (1.497). The goodness of fit indices were [GFI (.896), CFI (.917), RMSEA (.061) and SRMR (.056)] close to the acceptable limits, but still outside these limits.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients from the Mediation Model

Model	Endogenous	Effect	Exogenous	Non-standardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients	z	p
Model I	OI	←	JA	.175	.222	2.30	.021*
Model II	JS	←	JA	.844	.653	6.040	.000***
Model III	OI	←	JS	.440	.340	3.449	.000***
Mediator	JS	←	JA	.843	.853	6.079	.000***
	OI	←	JS	.776	.603	2.423	.015*
	OI	←	JA	-.390	-.06	-1.222	.222

** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

The data of the Model 1, in which the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) was examined, revealed that the effect is significant ($p < 0.05$). The data of the Model 2, in which the effect of job autonomy (JA) on job satisfaction (JS) was examined, revealed that the effect is significant ($p < 0.05$). The data of the Model 3, in which the effect of job satisfaction (JS) only on organizational identification (OI) was examined, revealed that the effect is also significant ($p < 0.05$).

Upon these statistically significant relationships found from the singular models, the model for the mediating effect of job satisfaction (JS) on the impact of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) was tested as a structural equation model. In the mediation model, the effect of job autonomy (JA) on job satisfaction (JS) was significant ($p < 0.05$) with a regression coefficient of 0.844, and the effect of job satisfaction (JS) on organizational identification (OI) was significant ($p < 0.05$) with a regression coefficient of 0.440, whereas the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) was statistically insignificant with $p > 0.05$. Job autonomy (JA) had a significant effect on organizational identification (OI) in the singular relationship, whereas the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) became insignificant ($p > 0.05$) when the mediation of job satisfaction (JS) was added to the model. Therefore, it is possible to indicate that the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI) becomes insignificant when job satisfaction (JS) acts as a mediator. According to this model, job satisfaction (JS) had a fully mediating role in the effect of job autonomy (JA) on organizational identification (OI).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore how job autonomy is related with organizational identification and whether job satisfaction had a mediating effect on such relationship. The study results showed a positive relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification as well as a fully mediating effect of job satisfaction on this relationship. Thus, the present study primarily contributes to the management literature by providing support for the autonomy-identification connection and to the job satisfaction literature by discussing this construct as a mediating variable.

The first finding of this study confirmed the Hypothesis 1 which assumed a positive effect of job autonomy on organizational identification. Most of the employees desire autonomy at work for exhibiting effective performance. Job autonomy is one of the employees' key needs and provides them with the chance of personal development and best performance (Gözükara & Şimşek, 2016). Highly autonomous employees are likely to consider the work outcomes as the consequence of their individual efforts, which is believed to be the motivation to personal development (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). Such positive work experiences also drive employees to develop more positive attitudes toward the organization, resulting in a sense of organizational identification (Lievens et al., 2007). In this regard, this finding of the present study is consistent with the studies by Apker et al. (2003), and Bamber and Iyer (2002) which reported a positive relationship between job autonomy and organizational identification.

Secondly, this study established that job satisfaction is positively related with organizational identification, as assumed in Hypothesis 2. According to Tang et al. (2014), job satisfaction is affected by three key relationships, one of which is the one between an employee and the organization. Based on our finding, satisfied employees feel more identified with their organization. Accordingly, employees who are satisfied with their job are likely to adopt the identity of the organization and define themselves with the characteristics of the organization. This finding is in line with the studies by Bart et al. (2001) and Gök et al. (2014).

Job satisfaction was also found affected by job autonomy in the present study, as assumed in Hypothesis 3. Job satisfaction is an essential factor for organizational effectiveness since satisfied employees are associated with greater performance and less separation (Clark 2001; Shields & Price 2002). Our finding demonstrated that employees who are granted autonomy at work feel more satisfied with their job. This finding is consistent with the studies by Pousette and Hansen (2002) which reported a significant relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction.

The last finding of this study showed that job satisfaction mediates the job autonomy-organizational identification relationship, as assumed in Hypothesis 4. This suggests that autonomous employees have a greater sense of organizational identification and such effect of autonomy at work becomes insignificant when the employees are satisfied with their job. This finding supports prior research on the positive employee behaviors of job satisfaction (e.g. Rehman & Waheed, 2011; Wegge et al., 2007). Since satisfaction was defined as an affective commitment to the organizational role (Lease, 1998), it is reasonable that employees identify themselves with their organization when they are satisfied at work.

In light of the findings of the present study, we recommend organizations to provide their employees with autonomy in order to allow their individual development and enhance their sense of responsibility, which would result in better performance. Human resources departments may conduct regular surveys to measure the extent to which the employees feel autonomous and take corrective actions to increase such extent. Organizations are also advised to pay attention to what is considered important by their employees since such factors have impact both on job satisfaction and organizational identification. As employees with a sense of organizational identification produces many positive outcomes at the organizational level, such as increased organizational commitment and loyalty, less turnover and better performance, human resources departments may conduct periodical events to clarify and emphasize the organizational goals and to boost the collective spirit. In future studies, organizational identification can be explored in different business sectors to reveal if there are occupational differences, or the effects of different variables such as tenure, age and educational background on organizational identification can be studied.

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