



Research article

Looking at both sides, outcomes of positive workplace relational systems: A phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

Relational systems are like a gear wheel in organizational processes that keeps employees connected and moving. These relationships are developed and maintained within the work environment for task accomplishment. But these relational systems are originating other outcomes that directly and indirectly affect the organizational process. The present study aimed to explore the outcomes of positive workplace relational systems. Under qualitative phenomenological approach followed a classical content analysis technique employed to analyze the data collected from 20 Bank employees through semi-structured interviews. The data analysis revealed that outcomes of positive relational systems varied depending on the duration and quality of relationships. Organizational culture identified as an important factor that influences the quality of relationships and their outcomes. The data analysis revealed that positive workplace relational systems along with positive behavioral outcomes also develop negative outcomes among employees such as perception of organizational politics. This study argued that outcomes of positive workplace relational systems depend on the perception and need satisfaction of participants. The result highlighted the important areas for individuals and organizations to consider in the context of relationship management, developing interpersonal skills in employees, and encouraging relationship generosity. It will help to enhance the well-being of employees and improve organizational performance.

1. Introduction

All interpersonal relationships that an individual develops and maintains at work for task accomplishment are referred to as workplace relationships [1]. Relationships inside an organization connect employees within and between departments for the achievement of organizational goals. High-quality workplace relational systems help the employee to overcome crises [2]. Positive relationship among employees increases their job satisfaction and performance [3–5]. Even employees rely on each other to get social support to satisfy their personal and professional needs [6].

Workplace relationships are a crucial component of organizational life that employees value. These are essential workplace factors that have a significant influence on organizational and employee behavioral outcomes [7–9]. The nature of outcomes depends on the nature of the relationship among employees. Tran [5] reveal that positive workplace relationships play a critical role in maintaining employees' overall well-being and work performance. Experience of high-quality relationships at a workplace increases employee commitment and engagement toward work [10,11] and helps employees to reduce stress [12]. Whereas having negative working

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relationships discourage work attachments [9] and causes other work-related outcomes such as turnover intention.

Rapid global advancement has brought a drastic shift in the working environment [13,14]. Most of the time it becomes necessary for employees to interact and collaborate for the accomplishment of tasks [15,16]. When employees interact with each other at work they develop a set of formal and informal relationships known as workplace relational systems [17]. Participants in relational systems make it functional for the attainment of their relational needs [11,17]. When individuals find that relationships are not doing any benefit to them they keep them dysfunctional [18]. Beneficial workplace relationships are considered positive or high-quality relationships that cause favorable behavioral outcomes [19]. Consequently, relational systems theory argues that when employees experience workplace relationships as positive their engagement and attachment towards their work increase and vice versa [11]. But Positive workplace relationships do not need to always result in positive outcomes. Studies found that high-quality relationships at work can also exert negative outcomes [20,21]. It's problematic that work engagement is not the only outcome of positive workplace relational systems but other unidentified behavioral outcomes are also disturbing the organizational life of employees. Positive relationships happen to exist between or among individuals who have the potential to develop and maintain relationships for the attainment of their relational needs and behave according to their experience. The influence of positive relationships is not limited to the functional participant of relational systems but these are also shadowing the behavioral outcomes of the dysfunctional participants.

Despite the importance of workplace relationships, there is less attention paid in the literature to exploring what are behavioral outcomes and how workplace relationships influence those outcomes. This is a significant literature gap that needed to be fulfilled. A smaller number of researchers attempt to specify these outcomes such as it reduces stress and turnover intention [5,8,12]. These studies are insufficient to fill the literature gap. Since less is known about this phenomenon and how this workplace relationship shapes employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors. Due to the significant influence of workplace relationships on the development of work-related attitudes and behaviors, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of how workplace relationships stimulate them [5, 10,15]. To get an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon it is essential to study workplace relationships as the center of employees' work experience instead of sideline [11].

Based on the above emerging perspective, the purpose of the present study is to explore the behavioral outcomes of workplace relationships and the phenomenon through which these working relationships influence those outcomes. This study helped to address the gap in the literature on the workplace relational influence phenomenon. The present study discovered the lived experience of employees' workplace relational systems, and how their work-related attitudes and behavior are stimulated by workplace relationships. A phenomenological approach was adopted to understand the employees' experience with workplace relationships and their influence on employees' behavioral outcomes. Workplace relational systems theory [11,17] was used as a theoretical framework for explaining the workplace relational influence phenomenon. This theory argues that workplace relationships determine the employees' engagement and commitment to work [11,17]. The present study aimed to extend the scope of theory and argues that the influence of workplace relationships is not limited to the determination of employee engagement and commitment toward work.

This study was important because workplace relationships among employees not only shape the behavior of employees but also impact the organizational environment in numerous ways [1]. Workplace relationships impact employees' well-being and help them resolve problems [22,23]. The rapid advancement in the global work environment has increased the professional competition that ultimately affects the relationships among employees. Existing research described that workplace relations have a greater influence on employees' performance and the organization's growth, these studies argued that positive relationship leads to positive outcomes and vice versa [4,24]. Few researchers attempt to investigate the process of workplace relationships and revealed that positive workplace relationship does not always lead to positive outcomes [21,25]. There is a paucity of literature describing the outcomes of positive workplace relational systems therefore it is necessary to carry out this research.

The findings of this research contribute to enhancing the existing concise body of literature in the field of workplace relational systems. This study extends the view of workplace relational system theory by exploring its outcomes beyond the domain of work engagement and work commitment. This study describes that positive workplace relational systems influence the employee's work-related behavioral outcomes such as job involvement. The dynamics of these behavioral outcomes depend on the need for satisfaction of the employees.

2. Literature review

Relationships are a fundamental component of human life that keeps them anchored to the environment to fulfill their social needs [26,27]. As argued by Aristotle human is a political and social animal, and building and maintaining interpersonal relations is their basic need or it can be said that human is bound to make social relations [28]. The existence of social relations arises from social or moral expectations that become the center of motivation in human life [29]. The origin of building and maintaining harmonious relationships among individuals is linked with the ancient Chinese philosophy of Confucianism which is known as the 'person making' philosophy [30]. According to the doctrines of Confucianism presence of harmonious social relations among humans are the basis of society [31]. These relationships reduce the suffering among people and develop prosperity [30].

2.1. Societal relationships

Human society is the particular social environment where humans symbolically interact with each other, their interaction is not just a reaction against action instead their reaction is an outcome of a meaningful interpretation of action under the influence of the environment [32]. Society is based on a logical structure that describes its concept and purpose [33]. It can be said that the workplace is a human society that has a logical structure, where workers interact with each other in a certain manner. The participants of society

have the freedom to interpret the actions of others according to their perceptions [34].

Since the participants of the workplace have free will to interpret the interacting actions of others, therefore, they do so and react accordingly. The existence of workplace relations is beyond control. Building Social connections within a certain society are important for human to become a functional participant in that society [35]. An individual has the freedom to choose, what kind of relations he wants to build and maintain [36]. Whether he opts to build positive or negative relations by alienating himself from the social environment. When a human makes choice, he becomes responsible not only for himself but also for others who are related to him [37]. Human choices make him responsible and influential to other human beings [36].

2.2. Workplace relationships

Workplace relationships are repeated, patterned and mutually influential interactions over time between two employees [38]. Earlier workplace relationships are only discussed or examined in the context of “office romance” or “office affairs” [39–41]. Researchers argue that mostly all workplace relationships turn out to be romantic that have a greater influence on employees’ work lives [42,43]. Workplace relationships described as emotional attachments among employees that can be weak or strong depending on individual and interpersonal factors [17]. The purpose of these relationships is the achievement of specific objectives.

Workplace relationships are shaped by underlying relational systems. It is referred to as a set of formal and informal work relationships that exist among different units of organizations for task accomplishments. Formal relationships are organizational role-based relationships in which partners are assigned by the organization to carry out the tasks whereas in informal relationships partners freely select each other [4,38]. The relational systems perspective argues that workplace relationships are the central workplace factor that predicts employees’ participation in work and shape their work-related attitudes and behavior [11,44]. Attitude is one’s tendency based on experience that influences the action in a certain way [45,46]. Whereas behavior is a set of actions an individual takes in response to a certain stimulus. Studies show that experience of a negative work environment develops negative attitudinal and behavioral responses such as stress, job dissatisfaction, workplace isolation, and absenteeism [47,48]. Contrarily, a positive work environment enhances the employee’s well-being and productivity [49].

According to relational systems theory, the experience of positive relationships at work will create and enhance employee engagement in their work [11,17]. This theory proposes that employees develop and maintain relationships at work for the fulfillment of their needs. This creation and maintenance of workplace relationships are subject to their experience. If employees experience these relationships as beneficial by any means they will be more inclined toward building relationships at work. Relational systems theory further argues that when workplace relationships satisfy any dimension of relational need, the employee considers that relationship as a positive or high quality and gets himself psychologically connected to their work and workplace [11]. Since the quality of the relationship matters while predicting behavioral outcomes consequently type of relationship also matters. Employees develop relationships according to their relational needs.

2.3. Relational needs

Relational needs are defined as the needs employees want to fulfill through their workplace relationships. Five dimensions of relational needs has been described, that exist between instrumental and emotional needs. Instrumental needs are related to job performance and career development whereas emotional needs are meant to satisfy the well-being of employees [11]. The type of relational need determines the type of relationship. Relationships are the influence that outlines behaviors and attitudes [50]. These are classified into two broad categories, dyadic influences and network influences [10,11].

2.4. Dyadic influence

Dyadic influence processes in which cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change in an employee occurs due to the influence of another employee after the attainment of social objectives [51]. Under the dyadic influence, employees consider the opinion and activities of influencers for the attainment of individual and organizational goals. These influencers can be specific constituents or groups of constituents in the organization including supervisors, coworkers, and mentors. Employees maintain relationships with them to get workplace social support to satisfy their job performance needs [52].

2.5. Network influence

Network influence refers to the effect of an interpersonal connection between two employees [53]. Network influence can affect employees’ attitudes and behavior through social network structures or friendship networks [10]. Friendship network at the workplace significantly affects the employee’s work experience [54] and helps employees to deal with workplace challenges [2,55]. Whether it’s dyadic influence or network influence the objective is to satisfy the relational need. The quality of relationships is determined by need satisfaction that varies across the employees [11].

3. Methodology

The qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because the research objective cannot be addressed through experiments or measured in numbers it requires interpretation to describe the meaning of the phenomenon [56,57]. Under qualitative

research phenomenological approach was selected, because this approach enables the researcher to develop a profound understanding of certain phenomena by interpreting the experience of the participants [58–60]. The hermeneutical phenomenological approach has been chosen, under this approach, the researcher describes and interpret the meaning participant created through their experience with a particular phenomenon [61]. While developing themes researcher simultaneously reflects on his own experience [62]. According to Heidegger, a key contributor to phenomenology, the meaning of experience based on the researcher's preconception is valuable otherwise it will be only a presuppositionless description [63]. Since the researcher of this study was also experienced with workplace relational systems and the researcher's bias cannot be separated from judgments and precognition therefore the hermeneutical phenomenological approach is most suitable for this study.

For this study banking sector of Pakistan has been considered. The banking sector is highly sensitive that is connected with finance so bankers required higher concentration and involvement to perform well [64–66]. The targeted population for the present study was full-time white-collar employees working in back-office operations support of the banking sector. This category of employees is more likely to experience workplace relationships because their involvement with each other is higher. Karachi is the economic hub of Pakistan therefore 21 banks out of 31 set up their head offices in Karachi and the rest have their main centers (back-office operations) in Karachi. Due to the availability of all the banks and their HR departments in Karachi, the sample size drags from Karachi.

Only those employees were invited to participate in the study who qualifies the following selection criteria 1) employees spend their overall working time within the organization because workplace relationships develop and maintain within the work environment. 2) Employees have a minimum of five years of working experience in the same organization because they possess in-depth experience in working relationships and they were able to provide valuable knowledge for the study. 3) employees were willing to voluntarily participate. Customer service/front desk employees were excluded from the sample because they spend their maximum time working and interacting with outsiders.

As per the objective of the research purposive sampling was employed to approach the subjects of the research. Purposive sampling is a simple and straightforward research method approach that improves the rigor and ensures the trustworthiness of research data and results [67]. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants with specific characteristics keeping the research objective in mind and expecting participants to have knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon of study their contribution will provide sufficient data to address the research question [59,68]. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because the present study involves an analysis of complex human behavior with aimed to find out the behavioral outcomes of workplace relational systems based on the experience and knowledge of participants. The human resource department of Banks has given access to approach their employees. Therefore, employees who meet the above-mentioned criteria were capable to provide the required response, purposively approached.

The suggested sample size for phenomenological studies ranges from 5 to 25 respondents [69]. Based on the meta-analysis researcher advised that a sample size of 12 would be appropriate [70]. The sample size of this study consists of 20 participants. The demographics of participants are presented in Table 1. In the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the researcher collects data through direct observation and in-depth interviews [56,62]. The interview questions were based on the research questions enabled the researcher to gather data according to the requirement of the study.

The bracketing technique is used to separate researcher influence from interview data. The purpose of bracketing is to alleviate the researcher's perception that may distract the findings of the research [71]. The researcher's experience and thoughts before, during, and after the interview as well as while analyzing the data, were separately recorded. Each participant was separately interviewed through a semi-structured interview format and it took an average of 28 min to complete. Other than qualifying questions all the interview questions were open-ended. The open-ended questions aimed to encourage participants to freely present their experiences

Table 1
Demographics.

Participant	Age	Gender	Work Experience within the existing organization	Overall work experience	Organization	Employment Level
1	32	Female	6	9	Private sector Bank	Officer
2	31	Male	5	8	Public Sector Bank	Officer
3	43	Male	12	20	Private sector Bank	Manager
4	58	Female	15	35	Private sector Bank	Group Executive
5	35	Male	6	11	Private sector Bank	Officer
6	33	Male	7	10	Private sector Bank	Manager
7	45	Male	13	22	Public Sector Bank	Senior Manager
8	39	Male	8	16	Private sector Bank	Manager
9	51	Female	10	28	Private sector Bank	Team Leader
10	56	Female	7	33	Private sector Bank	Officer
11	28	Female	5	5	Private sector Bank	Officer
12	35	Male	9	12	Private sector Bank	Team Leader
13	50	Male	22	27	Private sector Bank	Department Head
14	41	Male	11	18	Private sector Bank	Senior Manager
15	59	Female	36	36	Public Sector Bank	Chief Manager
16	52	Male	25	29	Public Sector Bank	Senior Manager
17	36	Male	13	13	Private sector Bank	Officer
18	39	Male	7	16	Private sector Bank	Officer
19	32	Female	5	9	Private sector Bank	Officer
20	35	Male	7	12	Private sector Bank	Manager

and views related to workplace relational systems.

Consideration of ethical principles while conducting research studies is important to ensure the protection of the research subject [72]. By following well-established ethical principles research can alleviate the difficulties inherent in qualitative studies' data collection [73]. This study abides by the ethical principles maintained by American Psychological Association (2021). To secure the rights of participants, prevent any kind of harm, and maintain justice, this study maintained the three basic but significant principles of ethics, i.e., Beneficence, justice, and respect for participants. Active employees were the participants of this study, so before getting their response, it assured that their participation would remain confidential and informed consent was taken. Participation in study was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw their participation at any time. The participants can omit to respond to any of the question if they are not comfortable with it.

A classical content analysis approach was followed to analyze the data collected through interviews and observation. Content analysis is the systematic, summative approach that compresses wordy sentences into less meaningful content by the subsequent clear rule of coding [74,75]. With the help of content analysis, this study identified the codes and strive to understand the concept explained by the respondent. This study adopted a method which consists of three steps i.e. categorizing, tabulating, and synthesizing [76]. This study employed MAXQDA, a sophisticated computer-assisted qualitative data analysis softer, to code and analyze the collected data. Recorded interview data was transcribed into a text file, first, each phrase and word were thoroughly analyzed, and then maintained excel sheet for each respondent.

The multi-cycle coding procedure was adopted to analyze the interview data. This procedure can reflect the required answer following the research question [77]. The first coding, cycle involves structural, exploratory, or procedural coding to introduce the data. The second coding cycle involves rigorous analytical skills, "classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building" [77].

4. Data analysis and findings

To address the research question this study followed [60]. First, this study categorizes the qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews, then tabulated and synthesized respectively. Each recorded interview was transcribed into a separate text file and through the inductive content analysis technique. Further, this study also followed the systematic steps described by Ref. [78], to analyze the collected interview.

4.1. Step 1: Preparing, organizing, and exploring the data

The answer to each question was transcribed as a separate paragraph. Every single statement was transcribed verbatim. Dialect was not transcribed; these were translated into English as accurately as possible in the participants' described context. Words or statements delivered under the emotional influence were underlined. Vocal utterances and nonverbal expressions were noted in the bracket such as "(Smirk)", "(laugh)" or similar.

4.2. Step 2: category development

In qualitative data analysis categorization is an important tool uses to classify, index, describe and explain the data [78]. Category contains a word or combination of two to four words. The present study thematically (Content base) categorized that data, the thematic category represents the thinking pattern, arguments, and ideas that appear repeatedly [79]. Given below in Table 2 are thematic categories described based on interview questions and participants' responses.

4.3. Step 3: interviews coding/basic coding

While coding the interviews each phrase was thoroughly reviewed and codes were assigned based on prominent terms or vocabularies of statements. Few overlapping codes were identified, and those were categorized under a single code. Sections containing irrelevant statements, and not addressing research questions, were ignored. Word frequencies were used to explore the data, it helped to identify the frequently used word across the interview. Meaningless words such as that could maybe be excluded and developed a word cloud (see Fig. 1). Ignored words with high frequency were further explored and coded accordingly.

Table 2
Category description.

Thematic Category	Description
Benefits of positive Workplace relational systems	Describes what are the benefits participants got from positive workplace relational systems, how these relationships help them in their work-life routine
The detriment of positive workplace relational systems	Describes what are the detriments participants experienced from positive workplace relational systems, how these relationships disturb their work-life routine
Perceptions of positive workplace relational systems	Describes participants' perception of positive workplace relational systems, and how participants observe workplace relational systems.

Table 3
Concept development.

Codes	Concept	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning new skills - Career opportunities and support - Easy promotions/easily highlight your work - Workplace support - Feel like a family - Part of organization/attachment - Enjoy working with colleagues 	Career Development and Growth	Career development and growth emerged in the data as a highlighted initial outcome of positive workplace relational systems. This is in line with the existing theory of relational systems.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workplace relations interfere with personal life (work-to-family conflict) - Create complications - Help solve conflicts 	Relatedness	A sense of relatedness emerged as an outcome that happens when employees participate in or experience positive workplace relations. some employees participate in fulfilling their social need for relatedness and sometimes these relationships create a sense of relatedness in employees that keep them engaged with their organizations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workplace relations interfere with personal life (work-to-family conflict) - Create complications - Help solve conflicts - Comfortable/good work environment - Relax feeling at work - Doesn't feel like the military - Work with robots 	Conflict	There is no existing research describing conflict as a factor influenced by positive workplace relationships. In some cases, positive relations at work help to manage workplace conflicts as well as reduce work-to-family conflicts, and for some cases, it is vice versa.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of performance - Waste of time - Pay less attention to work - Reluctant to highlight mistakes because of relation - Spend more time maintaining relations - Relying on a person with good terms 	Work environment	Existing literature on workplace relationships described the outcome related to employees. The present study identified that the impact of positive workplace relationships is not limited to the employees' personal and professional life but has an impact on other employees' work lives throughout the work environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilizing relations for task accomplishment - Need fulfillment - Shielding with others' performance - Scheming - Pulling threads - Harming others for personal gain/workplace politics 	Work Performance	The present study provides a specific explanation of how positive workplace relations influence the work performance of employees. It is found that relational systems not only influence work performance at the individual level but also at the organizational level. Alongside the quality of work is also get affected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Want to spend more time working - Attention towards work - Involvement in work - Participation in work 	Exploiter	The purpose of the establishment of positive workplace relational systems is to mutually benefit the employees and organization. The ideal situation where every individual equally participates not to fulfill their instrumental and emotional needs but also of others practically does not exist. Some employees become social loafers and create complications for others.
	Perceived organizational politics	Employees' perception plays an important role while maintaining positive relations among them. From the respondents' review, it has been observed that employees only consider their beneficial relations as positive whereas positive relations with others perceive as political which complicates the work environment.
	Job involvement	The existing literature identified job involvement as the highlighted factor that influences performance. The present study explored that having positive relationships at work influences employee job involvement. Most of the participants stated that diverts their attention from work. Employees spend more at the workplace but don't work.

perspective related to the outcomes of workplace relational systems. The themes revealed the possible outcomes of workplace relational systems. Table 3 reflects the mapping of the theme to the research question.

Given below are the details of about each of the finding that expands the theory.

4.5.2.2. Code: career development and growth. Employees experienced that presence of positive workplace relational systems helped them in learning new skills at work, achieving their career goals, help them to accomplish their tasks. This experience was captured in the major code "Career Development and Growth". When employees experienced positive work relations, they easily express their abilities and skills as well as feel relaxed while learning from others.

According to participant 6, participant 3 stated, "presence of positive relational systems helped in my early career, whenever I was stuck while doing work and need to learn positive relationships around me help me to learn new skills at work. Presence of positive relational systems helped to grow my career because I have positive ties with my peers and bosses it became easy for me to get promotions and salary increment".

"In an environment where everybody helps other each other. Tasks that we cannot handle or complete individually because of positive relations as a team we completed before the time."

4.5.2.3. Code: relatedness. Employees want to relate themselves to where they work. They experienced that due to the positive relational systems, they rarely felt alienation at work. The presence of positive relational systems gives them a sense of attachment at work. Participant 6 stated, "positive relations at work make me feel that I am a part of the work environment. I feel myself attached to

my workplace". A participant described his experience.

"Socialization is one of my basic needs, I want to socialize myself within the environment where I work. It creates a sense of belonging and motivates me to come to work. I feel that people around me care for me".

4.5.2.4. Code: conflict. Participants have diverse experiences related to the conflict. Participants have been asked about the influence of positive relational systems in their personal and professional life. Participant outlined,

"Due to positive workplace relational systems, I easily resolve the conflict at work. whenever I face any kind of conflict related to work supporting relations around me help me overcome those conflict. I never had a work-to-family conflict because of positive workplace relational systems. It reduces the level of stress, when I had a bad time during work emotional support was always there to cope with the situation and I didn't end up taking work-related problems at home."

Another participant gave a similar response,

"There are many things at work you cannot share with your family because many times they cannot understand it. When I was new to work, I used to take my work-related stress and frustration at home because I didn't have anyone to share or get support ultimately it caused work-to-family conflict."

The participant shared the opposite insight,

"Presence of positive workplace relational systems is one of the reasons for my work-to-family conflict. Because of positive relations at work, I find myself too involved within the work environment and with my colleagues. I want to spend more time at work because I enjoy my work environment and spend less time with my family".

4.5.2.5. Code: work environment. The existence of positive workplace relational systems has a noticeable influence on the work environment that ultimately influences employee behavior and mood.

Participant shared his experience by stating that,

"Existence of positive relational systems at work makes the work environment, please. I feel relaxed while working, it becomes easy to coordinate. I don't feel any kind of stress when I interact with people at work. positive relations at work make work environment joyous"

Participant 9 described his experience,

"Presence of positive relations around me makes the work environment happy. I enjoy working in such an environment. When I felt stressed because of workload this positive work environment made me feel relaxed, it helped me to calm myself down".

4.5.2.6. Code: work performance. The work performance of employees is affected as well the quality of work also improves. Employees help and support each other in their task performance. The employee learns and improves their skills and utilizes them at work improving the quality of work and increasing efficiency.

Participant 2 stated,

" Because of positive relations among teammates, they support each other for task performance. Mostly they accomplished their task earlier than defined timelines. Because of a relaxed and supportive work environment employees perform well".

Similarly, participant 10 stated,

" I perform my task well and efficiently, because of my positive relations with people around me who provided support, they guide me"

Contrary some employees believe that positive relational systems are a burden for them. For the sake of maintaining a positive work environment, they unwillingly participate in this system. It affects their work performance. Further participant 4 stated that employees pay more attention to building and maintaining relations at work and neglect work, as a result, their work performance reduces and the quality of work is also get affected.

4.5.2.7. Code: Exploiter. This study identified the drawback of positive workplace relational systems. Employees start to depend on others for their tasks, instead of doing it by themselves they ask others to do it for them. Employees become habitual to social loafing they take support as granted. Sometimes to satisfy the emotional needs they emotionally distress others. Many times employees put the excess workload on their peers and subordinates and demonstrate that they have a positive workplace relational system in which employees support each other in a win-win situation. Participant 1 described his experience in the following words:

"Employees spend approx. 75% of their time in social loafing others, they keep seeking support from others. They take advantage of positive workplace relations and put the workload on others".

Participant 4 stated that,

“Employees do you favor just to initiate the positive relational node and after that, they keep taking advantage of that one favor. When you ask for their support and favor they give you cold shoulder”.

Participant 14 stated that,

“Positive relational systems are hidden–out for parasites. Employees who don’t want to work put their efforts into maintaining positive relationships so they can offload them. To make the work environment supportive and friendly, I started positive relationships at work, and now I regret it. Most relationships are burdensome for me, it is challenging for me to say no to them because of their positive attitude. They are parasites who are disturbing my performance.”

4.5.2.8. Code: perceived organizational politics. Positive relationships among employees are not always perceived as positive by others. Employees consider those relational systems positive from which they can easily get benefits. Employees criticize others’ positive relations and they consider themselves, victims. They perceived that if others are on good terms and supporting each other, they might cause harm for the sake of their gain. Participant 7 expressed his perception in words,

“Employees become a part of the relational system for their benefits. When they gather start scheming for others. They pull the legs of other employees to get what they want. Employees do politics at work. I feel suffocated in such an environment and want to quit my job”.

Participant 19 shared her opinion,

“Positivity of relational systems is just for the showcase. In reality, employees maintain relationships at the workplace with an ulterior motive. They just want to control you with help of relationships and play their tricks.”

Participant 5 briefly answered that,

“relationships are means of play politics”.

4.5.2.9. Code: job involvement. Employee participation is the basic input for task performance. The present study identified that positive relational systems do not induce job involvement. Once employees get involved in workplace relational systems they pay less attention to their work. Employees’ involvement induces towards their workplace instead of work. Participant 17 described as,

“Based on my experience I have observed that when employees experience excessive positivity from workplace relationships they enjoy the work environment and waste work time.”

Further participant 13 added,

“Positive relational systems at the workplace divert the employees’ concentration from work. employees invest most of their energy and time in maintaining those relationships that can benefit them. They seem very much engaged with an organization but their work performance alarming because of their less participation in work.”

5. Discussion

The data analysis of this study shows that workplace relationships play a vital role in shaping employees’ work behaviors such as employee work engagement and work commitment. This study strives to fill the significant literature gap that will help academicians and practitioners to understand the underlying mechanism of positive workplace relational systems. The findings will enable managers to identify the extent at which positive relationship remains beneficial for organization. In order to develop positive work attitude and behavior in employee this study will also help to manage workplace relational systems.

The result of this study is supported by relational systems theory and existing studies on workplace relationships [13,17,23]. Along with these outcomes present study also identified that outcomes of workplace relational systems depend on the interpretation of participants which has not been discussed in the existing literature.

The present study proposed that positive workplace relational systems not only enhance employee engagement and attachment toward their work and work environment. There are other behavioral outcomes such as job involvement. Results also revealed that the outcomes depend on the perception of the employee. Employees consider relational systems as positive when they get their instrumental or emotional needs fulfilled. This is in line with the assumption of relational system theory, when employees are embedded in workplace relational systems and experience it positively they get engaged and committed to their work [10,11]. Based on the analysis this study extends the proposition of relational system theory, the experience of positive workplace relational systems does not always develop commitment and engagement of the employee. But one’s positive experience influence the workplace behavior of other participants of relational systems. Interview results explained that an individual employee cannot experience the workplace relational system positively without the participation of other employees. Because employees perceive workplace relational systems positively when any of their emotional or instrumental needs get satisfied. For this employees rely on other participants of relational systems and unintentionally influence their work behavior.

The results of this study explained that the perception of relational systems being positive or negative is a subjective phenomenon that exerts complex attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Further, this study also argued that it is not necessary that an employee

experiencing relational systems positively, end up getting himself engaged and committed to the workplace. Data analysis identified that theme *Exploiter*, under this employee gets help and support from the work environment for task accomplishment. Since the employee getting his instrumental needs fulfilled so accordingly, he interpreted it as a positive relational system. As a result, the employee has shown an enjoyable and relaxed attitude toward the work environment. In this case, the positive experience could not get the employee committed and engaged to work. Instead, employees become exploiters. Contrarily, this beneficial relationship is perceived as negative by other employees and exerted negative outcomes such as stress due to excess workload.

Perceived organizational politics are identified as a negative outcome of workplace relationships. Under this employees perceived positive (beneficial) relations with other employees as negative. Employees believe that their positive and beneficial relations will harm them for the sake of their benefit [80]. Empirical research revealed that perceived organization is a complex subjective phenomenon that developed due to negative perceptions of employees [81]. It exerts negative outcomes such as stress, workplace isolation, and work-to-family conflicts [82].

The findings of this study identified both positive and negative aspects of positive workplace relational systems. Existing literature emphasized that the presence of positive relational systems creates a positive influence on employees' work behavior and improves work performance [7,14,25]. The analysis of the present study revealed that outcomes of positive workplace relational systems depend on the perception and reaction of the participant. Existing studies highlighted that the presence of positive and supportive workplace relationships develop a positive work environment, and strengthen supportive work relationships among employee [1,9,13]. Most of the time these supportive ties help employees in their career development and growth. This is also supported by the findings of the present study.

The result of this study explored an interesting outcome which is job involvement. Existing studies showed that job involvement is a favorable work attitude that induces employee work performance [83–85]. According to the findings of existing literature job involvement is a positive outcome of a positive workplace that enhances employee job satisfaction [86,87]. In contrast, the findings of studies show that positive workplace relationship enhances employee involvement in the workplace. Employee wants to spend most of their time at work and stay involved in relational systems instead of work. Moreover, excess involvement in the workplace also disturbs the non-work life of employees. This is in line with the finding of [88,89] described that excess job involvement disturbs the work-life balance and leads to work-family conflict.

5.1. Implication for theory

The findings of the present research suggest the need for further research on positive workplace relational systems and how they influence employees' professional and personal life. The findings of this study revealed a new insight into workplace relational systems. This insight provides deeper context to the positive inter-organizational relationships among employees, which as proposed by the theory of relational systems, enhance employee work engagement and commitment to the work [11,17]. The present study proposed that positive workplace relational systems enhance employee engagement and attachment toward their work environment.

The implication of this study suggests that interpersonal relationship management training and counseling programs should consider because their attitude and behavior toward these workplace relationships influence their professional life as well as their work performance. This is particularly important because positive workplace relationships among employees are rarely considered in organizational behavior. There has been little literature support present that positive workplace relationships reduce stress and turnover intention [9,12]. Researchers also highlighted the negative insight of positive workplace relationships [20,21] but didn't describe those negative outcomes which is concerning because these outcomes affecting not only the individual level but also the organizational level. The participant of the present study frequently mentioned the dark side of positive relational systems right after mentioning the positive aspects which is contrasting with existing theory [17].

The conceptual implication of this study could help conduct further research on employees' positive workplace relational systems. Research reliably suggests the benefits organizations get from positive work relationships such as career growth and development and workplace relatedness enhance employee job satisfaction and engagement [90–92]. The present study identified that the influence of these outcomes is for the short term or benefits the employees in an early phase when employees initially participate in positive workplace relational systems. The negative outcomes of positive workplace relational systems such as perceived organizational politics may affect the work environment and employees' performance and well-being [93,94]. The research participants of the present study all sought to get benefits from relational systems but nobody wants to serve against those benefits.

5.2. Limitations and future research direction

The present study explored the lived experience of employees who are a part of the workplace relational system. This study has a two considerable limitations. The first limitation of this study was sample size was drawn from the employees working in back-office operations support. The selected sample of this study was not completely representing the all employed population of the organization. It only considered back-office operations support staff organizations therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the employees working in front office. Second limitation of this research was that the findings of the study were limited to the researcher's ability to separate personal bias while understanding and interpreting the participants' experiences. The researcher's bias about preconceived ideas cannot be eliminated but it can be reduced [62]. For the present study, while recording and interpreting the interviews, the researcher's opinions, feelings, and thoughts are separated by using the bracketing technique. With the help of the bracketing, the strategy researcher tried their best to remain honest about participants' perspectives and distinguish the personal cognitive bias while analyzing the data.

Present research encourages additional research on each outcome identified through an inductive approach. Future research should focus on how these identified outcomes of positive workplace relational systems cause spillover effects on employees' attitudes and behavior. For example, how employees perceive positive relationships with other employees as political, and how positive workplace relational systems cause or reduce conflicts in employees' personal and professional lives. With the help of existing literature and data gathered through semi-structured interviews, this study strived to uncover the outcomes underlying the phenomenon of the workplace. Further this study focused on the employee working in back-office operations support, it would be worthwhile to consider front desk employees across the sectors. It will help to generalize the finding of the study across the departments within the organization. Moreover, it will help to reshape the workplace environment for the betterment of employees as well as organizations. However, there is still much to explore, it would be notable for future research to explore how gender and cultural differences influence the perception of a positive workplace relational system. Gender and cultural considerations were beyond the scope of the present study. In the future researchers should investigate if gender and cultural differences produce different results.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study it is concluded that a positive workplace relational system is an essential factor in the workplace that shapes the overall working environment. Employees are the key players in this process and the outcomes of this process depend on the perception of employees. workplace relational system is perceived as positive until employees find it beneficial otherwise, they described it as a source of distraction. Outcomes of positive relational systems are not limited to the employee experiencing it. But it is also influencing the behavior of all the participants of relational systems. The positive relational systems also exert negative outcomes.

Therefore, it will be fair enough to say that the existence of positive relational systems is a perceived phenomenon. And outcomes of workplace relational systems are subjected to the perception of participants.

Author contribution statement

Sumbol Fiaz: Conceived and designed the experiment; Performed the experiment; Analyzed and interpreted the data, Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools, Wrote the paper.

Muhammad Azeem Qureshi: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools; Wrote the paper.

Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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