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The Impact of Supervisory Communication Apprehension on Subordinates' Job Performance: An Empirical Study in Pakistan

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Abstract

The impact of supervisory communication apprehension (SCA) on subordinates' job performance was investigated in this study. We also examined the impact of task-related uncertainty in mediating the relationship between SCA and subordinate work performance, as well as the role of information-seeking behavior in moderating the relationship between task-related uncertainty and subordinate job performance. A sample of subordinates and their supervisors from public and private sector enterprises in Pakistan were used in the study. The concept of communication apprehension is not limited to a single organization or industry, and the conditions suggest that apprehensive supervisors are likely to exist in different organizations and industries in Pakistan, including banks, telecommunications, and development sector organizations. Company directors and leaders of human resources departments were contacted to reach out to possible respondents. SmartPLS software was used to evaluate the data using a structural equation modeling technique which is commonly used in explanatory studies (Atta et al., 2021). We found evidence to support ideas predicting the association between SCA and subordinate job performance, as well as the mediating role of task-related ambiguity in the relationship. Furthermore, the findings show that information-seeking activity has a moderating effect on the link between task-related ambiguity and subordinate job performance. This is one of the first studies to look at major mediating and moderating mechanisms in the link between SCA and subordinate job performance.

Keywords: Supervisory Communication Apprehension, Job Performance, Information-seeking Behavior, Task-Related Uncertainty, Employee Outcomes

JEL Classification Code: D23, D80, D83, M10, M12

1. Introduction

Effective workplace communication has long been a topic of interest for researchers and practitioners alike. Supervisor-subordinate relations are amongst the most

important work relationships where subordinates expect their supervisors to effectively communicate work requirements and job instructions to achieve organizational objectives (Kramer et al., 2013). According to Newnam and Goode (2019), supervisors are considered as one of the most important sources of information to subordinates. Research studies revealed that effective communication from the supervisor is a prerequisite for effective subordinate functioning and ensuring healthy supervisor-subordinate relationships (Abu Bakar et al., 2010; Karanges et al., 2015; Mikkelsen et al., 2015). This suggests that any obstacle in supervisor-subordinate communication could potentially lead to various negative consequences. Thus, to enhance workplace communication and productivity, supervisors need to be clear and explicit while communicating important work instructions to subordinates (Mikkelsen et al., 2015).

The extant literature comprises two main streams of research studying the notion of supervisory communication. The first stream examines the outcomes of supervisory communication practices and behaviors (Abu Bakar et al.,

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2010; Brown et al., 2019; Dasgupta et al., 2013). Studies conducted under this stream of research have investigated the relationship between supervisory communication and subordinate outcomes. For example, supervisory communication practices/behaviors have been tested against the outcomes such as subordinate organizational commitment, motivation, and intention to stay (Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019). The second research stream considers the overall quality of communication and the conditions under which communication takes place (Bisel et al., 2012; Newnam & Goode, 2019; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019). The studies in this stream of research have suggested that the quality of supervisor-subordinate communication is an important condition that contributes to productive work relationships, as well as subordinates' communication satisfaction, trust-building, and job satisfaction (Bisel et al., 2012; Steele & Plenty, 2015; Werbel & Henriques, 2009). In addition, at the workgroup level, effective supervisory communication positively influences the commitment of group members (Abu Bakar et al., 2010), and their attitudes towards job satisfaction and propensity to leave (Mikkelsen et al., 2015; Raina & Roebuck, 2016).

While the relationship between subordinates' outcomes and effective supervisory communication (i.e., supervisors' communication capabilities) has been adequately explored in the extant literature, there is a paucity of empirical research that considers apprehensive supervisory communication attributes and tendencies and their impact on subordinates' outcomes. Apprehensive communication tendencies of supervisors could lead to ambiguity and communication uncertainty to subordinates, which in turn, negatively affect subordinates' attitudes, behaviors, and overall job performance (Sniderman et al., 2016). According to Bartoo and Sias (2004), communication apprehension is characterized by fear and anxiety while communicating with others. There exist several studies that examined the impact of employees' communication apprehension upon their performance, learning preferences, career advancement, future leadership roles, and the likelihood of emerging as a leader (Limon & La France, 2005; Pitt et al., 2000; Russ, 2013). Although the impact of an individual employee's communication apprehension upon their attitudes and behavioral outcomes has been studied in prior research, the role of supervisory communication apprehension (SCA) on subordinate outcomes is rarely investigated.

Thus, we further posit that job performance is a crucial employee outcome that needs to be examined in relation to SCA, as well as the associated mechanisms that influence this relationship. Being an undesirable communication attribute, SCA is likely to negatively affect subordinates' job performance. At the same time, it is equally important to carefully consider the mechanisms that intervene between the SCA and subordinate job performance relationship.

Drawing on the uncertainty management theory (UMT), we posit that uncertainty is a major element of communication encounters that is likely to increase when one or both parties are afraid of communicating (Brashers, 2001). Both the UMT perspective and extant empirical work concerning supervisory communication attributes demonstrate that SCA could reduce the amount of information received by subordinates (Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Kramer et al., 2013). Hence, task-related uncertainty appears to explain the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance. In addition to ascertaining the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance, this study attempts to examine whether task-related uncertainty explains this relationship. Furthermore, the literature on proactive employee behaviors suggested information-seeking behavior positively predicts job performance (Crant, 2000; Huang, 2012; Showail et al., 2013). Considering subordinate information-seeking behavior as a boundary condition between task-related uncertainty and job performance, the study also investigates its moderating effect on the relationship. Accordingly, to sum up, this study aims to examine the impact of SCA on subordinate job performance and determine whether task-related uncertainty mediates this relationship, as well as to ascertain the moderating role of information-seeking behavior in the relationship between task-related uncertainty and job performance.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. SCA and Subordinate Job Performance

Job performance is one of the most important criteria in industrial/organizational psychology used to determine employee productivity (Ismail et al., 2019). Literature indicates that it is the most studied outcome concerning various workplace antecedents and remains a current topic of interest amongst scholars. Improved job performance of employees contributes to organizational competitiveness (Ngo, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Furthermore, the literature suggests that improved organizational communication affects employee and organizational outcomes (Anjum et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2020). In their study of Taiwanese and American employees, Chen et al. (2006) reported a positive relationship between effective organizational communication and job performance, specifically higher levels of organizational communication positively influenced performance levels in both countries, implying that effective communication has positive implications for employees' job performance. In the same vein, Giri and Kumar (2010) demonstrated in their study of managerial level employees working in Indian organizations that effective organizational communication and job performance are positively linked. Similarly, in a

study of the supervisor-subordinate relationship in banks and credit unions by Michael et al. (2005), a positive relationship was found between supportive supervisory communication and job performance. Thus, the results of the above studies clearly show that high-quality and effective organizational communication leads to improved job performance.

In addition to that, previous studies have highlighted the importance of supervisory communication vis-à-vis employee outcomes. Supervisors' communication styles/practices influence employee attitudes and behaviors including job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions (Dasgupta et al., 2013; Mikkelsen et al., 2015; Raina & Roebuck, 2016). Thus, it can be argued that effective organizational and supervisory communications are predictors of job performance and other employee outcomes. At the same time, it is expected that undesirable communication attributes of supervisors may cause discomfort and uncertainty in subordinates which, in turn, could negatively affect their job performance. Against this background, it is pertinent to examine the impact of supervisors' unhelpful communication attributes on employee outcomes considering the paucity of research in this area. SCA is an important attribute that has implications for employee outcomes (Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Russ, 2013).

The current body of knowledge acknowledges that communication apprehension is an important concept in workplace communication (Russ, 2013). Communication apprehension is conceptualized as an attribute characterized by fear and anxiety while communicating with others (Bartoo & Sias, 2004). McCroskey (1977, p. 192) defined communication apprehension as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated (oral) communication with another person or persons". Thus, communication apprehension can be conceived as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or people: individuals with high communication apprehension find it difficult to communicate, are shy, fearful of communication assignments, and anxious regarding current and anticipated communication encounters. SCA in the workplace setting takes place under four theoretically unique, but not necessarily mutually exclusive contexts, which are interpersonal conversation, presentation/public speaking, formal meetings, and group discussions (Russ, 2013; Sallinen & Kuparinen et al., 1991), where supervisors face difficulties in effectively communicating with their subordinates due to the inherent feelings of fear and anxiety.

Marcel (2019) noted that first language, undergraduate major, gender, completion of a graduate degree, and communication coursework are involved in determining communication apprehension. In Pakistan, English is not the first language; nonetheless, formal meetings, presentations, and group discussions mainly depend on English language

proficiency. Moreover, many supervisors do not have professional qualifications in business administration, and some do not have a graduate degree (tertiary education) and therefore, only business graduates generally study business communication courses and are provided with communication skills training workshops by their employers (Bilal et al., 2021). Additionally, Pakistan is a country of diverse cultures and languages where people speak different local languages. The major languages spoken in Pakistan are Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki, Urdu, and Balochi (Tamim, 2014). Local languages are perceived to be useful as identity carriers in a multilingual and multiethnic country and are most commonly found in intra-ethnic interaction and family chitchat rather than as an official mode of communication (Manan & David, 2014). This implies that interpersonal communication and group discussion at work also become subject to communication apprehension when the native language of a supervisor and subordinate/group members are different, which is a very common phenomenon in Pakistani work settings. Owing to the above-mentioned factors, supervisors as a major source of communication to subordinates (Kurtessis et al., 2017) can bring apprehension while communicating with them in the work context of Pakistan. Thus, this study presents the following hypothesis.

H1: SCA is negatively related to subordinate job performance.

2.2. Mediating Role of Task-Related Uncertainty Between SCA and Subordinate Job Performance

It is plausible that as an undesirable communication attribute in work contexts, SCA negatively affects subordinates' job performance, yet the path by which SCA affects job performance is under-researched in the current literature. Accordingly, there is a need to reveal the essential mechanisms by which SCA affects subordinates' job performance. The UMT perspective holds that uncertainty is generally an outcome of communication encounters between two individuals in social settings (Brashers, 2001). The theory argues that predictability in communication is sought by individuals in various contexts including the workplace context. Literature indicates that supervisory communication practices and competence influence the levels of uncertainty of subordinates, and affect other outcomes as well. For example, Brunetto et al. (2011) analyzed the effects of supervisor-subordinate communication relationships on subordinates' role ambiguity and reported that higher levels of dissatisfaction with communication relationships brought higher role ambiguity. Similarly, Brunetto et al. (2012) showed that the degree of subordinates' ambiguity tends to rise due to unclear supervisory communication. Similarly,

lower levels of supervisory communication are also reported to cause subordinates' frustration (Harvey & Harris, 2010). Conversely, supervisory communication competence improves subordinate communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Mikkelsen et al., 2015; Steele & Plenty, 2015). Based on UMT and the above literature, it is expected that ambiguous or muddled communication from supervisors can lead to task-related uncertainty in subordinates, which is a condition when individuals are unable to clearly understand work standards, role requirements, and performance expectations. This suggests that apprehensive supervisory communication behavior could increase subordinates' task-related uncertainty, which in turn can influence subordinate outcomes.

The negative consequences of uncertainty regarding employees' role requirements and responsibilities are well documented (Beauchamp et al., 2002; Johlke & Iyer, 2013; Kramer et al., 2013). Prior research suggests that employee productivity is negatively affected under conditions where they are unclear about their roles and job responsibilities. For example, in their meta-analysis, Tubre and Collins (2000) found a negative relationship between role ambiguity and job performance. As a condition where employees do not have a clear understanding of their job responsibilities and requirements, task-related uncertainty has the potential to negatively affect employees' job performance. In this way, SCA leading to task-related uncertainty can further lead to a decline in subordinates' job performance, which highlights the mediating mechanism in this relationship. Hence, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H2: *SCA is positively related to subordinates' task-related uncertainty.*

H3: *Task-related uncertainty is negatively related to subordinate job performance.*

H4: *Task-related uncertainty mediates the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance.*

2.3. Moderating Role of Information Seeking Behavior Between Task-Related Uncertainty and Subordinate Job Performance

Prior literature highlights that employees who are engaged in proactive work behaviors achieve positive work outcomes (Crant, 2000; Ellis et al., 2017; Syed et al., 2021). Such behaviors include engaging in proactive work methods, problem-solving techniques, personal initiative, and information-seeking behavior (Bindl & Parker, 2011). The concept of information seeking is linked to proactive work behaviors (Benzinger, 2016). Studies on information-seeking behavior pointed out that this behavior improves

the socialization and learning experience of the situation. Moreover, studies highlighted that by seeking information, employees attempt to attain role clarity to understand the work role requirements that contribute to achieving the work unit's goals. Tan et al. (2016) argued that information seeking is particularly important in learning and building new relationships and employees can get actively involved in information seeking as part of their action plans for higher-order goals.

It is plausible that employees who are engaged in information-seeking behaviors can more effectively manage task-related uncertainty than those who are not engaged in such behaviors. UMT posits that information-seeking tactics help manage uncertainty (Brashers, 2001) and literature suggests that uncertainty regarding work roles, responsibilities, and requirements can be managed if employees engage themselves in information-seeking behaviors (Kramer et al., 2019; Rains & Tukachinsky, 2015). This suggests that information-seeking behavior can lead to positive employee outcomes. Additionally, the literature on information seeking indicates that it positively affects employee performance, but there is limited work on this relationship. For example, Showail et al. (2013) reported a positive relationship between information seeking and the job performance of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia. Other studies found effects of job performance upon outcomes such as learning, socialization, adjustment, and innovative behavior (Benzinger, 2016; Xu et al., 2010; Zhong et al., 2018). Hence, it can be argued that information seeking can positively influence subordinates' job performance.

As discussed above, task-related uncertainty can cause employee job performance to decline. However, task-related uncertainty does not appear to influence job performance independent of other proactive behaviors of employees including information seeking. Based on the above discussion, information seeking is believed to moderate the relationship between task-related uncertainty and employee outcomes. As information-seeking behavior appears to weaken the negative relationship of task-related uncertainty and job performance, thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5: *Information seeking is positively related to subordinate job performance.*

H6: *Information seeking moderates the relationship between task-related uncertainty and job performance such that the negative effect is weakened when subordinates engage in information-seeking behavior and vice versa.*

The conceptual framework of this study is depicted in Figure 1.

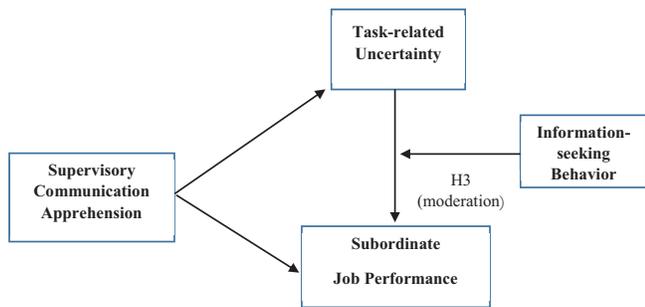


Figure 1: Study Model

3. Data and Methods

This study utilized a sample of employees working in various industries including banks, telecommunications, and development sector organizations. The construct of communication apprehension is not specific to a single organization or sector and the conditions indicate the likelihood of apprehensive supervisors across various organizations and industries as discussed earlier. To approach the potential respondents, company directors and heads of the human resources (HR) departments were contacted. We explicated the purpose of the study and the expected outcome to them through an information sheet that detailed the purpose of the study and potential outcomes along with the study questionnaire. Furthermore, we addressed the privacy issues by maintaining full confidentiality and anonymity of respondents during the data collection. To this end, we assured participants that their names, or other personal, identifying information will not be revealed. Upon getting approval from the senior managers, the questionnaires were distributed subsequently and a sample of 203 subordinates and their respective supervisors was collected.

The sample comprised male and female participants. The age group forming the highest percentage of the sample (40%) ranged from 23 to 27 years. The majority of respondents had an intermediate degree. All variables of the study were measured through standard instruments developed and validated in the prior research. Responses on all variables were obtained on Likert scales. SCA was measured through a scale developed by McCroskey (1977). It is the most widely used operationalization of communication apprehension and is known as the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). Minor modifications were made to adjust the scale to align it to the present study’s context. The word “my supervisor” was used instead of “I” to get subordinate responses regarding SCA. Sample items for each dimension included: “my supervisor gets involved in group discussions” (group discussions), “my supervisor does not express him/herself at meetings” (meetings), “my

supervisor is very tense and nervous in conversations” (conversations), and “my supervisor is relaxed while giving a presentation” (presentations and public speaking). The scale had 24 items. Negative items were reverse coded. The scale by Kramer et al. (2013) was adapted to measure task-related uncertainty experienced by subordinates. Sample items included “I do not know the performance standards in this organization”. This scale had 5 items. A 4-item scale of technical performance by Abramis (1994) was adopted to measure subordinates’ job performance. This scale is widely used to measure job performance (Menges et al., 2017; Peiró et al., 2020). Supervisors were asked to report subordinates’ performance based on their last seven days worked: conversing, handling work responsibilities, making the right decisions, performing without mistakes, and getting things done on time. The information-seeking behavior of subordinates was measured by adopting the scale of Major and Kozlowski (1997). Subordinates were asked how frequently they initiate conversations with their coworkers and supervisor about various topics (job-related, work priorities, job duties, and procedures, etc.) in a typical week. The scale had 8 items. We used structural equation modeling using SmartPLS for data analysis. Factor loadings, reliability, and validity were measured as part of the measurement model. Next, the structural model, mediation, and moderation analyses were run.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model shows the relationship between constructs and indicator variables. Indicators (GD1, GD6, M2, and M6) that had less than 0.6 factor loadings were removed. The measurement model carries composite reliability, which must be 0.7 and above (Ringle et al., 2020). The latent constructs in the measurement model displayed composite reliability of 0.7 and above (Table 1). This model also displays convergent validity which is assessed by the value of average variance extracted (AVE) for which the cut-off criterion value is 0.5 (Ringle et al., 2020). Table 1 shows that the study constructs carry convergent validity. The discriminant validity of the constructs is measured by Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Table 2). The ratio value must be less than or equal to 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). In our study, all the values of HTMT are less than the threshold value of 0.90 (Table 2). Hence, discriminant validity is established.

4.2. Structural Model

To test the direct relationships, path analysis was performed by the structural model (Table 3). H1

Table 1: Factor Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

	λ	Alpha	CR	AVE
Group Discussion		0.734	0.833	0.555
GD2	0.699			
GD3	0.797			
GD4	0.739			
GD5	0.741			
Interpersonal Conversation		0.883	0.909	0.625
IC1	0.699			
IC2	0.758			
IC3	0.765			
IC4	0.786			
IC5	0.863			
IC6	0.859			
Meetings		0.751	0.844	0.577
M1	0.734			
M2	0.810			
M4	0.836			
M5	0.642			
Presentations		0.816	0.866	0.520
P1	0.741			
P2	0.772			
P3	0.813			
P4	0.644			
P5	0.649			
P6	0.693			
Information-seeking behavior		0.902	0.918	0.584
ISB1	0.799			
ISB2	0.755			
ISB3	0.768			
ISB4	0.764			
ISB5	0.777			
ISB6	0.744			
ISB7	0.750			
ISB8	0.756			
Job performance		0.936	0.954	0.840
JP1	0.872			
JP2	0.928			
JP3	0.931			
JP4	0.933			
Task-related uncertainty		0.898	0.925	0.711
TRU1	0.844			
TRU2	0.885			
TRU3	0.822			
TRU4	0.856			
TRU5	0.806			

GD: group discussion, IC: interpersonal conversation, ISB: information-seeking behavior, JP: job performance, M: meetings, P: presentations, TRU: task-related uncertainty.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Using HTMT

	GD	IC	ISB	JP	M	P	TRU
GD							
IC	0.085						
ISB	0.089	0.834					
JP	0.640	0.057	0.128				
M	0.880	0.094	0.068	0.700			
P	0.779	0.068	0.095	0.666	0.854		
TRU	0.588	0.094	0.066	0.584	0.603	0.598	

GD: group discussion, IC: interpersonal conversation, ISB: information-seeking behavior, JP: job performance, M: meetings, P: presentations, TRU: task-related uncertainty.

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing

	Path Coefficients	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
H1: SCA → JP	-0.62	0.035	17.92	0.000
H2: SCA → TRU	0.56	0.039	14.38	0.000
H3: TRU → JP	-0.27	0.054	5.06	0.000
H5: ISB → JP	0.10	0.045	2.40	0.016

Table 4: Mediation Analysis

SCA → JP	Total Effects		Direct Effects		H3	Indirect Effects		
	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	SCA → TRU → JP	Coefficient	t-value	p value
	-0.62	17.92	-0.47	9.32		-0.15	4.56	0.000

proposed that SCA is negatively related to subordinate job performance. The results supported the hypothesis in the form of total effect ($\beta = -0.62, t = 17.92, p < 0.000$). H2 proposed that SCA is positively related to task-related uncertainty experienced by subordinates. The results supported the hypothesis in the form of total effect ($\beta = 0.56, t = 14.38, p < 0.000$). H3 proposed that TRU is negatively associated with subordinate job performance. The results supported the hypothesis in the form of total effect ($\beta = -0.27, t = 5.06, p < 0.000$). H5 proposed that subordinate information-seeking and job performance are positively related. The results supported the hypothesis in the form of total effect ($\beta = 0.10, t = 2.40, p < 0.016$).

4.3. Mediation and Moderation Analyses

Hypothesis 4 proposed that task-related uncertainty mediates the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance. The indirect effect was found to be significant

($\beta = -0.15, t = 4.56, p < 0.000$), implying that TRU explains the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance. Thus, H4 is supported (Table 4).

Hypothesis 6 suggested that the relationship between TRU and JP is moderated by ISB so that the negative relationship will be weaker for employees who are high on ISB. As shown in Table 5, the moderating effect turned out to be significant with a path coefficient of -0.09 , and a significant p -value of 0.036 . This establishes that ISB moderates the relationship between TRU and JP. Thus, the moderating hypothesis is supported (Table 5).

5. Discussion and Implications

The goal of this study was to put to test a model that examined the relationship between SCA and subordinate work performance, as well as the mediating and moderating factors. A negative link between SCA and subordinate work performance was hypothesized, and task-related

Table 5: Moderation Analysis

Relationship	S.D	Original Sample	T-statistics	p values	Moderating Effect
TRU → JP	0.05	-0.27	5.06	0.000	supported
ISB → JP	0.104	0.10	2.40	0.016	
Moderating effect of ISB between TRU & JP	0.04	-0.09	2.09	0.036	

TRU: task-related uncertainty, ISB: information-seeking behavior, JP: job performance, S.D: standard deviation.

ambiguity was investigated as a mediator to explain the association. Simultaneously, the moderating role of information-seeking behavior on the relationship between task-related ambiguity and subordinate work performance was investigated.

We found evidence to support the hypothesis that SCA has a negative connection with subordinate job performance. The validation of our hypothesis adds to the literature by proving SCA as a negative communication characteristic that lowers subordinate productivity. This supports the idea that good supervisory communication has a favorable impact on subordinate outcomes, whereas supervisory communication flaws have a negative impact on subordinate outcomes. Other research that looked at supervisory communication and subordinate outcomes, such as work performance, found similar results (Dasgupta et al., 2013; Johlke & Duhan, 2000). Nonetheless, the current study differs from previous research in that it uses the SCA constructs to predict subordinates’ job performance, which has never been employed as a predictor of job success before. SCA at work (interpersonal interaction, presentation/public speaking, formal meetings, and group discussions) is found to be a poor predictor of subordinate job performance, according to this study’s contribution.

The association between SCA and subordinate work performance was thought to be mediated by task-related ambiguity. The findings of the study backed this up. As a result, the link between the independent variable (SCA) and the outcome was explained by task-related uncertainty (subordinate job performance). The findings support the UMT position, which contends that uncertainty is mostly the result of communication exchanges (Brashers, 2001). The study confirmed that task-related ambiguity is the relationship between SCA and subordinate job performance, taking these theoretical insights a step further. The findings are useful in forecasting the unfavorable effects of SCA on subordinate-experienced uncertainty and the associated drop in work performance. As a result, SCA prohibits subordinates from having a clear knowledge of work standards, position requirements, and performance expectations, causing them to perform poorly.

Subordinate information-seeking behavior was also proposed as a moderator between task-related uncertainty

and job performance. Proactive employee actions, such as requesting information, predict employee outcomes and are favorable to employees who engage in such behaviors (Pham, 2021). Furthermore, UMT contends that humans can manage uncertainty by engaging in the information-seeking activity. The moderating link was hypothesized based on UMT and emerging research on proactive employee behaviors (Kramer et al., 2019; Rains & Tukachinsky, 2015), which was validated in the current study. This shows that engaging in information-seeking actions can mitigate the deleterious impacts of task-related ambiguity on performance. As a result, based on UMT and studies on the effects of such uncertainty, this moderating effect holds in the presence of task-related ambiguity.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study has several theoretical and practical consequences. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings showed that SCA is a significant predictor of subordinate work performance, which is a novel theoretical addition of the current research (Johlke & Duhan, 2000; Michael et al., 2005; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019). Furthermore, there has been a growing demand for research into essential communication constraints relating to subordinate outcomes (Haas & Yorio, 2021; Huang et al., 2018), and our analysis fills that gap. Second, the study’s findings demonstrated that task-related uncertainty modulates the association between SCA and subordinate work performance, according to the UMT perspective. This supports UMT’s hypothesis about the ubiquity of uncertainty and the difficulties it creates in getting favorable communication outcomes (Brashers, 2001).

Third, the relationship between task-related uncertainty and subordinate job performance provides theoretical richness by moderating information-seeking behavior. This research backs up UMT by indicating that the extent to which subordinates participate in information-seeking activity influences how well they can manage uncertainty (Kramer et al., 2019; Rains & Tukachinsky, 2015). Furthermore, the findings revealed that seeking knowledge (a proactive activity) helps employees achieve positive outcomes and

deal with ambiguity in communication circumstances, as suggested by the literature on proactive behaviors (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Meyers, 2020; Wu et al., 2018).

5.2. Managerial Implications

Supervisors must learn to overcome communication apprehension since they must spend a significant amount of time interacting with subordinates, and such communication is only viewed favorably if it is done in an appropriate manner (Kingsley Westerman et al., 2018). According to research, supervisors' communication skills predict low levels of ambiguity among subordinates, assist subordinates in matching their work efforts with supervisors' expectations, and serve as a support mechanism (Bisel et al., 2012; Harvey & Harris, 2010).

According to research, communication anxiety is influenced by first language, undergraduate major, gender, completion of a graduate degree, and communication coursework. As a result, businesses must encourage supervisory and leadership personnel to participate in relevant training and development opportunities to improve their communication skills. Although broad communication-related modules are a typical feature of staff development programs, it is recommended that participants' communication apprehension levels be measured alongside other characteristics. Personalized communication interventions can be devised to improve participants' communication effectiveness after analyzing their communication fear levels.

Furthermore, task-related uncertainty was identified as a major impediment to employee productivity. Organizational leadership should supplement supervisory communication with other tools such as more detailed job descriptions, more rigorous and informative orientation programs, and frequent sessions for employees about their work roles, responsibilities, and expected performance levels as an additional measure to reduce subordinates' task-related uncertainty. Senior leadership teams should also examine organizational culture factors that support open and flexible subordinate-supervisor communication to foster high-quality communication, which could help boost employee productivity, as suggested by Fakhri et al. (2021).

6. Conclusion and Limitations

The goal of the research was to see how SCA affected subordinates' job performance. From Pakistani organizations, we used a sample of subordinates and their respective managers. Our findings supported the existence of a link between SCA and subordinate job performance, as well as the role of task-related uncertainty as a mediating factor in this relationship. Furthermore, the

findings confirmed that information-seeking behavior has a moderating effect on the relationship between task-related ambiguity and subordinate job performance. We presented various practical and theoretical consequences based on these findings.

There are certain limitations to this study that could be addressed in future research. Although the study looked at the link between SCA and subordinate performance, there is a chance that there will be nervous coworkers who will have bad performance repercussions for other members of the company. As a result, it's also crucial to look into the consequences of coworker communication concerns. Furthermore, the interpersonal consequences of SCA must be investigated, meaning that SCA has ramifications for supervisor-subordinate interactions, which should be investigated further. SCA is also associated with subordinate communication anxiety, a lack of trust, and nervousness. As a result, it's important to see how SCA affects subordinate communication fear and other communication-related consequences. Furthermore, relevant national culture variables including uncertainty avoidance can be tested as a moderator in the relationship between task-related uncertainty and employee performance.

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