

WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS, JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF EXTENSION PERSONNEL IN THE NEW VALLEY GOVERNORATE

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at: (1) knowing about the profile of workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment of extension personnel in the New Valley Governorate; (2) identifying and testing the mediating effect of job satisfaction between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment. Data were collected by using a questionnaire during the period from March to May 2013 from 103 personnel representing about 85.1 % of the total number of extension personnel in this Governorate (121 Personnel). Data were described by the arithmetic mean. The results revealed the moderate presence of the workplace characteristics inside the agricultural extension workplace of the New Valley Governorate. Low levels of job satisfaction and commitment were found among the respondents toward their organization. The mediation analysis confirmed that job satisfaction is significantly mediating the relationship between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment. This indicates that workplace characteristics predict job satisfaction, which in turn is an antecedent to organizational commitment.

Keywords: Workplace Characteristics, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Mediation Analysis

1. Introduction and Problem Statement

Agricultural extension has often been conceptualized as an educational process, which promotes learning. It uses the combined findings of biological sciences and the principles of social science to bring about changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices in an out of school setting (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2008: 62). Since agricultural extension services play important roles with formulating and disseminating knowledge and helping farmers to be competent decision-makers, these services can highly contribute to effectiveness of the most projects aiming at achieving agricultural development (Mohammadi, 2006: 10).

Although developing countries that rely on agriculture, continue to invest considerable amounts of resources toward the training of qualified agricultural manpower, the intensification of agricultural research, and the development of favorable agricultural policies, little attention is given to the workplaces of key individuals in the success of the sector - the agricultural personnel responsible for extension work - who oversee the development, dissemination to farmers, and implementation by farmers of major technological innovations and knowledge (Mulinge and Mueller, 1998: 2181). According to Tladi (2004: 34), the success or failure of any extension programs is dependent on effective performance by extension agents.

Thus, organizational initiatives must be directed at understanding employees. Results can be used to help attract new agents, improve recruitment strategies, provide direction for future professional development

and career assistance, and reduce attrition. The ability to recruit and retain long-term, high quality professionals must be a high priority for Extension to remain a viable and successful educational outreach system (Arnold and Place, 2010: 11).

Extension personnel who are saddled with this responsibility need to be satisfied with and committed to their job in order to perform their duties effectively (Banmeke and Ajayi, 2005: 202). Regarding this matter, the neo-classical theories of job redesign focused on both the characteristics of jobs and the characteristics of workers in determining work behavior, but in so doing, did not specifically attend to characteristics of the workplace (Boonzaier, 2001: 30). Organizational commitment and job satisfaction have received significant attention in studies of the workplace (Lok, 2004: 321).

Therefore, according to effects, importance and consequences of these three important issues, this study endeavors to reach the following aims:

1. To explore the status quo of workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment of extension personnel in the New Valley Governorate.
2. To identify and test the mediating effect of job satisfaction between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment.

2. Literature Review

Workplace Characteristics

Human capital management in organizations virtually always requires an in-depth understanding of the work that people do in that organization. While the work activities and the competencies necessary to perform these activities are critical elements in defining a job, no job is performed in a vacuum. Every job is performed in a workplace and thus the characteristics of that workplace are critical elements to be identified in defining and understanding that job (Prien *et al.*, 2009: 11).

Poor workplace conditions result in decreasing employee performance consisted of following organization rules, quality, cooperating with coworkers to solve task problems, concentrating the tasks, creativity, and absenteeism (Kahya, 2007: 515).

Prien *et al.* (2009: 60 - 62) have identified a new, twelve-factor scale as the workplace characteristics profile. This profile has been designed to identify the priorities and the emphases of doing work in this organization. Each of these twelve-factors can be further understood based on the nature of the items that comprise the scales, which could be summarized as follows:

1. **Managing work efficiently.** Emphasis is on the efficient management of work in an increasingly dynamic and complex environment. Effectiveness of work performed is evidenced by the quality and quantity of output, and individuals are expected to adapt and orchestrate their activities on a relatively continuous basis in order to maintain efficiency.
2. **Accommodating to persons with disabilities.** Emphasis is on assisting individuals to overcome limitations and on facilitating individuals' efforts to overcome workplace obstacles.

3. **Communicating with others.** Emphasis is on communicating with others and seeking job-related information to increase both efficiency and effectiveness. Such information may come from a variety of sources—formal or informal contacts—and is generally easily accessible.
4. **Accommodating to persons from different backgrounds.** The emphasis is on adapting to people who do not come from the mainstream, but rather from the evolving heterogeneity of the workplace. Such persons come from different cultures and are different in their appearance, dress, attitudes, speech, and so on, and they often need acceptance and support to be successful in the workplace.
5. **Standardization of work roles and procedures.** Emphasis is on standardization of work roles and procedures. It exemplifies the role standardization in which individuals know what they should do and know what is expected of them, and thus produce a continuity of activities. Individuals can predict accurately what is going to happen and how they are expected to react.
6. **Promoting gender equality.** Emphasis is on providing equal treatment for men and women in the workplace—in job assignments, promotional opportunities, access to training, equality in pay and benefits, and all other important aspects of work.
7. **Standardizing tasks and performance.** Emphasis is on standardizing tasks and standardized performance of these job tasks.
8. **Managing change.** Emphasis is on providing support for employees in understanding the need for change, in coping with change, and in embarking on the many transitions required by changing conditions in the workplace.
9. **Managing work for effectiveness.** Emphasis is on responding effectively to external forces. This approach is characterized by a focus on responding promptly to market changes, including customer wants and needs, other market shifts, competition, changing technology, laws and regulations.
10. **Controlling harassment.** Emphasis is on active discouragement of workplace harassment, intentional or unintentional, harassment based on race, age, gender, physical limitation, or religion.
11. **Promoting specialization.** Emphasis is on developing and using a specialized skill that is regularly used on the job.
12. **Promoting independence of action.** Emphasis is on exercising independence of action. Individuals are expected to perform relatively independently and are held accountable through meeting output expectations and maintaining a high level of expertise.

Job Satisfaction

As job satisfaction is a widely researched and complex phenomenon, it follows that there are numerous definitions of the concept (Lumley *et al.*, 2011: 100). Job satisfaction is the extent to which an employee feels about his or her job (Azash *et al.*, 2012: 2). It could be defined as positive feelings

that individuals have towards their jobs (Chahal *et al.*, 2013: 11). Mudor and Tooksoon (2011: 41) concluded that job satisfaction is a combination of cognitive and affective reactions to the differential perceptions of what an employee wants to receive compared with what he or she actually receives.

According to Rothmann and Coetzer (2002: 29), job satisfaction among employees is an indicator of organizational effectiveness. Most employers realize that the optimal functioning of their organizations depends in part on the level of job satisfaction of employees. Employees' full potential is needed on all levels in organizations, which stresses the importance of their being satisfied. A person with high job satisfaction appears to hold generally positive attitudes, and one who is dissatisfied to hold negative attitudes towards their job (Robbins, 1993: 72). Samad (2006: 2) reported that job dissatisfaction could result in psychological frustration and low productivity. He also reported that job satisfaction plays a very critical role in attracting and retaining of employees' ability in an organization. The lack of job satisfaction results in high absenteeism, high turnover, low performance, and decreased productivity (Koys, 2001: 103). According to Nelson (2006: 19), the frustrated or discouraged employees negatively influence the willingness to do the job.

Weiss *et al.* (1967: 4) separate job satisfaction into internal and external satisfaction. Internal satisfaction consists of all the factors that have direct correlation with job satisfaction as follows:

1. **Ability utilization.** The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities.
2. **Achievement.** The feeling of accomplishment I get from the job.
3. **Activity.** Being able to keep busy all the time.
4. **Advancement.** The chances for advancement on the job.
5. **Compensation.** My pay and the amount of work I do.
6. **Coworkers.** The way my coworkers get along with each others.
7. **Creativity.** The chance to try my own methods of doing the job.
8. **Independence.** The chance to work alone on the job.
9. **Moral values.** Being able to do things that don't go against my conscience.
10. **Social service.** The chance to do things for other people.
11. **Social status.** The chance to be somebody in the community.
12. **Working conditions.** The working conditions.

External satisfaction consists of all the other factors which indirectly correlate with job satisfaction as follows:

1. **Authority.** The chance to tell other people what to do.
2. **Policies and practices.** The way policies are put into practice.
3. **Recognition.** The praise I get for doing a good job.
4. **Responsibility.** The freedom to use my own judgment.
5. **Security.** The way my job provides for steady employment.
6. **Supervision- human relations.** The way my boss handles his men.
7. **Supervision- technical.** The competence of my supervisor in making decisions.
8. **Variety.** The chance to do different things from time to time.

Organizational Commitment

The concept of organizational commitment has attracted considerable interest in an attempt to understand and clarify the intensity and stability of an employee's dedication to the organization (Lumley, 2009: 81). Organizational commitment can be defined as the degree of attachment or loyalty employees feel towards the organization. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are both reflecting a positive evaluation of the job (Udo *et al.*, 1997: 917). Employee commitment refers to the psychological attachment of workers to their workplaces (Allen and Meyer, 1990: 2). Organizational commitment acts as a "psychological bond" to the organization that influences individuals to act in ways that are consistent with the interests of the organization (Porter *et al.*, 1974: 605).

Mowday *et al.* (1982:27) mention three characteristics of organizational commitment: (1) a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organization's goals and values, (2) a willingness to exert a considerable effort for the organization, and (3) a strong intent or desire to remain with the organization. Meyer and Herscovitch (2001: 301) define a committed employee as being one "stays with an organization, attends work regularly, puts in a full day and more, protects corporate assets, and believes in the organizational goals".

Research suggests that low levels of organizational commitment may be dysfunctional to both the organization and the individual, while high levels may have positive effects (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990: 171). Organizational commitment is generally assumed to reduce abandonment behaviours, which include tardiness and turnover. In addition, employees who are committed to their organization may be more willing to participate in 'extra-role' activities, such as being creative or innovative, which frequently guarantee an organization's competitiveness in the market (Ferreira *et al.*, 2010: 4). An organization benefits from its employees' commitment in terms of lower rates of job movement, higher productivity or work quality, or both (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990: 171). Lack of organizational commitment has detrimental effects such as increase in turnover rate and turnover intention; higher absenteeism and tardiness; poorer performance which are affecting organizational efficiency and effectiveness negatively (Lum *et al.*, 1998; Becker *et al.*, 1996).

Meyer and Allen (1991: 61) insist on three distinct components of organizational commitment in order to maintain membership in an organization: Affective commitment (a desire) refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Continuance commitment (a need) refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Finally, normative commitment (an obligation) reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment.

The relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment has been extensively examined. Numerous studies have confirmed that organizational commitment is affected positively by job satisfaction (Decotiis and Summers, 1987; Williams and Anderson, 1991;

Brown and Peterson, 1993; Guleryuz *et al.*, 2008; Lumley *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, Currivan (1999: 513) reported that the workplace structures could be some of the common causes of satisfaction and commitment.

3. Methodology

A variety of scales were employed to collect the data consisting of workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The response format was a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Workplace characteristics were assessed using the twelve-factor scale (five items for each factor) of workplace characteristics profile (Prien *et al.*, 2009). Job satisfaction was indexed using the Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire (Weiss *et al.*, 1967), which consists of 20-items containing two dimensions: internal satisfaction (12 items) and external satisfaction (8 items). The six-items version of the affective, continuance and normative commitment scale (Meyer *et al.*, 1993) was used to measure organizational commitment. The reliability of scales was estimated by Cronbach alpha; reliability coefficients were 0.97 for workplace characteristics, 0.89 for job satisfaction, and 0.82 for organizational commitment.

Questionnaire forms were prepared and distributed among extension personnel in the New Valley Governorate. The process of their completion was followed up and the completed forms were gathered. Data were collected during the period from March to May 2013. The total number of completed forms was 103 representing 85.1 % of the total number of extension personnel in this Governorate (121 Personnel). Data were described by the arithmetic mean, which is appropriate for Likert scale data (Boone and Boone, 2012). To carry out a mediation analysis using causal-steps approach, series of regression analysis (2 simple regressions and 1 multiple regression) were performed by SPSS (version 15), in addition to apply the Sobel test to judge the mediation significance of job satisfaction between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment.

4. Results and Discussion

Workplace Characteristics

Mean scores for the respondents' perceptions towards each of the workplace characteristics are presented in table 1. The total score for the respondents' overall perception towards the presence of the twelve characteristics in their workplace is 152.71 representing 50.9% of the maximum score (300), which indicates moderate presence of these characteristics inside the agricultural extension workplace of the New Valley Governorate. As presented in the same table, scores remained close to a neutral response for most of the twelve characteristics. The respondents agreed most regarding communicating with others in order to obtain job-related information ($M = 15.79$), and standardizing tasks and performance of these job tasks ($M = 15.43$), while they responded least strongly to the management support of exercising independence of action ($M = 10.03$) and to the providing of equal treatment for men and women in the workplace ($M = 10.18$).

Table 1: Means of the respondents' perceptions towards workplace characteristics

No.	Workplace characteristics	Means
1	Managing work efficiently	13.27
2	Accommodating to persons with disabilities	12.12
3	Communicating with others	15.79
4	Accommodating to persons from different backgrounds	12.09
5	Standardization of work roles and procedures	15.36
6	Promoting gender equality	10.18
7	Standardizing tasks and performance	15.43
8	Managing change	11.29
9	Managing work for effectiveness	12.33
10	Controlling harassment	11.25
11	Promoting specialization	13.57
12	Promoting independence of action	10.03
	Overall workplace characteristics	152.71

Source: Questionnaire forms

4.2. Job Satisfaction

Means of the respondents' job satisfaction are shown in table 2. The total score for the respondents' job satisfaction represents 41.92 % of the maximum score (100), which indicates a low job satisfaction among the respondents. The same finding coincides with both internal and external satisfaction, they fall below average levels of job satisfaction subscales. As indicated in the same table, between the two subscales comprising the scale of job satisfaction, external satisfaction holds the items (authority, policies and practices, recognition, responsibility, security, supervision and variety) with the highest satisfaction levels (M = 18.84 which is 47.1% of the maximum score of 40). On the other hand, employees had lowest satisfaction levels for the internal factors (ability utilization, achievement, activity, advancement, compensation, coworkers, creativity, independence, moral values, social service, social status and working conditions) of job satisfaction (M= 23.08 which is 38.46 % of the maximum score of 60).

Table 2: Means of the respondents' job satisfaction

No.	Job satisfaction subscales	Means
1	Internal satisfaction	23.08
2	External satisfaction	18.84
	General satisfaction	41.92

Source: Questionnaire forms

4.3. Organizational Commitment

Table 3 shows means of the respondents' organizational commitment. The organizational commitment score for the current study is 42.54 which is 47.26 % of the maximum score (90) and indicating low

commitment from extension personnel to their organization. As illustrated in the same table, respondents express below average willingness to exert considerable effort for the organization (M= 10.97), and display below average belief in the organization's goals and values (M= 11.68), and have an above average desire to stay with the organization because they have too few options to consider leaving this organization (M= 19.89).

Table 3: Means of the respondents' organizational commitment

No.	Organizational commitment subscales	Means
1	Affective commitment	11.68
2	Continuance commitment	19.89
3	Normative commitment	10.97
Overall Organizational Commitment		42.54

Source: Questionnaire forms

The Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction between Workplace Characteristics and Organizational Commitment

Mediation occurs if the effect of an initial causal variable (X) on an outcome variable (Y) is partly or entirely “transmitted” by a mediating variable (M). A mediated causal model involves a causal sequence; first, X causes or influences M; then, M causes or influences Y. X may have additional direct effects on Y that are not transmitted by M. A mediation hypothesis can be represented by a diagram of a causal model. The term causal is used because the path diagram represents hypotheses about possible causal influence (Warner, 2013: 645).

A mediation analysis was performed in this study using causal-steps approach (Warner, 2013: 651-655; Baron and Kenny, 1986: 1176-1177). The initial causal variable was workplace characteristics; the outcome variable was organizational commitment; and the proposed mediating variable was job satisfaction. This analysis contains three separate regressions (2 simple regressions and 1 multiple regression), table 4 and figure 1 show the results. First, a regression was executed to predict Y (organizational commitment) from X (workplace characteristics). The coefficient from this regression corresponds to path c. This step provides information that can help to evaluate how much controlling for the mediating variable reduces the strength of association between X and Y. The results state that the regression coefficient for the prediction of Y (organizational commitment) from X (workplace characteristics) is $c = .410$; this is statistically significant, $t = 4.606$, $p < .001$. Thus, the overall effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment is statistically significant.

Next, a regression was run to predict the mediating variable (job satisfaction) from the causal variable (workplace characteristics). The results of this regression provide the path coefficient for the path denoted (a), which is $.512$, with $t = 6.826$, $p < .001$.

Finally, a regression was performed to predict the outcome variable (organizational commitment) from both workplace characteristics and job satisfaction. This regression provides estimates of the coefficients for path (b)

and also path c' (the direct or remaining effect of X on Y when the mediating variable has been included in the analysis). The results indicate that path (b) = .593, with $t = 6.738$, $p < .001$; path $c' = .106$, with $t = 1.218$, $p = .226$.

The causal-steps approach suggests that when the path from X to Y has multiple parts or arrows, the overall strength of the association for the entire path is estimated by multiplying the coefficients for each part of the path. Thus, the index of strength of the mediated effect (the effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment, through the mediating variable job satisfaction) is given by the product of the estimates of the path coefficients (ab) = (.512 \times .593) = .304. The strength of the direct or nonmediated path from workplace characteristics to organizational commitment corresponds to c' ; the coefficient for this path is .106. The total effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment corresponds to path c is .410.

The mediation analysis has partitioned the total effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment ($c = .410$) into a direct effect ($c' = .106$) and a mediated effect ($ab = .304$). It appears that mediation through job satisfaction explains a large part of the total effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is also predicted well from workplace characteristics and job satisfaction, with $R^2 = .745$, $F = 37.291$ and $p < .001$.

Table 4: Path coefficients of the mediation analysis

Paths	Coefficients	t	Sig.
<i>a</i>	.512	6.826	.000
<i>b</i>	.593	6.738	.000
<i>c</i>	.410	4.606	.000
<i>c'</i>	.106	1.218	.226

Source: Questionnaire forms

a = regression coefficient for the association between workplace characteristics and job satisfaction.

b = regression coefficient for the association between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (when workplace characteristics is also a predictor of organizational commitment).

c = regression coefficient for the association between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment.

c' = regression coefficient for the association between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment (when job satisfaction is also a predictor of organizational commitment).

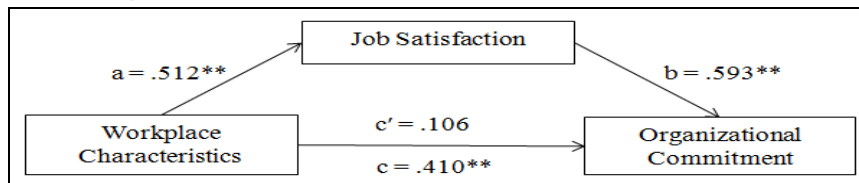


Figure1. Path coefficients of the mediation analysis

** $P < .001$

Going a step further, the study used the Sobel test (Warner, 2013: 657) to judge the mediation significance of job satisfaction between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment. Sobel test performs a statistical test to see if the indirect path from the IV to the DV is statistically significant. It examines the product of the (*a, b*) coefficients for the mediated path. The null hypothesis, in this case, is $H_0: ab = 0$. To set up a (*z*) test statistic, an estimate of the standard error of this (*ab*) product (SE_{ab}) is needed. Sobel provided the following estimate for SE_{ab} .

$$SE_{ab} = \text{SQRT} (b^2 s_a^2 + a^2 s_b^2)$$

Where:

a = regression coefficient for the association between IV and mediator.

s_a = standard error of *a*.

b = regression coefficient for the association between the mediator and the DV (when the IV is also a predictor of the DV).

s_b = standard error of *b*.

Using the standard error from the previous equation as the divisor, the following (*z*) ratio for the Sobel test can be set up to test the null hypothesis $H_0: ab = 0$:

$$z = ab/SE_{ab}$$

The Sobel test was carried out for this study on workplace characteristics, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. For the current data (*a* = .512, *b* = .593, s_a = .075, and s_b = .088), the following equation shows the result.

$$z = \frac{.512 \times .593}{\text{SQRT} (.593^2 \times .075^2 + .512^2 \times .088^2)} = 4.79$$

Because $z = 4.79$, with $p < .001$, the (*ab*) product that represents the effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment mediated by job satisfaction can be judged statistically significant.

By all these criteria (*a*, *b* and *ab* are statistically significant), the indirect effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment through job satisfaction was statistically significant. The direct path from workplace characteristics to organizational commitment (*c'*) is not statistically significant; therefore, the effect of workplace characteristics on organizational commitment is fully mediated by job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The topic of this study has attracted the interest of many researchers. A major challenge faced by any organization is developing and maintaining these three important issues to secure effectiveness, efficiency and reduce employee turnover. This study is among the rare studies that focus on workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment simultaneously in the area of agricultural extension. The findings indicated that the respondents were showing only moderate level of workplace characteristics, and low levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment; this implies that agricultural extension in the New Valley Governorate is in a pressing need for developing strategies to deal with the

demands of those employees who experience depressed workplace characteristics, job satisfaction and commitment.

According to research results, job satisfaction is a mediator between workplace characteristics and organizational commitment. Employees who think that their workplace is effective, efficient, fair and specialized are more likely to derive pleasure from their jobs, which consequently increase their belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment of extension personnel in the New Valley Governorate can be actively increased through changing the variables of workplace characteristics. The resulting predictive model could be regarded as an important tool for planning possible strategies to raise extension employees' satisfaction and commitment.

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خصائص بيئة العمل والرضا الوظيفي والإلتزام التنظيمي للعاملين بالجهاز الإرشادي بمحافظة الوادي الجديد

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يهدف البحث للتعرف على خصائص بيئة العمل والرضا الوظيفي والإلتزام التنظيمي للعاملين بالجهاز الإرشادي بمحافظة الوادي الجديد، بالإضافة إلى إختبار التأثير الوسيط للرضا الوظيفي بين خصائص بيئة العمل والإلتزام التنظيمي. أجريت الدراسة على ١٠٣ مبحوثاً يمثلون ٨٥.١٪ من إجمالي العاملين بالجهاز الإرشادي بمحافظة الوادي الجديد والبالغ عددهم ١٢١ فرداً وقد تم جمع البيانات باستخدام إستمارة الإستبيان خلال الفترة من مارس إلى مايو ٢٠١٣، واستخدم المتوسط الحسابي لعرض النتائج. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن خصائص بيئة العمل توجد بصورة متوسطة داخل العمل الإرشادي الزراعي بمحافظة الوادي الجديد. كما أوضحت النتائج إنخفاض كلاً من مستوى الرضا الوظيفي والإلتزام التنظيمي للمبحوثين. وفيما يتعلق بإختبار التأثير الوسيط للرضا الوظيفي بين خصائص بيئة العمل والإلتزام التنظيمي، تشير نتائج تحليل الوساطة إلى أن الرضا الوظيفي يتوسط معنوياً العلاقة بين خصائص بيئة العمل والإلتزام التنظيمي، أي أن خصائص بيئة العمل تؤدي إلى الرضا الوظيفي، والذي يؤدي بدوره إلى الإلتزام التنظيمي.

الكلمات الدالة: خصائص بيئة العمل، الرضا الوظيفي، الإلتزام التنظيمي، تحليل الوساطة

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