

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: De Clercq, Dirk, Haq, Inam Ul and Azeem, Muhammad Umer (2019) Role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals : mitigating roles of personal resources. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 57(2), pp. 150-173, which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.12178>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

**Role Ambiguity and Perceptions of Unfair Performance Appraisals: Mitigating Roles of
Personal Resources**

Dirk De Clercq

Goodman School of Business
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1
ddeclercq@brocku.ca

Inam Ul Haq

Faculty of Management Sciences
Riphah International University
Lahore, Pakistan
inamulhaq27@gmail.com

Muhammad Umer Azeem

School of Business and Economics
University of Management and Technology
Lahore, Pakistan
umer.azeem@umt.edu.pk

Paper accepted for *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*

Role Ambiguity and Perceptions of Unfair Performance Appraisals: Mitigating Roles of Personal Resources

Abstract

Drawing from conservation of resources theory and attribution theory, this study adds to human resource literature by investigating the relationship between role ambiguity and employees' beliefs that their performance is unfairly evaluated by their organization, as well as the buffering roles of relevant personal resources. In particular, the presence of unclear role descriptions may spur perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, but this process should be mitigated by organization-specific experience and Islamic work values. Data from Pakistani firms offer empirical support for these hypothesized effects. From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that human resource managers who fail to provide clear role descriptions to employees can mitigate accompanying concerns about the presence of unfair performance evaluations, to the extent that they encourage employees to leverage valuable personal resources.

Keywords: role ambiguity, unfairness; organization-specific experience; Islamic work ethic; conservation of resources theory; attribution theory

INTRODUCTION

The frustration that employees experience when they believe they are treated unfairly can have critical negative consequences, both for themselves and their organizations (Bezrukova, Spell, & Perry, 2010; Dbaibo, Harb, & van Meurs, 2010; Ha & Ha, 2015; Rupp, McCance, Spencer, & Sonntag, 2008). For example, these beliefs might undermine employees' psychological well-being (Sulu, Ceylan, & Kaynak, 2010), organizational commitment (Lemons & Jones, 2001), job satisfaction (Mayer, Nishii, Schneider, & Goldstein, 2007), and job performance (Greenberg, 1988) while also increasing their resistance to change (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999) or perceptions of the conflict between their work and family life (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Unfairness perceptions also might be particularly salient in relation to employees' beliefs about how their employer appraises their performance (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011; Kavanagh, Benson, & Brown, 2007). The principal goal of this study is to create a better understanding of why some employees might be more likely than others to develop beliefs about unfair performance appraisals, defined herein as the perception that they are held accountable for issues or problems over which they have limited control (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001).

Different factors may shape employees' beliefs that they are being appraised unfairly, including a lack of compensation parity (Leung, Lin, & Lu, 2014), unfulfilled psychological contracts (Harrington & Lee, 2015), or poor quality relationships with organizational leaders (Reinke, 2003). These factors generally evoke stress, because they constitute negative work circumstances. The focus of this study is on an underexplored source of stress that may inform perceptions of unfair performance appraisal, that is, role ambiguity or a lack of clear information about job roles (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau, 2014).

Such role ambiguity is challenging for employees, because it generates fears about their ability to meet the performance requirements set forth by their organization (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Zhou, Martinez, Ferreira, & Rodrigues, 2016). Previous research identifies various negative outcomes of role ambiguity, such as emotional exhaustion (Singh, Suar, & Leiter, 2012), depression (Schmidt et al., 2014), and reduced work performance (Zhou et al., 2016). However, it has not considered how employees may respond to role ambiguity by blaming their organization for adopting unfair performance appraisals, as means to cope with this stressful situation, or how this process might be mitigated or contained by employees' own valuable personal resources.

To guide theoretical arguments about the effect of role ambiguity on the likelihood that employees develop beliefs and complain about unfair appraisal practices, which may be mitigated by their personal resources, we draw on conservation of resources (COR) and attribution theory. According to COR theory, employees' attitudes and behaviors are guided by their desire to protect and conserve their resource bases (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). A threat of resource loss, due to adverse work conditions, generates significant stress, so people seek to avoid future resource losses (Beham, 2011; Hobfoll, 2001). Notably, because of their fear that they may not be able to fulfill their job duties in the presence of unclear role descriptions, employees may experience significant resource losses in the form of tarnished self-esteem (Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015), and seek to protect themselves by looking for external causes for their anticipated underperformance (Hobfoll, 1989; Mallin & Mayo, 2006). Thus, we theorize that the belief that their organization adopts unfair performance appraisals helps employees who confront role ambiguity in their effort to avoid self-depreciating thoughts (Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Hobfoll, 2001; Turner & Roszell, 1994). This argument is also consistent with

attribution theory, which predicts that exposure to unfavorable work conditions causes employees to attribute anticipated personal shortcomings to their organization, by developing beliefs that their organization treats them unfairly (Bradley, 1978; Schroth & Shah, 2000; Zuckerman, 1979).

Furthermore, COR theory predicts a *buffering* role of employees' personal resources (Hobfoll, 2001), such that the harmful effect of resource losses due to workplace adversity may be countered to the extent that employees have access to valuable personal resources (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenoghe, 2014; Witt & Carlson, 2006). Employees' organization-specific experience, based on the number of years they have worked for the organization, and their religion-based work values (i.e., Islamic work values in our empirical context of Pakistan) may represent personal resources that can mitigate the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals. By investigating these two personal resources, we consider a parsimonious but comprehensive set of understudied factors that might offset the hardships that employees experience in the presence of unclear role descriptions (Kahn et al., 1964; Showail, McClean Parks, & Smith, 2013).

First, organization-specific experience indicates the extent to which employees have access to relevant organizational knowledge and network contacts, based on the number of years they have worked for their organization (Karatape & Karatape, 2010). Longer tenured employees are not always willing to exploit these knowledge advantages—some of them may be “slackers” who prioritize job security and undertake only the minimum amount of work effort needed to avoid getting fired (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012)—but it is reasonable to expect that, all else being equal, these long-term employees understand better how to meet organization-set performance standards, even in the presence of unfavorable work conditions (Ng & Feldman,

2013; Valle, Harris, & Andrews, 2004). Second, Islamic work values reflect a set of moral principles that distinguish right from wrong and encourage hard work, peer collaboration, and high ethical standards (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008). This focus is guided by the important role of Islamic work values among Muslim employees, who regard Islam not solely as a religion but as a guide for how they should act in all realms, including the workplace (Murtaza, Abbas, Raja, Roqus, Khalid, & Mushtaq, 2016).

Contributions

In short, we seek to contribute to human resource research in three main ways. First, we consider an understudied outcome of role ambiguity: employees' perceptions of the presence of unfair performance appraisals (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). To the best of our knowledge, prior research has not considered the possibility that employees attribute their anticipated underperformance, due to unclear role descriptions, to external causes in the form of beliefs about unfair performance appraisals. We theorize that employees who feel threatened by the presence of unclear role descriptions, and thus their inability to meet their job requirements, seek to preserve their self-esteem resources by blaming their organization for not applying fair performance appraisal systems (Hobfoll, 1989; Mayo & Mallin, 2010; Zuckerman, 1979).

Second, we investigate *when* this translation of role ambiguity into perceptions of unfair performance appraisal might be less likely to occur. In particular, employees' access to valuable personal resources (e.g., organization-specific experience and Islamic work ethic) might buffer this harmful effect. Such personal resources help employees who suffer from role ambiguity mitigate the fear that their performance will be evaluated negatively (Zhou et al., 2016), such that the need to blame their organization for adopting unfair performance appraisals diminishes (Hobfoll, 1989; Mayo & Mallin, 2010). By noting the moderating roles of organization-specific

experience and Islamic work ethics, we extend previous examinations of the buffering roles of other personal resources, such as mastery and optimism (Ralston et al., 2010) or a learning orientation (Li & Bagger, 2008), on the negative effects of role ambiguity.

Third, we provide practical insights into how HR managers can immunize employees against the potential negative outcomes of ambiguous role descriptions, in the form of negative feelings about how their firm appraises their performance. They should help employees hone their relevant personal resources. This issue is particularly relevant for organizations that operate in competitive environments that are so volatile or complex that they cannot reasonably offer clear role descriptions for all their employees (Kahn et al., 1964; Sohi, 1996). In turn, we clarify a pertinent organizational challenge: how to prevent information gaps in role descriptions from spilling over to invoke employees' beliefs that their performance is being evaluated unfairly.

Importance of study context

Our study also is informative in that it focuses on an understudied, non-Western context that is relevant for the research objectives. Many countries in Asia, including Pakistan, are marked by high levels of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). People in such cultures tend to feel uncomfortable in uncontrollable, unstructured situations, and they suffer significant stress when they lack access to the information they need to make good decisions about executing job tasks (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The core issue of this study—the usefulness and impact of valuable personal resources for mitigating the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals—thus is particularly salient in our study context, with its high levels of risk aversion and sensitivity to stress. It similarly should have relevance for other countries in the Asia-Pacific region with cultural profiles similar to Pakistan's.

Furthermore, the Islamic work ethic construct is directly relevant in a predominantly Muslim country such as Pakistan. Previous research indicates the instrumental role of religion in the lives of many Muslims, such that it relates intricately to how they behave in the workplace (Ali, 1992; Khan, Mahmood, Akhtar, & Muhmood, 2014). Yet variation among Muslims, even in an Islamic country such as Pakistan, leads to their different exhibitions of Islamic work values (Ali, 2005; Murtaza et al., 2016). In a more general sense, employees' Islamist-based perceptions of performance appraisals also offer useful insights, considering that Islam is the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world, and Muslim countries are major customers of and investors in both Western and non-Western societies (Johnson & Grim, 2013). The increasing global competition and religious diversity in workplaces requires that organizations around the globe, including those that operate in the Asia-Pacific region, must recognize how work values anchored in religion might influence employees' beliefs about the organization (Uddin, 2003).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Studying employees' perceptions of organizational unfairness is pertinent, because such perceptions may lead to negative attitudes, including diminished group attachment (Phillips, Douthitt, & Hyland, 2001) or organizational commitment (Lemons & Jones, 2001), or negative behaviors, such as reduced collaboration with organizational peers (Pfeffer & Langton, 1993) or greater workplace deviance (Scott & Colquitt, 2007). Organizational unfairness—or its positive counterpart, organizational fairness—has been conceptualized broadly, to encompass different underlying dimensions, including distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational fairness. Distributive fairness is outcome oriented and compares inputs with outputs; procedural fairness captures fairness in relation to decision-making rules; interpersonal fairness reflects the respect that employees receive in interpersonal treatment; and informational fairness pertains to

the availability of pertinent information about organizational issues (Colquitt, 2001). We posit that these different dimensions of organizational fairness are not necessarily independent (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001); rather, they might be causally linked. To specify this link, we consider how a specific manifestation of informational unfairness, in the form of unclear information about job roles, may inform a specific manifestation of distributive unfairness, namely, the belief that employees are being held accountable in performance evaluations for issues over which they have limited control.

Employees tend to struggle to execute their job tasks when they sense that they lack critical information about what is expected of them (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Kahn et al., 1964; Tubre & Collins, 2000). Such role ambiguity is stressful, because it undermines employees' anticipated ability to perform adequately (Eatough, Chang, Miloslavic, & Johnson, 2011; Zhou et al., 2016) and accordingly poses a potential threat to their self-esteem or feelings of self-worth (Klein, Fencil-Morse, & Seligman, 1976; Schroth & Shah, 2000). To investigate the effect of employees' role ambiguity on their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, as well as how this negative effect might be mitigated, we draw from COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and attribution theory (Zuckerman, 1979). That is, we argue that anticipated underperformance due to role ambiguity leads to resource losses, in the form of lower self-esteem, such that employees may seek to protect themselves by attributing their predicted underperformance to the presence of unfair performance appraisal systems in their organization. We also turn to COR theory to predict an important buffering role of employees' personal resources for coping with the resource loss that may result from role ambiguity (Abbas et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). As pertinent personal resources, we consider employees' organization-specific experience and Islamic work values, both of which should decrease the uncertainty that

employees experience with regard to how to do their jobs effectively in the presence of unclear role descriptions (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2002; Schmidt et al., 2014).

Our theoretical framework and its underlying hypotheses are in Figure 1. The baseline relationship pertains to the link between employees' role ambiguity and their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, as influenced by the two personal resources. As we detail with our hypotheses, role ambiguity should enhance perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, but this effect may be mitigated at higher levels of the two personal resources.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Role Ambiguity and Perceptions of Unfair Performance Appraisals

We predict a positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals. According to COR theory, employees' feelings about their organizational functioning are driven in important ways by their desire to protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). To the extent that employees encounter adverse work situations that threaten their ability to perform adequately, they seek to protect themselves against negative outcomes that may result from underperformance (Beham, 2011; Hobfoll, 2001). We similarly argue that an important mechanism that connects role ambiguity to employees' enhanced perceptions of unfair performance appraisals is their motivation to conserve their self-esteem resources, by generating explanations for any underperformance that may result from unclear role descriptions (Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Hobfoll, 2001; Mallin & Mayo, 2006). If they believe that it is difficult to meet their performance targets because of uncertainty about what is expected from them, employees might focus on external reasons for the potential failure and blame the organization for its unfair performance appraisal practices (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). In so doing, they limit further resource losses, because they avoid the sense that they are

responsible for possible underperformance, which in turn provides a means to preserve their feelings of self-worth (Hobfoll, 2001; Mayo & Mallin, 2010).

This argument also aligns closely with the logic of attribution theory, according to which people externalize anticipated negative outcomes, to avoid responsibility for personal failures (Bradley, 1978; Schroth & Shah, 2000; Zuckerman, 1979). For example, employees may blame their organization, to explain why they might not fulfill their job duties (Mayo & Mallin, 2010). Similar to COR theory, such self-serving attributions imply a motivation to protect feelings of self-worth (Zuckerman, 1979). Thus, role ambiguity, which is a threat to their effective task performance (Eatough et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2016), should increase the likelihood that employees look for external reasons for anticipated underperformance, namely, by attributing it to the inadequate ways their organization evaluates their performance (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). This process shifts responsibility from the employee to the employer, thereby diminishing any damage to how employees see themselves (Bradley, 1978). Conversely, to the extent that employees believe their job duties are clearly explained, they should feel a lower need to protect their self-esteem by referring to unfair performance appraisal practices by their organization.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals.

Moderating Role of Organization-Specific Experience

This positive relationship may be moderated by organization-specific experience. According to COR theory, the positive relationship between resource-depleting work conditions and negative feelings toward the organization is weaker when employees have access to resources that can help them resolve the associated stress (Hobfoll, 2001; Ralston et al., 2010). Greater organizational experience may enhance employees' ability to deal with information deficiencies that result from role ambiguity, because their longer tenure in the organization

should make them more confident that they can apply their relevant expertise to overcome the deficiencies, reflecting their familiarity with how their organization functions and evaluates their performance (Bradley, 2007; Valle et al., 2004). This confidence then may diminish employees' fear that they will fail to meet performance expectations, even in the presence of unclear job descriptions (Ralston et al., 2010). Such an effect could decrease the value of beliefs about the unfairness of performance appraisals, as mechanisms to conserve self-esteem resources in the presence of role ambiguity (Hobfoll, 2001).

Similarly, employees who have worked for their organization for a longer time may have been exposed to a wider set of work challenges in the past, including the presence of unclear job descriptions, and thus learned ways to resolve these challenges (Karatepe & Karatepe, 2010). In particular, longer tenured employees might draw from specific insights gained from their previous organization-related experiences with adverse work situations (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Liu, Ge, & Peng, 2016), which should increase their ability to cope with those situations, without needing to blame the organization for its unfair appraisal methods. Previous research similarly indicates that organization-specific experience stimulates employees to go beyond their formal job descriptions and find adequate solutions to unfavorable work situations, such that the resulting insights mitigate the associated sense of uncertainty (Ng & Feldman, 2013). Thus, this personal resource also might stimulate employees' ability to find ways to deal with role ambiguity, through discretionary problem-solving efforts, which may reduce their need to express concerns about unfair performance appraisals as a means to conserve their self-esteem (Hobfoll, 2001).

Finally, employees with more organization-specific experience may have a strong *desire* to find ways to address workplace challenges, because these efforts may grant them enjoyable

feelings of personal accomplishment (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2007; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Employees with more organization-specific experience tend to exhibit stronger commitment toward achieving challenging goals (Liu et al., 2016), such that they may be strongly motivated to deal with the challenge of information deficiencies (Karatepe & Karatepe, 2010), and seek effective solutions, leaving them less likely to accuse the organization of unfair performance appraisal practices. Overall then, organization-specific experience should buffer the positive relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals.

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals is moderated by their organization-specific experience, such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of organization-specific experience.

Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethic

The value of unfairness beliefs, as mechanisms to conserve employees' feelings of self-worth in the presence of role ambiguity, also may be lower when employees can rely on Islamic work values. Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), to cope with the challenge of insufficient information about how to do their jobs, employees benefit from the possession of work values that emphasize hard work and dedication (Kahn et al., 1964; Ralston et al., 2010). Islamic ethical values fuel employees' resource reservoirs and enhance their persistence in seeking resolutions to challenging work situations (Ali, 2005), so they also may decrease the likelihood that employees rely on accusations about unfair performance appraisals as a means to maintain their self-esteem in the presence of role ambiguity (Hobfoll, 1989; Mallin & Mayo, 2006). A strong Islamic work ethic also leads employees to acknowledge the value of creativity in their work efforts (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008; Kumar & Che Rose, 2010), such that they may be more likely to identify novel solutions that prevent unclear role descriptions from hindering

their work activities. This propensity should diminish the likelihood that they blame their possible underperformance, due to role ambiguity, on unfair performance evaluation criteria.

Previous research also suggests that employees with strong Islamic work ethics tend to exchange personal experiences and workplace hardships with colleagues (Murtaza et al., 2016). Because they may more readily express concerns about the stress that they experience due to significant role ambiguity (Chen, Lin, & Lien, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2014), colleagues can better understand and help address those concerns. Such strong intrafirm network relationships also create more opportunities for employees to seek others' advice about how to maintain adequate job performance, even in the presence of unclear role descriptions (Ali, 1992). Ultimately, it should become less likely or necessary for employees to accuse the organization of unfair performance appraisal practices to protect their feelings of self-worth (Hobfoll, 2001). That is, the knowledge gained from peer interactions (Murtaza et al., 2016)—such as recognition that others in the organization may face similar levels of role ambiguity and associated feelings of “being in the same boat”—should lower the likelihood that role ambiguity spurs blaming efforts, in the form of complaints about unfair performance appraisals.

Similar to organization-specific experience, employees who can draw from Islamic ethical values also tend to seek solutions to challenging job situations (Yousef, 2000) and feel motivated to find ways to fulfill their job duties, even if they lack sufficient information about how to execute their job tasks (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). We thus expect that a strong Islamic work ethic also mitigates the potency with which role ambiguity spurs negative feelings, manifested in complaints about unfair performance appraisals, by increasing employees' desire to resolve the adverse situation (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). With their strong intrinsic motivation to exploit their skill set to deal with stressful situations (Ali, 2005), employees with a strong

Islamic work ethic likely experience positive feelings of accomplishment when they resolve the situation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contrast, employees who score low on Islamic work ethics may derive limited enjoyment from working hard and tend to be more passive in their efforts to resolve stressful situations (Ali & Al-Owaihah, 2008), which should enhance the likelihood that they complain about unfair performance appraisal practices, as a way to conserve their feelings of self-worth in the presence of significant role ambiguity.

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and their perceptions of unfair performance appraisals is moderated by an Islamic work ethic, such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of the Islamic work ethic.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

This study is part of a larger research project that seeks to understand the specific challenges and opportunities for female employees in Muslim countries, such as Pakistan. Accordingly, we collected data from female employees who work for six Pakistani-based organizations that operate in different areas (e.g., transportation, informational technology, finance). This empirical focus on women is not central to our theorizing, yet it is relevant for our research objective, namely, to gain a better understanding of how employees respond negatively to the challenge of receiving limited guidance about their job responsibilities. Previous studies indicate that the stress encountered by female employees due to role ambiguity may be more intense than for their male counterparts, due to the additional challenge they confront of combining their job and family responsibilities (Babin & Boles, 1998). Although women account for more than half of Pakistan's total population, their representation in the workplace is relatively low (Khan et al., 2014), and the challenges they experience in the face of adverse work conditions may be particularly severe, absent the availability of adequate peer or organizational

resources that otherwise could mitigate the stress suffered by this underrepresented group of employees (Haque & Yamoah, 2014). Accordingly, the question of how their valuable personal resources might mitigate the translation of unclear role descriptions into beliefs about unfair performance appraisals is a topical issue for female employees in Pakistan.

Access to the organizations was facilitated by the personal and professional contacts of one of the co-authors. The data were collected with a paper-and-pencil survey that contained existing measures in English, which is the official language in most professional Pakistani organizations, as well as the official language of instruction in higher education. The survey package included a cover letter that clarified the objective of the study and promised the complete confidentiality of responses, including assurances that the responses would only be accessible to the researchers, no individual-level data would ever be made public, and only aggregate information would be available to people outside the research team. Moreover, we emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, and we asked respondents to answer the questions as honestly as possible. These measures should diminish social desirability or acquiescence biases (Spector, 2006).

Before gathering the data, we ensured that all respondents were Muslim. As we noted previously, research has underscored the instrumental role of religion-based work values in the lives of many Muslims (Ali, 2005; Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008) but also acknowledged the variation among Muslims in the extent to which they embrace Islamic work values (Murtaza et al., 2016). Thus, our focus is appropriate for investigating how Islamic work values might influence the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions about unfair performance appraisals. Of 400 surveys distributed, we received 153 completed responses, resulting in a

response rate of 34%. Among these respondents, the average age was 26 years, 87% had master's degrees, and they had worked for their organization for an average of 3 years.

Measures

The measures all used five-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

Perceptions of unfair performance appraisals. We measured employees' perceptions of unfair performance appraisals with three items drawn from the fairness dimension of Kalshoven et al.'s (2011) multi-dimensional Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) questionnaire. The items assessed employees' beliefs that their employer holds them responsible for issues or problems over which they have limited or no control,¹ such as “My employer holds me responsible for things that are not my fault” and “My employer holds me responsible for work that I have no control over” (Cronbach's alpha = .78).

Role ambiguity. We assessed role ambiguity with five reverse-coded items, also drawn from Kalshoven et al.'s (2011) ELW questionnaire, that capture whether employees' role descriptions are clearly defined. For example, we assessed the following items: “My employer explains what is expected of me and my colleagues” and “My employer clarifies who is responsible for what” (Cronbach's alpha = .72).

Organization-specific experience. Organization-specific experience is the number of years that employees have worked for their current organization; it reflects their organizational tenure (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2007; Karatepe & Karatepe, 2006).

Islamic work ethic. We applied a well-established, 17-item scale, used in previous studies (e.g., Ali, 1992; Murtaza et al., 2016), to measure employees' Islamic work ethic. For example,

¹ The items were worded to refer to employees' perceptions about how they were appraised by their employer in general, in light of our theoretical focus on their beliefs about how they are treated by their organization.

they rated the following statements: “Dedication to work is a virtue,” “Laziness is a vice,” “Good work benefits both one’s self and others,” and “Creative work is a source of happiness and accomplishment” (Cronbach’s alpha = .77).

Control variables. We controlled for two demographic characteristics: employees’ age (in years) and education level (dummy variable, 1 = master’s degree).

To assess the discriminant validity of the focal constructs, we applied a confirmatory factor analysis and compared constrained models, in which the correlations between each pair of constructs were set to equal 1, with their unconstrained counterparts, in which the correlations between constructs were freed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). For all construct pairs, the constrained models showed significantly worse fit ($\Delta\chi^2(1) > 3.84$) than their unconstrained counterparts, in support of discriminant validity.² Further, we performed two tests to check for common method bias. First, Harman’s single-factor test revealed that the first extracted factor explained only 20% of the total variance in the data, which suggests common method bias was not a concern (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Second, a confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the fit of a model in which all items of the three multi-item constructs—perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, role ambiguity, and Islamic work ethic—loaded on a single factor was significantly worse than that of a three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 177.09, p < .01$). This result alleviated concerns about common method bias. In addition, previous studies note that conceptual models that rely on moderating effects are less subject to common method bias, because it is challenging for respondents to anticipate or recognize those effects (Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler, & Martin, 1997; Simons & Peterson, 2000).

RESULTS

² For example, for the pairing of role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals (two constructs that speak to employees’ beliefs about negative aspects of their organization), the chi-square difference was 45.0 (df = 1), so these constructs capture different phenomena.

In Table 1, we provide the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics; in Table 2, we offer the regression results. Model 1 included the control variables. Model 2 added the focal predictor variable of role ambiguity and the two moderator variables, organization-specific experience and Islamic work ethic. Models 3 and 4 added the two interaction terms, role ambiguity \times organization-specific experience and role ambiguity \times Islamic work ethic, respectively. Adding multiple interaction terms separately is appropriate, because the inclusion of multiple interaction terms into a single model might mask the true moderating effects (e.g., Covin, Green, & Slevin, 2006; De Clercq, Bouckennooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014; Zahra & Hayton 2008). For both interaction terms, we applied the well-established practice of mean centering the variables before calculating their product (Aiken & West, 1991).

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

Consistent with our argument in Hypothesis 1 that information deficiencies in role descriptions spur employees to complain about how their performance is evaluated, Model 2 indicates that role ambiguity relates positively to perceptions of unfair performance appraisals ($\beta = .35, p < .05$). Models 3 and 4 also confirm the mitigating effects of organization-specific experience ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$) and Islamic work ethic ($\beta = -.40, p < .05$) on this relationship. That is, the likelihood that role ambiguity escalates into enhanced unfairness perceptions is lower when employees have worked for their organization for a longer time (Hypothesis 2) and hold Islamic work values (Hypothesis 3).

To explain these interaction effects, we plotted the effects of role ambiguity on perceptions of unfair performance appraisals at high versus low levels of the two moderators in Figures 2 and 3, respectively, complemented with a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). The results in Figure 2 reveal that the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of

unfair performance appraisals is positive at low levels of organization-specific experience ($\beta = .41, p < .01$) but not significant at high levels ($\beta = .01, ns$). In Figure 3, the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions about unfair performance appraisals is positive when employees' Islamic work ethic is low ($\beta = .51, p < .01$) but not significant when it is high ($\beta = -.30, ns$).

These results provide further support for Hypotheses 2 and 3.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to extant HR literature by elaborating how unclear role descriptions spur employees to complain about the presence of unfair performance appraisals, as well as how personal resources can function as buffers in this process. The lack of attention to this topic is somewhat surprising, because employees' concerns about their inability to meet performance targets, in the presence of incomplete or vague job explanations, can be countered by their access to relevant resources (Ralston et al., 2010). With a foundation in COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) and attribution theory (Bradley, 1978; Zuckerman, 1979), we investigate how employees' organization-specific experience and Islamic work values act as personal resources that mitigate the translation of role ambiguity into perceptions of unfair performance appraisals. Our research findings offer empirical support for our theoretical arguments. We thus establish an expanded understanding of the negative reactions that might result from unclear job descriptions, as well as how this challenge might be overcome.

The direct positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and complaints about unfair performance appraisals follows previous research on the harmful effect of resource-draining work conditions for the development of negative feelings toward the organization (e.g., Eautough et al., 2011; Ngo, Foley, & Loi, 2005; Slatten, Svensson, & Sander, 2011). The

positive relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals may be explained by employees' desire to preserve their self-esteem resources by blaming any underperformance on the presence of unfair organizational practices (Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015; Hobfoll, 2001). Similarly, role ambiguity, as a significant threat to job performance, may spur employees to search for external reasons for their anticipated shortcomings, such that self-serving attributions assign blame for possible underperformance on the presence of unfair performance appraisal criteria (Schroth & Shah, 2000; Zuckerman, 1979).

The positive relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals is mitigated by employees' organization-specific experience though. This buffering resource reflects the COR argument that the desire to prevent resource losses, including damage to self-esteem in the presence of role ambiguity, can be better contained to the extent that employees can rely on valuable personal resources that diminish the associated adversity (Abbas et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). Their ability to meet performance standards in the presence of role ambiguity improves when employees can rely on organization-specific skills and internal network relationships to overcome the uncertainty (Schmidt et al., 2014). Employees with longer organizational tenure tend to have preferential access to these features, so their need to rely on accusations of unfair performance appraisal practices to conserve their feelings of self-worth decreases (Chao et al., 1994; Valle et al., 2004). These employees also may derive personal joy from finding solutions to adverse work conditions (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and this motivation reduces the likelihood that they feel compelled to blame unfair performance appraisal practices for their poor performance, in their efforts to deal with the ambiguity.

The positive relationship between employees' role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals also is mitigated by their Islamic work ethic. The likelihood that

employees resort to unfairness perceptions in response to unclear role descriptions gets subdued when the associated resource depletion can be compensated for by an Islamic work ethic (Hobfoll, 2001). Employees with a strong Islamic work ethic work hard and likely find appropriate solutions to prevent unclear role descriptions from hindering their ability to meet performance targets (Ali, 2005), which reduces their desire to attribute possible underperformance to unfair performance appraisal practices (Hobfoll, 1989; Mallin & Mayo, 2006; Zuckerman, 1979). Their propensity to gain insights from intensive interactions with organizational peers may mitigate this risk further (Murtaza et al., 2016). Finally, employees with strong Islamic work values experience personal satisfaction from meeting performance requirements in the presence of challenging work situations (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). This positive motivation makes charges of unfair performance appraisal practices less likely.

Notably, our theoretical focus on the buffering role of organization-specific experience and an Islamic work ethic centers around the *incremental* contribution of role ambiguity in spurring perceptions about unfair performance appraisals. We thus offer organizations a deeper understanding of the conditions in which resource depletion due to role ambiguity is less likely to drive employees to complain about unfairness. Empirically, this issue is manifest in the *slope* differences at different levels of personal resources. The interaction plots in Figures 2 and 3, and the corresponding simple slope analysis, indicate that increasing levels of role ambiguity do *not* significantly increase perceptions of unfair performance appraisals among employees with high organization-specific experience or strong Islamic ethical values. Even if employees sense that unclear role descriptions undermine their ability to meet their performance requirements, this belief spurs complaints about unfair appraisals only if they also lack organizational experience or cannot turn to Islamic work ethics. Overall then, this study establishes critical insights into *when*

role ambiguity is likely to enhance the propensity that employees complain about unfair performance appraisals to protect their feelings of self-worth. That is, we extend extant literature by specifying the combined influences of role ambiguity and two critical personal resources (organization-specific experience and an Islamic work ethic) on unfairness perceptions.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this study could be addressed by further research. First, by focusing on the effect of role ambiguity on perceptions of unfair performance appraisal, we conceptualize two dimensions of organizational fairness as part of a causal chain, in which limited information about job roles (informational unfairness) affects dissatisfaction about rewards (distributive unfairness). In so doing, we gain new insights from Kalshoven et al.'s (2011) multi-dimensional ELW questionnaire, relative to previous research on ethical leadership that typically relies on Brown, Trevino, and Harrison's (2005) unidimensional Ethical Leadership Scale, without considering how some of its underlying dimensions may relate causally. However, future studies also could investigate whether the findings hold for more traditional measures of the four organizational unfairness dimensions (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational; cf. Colquitt, 2001), rather than two selected aspects of Kalshoven et al.'s (2011) multi-dimensional ELW questionnaire. Studies also might investigate the complex web of relationships that potentially exist among the four organizational unfairness dimensions. Such investigations might cross-validate our approach, by assessing the linkages of different dimensions across time, using scales from both organizational fairness (Colquitt, 2001) and ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005; Kalshoven et al., 2011) literature.

Second, we investigate how role ambiguity informs perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, with an assumption of causality. It seems unlikely that unfairness perceptions

influence the presence of unclear role descriptions, but longitudinal research designs could nonetheless specify the long-term, causal processes that link role ambiguity with unfairness perceptions, as well as the role of personal resources. In a related limitation, we did not directly measure the theorized causal mechanism that connects role ambiguity with employees' perceptions of unfair performance appraisal, that is, the motivation to protect self-esteem or feelings of self-worth. Even though this mechanism is anchored in the well-established COR (Hobfoll, 1989) and attribution (Zuckerman, 1979) theories, further research could measure it directly.

Third, we also did not directly measure the theorized mechanisms that underpin the moderating effects of organization-specific experience (e.g., access to organizational knowledge, network contacts) and Islamic work values (e.g., dedication, creativity, information exchange with like-minded peers). Additional studies could assess which of these mechanisms are most prevalent. In particular, for the first moderator we used a somewhat crude measure that does not distinguish the different mindsets or motives that may characterize employees who have worked for their organization for a long time. Further research could consider, for example, how the prevalence of intrinsic versus extrinsic motives explains the potency with which organization-specific experience protects employees from the hardships caused by unclear role descriptions (Hom et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Fourth, by considering only two personal resources that mitigate the positive relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals, we have ignored alternative potential buffers and personal factors, such as employees' passion for work (Baum & Locke, 2004), resilience (Youssef & Luthans, 2007), or creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Organizational factors also could determine the extent to which resource depletion due to

role ambiguity fuels complaints of unfairness. For example, person–organization fit (Kristof, 1996), supportive organizational climates that promote creativity (Scott & Bruce, 1994), and trust in management (Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2009) could reduce the likelihood that employees complain about unfair performance appraisal practices in response to their sense of role ambiguity.

Fifth, our sample included female employees only and thus is not representative of the general workforce. However, our theorizing was not gender specific, and we would expect similar results if we included both male and female employees. Furthermore, our focus on female employees aligns with the argument that they may suffer especially from unclear job descriptions, because they already tend to experience significant challenges from the combination of their work and home demands (Babin & Boles, 1998). Thus, addressing how valuable personal resources can mitigate the hardships experienced due to role ambiguity is highly relevant for female employees. Nonetheless, continued studies could compare the relative strength of the moderating effects between female and male employees. Yet another factor that could be relevant to this study context is the gender of the supervisor who is responsible for creating the role ambiguity. In Pakistan’s cultural context, marked by expectations of a dominant role for men (Hofstede, 2001), the imposition of unclear role descriptions might be more acceptable if it comes from male supervisors. That is, the experienced hardship of role ambiguity, and the associated invigorating role of personal resources, may depend on the supervisor’s gender. Further, the mitigating effects of organization-specific experience and Islamic work ethic also may depend on whether employees and supervisors are of the same gender, as could be tested in further research.

Sixth, this study draws on a sample of Pakistan-based organizations, so cultural factors may be relevant. Our theoretical arguments are not specific to this country, but Pakistani culture scores relatively high on uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), implying that employees may be sensitive to the uncertainties that result from insufficient information about their role responsibilities. Accordingly, the buffering effect of personal resource access in mitigating the impact of role ambiguity on beliefs about unfair performance appraisals might be more prominent in our study context than it would be in more risk-prone countries. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate gender effects at the macro-level, such as whether the hardships experienced in the presence of role ambiguity may be lower in cultures that emphasize feminine values such as caring, nurturing, and social support (Hofstede, 2001). More generally, it would be interesting to undertake cross-country comparisons that assess the relative importance of role ambiguity for spurring unfairness perceptions, and the potency of various underlying resources in this process, across different cultural contexts. Such comparisons also might investigate the potential buffering roles of work values inspired by religions other than Islam.

Practical Implications

For HR practitioners, our results reveal how the challenge stemming from unclear role explanations can have significant consequences for how employees feel about their organization, particularly in terms of whether they accuse the organization of being unfair in their performance appraisals. Incomplete information about how to do their jobs creates significant stress for employees, and organizations should seek to diminish the occurrence of this stressor. Some employees also may be hesitant to admit the ambiguities that they experience, to avoid perceptions that they look incompetent or weak (Kahn et al., 1964). Therefore, HR managers would be well-advised to identify and resolve any such confusion proactively. To this end, they

might create detailed descriptions of the means and ends of employees' job requirements, as well as offering training programs to underscore expected performance outcomes and different ways to meet these requirements.

This study also indicates that employees who have worked for their organization for a longer time may be better positioned to deal with the stresses of unclear role descriptions. Exposure to relevant organizational knowledge provides an important means to mitigate the problems of excessive role stress (Karatepe & Karatepe, 2010), in that this personal resource increases employees' ability to find adequate solutions to resolve uncertain role descriptions. Organizations that operate in rapidly changing environments may not be able to provide detailed role descriptions (Sohi, 1996), such that they can benefit from relying on longer-tenured employees to help avoid creating an atmosphere in which performance appraisal practices function as excuses for possible underperformance. At the same time, HR managers should be aware that recent hires might be particularly sensitive to the hardships of unclear role descriptions. Socialization programs could help newcomers deal more effectively with concerns about how to meet their performance targets in such situations.

Moreover, HR managers should recognize that the likelihood that role ambiguity escalates into complaints about unfair performance evaluation practices is diminished among employees with strong Islamic work values. Employees who score high on the Islamic work ethic tend to be hard working and strongly involved in information sharing with like-minded peers (Murtaza et al., 2016). Therefore, they may be better able to meet performance requirements, even in the presence of unclear job descriptions, and they also derive personal joy from this process (Yousef, 2000), such that they are less likely to blame their organization for adopting unfair performance appraisal practices as a means to conserve feelings of self-worth in

the presence of role ambiguity. Thus HR managers should assess and leverage the personal joy that employees may derive from actively supporting their colleagues who encounter challenging role situations. We do not mean to suggest that organizations should actively prioritize religion-based work values, a practice that is illegal in many countries, nor should our findings be taken as evidence that people who score low on religion-based work values cannot defend themselves against the negative outcomes of role ambiguity. Instead, from a more general perspective, our study indicates that enhanced information sharing and feelings of support among employees who hold valuable work values can help them cope better with the stress that results from unclear role descriptions. When they engage in high-quality interactions with organizational peers for example, employees perceive less uncertainty about how to do their jobs, even in the presence of role ambiguity, so their inclination to complain about unfair treatment by their employer as a means to preserve self-esteem may diminish.

Conclusion

Drawing from COR theory and attribution theory, we contribute to research on role ambiguity by investigating an unexplored outcome, namely, the likelihood to complain about unfair performance appraisal practices, as well as the mitigating role of personal resources. The results indicate that the presence of unclear role descriptions enhances accusations of unfairness, but this relationship is mitigated when employees can draw on their organization-specific experience and Islamic ethical values. These personal resources immunize employees to the need to blame their possible underperformance, due to role ambiguity, on the presence of unfair performance evaluation practices. We hope then that this study can serve as a catalyst for further investigations of how organizations can mitigate the risk that unclear role expectations escalate into negative reactions, in the form of complaints about how employees are appraised.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, M., Raja, U., Darr, W., & Bouckennooghe, D. (2014). Combined effects of perceived politics and psychological capital on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and performance. *Journal of Management, 40*, 1813–1830.
- Aiken, L.S., & West, S.G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ali, A. (1992). The Islamic work ethic in Arabia. *Journal of Psychology, 126*, 507–519.
- Ali, A. (2005). *Islamic perspective on management and organization*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Ali, A., & Al-Owaihian, A. (2008). Islamic work ethic: A critical review. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal, 15*, 5–19.
- Anderson, J.C., & Gerbing, D.W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach.. *Psychology Bulletin, 1033*, 411–423.
- Babin, B.J., & Boles, J.S. (1998). Employee behavior in a service environment: A model and test of potential differences between men and women. *Journal of Marketing, 62*, 77–91.
- Baum, J.R., & Locke, E.A. (2004). The relationship of entrepreneurial traits, skill, and motivation to subsequent venture growth. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*, 587–598.
- Beauchamp, M.B., Bray, S.R., Eys, M.A., & Carron, A.V. (2002). Role ambiguity, role efficacy, and role performance: Multidimensional and mediational relationships within interdependent sport teams. *Group Dynamic Theory, Research and Practice, 6*, 229–242.
- Beham, B. (2011). Work-family conflict and organizational citizenship behaviour: Empirical evidence from Spanish employees. *Community, Work & Family, 14*, 63–80.
- Bezrukova, K., Spell, C.S., & Perry, J. (2010). Violent splits or healthy divides? Coping with injustice through faultlines, *Personnel Psychology, 63*, 719–751.
- Boyar, S.L., Maertz, C.P., Pearson, A.W., & Keough, S. (2003). Work-family conflict: A model of linkages between work and family domain variables and turnover intentions. *Journal of Managerial Issues, 15*, 175–190.
- Bradley, G.W. (1978). Self-serving biases in the attribution process: A reexamination of the fact or fiction questions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36*, 56–71.
- Bradley, G. (2007). Job tenure as a moderator of stressor-strain relations: A comparison of experienced and new-start teachers. *Work and Stress, 21*, 48–64.
- Brockner, J., Siegel, P.A., Daly, J.P., Tyler, T., & Martin, C. (1997). When trust matters: The moderating effect of outcome favorability. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 42*, 558–583.
- Brown, M.E., Treviño, L.K., & Harrison, D.A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 97*, 117–134.
- Chao, G., O'Leary-Kelly A.L., Wolf, S., Klein, H.J., & Gardner, P.O. (1994). Organizational socialization: Its content and consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology 79*, 730–743.
- Chen, M.-F., Lin, C.-P., & Lien, G.-Y. (2011). Modelling job stress as a mediating role in predicting turnover intention. *Service Industries Journal, 31*, 1327–1345.
- Colquitt, J.A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 386-400.
- Colquitt, J.A., Conlon, D.E., Wesson, M.J., Porter, C.O.L.H., & Ng, K.Y (2001). Justice at the millennium: a meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 425-445.

- Covin, J.G., Green, K.M., & Slevin, D.P. (2006). Strategic process effects on the entrepreneurial orientation-sales growth rate relationship. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* 30, 57–81.
- Dbaiho, D., Harb, C., & van Meurs, N. (2010). Values and justice as predictors of perceived stress in Lebanese organisational settings, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 59, 701–720.
- De Clercq, D., & Belausteguitia, I. (2007). Organizational commitment in Mexican small and medium-sized firms: The role of work status, organizational climate, and entrepreneurial orientation. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 45, 467–490.
- De Clercq, D., Bouckenooghe, D., Raja, U., & Matsyborska, G. (2014). Servant leadership and work engagement: The contingency effects of leader-follower social capital. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 25, 183–212.
- Dudenhöffer, S., & Dormann, C. (2015). Customer-related social stressors: Meaning and consequences across service jobs. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 14, 165–181.
- Eatough, E. M., Chang, C. H., Miloslavic, S.A., & Johnson, R. E. (2011). Relationships of role stressors with organizational citizenship behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96, 619–632.
- Folger, R., & R. Cropanzano (1998). *Organizational justice and human resource management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Folger, R., & Cropanzano, R. (2001). Fairness theory: Justice as accountability. In J. Greenberg & R. Cropanzano (Eds.), *Advances in organizational justice* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–55). New York: Information Age Publishers.
- Folger, R., & Skarlicki, D.P. (1999). Unfairness and resistance to change: hardship as mistreatment, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 35–50.
- Greenberg, J. (1988). Equity and workplace status: A field experiment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73, 606–616.
- Ha, J.-P., & Ha, J. (2015). Organizational justice-affective commitment relationship in a team sport setting: The moderating effect of group cohesion. *Journal of Management and Organization*, 21, 107–124.
- Haque, A.U., & Yamoah, F. (2014). Gender employment longevity: IT staff response to organizational support in Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 4, 324–347.
- Harrington, J.R., & Lee, J.H. (2015). What drives perceived fairness of performance appraisal? Exploring the effects of psychological contract fulfillment on employees' perceived fairness of performance appraisal in U.S. federal agencies. *Public Personnel Management*, 44, 214–238.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (1989). Conservation of resources. A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44, 513–524.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resource theory. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 50, 337–369.
- Hobfoll, S.E., & Shirom, A. (2000). Conservation of resources theory: Applications to stress and management in the workplace. In R.T. Golembiewski (Ed.), *Handbook of organization behavior* (2nd ed., pp. 57–81). New York: Dekker.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: *Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*, 2d ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Hofstede, G.H., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hom, P.W., Mitchell, T.R., Lee, T.W., & Griffeth, R.W. (2012). Reviewing employee turnover: Focusing on proximal withdrawal states and an expanded criterion. *Psychological Bulletin*, *138*, 831–858.
- Johnson, T. M., & Grim, B. J. (2013). *Global religious populations 1910–2010. The World's religions in figures: An introduction to international religious demography*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Judge, T.A., & Colquitt, J.A. (2004). Organizational justice and stress: the mediating role of work-family conflict, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *89*, 395–404.
- Kahn, R.L., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R., Snoek, J.D., & Rosenthal, R.A. (1964), *Organizational stress*. New York: Wiley.
- Kalshoven, K., Den Hartog, D.N., & De Hoogh, A.H.B. (2011). Ethical leadership at work questionnaire (ELW): Development and validation of a multidimensional measure. *Leadership Quarterly*, *22*, 51–69.
- Karatepe, O.M., & Karatepe, T. (2010). Role stress, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions: Does organizational tenure in hotels matter? *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, *9*, 1–16.
- Kavanagh, P., Benson, J., & Brown, M. (2007). Understanding performance appraisal fairness. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, *45*, 132–150.
- Khan, M., Mahmood, H.Z., Akhtar, S., & Muhmood, K. (2014). Understanding the employment situation of women: A district level analysis. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, *2*, 167–175.
- Klein, D.C., Fencil-Morse, E., & Seligman, M.E. (1976). Learned helplessness, depression, and the attribution of failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *33*, 508–516.
- Kristof, A.L. (2002). Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology*, *49*, 1–49.
- Kumar, N., & Che Rose, R. (2010). Examining the link between Islamic work ethic and innovation capability. *Journal of Management and Development*, *29*(1), 79–93.
- Lemons, M.A., & Jones, C.A. (2001). Procedural justice in promotion decisions: Using perceptions of fairness to build employee commitment. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *16*, 268–280.
- Leung, K., Lin, X., & Lu, L. (2014). Compensation disparity between locals and expatriates in China: a multilevel analysis of the influence of norms. *Management International Review*, *54*, 107–128.
- Li, A., & Bagger, J. (2008). Role ambiguity and self-efficacy: The moderating effects of goal orientation and procedural justice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *73*, 368–375.
- Liu, Z., Ge, L., & Peng, W. (2016). How organizational tenure affects innovative behavior? The role of culture difference and status determinants. *Nankai Business Review*, *7*, 99–126.
- Mallin, M.L., & Mayo, M. (2006). Why did I lose? A conservation of resources view of salesperson failure attributions. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *26*, 345–357.
- Mathieu, J., & Zajac, D. (1990). A review and meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organisational commitment. *Psychological Bulletin*, *108*, 171–194.

- Mayer, D., Nishii, L., Schneider, B., & Goldstein, H. (2007). The precursors and products of justice climates: Group leader antecedents and employee attitudinal consequences. *Personnel Psychology, 60*, 929–964.
- Mayo, M., & Mallin, M.L. (2010). The impact of sales failure on attributions made by “resource-challenged” and “resource-secure” salespeople. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 18*, 233–247.
- Michaelis, B., Stegmaier, R., & Sonntag, K. (2009). Affective commitment to change and innovation implementation behavior: The role of charismatic leadership and employees’ trust in top management. *Journal of Change Management, 9*, 399–417.
- Murtaza, G., Abbas, M., Raja, U., Roques, O., Khalid, A., & Mushtaq, R. (2016). Impact of Islamic work ethics on organizational citizenship behaviors and knowledge-sharing behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics, 133*, 325–333.
- Ng, T.W., & Feldman, D.C. (2013). A meta-analysis of the relationships of age and tenure with innovation-related behaviour. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 86*, 585–616.
- Ngo, H., Foley, S., & Loi, R. (2005). Work role stressors and turnover intentions: a study of professional clergy in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 16*, 2133–2146.
- Pfeffer, J., & Langton, N. (1993). The effect of wage dispersion on satisfaction, productivity, and working collaboratively: Evidence from college and university faculty. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 38*, 382–407.
- Phillips, J. M., Douthitt, E. A., & Hyland, M. M. (2001). The role of justice in team member satisfaction with the leader and attachment to the team. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 316–325.
- Podsakoff, P.M., & Organ, D.W. (1986). Self-reports in organization research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management, 12*, 532–544.
- Ralston, D.A., Lee, C.H., Perrewé, P.L., Van Deusen, C., Vollmer, G.R., et al. (2010). A multi-society examination of the impact of psychological resources on stressor-strain relationships. *Journal of International Business Studies, 41*, 652–670.
- Reinke, S.J. (2003). Does the form really matter? Leadership, trust, and acceptance of the performance appraisal process. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 23*, 23–37.
- Rizzo, J.R., House, R.J., & Lirtzman, S.I. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 15*, 150–163.
- Rupp, D.E., McCance, A.S., Spencer, S., & Sonntag, K. (2008). Customer (in)justice and emotional labor: the role of perspective taking, anger, and emotional regulation. *Journal of Management, 34*, 903–924.
- Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78.
- Schmidt, S., Roesler, U., Kusserow, T., & Rau, R. (2014). Uncertainty in the workplace: Examining role ambiguity and role conflict, and their link to depression—a meta-analysis. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 23*, 91–106.
- Schroth, H.A., & Shah, P.P. (2000). Procedures: Do we really want to know them? An examination of the effects of procedural justice on self-esteem. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*, 462–471.

- Scott, B.A., & Colquitt, J.A. (2007). Are organizational justice effects bounded by individual differences? An examination of equity sensitivity, exchange ideology, and the Big Five. *Group & Organization Management*, 32, 290–325.
- Scott, S.G., & Bruce, R.A. (1994). Determinants of innovative behavior: A path model of individual innovation in the workplace. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37, 580–607.
- Showail, S.J., McClean Parks, J., & Smith, F.L. (2013). Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia: a field study of role ambiguity, identification, information-seeking, organizational support and performance. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24, 3957–3979.
- Simons, T., & Peterson, R.S. (2000). Task conflict and relationship conflict in top management teams: The pivotal role of intragroup trust. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83, 102–111.
- Singh, P., Suar, D., & Leiter, M.P. (2012). Antecedents, work-related consequences, and buffers of job burnout among Indian software developers. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 19, 83–104.
- Slatten, T., Svensson, G., & Sander, S. (2011). Service quality and turnover intentions as perceived by employees: Antecedents and consequences. *Personnel Review*, 40, 205–221.
- Sohi, R.S. (1996). The effects of environmental dynamism and heterogeneity on sales people's role perceptions, performance and job satisfaction. *European Journal of Marketing*, 30, 49–167.
- Spector, P.E. (2006). Method variance in organizational research: Truth or urban legend? *Organizational Research Methods*, 9, 221–232.
- Sulu, S., Ceylan, A., & Kaynak, R. (2010). Work alienation as a mediator of the relationship between organizational injustice and organizational commitment: implications for healthcare professionals. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 5, 27–38.
- Tierney, P., & Farmer, S.M. (2002). Creative self-efficacy: Potential antecedents and relationship to creative performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 1137–1148.
- Tubre, T.C., & Collins, J.M. (1985). Jackson and Schuler (1985) revisited: A meta-analysis of the relationships between role ambiguity, role conflict, and job performance. *Journal of Management*, 26, 155–169.
- Turner, R.J., & Roszell, P. (1994). Psychosocial resources and the stress process. In W.R. Avison and I.H. Gotlib (eds.). *Stress and mental health: Contemporary issues and prospects for the future*. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 179–210.
- Uddin, S. J. (2003). Understanding the framework of business in Islam in an era of globalization: A review. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 12(1), 23–32.
- Valle, M., Harris, K. and Andrews, M.C. (2004). An examination of tenure in negative organizational environments. *Journal of Management Research*, 4, 113–119.
- Witt, L.A., & Carlson, D.S. (2006). The work-family interface and job performance: Moderating effects of conscientiousness and perceived organizational support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 11, 343–357
- Yousef, D. A. (2000). Organizational commitment and job satisfaction as predictors of attitudes toward organizational change in a non-western setting. *Human Relations*, 53, 513–537.
- Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resiliency. *Journal of Management*, 33, 774–800.
- Zahra, S., & Hayton, J.C. (2008). The effect of international venturing on firm performance: The moderating influence of absorptive capacity. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 23, 195–220.

Zhou, Q.; Martinez, L.F., Ferreira, A.I., & Rodrigues, P. (2016). Supervisor support, role ambiguity and productivity associated with presenteeism: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*, 3380–3387.

Zuckerman, M. (1979). Attribution of success and failure revisited: or The motivational bias is alive and well in attribution theory. *Journal of Personality*, *47*, 245–287.

Figure 1: Conceptual model

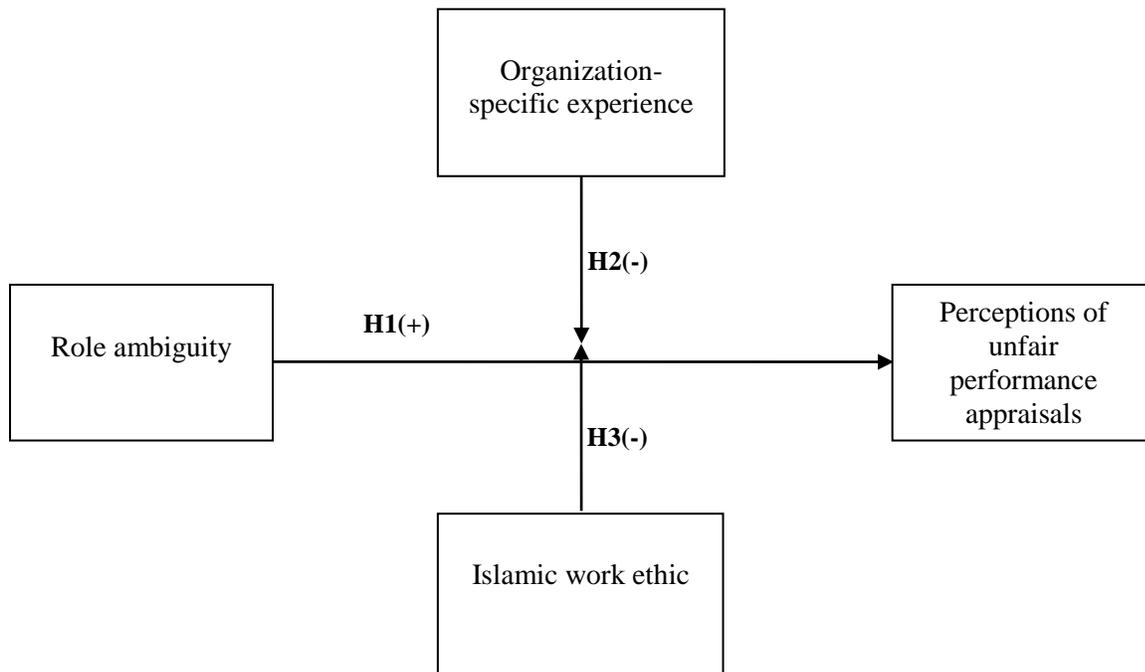


Figure 2: Moderating effect of organization-specific experience on the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals

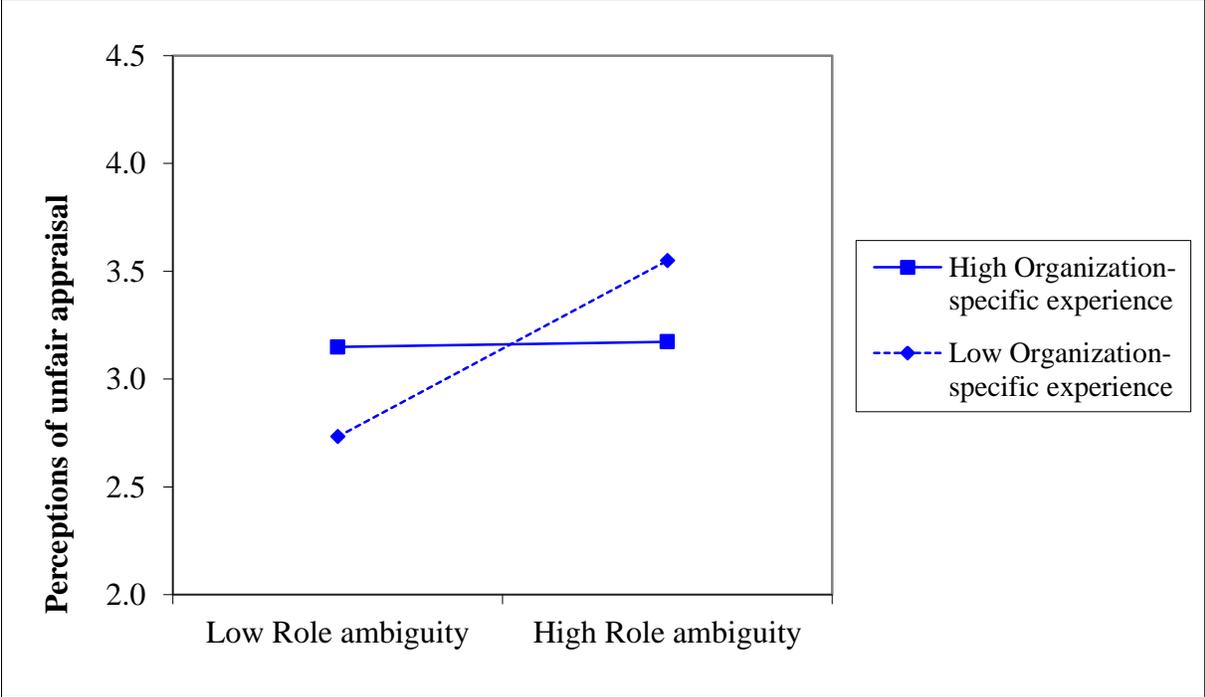


Figure 3: Moderating effect of Islamic work ethic on the relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair performance appraisals

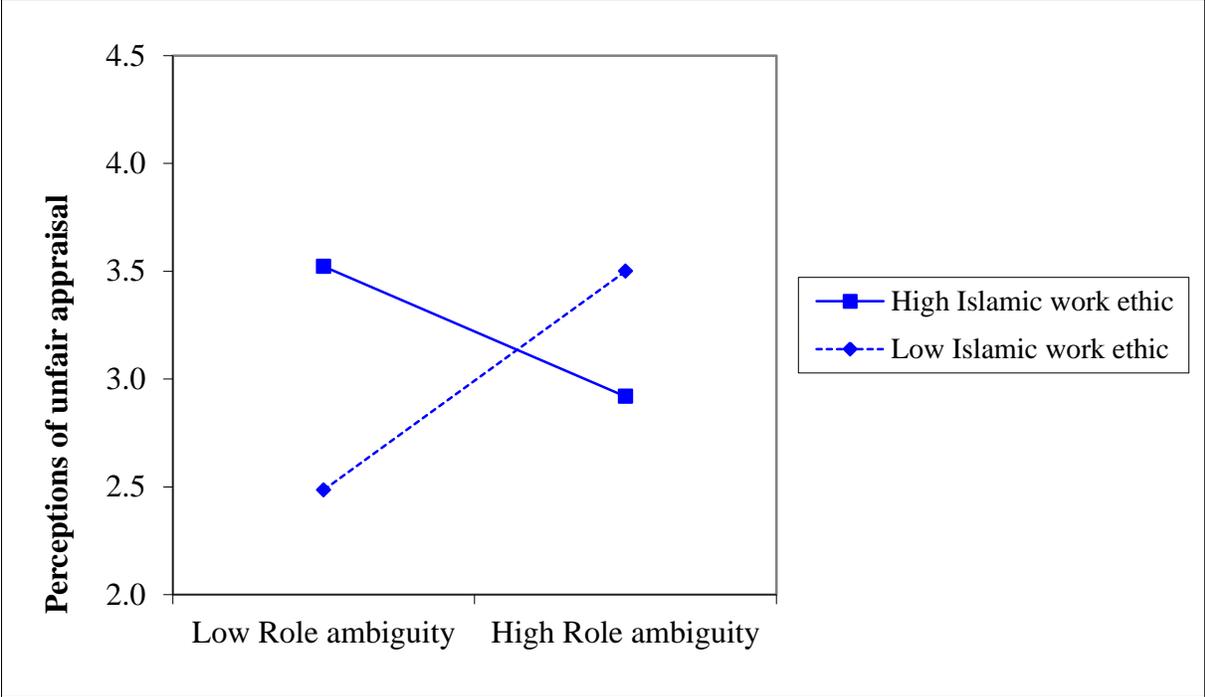


Table 1. Correlation table and descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceptions of unfair performance appraisals	3.16	.99					
2. Role ambiguity	1.99	.61	.18*				
3. Organization-specific experience	3.01	1.88	.15	-.18*			
4. Islamic work ethic	3.77	.45	-.12	-.42**	-.05		
5. Age	26.33	2.52	.19*	-.13	.81**	-.04	
6. Education	.87	.34	-.04	.10	.05	.05	.08

Notes: N = 153.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 2. Regression results (dependent variable: perceptions of unfair performance appraisals)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.07*	0.07	0.06	0.08
Education	-0.15	-0.22	-0.23	-0.22
H ₁ : Role ambiguity		0.35*	0.21	0.10
Organization-specific experience		0.03	0.01	0.02
Islamic work ethic		-0.03	0.05	0.11
H ₂ : Role ambiguity × Organization-specific experience			-0.20*	
H ₃ : Role ambiguity × Islamic work ethic				-0.40*
	R ²	.04	.08	.12
	R ² change		.04 ⁺	.04*

Notes: N = 153.

* $p < .05$; ⁺ $p < .10$.