

The Effect of Mortality Salience on Perceived Organizational Support

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ABSTRACT

Terror Management Theory is based on anxiety buffer and mortality salience hypothesis. According to the theory salience of mortality raises the anxiety of the individual. Individual raises his/her self-esteem or validates his/her cultural worldview as a buffer against this anxiety. This study was conducted to assess the effect of mortality salience on perceived organizational support scores of employees. Participants were 44 employees from communication sector. On the basis of terror management theory hypotheses, it was expected that employees would show increased scores in perceived organizational support after mortality salience. The results of this study showed that the salience of mortality did not effect perceived organizational support scores of employees. In other words, the terror management theory hypotheses are not supported. The findings and the implications for terror management theory are discussed.

Keywords: mortality salience, terror management theory, death, perceived organizational support

INTRODUCTION

Individuals spend a large part of their lives at workplace. While working gives meaning to their lives, healthy relationship between employees and the organization are good for both parties. If the needs of both employees and organization are satisfied, it will result in favorable consequences for both sides. When individuals think about their death, this affects their socially significant behaviors; they want to have positive self-images and evaluate other people negatively who do not have the same cultural worldviews as they have. These all come from protection of deeply rooted anxiety (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). In this present study, the effect of mortality salience on perceived organizational support is tested. It is hypothesized that participants would have increased scores in perceived organizational support after mortality salience.

Terror Management Theory and Research

The roots of terror management theory is based on the work of Ernest Becker who has many publications on the role of self-esteem and culture in providing a sense of meaning, value and security in a threatening world. According to the terror management theory, the whole anxiety was obtained from the fear of the absolute annihilation. People have a need for self-preservation and therefore if anything threatens one's existence, it causes intense anxiety. In general, anxiety is good for people since it leads them to go away from the threatening situation. The capability of people to think about the possible future, particularly traumatic and tragic events, is a possible source of anxiety. The difference between human and animal is not only that human are social but they are also cultural (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991).

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The protection against the most basic of all human fears and death-related anxiety is provided by a dual-component cultural anxiety buffer consisting of cultural worldview and self-esteem. Cultural worldview provides individual meaningful, exact, and durable concept of reality. Self-esteem is acquired when individual believes in the absolute validity of one’s cultural worldview. These two psychological systems protect an individual against anxiety (Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, Rosenblatt, Burling, Lyon, Simon, & Pinel, 1992; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999; Schimel, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Waxmonsky, & Arndt, 1999). Empirical evidence regarding the terror management theory was ensured by two main hypotheses (Harmon-Jones, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & McGregor, 1997);

- 1- *Anxiety-Buffer Hypotheses*: If a psychological structure modifies anxiety, enriching that structure should lessen anxiety.
- 2- *Mortality Salience Hypotheses*: When mortality is reminded, it changes the response of the individual to other people and things. When the worldview of the individual is supported, the reaction is favorable; otherwise unfavorable.

Many researchers conducted different experiments to test hypotheses derived from terror management theory in different aspects. Some of the studied variables are mentioned below; religious beliefs (Aksut-Cicek, 2008; Fergus & Valentiner, 2012; Rothschild, Abdollahi, & Pyszczynski, 2009; Vail, Rothschild, Weise, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2010); ageism (Boudjemadi & Gana, 2012; Bozo, Tunca, & Simsek, 2009; Martens, Goldenberg, & Greenberg, 2005; Maxfield, Pyszczynski, Kluck, Cox, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2007); cultural considerations, values, and worldviews (Johnstone, 2012; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989); voting intentions, political attitudes and ideology (Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013; Castano, Leidner, Bonacossa, Nikkah, Perrulli, Spencer, & Humphrey, 2011; Kosloff, Greenberg, Weise, & Solomon, 2010); creativity (Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Schimel, 1999); television (Taylor, 2012); organizational culture (Jonas, Kauffeld, Sullivan, & Fritsche, 2011); charitable behavior (Jonas, Sullivan, & Greenberg, 2013); symbolic self (Wisman, 2006); attachment style (Mikulincer & Florian, 2000); evaluations of leaders (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004); 9/11 event (Kosloff, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, Gershuny, Routledge, & Pyszczynski, 2006); human body (Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000); social judgment (Jonas, Martens, Kayser, Fritsche, Sullivan, & Greenberg, 2008); influence of norms (Jonas & Fritsche, 2012); consumption and consumer behavior (Maheswaran & Agrawal, 2004); social identification (Castano & Dechesne, 2005); abstract figures (Renkema, Stapel, & van Yperen, 2009); stereotyping (Renkema, Stapel, Maringer, & van Yperen, 2008; Schimel, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Waxmonsky, & Arndt, 1999; Stapel & Marx, 2007); close relationships (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002; Mieja, Kalaska, & Adamczyk, 2006); sports (Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt, & Schimel, 2000); self-esteem (Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000; Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & McGregor, 1997); intergroup violence (Hirschberger, Pyszczynski, & Ein-Dor, 2009); aggression (McGregor, Lieberman, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, Simon, & Pyszczynski, 1998); immigrants (Weise, Arciszewski, Verliac, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2012); meaning of life (Simon, Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1998; Vess, Routledge, Landau, & Arndt, 2009); driving (Ben-Ari, Florian, & Mikulincer, 1999); health (Goldenberg & Arndt, 2008); identity (Wojtkowiak & Rutjens, 2011); motivation (Fritsche, Jonas, & Fankhanel, 2008; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997); prosocial attitudes and behavior (Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, & Almakias, 2008); death thought accessibility (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999; Trafimow & Hughes, 2012), and military service (Pyszczynski, Abdollahi, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, & Weise, 2006).

Organizational Support Theory and Research

According to organizational support theory, approving treatment by supervisors heighten employees' perceptions of the organization that it values and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). When employees feel that the organization is as their homes, they feel secure and attached to it. Conversely, employees are usually concerned about the organizations commitment to them. As a result of being valued by the organization, employees can have advantages as respect, approval, and promotion (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Employees have beliefs about how the organization values their work and cares about their well-being, this is perceived organizational support and it minifies absenteeism. If the employee has significant exchange ideology, then the relation between perceived organizational support and absenteeism is higher. Employee's commitment to the organization depends on the perception of organization's commitment to the employee (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This reciprocity is essential for the organizational support theory. Due to the reciprocity norm, perceived organizational support should force employees to concern for the welfare of the organization and to help the organization achieve its goals (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Perceived organizational support is studied with many variables. Perceived organizational support effects organizational identification significantly. While both variables effect job performance and mediate between perceived organizational support and job performance (Turunc & Celik, 2010); organizational support mediate the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction (Demirel, 2013); teachers' emotional intelligence and perceived organizational support effects entrepreneurship positively (Polat & Aktop, 2010); organizational support has a negative correlation with work-family conflict (Akin, 2008); perceived organizational support has significant effects on organizational commitment, therefore organizations should satisfy employees work-related and non-work related needs and this in turn will increase attachment to the organization (Uchenna & Tolulope, 2013); the relation between perceived organizational support and turnover intentions are mediated by organizational commitment (DeConinck & Johnson, 2012); improper supervision has negative effect on perceived organizational support and this leads to high levels of counterproductive behavior towards the organization (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagencyk, 2013), and perceived organizational support effects employees' positive work attitudes (Beheshtifar, Ali-Nezhad, & Nekoie-Moghadam, 2012).

Present Research

Terror management theory is studied within many varied contexts. According to the above mentioned listing, there are few publications which examined terror management theory in organizational context. In addition, most of the publications related to terror management theory are derived from individualistic cultures. There are only few from collectivistic cultures as Turkey. Individualistic and collectivist cultures differ from each other in many aspects. People from individualistic cultures value personal independence howbeit people from collectivist cultures value the priorities of their in-group (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). The main goal of this article is to focus on the effect of mortality salience on perceived organizational support scores in a predominantly collectivistic culture. It is hypothesized that after mortality salience employees would make positive evaluations about their organizations and as a result perceived organizational support scores would increase.

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 44 employees from communication sector participated in this study. The location of this communication sector is the central Turkey (Inland Anatolia). There were 3 (6, 82 %) females and 41

(93,18 %) males in the sample. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 52 years ($M = 31.66$, $SD = 7.11$). The sample of this study consists of a wide range of positions within the organization (managers, technical workers, support workers, engineers, etc.). 43.2 % of the participants are single and 56.8 % are married. The education level of the participants are varied with 2.3 % secondary school, 4.5 % high school, 56.8 % undergraduate, 27.3 % bachelor, 6.8 % master and 2.3 % doctorate degree.

Materials

PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule): This scale is developed by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988) and measures positive and negative affect. It is adapted to Turkish culture by Gencoz (2000). It consists of 20-items; 10 positive affect and 10 negative affect item. 5-point Likert type scale was used for evaluation (Cronbach's Alpha for positive items is .86 and for negative items is .83). The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha for this study for positive items is .61 and for negative items is .89. PANAS assesses participants' current mood as a delay task.

Perceived Organizational Support Scale: This scale is developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa (1986). It consists of 36 items. 5-point Likert type scale was used for evaluation (Cronbach's Alpha is .88). The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha for this study is .95.

Procedure

Firstly, the participants were informed about the study. Participation to the study was voluntary. When they accept to participate, they were further informed. The participants were asked to respond the questions with their first and natural responses. They completed the questionnaires individually. The personality traits questions were used to maintain the cover story and to distract participants from the true purpose of the study. Participants of the study were divided randomly into two conditions (namely, control condition and experimental condition). In experimental condition mortality salience was induced by Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). This survey is translated to Turkish language by the author of this research. This survey consists of the following two open-ended questions which remind participants of their own death;

1. Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you.
2. Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead.

While the participants in the experimental condition were responding the two open-ended questions above, the participants in the control condition responded two open-ended questions about 'tooth pain' which had the same format as in the mortality salience condition. Because the effect of mortality salience occurs after a short delay of distraction (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994), following the two open-ended questions, 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was used to assess the mood (Watson et al., 1988). After PANAS, the participants solve the word search puzzle because the effect of mortality salience occurs after a short delay and distraction (Greenberg et al., 1994). Finally, participants both in the experimental condition and control condition answered perceived organizational support questionnaire to measure the dependent variable.

RESULTS

First of all, it was tested if PANAS had any effects. As expected, MS manipulation did not show any significant effect in mood ($p > .05$). Table 1 shows the means and the standard deviations for experimental and control conditions.

Table1. Means for perceived organizational support scores

	Experimental (n=23)		Control (n=21)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Perceived Organizational Support	2.92	.62	2.78	.91

Perceived organizational support scores for experimental condition (M=2.92, SD=.62) did not differ from control condition (M=2.78, SD=.91). To test the hypothesis of this study A Mann-Whitney test is used. The results of this test indicated that there was no significant difference between control (Mdn=2.97) and experimental condition (Mdn=1.00) on perceived organizational support scores, $U=228.5$, $p=.760$, $r=0.05$. There was also no main effect of marital status ($p=.25$), age ($p=.98$), education level ($p=.30$) and tenure in the organization ($p=.82$).

DISCUSSION

In this study the effect of mortality salience on perceived organizational support scores of employees is tested. Terror management theory hypothesis are tested in many different cultures and contexts. It is a new research area in Turkey and it recently began to be included in psychological studies. Therefore the number of studies in this area is quite limited and mostly they are theses, especially master thesis.

The aim of the present study was to determine whether perceived organizational support scores would increase after mortality salience among employees from communication sector. Many previous studies (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989; Rotschild, Abdollah, & Pyszczynski, 2009) related to terror management theory have shown that after mortality salience people often want to heighten their self-esteem. Mortality salience leads to increased attachment to and defense of individual’s cultural worldview (Maxfield, Pyszczynski, Kluck, Cox, Greenberg, Solomon, & Weise, 2007). In addition, after mortality salience individual evaluates his/her in-group positively and out-group negatively (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994).

In present study, after mortality salience there was no difference in perceived organizational support scores for control and experimental group. After mortality salience, employees did not attach themselves to their in-group (in this case their organization). Employees did not have more favorable evaluations of the organization where they work. This result is inconsistent with the previous studies. This inconsistent result must be understood within the different context in which this study was conducted. Unlike most of the previous studies, this study is conducted in organizational context. There are not so many studies which are conducted in organizational context. One of the studies which is conducted in organizational context is Jonas, Kauffeld, Sullivan, & Fritsche (2011)’s study. It is conducted in Western culture and the findings support terror management theory. In Turkey there are no other studies about terror management theory which is conducted in organizational context.

There are some studies which are conducted in Turkey that support terror management theory hypothesis. However it’s inconsistent with the results of the present study, Aksut-Cicek (2008)’s study support terror management theory. After mortality salience, students whose religious tendencies were threatened showed increased levels of aggression. In another study, supporters of headscarf evaluate religious essay more favorably and liberal essay less favorably (Camli, 2010). After mortality salience women who have more tendencies to evaluate their physical appearance by body related social norms showed more positive attitudes towards using diet pills (Cihan, 2013). According to Dalda (2011), adults who were asked to imagine a relationship break with high commitment level experience less death anxiety. After mortality salience participants positive attitudes towards peace was decreased and positive attitudes towards group-based dominance was increased (Guler, 2014). Kokdemir & Yeniceri (2010)’s study results also support terror management theory. After mortality salience private university students evaluate state universities’ superiority towards private ones more negatively. While

in another study, after mortality salience purchase intent increases. In order to buffer anxiety of death the propensity to consume increases (Ugurlar, 2011). After mortality salience the amount of administrative penalty is increased by gendarmerie staff and students (Cetiner, 2014).

Culture plays an important role in the effect of mortality salience. After mortality salience, East Asians' life related thoughts are more activated and they express more interest in enjoyable life activities than European Americans (Ma-Kellams, & Blascovich, 2012). According to the results of Aslıtürk (2001), the fear of death seemed to depend on certain cultural characteristics. In Turkish culture this can be seen as the reason of inconsistent results. Turkey has a higher collectivistic score in Hofstede (1980)'s study. In addition, the culture of the organization could be played an important role.

Another reason of the inconsistent results of these studies could be related to the distinct contexts (school, workplace) and religious beliefs (belief in death, belief that death is inevitable). Religion serves a sense of psychological security and hope of immortality (Vail, Rothschild, Weise, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2010). In contrast to Eastern religions, in most western religions life is seen as a one-time phenomenon. In addition, death is considered as the ultimate end of the existence. The main difference between Eastern and Western religious philosophy may have opposed the basic premise of terror management theory that mortality will cause terror (Maheswaran & Agrawal, 2004). This study took place in Turkey where it's a predominantly Muslim country. Muslims believe that everybody will die, in other words the life has an end. They also believe that there is a life after death. These results suggest that the religious beliefs of the participants can affect the results of the study.

The gender of the participants could also be played an important role in inconsistency of the results. Most of the participants of this study are male. The origins of differences in human behavior is fundamentally because of gender differences. Men and women have different places in social structure (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

The literature revealed conflicting findings. The inconsistent results of the studies from Turkey suggest that there should be more research about terror management theory in Turkey. Bulut (2015) performed meta-analysis under 12 studies which conducted in Turkey. The results of the meta-analysis showed that there is a small effect size (Hedge's $d=0,162$).

When the previous studies which conducted in Turkey are examined, it is very obvious that present study is quite unique in Turkey. Taking into consideration that the above mentioned studies are conducted outside the organizational context, whereas the present study is conducted within the organizational context.

Terror management theory is tested in Turkey in varied contexts but not within organizational context. In this respect, this study gives a new perspective to the terror management theory literature. In future studies, there should be more research testing terror management theory in organizational context especially in Turkey. The presented research and the future studies will have great contribution to organizational psychology literature.

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