

## **Red Tape and Employees Job Search Behavior: A Mediation Mechanism of Organizational Commitment**

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### **Abstract**

The core aim of the current study is to find the impact of red tape on employee job search behaviors. It also considers the investigation of mediating role of employee organizational commitment. Data for the current study is collected from IT firms, where only 212 useful responses were received and used for analysis purpose. The findings of the study reveal that red tape negatively related with employee commitment, but not related with the job search behavior. The commitment on the other hand fully mediate the relationship of red tape and job search behaviors. Future directions and implications are also provided at the end.

**Key words:** IT firms, Job search behavior, organizational commitment, red tape.

## Introduction

Red tape has been defined as presence of formal rules, laws, policies, and processes that prevent employees performing their duties (Borry, 2016). Although extant of literature has highlighted that its prevalent in public sector organizations (Pandey & Scott, 2002), its presence in private sector cannot be ruled out especially in large firms (Bozeman et al., 1992; De Jong & Van Witteloostuijn, 2015; George et al., 2021; Kaufmann et al., 2019). Red tape can be attributed to external factors (e.g. state laws) or internal factors such as policies, rules, and procedures formulated by the top-level management (Walker & Brewer, 2008).

Red tape negatively effects the business performance in many ways. For instance, it slows decision making and reduces workplace creativity. It also influences employees work experiences, attitudes, and behaviour negatively (Blom, 2020; Jacobsen & Jakobsen, 2018), such as job satisfaction and performance (Giauque et al., 2012; Steijn & van der Voet, 2019). It is positively related with undesirable outcomes like turnover and withdrawal behaviour (Jiang et al., 2023; Quratulain & Khan, 2015; Van Loon, 2017). Considering these outcomes, the researchers have increased their focus on red tapism and ways to overcome such issues (Cooke et al., 2019). As a result, this study investigates the process by which workers respond to perceived red tape by looking at job alternatives (i.e. job search behavior, JSB). The selection of JSB is also logical and important as previous studies have highlighted that due to psychological and emotional barriers caused by the red tapism, often employees go for finding new jobs (Quratulain & Khan, 2015), and JSB are actual predictors of job turnover (Jiang et al., 2023).

This study proposes that red tapism influences employees at emotional and psychological levels which ultimately makes them search for new jobs or look for alternatives. This relation can be logical because previous researchers have investigated the link between perceived red tape and predicted turnover (e.g., Brunetto et al., 2017; Giauque et al., 2019), there are multiple significant gaps in the literature (Jiang et al., 2023). The foremost is the focus of past studies on the attitudinal outcomes only (e.g., turnover intentions/cognitions), while disregarding the behavioral outcomes. As both attitude and behaviors are important components of voluntary turnover process (Jiang et al., 2023), the study of behaviors becomes valuable. Second, past studies have largely ignored the ways through which red tape can influence one's job search behaviors. While Quratulain and Khan (2015) observed mediating role of job satisfaction between red tape and turnover, other studies fail to provide such a mechanism (Giauque et al., 2019; Shim et al., 2017). Recent studies have observed job attitudes like job satisfaction (Quratulain & Khan, 2015) or engagement (Jiang et al., 2023) as the mediators between tapism and turnover. This study proposes yet another mediator i.e. organizational commitment. Like

engagement it is also a form of psychological and emotional attachment with the work and organization and employees tend to feel it as a consequence of various organizational level determinants (Haque et al., 2021; McCormick & Donohue, 2019).

This study is built upon the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), and propose that red tapism is considered as a job demand by employees which increases the stress and burnout and employees tend to feel less attached with the organization and its goals (commitment). According to JD-R model, employees need to have high level of energies and motivational states to remain at work, but the job demands (in form of red tapism) influences their motivational states and they tend to dis-own organizational goals and may indulge in searching new jobs (Schmitt et al., 2016).

This study contributes to the literature in the following ways, first it considers employees behavioral outcomes as a response to the red tapism which has been called for investigation in the previous studies (e.g. Brunetto et al., 2017; Giaque et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2023). Second, it covers the mediation mechanism through organizational commitment, an under-investigated aspect of one's job. Past studies have highlighted the value of emotional, psychological and motivational mechanism of red tapism and its outcomes (e.g. Brunetto et al., 2017; Giaque et al., 2019; Shim et al., 2017), but commitment has not been empirically investigated by those studies. Third, this study provides empirical evidence from Pakistani IT firms, where the JSB is high due to growth in the sector (Sethar et al., 2022). It is also observed that being a conventional society and lead to traditional management structure the prevalence of red tapism seems obvious. The cultural traits (e.g. high-power distance and collectivism) also tend to influence the structure in presence of red tapism, which seems organic and rational. Therefore, the study may offer a novel explanation from Pakistani culture. The following section covers the hypotheses development of the study.

## **Hypotheses development**

### ***Red tape and job search behavior***

The red tapism and job search behavior relationship seems organic and natural, because red tapism (presence of unnecessary rules, procedures and principles that reduce the flow of work) are considered negative workplace traits and such traits tend to influence employees negatively. Past studies have found that red tapism negatively influences employee attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction) which ultimately leads to employees' turnover intentions (Quratulain & Khan, 2015). Similarly, it has been observed that red tapism reduces employees emotional and psychological attachment with the work and organization (Jiang et al., 2023), which ultimately reduces the turnover intentions.

But literature has highlighted that actual turnover is a function of both turnover intentions and job search behavior (JSB), and JSB is even an outcome of personal factors while the organizational factors are the most important determinants. It has also been observed that negative workplace factors increase employees' job search behaviors. This relationship is assumed using the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), which proposes that workplace negative happenings are a source of workplace stress. It also proposes that social, organizational, physical and psychological components of work influence employees at emotional and cognitive levels and often employees translate them as excessive job demands (Bakker et al., 2014). The demands are challenging (when demands become the cause of personal growth, development or rewards) or stressors (when there are excessive demands and influence work negatively) (Van Laethem et al., 2019). Red tapism, due to personal desirability and costs, causes stress (Giauque et al., 2012; Quratulain & Khan, 2015) and a barrier in performing job tasks. In wake of red tape, employees tend to adopt passive or disengaged behaviors and often look for quitting their jobs. Employees who perceive the presence of red tapism tend to look for alternative job options, due to their decreased interest in the job. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**Hypothesis 1:** Red tape is positively related with job search behavior.

#### ***Mediating role of organizational commitment***

The relationship between red tape and JSB is under-investigated and the mechanism between these two variables still needs investigation. Recent studies have found the mediating role of job satisfaction (Quratulain & Khan, 2015) and engagement (Jiang et al., 2023) between red tape and outcomes. But it has been highlighted that emotional, psychological and motivational mechanism of red tapism and its outcomes is largely unaddressed (e.g. Brunetto et al., 2017; Giauque et al., 2019; Shim et al., 2017). This study fills this gap by considering the role of organizational commitment as mediator.

Being a component of a job demands red tape and its effects on the turnover seems logical and organic. For instance, Shim et al., (2017) identified that workplace factors (e.g. red tape) create stress-like feelings at work, which increases the fatigue in employees and they tend to find alternative work arrangements. The same has been observed by Quratulain and Khan (2015) in the Pakistani context where red tape is high and employees tend to feel negative about such job facets (reduced job satisfaction) which ultimately influences their staying intentions. As commitment is a state where employees consider themselves part of organization and align themselves with the organizational goals and tend to stay long with that (Goetz & Wald, 2022), the presence of red tape is expected to influence it first which may lead to further decline in retention intentions.

The same can be assumed on the basis of JD-R theory, which proposes that negative workplace characteristics may influence the employees' feelings about the job. The excessive job demands (red tape can be considered a form of demand) employees tend to feel a situation of stress and may indulge in avoidance strategies towards work (Schmitt et al., 2016). As red tape works as a hindrance demand it may divert the individual's intentions from their work and career, therefore red tape can be detrimental to an employees' psychological state (Sonnetag et al., 2010). In such a situation, employees may likely enter in an energy loss cycle (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), which may reduce their job involvement. It has also been observed that red tape reduces the zeal and devotion of employees (Schmitt et al., 2016), which is the major stay of one's commitment.

Red tape is considered as a barrier to demands by putting emotional and cognitive demands which results in reduction of psychological and emotional outcomes, in such a situation employee tend to find and look for new jobs. According to literature, committed employees tend to devote more time and energy to work and tend to consider organizational goals as their own, thus they tend to stay at work. Contrarily, employees who are not committed with the firm, tend to stay away from work and have a high propensity of finding new jobs (Lakshman et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected that commitment mediates the relationship between red tape and JSB. Earlier meta-analysis and empirical studies have also found that psychological and emotional de-attachment with the organization and work increase employees' chances of job switch behavior (Brunetto et al., 2012; Gabel Shemu eli et al., 2016; Halbesleben, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Based on the given debate, following relationship is assumed:

**Hypothesis 2:** Organizational commitment mediates the relationship of red tape and Job search behavior

### **Research methodology**

This study is comprised of data from IT firms located in a large metropolitan city of Pakistan. The IT firms are suitable for the current study due to high level of job search behavior present in such firms (Sethar et al., 2022). The study is also important and is expected to contribute because the sample of the study belongs to a high power distant and collectivist society (Pakistan), where the structures are bureaucratic and red tape prevail at work (Quratulain and Khan, 2015). Considering the suitability of the sample the researcher approached the management of IT firms and after getting their permission floated questionnaire in selected firms. The researcher approached using snowball sampling, using personal and professional references in these firms. All in all, 325 questionnaires were distributed among IT professionals via online mediums.

After repeated reminders and wait for a month only 235 filled questionnaires were received back. Researcher used check questions to see the quality of responses, and upon evaluation it was observed that 23 responses were either carelessly filled and were therefore considered redundant. At the end only 212 useful responses were available for analysis.

The scales were adopted from previous studies and only widely used and agreed upon scales were considered suitable for study. The red tape scale was adopted from the work of Borry (2016), which contained three items. Its example item is “*policies and procedures in my work division are burdensome*”. It was widely used scale and studies found it a reliable source of measuring red tape (Campbell, 2020; Jiang et al., 2023). Job search behavior was operationalized by using Irving et al., (1997) two items scale. It covered items like “*I will probably look for a new job within the next year*”. This scale was also widely used and found reliable by latest studies (e.g. Jiang et al., 2023). The organizational commitment was measured using nine items scale of Meyer and Allen (1997), it covered items like “*I have a strong desire to work with my organization*”. The scale was also widely used and accepted by researchers due to high reliability values (Chaudhary et al., 2023). The questionnaire comprised two major sections i.e. demographics and scales for measurement of variables.

### **Findings of the study**

Before hypotheses testing, data for the current study was assessed for preliminary tests including missing values, outliers, normality, reliability and validity. The analysis highlighted that there were no missing values in the data. The outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis Distance test where its evaluation highlighted that there were not outliers present in the data set. The data was normally distributed as the values for Skewness and Kurtosis were below the threshold of  $\pm 1$  and  $\pm 3$ . The Harman’s single factor test was using to observe the single factor model which accounted for only 25.45% variance, which was below the standard of 50%, thus the common method biasness was ruled out (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

After preliminary analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to judge the unidimensionality and validity (see table 1). The factors loading of all observed variables were above the threshold of 0.50 (between 0.53 and 0.78). The value of CR and AVE were also above the threshold values. Furthermore, the three factors model was acceptably fit ( $\chi^2/df=2.38$ , RMSEA=0.056, SRMR=0.054, CFI=0.90), thus both unidimensionality and validity requirements were met and the researcher proceeded with hypothesis testing.

Table 1  
*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

	Loading	CR	AVE
Red tape	0.56 – 0.78	0.88	0.59
Organizational commitment	0.53 – 0.64	0.79	0.68
Job search behavior	0.61 – 0.69	0.82	0.70

After CFA, the data was analyzed for descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients. It is from table 2 that red tape is not related with the job search behavior ( $r=0.06$ ), while its negatively related with the organizational commitment ( $r=-0.22$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). On the other hand, commitment is also negatively related with the job search behavior ( $r=-0.38$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), therefore the researcher proceeded with further analysis.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics & Correlation Analysis*

	RT	OC	JSB	Mean (SD)
Red tape	(0.77)			4.25 (0.327)
Organizational commitment	-0.22**	(0.75)		3.89 (0.521)
Job search behavior	0.06	-0.38**	(0.79)	3.23 (0.852)

\* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.001$

The results of hypotheses testing are provided in table 3, where both direct and indirect relationships are reported. The table reveals that red tape is negatively related with organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.38$ ,  $p<.05$ ), while it does not influence job search behavior ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Therefore hypothesis 1 is supported by the results. The table also reveals that organizational commitment mediates the relationship of red tape and job search behavior ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p<.001$ ), thus H2 assuming the mediation relationship is also supported.

Table 3  
*Results of Hypotheses Testing*

Relationships	B	SE	t-value	Bootstraps @ 95%		p
				LLCI	ULCI	
RP → JSB	0.09	0.051	8.55	0.461	0.701	0.073
RP → OC	-0.38	0.054	4.99	0.432	0.723	0.013
OC → JSB	-0.22	0.061	4.76	0.531	0.834	0.010
Indirect effects						
RP → OC → JSB	-0.12	0.048	2.97	0.420	0.817	0.000

## Discussion

The core aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between red tape and job search behavior via mediation of organizational commitment. The same had been hypothesized using JD-R (Demerouti et al., 2001). The findings of the study are interesting as it partially supports the assertions made in the current study. The findings first highlight that red tape is present at Pakistani organizations, which is already supported by the work of Quratulain and Khan (2015). The presence of red tape shows the bureaucracy at work and signifies the need of change in structure. When the red tape is evaluated for its influence on the employees' job search behavior the findings are against the assertion made via H1. The findings are also interesting as these results contradict the theoretical premise of the study i.e. JD-R, which proposes that the red tape is a form of job demand which negatively influences the perceptions about work and employees tend to translate such organizational principles as burdensome and demanding that may impair their emotional and psychological states (Pandey & Kingsley, 2000). These findings are also against the results highlighted by the previous studies who have observed that red tape increase employee turnover intentions (Jiang et al., 2023; Quratulain & Khan, 2015). Though the job search behavior is one part of turnover, but its independent effect has not been evaluated in the past and calls have been made for its investigation. Therefore, the findings of the current study are contributing as well as interesting.

Furthermore, this study also adds value by highlighting the mechanism through which the red tape can influence the job search behavior. More precisely, this study covers the mechanism of organizational commitment (a form of psychological and emotional state). The findings reveal that red tape reduces employee commitment which further increases the job search behavior. This relationship was again based on JD-R perspective and was assumed via H2. The findings supported both the theoretical premise and assertion made in the hypothesis development section. The results revealed that red tape first affects employees at psychological and emotional level which further reduces their intentions to stay with the organization and they move for alternative job opportunities. Though the same has not been investigated in the past, the results stand tall with the work of Quratulain and Khan (2015) who observed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship of red tape and turnover. Similarly, Jiang et al., (2022) also observed that engagement mediates the relationship of red tape and turnover. These findings of the current study support these results from the attitudinal aspect, as organizational commitment is also an attitude just like job satisfaction and engagement and therefore add value to literature by proving another attitude as mechanism.

### **Implications of the study**

This study offers important theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, this study entails investigation of job search behavior as an outcome of



red tape, which has not gained researchers' attention in the past. Though the past studies have valued its important in actual turnover, but its independent impact has not been studied. In addition to that, this study covers the mechanism of organizational commitment a form of psychological and emotional state between red tape and job search behavior. Past studies have studied similar mechanisms (e.g. job satisfaction and work engagement; Jiang et al., 2023; Quratulain & Khan, 2015), but the commitment has been ignored as explanatory factor. This study borrows the theoretical lens of JD-R and proves that red tape is a form of job demand which influences employees at motivational and emotional levels and they tend to initiate job search behaviors.

Practically, this study leaves valuable messages for the management of IT firms. The foremost message is about work structures. The current work structured are believed to be source of red tape by the employees. Literature highlights that red tape is one of the negative job-related aspects and have negative outcomes for organizations (e.g. Blom et al., 2021; George et al., 2021). IT has been considered damaging for IT firms as it may reduce the innovation and creative propensity of the employees (Moon & Bretschneider, 2002). Therefore, the management should start focusing on the work structures and principles. Furthermore, this study highlights that red tape reduces employee commitment (a psychological and emotional attachment with the organization), which has been important predictor of various employee and organizational level outcomes including turnover, performance and overall organizational performance (Guzeller & Celiker, 2020). The current study also highlights that when employees have reduced level of commitment they tend to go for alternative jobs and search of those. But the researcher believes that there could be some other damaging outcomes associated with the low commitment. Therefore, the management should focus on ways of improving the reduced commitment due to red tape. Furthermore, the study highlights that employees in IT sector tend to search for alternative jobs. Though the current study highlights that the red tape is the cause, but this cannot be the only cause, as the IT sector is a flourishing sector in Pakistan and there are job alternatives available to the professionals. Therefore, keeping employees stacked to a company has become challenging and important. In short run firms may go with interventions and mechanism through which commitment can be increased which would result in reduction in job search behaviors.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Though this research is an outcome of carefully carried out investigation process, it is still prone to some limitations. The foremost is the study design which is cross sectional. This design has limitations like chances of common method biasness, which was ruled out using the Harman's single factor analysis. But the causality can

better be judged either through experimentation or via longitudinal studies. It is therefore recommended to conduct longitudinal studies in future. The study is based on small sample size taken from employees only. Its recommended to go with either lag studies (when using cross sectional approach), or go with dyadic data (reported by the employee and supervisors). Future researchers can also consider this aspect. This study uses JD-R as the underpinning theory, while the future studies could borrow other theories that may explain the effects of red tape on employees (e.g. conservation of resources theory, organizational support theory). This study has considered organizational commitment as a unidimensional construct, but it is a multi-dimensional construct in nature and future researchers could consider these aspects independently to see their impact between red tape and employee outcomes. There could be some boundary conditions (e.g. personality, organizational support, or leadership) that may reduce the impact of red tape at work. Therefore, future researchers should consider moderating variables in the current model.

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