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Meritocracy, job autonomy, and work attitudes of civil servants

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Meritocracy, job autonomy, and work attitudes of civil servants

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to get a better understanding of the role of meritocracy in shaping civil servants' work attitudes by taking into account mediating and contextual factors. Specifically, this study examines whether job autonomy mediates the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes as well as whether the mediating effects differ across hierarchical levels.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was employed through the use of a survey strategy for data collection. The data was drawn from the COCOPS Executive Survey on Public Sector Reform in Europe. For data analysis, multiple regression analysis, mediation analysis, and moderated mediation analysis were performed in SPSS version 26.

Findings: The perceptions of meritocracy in public organizations significantly affect civil servants' degree of job autonomy, which in turn influences their work attitudes. Moreover, the indirect effect of meritocracy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment via the mediator variable (job satisfaction) differs between top- and lower-level civil officials.

Implications: The findings of this study are relevant for public service organizations wishing to increase civil servants' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study argues civil servants' work attitudes depend on their intrinsic motivation, which is greatly influenced by the degree of autonomy and discretion they have in performing their duties.

Contribution: This study makes a significant contribution to the field of public administration by expanding our understanding of the antecedents of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in public organizations.

Keywords: meritocracy, work attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An effective public administration system is essential to implement government policies and foster economic and human development. Personnel decisions, such as hiring, promotion, and dismissal of civil servants based on merit rather than at the whim of political actors, are one of the most crucial aspects of public administration (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Rauch & Evans, 2000; Gualmini, 2008; Nistotskaya & Cingolani, 2016; Charron et al., 2017; Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Oliveros & Schuster 2018; Suzuki & Hur, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). Meritocratic recruitment, which selects civil employees based on their skills and capabilities, has been shown to increase economic growth and reduce corruption, while politicized recruitment, which hires civil employees based on their wealth and political connections, has been linked to higher levels of corruption (Evans & Rauch 1999; Dahlstrom et al., 2012).

Meritocracy can be described as a social system in which individuals are chosen based on their skills, merits, and abilities rather than their wealth, social status, and political connections (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013; Kim & Choi, 2017). Many researchers concluded that the method by which civil servants are hired had significant consequences on governance outcomes, such as corruption, economic development, and regulatory quality (Hollyer, 2011). Prior research demonstrates that meritocratic recruitment increases economic development (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Charron & Lapuente, 2015); enhances civil servants' performance (Anderson et al., 2003); fosters accountability (McCourt, 2000); minimizes corruption (Recanatini et al., 2005); and attracts well-educated people to public services (Arezki & Quintyn, 2013). In addition, merit-based recruitment is considered a significant component of bureaucracies to avoid the dangers of a patronage system, which in turn leads to higher citizen trust in their government (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2015).

Despite the importance of meritocracy in the public sector, little is known about its relationship with the work attitudes of civil servants. Work attitudes play an important role in predicting employees' work-related intentions and behaviors, such as absenteeism, turnover, performance, and learning (Locke 1976; Tett & Meyer 1993; Griffeth et al., 2000; Rainey 2009). However, only a handful of studies have examined the impact of meritocracy on work attitudes in the public sector, for example, the studies by Suzuki and Hur (2020) and Kim et al. (2021). In these studies, the authors focused on job satisfaction and organizational commitment to measure civil servants' work attitudes. According to their findings, meritocracy (or a closed bureaucratic system) in the public sector is positively related to senior public officials' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. While these studies provide some insight into the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes, the significance of mediating factors (i.e. job autonomy) and contextual factors (i.e. hierarchical level of civil servants) within organizations that may mitigate or modify this relationship has been neglected. As noted by Kim et al. (2021), the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes might be more complicated. This study aims to address this issue by taking into account contextual factors to better understand the role of meritocracy in shaping the work attitudes of civil servants.

Specifically, this study will examine whether job autonomy mediates the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes. Job autonomy refers to an individual's level of independence and discretion in determining how work is done, including the flexibility to choose the types of procedures to carry out the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Many studies in the private sector have shown that increasing job autonomy in the workplace can lead to higher job satisfaction (DeCarlo & Agarwal, 1999; Finn, 2001; Cuyper & Witte, 2005; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Taylor & Westover, 2011) and organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; van Knippenberg, 2000; Karim, 2010; Park & Searcy, 2011; Dude,

2012; Sisodia & Das, 2013; Naqvi et al., 2013; Jain & Duggal, 2018). However, whether job autonomy will mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes needs to be empirically tested.

Additionally, this research will investigate the mediating effects of job autonomy at different hierarchical levels and examine whether the relationship between meritocracy, job autonomy, and work attitudes is the same for senior- and lower-level civil servants. To that end, past research has found that employees at different hierarchical levels have different work attitudes (Jain et al., 2002). For example, Randall (1990) found that white-collar workers displayed a higher level of organizational commitment than blue-collar workers since they have more autonomy at work. Similarly, a study conducted in the public sector revealed that executives were more committed to their organization than supervisors (Pattanayak, 2000). Suman and Srivastava (2012) found significant variations in organizational commitment between higher and lower-level employees. The authors further recommended that employees at all levels should be given every opportunity to meet their higher order needs to increase their level of commitment. The employees' hierarchical level in an organization has also been proven to have varying effects on job satisfaction (Singh & Bhardwaj, 2007). Therefore, it seems critical to consider the organizational hierarchical level of civil workers while assessing their work attitudes.

Based on the above, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ 1: What is the impact of meritocracy on civil servants' work attitudes as measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment?

RQ 2: Does job autonomy mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes as measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment?

RQ 3: Does the hierarchical level of civil servants influence the relationship between meritocracy, job autonomy, and work attitudes?

As a result, this study will make significant contributions to the field of public administration. First, this study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of meritocracy on civil servants' work attitudes, which is critical for the effective implementation of government policies (Cornell, 2014) as well as gaining public trust (Rothstein, 2009). Second, public management reforms emphasize managerial autonomy, making it an important determinant of organizational performance and accountability (Bezes & Jeannot, 2018). Thus, understanding the importance of job autonomy will aid public organizations in promoting positive work attitudes among civil servants and enhancing organizational performance. Third, organizational commitment has been identified as a key factor that drives employee performance and reduces employee intention to leave (Koh & Boo 2004). Therefore, this study will expand our understanding of the antecedents of organizational commitment in public organizations by examining the mediating and moderating roles of contextual factors (i.e. job autonomy and hierarchical level) on work attitudes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on meritocracy and work attitudes. The chapter begins with a discussion on meritocracy, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job autonomy in sections 2.2 – 2.5. Next, various hypotheses were formulated in section 2.6 using SDT as a theoretical framework. Finally, the conceptual model is presented in Section 2.7.

2.2 Meritocracy

When defining meritocracy, it is important to distinguish between merit and meritocracy. According to McNamee and Miller (2009), merit is a trait of an individual (e.g. an individual's skills and education), whereas meritocracy is a characteristic of society as a whole (e.g. a merit-based recruitment system). As described in Suzuki and Hur (2021), meritocracy can be understood as a social system in which an individual's skills, hard work, and ambition lead to wealth, jobs, and power, whereas in non-meritocratic social systems, wealth and power are allocated based on an individual's family, wealth, social status, and connections (Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013; Reynolds & Xian, 2014; Kim & Choi, 2017). Moreover, the notion of “equality of opportunity” has been identified as the most salient feature of meritocracy in previous studies (Kim & Choi, 2017), which emphasizes that everyone has an equal opportunity to grow based on their skills and abilities, regardless of gender, race, class, or other non-merit factors (Castilla & Benard, 2010).

The implementation of meritocratic systems strongly depends on agreement on what constitutes merit and how to measure it (S'liwa & Johansson, 2014). In this regard, Setyowati (2016) presented a list of merit-based indicators about employee recruitment and selection, which includes: 1) all program participants must be held accountable for their decisions; 2) recruitment involves capable individuals and appropriate sources to recruit workers from all

segments of society; 3) all applicants are treated fairly regardless of political background, race, color, religion, ethnic origin, sex, marital status, age, or disability; 4) staff selection should be based on skill, expertise, and experience through fair and transparent competition to provide equal opportunity to everybody; 5) selection procedure must ensure that only qualified employees are hired and placed in the most appropriate position; 6) hired staff should be protected from favoritism or fraud for political purpose.

The goal of meritocracy in public administration is to promote competition, open selection, rigorous evaluation, and an established recruitment procedure rather than an arbitrary appointment of individuals to civil service positions (Suzuki & Hur, 2021). A well-functioning recruitment system helps in the identification of individuals with the required skills, qualifications, and professional competencies to effectively perform their duties (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2016). In line with the principles of meritocracy, this can be achieved by recruiting civil servants through competitive examinations, interviews, CV screening, and psychological tests (Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013; Sundell, 2014). Similarly, performance-based evaluations of individuals with explicit performance goals can be utilized for appraisals and awards (Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013). To conclude, meritocracy in public service recruiting refers to methods and processes for selecting the most qualified personnel for a particular position based on rigorous examinations.

2.3 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as employees' psychological attachment to the organization. The three-dimensional model proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer and Allen (1991; 1997) has been the dominant approach to studying organizational commitment in organizations. According to this model, distinct psychological states including affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment influences an individual's desire to continue or terminate a relationship with an organization

(Meyer et al., 2002). Affective commitment is an employee's emotional attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Continuance commitment reflects an employee's commitment to the company based on a cost-benefit analysis of terminating or continuing the relationship with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The normative commitment represents an employee's perceived obligation to stay with the organization despite what it offers (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

In public organizations, organizational commitment is recognized as an important tool for employee performance and productivity (Stazyk et al., 2011; Oliviera & Rowe, 2018). In this regard, a considerable amount of research has shown that organizational commitment leads to favorable organizational outcomes, such as motivation, effort, productivity, and performance (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Boardman & Sundquist, 2009; Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010; Moldogaziev & Silvia, 2015). Furthermore, a high level of organizational commitment is associated with less absenteeism and turnover intentions among employees (Karunaratne & Wickramasekara, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for public managers to regularly examine employees' commitment to ensuring that employees maintain a positive work attitude, which is critical for overall organizational performance (Ahakawa et al., 2021).

This study exclusively focuses on affective commitment to investigate civil servants' commitment to the organization. Compared to the other dimensions, affective commitment has been proven to be a stronger and more consistent predictor of positive work attitudes and behaviors and employee performance (Kim et al., 2021). Individuals that have strong affective commitments are more likely to identify with the organization and are more motivated to achieve their goals (Cheah et al., 2016). A meta-analysis of the antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment conducted by Meyer et al. (2002) revealed that affective commitment was negatively associated with withdrawal, absenteeism, turnover, stress and work-family conflict, but positively associated with job performance and

organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, Colquitt et al. (2013) concluded that employees with high affective commitment tend to put in extra effort whenever possible and engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors.

2.4 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is another important work attitude that significantly influences organizational performance. According to Locke (1976), it can be defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p.1300). Generally speaking, job satisfaction refers to an individual's work attitude, such that a person with a high degree of job satisfaction will have a positive attitude toward work, whereas a person with a low degree of job satisfaction will have a negative attitude toward work (Sjahrudin, 2016).

Herzberg's dual-factor theory is commonly used to study job satisfaction, which distinguishes between intrinsic (i.e. recognition, achievement, or personal growth) and extrinsic (i.e. company policies, supervisory practices, working conditions, and wages/salary) factors causing satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding an employee's image of his/her job (Tietjen & Myers, 1998).

Several studies have found that job satisfaction contributes to positive work outcomes such as job engagement, well-being, and organizational citizenship (Saks, 2006; Jalagat, 2016, Judge et al., 2020). While low job satisfaction is more likely to be connected with higher turnover intentions (Lambert et al., 2001), which can be extremely costly for organizations (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008). Furthermore, job satisfaction is a significant predictor of employee job performance (Eliyana et al., 2019), career mentoring (Weng et al., 2010), absenteeism (Kehinde, 2011), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Mohammad et al., 2011). An organization with a higher number of satisfied employees is more likely to be

effective because satisfied workers are more productive than dissatisfied workers (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

2.5 Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is a primary job characteristic that holds considerable importance in job designs. It is one of several key job design characteristics identified by Hackman and Oldham in their job characteristics model (1975). According to Hackman and Oldham (1975), job autonomy can be defined as “the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (p.162).

Giving individuals autonomy at work is crucial for both individual and organizational success because autonomous people have more freedom in how they carry out their jobs and can thus be more productive (Kroth & Puets, 2011). When employees are allowed to exercise job autonomy, they will believe that they are trusted to finish the task, which enhances their intrinsic motivation and leads to higher organizational performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Langfred & Moye, 2004). Past studies have identified job autonomy as a crucial factor in increasing employee motivation (Zhang et al., 2017), which enhances employee commitment. Job autonomy was also found to be positively associated with job involvement (Hassan, 2014) and job satisfaction (Taylor & Westover, 2011). Moreover, it allows individuals to think outside the box and find the best solution throughout the process (Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

2.6 Theory & Hypotheses

Following Kim et al. (2021) study, the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes was investigated using self-determination theory (SDT) as a theoretical framework. According to SDT, the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – is necessary for autonomous motivation, which

includes intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation, and these requirements are universal across cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Furthermore, Kim et al (2021) contend that social settings can either facilitate or impede satisfaction of these needs, thereby influencing motivation, satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Deci et al. 2001). As a result, this study posits that civil servants' perceptions of meritocracy in their organization may increase their autonomous motivation and lead to positive work attitudes, specifically job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

2.6.1 Impact of meritocracy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment

Job satisfaction is determined by the disparity between an employee's expectations and reality, which also includes the work environment. As such, an employee would be satisfied if his/her expectations regarding the job as well as the working environment were realized. According to SDT, employees are more likely to be satisfied with their job if they find it interesting, internalize the value of their work (Gagné & Deci 2005; Taylor & Westover 2011), and feel effective in their job (Chordiya et al., 2019). Moreover, as pointed out in Kim et al. (2021), autonomous work environments and decentralized decision structures (Hansen & Høst, 2012), task significance (Steijn & van der Voet, 2019), performance feedback (Masal & Vogel, 2016), fairness in performance appraisals (DeHart-Davis et al., 2014), role and goal clarity (Wright & Davis, 2003), and employee empowerment are all factors that improve job satisfaction.

Regarding organizational commitment, Suzuki and Hur (2020) indicated that positive work environments and HRM practices such as participation in decision-making (Hansen & Kjeldsen, 2018), intrinsic rewards (Mottaz 1988), goal clarity, and difficulty (Stazyk et al., 2011), procedural fairness (Park & Rainey, 2007), and trust in management (Perry, 2004) have been identified as factors that enhance the level of affective commitment in previous

studies. Moreover, civil servants who are hired and promoted based on their abilities and merits rather than patronage, political party affiliation, friendship, or connection are more likely to value integrity (Pedersen et al., 2015), which in turn increases their commitment toward the organization. On the contrary, SDT suggests that non-meritocratic environments would diminish organizational commitment since individuals tend to resist external controls on their behavior (Kaiser et al., 2013).

Based on SDT, we infer that a meritocracy would lead to the selection of the best-qualified personnel who would have high autonomous motivation. Therefore, similar to Suzuki and Hur (2020), the study hypothesizes that the higher the level of meritocracy in the organization, the higher their job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

H1: The perception of meritocracy will be positively associated with civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment.

2.6.2 Impact of job autonomy on job satisfaction and organizational commitment

The degree to which a person takes ownership of their job, or how much an individual feels intrinsically motivated towards their job, increases job satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy involves taking responsibility for the outcomes of work, which leads to increased productivity and higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Langfred & Moye, 2004). A sense of job responsibility fosters positive affective and behavioral reactions in individuals toward their jobs, which increases job satisfaction.

According to SDT, access to autonomy satisfies basic psychological needs for the experience of free will, or volition, in action or task, both of which are important components of intrinsically motivated behavior and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals with autonomy have the liberty to control the pace of work and to regulate work processes and evaluation procedures. Previous research on the association between job autonomy and job satisfaction has yielded strong and consistent results. For example, DeCarlo and Agarwal's

(1999) cross-cultural study investigated the impact of job autonomy on salesperson job satisfaction. The findings revealed that job autonomy was a major predictor of job satisfaction among salespeople in Australia, India, and the United States. Morrison et al. (2005) found that job autonomy was a crucial component in increasing employees' intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. Cuyper and Witte (2006) demonstrated that job autonomy had a considerable impact on job satisfaction in both permanent and temporary employment. Thompson and Prottas (2006) found that employees with higher levels of job autonomy were more likely to be satisfied with their job. Increased job autonomy improves an employee's perception of control over their work environment (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010), which boosts their confidence in completing a task and hence increases job satisfaction (Saragih, 2011).

Job autonomy might also be positively associated with organizational commitment. According to SDT, the more autonomous the individual's excitement is, the greater their commitment and performance for the company, which leads to higher self-motivation and self-determination at work (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Employees feel more empowered and dedicated to the firm when they are given greater responsibilities, are assigned tasks with high rewards, are given decision-making power, and are given a platform to voice their views (Sarboland, 2012).

Several studies have shown a significant and positive relationship between job autonomy and organizational commitment at the workplace (Dude, 2012; Park & Searcy, 2012; Naqvi et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2016; Karim, 2010). According to Jain and Duggal (2018), transformational leadership significantly increases employees' organizational commitment through job autonomy. The underlying assumption is that when employees believe they have discretionary authority in performing their tasks, they are more inclined to stay with existing organizations due to increased ownership of work (Moe, Dahl, Stray,

Karlsen, & Schjdt-Osmo, 2019). Therefore, greater autonomy leads to greater organizational commitment. Similar findings were reported by Ismail et al. (2011), which demonstrated that transformational leaders increase employees' empowerment and subsequently the level of employees' organizational commitment. Naqvi et al. (2013) showed that when employees are granted freedom in decision making and participation in the activities of the organization it does generate an increased level of organizational commitment among members of the organization. The relationship between job autonomy and organizational commitment was found to be significant in Kirkwood (2007) where there was a positive relationship established between a global scale of professional work autonomy and affective commitment.

H2: The perception of job autonomy will be positively associated with civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment.

2.6.3 Mediating effects of job autonomy

In addition, this study examines the mediating effects of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Particularly, we argue that bureaucratic structures with a formalized employee recruitment system are more likely to offer greater autonomy to civil servants. As described by Diefenbach and Sillince (2011), bureaucratic structures with formal rules and regulations, such as meritocratic recruiting, are designed to promote professionals' autonomy. As a result, we propose that a merit-based recruitment system would encourage job autonomy among employees. Alternatively, a meritocratic recruitment system is characterized by well-documented regulations, thereby there is limited flexibility in establishing how a decision is made or what outcomes are expected in a given situation (Schminke et al., 2000).

Past literature suggests that centralization and formalization were negatively associated with job characteristics such as autonomy and variety (Brass, 1981). This may appear to contradict the literature on bureaucracies, which claims that bureaucracies promote

role clarity with a formalized recruiting system (Adler & Borys, 1996). However, this study focuses on vertical decentralization, or the distribution of authority, which is similar to one of the traditional characteristics of bureaucratic systems. This type of decentralization indicates that managers have clearly defined responsibilities for which they are held accountable. This in turn increases the sense of control and self-determination that civil servants feel over their jobs. Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

H3: The perception of job autonomy will mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment.

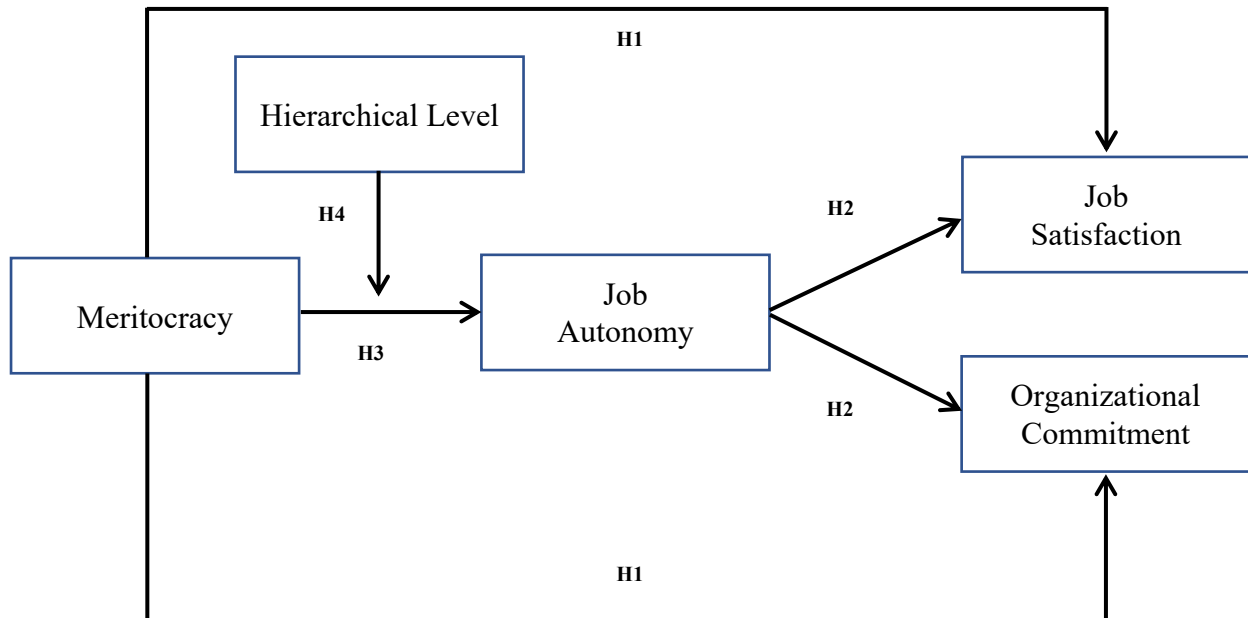
2.6.4 Moderating effects of hierarchical level

Finally, this study examines moderated-mediation effects using a civil servant's hierarchical position in the organization as a moderator. Specifically, this study argues that the mediating effects of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes would depend on the civil servants' position in the organizational hierarchy. The underlying implication is that individuals working at the top hierarchical level enjoy higher job autonomy and therefore will be more satisfied and committed to the organization. Thus, the mediating effects of job autonomy for top-level employees will be stronger compared to those who work at a lower hierarchical level. In this regard, previous studies have consistently shown that hierarchical levels exert a strong influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Singh & Bhardwaj, 2007; Suman & Srivastava, 2012; Sisodia & Das, 2013).

H4: The mediating effect of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment will be stronger for senior-level officials as compared to lower-level officials.

2.7 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model used in this is presented below.



2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter contained a review of the literature. The literature review focused mainly on the relevant concepts and the interrelationships between them. Particularly, while analyzing the relationships between concepts, this study employed self-determination theory as a theoretical framework. Finally, the conceptual framework and research hypotheses were presented based on the SDT. The following chapter explains the research methodology used to test those hypotheses.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter starts with an explanation of the data, sample size, and data collection process in section 3.2. Following that, the operationalization of the dependent, independent, mediator/moderator, and control variables is explored in section 3.3, as well as the instrument reliability. Finally, an overview of the data analysis methods is presented in section 3.4. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methods utilized to address the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

3.2 Data

This study made use of COCOPS Executive Survey data on Public Sector Reform in Europe (Hammerschmid, 2015), which includes information on the overall work attitude of civil service personnel from 17 European countries. Specifically, the survey gathered senior public officials' perceptions and experiences about various aspects of working in the public sector, such as management and work practices in their organizations, administrative reforms and the impact of the financial crisis on public administration in their country, and attitudes and preferences about work-related values. A total of 36,892 public officials from twenty-one countries were included in the survey. Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom were among the participating countries. The free version of the data that we obtained, on the other hand, had 7,312 respondents.

3.3 Variable Operationalization

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment were used as the dependent variables in this research. The degree of meritocracy in the public sector was used as the independent

variable. Next, job autonomy and hierarchical organizational level served as the mediator and moderator, respectively. In addition, various individual-, organizational, and country-level characteristics were included as control variables. The operationalization of these variables is given below:

3.3.1 Dependent Variables

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of meritocracy on the work attitudes of civil servants. Consistent with past research, this study used job satisfaction and organizational commitment to measure work attitudes (e.g., Suzuki and Hur, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). Following Kim et al. (2021), job satisfaction was measured using the following two items from the COCOPS survey: 'I get a sense of satisfaction from my work' and 'I feel valued for the work I do' (Cronbach's alpha = .791). To measure organizational commitment, the affective commitment scale developed by Allen Meyer (1990) was utilized. Particularly, similar to Suzuki and Hur (2020) and Kim et al. (2021), the following two items from the COCOPS survey were used to measure affective organizational commitment: 'I would recommend my organization as a good place to work' and 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization' (Cronbach's alpha = .626). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Finally, the mean scores for both job satisfaction and organizational commitment were calculated using the average of all items.

3.3.2 Independent Variable

Following Kim et al. (2021), the independent variable included civil servants' perceptions of meritocracy in their organizations. As the authors pointed out, political intervention can occur in areas other than personnel systems. Specifically, the authors focused on four different types of political interference that could influence merit-based hiring in the public sector namely (1) political appointment, (2) political influence over

policy, (3) political interference in managerial activities, and (4) politicians' disrespect for bureaucratic expertise. Therefore, based on Kim et al. (2021), this study measured the degree of meritocracy using the following 4 items from the survey: (1) for political influence on senior-level appointments: 'Politicians regularly influence senior-level appointments in my organization' (reverse-coded); (2) for political influence over policy: 'The administration, and not the political level, is the initiator of reforms or new policies' (reverse-coded); (3) for political interference in managerial activities: 'In my organization, politicians interfere in routine activities' (reverse-coded); and (4) for politicians' disrespect for bureaucratic expertise: 'Politicians respect the technical expertise of the administration' (reverse-coded). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Finally, the mean degree of meritocracy was calculated using the average of all items (Cronbach's alpha = .475).

3.3.3 Mediator and Moderator

As discussed earlier, this study intends to examine the mediating and moderating role of job autonomy and hierarchical level in an organization, respectively. First, this study examined whether job autonomy would mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes. The COCOPS survey included eight items to measure job autonomy. Table 1 below presents the factor analysis of all those items. As can be seen, items 1- 6 load very high on a single component. Therefore, this study measures job autonomy based on respondents' agreement with the following six items from the survey: (1) Budget allocations, (2) Contracting out services, (3) Promoting staff, (4) Hiring staff, (5) Dismissing or removing staff, (6) Changes in the structure of my organization (Cronbach's alpha = .857). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low autonomy) to 7 (very high autonomy). The mean score for job autonomy was calculated using the average of all six items.

Table 1: Factor Analysis: Job Autonomy items

	Component	
	1	2
Autonomy: Budget allocations	.603	.413
Autonomy: Contracting out services	.568	.399
Autonomy: Promoting staff	.793	-.006
Autonomy: Hiring staff	.846	.151
Autonomy: Dismissing or removing staff	.834	.164
Autonomy: Changes in the structure of organisation	.635	.456
Autonomy: Policy choice and design	.120	.873
Autonomy: Policy implementation	.153	.846

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Second, this study examined whether the hierarchical level of a civil servant would moderate the mediating effects of job autonomy. In the COCOPS survey, the respondents were asked to indicate their hierarchical level in the organization from the following options: (1) Top hierarchical level in the organization, (2) Second hierarchical level in the organization, and (3) Third hierarchical level in the organization. This study only focused on employees working at the top or third-hierarchical levels. Therefore, respondents' hierarchical level was measured as a binary variable (1/0) where the value 1 represents employees working at the top hierarchical level in the organization while the value 0 represents employees working at the third hierarchical level in the organization.

3.3.4 Control Variables

This study included various individual-, organizational-, and country-level controls that may be associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Following Suzuki and Hur (2020) and Kim et al. (2021), individual-level control variables comprised goal clarity and civil servants' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The items used to measure

these individual-level control variables were chosen based on a factor analysis of the full scales in the COCOPS survey. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the items that have high loadings on the relevant component. For example, goal clarity was measured based on respondents' agreements with the following four items: 1) Goal clearly stated; 2) Goal communicated to the staff; 3) easy to observe and measure activities; 4) mainly measures outputs and outcomes (Cronbach's alpha = .809). Similarly, intrinsic motivation was measured based on the respondent's agreement with the following three items from the motivation scale: 1) Interesting work; 2) Room to make decisions; 3) Flexible working hours (Cronbach's alpha = .425). Whereas, extrinsic motivation was based on the following four items: 1) high income; 2) Job security; 3) Opportunities for promotion; 4) Status (Cronbach's alpha = .691). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The final scores for goal clarity, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation were calculated using the averages of corresponding items. Due to the unavailability of demographic information, this study could not control for civil servants' demographic profiles.

Table 2: Factor Analysis: Motivation items

	Component		
	1	2	3
Motivation: Interesting work	-.042	.418	.549
Motivation: High income	.756	.081	.136
Motivation: Opportunities to help others	.267	.813	-.017
Motivation: Job security	.710	.228	-.121
Motivation: Room to make decisions	.137	.283	.692
Motivation: Opportunities for promotion	.619	.107	.413
Motivation: Useful for society	.011	.808	.230
Motivation: Flexible working hours	.242	-.136	.668
Motivation: Status	.695	-.050	.229

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 3: Factor Analysis: Organizational Clarity items

	Component	
	1	2
Organisation: Goals clearly stated	.884	.094
Organisation: Goals communicated to staff	.872	.120
Organisation: High number of goals	.452	.183
Organisation: Easy to observe and measure activities	.612	.329
Organisation: Mainly measure inputs and processes	.176	.402
Organisation: Mainly measure outputs and outcomes	.639	.353
Organisation: Rewarded for achieving goals	.151	.713
Organisation: Clear sanctions for not achieving goals	.110	.786
Organisation: Politicians use indicators for monitoring performance	.259	.675

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Organizational-level controls included the size and type of organization. Furthermore, country-level dummy variable were included in the analysis to account for country-level differences in the survey responses. To do so, dummy variables were created for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, using UK as the reference group. All these variables were collected from the COCOPS dataset.

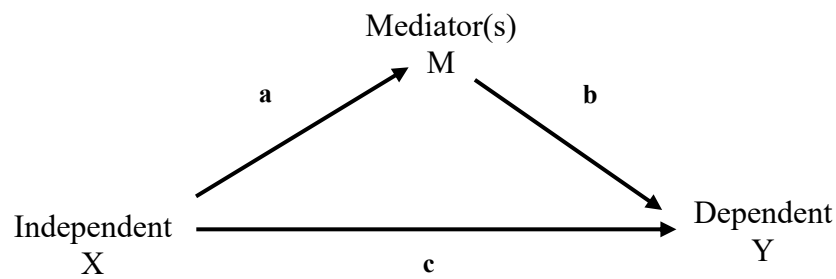
3.4 Data Analysis

In order to test hypotheses 1- 2, multiple regression analysis was conducted in the SPSS version 26. Multiple regression analysis appeared to be an appropriate statistical technique since it examines the strength of the relationship between two or more independent variables (i.e. meritocracy) and one dependent variable (i.e. job satisfaction or organizational commitment). Furthermore, it can be used to demonstrate one-way causality between

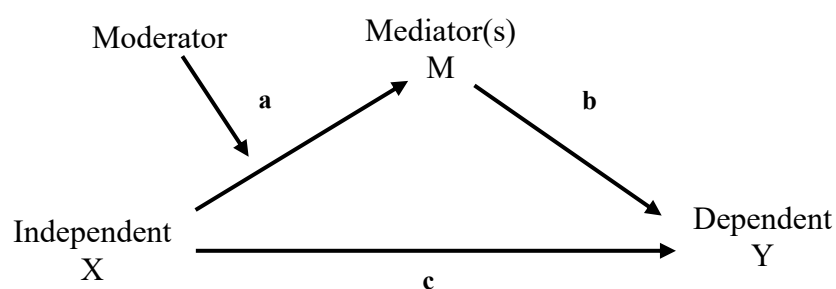
observed variables (Saunders et al., 2019). Another method is to utilize structural equation modelling (SEM), which is commonly employed for latent constructs. SEM has various advantages, including the ability to deal with dual causation and latent variables, however, this is not a concern for this study.

For hypothesis 3, this study performed a mediation analysis to investigate the mediating effect of job autonomy, using Preacher and Hayes (2004) PROCESS macro in SPSS. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the following stages are required to perform mediation analysis. To begin, determine whether the independent variable(s) has a significant effect on the mediator variable (see path a in Figure 1). Second, see if the mediator variable has a significant effect on the dependent variable (see path b). Third, see if the previously significant association between the independent and dependent variables becomes insignificant when both the independent and mediating variables are included in the regression model. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), full mediation occurs when the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable becomes statistically insignificant while the effect of the mediator variable remains substantial.

On the contrary, Zhao et al. (2010) contend that when both the independent and mediator variables are included in the model, there is no need to confirm the insignificance of the direct relationship between independent and dependent variables. According to the authors, the sole requirement for establishing mediation effects is the significance of the indirect effect. If the indirect effect (i.e. Path a x Path b) is statistically significant, then there is a mediation. As a result, this study employed the Zhao et al. (2010) approach to conduct mediation analysis.

Figure 1

For hypothesis 4, this study performed a moderated mediation analysis to examine whether the mediating effects of job autonomy are contingent on the hierarchical organizational level (i.e. moderator variable). Formally, moderated mediation occurs when the strength of an indirect effect depends on the level of some variable, or in other words, when mediating relations are contingent on the level of a moderator (see figure 2). To perform a moderated mediation analysis, an interaction term can be created between the independent variable and the moderator variable, which can be later used in the mediation analysis discussed above. However, this study utilized Preacher and Hayes (2004) process macro in SPSS that has a built-in option to perform a moderated mediation analysis.

Figure 2

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the research methodology used in this study. A quantitative research design was employed and identified through the use of a survey strategy for data collection. The data was drawn from the COCOPS Executive Survey on Public Sector

Reform in Europe. For data analysis, multiple regression analysis, mediation analysis, and moderated mediation analysis were performed in SPSS version 26. The next chapter presents the results of the data analysis and tests the research hypotheses proposed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the research process, focusing on research design/methodology, data collection, variable measurement, and data analysis methods. This chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion of research findings. Section 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics of the main (dependent/independent/control) variables. Section 4.3 contains the hypothesis testing, in which the four hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2 are rigorously analyzed to determine if they should be accepted or rejected. Section 4.4 summarises the main findings from hypothesis testing.

4.2 Descriptives

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables used in this study. According to the survey results, the mean organizational commitment among respondents was 5.03, with a standard deviation of 1.45. Respondents' job satisfaction was slightly higher than their organizational commitment, with a mean score of 5.40 and a standard deviation of 1.31. Moreover, the reported mean score for respondents' perceptions of the degree of meritocracy in their organizations was 4.28. However, respondents' opinions of job autonomy in performing their duties were quite low, with a mean score of 3.64. For control variables, the mean scores for goal clarity, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation were 4.91, 5.71, and 5.13, respectively.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Organizational Commitment	3860	1.00	7.00	5.03	1.45
Job Satisfaction	3876	1.00	7.00	5.40	1.31
Meritocracy	3732	1.00	7.00	4.28	1.27
Job Autonomy	4090	1.00	7.00	3.64	1.58
Goal Clarity	4106	1.00	7.00	4.91	1.28
Intrinsic Motivation	3565	1.00	7.00	5.71	.87
Extrinsic Motivation	3556	1.00	7.00	5.13	.99

Next, the comparison between the mean scores of respondents working at the top and third hierarchical levels is shown in Table 5. As can be seen, individuals working at the top had higher organizational commitment (5.28), job satisfaction (5.67), meritocracy perceptions (4.67), and job autonomy (4.60) than those working at the bottom, with mean scores of 4.88, 5.25, 4.05, and 3.09, respectively. Furthermore, top-level employees had more goal clarity on average (5.11). However, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were stronger among respondents working at the third hierarchical level, with mean scores of 5.72 and 5.18, respectively.

Table 5: Comparison between employees at different hierarchical levels

	Top hierarchical level employees		Third hierarchical level employees	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Organizational Commitment	5.28	1.35	4.88	1.49
Job Satisfaction	5.67	1.16	5.25	1.37
Meritocracy	4.67	1.14	4.05	1.28
Job Autonomy	4.60	1.48	3.09	1.35
Goal Clarity	5.11	1.19	4.80	1.31
Intrinsic Motivation	5.67	.84	5.72	.89
Extrinsic Motivation	5.04	1.00	5.18	.98

Finally, the correlations between dependent, independent, mediator, and control variables are shown in Table 6. As can be seen, the majority of correlations were positive and statistically significant. For example, the correlations between meritocracy and organizational commitment and meritocracy and job satisfaction were .293 and .336, respectively. Similarly, job autonomy was also positively associated with organizational commitment (.244) and job satisfaction (.325). Control variables such as goal clarity and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were also found to be positively associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Table 6: Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Organizational Commitment	1						
2. Job Satisfaction	.628**	1					
3. Meritocracy	.293**	.336**	1				
4. Job Autonomy	.244**	.325**	.307**	1			
5. Goal Clarity	.409**	.399**	.260**	.275**	1		
6. Extrinsic Motivation	.149**	.036*	-.067**	-.020	.200**	1	
7. Intrinsic Motivation	.093**	.110**	.042*	.140**	.129**	.384**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.3 Hypothesis testing

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 states that “the perception of meritocracy will be positively associated with civil servants’ (a) job satisfaction and (b) organisational commitment”. To examine this, separate regression analyses were performed, using organizational commitment and job satisfaction as dependent variables. Moreover, two models were tested for each dependent variable by entering independent variables in a stepwise manner. As such, model 1 included

only meritocracy as the main independent variable whereas model 2 added individual-level (i.e. goal clarity, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation) and organizational-level characteristics (i.e. no. of employees, dummies for organization type, and countries) to the main model. The results of the regression analysis are given in tables 7a and 7b.

Table 7a presents the estimated relationships between meritocracy and organizational commitment. Specifically, model 1 and model 2 show that the estimated relationship between meritocracy and organizational commitment with and without control variables (.327 and .212, respectively) were positive and statistically significant at a 1% significance level (p -value $< .01$). This implies that civil servants' perceptions of meritocracy were positively associated with their organizational commitment, after controlling for individual- and organizational-level characteristics.

Table 7a: Regression results for the relationship between meritocracy and organizational commitment

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	3.616*** (.087)	1.092*** (.399)
Meritocracy	.327*** (.019)	.212*** (.020)
Goal clarity		.391*** (.020)
Intrinsic motivation		-.020 (.030)
Extrinsic motivation		.105*** (.028)
No. of employees		.063*** (.016)
Organization type dummies	No	Yes
Country-level dummies	No	Yes
R squared	.079	.233
No. of observations	3290	3290

DV: Organizational commitment

*** p < .01 **p < .05 p < .01

Standard errors are reported in brackets

Table 7b shows the estimated relationships between meritocracy and job satisfaction. Like the impact on organizational commitment, model 1 and model 2 show that the estimated relationship between meritocracy and job satisfaction with and without control variables (.345 and .251, respectively) were positive and statistically significant at a 1% significance level (p-value < .01). This implies that civil servants' perceptions of meritocracy were also positively associated with their job satisfaction, after controlling for individual- and organizational-level characteristics.

Table 7b: Regression results for the relationship between meritocracy and job satisfaction

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	3.935*** (.076)	1.880*** (.352)
Meritocracy	.345*** (.017)	.251*** (.018)
Goal clarity		.363*** (.018)
Intrinsic motivation		.075*** (.026)
Extrinsic motivation		.017 (.025)
No. of employees		.034** (.014)
Organization type dummies	No	Yes
Country-level dummies	No	Yes
R squared	.112	.245
No. of observations	3293	3293

DV: Job satisfaction *** p < .01 **p < .05 p < .01

Standard errors are reported in brackets

Therefore, the above findings provide full support for hypothesis 1, as civil servants' perceptions of meritocracy were found to be positively associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

4.3.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 states that “the perception of job autonomy will be positively associated with civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment”. Similar to hypothesis 1, separate regression analyses were performed to examine the impact of job autonomy on organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The findings of the regression analysis are given in tables 8a and 8b.

Table a presents the estimated relationships between job autonomy and organizational commitment. As shown in the table, model 1 and model 2 show that the estimated relationship between job autonomy and organizational commitment with and without control variables (.217 and .127, respectively) were positive and statistically significant at a 1% significance level (p -value < .01). This implies that civil servants' perceptions of job autonomy in performing their duties were positively associated with their organizational commitment, after controlling for individual- and organizational-level characteristics.

Table 8a: Regression results for the relationship between job autonomy and organizational commitment

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	4.242** (.061)	1.604*** (.395)
Job autonomy	.217*** (.015)	.127*** (.017)
Goal clarity		.400*** (.020)
Intrinsic motivation		-.032 (.029)
Extrinsic motivation		.101*** (.028)
No. of employees		.053*** (.016)
Organization type dummies	No	Yes
Country-level dummies	No	Yes
R squared	.056	.222
No. of observations	3366	3366
DV: Organizational commitment	*** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ $p < .01$	
Standard errors are reported in brackets		

Table b shows the estimated relationships between job autonomy and job satisfaction. Similar to the effects on organizational commitment, model 1 and model 2 show that the

estimated relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction with and without control variables (.261 and .190, respectively) were positive and statistically significant at a 1% significance level (p -value $< .01$). This implies that civil servants' perceptions of job autonomy were also positively associated with their job satisfaction, after controlling for individual- and organizational-level characteristics.

Table 8b: Regression results for the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	4.471*** (.053)	2.443*** (.348)
Job autonomy	.261*** (.013)	.190*** (.015)
Goal clarity		.368*** (.018)
Intrinsic motivation		.046* (.026)
Extrinsic motivation		.016 (.025)
No. of employees		.024* (.014)
Organization type dummies	No	Yes
Country-level dummies	No	Yes
R squared	.102	.236
No. of observations	3371	3371
DV: Job satisfaction	*** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ $p < .01$	
Standard errors are reported in brackets		

Therefore, the above findings provide full support for hypothesis 2, as civil servants' perceptions of job autonomy in their tasks were found to be positively associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

4.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 states that “the perception of job autonomy will mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants’ (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment”. To test hypothesis 3, a mediation analysis was performed using Preacher and Hays (2014) PROCESS macro in SPSS. The following steps were taken to perform mediation analysis: 1) Examine the effect of meritocracy on the dependent variables (i.e. organizational commitment and job satisfaction), excluding job autonomy, 2) Examine the impact of the meritocracy on job autonomy, 3) Examine the impact of job autonomy on organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and 4) Examine if the previously significant association between the meritocracy and organizational commitment and job satisfaction becomes insignificant when both meritocracy and job autonomy are included in the regression model simultaneously. A separate mediation analysis was performed for both organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Tables 9a, 9b, and 9c report the total, direct, and indirect effects of meritocracy on the organizational commitment that occurs through job autonomy. Table 9a reports that the total effect of meritocracy (.233) on organizational commitment was positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$). Table 9b shows that the direct effect of meritocracy (.204) on organizational commitment was also positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$), after including control variables. Finally, Table 9c shows that the indirect effect of meritocracy on organizational commitment via job autonomy (.029) was also positive and statistically significant since the bootstrapped confidence interval did not contain zero. This suggests that job autonomy indeed mediates the relationship between meritocracy and organizational commitment.

Table 9a: Total effect of X on Y

Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.233	.018	12.616	.000	.197	.269

Y: Organizational commitment; X: Meritocracy

Table 9b: Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.204	.019	10.749	.000	.167	.241

Y: Organizational commitment; X: Meritocracy

Table 9c: Indirect effect of X on Y through M

Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
.029	.005	.019	.040

Y: Organizational commitment; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

Tables 10a, 10b, and 10c report the total, direct, and indirect effects of meritocracy on job satisfaction commitment that occurs through job autonomy. Table 10a reports that the total effect of meritocracy (.251) on job satisfaction was positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$). Table 10b shows that the direct effect of meritocracy (.208) on job satisfaction was also positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$), after including control variables. Finally, Table 10c shows that the indirect effect of meritocracy on job satisfaction via job autonomy (.043) was also positive and statistically significant. This suggests that job autonomy indeed mediates the relationship between meritocracy and job satisfaction.

Table 10a: Total effect of X on Y

Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.251	.016	15.314	.000	.219	.283

Y: Job satisfaction; X: Meritocracy

Table 10b: Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.208	.017	12.483	.000	.175	.241

Y: Job satisfaction; X: Meritocracy

Table 10c: Indirect effect of X on Y through M

Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
.043	.005	.033	.054

Y: Job satisfaction; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

The findings of the mediation analysis fully support hypothesis 3, as job autonomy was found to mediate the impact of meritocracy on organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

4.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 states that “the mediating effect of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants’ (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment will be stronger for top-level officials as compared to lower-level officials”. In other words, hypothesis 4 investigates the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy via job autonomy at various hierarchical levels. To accomplish this, a moderated-mediation analysis was carried out, with the position of civil servants in the organizational hierarchy serving as moderator.

Table 11a shows the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy on organizational commitment for civil servants at the top and third hierarchical levels of an organization. As can be seen, the indirect effect of meritocracy via job autonomy was more positive for top-level employees (.036) than for lower-level employees (.012). Furthermore, the conditional indirect effects were statistically significant for both groups. The statistical significance of the difference between the conditional indirect effects is reported in Table 11b. As can be seen,

the difference between the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy via work autonomy (-.024) was also statistically significant, indicating that the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy via job autonomy were larger for top-level employees.

Table 11a: Conditional indirect effects of X on Y through M

Hierarchical Level	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Top hierarchical level in the organization	.036	.007	.023	.050
Third hierarchical level in the organization	.012	.003	.006	.018

Y: Organizational commitment; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

Table 11b: Difference between the conditional indirect effect of X on Y through M

Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
-.024	.006	-.036	-.014

Y: Organizational commitment; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

Table 12a shows the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy on job satisfaction for civil servants at the top and third hierarchical levels of an organization. As can be seen, the indirect effect of meritocracy via job autonomy was more positive for top-level employees (.052) than for lower-level employees (.018). Furthermore, the conditional indirect effects were statistically significant for both groups. The statistical significance of the difference between the conditional indirect effects is reported in Table 12b. As can be seen, the difference between the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy via work autonomy (-.035) was also statistically significant, indicating that the conditional indirect effects of meritocracy via job autonomy were larger for top-level employees.

Table 12a: Conditional indirect effects of X on Y through M

Hierarchical Level	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Top hierarchical level in organization	.052	.007	.039	.067
Third hierarchical level in organization	.018	.004	.010	.026

Y: Job satisfaction; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

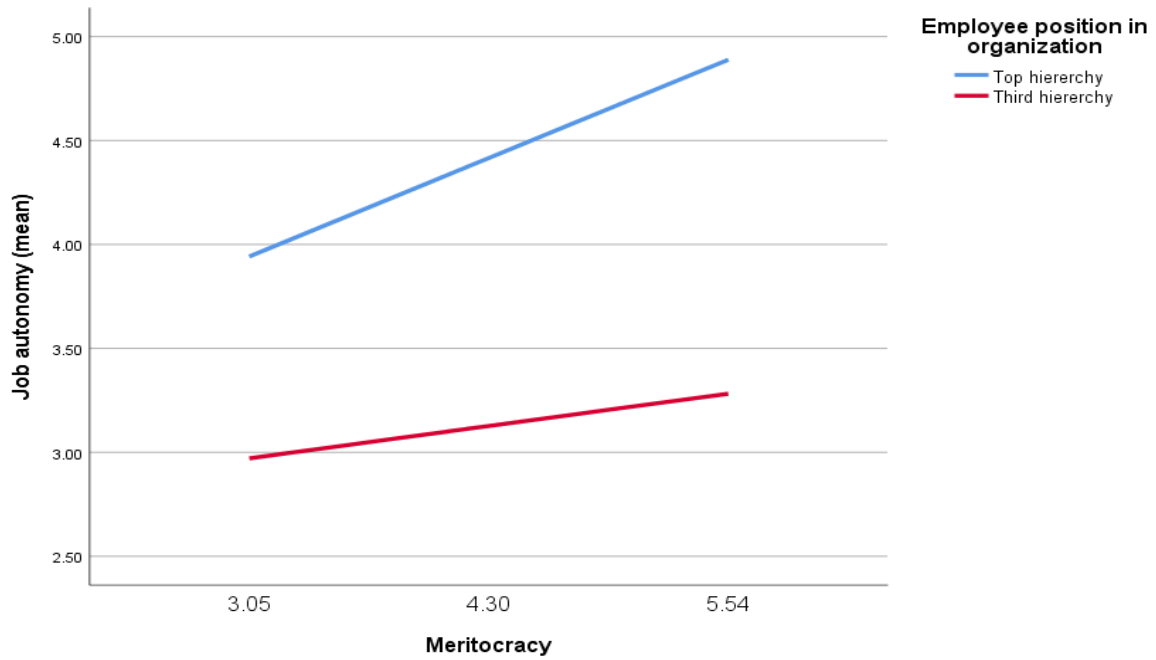
Table 12b: Difference between conditional indirect effect of X on Y through M

Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
-.035	.007	-.049	-.022

Y: Job satisfaction; X: Meritocracy; M: Job autonomy

Figure 3 below depicts the relationship between meritocracy and job autonomy for individuals working at the organization's top or third hierarchical level. The steep line in the graph shows that the association between meritocracy and job autonomy is more positive for top-level employees than for those working in the lower-level hierarchy.

Figure 3



Therefore, the findings of the moderated-mediation analysis fully support hypothesis 4, as the mediating effect of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and organizational commitment and job satisfaction was stronger for top-level officials compared to lower-levels officials.

4.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the data analysis performed to examine the proposed hypotheses. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis, mediation analysis, and moderated-mediation analysis were conducted. The main hypothesis outcomes are shown in Table 13. As seen in the table, the findings provided full support for all of the hypotheses.

Table 13: Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Results
H1: The perception of meritocracy will be positively associated with civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment	Supported
H2: The perception of job autonomy will be positively associated with civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment.	Supported
H3: The perception of job autonomy will mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment	Supported
H4: The mediating effect of job autonomy in the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' (a) job satisfaction and (b) organizational commitment will be stronger for top-level officials as compared to lower-level officials.	Supported

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Discussion

Despite the importance of meritocracy in the public sector, only a handful of studies have examined how civil servants' perceptions of the degree of meritocracy in their organization affect their work attitudes (e.g. Suzuki & Hur, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). More importantly, the role of mediating factors such as job autonomy and contextual factors such as civil servants' organizational hierarchical level has been entirely overlooked. Therefore, the goal of this study was to investigate how two characteristics (i.e. job autonomy and organizational hierarchical level) influence the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes. Specifically, the following research questions were investigated:

RQ 1: What is the impact of meritocracy on civil servants' work attitudes as measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment?

RQ 2: Does job autonomy mediate the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes as measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment?

RQ 3: Does the hierarchical level of civil servants influence the relationship between meritocracy, job autonomy, and work attitudes?

By using self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) as a theoretical foundation, this study argued that individuals hired based on merit typically have a greater autonomous motivation, which in turn increases their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In this regard, recent empirical studies on meritocracy and work attitudes in the public sector by Suzuki and Hur (2020) and Kim et al. (2021) found that meritocratic recruitment systems result in favorable workplace attitudes. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted for RQ 1 to investigate the effects of public servants' perceptions of meritocracy on their work attitudes measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Consistent with previous studies, the analysis revealed that perceptions of meritocracy were positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The goal of meritocracy in government is to select and hire the best-qualified employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social background. But how does meritocracy result in positive work attitudes? According to the tenets of self-determination theory, autonomous motivation depends on meeting basic psychological needs, such as job autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As argued by Kim et al. (2021), a meritocratic workplace can facilitate the fulfillment of these psychological requirements (2021). Moreover, Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) stated that meritocratic hiring systems are intended to enhance professional autonomy. This underlies that a merit-based recruiting system is more likely to provide civil servants with greater job autonomy. Therefore, we argued that job autonomy will mediate the link between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes. While earlier research has demonstrated that higher job autonomy improves individuals' intrinsic motivation, productivity, and positive work attitudes (Morrison et al., 2005; Neimiec & Ryan, 2009; Saragih 2011; Naqvi et al., 2013), no study has looked at the impact of meritocracy on job autonomy. As a result, in RQ2, a mediation analysis was carried out to investigate the mediating effects of job autonomy. Consistent with previous research, the findings demonstrated that job autonomy does indeed mediate the influence of meritocracy on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes might also depend on the organizational hierarchical level of civil servants. Because individuals at different hierarchical levels have varied levels of job autonomy, we proposed that the mediating effects of job autonomy might differ between the top and lower-level employees. Prior empirical studies in the private sector have consistently indicated that top-level employees are more satisfied and committed to their firms due to greater job autonomy than lower-level employees (Suman & Srivastava, 2012; Sisodia & Das, 2013). Therefore, a moderated-mediation analysis was undertaken for RQ3 to see if the mediating effects of job autonomy

are affected by the hierarchical level of civil servants. The findings revealed that the mediating effects of job autonomy were stronger for top-level officials compared to lower-level officials.

This study provides several theoretical and practical implications. First, we present a more elaborate test of self-determination theory by investigating the underlying mechanisms (i.e. job autonomy and organizational hierarchical level) via which meritocracy influences workplace attitudes in public organizations. As scholars have begun to investigate the benefits of meritocracy in the public sector and how it affects workplace attitudes, this study adds to that literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of meritocracy's influence and various characteristics that can impede or facilitate its impact on civil servants' work attitudes.

Second, from a practical standpoint, this study suggests that public organizations can gain from increasing civil servants' work autonomy, as the findings show that the main benefit of a meritocratic recruitment system depends on providing employees with greater job autonomy. Not only this, but the hierarchical level of civil servants holds equal importance since individuals at different hierarchical levels have varying degrees of autonomy, which has been shown to have a major impact on their job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

This study comes with some limitations and provides interesting avenues for future researchers. The first limitation is related to the data collection strategy. While surveys are an effective data collection approach for quantitative research, they do not provide in-depth information on the studied variables. To have a better grasp of the relationship between meritocracy and civil servants' work attitudes, future researchers should conduct "focus groups" and qualitative studies. Such a study will greatly enhance our understanding of the underlying reasons why a non-meritocratic system reduces job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The second limitation is data availability. While this study controlled for individual characteristics such as goal clarity and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, as well as organizational characteristics such as the number of employees and organization type, data on respondents' demographic characteristics, were not available. As a result, we encourage future researchers to replicate the current analysis after accounting for demographic control variables and other organizational characteristics. This will not only reveal further insights but will also strengthen the reliability of the results.

The third limitation is about the mediating and moderating effects of job autonomy and organizational hierarchy, respectively. While job autonomy was found to be a strong predictor of civil servants' work attitudes, other factors could also explain meritocracy's influence on work attitudes. Previous research, for example, has shown job stress and self-efficacy as significant predictors of employees' work attitudes (Saragih, 2011). However, this study did not examine the impact of these mediators. On a similar note, Kim et al. (2021) highlighted task complexity as a potential moderator in the relationship between meritocracy and work attitudes. While this study attempted to capture this phenomenon by investigating the effects of civil servants' organizational hierarchical level, we did not specifically measure task complexity. Therefore, examining task complexity as a potential moderator would thus be an intriguing study topic for future research.

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