

## **Consequences of Workplace Envy and It's Antecedents – A Theoretical Framework**

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### **Abstract**

The emotions felt by an individual at the workplace play a significant role in the performance output of an employee and the organisation at large. The academic world has been trying to understand the impacts of various such emotions on the productivity of employees but most of the studies have focused on positive emotions like engagement, commitment etc. Envy at workplace is one of the negative emotions felt by the employees which has a significant impact on employee's performance and overall behaviour as well. The current study is an attempt to understand what induces envy among employees at workplace, the role played by the leaders and organisational climate and the various positive and negative consequences of envy at workplace.

The researchers have proposed a theoretical framework for understanding the construct of workplace envy - its antecedents, moderators, and consequences.

### **Introduction**

An employee during their interactions with the colleagues, supervisor, subordinates, or any other stakeholder depict a lot of emotions. Lately, a lot of focus on these emotions in the academic literature has been observed. More often we discuss how the feelings and emotions of an individual affect the performance of employee and ultimately, the organisation's performance. And hence, it becomes important for managers to recognize both the positive and negative emotions shown by employees at the workplace. In the past few decades, envy at workplace as an emotion has attracted the interest of many researchers) (Buunk et al., 2020; Dogan & Vecchio, 2001; Smith et al, 2017).

Envy at workplace is explained as a form of negative emotions, feelings, beliefs, and manners that are an effect of loss of appreciation or self-esteem when someone else who is significant to a person achieves outcomes that they desire (Vecchio, 1995; 2000). Envy is generated when someone lacks or yearn for others' outstanding qualities, accomplishments, or belongings (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Accordingly, envy is common in the organisations (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Smith & Kim, 2007), particularly when employees experience or generate a perception of an imbalance in the distribution of attention, time, rewards, or job promotions by the organizational authorities (Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012). The

feeling of envy may result in both positive and negative outcomes for the employees looking for gaining the comparative advantages of those they envy (Duffy et al, 2008; Smith & Kim, 2007). Modern research on envy at workplace suggests that envy can be categorized into two forms: benign envy and malicious envy. While an employee is envious of someone, the envier tries to reduce the difference between them and the envied person. When the actions taken by the envier are focused on improving one's position to decrease the difference between self and the superior other, it is benign envy, while when the actions of the envier are focused on pulling the other person down aimed at damaging the position of the envied person, it is malicious envy (Braun et al., 2018; Celse et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017; Lange & Crusius, 2015; Lange et al., 2018; Navarro- Carrillo et al., 2018).

Managing envy is crucial for employees as well as organisations because it can significantly affect the behaviour of people at the workplace. In the current volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment, the level of competitions within the firms and within the employees have been increasing leading to a hostile environment in and out of the organisations. The social interactions of employees generally are also becoming more complex involving a variety of stakeholders like dealers, supplier, customers to name a few. These new demands have created a shift in interpersonal relationships at work. It is in this context that envy at workplace needs attention for its existence and possible repercussions for working life. (Buunk et al., 2012).

### **Theoretical Background of Envy**

Individuals are motivated to see the world around them and their place in that world by comparing themselves to others. It is with these comparisons that the individuals gain the information that helps them understand, the importance of their thoughts, opinions and their social standing as compared to others. Festinger's (1954) theory on social comparison proposed the process and consequences of social comparisons. He posited that individuals have a basic need of comparing their abilities and opinions with those of others. These comparisons of individuals with the abilities, opinions, performances of others, influence the behavior of individuals and their performance as well. Envy gets triggered due to such formal or informal social comparisons (Takahashi et al., 2009).

Individuals use this social comparison as a way of self-evaluation. One's sense of self-worth is influenced by one's perceived performance, success, opportunities, rewards, position, and status within an organisation. In most organisations, performance and the resultant opportunities gained by an individual are not completely evaluated objectively, rather it is something which is socially constructed which is reflected in the status of an individual within the organisation and with the access that individuals get to rewards, recognition, and the attention of higher authorities (Judge & Ferris, 1993). Any event or person that is perceived to threaten an individual's status within the organisation gets a strong reaction from that individual. Social comparisons within the workplace, especially those focused on upward comparisons i.e. comparisons with those who are perceived to be better than them result into negative affective and behavioural consequences. Ignoring these potential consequences, organisations promote performance-based appraisals, rewards, and recognition practices like 'employee of the month' to implicitly encourage upward comparisons in order to motivate

the higher performers (Stein, 2000). When an individual feels outperformed by their peers, it may result into either productive or counterproductive behaviour. Productive behaviours may include trying to improve their performance and counterproductive behaviours may include trying to reduce the achievement of others. Social comparisons may induce a variety of feelings and emotions and it has been concluded by many researchers that the same stimuli may result in different behaviours of different individuals. The social comparison may result into benign envy or malicious envy.

Since these social comparisons happen within the context of an organisation, the organisational climate also plays a significant role in deciding whether individuals will depict malicious or benign envy. In case of perceived fairness and climate of justice, the individuals will be more likely to feel benign envy where the social comparison will result in believing that with improvement in performance, they can also reach higher level of achievements. Conversely, if the organisational climate is perceived to be biased and unfair, individuals will more likely experience malicious envy where they will be able to improve their rewards only by proving others to be below them.

### **Difference between Jealousy and Envy**

Jealousy arises when an individual fears losing a relationship with someone valued over an imaginary or actual rival who seeks attention from that valued person (DeSteno&Salovey, 1996; Heider, 1958). In the context of organisations many situations may induce the fear of losing such a valued relationship to another individual. The situations may arise because of reorganization of teams, introduction of a newcomer to the organisation, mergers of functional departments etc. (Vecchio, 2000). As mentioned, the threat may be real or imagined, the feelings of jealousy surface as an individual senses a threat of losing an important relationship.

Though jealousy is largely spoken about in the context of romantic relationships, researchers and theorists argue that similar process that results in sexual jealousy may lead to jealousy in other types of dyadic relationships through a universal jealousy mechanism. (DeSteno et al 2006; Fussel&Stollery, 2012; Harris, 2003; Parrott, 1991; Salovey & Rodin, 1984). In organisations workplace relationships like supervisor-subordinate to colleague relations may be affected by the consequences of jealousy. Jealousy takes place in a triad- the jealous individual (actor), the valued partner (target), and the rival. Jealousy in workplace can affect communication between co-workers, it may give rise to behavioural misinterpretations and may also induce destructive behaviours (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998; Kim et al, 2013). Jealousy may be felt in absence of an existing valued relationships also if such relationships are desired as the actor feels a longing for having a valued relationship.

In contrast, a person may feel envious without a fear of losing a valued relationship when an individual feels that the other person has what is desired by them. Envy rises when an individual feels a deficit of quality, achievement, status, or any other possession that is strongly desired by the individual but is being possessed by someone else (Salovey & Rodin,1988). The feeling of envy is defined as “an unpleasant and often painful blend of

feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by a comparison with a person or a group of people who possess something we desire” (Smith & Kim, 2007). There are four approaches to understand Envy: Situational Approach, Episodic Approach, Typological Approach and Dispositional Approach.

According to situational approach envy is a pattern of thoughts, behaviour, feelings, and emotions experienced due to the loss of self-esteem when someone else who is significant to the person achieves better outcomes (Demirtas et al., 2017; Eissa, &Wyland, 2016; Erdil, &Muceldili, 2014; Ghadi, 2018; Gonzalez- Navarro et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2016; Ogunfowora et al.2019 and Reh et al. 2000). The episodic approach to envy focuses on envy generated because of specific events which is induced by upward social comparisons within the organisation during which the envied person gets the feeling of being inferior to the envied person as the envious person lacks what the envied person has.(Brooks et al., 2019; Dineen et al. 2017; Gan, 2019; Khan et al., 2014;Nandedkar, 2016; Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2018; Shu &Lazatkhan, 2017; Tariq et al. (2019); Thiel et al.,2020; Wilkin & Connelly, 2015). Typological approach to envy explains envy as an agonizing sentiment which is induced by the good luck and fortune of others. This approach makes a distinction between two types of envy: benign and malicious envy. In both the cases, the envious person tries to reduce the difference between oneself and the superior other. In benign envy the individual seeks to increase their efforts to improve one’s position and in malicious envy they try to reduce the gap by pulling the other down by damaging the position of the superior other (Van de Ven et al 2009). Dispositional approach to envy conceptualizes the feeling of envy as an unpleasant and painful emotion which is a blend of mediocrity, aggression, and dislike linked to the pleasure derived by someone else. This approach considers that the envious person develops a generalised tendency of responding with negative feelings when another person achieves any advantage. The approach focuses on the individual differences in the tendency of being envious.

### **Factors impacting Envy**

#### *Personality of Envier*

The typological approach to envy proposes that there are two types of envy: benign and malicious and that benign envy results in positive behaviours. However, some researchers argue that both of them constitute a negative emotional state (Falcon, 2015; Lange & Crusius, 2015a; Van de Ven et al., 2009). Further evidence suggests that both situational as well as dispositional envy are correlated positively with a negative affect resulting from upward comparison (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Lange, Weidman, & Crusius, 2018). The pain induced by envy is the feeling of inferiority which in turn can stimulate depression (Smith et al, 1994). The distress caused due to benign envy results into a strong intent of self-improvement to match the envied person (Lange et al, 2018). Such situations lead the envious person towards unconditional efforts to improve their status in the organisation however, in this case, any such visible aggressive actions may reduce the chances of the envious person to rise in the hierarchy. So, the envious needs to strategize subtle and indirect actions which are reflected as behavioural patterns of Machiavellianism (Jones &Paulhus, 2009). Machiavellian behaviour is regarded as pragmatic ethics that rationalize any means to be successful. Such

behaviours may be functional in both benign as well malicious envy. Further, malicious envy has been linked with impulsivity (Shoham et al, 2015). Psychopaths are also exemplified by such manipulations which are impulsive in nature (LeBreton et al., 2006). Research suggests that such personalities are more likely to show hostility towards competitors (Jones & Paulhus, 2010; Williams & Paulhus, 2004). By such behaviours these personalities try to defame their successful competitors and decrease their status in the organisation.

However, Individuals with high self-esteem treat envy as a motivation to get engaged in positive behaviours like work engagement so that they raise their status in the organisation to the level of their envied target so that their self-view is improved (Brockner et al, 2009). Self-esteem is positively correlated to work engagement, negatively correlated to anxiety, and positively correlated to energies for personal engagements. Individuals with lower self-esteem tend to behave anti-socially, may be because they are more critical and susceptible to influence by external and social cues. (Duffy et al., 2006; Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Brockner, 1988).

Research have also concluded that individuals with higher level of neuroticism generally experience higher level of reactions to stressful events and are more expected to apply maladaptive coping strategies like self-blame (Gunthert et al 1999; Wang et al, 2011). It is also negatively linked to overall satisfaction with life (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Individuals high on neuroticism are more likely to show higher levels of hostility and anger. They are also more receptive to provocations in the external environment. They often interpret neutral stimuli also negatively (Duffy et al., 2006; Judge et al., 2002). People high on neuroticism are more likely to feel malicious envy as they engage in reactive behaviours in an attempt to ease their feeling of inferiority (Tracy & Robins, 2003). Individuals with higher level of emotional stability (low neuroticism) are less likely to exhibit harming behaviors such as social undermining. Employees' personality and behaviours affect envy, i.e. employees who have higher expectations from themselves derive higher disappointment. When employees compare their failure / success and expectations with the success of others, envy evolves (Schaubroeck and Lam, 2004). Envy has numerous intrinsic characteristics like low self-esteem, subjective or perceived injustice, high need for achievement (Silver and Sabini, 1978).

Employees high on Conscientiousness have the desire to organise and complete duties efficiently (Taylor and De Bruin, 2006). High levels of conscientiousness in an individual are characterised by carefulness, dependency, high determination, self-discipline, and task orientation (Judge et al., 2002). Conscientious employees are expected to focus more on their assignments rather than on what their colleagues are doing and hence they are expected to experience less envy (Mishra, 2009). Furthermore, conscientious and employees with internal locus of control do believe that the outcomes are under their control (Smith and Kim, 2007).

### Leadership

The behaviour of leaders in any organisation has significant effects on the job satisfaction of employees. Perceived fairness in the organisation results into positive work behaviours of the employees. The personality traits and personal abilities of the leader as perceived by the subordinates influences their behaviour in the workplace. For example, a considerate leader with good interpersonal processing and business abilities will be able to elevate the

organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) of employees while minimizing the psychological activities like jealousy and hatred (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Since leaders play a significant role in the distribution of rewards and recognition in any organisation, employees with good working relationships with their leaders are more likely to obtain better support. (Vecchio 2005).

When a leader is perceived to be non-considerate or when the followers perceive that the quality of their relationship with their leader is not very good, it is more likely that the follower envy those who have a better relationship with the leader (Castro et al. 2004). A good relationship may be useful in reducing the emotional burdens felt by the employees. A leadership theory which tries to explain the quality of relationship between the leader and a member is LMX theory. It focuses on the effect of low and high leader member exchange on followers' behaviour. The theory explains which type of followers get to enter in the in-group of leaders and also explains that the followers who are in the in-group of leaders generally have higher job satisfaction, higher level of performances and overall are seen to be more successful in the organisation. The present literature proves, through both empirical and normative research, that the leaders or supervisors have the capacity to adjust the envy or jealousy felt by the employees by improving the perceived quality of LMX with employees (Kim et al. 2010).

Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005: 120). This definition also focuses the importance of leader behaviour and their relationship with subordinate on organisational effectiveness. A leader who is seen as fair and just in his actions and treatment of his subordinates can motivate the employees through LMX (Dunn & Schweitzer 2006). In contrast to this, a leader who is unfair and unjust may invigorate envy among employees.

Envy gets converted to jealousy when subordinates feel that some special treatment is enjoyed by those in the in-group of a leader when the envious employee also desires to have a good LMX with the leader. Scholars have therefore concluded that with ethical leadership behaviour moderated by high LMX a leader may increase the organisational citizenship behaviour of employees and jealousy among employees and resultant workplace deviance behaviours may be alleviated. Poor leadership or poor LMX indicates a tendency of subordinates to target opposing behaviours of the leaders and result in damaging the organisational functions (Hupka 1984).

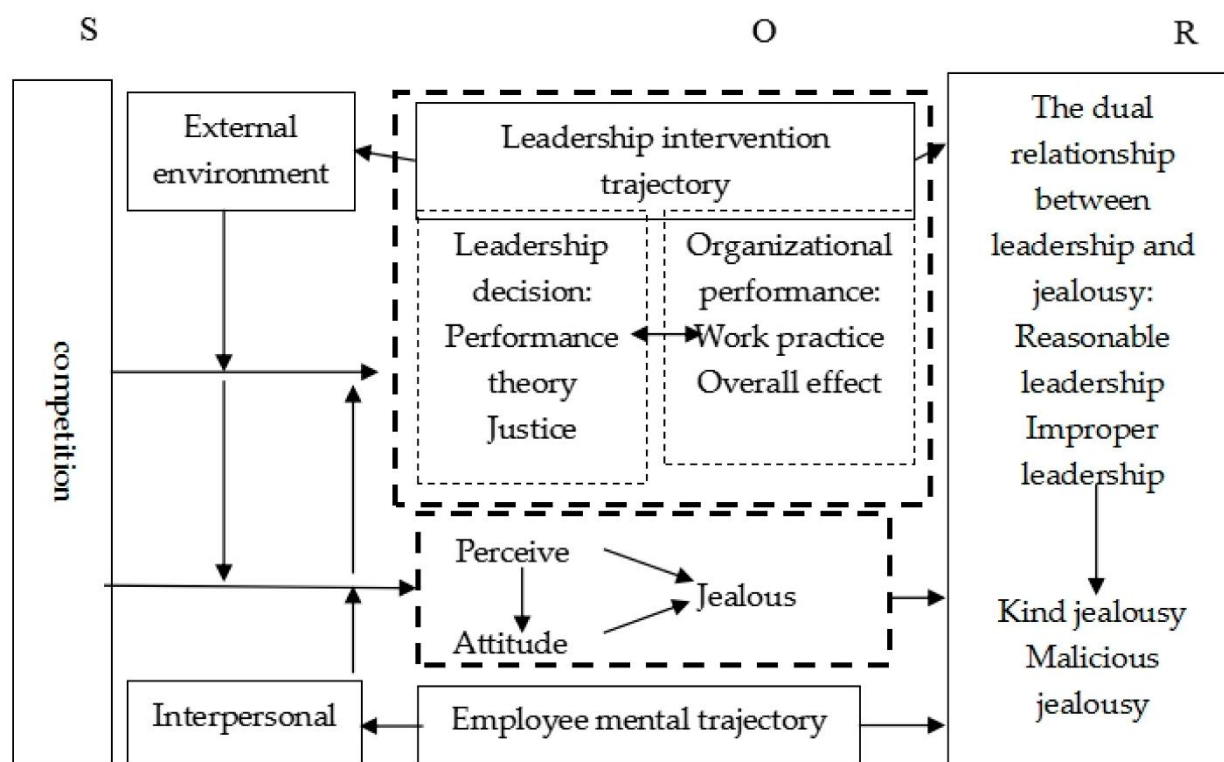
Earlier studies on envy and leadership used to focus on the competition among the employees for gaining access to resources. It was believed that envy will originate if one fails to give a tough competition in the workplace. Recently the focus has been shifted to such envy which is generated even if an employee is not directly in competition with the other employee, but they share the same leadership. This type of invisible envy has no results on the resource allocation but can still significantly affect the behaviour of employees because such type of envy is deep rooted in the standards established by employees on their own which are guided by their self-esteem. Once an employee starts feeling that other employees are secretly closely related to the leader and that they are not able to be as expressive as others, they are

likely to experience jealousy. Since the cause of such envy is rooted in subjectivity of the employee, this type of envy becomes difficult to control. It was found that the employees who perform better become vulnerable to sabotage behaviour of other employees, but the leader has the power to alleviate this adverse effect by establishing a team identity (Kim & Glomb, 2014).

In case the leadership goes out of balance, the working environment will be detrimental resulting in difficulty to carry out the follow-up work. Due to the presence of *schadenfreude*, employees feel pleased with the suffering of others if the supervision by a leader is perceived to be abusive (Leon and Halbesleben, 1981). Social exchange theory proposes that in social interactions people try to gain benefits and reduce the costs associated during interactions. Taking clues from this proposition, people should try to eliminate competition in situations with an inherent conflict of interest and focus on win-win situations through mutual social exchanges. The LMX theory is an extension of social exchange theory where leaders should try to minimize conflicts in the workplace, search for win-win solutions so that the working environment is felt to be healthy and motivating.

With poor leadership and abusive use of power, a leader may create tensions in the workplace. Leader may motivate formations of small groups of employees to achieve higher leadership control over the followers. In such situations leader motivates employees to envy those who are seen as close to the leader. Leaders also many a times deliberately assess and quantify the job performance, inducing competition among the employees to achieve higher performance by them at the cost of mutual trust. In such situations employees make progress in the performance with a high degree of tension and negative feelings like envy towards their competitors. The followers of a narcissistic leaders are found to be more likely to react with greater levels of malicious envy (Braun et al, 2018).

In the current workplaces, employees are more accessible and subjective as well. If the leaders respond to employee jealousy flexibly and appropriately, they may be able to convert the malicious envy to benign envy (Demirtas et al. 2017).



**Figure 1: Relationship of Leadership and Envy: How to Resolve Workplace Envy with Leadership**

Source: Liu, Hongda, JiejunGeng, and Pinbo Yao. 2021. Relationship of Leadership and Envy: How to Resolve Workplace Envy with Leadership—A Bibliometric Review Study.

Figure 1 shown above tries to explain the role of leadership in envy. The model proposes that the relationship between envy and leadership is not linear. There are many other factors intertwined. The model proposes that competition in the workplace which is a resultant factor of both interpersonal and external environment of the organisation may result in either benign or malicious envy. The relationship between competition and envy is being moderated by the leadership experienced by the employees in the organisation along with the psychological traits of the employees experiencing envy. Through leader's intervention trajectory, the employee's psychological trajectory w.r.t. perceived attitudes towards envy may be adjusted, eventually converting malicious envy into benign envy. In contrast, inappropriate leadership may inhibit good envy and intensify the presence of malicious envy.

#### Referent Cognitions

The way an individual perceives the envied target is their referent cognitions. Most explanations of envy have focused on perceived similarity between the actor and target (Schaubroeck& Lam, 2004). However, the feelings of referent cognitions are much more than just a judgment of similarity between the actor and the target. Social cognition research proposes that individuals make conclusions about others in their surroundings on two dimensions, the warmth with which they meet and deal with people and the competence they show in their work (Cuddy et al, 2008; Fiske et al, 2007; Judd et al, 2005). The warmth dimension includes qualities like friendliness, trustworthiness, morality, and helpfulness while the competence dimension focuses on the ability, skills, intelligence, and creativity of the individual. An employee who is perceived to be warm will be the target of positive envy



i.e. the individual will not be socially undermined as the achievements of such an envied person are seen to be justified. Competence of a person is less relevant if the person is perceived to be lacking the warmth. (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008). On the contrary if an employee is neither perceived warm nor competent, he/she is likely to be target of increased social undermining. Research shows that when people in the organisation perceive the inequitable treatment of employees is unjustified by warmth and competence of envied target, they develop feelings of bitterness (Folger et al., 1983) and the consequences of such feelings are faced by the envied target. In such a case the envied target fails to get the cooperation of envier as the envier feels that envied target is already enjoying an advantage in the organisation (Parks et al, 2002). If the envied target is perceived to be competent but not warm, they are likely to draw negative emotions. (Spears et al., 2005). In fact such a situation gives rise to more hostility or even Schadenfreude i.e. the envier person starts deriving pleasure from the misfortune of the envied person (Smith et al., 1996). However, the role of referent cognitions is limited to the social exchanges between the envier and the envied target. They do not have any implications on the social exchange with the organisation.

#### Perceived Organisational Support

Perceived Organisational Support is the general perception held by employees about the value provided to them, their contributions, and their well-being in the organisation (Eisenberger et al, 1986). Perceived organisation support is the perception towards organisational policies, norms and procedures which have significant effect on employees. Findings of empirical research on perceived organisational support show that it plays a significant role in satisfying the esteem needs of employees through approval and social identity ((Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). It provides a foundation for mutually beneficial social exchanges between the organisation and its employees where employees reciprocate the support received through greater job performance, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Eisenberger et al, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993). With respect to envy, it is contended that employees who are high on perceived organisational support will view the advantage received by the envied as well deserved as the system is perceived to be just and fair. Furthermore, they will have positive expectations that in case they perform better, organisation will reward them too. Thus employees with high perceived organisation support are expected to show higher performance in the presence of envy. On the contrary, when employees have low perceived organisational support, they are likely to hold the organisation responsible for their undesired situation (Moorman et al., 1998; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In such a situation, envy will be associated with decreased job performance.

### **Consequences of Workplace Envy**

#### Behavioral Outcomes of Envy

The outcome of comparisons induced as proposed in social comparison theory are integration or contrast. The research on envy has studied the behavioural outcomes of envy from multiple dimensions but in general it is found that the envier either tries to improve self or harm the envied so that the gap between the envier and the envied may be reduced (Crusius et al., 2020; Koopman et al., 2020; Lee&Duffy, 2019; Mao et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2018).

Equity theory also provides a base for understanding the behavioural consequences of envy. It proposes that when an individual feels that they are victim of inequitable treatment at the workplace based on their assessment of input to output ratios of self and others, they try to restore equity by variety of means (Pinder, 2008). They might respond through social undermining of the target, prosocial behavior of self or by improved job performance.

Since open expressions of envy are socially not desirable so people frequently use more covert ways to restore the balance with envied targets. Social undermining is one such behavioural response to envy where the envier's behaviour is focused on bringing the envied target down. This behaviour is a threat-oriented action tendency (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006). The intentional actions of the actor towards the target to reduce the target's ability to establish and sustain positive working relationships and a favourable reputation is called as social undermining. Though in most of the cases unfavorable social comparisons lead to such negative behavioural outcomes, in some cases such comparisons may also be found to increase the positive affect (Buunk et al, 1990; Buunk et al, 2001). Whether the behavioural outcome of such upward social comparison will be negative or positive also depends on people's self-views (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). People with positive self-views focus on "getting ahead" instead of social undermining.

An individual who experiences envy may feel inferior and less worthy of self at work. This in turn affects their behaviour in their expected roles (performance) and also affects their organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Negative upward comparison results in resentment and despair in the envious which results into reduced performance and OCBs. The envious also tries to improve self by seeking help, engaging in learning behaviours and such other forms of self-improvement to reduce the perceived gap between envier and envied (Lee & Duffy, 2019).

#### Organisational Perceptions

Workplace envy born through the social comparison processes in the organisation tend to induce unfavorable perceptions about an organisation which includes reduced sense of self within an organisation and group (Ashmore et al., 2004; Kim & Glomb, 2014). It also results in reduced level of organisational engagement, i.e. the employees spend less emotional, cognitive, and physical energy towards their work roles (Erdil & Muceldili, 2014; Kahn, 1990). The job satisfaction also gets reduced when one experiences workplace envy (Brown et al., 2007; Judge et al., 2005).

#### Prosocial Behaviour

Workplace envy results in low levels of prosocial behaviour if the envy is malicious, i.e. a person who perceives that other person is enjoying an advantage which was deserved by them, they reduce such behaviours which may benefit the target of envy. However, whether the prosocial behaviour will increase, or decrease will depend on the personal orientation of envious person. If the envier has a challenge orientation, the prosocial behaviour may increase where the actor engages in such discretionary efforts which assists others and even towards those people whom they envy. Such behaviours may help them to look good in front of others and may also contribute to enhanced performance evaluations ultimately leading to higher chance of career advancement (Flynn, 2003, 2006; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Hui et al, 2000). The desire to be prosocial may also be influenced by other contextual factors like the

likeability of envied coworker (De Dreu, 2006; De Dreu&Nauta, 2009). Research shows that when people see a potential threat of exclusion from desirable social groups, their willingness to extend cooperation to the group members increase (Derfler-Rozin et al, 2010). Since the envied persons are often professionally successful, envious people may be interested in reconnecting with them so that they are not excluded from such desired groups.

#### Job Performance

One way of restoring perceived inequity at the workplace is by reducing the level of efforts put into the job. By reducing the level of effort, the outcome to inputs ratio can be improved (Pinder, 2008). The sense of injustice as perceived by the envious parties is often very intense and in order to overcome such feeling, job performance is often compromised (Smith et al, 1994). One more approach to restore this inequity is by engaging in the opposite behaviours. That is by showing higher initiative and increasing the job performance envious persons may try to increase their outcomes. When the individual has a challenge-oriented response to envy, job performance will increase. Many studies have concluded that upward social comparisons with superior coworkers can be motivating (Brown et al 2007; Duffy et al, 2008).

#### Turnover Intentions

Researchers conclude that envious people tend to withdraw themselves from their jobs and workplaces either physically or psychologically (De Clercq et al., 2018; Sterling, 2013; Vecchio, 2000). Upward social comparisons in the workplace results in lower levels of job satisfactions and affective commitment which directly influences the turnover intentions (Brown et al., 2007). A reduction on job satisfaction and organisational commitment may mean that envious individuals are more likely to quit than those who are unenvious.

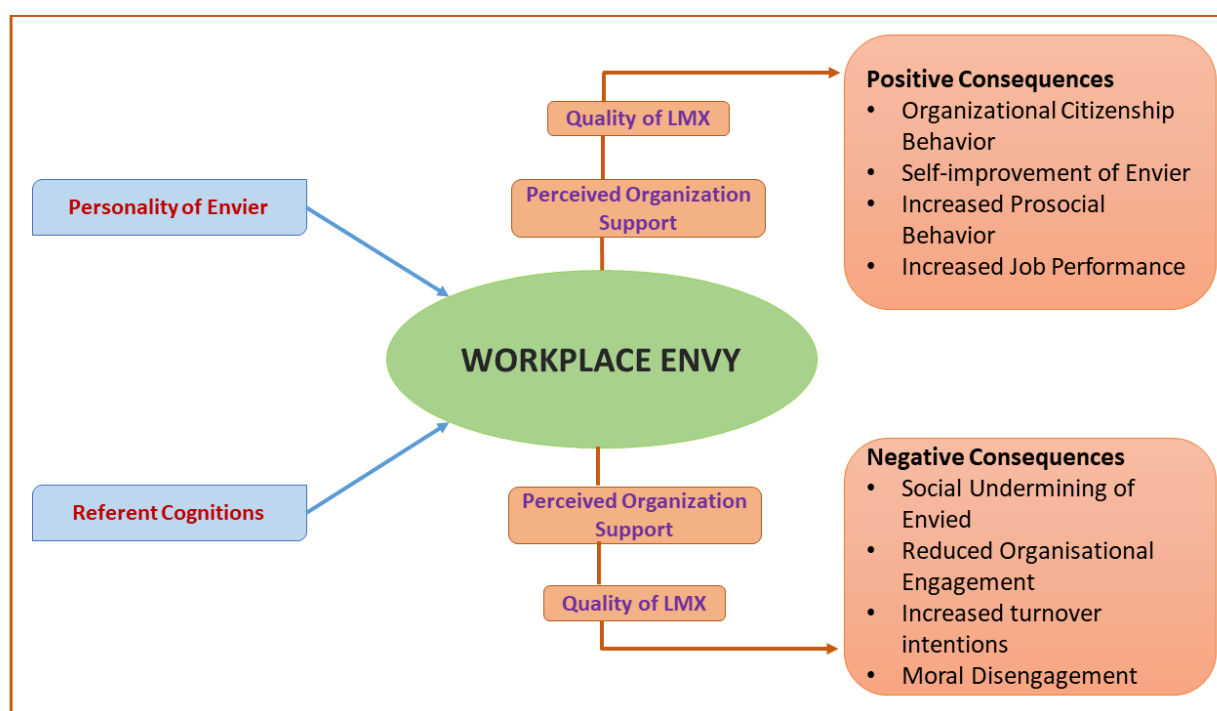
#### Moral Disengagement

Individuals can separate behaviours from their moral standards by giving a series of cognitive justification mechanisms (Bandura, 1999; Moore, 2015). This type of dysfunction in an individual's moral standards is called moral disengagement. Feelings of envy may result into moral disengagement through three mechanisms: undervaluing the worth of envied targets who are perceived to be undeserving of the benefits enjoyed by them, reconstruction of negative anti-social behaviour by rationalizing it through fake moral justifications or by distorting the costs of one's behaviors (Duffy et al., 2012). The envious may convince themselves that their engagement with moral standards are not resulting into anything good for them and hence their disengagement with moral standards is justified. (Thiel et al., 2020).

### **Discussion and Theoretical Framework for Workplace Envy**

Workplace Envy significantly impacts the behaviour of people at the workplace (Brooks et al., 2019; Demirtas et al., 2017, Jones &Paulhus, 2009). Extensive review and examination of previous literature, reveals that professional envy can be benign or malicious. However, in either case efficient handling of this complex emotion needs organizational support. The current study extends our understanding of the factors that might lead to Envy at workplace. Drawing from previous literature on this topic, the present study looked at envy at workplace and its antecedents. The framework proposed by authors (refer Figure 2), examines the drivers of workplaceenvy, and also highlights its positive and negative consequences. While

personality of the envier is recognized as an important factor leading to professional Envy (Jones & Paulhus, 2010; Brockner, Wiesenfeld, & Diekmann, 2009), the referent cognitions towards envied also play a significant role in deciding the type of envy felt and also the resultant behaviour of the envied. The way envied target is perceived by the envier in given organizational setup might significantly impact the social exchange between the two parties. Competency of the envied who gets all the limelight from the top management and the superiors, if not taken positively, might act as another factor contributing to professional envy. Those targets who are perceived to be less competent and unfriendly are more prone to be the target of malicious envy. The study further focused on the likely consequences of this emotion of envy at workplace. Building on previous literature, it may be asserted that self-reflection by the envier who have positive self-views, may lead to positive outcomes like self-improvement by the envier to reduce the perceived gap between envier and envied (Lee & Duffy, 2019). This may lead to enhanced performance and increased prosocial behavior influenced by the need to belong to the desired groups. This finds support from previous studies by scholars (Derfler-Rozin, Pillutla, & Thau, 2010; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000). However, in absence of a good leadership and appropriate organizational support, this emotion is likely to bring negative consequences for both the envier and the envied. For the envied, he may be socially undermined by the larger group who perceive them to be undeserving of all the benefits accrued to them. For the envier, it may have grave consequences like depression arising out of feeling of inferiority, increased intention to leave the organization.



**Figure 2: A Theoretical Framework - Consequences of Workplace Envy and Its Antecedents**

The proposed model posits that personality of envied is one of the important antecedents of workplace envy. People who are characterised as high on Machiavellianism, low on self-esteem, high on neuroticism, high on their need for achievement, and low on contentionsness

are more likely to feel this negative emotion and also more like to have negative consequences. On the contrary, people with high level of self-esteem, higher emotional stability and high level of conscientiousness show less of envious feelings towards their counterparts. Another important antecedent of workplace envy is the referent cognition held towards the envied target. People who are perceived to be friendly, helping, and courteous in nature do not face negative or malicious envy as whatever they achieve is perceived to be their genuine earnings. Competence of envied person also plays a significant role in the feeling of envy in the envied. If a person is seen to be incompetent and still enjoying competitive advantage, they become the target of malicious envy. In contrast those perceived to be competent, even if become the target of envy do not face malicious envy. However, the role of referent cognitions towards the envied target is limited to the outcomes related to dyadic relationship between the envier and the envied, i.e., the role of referent cognitions is limited to the social exchanges between the actor and the target. It does not have much impact on the social exchanges of an individual with the organisation. The quality of social exchanges of an individual with the organisation are affected by the quality of Leader-Member Exchange and the perceived organisational support.

As posited in the model shown in figure 2, the quality of LMX, i.e. the leader member exchange and perceived organisational support (POS) act as a moderator between the envy and its consequences. A high quality LMX and higher perceived organisational support results into positive consequences of workplace envy. With high LMX and high perceived organisational support, the envier's organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) increases as they expect that with higher level of OCB, they will also be gaining the advantage which is currently enjoyed by the envied target. The envier also tries to improve his capabilities by showing learning attitude and cooperative behaviour because the organisational climate and the leader are perceived to be fair and just. When experiencing high LMX and POS, the envier starts showing prosocial behaviour to gain the acceptance of other members and superiors in the organisation.

However, in presence of low quality of LMX and POS, the consequences may become graver. The envied targets are socially undermined, and a deliberate attempt is made to tarnish the image of the envied target. As a result the envied may start showing reduced level of organisational engagement. The envier also shows reduced level of organisational engagements as they perceive the organisational climate and leadership as biased. With lower level of organisational engagement, the intentions of envier to quit the organisation increases. In some cases, the envier may even display higher levels of moral disengagements.

### **Conclusion**

Emotions felt by employees at the workplace play a significant role in the overall productivity of employees as well as organisation. The present study was focused on understanding the antecedents, moderators, and consequences of workplace envy. A thorough review of literature on workplace envy revealed that it is important that organisations make a deliberate attempt to direct this emotion in such a way that the performance of the organisation and the relationships within the organisation are not compromised. The researchers propose a model to understand the concept of workplace envy in detail. The

researchers have highlighted that though the emotion of envy may be inevitable in organisations, an open environment which is perceived to be fair and just may significantly improve the consequences of workplace envy for the organisation. Leaders need to be made aware about the role they play in moderating the feelings of envy in any organisation. If the leaders start improving the quality of relationships they share with their followers, a lot of negative consequences of workplace envy may be avoided. Organisations also need to acknowledge that fair and transparent system and processes may alleviate the feelings of workplace envy. The model also mentions the role of referent cognitions of envier towards the envied target however, the implications of these referent cognitions are limited to the treatment of the envied target by the envier. Those who are the envied targets should understand this and try to be warm towards colleagues and also make an effort to prove that whatever they receive as a reward is because of their competence. Further, the HR department should try to find out the typical personalities who are more prone to be envious and counselling services should be provided to them so that they may deal with the feelings of envy in a more positive way.

### Scope for future research

The proposed model may be tested with empirical research. Till now no studies have been focused on understanding whether a person feels more envious towards competitors of the same or the opposite gender. A study focusing on this variable may be undertaken in future.

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