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Turnover Intention of Employees, Supervisor Support, and Open Innovation: The Role of Illegitimate Tasks

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Abstract: Recently, the small and micro enterprises have earned significant fame in the management and entrepreneurship discipline. Researchers have examined the turnover intention of employees working within formal organizations, but ignored the employees working within small and micro enterprises. The aim of this study is to analyze the moderating effects of supervisor support on the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention of the employees of small and micro enterprises. An interview-administered questionnaire approach was used for data collection, and the snowball sampling technique was employed in this study to contact employees who were working within small and micro enterprises. The sample size was 420 employees from Lahore city (the provincial capital city of Punjab, Pakistan). Results showed that supervisor support would moderate the impact of illegitimate tasks on turnover intention, and a high level of support available from supervisor to the employee at the workplace would make them less likely to leave the organization as opposed to an employee who has less supervisor support at the workplace. The study reveals that supervisor support in small and micro enterprises is necessary to reduce or eliminate stress in the environment. Consequently, this study implies that the managers and supervisors of small and micro enterprises should provide logic and explanation to their subordinates and motivate their subordinates as to why they are assigned that particular task instead of any other employee and how important it is. This study contributes to the field of small and micro enterprises by evaluating the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention. This study is unique because management scholars have more often studied employees' behavior in large corporations rather than in small and micro enterprises.

Keywords: small and micro enterprises; illegitimate tasks; turnover intention; supervisor support; open innovation; Pakistan

1. Introduction

The business environment urge firms to have an innovative culture in terms of design, model and processes [1] to achieve a competitive position. These innovative processes are breakthroughs to achieve firm's primary annual and long-term objectives. Open innovation has become an inspiring catch-all in the eyes of researchers in the field of large-scale firms, however, the literature is not well documented for small and micro enterprises [2]. Although scant literature on small and micro

enterprises has focused on introducing new processes and products [3], introducing new products and innovative processes is not an easy task for small and micro enterprises [4,5].

Open innovation is a widespread and growing concern and topic in small and micro enterprises. Chesbrough coined the open innovation term for the first time which is defined as “the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively” [6]. According to Tidd, innovation is a process of converting opportunities into business practices [7,8]. However, the exercise of innovation is not a simple task to adopt without having a strong culture that promotes innovation within the organization. As such, the firm needs to encourage the culture of innovation within its activities. Usually, organizational culture refers to a degree to which norms, values, and beliefs support the firm’s innovativeness [9,10]. Several factors can affect the firm’s innovation culture, such as mechanisms, firm’s structure, employee’s support, employee’s behavior, and open communication [11]. Appropriate norms among employees lead to creative activities among them [12,13] and foster their innovation mentality [9]. To enhance its competitiveness, the firm needs to adopt an innovative culture to support their capabilities [14]. Employees should be creative, alert, and innovative in those firms where innovative culture exists. According to Mello, innovative firms cannot afford high employee turnover levels because their primary objectives may suffer [15]. Therefore, such firms primarily focus on fostering such a culture where employees can share their knowledge without hesitation, helping employees be with their organization [16]. In addition, Robbins and Coulter commented that “it costs an organization ten times more to hiring new employees as compared to retaining the existing ones”; these statistics generate the need to study employee turnover [17]. Indeed, employee turnover can damage the organization’s innovative culture. According to Islam and colleagues, it is important to study turnover intention rather actual turnover, because employees who left their organization are less likely to describe the actual reasons, whereas, if employees have intentions to leave the organization, maybe reduced [18,19]. Turnover of employees can damage the innovation culture of firms [20].

Turnover of employees has been the most persistent challenge and issue for small and large organizations [21,22]. Hancock and colleagues revealed that turnover has not only a negative connection with bearing high costs, losing qualified, skilled labor, being expensive and time-consuming for organization but also it damages the company’s open innovation performance [23]. Due to this cause, organizations pay more attention and show interest in preventing employees’ turnover and their intention to leave, especially in small and micro enterprises [24]. Researchers have examined the turnover intention of employees working in formal organizations rather than small and micro enterprises [25].

Different kinds of stress at the workplace might lead to a high turnover of employees, but at the same time, it may increase the stress at the workplace [26], such as in the small and micro enterprises. Such an enterprise is considered as a highly exhausting [27], bullying [28], harassing [29], and pathetic working environment [30,31]. Depression and bullying at the workplace can cause stress [32], and stress leads to low open innovation at the workplace [33]. The Stress-as-offense-to-self theory discusses the illegitimate tasks which are supposed to be unnecessary or unreasonable, and finally harmful to organizations. Semmer and colleagues stated that these tasks directly or indirectly lead to employee disrespect and loss of self-esteem [32]. Schaufeli and Bakker [34] indicate in their study that there is a high turnover intention due to low job resources in organizations and high demand from employees. However, employee turnover is still an understudied question within small and micro enterprises. Management scholars have more focused on investigating the attitudes and behaviors of employees of formal sector and overlooked employees working in small and micro enterprises [35]. Researchers also opine that these tasks produce turnover intention in the mind of employees. The objective of this study is to investigate the direct relationship between illegitimate tasks and employees’ turnover under the theory of stress-as-offense-to-self (SOS) [32], and the moderating role of supervisor support (see Figure 1).

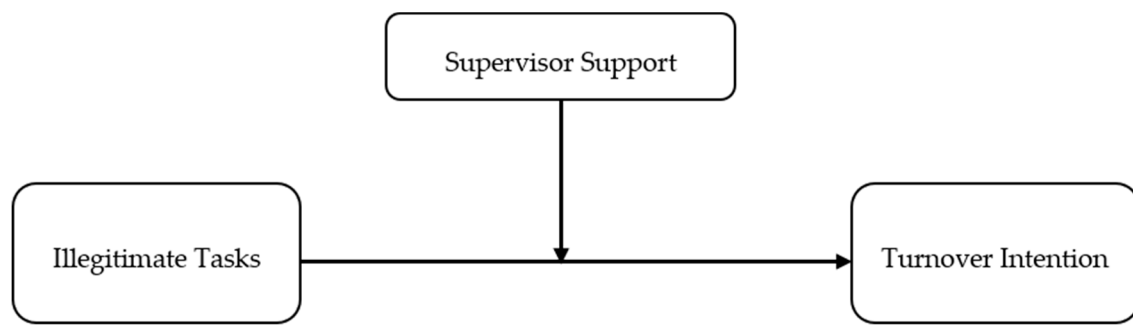


Figure 1. Research framework.

Moreover, due to SOS theory, researchers expect that supervisory support buffers the negative effects on the relationship of dependent and independent variables of this study. Fortunately, good supervisors improve working environment by relieving employees' stress [36,37] through backing up if employees face problems, being helpful in getting the job done, and providing help to employees for obtaining necessary resources to perform their duties [38]. Cummins [39] stated that supportive supervisors are more productive at the workplace, even when employees are stressed out. Therefore, illegitimate tasks are possible to generate turnover intentions among employees [22]. Supervisor support helps employees to get a positive assessment and increases open innovation practices at the workplace. SOS theory was launched to contribute to turnover intention and stress, first by examining the association between illegitimate tasks and employee turnover intention in small and micro enterprises in Pakistan, and then by investigating supervisory support as a likely moderator of the above-mentioned relationship. The benefit of this study is if workers of informal enterprises have less ability to understand the assigned tasks. Therefore, the supervisor should manage such training programs that may increase the knowledge and ability to understand the given tasks that reduce the turnover intention.

The next section of this paper provides a summary of the literature on turnover intention, illegitimate tasks, stress, and supervisor support. After that, the methodology section is described. The next part of this study presents the results and discussion. Finally, concluding explanations are made in the lens of contributions and further research directions.

2. Literature Review: Stress-as-Offense-to-Self and Turnover Intention

According to Lazarus [40], the SOS theory is that the employees feel stressed in a particular circumstance that jeopardizes their self-esteem. Recently, Semmer et al. [32,41] introduced the SOS theory that focuses on the fact that employees struggle to uphold a positive self-respect, self-image, and self-esteem [42,43], and experience unwelcome and undesirable practices in the workplace that threaten one's self-esteem and self-respect due to the stressful work environment. The important supposition of this theory is that social messages of workplaces cause stress at the workplace; such tasks ignore the respect of employees and the legitimacy of laws at work [32,42]. Therefore, these tasks, one way or the other, lead to the disgrace of employees and loss of their self-esteem. This loss of self-esteem and self-respect causes a stressful work environment [24,32,41]. When a threat is recognized, employees take action to overcome the severe issue [44]. This action may result in an employee's decision to leave that particular organization. Consequently, we consider that threat to employees' self-respect, self-esteem, and self-image positively affects turnover intention.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Illegitimate Tasks

Illegitimate tasks are those practices at work that employees think they should not perform [32]. There are two types of illegitimate tasks that are unreasonable and unnecessary. Tasks can be seen as unreasonable if tasks are not the part of employees' occupational duties [32,41]. An example of an

unreasonable task is when an employee (gatekeeper) of your firm has to pick up and drop off your children at school, which is not included in their duties; furthermore, it is unreasonable if an owner asks an employee to do those tasks which are not included in their occupational role. Another example of an unreasonable task is that an accountant of a firm also has to perform sales and marketing activities during their job or handle the complaints of customers regarding the firm's product or manage the recruitment process. Therefore, unreasonable tasks are those illegitimate tasks that are part of another employee's job [32,42]. In other words, unnecessary tasks can be seen as illegitimate when tasks are not allocated to any employee as per their nature [45,46]. Such tasks require very little effort to perform. One such example is when an employee has to conduct stocktaking again, which they have already done in the inventory logbook because the company has no compatible computer to maintain account data in certain software. Employees consider those tasks illegitimate, which they find unreasonable and unnecessary. Employees think they should not perform such tasks as they are not included in their jurisdiction [47].

More specifically, illegitimate tasks are inappropriate and, as such, interrupt the core norms and values that are associated with an employee's occupational role. Such a lack of self-image and self-respect is likely to be considered unfair and highly stressful [48,49]. Such tasks have been highlighted in different studies as threats to self-image or self-respect and serve as commanding stressors [50]. If illegitimate tasks are carried out in an organization, employees face a higher level of stress. SOS theory suggests that such tasks threaten an employee's self-esteem and dignity [41]. As SOS theory and illegitimate tasks are relatively a new and hot topic in formal organizations, some evidence shows the positive effects of illegitimate tasks on turnover intention [24,32,51–53]. Sleep damage [50], increased resentment [46], less productive behaviors can be seen as a result of illegitimate tasks. Available studies were conducted in different countries in different industries, such as IT, health, and manufacturing [54]. Therefore, previous literature gives useful feedback for illegitimate tasks done. Nevertheless, no study investigates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention within small and micro enterprises. In such conditions, employees of the small and micro enterprises (SME) may experience illegitimate tasks that can develop the turnover intention in these employees.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Illegitimate tasks significantly increase the turnover intentions of employees who are working in small and micro enterprises.*

3.2. Supervisory Support as a Moderator

Previous studies showed supervisory support as an important ingredient to increase the firm's effectiveness [55–57]. Burke et al. defined supervisory support as when the supervisor is more supportive and promotes achievable work practices and solves the employee's issues [58]. Supervisor support is connected to increased supporting behavior [59], well-being [60], and showing respect [61]. Previous studies serve as evidence that supervisory support is already used as a moderator [62] between job autonomy and turnover intention [63], and also between work schedule flexibility and job stress [64]. However, researchers have been paying very low attention as to how supervisory support affects the attitude of employees who are working within small and micro enterprises.

Employees with a high level of illegitimate tasks at the workplace are more likely to demonstrate harmful results such as turnover intention and job-search behavior [24,46,65]. Supervisor support at the workplace is a good indicator of reduced stress at work [66]. Such techniques of increasing self-esteem, supportive behavior, and well-being at the workplace suggest that illegitimate tasks are less likely to trigger turnover intentions among small and micro enterprises. They perceive high supervisory support at the workplace.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Supervisory support moderates the positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions, such that the positive relationship will be less strongly associated with turnover intention when high supervisory support (compared with low supervisory support) is provided.*

4. Methods

4.1. Sample

The data were collected from the employees working in small and micro enterprises in Lahore city, the provincial capital city of Punjab, Pakistan. To increase the external validity, employees from different small and micro enterprises were requested to contribute to this study [67]. The questionnaire, along with the cover letter, ensured the voluntary participation of participants. It was assured that the information of participants would be treated anonymously. A 76% response rate was received from participants. The average age of respondents was 34 years, ranging from 14 to 45 years. The majority of participants were male 70%. The average tenure of employees in one organization was 8.55 years. Concerning their qualifications, 56% had less than a high school qualification and 28% had a matriculation diploma.

4.2. Measures

Bern's Illegitimate Tasks Scale was used to assess the illegitimate tasks (BITS) [54]. Bern's Illegitimate Tasks Scale covers two aspects: (a) unnecessary tasks (b) unreasonable tasks. Illegitimate tasks were measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently) for this study. Sample items of unnecessary tasks and unreasonable tasks are given respectively: "Do you have work tasks that arouse the question whether they have to be done at all?" and "Do you have work tasks that you believe are beyond your job scope and should not be expected from you?".

Support from the workplace is a significant force to reduce the stress level of employees [67]. Supervisor support was measured with seven items used in the Job Content Survey [68]. Scale items were modified according to this study. A 5-points Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used to assess the supervisory support. Sample items of supervisor support were "Concern about the welfare of subordinates", "Paying attention to what subordinate is saying", and "Giving credit for things well done by subordinates".

Meyer, Allen, and Smith [69] have developed a three-item scale to measure the turnover intention based on 6-point Likert ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; this scale was used to measure the turnover intention. The sample item was "I intend to search for a job in another organization within the next year".

4.3. Control Variables (Age, Tenure, Gender, Time Pressure)

We decided to control the following variables: gender, age, tenure, and time pressure with the help of prior studies. According to Cotton and Tuttle [20], age and tenure have different effects, and these are negatively connected with turnover intention. The gender variable is also controlled because Antonucci and Akiyama [70] mentioned that men and women gain and use support differently. Small and micro enterprises have fewer employees to accomplish their work or need to perform tasks more quickly than usual. In such conditions, employees feel that they have insufficient time to finish their tasks [71].

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Results

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics with correlations and reliability coefficient of all measures. Gender, age, and tenure were no significant correlations with turnover intention. Education was positivity ($r = 0.18, p < 0.05$) related with dependent variable, whereas time pressure value ($r = 0.26, p < 0.01$) and illegitimate tasks value ($r = 0.64, p < 0.01$) show that these were positively correlated with turnover intention. Lastly, the negative correlation between supervisor support and turnover intention is ($r = -0.35, p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	0.38	0.46								
2. Age	38.82	12.24	−0.02							
3. Tenure	6.43	5.52	0.08 *	0.03						
4. Education	2.15	1.03	0.30 **	0.02	0.02					
5. TP	4.14	0.95	−0.17 *	−0.14	−0.11	−0.19 *	(0.87)			
6. IT	2.89	0.85	−0.21	−0.01 *	−0.04	−0.09	−0.48 **	(0.91)		
7. SS	4.01	1.54	0.12	0.01	0.08	0.12	−0.17 *	−0.45 **	(0.81)	
8. TI	2.56	1.26	−0.11	−0.03	−0.06	0.18 *	0.26 **	0.64 **	−0.35 **	(0.79)

Note: M, mean; SD, standard deviation; TP, time pressure; IT, illegitimate tasks; SS, supervisor support; TI, turnover intention; Cronbach's Alpha on the diagonal in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

5.2. Hypotheses Testing

Firstly, we z-standardized independent and moderator variables. The interaction term of independent and moderator was then calculated to enable it for interpretation and avoid multicollinearity. In model 1, illegitimate tasks and supervisor support explained 48% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.48$, $F = 12.90$, $p < 0.001$) in turnover intention. Table 2 also shows the results of hypotheses testing as the illegitimate tasks were positively associated ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) with turnover intention, but supervisor support was not associated ($\beta = -0.12$, non-significant). Hypothesis 1 of this study is supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that supervisor support would moderate the impact of illegitimate tasks on turnover intention, such as a high level of support available from supervisors to the employee at the workplace. This would lessen their desire to leave the organization rather than an employee who has less supervisor support at the workplace. Additionally, it explains 3% of the variance. Model 2 shows that interaction term was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.001$). The following Figure 2 shows the ordinal interaction relationship. The relationship between IV (illegitimate tasks) and DV (turnover intention) variables is significant due to low-level supervisor support (moderator variable), and a high level of supervisor support is non-significant. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2. Regression analyses (hypothesis 1 and 2).

	Turnover Intention					
	Model 1 (H1)			Model (H2)		
	b	s.e	95% CI	b	s.e	95% CI
Constant	2.28 ***	0.34	2.31, 3.52	2.34 **	0.86	0.68, 4.05
Gender	0.42	0.19	0.08, 0.69	0.33	0.19	0.03, 0.09
Age	−0.16	0.06	−0.25, −0.10	−0.15	0.06	−0.24, −0.08
Tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time pressure	0.12 ***	0.04	0.18, 0.15	−0.2	0.04	0.14, 0.09
Illegitimate tasks (IT)	0.28 ***	0.10	0.10, 0.52	0.76 ***	0.28	0.29, 1.35
Supervisor support (SS)	−0.12	0.15	−0.28, −0.09	−0.09	0.30	−0.27, −0.18
IT X SS				−0.15 **		−0.39, −0.02
R ²	0.48 ***			0.51 ***		
ΔR ²				0.03 ***		
F	12.90 ***			13.21 ***		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

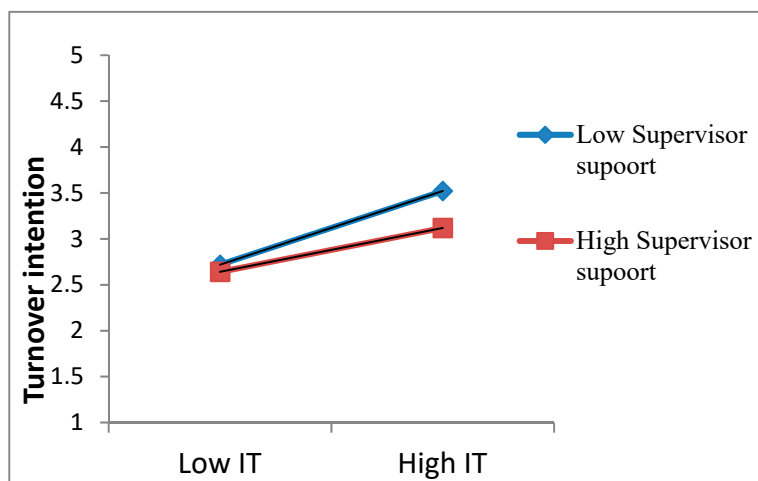


Figure 2. The moderator role of supervisor support on the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention.

6. Discussion: Turnover Intention, Supervisor Support and Open Innovation

In this paper, we have assessed an underlying mechanism of the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention within employees of small and micro enterprises. Specifically, constructing on the SOS theory, we predict and find that frequently assigning the illegitimate tasks had a positive effect on employees' intention to leave, even after controlling for education, time pressure, and tenure. The findings of this study are clearly similar to past studies that both manufacturing and service-based SMEs are equally concerned about open innovation [24,72]; these studies had been conducted in formal enterprises which were based on IT companies and non-profit organizations, respectively. Furthermore, previous studies have highlighted the importance of networking for SMEs to be innovative [73]; our findings added to the existing studies by arguing the importance of supervisor support and turnover intention (macro-factors) for innovation. Research has suggested that cultural aspects are important aspects of open innovation [74], and supervisor support and turnover intention are essential cultural aspects as per the findings. Further, [75] highlighted the importance of macro-factors that positively contribute to the industries open innovation. Studies have [32,76] also suggested that to be innovative and creative, small and micro enterprises need to retain the employees and provide them with supervisory support.

When tasks are increased, the feeling of resentment also increases. Previous studies also demonstrate that illegitimate tasks threaten professional identity, self-image, low self-esteem [77,78]. Consequently, working conditions and situations of small and micro enterprises, such as work time, earnings, and place of work, are different from the main activities which are mentioned at the time of initial contract with employees [79–81]. These tasks are unreasonable and unnecessary. These tasks may give rise to feelings of frustration, irritation, hindrance, and role conflict at the workplace.

Moreover, it was observed that the role of the supervisor support considerably interacts with care in relation to turnover intention [56,81]. As predicted in H₂, supervisor support buffers the positive association between the independent variable and dependent variable. There is no association between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention if supervisor support is high within small and micro enterprises. These results provide a new focused moderator that shows the effects of supervisor support on the abovementioned relationship. Except for the findings of the study support with Galletta [63], no study was conducted on small and micro enterprises. On the whole, the findings suggest that the supervisor support factor of stress-as-offense-to-self (SOS) theory can be expanded by incorporating the supervisor support as a moderator. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential negative effect of illegitimate tasks beyond the work domain through psychological detachment and results match with other studies (e.g., [82–84]).

6.1. Practical Implications

Solid empirical evidence shows that the illegitimate tasks (unreasonable or unnecessary) are major factors contributing to a stressful environment within the workplace of formal entrepreneurship. The findings of this study show that illegitimate tasks also boost the stress level of employees who work in small and micro enterprises. The rate of illegitimate tasks is high in those businesses that have no licenses and thus do not comply with legal regulations. Justifications of every task reduce the stress level of employees [49]. Therefore owners, managers, and supervisors of small and micro enterprises must pay more attention to justifications of every task to minimize the turnover intention at the workplace. Consequently, managers and supervisors of small and micro enterprises should provide logic and explanation to their subordinates and motivate them by highlighting the importance of the task and explaining why these subordinates are selected for this task.

These justifications may vary according to employees, time, situations, and place [32]. Second, developing an exemplary job design, clear decision making, fair distribution of resources, and clear responsibility can reduce or eliminate illegitimate tasks at the workplace [24,47]. We have practically demonstrated that low levels of illegitimate tasks improve the clarity of responsibilities, resources, and fairness. Third, our findings verify that supervisor support moderates the basic relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention within small and micro enterprises. Our results show that supervisor support is not enough if informal enterprises have less ability to understand the assigned tasks. Therefore, the supervisor should manage such training programs that may increase the knowledge and ability to understand the given tasks.

Supervisor support mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention of employees' small and micro enterprises, it is very important to support these employees by their supervisors not only to increase their work-related well-being, but also to improve the organizational performance. Managers of such enterprises should have more authority to make decisions and provide constructive feedback as well. Supervisors should react in such a manner that allow lower employees to have more involvement in or knowledge of decision making, especially for those decisions that directly affect the employees.

6.2. Limitations and Future Instructions

The first limitation which is examined is that the direct relationship of illegitimate tasks and turnover intention with supervisor support moderates the relationship. No mediating role was introduced in this study. Therefore, in future studies, mediating mechanisms should be applied in a theoretical framework. Besides, the aggressive behavior of employees should be examined in future studies. Furthermore, perceived social support [84] and organizational support [63] might moderate the effects on this relationship. The second limitation is based on the methodological approach. In this study, an interview-administered questionnaire approach was used for data collection. The triangulation approach might be useful to obtain more reliable and valid data from respondents. The third limitation is related to geography. This study focused only on employees who work in small and micro enterprises located in Lahore city. Similar studies can also be piloted in different geographical areas, and the findings of studies may vary across geographical areas. Furthermore, findings of formal and small and micro enterprises might vary in different sectors. Consequently, empirical evidence from both formal and entrepreneurship domains can also contribute significant knowledge in the field of management and entrepreneurship.

Innovation results from risk-taking activities that small and micro enterprises engage in. Innovation is not a primary intent in this study; however, future researchers should employ the theories of innovation in studying such enterprises. This could empirically map out direct and indirect linkages between small and micro enterprises and innovation. At present, no study is available which explore how small and micro enterprises interact in open innovation. In the future, academic and industry researchers should explore the open innovation practices, culture, motives, and strategies within small and micro enterprises.

7. Conclusions

The first contribution of this paper is that the findings show that illegitimate tasks are positively associated with turnover intention in the employees who work in small and micro enterprises even after controlling gender, age, tenure, and time pressure. Second, our results endorse that supervisor support moderates the above relationship. If employees of small and micro enterprises receive high supervisor support during job environment, illegitimate tasks are not positively linked with turnover intention. But on the other hand, illegitimate tasks were significantly associated when employees received low supervisory support from their immediate supervisor. In future research, researchers can introduce anger or role conflict as a mediator between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention. However, similar studies can also be managed in different sectors of small and micro enterprises or across geographical areas. Finally, further examining the core factors which may reduce or eliminate illegitimate tasks at both formal and informal workplaces should be undertaken.

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