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Investigating the mediating role of job embeddedness: evidence of Iranian context

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility and its impact on creative performance. **Design/methodology/approach** – The statistical population of this study consisted of all employees at the Electricity Company of Mashhad, and a sample comprising 300 participants was finalized. In order to analyze the data, different statistical analysis methods were used, including Pearson's correlation analysis and structural equation modeling.

Findings – The findings indicated that perceived job security has a positive impact on job embeddedness, while it has no significant impact on the employees' creative performance. On the other hand, perceived job flexibility has a positive effect on both job embeddedness and creative performance. Moreover, the mediating role of job embeddedness was approved.

Originality/value – Since creative performance in this changeable environment becomes essential, identifying mechanisms which can embed employees to their company would bring about several positive consequences. Furthermore, little is known about the antecedents and potential consequences of job embeddedness, especially in developing countries.

Keywords Quantitative, Job embeddedness, Creative performance, Perceived job flexibility, Perceived job security

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the current competitive business environment, the main features of which are sequential changes and continuous innovations, organizations will have to understand the strategic role of their human resources and hire highly skilled, knowledge-oriented, competent and capable employees (Kumpikaite, 2008). Moreover, turnover intention of employees is considered as a costly and challenging issue for the organizations in the manufacturing industries (Rathi *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the presence of empowered and creative employees in the organization can eliminate many of the problems caused by environmental changes (Karatepe, 2016). Therefore, the retention of talented employees is vital, since they can improve the overall organizational performance through their creative ideas and provide unprecedented solutions for responding to the changing problems of the customers. In addition to this, for employers, the retention of valuable employees is important because they are the organization's most valuable assets (Karatepe, 2013).

In this regard, one of the most recent issues in the human resources management literature is job embeddedness. Job embeddedness theory is defined as "a broad constellation of influences on employee retention" (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001, p. 1104). This theory not only exists inside the workplace, but also outside the working environment. It functions as a web that involves individuals performing different organizational activities and increases their extra-role behaviors such as creative performance (Zhang *et al.*, 2012; Karatepe, 2016). In other words, job embeddedness represents a wide variety of internal and external stimuli which encourage people to stay in the organization and show their best performance (Murphy *et al.*, 2013). According to previous studies in the field of job embeddedness, job characteristics such as perceived job security and perceived job



flexibility increase the motivation of employees to become more embedded in their jobs and demonstrate extra-role activities such as creative performance and innovative behavior (Karatepe, 2013; Chen, 2017). Such practices have become widespread within organizations and are often part of a central strategy to attract, motivate and retain key talented employees (Allen *et al.*, 2013). Based on the notions of social exchange theory, providing convenient job characteristics (e.g. job security and flexibility) by the organization established a reciprocal atmosphere in which employees repay a favorable work environment by higher retention and better job performance (Chen, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2016). In the existing literature, it has been claimed that higher perceived job security and perceived job flexibility would lead to an increase in job embeddedness, enhancing the employees' creative performance in the organization and reducing their tendency to search for a second job outside the organization (Richman *et al.*, 2008; Murphy *et al.*, 2013; Karatepe, 2016). Therefore, regarding the continued attention on perceived job security and flexibility initiatives within both the private sector and public sector, a more precise understanding of the relationship between job embeddedness and work performance (creative performance) that are considered to play a mediating role is needed (Harris *et al.*, 2011).

Northeast electricity industry is one of the oldest and largest regional electricity industries, which is located in Iran. According to the results obtained in the national assessments by the Ministry of Energy, this regional industry is considered as superior grade than other regional electricity industries. In addition, this industry is known as the pole of automation and renewable energy and some innovative activities. Furthermore, following an initial investigation of the policies and procedures at the industry, the researchers found that this case emphasizes on creative performance as an attempt to turn into an innovative organization. Therefore, this study has the potential to contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, it may extend the conceptual framework and respond to recent calls for more research on the potential antecedents of job embeddedness (e.g. perceived job security, career opportunities and performance outcomes) in order to enhance the current understanding of job embeddedness as a mediating mechanism (Karatepe, 2016). Second, this study contributes to the emerging literature on "retention" in the organization by focusing on the job characteristics (perceived job security and perceived job flexibility), a factor contributing to service sector workers' intention to stay (Holtom and Inderrieden, 2006). Third, it extends the understanding of the retention and turnover issues to other cultures outside developed countries (Gelfand *et al.*, 2007). Fourth, in Iran, which is a developing nation with cultural dimensions and economic conditions that differ from western countries, there is sparse internationally accessible management and human resources literature (Farivar *et al.*, 2016) and, to our knowledge, there are few studies in the English language academic literature focusing on investigating the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job autonomy and its impact on creative performance among employees in Iran. Hence, in order to contribute to academic and practitioner knowledge on Iranian labor market issues, this study investigates the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility and its impact on creative performance.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 *Job embeddedness theory*

The main conceptualization of job embeddedness included two dimensions, organization and community embeddedness, with each dimension further classified into three independent components: fit, links and sacrifice. According to Karatepe (2016), links are defined as the formal and informal relationships between a person with other institutions and individuals. It has been confirmed that individuals who have more intra-organizational and inter-organizational links would become more embedded in their jobs and will have less

tendency to leave the organization. The second component, fit, is referred to as perceived adaptability or comfort with the organization or social environment of the employees (Karatepe and Karadas, 2012; Karatepe, 2016). According to the definition of Mitchell *et al.* (2001), higher job embeddedness occurs when the employees perceive that their values and career goals are in line with their organizational culture and job requirements. The third component of job embeddedness, sacrifice, refers to the material cost and perceived psychological outcomes resulting from leaving the job. According to the theory of job embeddedness, the higher the sacrifice of resources due to leaving the job, the employees will express a higher level of job embeddedness.

Job embeddedness is a structure composed of combined forces that prevent an individual from desiring to leave a job in the organization, however, expressing innovative and creative attitude instead (Karatepe and Karadas, 2012; Ng and Feldman, 2010). According to the existing literature on the theory of job embeddedness, job embeddedness affects employees' work-related behaviors such as job performance, creative performance and innovative work behavior (Tian *et al.*, 2016; Karatepe, 2016). In fact, job embeddedness focuses on antecedents, factors and reasons that increase employees' extra-role behavior (e.g. creative performance) (Khorakian *et al.*, 2017; Karatepe, 2016). Accordingly, employees who have higher levels of job embeddedness not only eager to embed with the organization but also try to involve themselves in creative tasks or activities more eagerly and enthusiastically. For example, the study conducted by Karatepe and Vatankhah (2014) concluded that high-performance work practices have a positive influence on extra-role behavior (e.g. creative performance) by mediating the role of job embeddedness (Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2014). Although most researchers place an emphasis on exploring and identifying the antecedents and consequences of job embeddedness in organization (Harris *et al.*, 2011; Karatepe, 2013; Wheeler *et al.*, 2010), until now, few surveys have focused on how organizations can promote greater embeddedness among employees (William Lee *et al.*, 2014; Tian *et al.*, 2016). With this attitude, it is important to examine the factors and antecedents that contribute to job embeddedness in the organization.

2.2 The effect of job embeddedness on creative performance

Due to the complex nature of creativity, there are different definitions of this concept and creative performance (Chan, 2007). Creativity refers to the creation of new ideas which would positively influence the organization (Amabile, 1988) and includes the changes and behaviors which sometimes break the existing norms (Sternberg, 2006). Creative performance can be defined as the ability to create new ideas or solutions for effectively solving the problems and the behavioral tendency of individuals to be creative (Carmeli *et al.*, 2013). According to another definition presented by Chan (2007), the employees' creative performance is defined by the degree of effort and time spent to achieve creativity and fulfilling it in the organization. On the other hand, creative performance may be described with regard to the capacity and empowerment of the employees in order to produce new solutions, appropriate to their business region and domain (Gaggioli *et al.*, 2015). Several organizational and environmental factors influence the creative performance of individuals, including but not limited to perceived job security and flexibility (Nguyen, 2015).

The relationship between job embeddedness and creative performance may be addressed using the job embeddedness theory. According to this theory, the employees with a high level of job embeddedness often involve themselves in the organization's business responsibilities and establish profound links with other individuals such as colleagues and administrators. Consequently, knowledge sharing is facilitated and employees will achieve higher creativity levels in their job (Karatepe, 2016). Furthermore, the employees will come to recognize that leaving their job in the future would possibly result in losing many benefits

which cannot be easily sacrificed (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Based on the conservation of resources (COR) theory, when the employees believe that by staying in the organization they can achieve many moral and material interests, they would become more interested in becoming embedded in their job and show extra-role behaviors such as creative performance, job satisfaction and many other positive factors (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001).

According to Lee *et al.* (2004), the employees who have been embedded with their duties and working responsibilities would make a good fit with the job and the organizational culture, which would ultimately increase their motivation toward creative performance. In addition, the employees who have been embedded with their job would better perform their major and extra roles, which probably leads to the development of innovative performance levels of the organization (Karatepe, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2004). Since job embeddedness creates a large number of links, a feeling of compatibility with work and valuable assets that may have been destroyed due to employee's displacement, employees become motivated to perform in a more creative manner (Karatepe, 2016; Ng and Feldman, 2010). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1. The employees' job embeddedness has a positive impact on their creative performance.

2.3 The effect of perceived job security on job embeddedness and creative performance

Nowadays, perceived job security has become an interesting topic for scholarly investigation. Perceived job security/insecurity refers to the perceptions of the employees about their current job position within the organization and their positive/negative progress in the future (Reisel *et al.*, 2010; Ghosh, 2017; Piccoli *et al.*, 2017). Also, perceived job security is defined as the feeling of possessing a good job and being sure about the continuation of the job regardless of the existence or absence of external threat factors such as recession in the external environment (Jandaghi *et al.*, 2011). According to De Witte and Näswall (2003), perceived job security has a subjective as well as an objective dimension. The objective dimension of perceived job security consists of stable job conditions, full-time work and timely payments under various working conditions (De Witte and Näswall, 2003). As for the subjective dimension of perceived job security, it emphasizes perceived job security which includes the feeling of retention in the organization and lack of concern for losing the job in the future (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012). The current study focuses on the subjective dimension of perceived job security.

Experimental research studies have shown that stable employment and full-time working hours are the most desirable characteristics of a job from the viewpoint of employees (Burgess and Connell, 2008). Full-time job often promotes the retention and embeddedness of employees due to the expectations of balance between work and personal life or family needs (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012). Previous studies have found that work conditions, such as perceived job security, affect the employees' job embeddedness (Holtom and Inderrieden, 2006; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009). According to Karatepe and Vatankhah (2014), perceived job security represents the stability of employment in an organization. They also argue that perceived job security is positively correlated with the employees' tendency to stay in the organization (Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2014). Based on the notions of social exchange theory, organizational effort toward setting up perceived job security can signal a long-term commitment to employees, which may encourage them to become more embedded in their job (Emerson, 1976). Furthermore, previous research has declared that perceived job security increases the employees' retention rate through reducing their concerns about getting fired from work (Wang *et al.*, 2016). This concept may also be considered and verified based on the COR theory. According to COR theory, "people must invest in resources in order to protect against resource loss and gain resources" (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 349).

Whenever the employees develop the perception that their job is secure and they can thereby gain valuable resources in the organization, they would not want to sacrifice such benefits. Therefore, they become more motivated to embed in their jobs and become more creative (Karatepe, 2016). Stated differently, perceived job security in an organization leads to a long-term collection of resources by the employees which would, in turn, enhance job embeddedness and other positive job features such as creative performance (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012).

Perceived job security has been linked to many positive health-related and performance outcomes (e.g. creative performance) (Wang *et al.*, 2016; Karatepe and Vatankhah, 2014). Apart from enhancing positive performance outcomes, perceived job security has also been found to increase positive aspects of employee performance, such as creativity (Khaksefidi *et al.*, 2015). Since perceived job security establishes a stable work condition free from any conflicts, a sense of tranquility is raised which has an important role in the recovery process of performance and employees' creativities (Khaksefidi *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, in addition to examining the direct links between perceived job security and creativity, we also investigate potential mediators of those relationships. Specifically, job security has been related to higher levels of job embeddedness and also results in extra-role behavior such as creative performance in the organization. Based on the previously argued concepts, two hypotheses are as follows:

H2. Perceived job security is positively associated with job embeddedness.

H3. Perceived job security is positively associated with creative performance.

2.4 *The impact of perceived job flexibility on job embeddedness and creative performance*

Perceived job flexibility is considered as a benefit for the employees, through which they can exert some control over their tasks. In addition, perceived job flexibility sometimes allows employees to complete the assigned tasks outside the workplace and the formal work hours (Lambert *et al.*, 2008). During the last decade, several studies have focused on perceived job flexibility due to its potential benefits for both the organization and the employees (Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa, 2008). In most organizations, perceived job flexibility is considered as a pervasive matter and often as a key strategy used to embed the talented and experienced employees (Allen *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, perceived job flexibility has a positive impact on the mental health of the employees through establishing a decent balance between their personal life and work life. The independence and authority provided through perceived job flexibility creates a desirable atmosphere to think creatively and outside the work territory (Grzywacz *et al.*, 2008).

According to Hinkin and Tracey (2010), perceived job flexibility is one cause of argument of success of this kind of companies and in addition to that, perceived job flexibility is one of the most important effective skills in order to achieve the success of the organization. Following this claim, Kim *et al.* (2017) argued that employees' perceived job flexibility improves their performance levels and is effective in creating job compatibility and maximizing employees' tendency for job retention (Kim *et al.*, 2017).

According to COR theory, members of an organization try to obtain material, spiritual, social and economic resources in the organization in order to fulfill their personal objectives as well as contributing to organizational goals. According to this theory, access to resources would yield some positive results in an organization. On the contrary, any type of damage and perception of removing resources would most probably lead to job stress, lack of job satisfaction, leaving the job and many other negative outcomes in the organization (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001; Harris *et al.*, 2011). Since perceived job flexibility makes it possible for employees to manage their time as well as fulfill the assigned responsibilities in the best

possible manner, they can make a balance among their personal and job responsibilities (McNall *et al.*, 2009; Allen *et al.*, 2013). In other words, a good fit between the employees' needs and preferences originates from perceived work flexibility. Also, based on the existing literature, employees who perceive the highest level of perceived job flexibility can fit better with their jobs and show higher job embeddedness (Richman *et al.*, 2008). Drawing on person-environment fit theory, perceived job flexibility enhances employees' resources and ability to address the demand of work, thereby increasing work fit and reducing work-life conflicts (Edwards *et al.*, 1998).

In addition, one of the primary ways to enhance the creative performance of employees is to promote perceived job flexibility. Through perceived job flexibility, employees will be able to think "out-of-the-box" and generate many diverse ideas to solve long-lasting organizational problems (Gutnick *et al.*, 2012). Previous research and theory have often assumed a strong link between flexibility and creative performance in an organization (Ashby and Isen, 1999). For instance, Nijstad *et al.* (2010) provided some evidence which indicated that the notions of brainstorming are affected by perceived job flexibility (Nijstad *et al.*, 2010). In addition, a large bulk of research has mentioned the positive impact of flexibility on the creative performance of individuals (Fiedler, 2001). Accordingly, it could be claimed that creative performance takes place through perceived job flexibility which signals to employees that their work responsibilities belong to themselves. Furthermore, employees would experience lower job stress, since they can perform their tasks without being constrained by strict deadlines (Chen, 2017). As a result, individuals are encouraged to get engaged in creative thinking and performance. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

H4. Perceived job flexibility has a positive impact on the job embeddedness of employees.

H5. Perceived job flexibility has a positive effect on the creative performance of employees.

2.5 Mediating role of job embeddedness

While many other structures and mediating variables (e.g. organizational commitment, organizational identity) exist in the theoretical principles of job characteristics and they can be used to test the mediating relation between job characteristics (perceived job security and perceived job flexibility) and creative performance, the current study has considered job embeddedness for two reasons. First, previous studies have acknowledged that job embeddedness is among the most important strategies for retaining employees in an organization and they have also emphasized the need for further research on job embeddedness as a mediating variable (Wheeler *et al.*, 2010). Second, previous research has stated that job embeddedness predicts more effective and useful results than other mediating variables, including commitment and organizational identity (Jiang *et al.*, 2012).

Based on the study conducted by Holtom and Inderrieden (2006), job embeddedness performs a mediating role among certain job characteristics. For instance, high levels of perceived job support from colleagues enhance job embeddedness. As a result, positive attitudes such as job satisfaction and creative performance are enhanced (Harris *et al.*, 2011; Karatepe, 2016). Job embeddedness theory acknowledges the relationships between organizational factors and positively contributes to the employees' retention in the organization (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, job characteristics are among the factors which strengthen the job embeddedness of employees in an organization, which ultimately leads to creative performance (Karatepe, 2013).

Based on social exchange theory, providing suitable job characteristics (e.g. perceived job security and flexibility) signals an organization's long-term commitment to its employees, which may stimulate employees to reciprocate in the form of retention and extra-role behavior (Wang *et al.*, 2016). For example, some studies demonstrated that

perceiving a low level of job security and also job flexibility by employees will act as a hindrance toward positive and extra-role working outcomes (creative performance) (De Witte and Näswall, 2003). However, when job characteristics such as job security and job flexibility combine with various links, a feel of compatibility with job and organization (fit) and valuable resources (which can never sacrificed), not only employees would embed with their job but also withhold extra-role behavior such as creative performance (Richman *et al.*, 2008; Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, one could argue that perceived job flexibility and perceived job security, through the mediating role of job embeddedness, increase the creative performance and positive attitudes of the employees. Murphy *et al.* (2013) found that job characteristics (e.g. perceived job security) enhance the job embeddedness of employees, thereby increasing their tendency to stay in the organization and reducing their motivation to find a new job. Based on the previously argued concepts, the sixth and seventh hypotheses are as follows:

H6. Job embeddedness as a mediating variable strengthens the relationship between perceived job security and employees' creative performance in an organization.

H7. Job embeddedness as a mediating variable strengthens the relationship between perceived job flexibility and employees' creative performance in an organization.

Figure 1 depicts the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility and its impact on creative performance.

3. Research method

Since the study attempts to evaluate the values and type of relationship between the variables to address a scientific problem through a questionnaire tool, it makes the use of the survey method. Standard measures taken from previous studies were used to measure the variables. As stated above, the case of study is one of the largest companies with more than 1,000 employees, many of which working part-time or under the supervision of technical contractor companies perform a part of the tasks. Since perceived job security and flexibility has a more objective and operational presence in full-time employees, only these employees were selected. In addition, considering that job embeddedness is usually created in employees with a high background, only the full-time employees who have over five years of working experiences are chosen. Bringing these points in mind, the population of the research consisted of 300 employees, who had the initial conditions for answering the questions. After that, Cochran formula was used for the known population in order to determine the volume of the sample. Accordingly, an initial sample including 30 completed questionnaires was pretested, and by inserting its standard deviation (0.65) in Cochran formula with estimation accuracy and confidence level of 0.95 and error value of 0.05, the minimum volume of the sample was determined to be 206 participants. Since some of the questionnaires are often not returned properly, 250 questionnaires were randomly

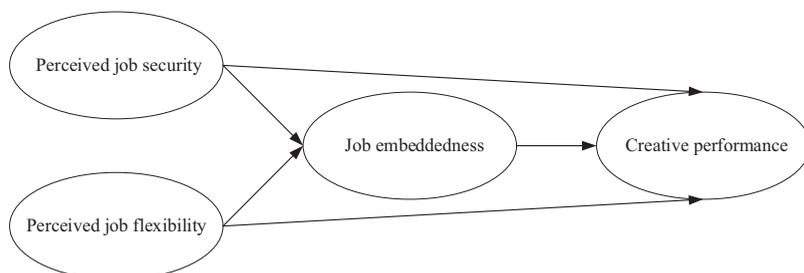


Figure 1.
The conceptual
model of the study

distributed among the employees. The questionnaires were distributed in paper-and-pencil format during unit meetings. Time was allocated for staff to complete the surveys during work hours. Completed paper-and-pencil surveys were returned to the authors in person. Finally, 210 completed questionnaires were returned, which were used in the analysis. Various analytic statistical methods were used in order to analyze the collected data such as Pearson's correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM). These analyses were conducted by the analysis of moment structures (AMOS v.18) software and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS v.19).

3.1 Measures

All the variables rated on Likert-type scales were measured with responses ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree." The measures have been localized through back-translation method in order to be used in the Iranian organizational field. Content validity of the final questionnaire was confirmed through evaluating the opinions of management experts. The validity of the questionnaire was analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS software. "Perceived job security" one of the independent variables was measured via four items obtained from Delery and Doty (1996). A sample item was: "If this company were facing economic problems, employees in this organization would be the last to get cut." Responses were scored on a Likert scale, with higher values indicating higher perceived job security. The results of Cronbach's α for the scale indicated an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$). "Perceived job flexibility" the other independent variable was measured by three items taken from Hill *et al.* (2001). A sample item of the scale was: "I have much flexibility in selecting the location of where I done my work." The scale demonstrated a good reliability with Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.73$). "Job embeddedness" was measured through the global measure of job embeddedness as developed by Crossley *et al.* (2007) and consisted of seven items. A sample item of the scale was: "I simply could not leave this company that I work for." The scale showed good reliability with high Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.88$). Finally, "Creative performance" was measured via six items adapted from Wang and Netemeyer (2004). A sample item of the scale was: "I generate and evaluate multiple alternatives for novel customer problems." The scale showed good reliability with a high value of Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.85$).

3.2 Data analyses and results

3.2.1 Validity and reliability. Before evaluating the proposed structural model, it is necessary to consider the regression weight of the various constructs of the questionnaire in the prediction of the related items, in order to ensure the satisfaction of the measurement models and the appropriateness of their markers in the measurement of the structures. This important issue was accomplished by using CFA and AMOS software. As the results show, the factor loads of perceived job security variables ranged from 0.63 to 0.83, perceived job flexibility ranged from 0.68 to 0.72, job embeddedness ranged from 0.50 to 0.84 and creative performance is between 0.55 and 0.81.

To evaluate the convergent validity of the research, average variance extracted (AVE) criteria was used. This indicator indicates the variance level that a construct (latent variable) derives from its markers. For this criterion, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested values greater than 0.5, since this ensures that at least 50 percent of the variance of a structure is defined by its markers. As shown in Table I, all four variables have values greater than 0.05. To assess the differential validity, it should be considered whether the average of the variance extracted AVE for a structure (latent variable) is more than the second power of correlation between that structure and other structures of the model. This study shows whether a structure is different from other structures of the model

Table I.
Results of
confirmatory
factor analysis

Variables	Item	Load factor	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	AVE	Cronbach's α
Perceived job security	Q1	0.840	–	0.000	0.531	0.80
	Q2	0.771	12.220	0.000		
	Q3	0.638	9.518	0.000		
	Q4	0.648	9.711	0.000		
Perceived job flexibility	Q5	0.691	–	0.000	0.506	0.73
	Q6	0.720	9.186	0.000		
	Q7	0.724	9.238	0.000		
Job embeddedness	Q8	0.815	–	0.000	0.530	0.88
	Q9	0.721	11.163	0.000		
	Q10	0.843	13.825	0.000		
	Q11	0.772	12.229	0.000		
	Q12	0.731	11.364	0.000		
	Q13	0.653	9.838	0.000		
	Q14	0.509	7.319	0.000		
Creative performance	Q15	0.551	–	0.000	0.504	0.85
	Q16	0.784	7.731	0.000		
	Q17	0.816	7.892	0.000		
	Q18	0.660	6.991	0.000		
	Q19	0.736	7.465	0.000		
	Q20	0.684	7.148	0.000		

(Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In order to make the differential credit calculation procedure operational, it can be reversed. This means that the second root of the AVE is calculated. This value should be greater than the correlation of other structures. Table I shows the calculated values. The values of the main diameter in the table representing the root of the second AVE and the other values also indicate the correlation between the structures. It is noticeable that all structures conform to the desired conditions and therefore it can be stated that the structures have a differential validity. The results of CFA along with the two AVE and Cronbach's α variables are presented in Table I. In addition, the fitting indices of the CFA model ($\chi^2 = 342.774$, degrees of freedom (df) = 164, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.849, AGFI = 0.807, NFI = 0.856, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.918 and RMR = 0.050) represent a good fitting of the model of measurement.

Table II shows the mean standard deviation and correlation values of perceived job security, perceived job flexibility, job embeddedness and creative performance. The average of variables indicates that all variables are more than the average number of the questionnaire, which is 3, among which the highest value belongs to the creative performance variable and the lowest amount is also related to perceived job flexibility.

3.3 Hypothesis testing

Figure 2 illustrates the results of SEM model and the intensity of relationships between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility on creative performance with mediating

Table II.
Mean, standard
deviation and
correlation
of variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived job security	3.35	0.66	0.72			
2. Perceived job flexibility	3.23	0.80	0.63**	0.71		
3. Job embeddedness	3.45	0.68	0.59**	0.65**	0.72	
4. Creative performance	3.51	0.67	0.55**	0.61**	0.65**	0.70

Notes: The values of the main diameter of AVE. ** $p < 0.01$

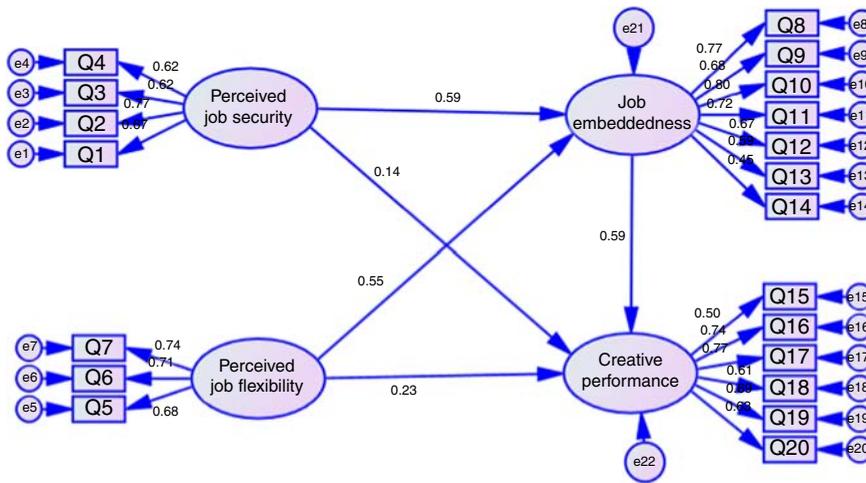


Figure 2.
The results of
structural equation
modeling

role of job embeddedness. Structural model clarifies the intensity of relationships. In a favorable structural model, the following ratios have to hold true: the χ^2 has to be insignificant, the ratio of χ^2 to freedom degree lower than 3, normed fit indexes (NFA) and (GFI) higher than 0.80, CFI higher than 0.9, root mean squared residual (RMR) lower than 0.09, and root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than 0.08. The results in this study indicated that χ^2 was equal to 442.404; ratio of χ^2 to freedom degree was 2.68; indices of normed, comparative and goodness of fit were 0.80, 0.93 and 0.92, respectively; root mean squared residual was 0.072 and RMSEA was 0.061.

In the fitted model, all the direct effects of variables except perceived job security effect on creative performance at the confidence level of 0.95 are positive and significant ($p < 0.05$, $t > 1.96$). To test the hypothesis, p -value and t -value have been used. The condition of the significance of a relationship is that the value of the first index for the given relation is less than 0.05 or the value of the second index is outside the range of ± 1.96 . As shown in Table III, the impact of the coefficient of job embeddedness on creative performance is estimated to be 0.59, which is according to the two p -value and t -value indicators for this path coefficient of 0.000 and 3.388, respectively, the first one is less than 0.05 and the second one is outside the range of ± 1.96 . It can be said that job embeddedness has a positive and significant effect on employees' creative performance and the first hypothesis of the research is supported. The coefficient of perceived job security on job embeddedness is

Hypothesis	Standard coefficient	SE	t -value	p -value	Test result
1. Job embeddedness → Creative performance	0.590	0.113	3.388	0.000	Support
2. Perceived job security → Job embeddedness	0.586	0.065	7.784	0.000	Support
3. Perceived job security → Creative performance	0.139	0.066	1.362	0.173	Reject
4. Perceived job flexibility → Job embeddedness	0.546	0.084	6.297	0.000	Support
5. Perceived job flexibility → Creative performance	0.231	0.078	2.136	0.033	Support
6. Perceived job security → Job embeddedness → Creative performance	0.348	0.076	4.525	0.000	Support
7. Perceived job flexibility → Job embeddedness → Creative performance	0.324	0.081	4.000	0.000	Support

Table III.
Summary of results of
testing research
hypotheses

estimated to be 0.586. According to the two p -value and t -value indicators, which are 0.000 and 7.784, respectively, we can say perceived job security has a positive and significant effect on job embeddedness, and the second hypothesis is also supported. In addition, perceived job security effect factor on creative performance is equal to 0.140, which is due to an increase in the p -value index of 0.05 as well as t -value within the range of ± 1.96 , thus the third hypothesis is rejected.

Also, the coefficient of perceived job flexibility effect on job embeddedness and creative performance is estimated to be 0.55 and 0.23, respectively, which according to the p -value index, for the first equation is 0.000 and for the second one 0.033, and both are less than 0.05. Also, the t -value index, which is equal to the two relations, is 6.297 and 2.136, respectively, and is outside the range of 1.96. It can be said that these two coefficients are significant, that is, perceived job flexibility has a positive and significant effect on job embeddedness and creative performance, and the fourth and fifth hypotheses are supported. Finally, the two final hypotheses ($H6$ and $H7$) have examined the indirect effect of perceived job security and perceived job flexibility on creative performance. These values were calculated using the following formula in which a is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator and b is the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable:

$$B_{\text{indirect}} = a \times b.$$

In addition, the significance of these impact values were calculated using the following formula for Sobel significance test in which a is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator, sa is the standard error for the effect of independent variable on the mediator, b is the effect of mediator on the dependent variable and sb is the standard error for the effect of mediator on the dependent variable:

$$t - \text{value} = \frac{a \times b}{\sqrt{b^2 \times sa^2 + a^2 \times sb^2}}.$$

In order to calculate the indirect effect of perceived job security on creative performance, as seen in Figure 2, the amount of path coefficient for the relationship between perceived job security and job embeddedness is equal to 0.59, and for the relationship between job embeddedness and creative performance was calculated to be 0.59. Therefore, the indirect effect of perceived job security on creative performance is equal to 0.348. By placing numbers in the formula, the value of t -value for indirect effect was 4.525; since it was outside the range of ± 1.96 , it can be said that the indirect effect of perceived job security on the creative performance is significant. In other words, it can be said that perceived job security can increase creativity through increased job embeddedness. Also, the path coefficient for the relationship between the two variables of perceived job flexibility and job embeddedness is 0.55, and for the relationship between the two variables of job embeddedness and creative performance was calculated to be 0.59. Therefore, the indirect effect of perceived job flexibility on creative performance is equal to 0.324. By placing the numbers obtained in the formula, the value of t -value for indirect effect was 4.000; since it was outside the range of ± 1.96 , it can be said that the indirect effect of perceived job flexibility on creative performance is significant. In other words, it can be said that perceived job flexibility can increase the creative performance of employees by increasing job embeddedness. The results of direct and indirect effect of perceived job security and perceived job flexibility on creative performance with mediating role of job embeddedness which consist of 1–7 hypotheses are shown in Table III.

4. Conclusions and implications

The main objective of this study was to examine the mediating role of job embeddedness between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility, as well as its impact on the creative performance. Overall, seven hypotheses were developed and the data collected from the employees were used to test these hypotheses. This research expands the related literature in two ways: First, it indicates that security features and perceived job flexibility improve the job embeddedness of employees. Also, the findings indicate that job embeddedness leads to a significant increase in the creative performance of individuals within the industry. Eventually, the findings of this study with regards to the impact of perceived job security and perceived job flexibility on the creative performance of individuals introduce new dimensions in managing human resources in the field of developing countries like Iran. In line with the expectations, testing the first hypothesis indicated that job embeddedness has a positive impact on the creative performance of individuals (sig. = 0.027). This result is in line with the findings of Karatepe (2016), who also found that employees show higher levels of creative performance as a result of higher levels of job embeddedness. In the other words, when employees perceive that they have more links in organization (e.g. with colleagues and senior managers), their capabilities and skills fit with organizational goals and possess valuable resources which are hard to sacrifice, they encourage to involve themselves in extra-role behavior or creative performance. Therefore, it can be concluded that according to COR theory, job embeddedness signifies that the accumulation of and attaining distinctive resources lead to positive behaviors (creative performance).

With regard to the second hypothesis, the effect of perceived job security on job embeddedness was confirmed (sig = 0.000). In the same vein, Zeytinoglu *et al.* (2012) argued that mental features, such as perceived job security, have an important effect on the tendency of employees to stay in an organization. The third hypothesis of this study (relationship between perceived job security and creative performance) was rejected, implying that perceived job security does not have a significant impact on the creative performance of employees (sig. = 0.17). This finding is not in line with the study conducted by Khaksefidi *et al.* (2015) which confirmed the significant positive impact of perceived job security on creative performance. By the result of these two hypotheses, we can conclude that perceived job security cannot directly stimulate toward creative performance; however, when perceived job security synchronize with the components of job embeddedness (links, fit and sacrifice), it indirectly affects creative performance (extra-role behavior).

As for the fourth and fifth hypotheses, the results indicated that perceived job flexibility has a significant impact on the job embeddedness and creative performance of employees. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Gutnick *et al.* (2012) and Richman *et al.* (2008). According to these results, when employees perceive that they have enough job flexibility in their workplace, they can think or act beyond organizational structure, and not only find themselves free to create formal or informal links but also demonstrate their creative ideas without any fear of being punished. Therefore, based on COR theory, the electricity industry can create an atmosphere in which its employees perceive job flexibility as a factor to link formally or informally, fit their familial life with their working time and finally gain resources that encourage them to involve in creative performance. Finally, the mediating role of job embeddedness between perceived job flexibility and perceived job security and its impact on the creative performance of employees were confirmed. This shows that job embeddedness creates a strong link between the mentioned job features and the creative performance of individuals.

In total, the results obtained from the analysis of data indicated that perceived job security and perceived job flexibility can significantly increase the job embeddedness. In other words, positive job features create informal links at different levels of the

organization, establish a balance between the capabilities of an individual and the assigned tasks and ultimately result in an unwillingness to sacrifice the values and interests of the organization. In addition, by achieving an acceptable level of job embeddedness in the organization, the high costs resulting from the displacement of influential and talented employees would be prevented.

Moreover, the results indicated a positive correlation between job embeddedness and the creative performance of employees. Accordingly, the senior managers have to create positive features in order to strengthen their organizational strategies, thereby achieving the first stage of innovation that includes new ideas and creative performance on part of the employees. Due to the mediating role of job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility, senior managers would better replace routine and fixed work schedules by flexible work schedules which create a sense of belonging and further embeddedness in the organization. From a practical perspective, this study suggests that organizations consider offering specific work policies such as work security and flexibility to enhance job embeddedness in organization which at last leads to creative performance. Moreover, due to results of this research, the existence of a positive relationship among the mediating variables of job embeddedness and creative performance of individuals in organization has been confirmed, and it can be claimed that this relationship can lead senior managers, who have built organizational strategy based on innovation, to create positive features in order to strengthen embeddedness of individuals to achieve the first stage of innovation that includes new ideas and creative performance from employees of the organization and is considered as a prerequisite for innovation. Due to confirmation of the role or mediation in job embeddedness in the relationship between perceived job security and perceived job flexibility among employees of the electricity industry, we can suggest that employees expect an increasing level of security and flexibility from employers so they can better meet the demands of their work and personal lives. Based on this notion, senior managers should use changeable and unfixed schedules as flexible work schedules as well as secure job condition to stimulate employees in order to create a sense of belonging and further embeddedness of employees. In addition to create a sense of perceived job security, managers should take steps for the development and retention of talented human resources of organization.

As mentioned in previous sections, the studied cases are considered as one of the largest, the most important and leading industry in the field of innovation and creativity in the north and north-east of Iran. Given that the industry is a subset of the Ministry of Energy in Iran, the results and outcomes of this study can be well applied in other industries of the Ministry of Energy such as: Water and Wastewater Corporation, Gas Corporation and renewable energy which are following or pursuing factors and antecedents of being creative.

As with any other scientific work, there are certain limitations associated with this study. First, the data had a correlational nature and were based on a single source; therefore, the results should only be cautiously generalized to other organizations and industries. Also, the data were obtained from the employees working at the north-east electricity industry. Obviously, the nature of this job context can have some impact on the relationships between the variables included. Second, we only measured employee perceptions at one point in time. In other words, this research was done through data collection at one point. However, it is highly contended that the impacts of perceived job security, perceived job flexibility and job embeddedness on creative performance perception may get formed during time. Further longitudinal research considering the proposed model may yield more robust results. Moreover, as with any other study, it is not possible to account for every variable that may possibly influence the relationship between perceived job security, perceived job flexibility, job embeddedness and creative performance. Indeed, there may be variables that moderate the relationship between these variables and also some other outcomes that have not been

explored yet. For instance, the relationship between job embeddedness and creative performance may be moderated by job stage which is different in various cultural and organizational structures.

Together, the results underscore the value of devoting further research attention to other authentic aspects of job characteristics, antecedents and outcomes of job embeddedness, and the full mediating role of job embeddedness. In addition, based on previous studies which emphasize the results and outcomes of job embeddedness (Holtom *et al.*, 2012), other outcome variables such as competitive advantages need to be tested and identified, later interpreted through AHP methods. In addition, Ng and Feldman (2010) suggested that future research in this area needs to investigate the causes of job embeddedness. More specifically, social and psychological support such as leadership or supervisor support and organizational support requires further investigation. Identifying the moderating relationship between independent, dependent and mediating variables would also be a potential direction for future research.

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