



The work environment stressors: The link between the job performance and the well-being of the employees.

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Abstract:

Background: Employees are the human capital that contributes to the success and development of a company to a great extent. Thus, these days, companies do not see them only as factors of production from the classical perspective but have started to value them as stakeholders and partners with whom long-term goals are achieved together.

Problem Discussion & Purpose: Researchers realized the need for companies to deal with employees, and for that reason, there has been great time and effort spent on studies concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. However, the authors of the thesis came to the conclusion that the link between job satisfaction and job performance was still a vague one.

Theoretical Framework: The theories used for this study are concerning job performance, well-being, and stress. An emphasis is given to the work environmental stressors, which are working tools, workload, safety, heat, and noise.

Methodology: To make this study, the researchers applied a qualitative approach and used 8 semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The authors have conducted personal “face-to-face” interviews.

Conclusion: After conducting research, acquiring empirical findings, and making an analysis of data, the thesis authors suggest that there is a link between job performance and job-related well-being via work environment stressors.

The study is of great importance because it gives a good insight into seeing well-being as a link to performance which previously was not done by any other research. Being aware of the influence of environmental factors, managers can better realize how these factors contribute to the performance and well-being of their employees and find ways how to improve the working environment in order to increase workers’ job performance and job-related well-being.

Keywords: Performance, Well-Being, Stressors, Stress, Work environment.

INTRODUCTION

Performance is the real behaviour generated by each person as the resulting performance by employees in accordance with their role within the company. To get good performance an employee of an organization must be able to provide the facilities and infrastructure to support the work REMEDY. One way in which to view the development of the company is by looking at the results of performance appraisal. This means that form the object of the performance appraisal is a skill. The ability of employees to carry out a job or task is evaluated by using a specific benchmark objectively and regularly. From the assessment results can be seen in the company's performance, as reflected by the performance of employees.

Good job performance is one of the objectives of the organization in achieving high productivity. Campbell, et al. in Umam (2010: 186) states that performance is something that looks, that is relevant to your individual organizational objectives. A person's performance is a combination of ability, effort, and opportunity that can be measured from the effects it produces. Therefore, the performance of not involve personal characteristics exhibited by a person through the work that has been and will be carried out by someone. Performance can be defined as an individual's success in doing his job. To be able to assess the employee's performance in an objective and accurately, employers must be able to measure the performance levels of their employees. Entangling (2009) cites the opinion of Mitchel to provide indicators to measure employee performance. Indicators provided by Mitchel are as follows: Quality of Work, Job Knowledge, creativeness, Cooperation, Dependability, Initiative, Personal qualities, Capability, and Communication. The measurement means providing opportunities for employees to know their performance. Performance measurement can also serve as an attempt to gather the information that can be used to guide employees through a series of specific priorities.

Background: Companies in different industries have always strived for success, however earlier it was defined mostly it in the amount of profit they received from business activities. Nowadays, the concept of long-term success has a far broader meaning, including the idea of sustainable development as a part of the goals of the company (Hellenes, 2004). It means that companies no longer concentrate only on profit and other material motives. These days, in order to stay competitive in the market, the focus should be established on other areas of the company as well. These areas include environment-friendly entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, expedient supply chain management including the development of logistics, information flows, information technologies, and efficient human resource management (HRM) (Dicken, 2003).

One of the reasons for that is the fact that the market is getting more and more complex due to globalization, which sets higher requirements for those companies that want to stay competitive in the market. According to Dicken (2003), globalization causes global shifts in the production of goods and services.

The development of information technology and systems leads to rapid change in the business environment where time efficiency becomes one of the most important prerequisites for success. As a result of these changes, more pressure is put on human resource management since it is more crucial than before to develop the right knowledge and skills of companies' employees. These are employees who are engaged in the profit-gaining activities of the business. They have a certain influence on customer satisfaction; produce sales goods with certain levels of productivity. As a result of a great number of activities, they lead the company toward its success or failure. Casio (2003), states that human capital is becoming crucial for business success.

Researchers have dedicated much time and effort to providing businesses with models and theories concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, as organizations want their employees to be both satisfied and productive.

In a job-related context, satisfaction represents the general satisfaction with the job as such, and the performance is defined in terms of the level of employees' contribution to organizational goals (War, 2002, Daniels & Harris, 2002). Edwin Locke has defined job satisfaction as a "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience" (Oxfords dictionary of human resource management, 2001, p. 189). From the definitions, it can be seen that job satisfaction is a positive emotional feeling.

Previous research showed scientifically that job satisfaction affects job performance which means that an increase in job satisfaction increases job performance. Strauss (1968) states that social factors such as job satisfaction have an effect on performance, and adds that in order to get the picture of a "good organization" (and thus appropriate performance and job satisfaction) one needs to integrate the findings of different researchers (Strauss, 1968). A good example is Hawthorne's studies at the Western electric plant. Harvard University professor Elton Mayo did him nowadays widely known research about the performance of employees and the working environment (Hatch, 1997). It was concluded that the results were

more of an effect of the experiment itself than the variations in the physical or psychological factors (Marshall, 1998). The findings of the experiment are known as the “Hawthorne effect”.

If a manager puts more emphasis on how the employees feel, it would usually lead to an increase in their performance (Hatch, 1997).

Purpose:

The purpose is to explore and understand the relationship between employees’ job-related well-being and their job performance in the context of stress caused by environmental factors:

Working tools

Workload

Heat

Noise

Safety

Delimitation:

This study concentrates on the blue-collar workers who work in the production line of the company X. Blue collar worker is defined as “manual worker in a factory” (Dictionary of human resources and personnel management, 1997, p. 29) or “somebody whose job involves mainly physical labor” (Dictionary of business and management, 2004, p.47). The authors of the thesis refer to this definition when using the concept of “worker” during their research. Since the study was conducted only in company X, its results are applicable to this particular company’s blue-collar workers; the thesis authors do not claim the applicability of results to other companies and settings.

Theoretical Framework

Job Performance

It is essential to understand what performance means in order to improve and manage it well. According to Roth well (1996), “perform” means to begin and carry through to completion; to take action in accordance with the requirements of; fulfilment (cited in Gilley & Maycunich, 2000)

In addition, according to Campbell (1990), job performance can be defined in terms of whether employees’ behaviors contribute to organizational goals (cited in Daniels & Harris, 2002). The authors of the thesis see the two definitions as complementing each other and it is necessary to have them both since they define better the meaning of performance and make it clearer.

Further, in the thesis, when the authors mention the term “performance”, they imply the job performance of employees.

Performance can be seen as an individual, group, or organizational task performance. Organizations have a vital need to understand how to improve employee performance, and therefore they try to find an explanation as to why employees fail to perform (Muchinsky, 1993). The authors of the thesis concentrate on individual workers’ job performance.

There are numerous causes that affect the level of performance. Korman (1971) considers internal determinants as very important factors that affect job performance. Internal determinants are divided into two main aspects. The first aspect is the skills and abilities for a given job that the employee has. The second aspect is the role perceptions or the requirements for a job as an influence on work performance. This means that if one perceives his/her job role accurately, he/she would be considered as an adequate performer. Conversely, one who does not perceive the requirements of the job would be considered ineffective (Korman, 1971).

Well-being:

Well-being is a concept that includes both physical and psychological well-being (War, 2002). The work environment which affects physical well-being can be more noticeable, which means that one can more easily see the direct link between the physical environment and a subsequent health problem. In contrast, the way in which the work environment affects psychological health is less noticeable and less direct.

In the last 30 years, theory and empirical research have focused more on the negative impacts of work on well-being and; more precisely, on how work stress influences health. Therefore, physical well-being is not going to be discussed in the thesis; the authors will focus on the psychological well-being of employees as an important factor influencing their performance (Brine, 2000)

Stress

Job stress is a significant topic of interest in organizational researchers, managers, and society as a whole. It is of great importance since job stress is one of the factors influencing individual work performance (War, 2002).

Another substantial factor is the fact that stress causes a high cost to individual health and well-being (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001). Thus, the importance of stress is significant for managers to take note of to be more aware of the costs associated with ignoring the issue of stress (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005) Stress can be described in 4 different ways, depending on the level of pressure:

The relationship between the level of stress and performance is depicted in the form of an inverted U-curve. Based on the work of Nixon (1979), illustrates the effect of stress management methods on performance.

1. **Hypo-stress:** The cause of stress may sometimes be boredom or too little pressure and often can take the form of frustration, indifference, depression, and pent-up emotion.
2. **Eu-stress:** When an individual is under the influence of optimum pressure one usually thrives and makes the most out of one action.
3. **Hyper-Stress:** This situation happens when the pressure becomes extreme. The hyper-stress reactions may vary from person to person and even for the same person, from situation to situation.
4. **Distress:** After continuous stress within one individual, the one experiences distress. This might have negative effects or costs for both the individual and the organization. In addition, the individual is most likely to experience health problems and a wish to get away from the situation.

When being too high, stress is seen negatively (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005) Work environment and working tools Work tasks are made of sequences of actions, carried out to achieve certain goals (War, 2002). Good skills employees enable to operate efficiently with respect to the goals of the work. The work environment is a significant factor that should not be underestimated.

War (2002) states that environmental pressures may sometimes cause problems for skilled performance, resulting in impaired quantity or quality of working output, or, for example, mistakes in decision-making.

Thus, it is important to take into consideration the environment in which employees operate. The physical work environment stressors have not been focused enough upon by previous research. However, it is significant to explore them since the working environment and working tools are not only related to job performance; they are also one of the major factors of stress (as mentioned in the stress section).

Environmental stressors in the workplace

Environmental conditions such as noise and heat, for instance, can be considered significant threats to the effectiveness of work, motivation, and the health of employees. Taking into consideration Korman's (1977) and Muchinsky's (1993) suggestions, the authors of the thesis divided the environmental stressors factors into such categories:

Noise:

Muchinsky (1993) defines noise as "unwanted sound". Noise appears to affect the quality of work and the level of performance. The most noticeably affected by noise tasks are those requiring concentration (Cohen, 1968, cited in Muchinsky, 1993). Moreover, according to Korman (1977), noise also possibly affects the physiological health of working individuals.

Heat:

According to Muchinsky (1993), heat stress is not only a problem for employees who work outdoors, but also for those working around subjects emitting heat, and it can greatly impair the productivity of those who perform strenuous work. Moreover, heat stress can also impair performance in tasks requiring mental effort (Muchinsky, 1993).

Workload:

Generally, a high workload with two or more tasks is a primary cause for decreased performance. There are two methods to measure or indicate a high workload. One of the methods is worked on the performance level and is therefore called "performance-based indicators". The second approach is on the psycho-physiological level (War, 2002).

A shortage of labor causes the workload to increase per worker employed at work. Thus, each worker is expected to compensate for the lack of additional workers. This results in decreasing level of quality of production. Nonetheless, the employees suffer from stress (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005).

Safety and accidents:

Developing safe working conditions is of paramount significance. Researchers in different disciplines address this issue and are all most concerned with reducing the frequency and severity of work accidents.

Dangerous working conditions may influence not only employees' productivity and work outcomes; they also generate stress which leads to lower job satisfaction or even an increase in personnel rotation (Machinery, 1993).

According to Muchinsky (1993), there are several categories of accidents causes. First, accidents may occur due to a worker's personal characteristics or lack of attention. Second, alertness and stress can be determinants of work accidents. Korman (1977) states that Keenan, Kerr, and Sherman (1951) concluded that the increasing feeling of control over the working environment or increased feeling of self-esteem and competence will reduce the likelihood of accidents. Increased job satisfaction, good working results, and promotion possibility are those factors that would generate positive emotions in employees.

Research approach:

One of the most important questions in research design is which research approach to be used. The scientists suggest choosing between the two major approaches, deductive and inductive.

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007), the deductive approach involves developing a theory and hypotheses and then testing them. It represents the commonest view of the nature of the relationship between theory and research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Thus, it has a theory as a foundation of research, then test if it agrees with reality by stating a hypothesis.

Furthermore, it aims at explaining causal relationships between certain variables (Saunders et al., 2007). As far as the inductive approach is concerned, it helps formulate a new theory resulting from the observation of empirical data. This approach is suitable to analyze the cause-effect link between particular variables (Saunders et AL, 2007). Thus, the researcher having

Data collection:

- i. Method of data collection
- ii. Type of interviews
- iii. Time horizons
- iv. Target population
- v. Sample selection:
 1. Blue-collar workers; Employees working in the production line of the Company X
 2. With minimum 2 years of full-time working experience;
 3. People who permanently live in Sweden;
 4. Employees are willing to participate in an interview.

Facts about the collection of the data:

Date	Place	Activity	Who	Age	Length
2008-04-19	Company X I	Interview	Respondent	60	24:09
2008-04-19	Company X I	Interview	Respondent	19	31:45
2008-04-19	Company X I	Interview	Respondent	26	27:19
2008-04-19	Company X I	Interview	Respondent	36	19:27
2008-04-19	Company X I	Interview	Respondent	20	27:22
2008-04-19	Company X	Interview	Respondent	40	17:45

Data Analysis:

The authors of the thesis have developed the following structure of the analysis in order to explore the relation between the concepts of well-being and performance.

First, the aim was to understand the effect of every work environment stressor's influence on employees' job performance and well-being separately. This was done in sections 5.1 (How work environment stressors affect performance) and 5.2 (How work environment stressors affect well-being). There, the analysis mostly took the descriptive character and followed the deductive approach.

Afterward, however, the authors continued their analysis basing it on the results of previous sections (given in sections 5.1 and 5.2), and combining it with their empirical findings (respondents' interviews), suggesting how well-being and job performance could be related to each other. There, even though some of their research results were verified by some theoretical models, due to the fact that the link between well-being and job performance have not been offered by any up-to-date literature, the research followed more of the inductive approach. Finally, the authors developed a model called the "performance-well-being link" which in their opinion suggests a link between job performance and job-related well-being. The possible model offered to the reader is portrayed in the latest part of the Analysis in subsection 5.4.

Empirical Findings:

Information about Company X All the information given about company X is received through personal communication from the production manager on 2008-04-09. Some additional information is used from the company's web page. Due to the anonymity of the company the authors of the thesis cannot give the exact names of these sources.

Information for company X given below is essential for this study because it helps the authors of the thesis understand and see facts from both workers' and the company's perspective. This is done to increase the objectivity of the research.

Well-being and work stressors:

Working tools:

The respondents state that the main cause of stress and negative feelings in the working place are when the machines break down or when the working tools are not where they are supposed to be. Respondent 2 says: "when there is a problem, we have to fix it as fast as possible and then you get stressed because you do not know where the right tool is which means that we have to run around and find it. I feel stressed when it happens." He explains further that the machines could break down several times in a relatively short period. In addition, the same respondent mentions that he feels frustrated and irritated because he already fixed the machines, yet the same error occurs.

Safety:

Seven of the respondents say they feel safe at work. Opposite to the seven respondents who feel safe at work only respondent 1 claims that he is not feeling safe lately, which he believes is a result due to the management failing to inform employees about the safety issues.

Noise:

All the respondents state that the level of noise is high in the production line. However, in order to cope with this problem, they use earplugs or listen to music to reduce the noise.

Heat:

Six of the respondents stated that they have problems with the heating or temperature in the factory. Moreover, they say that in the winter it is cold in the factory and in the summer it is very hot there. Four of these respondents stated that they feel hot and sweaty while working. In their opinion, because of the heat, they feel less energetic, get irritated, and angry, which decreases their job-related well-being. Respondent 3 affirms that air conditioner in the factory is not always working properly in the summer; therefore, he says, the temperature can go up to 32-33 degrees Celsius.

Workload:

Five of the respondents think that the workload varies, sometimes it is low when the machines work and do not break down often. On the other hand if the machines break down frequently the workload is high. Respondent eight says that sometimes the workload is very high because there is a shortage of people in the production line.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and understand the relationship between job performance and well-being. It has been fulfilled by using the environmental stressors as tools, meaning that the authors have proposed the possible link between job-related well-being and job performance.

From established literature and research existing today, factors of performance are stated to be mostly influenced by a number of motivators such as rewards and appraisal, although there are ambiguous results. Through this report, it has been seen that factors influencing performance and well-being are not only motivational aspects; rather, there can be different kinds of environmental stressors, such as work tools and workload. The authors not only intended to see how each factor affected each concept separately but also to use the stressors as tools to see the link between the two concepts.

Work tools together with heat had the strongest effect (although in a slightly different order) on both performance and well-being. Also, all the stressors were expressed in such a way that they were seen as obstacles in the work environment thus affecting well-being and performance negatively (except workload that at certain times could be seen positively)

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