

Workload and Performance of Employees

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Abstract

Performance of employees is major concern for all business organizations. High performance work system is a distinguishing factor of leading organizations. In many organizations, inadequate policies at managerial level badly affect performance and don't permit employees to produce at their full potential. It is the most dynamic factor of production. Many variables like intellectual & physical abilities of the employees, their qualification, training, experience, culture of the organization, reward systems, career progression opportunities, co-workers behavior, authority and responsibility, workload, and structure of organizations, influence the performance of employees. Organizations try to select and retain talented employees to compete in global market. Efforts are also made to create conditions in the organizations to achieve optimal production by the employees. But in fact the major problem in this concern is that the interests of the organizations and employees are not in the same direction. Employees wish to have less work with them while managers try to take optimal production from existing workers by overloading them. Similarly, employees desire to earn more by fewer efforts while managers try to pay less to the workers to keep the costs low. In either case, performance of the employees affects. Many researchers have given due importance to the topic and have explored many variables affecting the performance of employees. Studies conclude empirically the correlation between pay and performance, organizational culture and performance, stress and performance, and workload and performance. Today, in practical life each employee seems to be exposing the workload problem. Each individual is under a range of stress variables both at work and in their personal lives, which ultimately affect their health and performance. Hence, workload and stress issues are rising day-by-day, which requires thorough studies to resolve the issues. This study is an attempt to combine and evaluate different theories on

the topic of workload and performance of employees' and conclude the key points for the guidance of managers and employees.

Keywords: Workload, Performance, hpws, employees, managers

1. Introduction

Workload refers to the intensity of job assignments. It is a source of mental stress for employees. Stress is an active state of mind in which human being faces both an opportunity and constraint (Robbins, 1996). There are various ways that stress symptoms or outcomes are reflected in the workplace. In stress, outcome that is desired from an employee is generally perceived to be both uncertain and important (Robbins, 1996). If outcome of an activity is well known earlier or the employee has no interest to enjoy the fruit of task completion or to avoid the consequences of non-accomplishment, the potential stress cannot become actual stress. Besides workload, many other variables have their impact on the stress level of human beings. On the basis of previous studies, the stress factors at work may be classified into four groups that are the working conditions (including shift problems, weekend duty, inadequate pay, long working hours, discrimination, and safety issues), relationships at work (including poor relationships at horizontal and vertical levels), ambiguity in authority and responsibility (including ill-defined role, functions, expectations, and duties), and organizational structure and climate (including communication policy and practice, major changes in the workplace, culture of the organization, and lack of participation in decision-making). In organizations, reaction of people toward workload is different. Some tackle much better while others suffer in destructive consequences. Just as workload differs as a function of the individual, it also differs as a function of one's type of occupation. Some occupations are, inherently more work loaded than others. All the stress strain relationships have an apparent impact on the organization and industry. A research on the topic describes that certain individuals, in different occupations, are increasingly exposed to be under unacceptable level of workload stress (Schultz, 2002).

This is era of globalization. Now, performance of employees in organizations is more concern by managers than earlier. They seek and recruit only high performance employees. Organizations hunt and retain talented employees to compete in global market. Low-efficient employees are avoided by the organizations. Organizations develop systems to avail optimal utilization of human resources. For this purpose, high-performance work teams are developed. HR practices are combined into an overall system to enhance employee involvement and performance (Creating high performance work systems, 676). High-performance

work systems are composed of many interrelated parts that complement one another to reach the goals of an organization, large or small.

Change in workload tends to change the stress level of employees, which ultimately affect the performance of employees. Stress is not necessarily bad in and of itself, while it is typically discussed in a negative context. It is an opportunity when it offers potential gain. (Robbins, OB). Workload is an opportunity for the employees to learn and prosper more quickly. As employees do their jobs they gain more work experience, which enrich their exposure. It is also viewed that employees who have enough work to do remains more active and energetic while work-less employees leftover inactive and lazy. Workload pressure can be positive leading to increased productivity. Under utilization of human skills or failing to reach the full potential of the employees is also one cause to increase stress. Employees who possess the capabilities to perform a job enjoy workload. However, when this pressure becomes excessive it has negative impact. In this stage, the individuals perceive that they don't possess necessary skills and abilities, required to affray with the stress. However, occupational stress is discomfort at a personal level unless it exceeds a person's coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately (Malta, 2004). Stress is acknowledged to be one of the main causes of absence from work (Mead, 2000). If employees are not interested with their jobs or they are not satisfied with the job field they take extra work as fatigue and it causes to contribute job stress. Parikh & Taukari (2004) says, another contributing factor is the nature of the job, which might amount to an immense amount of physical and emotional exhaustion. In the late 1980s, a survey of HSE department, USA showed that stress is second major cause of ill health in serving employees (Colin J. Mackay et al, 2004).

Organizations face a number of competitive challenges such as embracing technology, managing change, keeping the customers satisfied, developing intellectual assets, and containing costs (HPWS). All these challenges require efficient and high performance employees to compete in the global environment. It is the liability of organizations to manage employee related issues to achieve optimal production by the employees. Employee related issues involve managing workforce diversity, recognizing employee rights, and adjusting workloads (HPWS). Organizations must create work environments that merge these employees related concerns to simultaneously get the optimal from employees to meet the goals of the organization.

2. Literature Review & Methodology (Meta analysis)

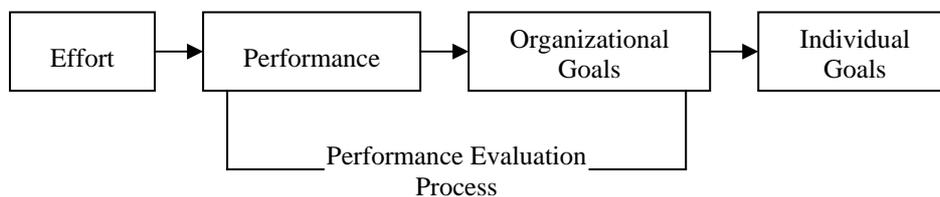
Occupational stress is defined as the critical reactions of human body that occur when job requirements do not match with the capabilities or environment, available to the worker (Sauter and Murphy, 1999). Ultimate affect of occupational stress is change in performance. Performance is defined as the output and

accomplishments of a worker, which are acknowledged by the organization or system in which he works in (Robbins, 1996). Many researchers developed studies to empirically conclude the contributing factors of performance. On the basis of various researches we may say that: -

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Abilities} + \text{Opportunities} + \text{Motivation}$$

It is natural phenomena that when basic necessities of human being are fulfilled, he wants to utilize his capabilities at full potential (Maslow, 1943). If he or she is not provided opportunities by the organizations by extending his or her job assignments up to the level of his abilities, he will un-satisfied (Maslow). It will also lead to increase the stress level. Similarly, if he is not motivated by providing comparative reward against his services, it will also affect his performance (Weissman, 2001). While giving the above said formula of performance, the author assumes that for good performance, employees know what is expected from them, they know how their performance will be measured, they are confident that their extra efforts will lead to better performance, and they feel confident that their good performance will yield good rewards. Moreover, many researchers also determine strong relationship between organizational culture and performance. Figure-1 below represents the relationship between performance, organizational and individual goals.

Figure-1



Raymond (2004) says, it is the responsibility of HRM to develop committed, productive workforce in challenging economic conditions to get efficient performance. It is obvious from available facts that impact of stress on job performance be either a positive or negative. Generally low to moderate level of stress boost the performance of many employees by increasing their work intensity, alertness and ability to react. However, a high level of stress, or even a moderate amount sustained over a long period of time, ultimately takes its toll and performance declines. An employee who is under high level of stress for a long time may develop high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty in making routine decisions, and the like. The influence of stress on the satisfaction level of employees is very straightforward. The findings about the satisfaction and productivity relationships have important implications for managers. They suggest that the goal of making employees happy on the assumption that this will lead to high productivity is probably misleading. Managers

who follow this strategy could end up with a very happy, but very un-productive group of employees (Stephen P. Robbins, 1999).

For longer time researchers in the field of human resources have been interested to find out that how workload affects task performance. Nevertheless, knowledge remained limited regarding the characteristics and dynamics of workload that are relevant to work performance. The study of workload history in particular examines how prior work activity effects subsequent work activity (Cox, in press). In 1993, the National Research Council identified workload transition as an important concern for human factors researchers. The Council highlighted the importance of examining the effects of workload variation on performance. Indeed, workload history (and, more specifically, a workload shift) has important implications for many occupations, especially those in which employees are confronted with varying workload levels (Huey & Wickens, 1993).

A document on the subject "evaluation and management of staff workload", duly approved by CEO (HR) of Vincent policy manual witnesses that excessive workload, actual or perceived can contribute towards stress related psychological illness. CEO is committed to offer an opportunity to all employees to review their workloads on request, if they desires.

Mica R. Endsley and David B. Kaber (1999) suggests in their research that automation of task implementation portion in manufacturing processes gives major benefit to operator in normal operating conditions. However, if operator is removed from task implementation phase, performance declines or stops, if automation system fails to function properly. They suggest that compatible utilization of human / automation resources improve performance.

Douglas McGregor's theory X of motivation (in which he assumes "employees inherently dislike work and will attempt to avoid it, whenever, possible. They must be coerced, controlled, or threatened with punishment to achieve desired goals") supports the notion of "management by stress". Workload is one positive way to enhance stress level on employees (Weissman, 2001).

Work related stress has negative impact on the performance and health of employees (Mackay, 2004). HSE report (UK) describes that work-related stress costs UK employers about £353 million to £381 million per annum, according to the prices in 1995-96 (Jones, 2003) and the cost of number of days lost due to stress is almost double of this figure.

Previous research identifies six variables (involving many elements) affect performance of employees (Yang, 2004). Workload is one of them. The empirical examination strengthen the hypothesis that workload has significant impact on the performance of employees (Yang, 2004).

Economic systems of developed countries are now dependent upon computerization, which has its proven worth for the lowering of production costs, increasing productivity, raising business competitiveness and generating higher profit margins (Sherwin, 2000). Importance of performance in such societies is much greater than developing economies.

It is a characteristic of most post-transition periods that a large number of tasks are demanded and imposed with very limited timeframes. These tasks are often characterized by the description of high workload. Although workload and performance are clearly related, however relationship between these two is much complex. Some vigilance studies suggests that participants using a visual task find it to be more stressful than those using other types of tasks, such as auditory, possibly due to the added tensions of eyestrain and posture (Szalma et al., 2004).

A study to examine the sudden changes in workload level was designed and carried out by Cox Fuenzalida in 2006. The purpose of study was to make direct comparison between sudden increase and decrease in workload situations. Results indicated that performance was significantly impaired for both conditions. Findings suggested that either a sudden decrease (High to Medium) or increase (Low to Medium) workload could result in impaired performance (Cox, 2004). Furthermore, the study suggested that a sudden decrease may result in greater detrimental effects.

The notion of high performance work systems was originally developed by David Nadler to capture an organization's architecture that integrates technical and social aspects of work (HPWS). Primary principles that support high performance work systems are shared information, knowledge development, performance reward linkage, and egalitarianism (Edward Lawler et al.). In many ways these principles have become the building blocks for managers who want to create high-performance work systems (HPWS). More importantly, they are also quickly becoming the foundation for current theories of human resources management (HPWS). A time tested adage of management is that the interests of employees and organizations naturally diverge. People may intentionally or unintentionally pursue outcomes that are beneficial to them but not necessarily to the organization as a whole (HPWS). A corollary of this idea, however, is that things tend to go more smoothly when there is some way to align employee and organizational goals. When rewards are connected to performance, employees will naturally pursue outcomes that are mutually beneficial to themselves and the organization (HPWS). At a general level, the broad process of performance management requires that managers do three things well (HR 300), they define performance, facilitate performance, and encourage

performance. Hall and Mirvis (1995) suggested that distinctions between the work and non-work life have blurred. There has been an increase in the number of managers working relatively longer hours in developed countries (Clarkberg & Merola, 2003; Kods et al., 2002) workplace stress and stress related illnesses are frequently cited as common occurrences, with the general perception that the workplace is becoming more and more stressful (Jones & Bright, 2001) with managers most likely to experience negative spillover from work to the non-work context (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002). O, Driscoll (1996) found that the non-work context also had a negative impact on career outcomes, including the likelihood of participation in career focused learning and development. Examples of non-work contextual variables that negatively impact behaviors include work and family resources, work and family demands, gender, and dependents (O' Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2006).

Results show that changes in heart rate and skin conductance with increasing levels of workload are similar to those observed in an earlier simulation study. Heart rate increased in a step-wise fashion through the first two increases in load and then showed a less marked increase at the highest task level. Skin conductance increased most dramatically during the first level of the cognitive task and then appeared to more rapidly approach a ceiling (leveling) than heart rate. Findings further demonstrate the applicability of physiological indices for detecting changes in driver workload.

Theoretically, performance and arousal have an inverted U relationship (Yerkes-Dodson law); performance increases with arousal up to an optimal point and then declines as workload and the arousal associated with it continues to build. This point or, more broadly, optimal operating range, will vary with differences in operator capacity and other individual and situational factors. Heart rate and skin conductance measures are presented as indicators of changes in driver workload associated with a secondary cognitive task. Consistent with Mehler et al., heart rate appears to be a robust measure of incremental changes in real time workload associated with the secondary task. The current study replicates our simulation work by showing a remarkably consistent pattern of heart rate change in an on-road setting using the same protocol.

Present a model that shows how ability, efficacy, motivation and desirability affect performance in the task of recognizing new environmental opportunities (Hostager, 1998). Identify a range of practices for achieving increased performance through enhanced ability, efficacy, motivation and desirability (Hostager, 1998).

3. Results discussion/ Conclusion

On the basis of available literature and previous researches we may say that workload has significant impact on the performance of employees. For high performance workload on employees must be according to their

abilities and potential to cope with the stress. Extensive high workload and extremely low workload correlate to low performance. It is the job of the leader to create culture in the organization, where optimum workload-productivity correlation exists. If an individual has low workload in relation to his abilities, he is under utilization and his workload must be raised to an appropriate level. It will give satisfaction to the individual and the organization will also gain optimum production. Conversely if workload is high, it is the leader's job to reduce this workload level.

Moreover, sudden increase or decrease in workload both lead to impaired performance. However, sudden increase in workload curve is more sensitive and it badly affects the performance of the employees. Workload should be periodically evaluated in terms of new organizational priorities and initiatives (HPWS). It is more desirable if employees are involved in this evaluation process and workload is determined as per their demand and potential. However, organizational priorities and norms cannot be ignored while establishing this process. Employees should be permitted to raise their workload issues with their supervisors or Executive Managers. If they fail to satisfy the employees, they might be permitted to resolve this issue directly with CEO. If it is requested by the employees, review of the job purpose, duties, key performance indicators and performance measures should be carried out by a manager or supervisor from a different division, section or team as deemed appropriate and approved by the CEO. Key requirement and standard operating procedure may be defined by the organizations to run this system smoothly. An audit of the skills and training required to undertake the identified tasks and actions may also be carried out at this stage. The resulting review will identify areas that are exceeding expected workload, or other factors that are infringing on effective time and work efficiency. A strategy be formulated to assist the employees and their line management to resolve the arising issues related to workload management. The strategy may include work assignment, required training of employees, duty statement revision and workload adjustment etc. Monitoring of the performance after change in workload on monthly, quarterly, semiannually and annually basis is also required to evaluate the performance and workload correlation.

It is also memorable that interests of organizations and employees are not in the same direction. Employees desire to utilize themselves at their full potential but not for the benefit of the organization. Actually, they want to earn more in exchange of their services. If their extra efforts are not acknowledged by the organizations they will unsatisfy from this behavior and it will lead to increase in stress level. There must be some reward for this hard work. This reward may be in shape of increase in pay, incentives, promotion, enhancement in authority, job enlargement etc. For satisfaction of employees, they must be confident that

whatever they are receiving is in accordance with their services. Under utilization of employees' potential and reward below their performance both causes to increase the turnover ratio of the employees.

In many developing countries, Douglas McGregor's theory X of motivation is observed. Where employees dislike work, attempt to avoid work, shirk responsibilities, and show little ambition. According to the author, they must be coerced, controlled or threatened with punishment to achieve desired goals. So, in such society seeking help of employees regarding the distribution of work may be destructive for the organization. Work distribution behavior at public and private sector organizations is also different. In public sector organizations, generally employees exploit their little work and seek extra benefits in exchange of their services. They are not overloaded but they expose themselves under the stress of workload. Normally employees remain under utilization and with the passage of time their abilities tends to decline. However, in private sector organizations, behavior of managers regarding work distribution is entirely different. Here, managers try to take extra work from the employees and normally employees remain under the stress of workload. It is assumed that in corporate sector, most people have high workload therefore further raise of workload level creates an environment that leads to lower productivity levels. In short, it requires constant time and attention of the leader to maintain workload because performance falls in both less workload and high workload situations.

Organizations should seek to ensure that there is a consistent allocation of reasonable workload to workers. To determine the "reasonable workload" the managers and supervisors should ensure that: -

- Tasks are allocated to employees in such a way that their workload don't not exceed from whatever is reasonably expected from them.
- Systems are developed to monitor the working hours of individual employees to see the relationship between working hours and workload. If employees work regularly in excess to working houses for which they are employed, changes in technology, responsibility are made or extra resources are provided to them.
- If an employee leaves job, appointment on his replacement normally be made within three months of relieving.

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