

WORK HABITS AS POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCE ON WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to measure senior level executive perception of what encompasses successful workplace productivity in 21st century organizations. This qualitative study involved 42 senior level executives from 14 different industries and institutional groupings who represented Western organizations. The authors collected data from August 2013 to April 2014. Over 76% of the participants had over 10 years' experience in their professional field. These senior level executives indicated that a number of different categories such as Attitude, Ethics, Initiative, Interpersonal Skills, Personal Development, Teams, Leadership, Time Management, Focus, Rules and Solutions were either positive or negative workplace habits affecting productivity. The majority of executives cited Attitude as the most positive workplace habit affecting productivity and Unaccountability and Carelessness as the most negative workplace habits affecting productivity. The authors' findings offer insights into ways that senior leaders can adjust their hiring and training strategies so positive workplace habits are enabled and negative ones are contained and minimized so greater productivity can be engaged in the workplace. We offer directions for future research in the subject area and point to areas for possible training consideration.

JEL: M12, M51, M53, M54

KEYWORDS: Workplace Productivity; Workplace Habits; Strategic HRM

INTRODUCTION

Measuring work place productivity is a difficult process to quantify. What does it mean to have a productive workplace? Is productivity measured strictly by financial results or do other characteristics play a role in the final definition? The characterization of the 21st century as the information age has brought with it an unquestionable number of challenges for businesses. These challenges range from ethical considerations to technological advances to methods of communicating a message to a global community forcing companies to evaluate business strategies and focus. Each of these concepts is a component of what becomes overall organizational productivity. According to Plunkett, Allen and Attner (2013), "productivity is the relationships between the amount of input needed to produce a given amount of output and the output itself" (p. 136). Understanding what defines specific inputs and outputs will differ from organization to organization. Kempplila and Lonnqvist (2003) believe productivity is the key measure of success. This study focused on the key concepts that senior level leaders believe encompass successful workplace productivity in 21st century organizations. Primarily, this study sought to understand the specific work habits expected by senior level management to create positive workplace productivity. In contrast, understanding what behaviors and work habits create negative productivity was also important. The following summarizes the opinions and findings of the research participants, which serves as the starting point for further discussion of these concepts. This paper presents a rational approach format beginning with a discussion on the research background followed by a thorough review of the literature.

The authors presented a methodology and data with a thorough analysis of the findings, concluding with a thorough analysis of the findings and concluding with recommendations for future study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies agreed there are positive and negative connotations associated with an employee's workplace performance. de Waal (2012) identified 35 characteristics correlating with high performance in an organization. de Waal's study grouped these qualities into five factors, which effectively developed a descriptive framework model of a high performance organization (HPO). de Waal defined a HPO as one that "achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of time of five years or more" (pp. 46-47). de Waal's five factors included: Continuous Improvement and Renewal, Openness and Action Orientation, Management Quality, Workforce Quality, and Long Term Orientation. The Long Term Orientation factor had the strongest correlation with competitive performance, while a sixth factor, Autonomy, did not show any correlation with relative performance and only a weak correlation with historical performance, and was eliminated as a relevant factor.

Additionally, in an examination of the impact of organizational culture on employee performance and productivity, Uddin, Luva, and Hossian (2013) conducted a qualitative study in the telecommunications industry in Bangladesh and concluded that organizational culture significantly influenced employee performance and productivity. Rapert and Wren (1998) incorporated both a structural framework and processes of communication theory when they concluded that both are determining factors between what is considered a high or a low performing organization.

One other consideration involved the changing nature of technological improvements in the workplace and how there may be generational differences in how workers are able to adjust to organizational demands. According to de Koning and Gelderblom (2006) the relationship of information and communications technology (ICT) use among older workers influences job performance. de Koning and Gelderblom concluded that older workers make less use of ICT and have more difficulties with complicated applications than younger workers. The diminished use of ICT was seen as a disadvantage for older workers, as the increased application of ICT in today's workplace is recognized as a positive impact on performance.

Meanwhile, Posthuma, Campion, Masimova, and Campion (2013) recognized there is a lack of consensus in the literature related to the structure of high performance work systems (HPWS). Posthuma et al developed a taxonomy to address what they determined to be a potential barrier to growth in the literature on HPWS, as well as limited knowledge that potentially resulted in diminished application of HPWS in organizations. Posthuma et al reviewed 193 peer-reviewed articles published between 1992 and 2011, categorizing 61 practices into nine categories to draw those conclusions: 1) compensation and benefits; 2) job and work design; 3) training and development; 4) recruiting and selection; 5) employee relations; 6) communication; 7) performance management and appraisal; 8) promotions; and, 9) turnover, retention, and exit management (pp. 1193-1199).

Jensen, Patel and Messersmith (2013) explored the influence of high-performance work systems (HPWS) with traditional human resources variables of job control, employee anxiety, role overload and turnover. Jensen et al surveyed nearly 1600 government workers in Wales, concluding that appropriate levels of job control and employee autonomy in the implementation of job responsibilities could ameliorate the negative consequences of HPWS. HPWS typically address human resources management practices that address recruitment and selection, compensation, and training, with the expectation of the organization realizing a strategic competitive advantage because of improved efficiencies in performance, productivity, and employee turnover.

Furthermore, Langfred (2013) investigated the underlying reason of what motivates people to seek autonomy at work. Langfred's research focused on two perspectives: 1) people desire autonomy to be more satisfied in their job, and 2) people desire autonomy to be more productive in their job. The Langfred study concluded that workers who believe that more autonomy would lead to greater satisfaction were more likely to seek increased autonomy than those seeking autonomy only for potential rewards. Dever and Morrison (2009) studied the positive workplace conditions that were highly conducive for productivity among women researchers. Among the factors leading to higher productivity were varieties of personal factors as well as the workplace culture. Complementing the traditionally recognized factors of personal motivation and individual practice were the institutional support structure of organization culture, work-life balance and workplace dynamics. Utilizing research survey data conducted in British workplaces, Brown, McHardy, McNabb and Taylor (2011) focused on the influence of worker commitment and loyalty on workplace performance. Brown et al concluded that through HR practices, management could increase commitment and loyalty among employees, resulting in improvement of workplace performance.

External factors also have an effect on performance as evidenced by Forde, Slater and Spencer (2006), who revisited a 1998 British workplace employee relations study examining the relationship between threat of job loss and participation on productivity. Forde et al found the threat of job loss on productivity was relatively insignificant compared with the highly positive influence occurring when workers fully participate in their work and productivity is increased. Concurrently, Linz (2003) analyzed job satisfaction of Russian workers, utilizing studies of U.S. workers showing positive correlation with labor productivity and negative correlation with labor turnover, and concluding both had an influence on the organization's performance. Both of these correlated factors, worker characteristics (e.g., work experience and supervisory responsibilities) and subjective characteristics (e.g., attitude toward work), appeared to influence the firm's performance. The Linz study did not attempt to assign causality of the factors on job satisfaction, but did evaluate factors that increased probability of perceived high level of job satisfaction.

Charness and Kuhn (2007) found that worker attitudes directly affected behavior and thus overall productivity. The impact of worker attitudes comparing their own wages to coworkers' wages was found to be a non-factor in affecting workers' efforts. Charness and Kuhn concluded that workers' efforts were related to their own wages, raising a question about the validity of equity concerns in relation to pay policy (wage compression and wage secrecy). Doucouliagos (1995) applied meta-analysis techniques to investigate effects of worker participation on productivity. Doucouliagos addressed two perspectives related to participation: supporters' arguments for improved worker commitment, and increased work effort resulting in efficiency and productivity; detractors' arguments that participation reduces managerial power waste of resources and other human resource problems.

Doucouliagos (1995) arrived at several conclusions: participation did not hinder productivity; democratic governance in labor-managed firms is not negatively correlated with productivity; labor-managed firms' (LMFs) profit-sharing is more positively related to productivity than worker participation in decision making; profit-sharing did not appear to be more important than participation in participatory capitalist firms (PCFs). This opposing view of the effect of profit-sharing was explained by Doucouliagos describing workers in LMFs as worker-entrepreneurs, more interested in profit and the firm's survival. Workers in PCFs, however, were described as hired labor, more interested in issues affecting them as workers, rather than in furthering the owner's interests.

Additionally, Heywood and Jirjahn (2004) explored the costs of absenteeism as it relates to productivity. The researchers hypothesized that interdependent worker productivity firms have higher costs of absence, and therefore spend additional resources on monitoring absences as compared with team production firms that experience lower costs for absenteeism. Heywood and Jirjahn determined that firms with a team approach have lower absence rates, which would then increase worker productivity and lower the organization's overhead costs. Mas and Moretti's (2009) study on peer pressure's effects in the workplace

noted positive productivity outcomes from infusing highly productive personnel into a work group. Mas and Moretti concluded that positive productivity was the outcome of workers who interacted with highly functional team members. Meanwhile, those workers who did not have direct engagements with such engaged people did not experience the same level of productivity in their organizational setting.

Similarly, Abel (2013) explored the relationship between increasing employee satisfaction and lower labor costs. Recognizing a need to increase organizational efficiencies, Abel researched employer-employee relationships, and concluded that more satisfied employees likely provide organizations with human resources to address environmental challenges effecting increased profitability. There is also a connection to a study by Singh (2013), who explored the correlation between leader emotionally intelligent behaviors (EIBs) and the job satisfaction of their employees. Singh found that there is a significant correlation between employee job satisfaction and leaders’ interpersonal and intrapersonal EIBs. The study concluded that a leader’s EIBs are essentially intrinsic motivational factors that influence employees to perform at optimum levels due to job satisfaction. On the other hand, Singh concluded that dissatisfied employees are less influenced by the leader’s EIBs and thus perform at less than desired optimal levels in the organization. Thus, there are opportunities and challenges for leaders who either have a positive or negative influence on their organization’s operations and desire to effect a change toward greater productivity.

METHODOLOGY

Design and Population

This study utilized a qualitative, exploratory case study research design to consider how senior leaders identify and categorize positive and negative workplace habits involving current employees. This approach was performed in order to probe if there are approaches for organizational leaders to use when attempting to increase positive productivity levels and reduce negative behavior that causes productivity to decrease and morale to be lowered in the process. Data was collected from August 2013 through April 2014. Gaining insights from this method was seen as appropriate because its purpose was to provide senior leadership with understanding on ways to proactively engage future and current employees and connect them to the organization’s cultural expectations. The results provide significant value in considering human capital need decisions in pre-employment and for training considerations for established workers.

Forty-two senior level leaders’, coded RS1-RS42 to protect their identity, from 14 industries and institutional groupings were chosen to participate in the study from a population of several hundred professional and social media connections of the researchers. Other invited connections did not respond to repeated requests from the researchers to provide their insights into the subject matter. Gender, age, and education were not considered significant areas of delineation for the current study. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the participants’ demographic background in terms of years of experience and areas of expertise makeup. In the open-ended online survey, the sampled participants were asked to describe their perspectives on work habits that may have a positive or negative influence on their organization’s operations.

Table 1 Subjects’ Years of Experience

Years in Work Area	n
1-10	10
11-20	12
21-30	13
31-40	5
41-50	2

Table 1 illustrate the participants’ demographic background in terms of years of experience a. N=42 participants in the study

Recruitment, Data Collection and Analysis

The study was limited by the number of executives who agreed to visit the survey web site and complete both the demographic and survey questions. Participants were invited to give their opinion on workplace habits from the fields of education and learning; government and legal; manufacturing; consulting; service; communications; information technology; security; food and beverage; marketing; transportation; medical; nuclear engineering; and real estate. Prior to having access to the actual survey questions, participants were required to sign an informed consent document that explained participant rights and provides an assurance of strict confidentiality with any published documents relating to this study.

Table 2: Subjects' Work Fields

Area of Expertise	n
Education and Training	9
Military and Government	7
Service	5
Consulting	4
Manufacturing	4
IT/Software	3
Communications	2
Food and Beverage	2
Marketing	1
Medical	1
Nuclear	1
Real Estate	1
Security	1
Transportation	1

Table 2 illustrate the participants' demographic background in terms of years of areas of expertise makeup. N=42 participants in the study

Those participants who did not follow instructions were not allowed by the system to move on to the main survey pages. Participants who just filled in letters or numbers to defeat the system were not included in the survey tabulation. Approximately ten potential participants were excluded from the study for that reason. This study focused on two interview questions:

1. What does your organization consider to be the most important work habits that an employee should follow, which could lead to positive workplace productivity?
2. What does your organization consider to be the most detrimental work habits that an employee should avoid, which could lead to negative workplace productivity?

Research was conducted using an online survey method through SurveyMonkey™. This method allowed participants to use as much time as required to answer two open-ended survey questions at their leisure, but all responses were required to be entered during that session. Information was not tabulated by SurveyMonkey™ until the subject clicked on the submit button once their work was completed. Prior to the beginning of the survey session, potential subjects were informed of the purpose, benefits, measures to protect their identity, possible risks, and where to seek assistance if questions or concerns arose from their involvement in the study.

The instrumentation used for this study were semi-structured interview questions to gather participants' perceptions of both positive and negative workplace habits. Two open-ended questions were used to guide the study in determining what senior level leaders believe are work attributes that are either beneficial or detrimental to organizational productivity. Each question was categorized under two research topics. Survey question #1 was used to gather details on what senior leaders see as the most important work habits that an employee should follow to maintain and increase workplace productivity. Survey question #2 was

used to gather details regarding what senior leaders in an organization view as the most detrimental work habits that an employee should avoid because such practices lower workplace productivity in an organization. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative method study with a collective case study research design. Axial coding was utilized to evaluate the data closer and to specifically identify categories and clusters of information where the senior leaders might be in general agreement. Selective coding was also used to identify the major themes, constructs, and concepts of the study. The coding process reviewed emerging themes that were naturally categorized around the raw data that came from the received qualitative data.

RESULTS

The narrative data were analyzed, and themes and patterns emerged pertaining to the viewpoints of senior leaders and their perspectives on positive and negative workplace habits. The 42 senior level leaders in this study identified 11 general categories where on the research questions seemed to cluster. Participants indicated that workplace habits were aligned in the areas of attitude; rules; ethics; focus; development; initiative; interpersonal skills; solutions; time management; leadership; and teams. The number of subjects who commented on attitude issues in the workplace was at the top of the list in both the positive and negative habit inquiries. Ethics and Interpersonal Skills also shared in the top five categories in both listings, though not in the exact same position. Focus, Initiative, Personal Development, and Time Management also appeared in one of the top positive or negative categories of the study. Table 3 provides a side-by-side comparison of where all 11 categories ranked when all areas were categorized from the data collected and analyzed.

Table 3: Workplace Attitude Category Rankings

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits	
Attitude	43%	Attitude	45%
Ethics	33%	Interpersonal Skills	29%
Initiative	26%	Time Management	26%
Interpersonal Skills	24%	Focus	24%
Personal Development	21%	Ethics	21%
Teams	17%	Initiative	17%
Leadership	14%	Rules	14%
Time Management	14%	Leadership	10%
Focus	12%	Personal Development	10%
Rules	12%	Solutions	10%
Solutions	7%	Team	5%

This table shows workplace attitude category rankings.

The top five issues in both positive and negative work habits that emerged from the data are presented. Attitude, Ethics, Focus, Initiative, Interpersonal Skills, Personal Development, and Time Management will be examined from the perspectives of the 42 senior level leaders who participated in this study.

Attitude

This category was the one noted by participants as both the top positive and negative workplace habit an employee can possess. Eighteen participants (43%) gave comments involving attitude related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while 19 participants (45%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 4 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the attitude issue.

Ethics

Fourteen participants (33%) gave comments involving ethics related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while nine participants (21%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 5 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the ethics issue.

Table 4: Workplace Attitude Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits	
Accountable	Positive Attitude	Absenteeism	Negative talk
Adaptable	Pride in work	Arrogance	Not committed
Attention to details	Professional	Backstabbing	Questions authority
Cooperation w/Peers	Quality	Careless	Reactive
Curiosity	Respectful	Complaining	Rude
Enthusiasm	Sense of humor	Disrespect	Selfish
Hard work	Servant Leadership	Disrespectful	Unaccountable
Initiative	Willing to learn	Finger pointing	Uncooperative
Open to ideas	Work-life balance	Inconsistency	Undependable
		Indifference	Unmotivated
		Lone wolf	Unwilling to change
		Low respect	

This table shows positive and negative workplace attitude characteristics.

Table 5: Workplace Ethics Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits	Negative Workplace Habits
Environmental awareness	Bad mouth clients
Ethics	Corruption
Honesty	Inappropriate behavior
Integrity	Inappropriate language
Moral Courage	Lying
Work ethics	Misrepresenting facts

This table shows positive and negative workplace ethics characteristics.

Focus

Five participants (12%) gave comments involving focus related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while ten participants (24%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 6 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the focus issue.

Table 6: Workplace Focus Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits	Negative Workplace Habits
Attention to details	Divisive
Big Picture	Email wars
Dedication	Missed deadlines
Focus on customer	Not able to multi-task
Globally competitive	Personal problems
Right mind set	Repeated mistakes
	Unfocused work

This table shows positive and negative workplace focus characteristics.

Initiative

Eleven participants (26%) gave comments involving initiative related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while seven participants (17%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 7 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the initiative issue.

Table 7: Workplace Initiative Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits
Commitment	Follow up	Accept poor quality
Customer Served	Initiative	Lack of follow up
Dependable	Intellectual curiosity	Lack of preparation
Diligent	Owens up to mistakes	Reactive in approach
End result in mind	Takes ownership	Unfocused work
Follow through		Unmotivated
		Unwilling to change

This table shows positive and negative workplace initiative characteristics.

Interpersonal Skills

Ten participants (24%) gave comments involving interpersonal skills related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while 12 participants (29%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 8 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the interpersonal skills issue.

Table 8: Workplace Interpersonal Skills Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits	
Be wrong	Preparation	Arrogance	Inconsistency
Consistent	Prioritize	Disrespect	Lack of quality
Creativity	Quality	Ego centered	Not prepared
Detailed	Resourceful	Gossiper	Not value others
Help others	Responsibility	Ignore people	Poor people skills
Networks with others	Thoughtful	Inconsiderate	Unpredictable

This table shows positive and negative interpersonal skill characteristics.

Personal Development

Nine participants (21%) gave comments involving personal development related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while four participants (10%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 9 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the personal development issue.

Table 9: Workplace Personal Development Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits
Coach others	Learnability	Inability to grow
Continuous development	Networking	Lack of follow up
Innovation	Persistent	Lack of suggestions
Learn software used	Willing to learn	Miscommunication

This table shows positive and negative workplace personal development characteristics.

Time Management

Six participants (14%) gave comments involving time management related issues as a positive influence in the workplace while 11 participants (26%) provided input involving such practices being a negative influence in the organization. Table 10 shows specific comments from subjects on both sides of the time management issue.

Table 10: Workplace Attitude Characteristics

Positive Workplace Habits		Negative Workplace Habits	
Being on time	Time allocation	Lack of time commit	Tardiness
Punctuality	Timely delivery	Not timely	Time commitment
Scheduling	Work until done	Procrastination	Unable to complete work

This table shows positive and negative workplace attitude characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

The diverse nature of the participants of this study encompassed a wide range of expertise and professions ranging from both public sector and private sector organizations. The focus of this study was not on a specific measure of productivity but on expected behaviors of performance covering both positive and negative workplace habits. According to an overwhelming majority of cited opinions, attitude focused on such positive components of accountability, adaptability and professional behavior and such negative components of disrespect, unaccountability and carelessness.

In summary, the direct correlation of either positive or negative workplace habits to workplace productivity was based on intangible behaviors that are not easily quantified but are familiar to experienced leadership. The behaviors noted by participants for positive workplace productivity included: (a) ethics, (b) initiative, (c) interpersonal skills, and (d) personal development. Senior leaders also noted that negative behaviors affecting workplace productivity included: (a) lack of interpersonal skills, (b) inability to manage one’s time, and (c) lack of individual focus.

Future Research

The basis of this study was on a wide range of senior level executives from both public sector and private sector organizations. Future research should focus on more specific professional disciplines. It would also be helpful to tie related organizational disciplines together to indicate whether a correlation exists between the disciplines. Another approach could be on geographic location. Future research needs to focus on a more specific work environment that could eventually be used in a comparative study between these disciplines.

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