Occupational stress and organizational commitment in Romanian public organizations

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Abstract

Studies indicate that high level of stress can lead to low organizational commitment, which can contribute to voluntarily employee turnover and may lead to low overall firm’s performance. Occupational Stress Scale (House, McMichael, Wells, Kaplan & Landerman, 1979) and Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment Scales (Meyer & Allen, 1997) were applied on a sample of 102 employees from five Romanian public organizations. Negative significant correlations have been identified between occupational stress and affective and continuance commitment, enhancing the need for designing tailored interventions in view of reducing stress and enhancing commitment in Romanian public organizations.

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1. Introduction

It can be clearly noticed that occupational stress exists in all professions, and as Fletcher (cited by Fairbrother & Warn, 2003) argues, the experience of stress reactions in the workplace is not an isolated phenomenon. Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, responses, or needs of the worker (National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health, 1999, p. 6). Occupational stress can negatively affect individual employees highlighting counterproductive work behavior (Chraif, 2010) low performances at
work place (Pitariu, Radu & Chraif, 2009; Pitariu & Chraif, 2009, Chraif, 2008) as well as the entire organization. As surveys of the scientific literature indicate, stress is associated with impaired individual functioning in the workplace (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Stress fundamentally initiates a number of complex changes on the psychological and emotional level (tiredness, anxiety and lack of motivation), cognitive level (increased potential for error and, in some cases, accidents arising through error), behavioral level (poor or deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism, smoking, excessive eating and alcohol consumption) and on the physical level (increasing ill health associated with headaches, general aches and pains, and dizziness) (Stranks, 2005). Also, occupational stress is strongly associated with important organizational outcomes as reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment or high employee withdrawal behavior (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003) and other organizational variables (Chraif & Anitei, 2011a).

Regarding organizational commitment (OC), Mowday, Porter & Steers (as cited in Fields, 2002, p. 43) have defined it as a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in an organization. Usually, the various definitions of OC reflect three main types: commitment reflecting an affective orientation toward the organization, commitment based on recognition of costs associated with leaving the organization and commitment based on moral obligation to remain with an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Thus, an employee’s liking for an organization is termed as affective commitment and it includes identification with and involvement in the organization (Fields, 2002) and high performances at workplace correlated with optimal health (Chraif & Stefan, 2010). Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization and normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment, feeling that it ought to remain with the organization (Fields, 2002) and also to make the optimal personnel selection (Chraif & Anitei, 2011b). All three forms of commitment relate negatively to withdrawal cognition and turnover, affective commitment having the strongest and most favorable correlations with organization-relevant (attendance, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior) and strongest and negative correlations with employee-relevant (stress and work–family conflict) outcomes (Fields, 2002).

Throughout various studies, lack of organizational commitment has been investigated as a psychological outcome of organizational situations including stressors, as a predictor of the intention to leave, and as a mediator of the relationship between role stressors and withdrawal behaviors, results indicating that organizational commitment is a consequence of role stressors and anxiety and a predictor of withdrawal behaviors (Glazer & Kruse, 2008).

2. Purpose of the study

Starting from these theoretical considerations, the present research is focusing on analyzing the association between occupational stress and organizational commitment on a sample of employees from Romanian public organizations. We expect that a strong negative correlation will be obtained between occupational stress and affective, normative and continuance commitment. Responsibility pressures and workload will strongly negatively correlate with affective commitment, enhancing the importance of job redesigning in view of maintaining employees’ emotional identification and involvement with the organization.
3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted on 102 employees from five public organizations from Romania (local administrations from five cities in Romania) with ages raging from 26 to 58 years \((m=36.1, \text{S.D}=4.3)\). 64% of the investigated employees were females and 36% males. The requirements for the participants’ selection were a minimum of one year of professional experience and a minimum of a one year stage in the current organization. The participants had a mean of six years experience in their field of working and of approximately two years in the current organizations. No managerial positions were taken into account for the current research.

3.2. Instruments

The Occupational Stress Scale (OSS), developed by House, McMichael, Wells, Kaplan, and Landerman (1979), measures the frequency with which employees are bothered by stressful occurrences. The measure contains five subscales that assess the extent of occupational stress due to job responsibilities, quality concerns, role conflict, job vs. non-job conflict and workload (Fields, 2002). Obtained coefficient alpha values are of .71 for responsibility pressures, .75 for job vs. non job conflict, .78 for quality concerns, .69 for role conflict and .81 for workload stress.

The Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment Scales, developed by Meyer and Allen (1990/1993), measure the three types of organizational commitment, the original eight-item per scale versions being shortened to six items for each type of commitment. Coefficient alpha values were of .78 for affective commitment, .70 for continuance commitment and .83 for normative commitment.

4. Results

After the data have been collected, their analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS 16.0, first being calculated the descriptive statistics for the two variables (Table 1). As we can observe, low scores were obtained for affective \((m=16.5, \text{S.D}=2.7)\) and continuance commitment \((m=18.3, \text{S.D}=1.9)\) and medium scores for normative commitment \((m=24.9, \text{S.D}=3.1)\). Regarding occupational stress, high scores were obtained on subscales like responsibility pressure \((m=8.2, \text{S.D}=2.1)\) and workload \((m=9.0, \text{S.D}=1.4)\), and medium scores on subscales like quality concerns \((m=5.4, \text{S.D}=1.7)\), role conflict \((m=6.9, \text{S.D}=1.5)\) and job vs. non job conflict, the last subscale obtaining the lowest scores \((m=4.9, \text{S.D}=2.4)\).

| Table 1. Descriptive statistics for occupational stress and organizational commitment |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Occupational Stress                           | 49.5           | 3.7            |
| Responsibility pressure                        | 8.2            | 2.1            |
| Quality concerns                               | 5.4            | 1.7            |
| Role conflict                                  | 6.9            | 1.5            |
| Job vs. non job conflict                       | 4.9            | 2.4            |
| Workload                                       | 9.0            | 1.4            |
After reporting the descriptive statistic indicators, in view of testing the research hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficients, presented in Table 2, were calculated. As we can observe, strong negative correlations have been obtained between occupational stress and affective commitment \((r=-.561, p<0.05)\), and between occupational stress and continuance commitment \((r=-.502, p<0.05)\), moderate negative correlations being obtained between occupational stress and normative commitment \((r=-.390, p<0.05)\).

Table 2. Correlation matrix for occupational stress and organizational commitment

|                      | Affective Commitment | Normative Commitment | Continuance Commitment |
|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Occupational stress  | -0.561*              | -0.390*               | -0.502*                |
| Responsibility pressure | -0.539*              | -0.502*               | -0.401*                |
| Quality concerns     | -0.217*              | -0.356                | -0.379*                |
| Role conflict        | -0.306*              | -0.441*               | -0.236*                |
| Job vs. non job conflict | -0.265*              | -0.302*               | -0.198                 |
| Workload             | -0.571*              | -0.428*               | -0.327*                |

* Correlation is significant at a 0.05 level

Having in view the subscales of the OSS, relatively strong negative correlations have been obtained between affective commitment and responsibility pressures \((r=-.539, p<0.05)\) and workload \((r=-.571, p<0.05)\) suggesting that perceived high responsibilities and workload at the workplace (composed of numerous difficult tasks with tight deadlines) are associated by the employees of the public organizations investigated with a low emotional attachment, identification and involvement regarding the organization.

Also, relatively strong negative correlations have been identified between responsibility pressure and normative commitment \((r=-.502, p<0.05)\), suggesting that high responsibilities perceived at work are associated with the decrease of the commitment to remain generated by a normative pressure (moral obligation or organizational norms induced through socialization). Medium and low negative correlations have been identified between the responsibility pressure, workload, role conflict and quality concerns subscales of OSS and continuance commitment, suggesting that the commitment related to the perceived costs of leaving the organization is not so strongly associated with the different pressures to which employees are exposed to at the workplace.

5. Discussions

Starting from the obtained results, we can observe that generally medium and high levels of stress and low and medium levels of organizational commitment have been obtained on the sample of employees from Romanian public organizations. The first hypotheses of the research has been partially confirmed, only affective and continuance commitment strongly negatively associating with occupational stress. A moderate correlation between normative and occupational stress was identified, suggesting that normative commitment may be influenced by other variables such as the pression of the institutional culture existing
in public organizations. The second research hypothesis was confirmed, indicating that responsibility pressures and workload are highly negatively associated with affective commitment.

A series of research limits can be identified, consisting in the reduced number of participants, the differences between the types of public organizations investigated and the use of self-report measures. Starting from the obtained results practical implications can be highlighted consisting in special tailored interventions designed to reduce workplace stress, especially decreasing responsibility pressures and workload at the job and increasing affective commitment through employee localisation programmes or internal communication campaigns targeted towards consolidating employee identification with the organization. New research directions can be traced in examining organizational commitment as a mediator between occupational stress and turnover intentions in Romanian public organizations.

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