THE ANTECEDENTS OF WORK RELATED STRESS – A STUDY OF GENERATION Y WORKERS IN THE KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to test the limits of the theory that have found certain relationships in the West relating to the antecedents of stress. This research aims to show that much of the theories and research in the West are culture-bound and do not necessarily apply to other countries such as Malaysia and especially among certain age groups such as those between 15 years and 34 years known as Generation Y. Results of regression show that role ambiguity, work intensification, working conditions are significant predictors of work-related stress but role conflict, relationship with colleagues, and bullying or harassment are not significant predictors. Possible reasons for this phenomenon are offered..

Keywords: Stress, Generation Y, Malaysia..

1. INTRODUCTION

This research aims to test the limits of the theory that have found certain relationships in the West relating to the antecedents of stress. This research aims to show that much of the theories and research in the West are culture-bound and do not necessarily apply to other countries such as Malaysia and especially among certain age groups such as those between 15 years and 34 years known as Generation Y. According to the Malaysian Statistical Department (2011), Generation Y employees contribute over 50% of the workforce in Malaysia. This fact means that Generation Y will make a significant influence on Malaysia's workforce and human resources. The antecedents of stress examined in this research are role ambiguity, role conflict, work intensification, relationship with colleagues, working conditions and bullying or harassment. The main research question is whether the abovementioned antecedents explain stress as in the West, or are there different outcomes with the generation Y workers in the Klang Valley in Malaysia?

2. METHODOLOGY

Hess and Jepsen (2009) found that the current workplace consists of three different cohorts: the baby boomers who were born between 1946 to 1964, the Generation X, who were born between 1965 to 1979, and the Generation Y, who were born from 1980 to 2000. Work-related stress is the damaging physical and emotional reactions that occur when the demands of the job do not match the needs, resources and capabilities of the employee (Sauter et al. 1999). Jamal (1990) found that work-associated stress could happen when the employees face conflict in their job expectations and requirements. Swaen et al. (2004) reiterated that work-related stress could result in the incapacity (mental or physical) of the employee at work, i.e., affects the employees' performance which could lead to increased costs and lost productivity.

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Role ambiguity refers to the uncertainty an employee faces when he or she does not have a distinct job description and are not aware of what the organizational expectations of them (Baron, 2010). Employees with long-term exposure in role ambiguity will lead to poor involvement in a workplace, low satisfaction, high absenteeism, which will result in work-related stress (Boles & Babin, 1996). Role conflict exists when two or more sets of pressures occur at the same time such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult (Ahmad et al. 2014). Sager (1994) found that there are positive associations between work-related stress and role conflict. Work intensification refers to role overload that can happen when employees have been assigned to many obligations, role requirements, and responsibilities which require them to fulfil them under a time constraint (Tyagi, 1985). Liu et al. (2009) defined work intensification as more workload for each worker or just work overload. Kahn and Byosiore (1992) found that work overload would cause the employee to have fears, depression, exhaustion, loss of self-confidence, loss of concentration, and high absenteeism. The term, relationship between colleagues (Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), is self-explanatory. Gavin and Dileepan (2002) reiterated that a poor relationship with colleagues is the most stressful factor within the organization. Working conditions refer to the features of the workplace and the organizational structure of the work environment, which may affect the employee's performance (Johnson, 2006). Doherty (1996) found that changes in the working environment, such as business downsizing or reorganization, would affect employee's performance. Einarsen & Hoel, (2001) says that workplace bullying constitutes any consistent behaviours like baffling behaviours, offensive behaviours, unwanted behaviours towards an individual or a group of employees. Workplace bullying is a continual behaviour where a colleague behaves emotionally and psychologically with the intent to punish another colleague (Aryanne, 2009). Workplace bullying and harassment is a form of social stressor that influences the psychosocial workplace where it can harm and devastate both employees and the organization itself (Hauge et al., 2010).

3. Findings

This research is quantitative as it aims to replicate studies done in the west which are mostly quantitative. The questionnaire contains 27 items. Four items from Ismail and Tan (2011) measured the dependent variable of work-related stress. The rest of the 23 items are from Montgomery et al. (1996), and they measured the dependent variables. Four items from measured role ambiguity. A sample item is "My job description can be interpreted in more than one way." Four items measured role conflict. A sample item is "My job requires me to carry out many tasks at once." Five items measured work intensification. A sample item is "I am under constant pressure to meet set performance standards." Three items measured relationship with colleagues. A sample item is "I do not socialize with my colleagues during breaks at work." Four items measured working standards. A sample item is "The working conditions are not up to satisfactory standards." Three items measured bullying and harassment. A sample item is "I am bullied and harassed by colleagues." Respondents chose a score from a 7-point Likert type scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

A total of 400 survey questionnaires (including 50 online) were distributed by convenience sampling. 310 questionnaires and 34 online questionnaires were returned completed reflecting an initial response rate of 86%. Finally, only 232 questionnaires could be used for analyses as 73 were excluded because the respondents fall outside the age group and 39 questionnaires were incomplete. The final response rate was 58%.

4. FINDINGS

Correlational analyses showed that all the six antecedents were significantly correlated with satisfaction. See Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson correlation analysis

	Work-related Stress	Role Ambiguity	Role Conflict	Work Intensification	Relationship with Colleagues	Working Conditions	Bullying and Harassment
Work-related Stress	1						
Role Ambiguity	.437**	1					
Role Conflict	.346**	.527**	1				
Work Intensification	.466**	.359**	.389**	1			
Relationship with Colleagues	-.211**	-.023	-.066	-.180**	1		
Working Conditions	-.412**	-.380**	-.379**	-.288**	.333**	1	
Bullying and Harassment	.224**	.126	.021	.058	-.273**	-.415**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=232

However, regression tests showed that only three were significant predictors and the other three were not significant. Only role ambiguity, work intensification, and working conditions significantly predict the variance in work-related stress. Role conflict, relationship with colleagues and bullying and harassment do not significantly explain the variance in work-related stress. See Table 2

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.351	.383		.918	.360
Role Ambiguity	.262	.074	.235	3.556	.000
Role Conflict	.041	.076	.036	.542	.588
Work Intensification	.303	.060	.303	5.033	.000
Relationship with Colleagues	-.092	.076	-.071	-1.209	.228
Working Conditions	-.171	.072	-.161	-2.359	.019
Bullying and Harassment	.122	.082	.090	1.497	.136

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results in this study are partially in line with western studies in that role ambiguity, work intensification and working conditions significantly predict the variance in work-related stress. However the results in this study are not consistent with the west in that role conflict, relationship with colleagues and bullying and harassment do not significantly explain the variance in work-related stress. We offer possible explanations here. The possible explanation for the absence of role conflict on work-related stress among Generation Y in Klang Valley could be because Generation Y employees are more confident and can maintain control even in less-structured environments, and they can modify the job characteristics to make work more meaningful (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Regarding the relationship with colleagues, Twenge et al., (2010) argues that Generation Y show less need for social interaction at the workplace, and they prefer to socialize with their family and friends. Twenge et al. (2010) also added that Generation Y was a generation with higher levels of self-esteem and narcissism, so they do not need social approval.

Regarding bullying, the current results contrast with Einarsen, (1999) where he found that bullying and harassment in the workplace produce a high level of work-related stress. According to Eisner (2005), Generation Y believes that they can be and behave as what they want and do not have to conform. As a result, they are not easy to be bullied and harassed in the workplace. Also, because they are less attached to the workplace, they can easily resign, if bullied (Macky et al., 2008).

The current research, as with all research, has limitations - the small sample size collected by convenience sampling is one. Further research should be conducted on a larger sample to see if the results are the same. This research was restricted to Generation Y workers in the Klang Valley, which are arguably forms a large

percentage of the current urban workforce – that is why the research chose to focus on this group. Different results are expected if the sample included other generations and workers in rural parts of Malaysia.

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