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JOB WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIORS: A RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT MATTERS

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ABSTRACT

During the early days of work and organizational psychology, arriving late at work, being absent from work, and quitting work were few of the first phenomena considered by work psychologists. The psychological processes underlying these job withdrawal behaviors are reviewed in the study. Withdrawal model has dominated the studies in this area in the past few decades and it was later established that its dominance was more of a historical accident. The main purpose of this paper is to define the job withdrawal behaviors, discuss the progression of withdrawal, compare the alternates of withdrawal model - social model and the dispositional model and narrow down the areas of improvement in withdrawal research.

KEYWORDS

job withdrawal behaviour, HRM.

DEFINITIONS

Lateness has been defined by Adler and Golan (1981) as the tendency of an employee to arrive at work after the scheduled starting time. According to the definition given by Johns (1995), absenteeism is the failure to report for scheduled work. For Price (1977), turnover is the degree of individual movement across the membership boundary of a social system. The common thread linking these traditional definitions is the physical removal from the workplace, either for portion of a day, whole day, or permanently.

Data from employee personnel files are used by most academic psychological research concerning lateness, absence, and turnover to measure these behaviors. For expressing lateness, researchers usually use minutes late or the number of lateness incidents, both aggregated over some period of time ranging from several weeks to a year. While measuring absenteeism, contemporary research mainly relies on total time lost (days) or frequency with typical aggregation periods ranging from 3 to 12 months. When the voluntary separation from an employer happens during some arbitrary time window ranging from a few months to well over a year, it is usually termed as turnover.

PROGRESSION OF WITHDRAWAL

The connections among the various forms of job withdrawal have been studied in detail by researchers in the past decades. Theoretically, knowing more about such connections helps in explaining more clearly what is meant by withdrawal. Practically, such understanding may help us to forecast one form of withdrawal from the occurrence of another. Even though connections among lateness, absence, and turnover have been most researched, the withdrawal rubric might be stretched to include psychological detachment, reduced in-role performance (Bycio, 1992; Bycio, Hackett & Alvares, 1990), reduced organizational citizenship (Chen, Hui & Sego, 1998; Mayer & Schoorman, 1992), choice of part-time work (Wise, 1993), or early retirement (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990). Several feasible models might explain the connections between various withdrawal behaviors (Hulin, 1991; Rosse & Miller, 1984).

Independent forms argue that despite some surface similarities, the behaviors have different causes and functions, and should thus be unrelated to each other. In the area of lateness, absence, and turnover, the independent forms can be surely eliminated, as meta-analyses reveal common attitudinal correlates and substantial positive correlations between the various forms of withdrawal at the individual level (Hon & Griffeth, 1995; Koslowsky et al., 1997; Mitre, Jenkins & Gupta, 1992). According to spill over form, withdrawal is nonspecific such that any given manifestation will be positively related to other manifestations.

The alternate form is based on the premise that if the occurrence of one form of withdrawal is constrained, a substitute form will be manifested. The inability to react to dissatisfaction with one form of withdrawal will increase the occurrence of another form. Compensatory forms confirm that fact that any act of withdrawal relieves dissatisfaction and thus reduces the probability of some other act. Wise (1993) identified that increased absenteeism was associated with a reduction in the adoption of part-time or casual work among nurses. Similarly, Dalton and Mesch (1992) established that utility employees who ask for a job transfer but had not received it experienced double the absence of those who had been given a transfer. Dalton and Todor (1993) suggested how absenteeism and the availability of internal transfers might affect subsequent turnover.

The past research has shown strong evidence that support the progression of withdrawal model. Longitudinal studies carried out by Clegg (1983), Wolpin, Burke, Krausz and Freibach (1988), and Rosse (1988) established a lateness-absence progression, although Adler and Golan (1981) did not. Blau (1994) identified that a pattern of increasing chronic lateness was related with elevated absence within the same 18-month period. Lots of studies exposed a progression from absence to turnover (Burke & Wilcox, 1972; Farrell & Peterson, 1984; Rosse, 1988; Sheridan, 1985; Waters & Roach, 1979), and Krausz suggested that the progression was mediated by reduced job satisfaction.

WITHDRAWAL MODEL

Many key publications in the area of work and organizational psychology summarized empirical evidence bearing on a key premise of the human relations movement, the belief that positive attitudes toward one's work and organization would produce a wide variety of favorable organizational outcomes, including enhanced productivity and reduced accidents, lateness, absence, and turnover. The heart of withdrawal model lies in the assumption that withdrawal behaviors happen in response to unfavorable job or work attitudes, prominent among which are job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment. This view is well supported by Hulin (1991) who argues that the various manifestations of withdrawal constitute means of adapting to unfavorable job attitudes.

Brayfield and Crockett (1955), in their influential work of attitude - work behavior literature summarized that there was little appreciable relationship between attitudes and performance, but that the data are indicative mainly of a relationship between attitudes and two forms of withdrawal from the job [absence and turnover]. According to an independent review carried out by Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson and Capwell (1957), the researchers were more favorably inclined toward an attitude-performance connection and stated a stronger relationship existed for withdrawal, describing attitudes as 'unequivocally related' to both absence and turnover. Finally, Vroom (1964) identified a consistent negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover, a less consistent negative relationship between satisfaction and absenteeism, and no simple relationship between satisfaction and performance.

The three reviews cited above comfortably established the status of a withdrawal from dissatisfaction model as appropriate for explaining absence and turnover (and by extension, lateness) and did so by virtue of the supposed contrast to research on performance as much as any strong connection between satisfaction and absence or turnover. Consecutive qualitative reviews of the absenteeism and turnover literature (Muchinsky, 1977; Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979; Nicholson, Brown & Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Porter & Steers, 1973; Price, 1977) showed that the withdrawal model exerted a theoretical closed shop on withdrawal research, as other approaches to studying the behaviors have a tendency to report atheoretical associations with demographic variables or organizational variables such as work unit size.

SOCIAL MODEL

Research on organizational demography has dominated the effect of social context on turnover. Even though it was originally conceived by Pfeffer (1983) to relate to the distribution of the length of service of a workforce (tenure diversity), the term has been extended to the study of diversity in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and functional background. According to Pfeffer, the distribution of tenure would impact the dynamics of power and control as well as cohort identity and conflict between cohorts. As an effect, these social—contextual factors were expected to change organizational performance and turnover patterns. In a nutshell, those who are most different from the dominant tenure cohort are likely to become turnover statistics.

Williams and O'Reilly (1998) argue that theories of social identity and attraction predict that diversity will promote lower social integration and cohesion in groups, by extension increasing turnover. They concluded from their comprehensive review that both tenure and age diversity are related with elevated group or organizational turnover. The studies done by Harrison, Johns and Martocchio (2000) explored how demography might influence absenteeism. It is well known that women shows higher absence rates than men (Cote & Haccoun, 1991) and that younger employees are absent more than older employees (Hackett, 1990). As gender or age diversity escalates, it is likely that disagreement concerning appropriate attendance norms would increase, especially under conditions of high task interdependence (cf. Barker, 1993).

The research done by Feeley and Barnett (1997) describe three models by which communication patterns might underlie employee turnover. In the first model of structural equivalence, turnover happens among employees who communicate with identical others, whether or not they communicate directly with each other. That means, turnover follows patterns of informal role similarity. According to social influence, turnover arises along direct communication lines. People who have direct connections with leavers are likely to quit. In the third model of erosion, turnover takes place among those who lack strong communication links to others. That means, those least central to the communication network are prone to quit.

There is good consensus among researchers on the fact that perceived work-place norms play an important role in the occurrence of absenteeism. That is, people who happen to see their coworkers as demonstrating high absence tend to be absent more themselves. This insight is applicable to a wide variety of operationalizations of absence norms, including direct numerical estimates (Johns & Xie, 1998), ratings of peer absence (Baba & Harris, 1989), subjective norm estimates, and return potential estimates (Gale, 1993). In an influential study, Gellatly (1995) established that perceived absence norms mediated the connection between workgroup absence frequency rates in one year and the absence exhibited by individual members the following year.

DISPOSITIONAL MODEL

A proneness justification grounded in disposition indicates some stability of withdrawal behavior over time and especially across situations. The evidence of such stability is fairly well recognized for absenteeism. The meta-analysis done by Farrell and Stamm's (1988) determined that absence history was correlated .65 with current absence frequency and .71 with time lost. Concerning stability under situational change, Brenner (1968) found out that absence from high school was positively correlated with absenteeism in subsequent employment. Similarly, Ivancevich (1985) found that past absence forecasted subsequent absence even when substantial job design alterations intervened.

Very little research is done in the association between personality and withdrawal behaviors. The few reviews did find evidence of links between personality and turnover, particularly implicating extreme values on personality dimensions (Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979; Porter & Steers, 1973). According to Hough and Schneider, the recent advances in research such as the five-factor model of personality, the linking of specific traits to specific criteria, and the development of specialized work-related measures that draw on the Big Five, especially integrity tests have rekindled interest in personality in organizations.

A potential connection between disposition and withdrawal lies in the general domain of undependability, irresponsibility, and low integrity. These traits show deviance, and there is much proof that people see absence as deviant behavior. Although such negative views of turnover are less documented and probably less intense, the tendency is well portrayed in the hobo syndrome, a form of irrational occupational wanderlust proposed by Ghiselli's (1974) which is characterized by high mobility and low organizational commitment.

Based on research done by Hough and Schneider, personality is more than integrity. Indeed, there is increasing proof that there is a dispositional component to job satisfaction (Judge, Locke & Durham, 1997). Day, Bedeian and Conte (1998) established that job satisfaction mediated the association between the personality dimensions of self-control and extraversion and propensity to quit. Obviously, personality traits external to integrity nexus may be associated with withdrawal. For example, George (1989) identified that positive affectivity was positively related with being in a good mood at work, which in turn was negatively related with absence. Iverson, Olekalns and Erwin (1998) noted somewhat analogous results, showing that positive affectivity resulted in feelings of personal work accomplishment, which in turn were associated with reduced absenteeism.

It was well established that personality affect withdrawal through its impact on cognitions about the behaviors themselves rather than via affective mechanisms. Judge and Mirotocchio explored the perceived degree of control that people believed they would have when faced with a variety of absence-inducing scenarios and proved that personality affected these attributions. Researches points towards the finding that a tendency to attribute events to external than internal causes is more among Individuals with external locus of control, low work ethic, an inclination to make excuses, or self-deceptive personalities. Chronic optimists are expected to perceive more job alternatives and to view prospective job changes more favorably than pessimists.

IMPROVING WITHDRAWAL RESEARCH

A number of improvements can be recommended for withdrawal research that builds upon previous research. First, withdrawal research should benefit from more active integration with associated literature to which it has an valid but unexploited affinity. Turnover research would gain benefit from greater linkages with areas that can stress the context in which the behavior might occur such as work or career (Ornstein & Isabella, 1993; Sullivan, 1999; Taylor & Giannantonio, 1993). Second suggestion is that the withdrawal research needs to be less organization centric, better including how off the job factors affect withdrawal. In their research, Morgan and Herman (1976) described how non work consequences influenced absenteeism more than organization mediated consequences.

Thirdly, withdrawal research needs to better include the role of time. Even though the important forms of withdrawal can all be titled as problems concerning the allocation of time, place and events that unfold over time, these facts of life have not made a good impact on withdrawal research. The fourth point is that withdrawal research needs to be more concentrated on the changing world of work, accepting the influence of new technology, teamwork and revisited psychological contracts. Harrison et al. (2000) discussed how information technology allows for work to be accomplished independent of the strictures of time, space or direct social influence.

Lastly, we need to imbibe the cross cultural similarities and differences in withdrawal behaviors and their determinants and consequences. The information gap in this area is appalling since the act of withdrawal can be measured in a culture free way. According to the study done by Abrams, Ando and Hinkle (1998), organizational identified forecasted turnover intentions in both Britain and Japan, but that perceived social norms related to turnover had less influence in Britain than in more collectivist Japan. Addae and Johns (1998) depicted a cross cultural model of absence legitimacy based on locus of control, time urgency, social support and gender role differentiation.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, withdrawal research has an esteemed history that has not affected from the faddishness and fashion of much construct centered work. On the other hand, it has suffered from a lack of theoretical development both within and beyond the core concepts of the basic withdrawal model. Much remains to be done.

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