Work Specific Locus of Control as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Organizational Stressors and Job Related Well-Being[1]

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The purpose of this study was to examine the job related well- being of managers in the telecom sector in relation to some situational variables, which have been identified as "organizational stressors" in the work environment. The personality variable of work locus of control was hypothesized as a potential moderator of the relationship between the job related well- being and the organizational stressors.

Introduction

To keep pace with the rapid changes at the workplace there are increasing demands on the organizations and the workers. A well-adjusted employee can feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from his workplace. But the work itself and also the work environment can at times place a great deal of burden on him. This may lead to certain negative physiological and psychological reactions to these events and are called "work stress". These negative reactions influence not only the worker but also the organization. This job related stress is one of the highest health risks influencing employees, regardless of the size of the organization or the work sector. According to Riggio (1996), most of researchers view stress as an interaction between the person and some environmental event or "stressor". Parasaruman and Alutto (1984) have expressed that "job stressors" are defined as job demands, constraints, and or opportunities, and job related events or situations that might affect the individual's feelings of stress.

Well-being is a state of physical health and psychological wellness that allows for better functioning in a dynamic environment. As put forth by Blalock and Blalock (2002), this state implies the ability to balance personal and work life, and is associated with physical, psychological, social and spiritual health. An important perspective of research (Warr, 1999) shows that people's feelings about their work are a function of both work and their own personality. Work literature reveals several factors, which can influence the job related well-being. However, the researchers are urged to re-examine the role of affective reactions in the workplace by using new and innovative methods, rather than using surrogate measures of well-being like job satisfaction (Wright & Doherty, 1998).

Rotter (1966) introduced the concept of locus of control to represent the degree to which individuals believe they have control over the outcomes of their actions. Locus of control can be either internal or external. The individual variable of "locus of control" has also been studied extensively in the work domain and findings indicate its importance in organizational research and theory. The concept of "work locus of control" was developed to measure a person's generalized control belief in the organizational settings.

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This work related concept was initially developed by Spector, (1988), who showed that it is an important and useful personality construct for explaining behavior in the work settings.

Spector (1988) has developed a 16-item measure of generalized control beliefs in work setting, to measure what is called the Work Locus of Control. This is "job" specific measure of the overall concept of locus of control and is designed to assess control beliefs in the workplace. It has proved to be an important moderator between work characteristics and work behavior (Spector, 1982). This is further corroborated by a research by Spector, Cooper, Sanchez, et.al., (2002), which shows that control beliefs contribute to well-being at work.

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to understand the following concepts and relationships by the means of survey research:

1. To study the relationship between the specific organizational stressors and the job related well being.
2. To examine how work-specific locus of control relates to the organizational stressors and to the job related well-being.
3. To test for the "moderator effect" of work locus of control on the relationship between the organizational stressors and the job related well-being.

Method

Population: The population focused for the study is the Thailand's telecommunication sector. The review of this sector reveals that it is faced by rapid growth and along with it tremendous pressures since 2000. As the competition gets tough, both the private sector and also the public sector are facing many changes.

Sample: Seventy-eight managerial level employees completed a survey assessing the aforementioned variables. The study sample included managers working in the telecom sector in Bangkok, Thailand, consisting of both the private sector (n=34, 43.6%) and the government sector (n=44, 56.4%).

Instruments: In the current research some of the stressors that had been chosen for study were the workload, interpersonal conflict and organizational constraints. The instruments included the measurement of organizational stressors by the three scales - Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale, Organizational Constraints Scale and Quantitative Workload Inventory (Spector and Jex, 1998); measurement of the affective aspect of job well-being by the Job–related Affective Well-Being Scale (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector,& Kelloway,2000); and assessment of the employee control beliefs at work in general by the Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1988).Item discrimination analyses was done and the items with low reliabilities were deleted from the scales. The resulting coefficient alpha reliabilities of the scales were reasonably high.

Results

Statistical analyses of the data were done to verify the hypothesized relationship among the variables. First the relationship between the independent variables (the three

organizational stressors) and the outcome variable of Job related well-being was investigated. As predicted the results show that the Job Related Well Being has a statistically significant negative correlation ($r=-.230$, $p<.05$) with the variable of Organizational Constraints (OCS), a negative correlation ($r=-.215$, $p<.05$) with the Interpersonal Conflict At Work (ICAW), but a statistically significant positive correlation ($r=.286$, $p<.01$) with the third organizational stressor, the Quantitative Workload (QWI).

The research study also examined the relationship of the three independent variables and the outcome variable with the moderator variable of Work Specific Locus of Control (WLOC). It was found that an external WLOC has a statistically significant positive correlation with Interpersonal Conflict At Work (ICAW) ($r=.263$, $p<.01$), a positive correlation with Organizational Constraints (OCS) ($r=.128$, $p<.05$), but a negative correlation ($r=-.097$, $p<.05$) with Quantitative Workload (QWI). Finally, an external orientation of WLOC has a statistically significant negative correlation ($r=-.218$, $p<.05$) with the dependent variable of Job Related Well Being. It verifies the hypothesis and it is further supported by evidence by Anderson (1977) that the people with an internal locus of control report higher job satisfaction and can cope better with higher levels of job stress than externals. Also confirmed by a study of accountants, conducted by Daniels & Guppy (1994) that those with an internal locus of control were significantly less affected by stress than those with an external locus of control.

The relationship among the three independent variables- the organizational stressors (ICAW. OCS, QWI) was also studied. The variable of Interpersonal conflict at work (ICAW) has positive significant correlation with the other two stressors- a ($r=.349$, $p<.01$) for Organizational constraints (OCS), and ($r=.085$, $p<.05$) for Quantitative workload. The variable of Organizational constraints (OCS) has a statistically significant positive correlation ($r=.225$, $p<.05$) with Quantitative workload. Thus, all the independent variables labeled as the organizational stressors are positively inter-correlated.

Contrary to the hypothesis, no statistically significant moderator effect was found through the regression analysis of Work Specific Locus of Control as the moderator of the relationship between the organizational stressors and the job related well- being. A longitudinal study by Krause & Stryker (1984) also supports the view that extreme internals also fare no better than extreme or moderate externals when exposed to uncontrollable stressors. In an interesting study by Noor (2002) it was found that the internal orientation is not always associated with positive outcomes. In her study locus of control could not moderate the relationship between conflict and job satisfaction showing that internal beliefs could not help those experiencing high conflict.

Building up the analyses of the study after a review of the initial results, some additional explorations were also done. The results of correlation analysis show that Work Specific Locus of Control (WLOC) has a statistically significant positive correlation with gender ($r=.372$, $p<.01$). This implies that females have a more external orientation of WLOC. These findings are supported by the research based findings of factory workers in India which showed that women have a high external locus of control as compared to men (Kumari & Singh,1998).

The detailed additional analysis of the variables in the study also shows that the perception of organizational stressors mediates the pathway between the work locus of control and the job related well-being. Researchers, such as Cooper (1983), consider

individual differences as mediating between job factors and physical and organizational consequences. The findings of the research however indicate that not only do individual differences influence perceptions of stressors at work, but also the stress itself influences the individual's reaction.

Conclusion

On the basis of these results it can be concluded that for the chosen sample, the affective response at work- "job related well-being" is negatively correlated with the "organizational stressors". Also though the external orientation of "work locus of control" has a low correlation with "job related well-being" and a high correlation with some of the "organizational stressors" selected for the study, it does not moderate the relationship between the organizational stressors and the job related well- being. We can further sum up, from the results and review of literature, that work related well being is a function of both the individual and the work environment. There needs to be extensive research work done before generalizing conclusions drawn from a sample, But the findings of the above research study may be stepping stones towards building a bigger model of well being at work in a specific work environment.

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