WORK STRAIN, ABSENCE, AND INTENTION OF QUITTING JOB - FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF OCCUPATIONAL DIFFERENCE

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Abstract

This research investigated how occupations influenced on stress and behaviors at work using questionnaire surveys (N = 613). Four heterogeneous occupations were recruited, including: high school teachers, shop clerks, factory employees and civil servants. Civil servants reported more sources of pressures, shop clerks reported higher levels of work strain, factory employees reported lower occurrence of absence behavior, and high school teachers reported lower intention of quitting job and higher working morale. The differences in stress and work behaviors across four occupations were due to two major factors. First, occupational differences, i.e., uniqueness and culture within the occupation. Second, individual demographics, i.e., marital status, education, job tenure, position rank and age. These individual demographics also offered account of differences in absence behavior, intention of quitting job and low working morale across four occupations. Implications of the findings and suggestion for future research are discussed.

Key Words: *occupation, stress and work behavior*

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies done on job stress have focused on the stressor-stress nexus. One body of research has concentrated on the stressful incidences, stress formation and development of theoretical concept (e.g., Siu, Lu and Cooper, 1999; Weidner, 2003), whilst another body of research has concentrated on the stress impacts and coping efficacy (e.g., Eslick and Raj, 2002; Janssen, 2004). These findings clarified the stress dynamics as well as the mechanism of stress coping; however, limited information was provided to examine whether (or how) stress and behaviors at work are affected by the uniqueness specific to each occupation. For this reason, the current study was conducted, in which job stress and work behaviors across different occupations were investigated. It is envisaged that the findings can increase understanding of the occupational influences on stress and behaviors at work, which can also help alleviate the negative impact of occupational difference.

Occupational stress is a consequence of perceiving an inconsistency between a stressor rising from the workplace and the individual's ability to cope with it. Sutherland and Cooper (1992) proposed that occupational stress was a negatively perceived quality, the result of inadequate coping with sources of stress, and leading to negative mental and physical ill health. It is also described as any force that pushes a psychological or physical factor beyond its range of stability, producing a strain to the individual (Keita and Hurrell, 1994). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) claimed that stressor-stress interaction is

characterized as a process by which a person encounters a stressor, interprets it as a threat, mobilizes his or her effort to cope with it, engages in confronting it, and, finally, succeeds or fails in dealing with it. One empirical study by Cartwright and Cooper (1996) argued that an individual's perceptions, personality disposition, previous stress experiences, social support network, coping strategies, and ambient conditions at work, all affect this stressor-stress interaction. As the individual's perceptions of stress are subjective, what one person considers stressful may be seen as merely challenging by another. This clarifies why people coming from the same worksite and sharing the same objective stressors still have different levels of stress.

Based on prior research, French, Caplan and Harrison (1982) addressed that pressure at work may arise from the mismatch between individuals and their environment, i.e., concept of the Personal-Environmental Fit Model. This model explains that lack of personal-environmental fit may trigger strain if either individuals are under-demand, (e.g., arising from routine or tedious tasks) or over-demand (e.g., arising from complicated operational procedures occur). It also indicated that, for each individual, there are optimal levels of environmental demands for that individual capability.

Subsequently, Cooper, Sloan and Williams (1988) incorporated previous research and proposed Occupational Stress Model. This model comprises of pressure sources, individual characteristics, coping strategies and psychological health outcomes. Cooper et al. indicated that individual characteristics serve as moderators and coping strategies serve as mediators in the stressor-stress relationship (See Figure 1.). Based on these findings, Cooper et al. then developed a scale (titled Occupational Stress Indicator) to measure occupational stress. For the consideration of appropriateness, entirety and fashion of stress measurement, the current study decided to adopt Cooper et al's manifestation of occupational stress as the research framework.

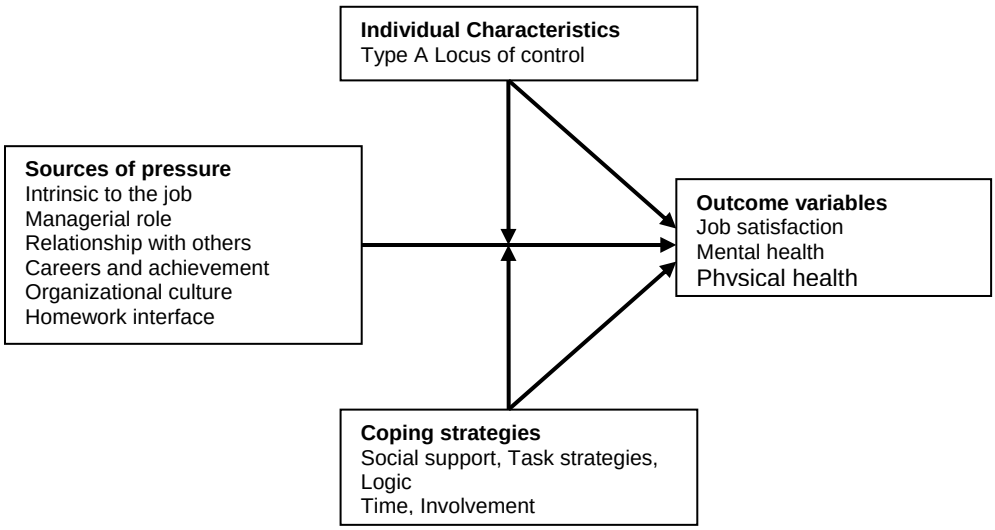

Figure 1. Occupational Stress Model (Cooper, Sloan, and William, 1988)

As aforementioned, contemporary studies have focused on stressors specific to occupations. To begin with, Burke and Greenglass (2000) emphasized that the threat of duty overload and long working hours was a typical stressor among nursing staff. In other health care professions and practitioners, inadequate resources (no equipments, lack qualified staff and vehicles) were identified as major sources of pressure at work (Weinberg and Creed, 2000). The sources of pressure for radiographers appear to be continuous patients turnover, on-call and overtime work (Eslick and Raj, 2002).

These prior findings convey an underlying message that job-specific characteristics may affect the formation of stressors. A stressor may only occur in one occupation/organization but not appear in another; alternatively, a stressor may be very widespread in one occupation/organization but rare influential in another. In order to examine the legitimacy of message, we proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There are differences in stressors (i.e., sources of pressure) across occupations

Previous studies revealed that occupations and stress are of relevance, but contemporary studies also claimed that stress and work performance are of relevance, e.g., reduced productivity, frequent tardiness, absenteeism and high turnover were the common consequences of work strain (E.g., Noe, 2002; Sagie, 1998). US industry annually loses approximately 550 million working days due to absenteeism, and 54 per cent of these absences are stress-related (Elkin and Rosch, 1990). Sigman (1992) indicated that the Confederation of British Industry have calculated that 360 million working days are lost annually through sickness, at a cost to organizations of eight billion pounds, and at least half of these lost days are related to stress-related absence. Why did we feel interested in these three specific behaviors? First, they are direc-tly linked to workers and may affect them on-duty and off-duty hours, i.e., both at work and after work. Second, these three behaviors, to our knowledge, were not simultaneously examined in the past, but we believed such integration help further explore the association between occu-pations and behaviors at work. An in-depth analysis of each behavior follows:

Absence behavior, factors triggering absence behavior are multifaceted. Its occurrence may be attributed to psychosomatic factors, factors intrinsic to the job, and factors extrinsic to the job. These factors may include, for example, chronic illness, covert discrimination or unstable marital relationships (Sagie, 1998). Absence from work is a costly personnel problem and its consequences immensely obstruct profits and organizational performance (Johns, 1997). Absenteeism and similar withdrawal behaviors (e.g., lateness, turnover) reflect invisible attitudes such as job dissatisfaction, low levels of organizational commitment and an intention of quit; specifically, a worker who is absent from work is consciously or unconsciously expressing negative attachment to the organization (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991). Prior studies also argued that individuals' values and attitudes toward work affect absenteeism, and that absenteeism is associated with the characteristics specific to the occupations (cf. Johns, 1997; Johns and Xie, 1998). These prior studies imply that, due to different characteristics embedded in occupations, there may be differences in absence behavior across occupations.

Intention of quitting job. An individual's intention to quit can be described as a psychological response to specific organizational conditions which fall along a continuum of organizational withdrawal behaviors ranging from day-dreaming to the physical act of quitting (Tett and Meyer, 1993). Recently, industrials have faced substantial difficulties in retaining

existing staff. Lader (1995) found that, among qualified nurses, only 68% of those of working age in England were actually working in the profession. The remainders were split between working in another profession (19%) and out of paid work (15%). Another example is that Stuller (1999) estimated an average turnover rate of over 30% in the field of call-center business. Contemporary studies done on intention of quitting job have identified several antecedents, which serve as good indicators to predict actual leaving behavior. These were: promotion and training opportunities, job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, wages and organizational commitment (cf. Bishop et al., 2000; Susskind et al., 2000). In essence, these antecedents reflect the characteristics specific to the occupations and then affect individual intention of quitting job.

Working morale. Working morale is one of the crucial factors for the organizational survival and success (Trout and Rivkin, 2001). The consequences of low morale at work are widespread and both individuals and organizations are affected. Keough et al. (2003) conducted a survey among emergency nurses and asked them to rate three biggest challenges they faced on a daily basis. The results indicated that low morale among staff was one of the greatest concerns and made overall nurses overburdened and frustrated. In contrast, high morale at work contributes to the organizational competitiveness, which functions as an accelerator to enhance business profits (Hausman et al., 2002). From a practical perspective, analyzing working morale is meaningful to organizational development and success, analyzing working morale across different occupations is also imperative, as both of analyses contribute to the understanding of morale influences at work.

Aforementioned literature reviews have found preliminary evidence to support the relevance between occupations and three work behaviors (i.e., absence behavior, intention of quitting job and working morale). In order to examine this relevance, we proposed:

Hypothesis 2: There are differences in three specific work behaviors across occupations

In addition, we were interested in the link among strain, behaviors and individual demographics, which was underpinned by three reasons. First, each occupation is a form of collectivistic organization and individuals are the vital and valuable asset to the organization. Second, characteristics of individuals may reflect how they behave in the organization, such as obedience to the leader or levels of organizational commitment (Van Vugt et al., 2005). Third, when analyzing work behaviors, the influence of individual demographics should be taken into account, as it helps clarify dynamics of work behaviors.

Notably, the individual demographics investigated here included four generic demographics, including: age, gender, marital status, and education. However, as contemporary studies (cf. DeCenzo and Robbins, 2002; Noe, 2002) indicated that job tenure and position rank are associated with the work behaviors (i.e., job satisfaction and performance), these two factors were then added in the survey. In view of what preceded, we therefore proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Work stress and three specific work behaviors are related to individual demographics

Previous research indicated that stress is seen as a stimulus, a response, or a mediation process (cf. Karasek and Theorell, 1979; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In view of stress psychology, the essence of stress seems malleable, expedient, and changes align with the environmental conditions (Cooper et al., 1988). It is therefore legitimate to deduce that work strain can be seen as a dynamic

element, which interacts with all behaviors at work. In the light of this deduction, we proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Stress is related to three specific work behaviors

From a realistic perspective, identifying occupation-specific stressors is more amenable to stress-interventions (rather than global measures of job stress). Namely, when investigating occupational stress, recruiting heterogeneous occupations helps discover how occupational uniqueness affects sources of pressure and stress perception. For this reason, we decided to recruit four occupations, includeing: high school teachers, shop clerks, factory employees and civil servants. These occupations were found to be ones of the most prevailing occupations in the modern society (cf: DeCenzo and Robbins, 2002).

Many prior occupational studies have focused on single jobs (e.g., Broadbridge, 2002) or aspects of stress incidences (e.g., Eslick and Raj, 2002). The current study differs from prior studies in several ways. First, in order to broaden stress scope, four heterogeneous occupations were simultaneously recruited in the survey. Second, apart from stress issues, three specific work behaviors (i.e., absence behavior, intention of quitting job and working morale) were assessed across occupations, which help clarify the impact of stress in the workplace.

Third, previous findings indicated that January (E.g., New Year and Christmas holidays) and July (E.g., Graduation time) are two highest turnover-peaks across a year (cf. Noe, 2002). To avoid such seasonal effect on intention of quitting job, the current study was conducted in April 2004. Finally, in order to ensure the legitimacy of data analysis, employees with shorter job tenure (smaller than one year) were not recruited.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Four heterogeneous occupations in Taiwan were selected, including: high school teachers, shop clerks, factory employees and civil servants. 880 copies of questionnaires were distributed (220 copies for each occupation), 675 copies returned, of which 613 were useable. This gave an overall response rate of 69.66%, which is eligible for further statistical analysis. In terms of response rate, the factory employees (41.25%) and shop clerks (41.00%) were the highest followed by the civil servants (38.25%), and the lowest was the teachers (32.75%). No between-group difference was detected ($\chi 2$ (3, N = 4) = 4.89, n.s.).

Sources of pressure were measured by the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI: Cooper, Sloan and Williams, 1988), which comprises of six stressor subscales. Notably, a body of research suggested that managerial role and organizational climate-structure subscales were inappropriate to gauge stressors among Taiwanese employees (e.g., Chow, 1994; Siu et al., 1999). For this reason, only four subscales were adopted here, including: factors intrinsic to the job, relationships with others, career-achievement and homework interface. The stem preceded all scale items: The following items are all potential sources of pressure. Please rate them in terms of the degree of pressure you perceive each may place on you. (See item samples in Table 1). Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Very definitely is not a source, 6 = Very definitely is a source). Scale reliability α was .85.

Stress was assessed by the Abridged Perceived Stress Scale (APSS: Cole, 1999). The stem preceded scale items: In the last month, how often have you... Item samples included been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly and Felt that your could not

cope with all the things that you had to do. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Scale reliability α was .80.

Two items assessed absence behavior, including how many times do you absent from work every month (e.g. illness or private business) and How many times do you take time off every month (i.e. without organizational approval). The numbers participants provided, so bigger numbers stood for higher occurrence of absence behavior, recorded responses. Scale reliability α was .61.

Three items measured intention of quitting job, which reflects the strength ness participants intend to quit their job (See item samples in Table 2). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Higher scores indicated participants had a stronger intention of quitting their job. Scale reliability α was .83.

Five items measured working morale, which assesses participants' generic feelings about their working environment (See item samples in Table 2). Responses were recorded on 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely agree, 5 = completely disagree). Higher scores indicated that the working morale in participants' workplaces was higher. Scale reliability α was .77.

In addition, as OSI and APSS scales were originally written in English, a back-translation procedure was adopted to ensure the Chinese and English versions compatible. A pilot study (N = 20) was thereafter conducted to ensure the appropriateness and comprehension of all five scales.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

Means ages of the entire sample (N = 613) were 34.07 years old (SD = 8.16). Teachers (M = 38.56, SD = 8.40) were particularly older than other three counterparts (F (3,612) = 18.73, p < .001), including: factory employees (M = 33.36, SD = 7.37), civil servants (M = 32.60, SD = 8.27) and shop clerks (M = 32.54, SD = 7.36). Female participants seemed to be the majority (57.40%) across four occupations, and no between-group difference was detected ($\chi 2$ (3, N = 611) = 3.80, n.s.). Majority of participants had college degrees (college = 74.40%; post-graduate = 14.80%; high schools = 10.50%), and no between-group difference was detected ($\chi 2$ (3, N = 613) = .73, n.s.). Mean tenures were 8.32 years (SD: 7.53), and a between-group difference was detected (F (3, 609) = 50.33, p = .00). More specifically, teachers (M = 14.69, SD = 8.91) were longer than factory employees (M = 7.33, SD = 7.08), civil servants (M = 6.42, SD = 6.03) and shop clerks (M = 6.02, SD = 4.79). In terms of position ranks, majority of participants were from either middle-class (45.00%) or senior-class (30.00%), and the rest were from junior-class (18.90%) and top-class (6.0%). No between-group difference was detected ($\chi 2$ (9, N = 610) = 14.18, n.s.). Finally, married people (53.30%) were generally more than single people (41.60%) and other statuses (5.10%). Notably, this phenomenon was particularly obvious in teachers ($\chi 2$ (2, N = 131) = 45.75, p = .00), in which the married were 75.60%, followed by single (19.10%) and other statuses (5.3%).

Hypothesis 1

Significant differences were detected on three stressors across occupations, including: factors intrinsic to the job (F (3, 612) = 5.25, p = .00), relationships with others (F (3, 612) = 3.67, p = .01) and career-achievement (F (3, 612) = 4.58, p = .00). A marginally significant difference was also found on the homework interface (F (3, 612) = 2.36, p = .07). Namely, these findings were congruent with Hypothesis 1. When considering all stressors together, a

difference was detected across occupations (F (3,612) = 3.81, p = .00). Scheffe post-hoc analysis revealed that civil servants had significantly more sources of pressure than shop clerks (.17, p < .01). To be exact, civil servants (M = 4.01, SD = .43) had relatively more stressors than teachers (M = 3.88, SD = .48), factory employee (M = 3.87, SD = .53) and shop clerks (M = 3.84, SD = .46). In view of these findings, Hypothesis 1 was supported, i.e., there were differences in stressors across occupations.

Interestingly, although civil servants had more stressors, they were not the occupation who felt most stressed. A subsequent analysis indicated a stress difference across four occupations (F (3, 612) = 4.30, p = .00). Scheffe post-hoc analysis identified significant differences between teachers and shop clerks (.20, p< .05), and between teachers and civil servants (.19, p < .05). Simply put, among four occupations, shop clerks felt most stressed (M = 2.74, SD = .45), followed by civil servants (M = 2.73, SD = .51), factory employees (M = 2.68, SD = .55), and teachers felt least stressed (M = 2.55, SD = .58).

Hypothesis 2

The analysis revealed significant differences across occupations, including: absence behavior (F (3, 612) = 4.45, p = .00), intention of quitting job (F (3, 612) = 10.28, p = .00) and working morale (F (3, 612) = 2.95, p = .00).

In terms of absence behavior, Scheffe post-hoc analysis identified significant differences between the factory employees and shop clerks (.27, p < .01), and between the factory employees and civil servants (.29, p < .01). Across four occupations, factory employees (M = .51, SD = .61) had relatively lower occurrences of absence behavior than teachers (M = .60, SD = .83), shop clerks (M = .78, SD = .90) and civil servants (M = .80, SD = .99).

In terms of intention of quitting job, Scheffe post-hoc analysis identified a difference between the teachers and civil servants (.56, p < .01), indicating that teachers had lower intention of quitting job than the civil servants. Specifically, when inspecting the mean scores of all four occupations, teachers had the relatively lower intention of quitting job (M = 2.29, SD = .93), compared to shop clerks (M = 2.42, SD = .86), factory employees (M = 2.60, SD = .99) and civil servants (M = 2.85, SD = .85).

In terms of working morale, teachers (M = 3.49, SD = .62) had relatively higher working morale, compared to shop clerks (M = 3.44, SD = .62), civil servants (M = 3.34, SD = .73) and factory employees (M = 3.28, SD = .70). In sum, these findings offered sufficient rapport to Hypothesis 2, i.e., there are differences in work behaviors across occupations.

Hypothesis 3

Stress and demographics

Stress was related to marriage (F (2, 609) = 3.75, p = .02), education (F (3, 608) = 2.90, p = .03), position rank (F (3, 608) = 5.04, p = .00), tenure (F (2, 609) = 4.46, p = .01) and age (F (2, 609) = 3.16, p = .04). Several findings also drew our attentions. First, married people felt less stressed than single people (.10, p < .05), and other marital statuses (divorced, widowed) felt most stressed (.16, p <.05). Second, people with highest educational level (postgraduates) felt less stressed than people with college degrees (.05, p < .05), and people with lowest educational level (high schools) felt most stressed (.24, p < .03). A subsequent analysis indicated that higher educational level was related to less stress (F (1, 610) = 6.99, p = .00). Third, senior-class and middle-class employees had similar levels of stress (.01, n.s.), and top-class

employees felt less stressed than junior-class employees (-.38, $p < .01$). It also showed that higher rank was related to less stress ($F (1, 610) = 9.28$, $p = .00$).

Fourth, shorter-tenure group (N = 210; 1-3 years; M = 2.76, SD = .51) felt more stressed than middle-tenure group (N = 191; 4-8 years; M = 2.68, SD = .48), and longer-tenure group (N = 211; 9 years or more; M = 2.60, SD = .57) felt least stressed ($F (2, 609) = 4.46$, $p = .01$). A subsequent analysis indicated that longer-tenure was related to less stress ($F (1, 610) = 8.94$, $p = .00$). Last, younger-age group (N = 193; 18-29 years old; M = 2.75, SD=.49) felt more stressed than middle-age group (N = 215; 30-36 years old; M=2.67, SD=.52), and older-age group (N = 204; 37 years old or older; M = 2.62, SD = .55) felt least stressed. A subsequent analysis revealed that younger-age was related to higher stress ($F (1, 610) = 6.19$, $p = .01$).

Work behaviors and demographics.

As for absence behavior, only educational level was related ($F (3, 609) = 4.89$, $p = .00$). Those with highest level (postgraduate) and those with middle level (college degrees) had similar occurrences of absence behavior (Ms = .65, .62, SDs = .84, .80, respectively), but people with lowest level (high schools) had relatively higher occurrences of absence behavior (M = 1.06, SD = 1.00). A subsequent analysis indicated that higher educational level was related to lower occurrence of absence behavior ($F (1, 611) = 6.23$, $p = .01$).

As for intention of quitting job, only age was related ($F (2, 610) = 3.48$, $p = .03$). Younger-age people (M = 2.69, SD = .89) had highest intention, followed by middle-age people (M = 2.52, SD = .94), and older-age people (M = 2.45, SD = .94) was the lowest. A subsequent analysis indicated that younger age was related to higher intention of quitting job ($F (1, 611) = 6.53$, $p = .01$).

As for working morale, only position rank was related ($F (3, 609) = 3.96$, $p = .00$). Top-class people had highest working morale (M = 3.59, SD = .68), followed by junior-class people (M = 3.51, SD = .67) and middle-class people (M = 3.37, SD = .69), and senior-class people had lowest working morale (M = 3.29, SD = .63).

In summary, stress was related to marital status, educational level, position rank, tenure and age. Absence behavior was related to education. Intention of quitting job was related to age. Working morale was related to position rank. Hence, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4

Higher levels of stress was related to higher occurrences of absence behaviors ($r = .18$, $p = .00$), stronger intention of quitting job ($r = .28$, $p = .00$), and lower working morale ($r = -.18$, $p = 00$). Analyses also revealed that stronger intention of quitting job was related to higher occurrence of absence behaviors ($r = .16$, $p = .00$), and lower working morale ($r = -.26$, $p = .00$). Subsequent analyses indicated that stress was related to more absence behavior ($F (1, 610) = 20.81$, $p = .00$), intention of quitting job ($F (1, 610) = 51.60$, $p = .00$) and low working morale ($F (1, 610) = 21.42$, $p = .00$). Simply put, these statistical findings supported Hypothesis 4, i.e., stress is related to three specific work behaviors.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that work behaviors and strain not only differed across occupations but also being affected by individual demographics. On the one hand, these findings have explored occupational influences on stress and work behaviors. On the other hand, it is more important to find out what these findings actually imply, so that relevant strategies can be embarked to alleviate

the negative impact of occupational influences.

Occupational Influence on Stress and Work behaviors

High School Teachers. When inspecting all observed variables across occupations, high school teachers seem to be a pleasant occupation, because they had lowest levels of perceived stress, lowest levels of intention quitting job and highest morale at work. Nevertheless, two findings are worthy to be noted. In the survey, teachers had very high scores on two specific stressors: lack of consultation and communication and dealing with ambiguous or delicate situations. In terms of former stressor, the cause may be the deficiency of the consultants and counseling services for general teachers at school (Weidner, 2003). In other words, government and education authority shall be aware of this phenomenon. There is a need to develop consultation facilities for high school teachers, in which professional advices are offered, and counseling services regarding stress intervention are provided.

Shop Clerks. Across four occupations, shop clerks had highest levels of stress, highest scores on career-achievement stressor and second highest occurrence of absence behavior. These findings implied that shop clerk may be a tough and very challenging occupation. Our survey found that the majority of shop clerks believed they were undervalued, had unclear promotion prospects and rare opportunities for personal development (See Table 1). From this concern, organizations shall re-examine personnel evaluation regulations. Re-designing promotion scheme (e.g., add promotion opportunities) is an appropriate and expedient solution (Lemons and Jones, 2001).

Factory Employees. Interestingly, the lowest working morale and lowest occurrence of absence behavior were both found in factory employees; however, no particular or salient stressor was available across occupations. In other words, the factors causing low working morale and low occurrence of absence behavior might not be attributed to the stressors or strain measured here. Very likely, the factors are attributed to other variables, but which were not measured in the current survey.

Civil Servants. Compared to other three counterparts, the civil servant was the most stressful occupation. They had highest number of stressors, second highest levels of stress, highest occurrence of absence behavior and highest intention of quitting job (See Tables 1 and 2). The survey revealed that civil servants actually suffered from two specific stressors: relationship with others and homework interface.

Demographical Influences on Stress and Work behaviors

The survey revealed that both stress and work behaviors were related to individual demographics. Specifically, individuals who are married, have higher educational levels, longer job tenure, or younger age generally feel less stressed than their counterparts. These finding are not entirely congruent with previous findings (e.g., Broadbridge, 2002; Keita and Hurrell, 1994). To begin with, position ranks were related to stress perception. The survey confirmed a pattern that a higher position rank was related to lower stress levels. One explanation to this pattern is that people with higher ranks usually have more control at work and are more capable of handling their problems. They are also likely to know where to seek assistance.

Second, it is intriguing that position ranks are linked to working morale. People from top-class had highest morale, followed by junior-class and middle-class, and people from senior-class had lowest working morale. Two explanations

were provided to explain such phenomenon: a). People from top-class stand on the peak of hierarchy system and have an absolute dominance to manage the organization. All development and changes within the organization are congruent with their expectations; b). People from junior-class are usually those who just enter the organization, they may have many expectations (or even ambitions) to the organization, and therefore maintain relatively higher morale at work.

Stress and Work behaviors – Another look

This study confirmed the relevance between stress and work behaviors, i.e., stress is related to absence behavior, intention of quitting job and low working morale. Leaders in the organizations should bear in mind that stress is gradually undermining their workforce. Unless the removal of work strain is embarked, any strategies to stimulate work performance will not reach the optimum effect. Leong (2003) suggested that enacting a stress audit in organizations help monitor the stress variations, which facilitates organiza-tions to devise in-time stress intervention schemes.

Limitation and Direction for Future Research

This study revealed differences on stress and work behaviors across occupations. These findings provided valuable insight for future studies in recognizing the uniqueness of each occupation and in the design of occupation-specific intervention for reducing work stress. Conceivably, stress assessment by self-reported quantitative scales was mainly based on individual subjective experiences, which shall not be isolated from its broader and larger context. Very likely, there may be other explanations for the differences discovered here. Meyerson (1994) indicated that there may be different cognitive and symbolic systems for different occupations and the meaning of stress may be socially constructed. There may be norms about acknowledging or claiming stress across occupations.

Last but not least, it is hoped that the findings reported here can serve as a springboard to instigate further research on occupational influences, which will be beneficial to both individuals (e.g., physical and mental well being) and organizations (e.g., global competitiveness and profits).

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