

HEALTH EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND:

Employees require an appropriate working environment that helps them work without problems limiting their performance.

OBJECTIVE:

This study aimed to assess the perspectives of the employees at the Ministry of Health in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region regarding their work environment and satisfaction with the various aspects of work.

METHODS:

This self-administered questionnaire survey involved 109 employees from the Ministry of Health in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan Region. A questionnaire containing different questions about the work environment and work satisfaction was used to assess employees' perspectives about their working environment.

RESULTS:

The participants thought that the sense of preserving public money and materials and feeling responsible among employees is low. The employees were not much satisfied with the relations between managers and employees. Most participants thought that improving the financial situation would affect the employees' capacity (96.3%) and that implementing modern systems, equipment, and programs would improve protection (84.4%). Most participants were satisfied with their workplace (71.6%) and thought their education was relevant to their work (73.4%). They emphasized the importance of making employees feel responsible, providing training courses, and improving the services and work facilities to improve the working conditions.

CONCLUSION:

Low work awareness and commitment exist among employees. The working environment was an important factor in the job satisfaction of employees.

KEYWORDS

Work responsibilities, employee rights, work environment, satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Employees are essential factors in attaining the mission and vision of any organization. Employees need to meet the performance criteria established by the employers to maintain work quality. Employees require an appropriate working environment that enables working without problems limiting their performance [1].

Job satisfaction involves an orientation of employees' emotions towards their role in the workplace. It is an essential factor for motivating and encouraging employees and enhancing work performance [2]. Job satisfaction is a combined set of physiological, psychological, and environmental conditions that make an employee content or pleased with the job. According to Herzberg's two-factor or motivation-hygiene theory, some specific factors in the workplace are responsible for work satisfaction, and a separate set of factors are responsible for work dissatisfaction. These two sets of factors act independently of each other. Herzberg's two-factor theory explains the association between job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction among employees in the working environment [3,4]. Examples of the hygiene issues that decrease employees' dissatisfaction with the work environment include salary and supervision. On the other hand, examples of the primary motivators that make workers more productive, creative, and committed include recognition, achievement, responsibility, and advancement [5]. Factors that determine job satisfaction include task variety, workload, career perspectives, and working conditions [6]. The employees' role in the workplace is important due to their impact on the various elements of the work organization [7]. The role of the employee is a significant source of a worker's identity, meaning, and life satisfaction [8].

Herzberg's theory might offer a reasonable starting point, as providing an environment that encourages job satisfaction will develop productive, motivated, and fulfilled employees [9]. However, employees have different needs, expectations, and backgrounds, so there might not be one right way to manage them. Hence, Herzberg's theory has been criticized for its non-conclusiveness, subjective and biased methodology, and primary emphasis on job enrichment [10,11].

The different content theories of motivation and work satisfaction provide several definitions for explaining the

meanings and sources of different motivation factors. For example, Herzberg's two-factor theory shares a clear relationship with McClelland's need for achievement theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory regarding the similarity between higher-level needs and motivators and the respective similarity between lower-order needs and hygiene issues [10,12]. The lower-order needs should be met before higher-order needs to achieve motivation. Moreover, Herzberg's hygiene issues must be obtained to avoid job dissatisfaction. The Maslow's higher order needs result in motivating employees and are considered intrinsic type and are similar to the motivational factors of Herzberg that are likewise intrinsic. On the other hand, the needs of McClelland's theory are of three main types, namely, the need for power, the need for achievement, and the need for affiliation [10,13].

If the employees are unhappy with their work assignments and working conditions, they might feel they do not belong to the organization. When the employees are dissatisfied, they will not perform up to their potential or expectations, and thus the organizations cannot afford them. If they are fired, the organization will need to bear additional costs for recruiting new employees [14,15]. It is helpful for organizations to provide a flexible working environment where employees feel that their opinions are considered and are part of the working organization [16]. Employee morale needs to be high because it can be revealed in their performance. Low morale will give the employees little motivation and effort to improve [17].

Employers have an important role in shaping and developing adequate career satisfaction [18]. Employers need to develop meaningful work environments to increase motivation for work, increase job satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and enhance productivity [8]. Research has shown a positive association between the environment of work and the fundamental side of job satisfaction. The working environment includes the two broader dimensions of the work and the context. The work dimension includes several characteristics of the job, including the way the work is conducted and accomplished, control of the job-related activities, the sense of achievement, and variation in the tasks and task values. The context dimension of job satisfaction includes the physical and social work conditions [19-21].

Many organizations neglect the working environment leading to adverse consequences on the employees' performance. The work environment includes job security,

the safety of employees, the motivation for better performance, recognition of good performance, relations with other workers, and involvement in decision-making [22]. The current economic crises in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the significant cuts and delays in the payments of public sector employees might have negatively affected the work commitment of the employees. Moreover, no research has studied the perspectives of public sector employees regarding their rights and work responsibilities. This study aimed to assess the employees' perspectives at the Ministry of Health in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region regarding their work environment and satisfaction with the various aspects of the work.

METHODS

DESIGN AND SETTING

We conducted a self-administered questionnaire survey of the employees in the Ministry of Health in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The study was conducted from February to July 2017.

A theoretical framework guided this study based on Herzberg's two-factor or motivation-hygiene theory, in which motivation factors improve job satisfaction. On the other hand, a lack of hygiene factors spawns job

dissatisfaction. These factors work independently of each other. Generally, the factors that encourage job satisfaction relate to self-actualization and self-growth. The primary motivators considered for this study included responsibility, recognition, performance and achievement, and opportunities for advancement. In contrast, the main hygiene factors included salary, working conditions, and relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

PARTICIPANTS

All the 120 employees working at the main building of the Ministry of Health in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region were invited to participate in the study. As all the employees were invited, there was no need to sample size calculation or random sample selection. Of the 120 employees, 109 (90.8%) completed the survey. The staff at the high management level, like advisors, directors general, directors, and those with temporary or daily contracts, were excluded from the study.

Of the 109 employees who responded to the questionnaire survey, 51.4% were male, and 48.6% were female. Most participants were college graduates (47.7%), followed by institute graduates (20.2%). Most participants had one to six years of work experience (61.5%), followed by six to 16 years of work experience (24.8%). Details of the characteristics of the study participants are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS (N=109)

Characteristics	No.	%
Gender		
Male	56	51.4
Female	53	48.6
Education		
Primary school	11	10.1
Intermediate school	10	9.2
Secondary school	11	10.1
Institutes (2 years post-secondary)	22	20.2
College	52	47.7
Higher education (master degree)	3	2.8
Work experience (years)		
1 to 6	67	61.5
6 to 16	27	24.8
16 and more	15	13.8

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

A questionnaire was developed to assess employees' perspectives about their rights and responsibilities at work.

The first part of the questionnaire included information about the respondents' main demographic and work characteristics. The second part of the questionnaire included rating some aspects of commitment, transparency, protection of the public materials, and work relations on a 5-point scale from very low to very high. The third part of the questionnaire was about participants' agreement or disagreement with some sentences related to work environment and satisfaction. The fourth part of the questionnaire asked open questions about making employees feel responsible, what training is required and what type of services the employees need to improve their work.

DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire was tested to assess the comprehensiveness, clarity, adequacy, and relevance of the questions. The questionnaire was directly provided to the employees. A brief description of the aim of the survey, the anonymity of the participants, and the clarification of the type of questions were provided. Written informed consent from the participants was obtained before data collection. The research ethics

committee of the authors' institute approved the study protocol.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, version 20.0). The descriptive statistical analysis and presentation were applied. Due to the specific characteristics of the data and variables included in this study and the lack of specific data on the participants, analytical statistics and assessment of relationships between different variables and concepts were not applied.

RESULTS

The participants' main concern was about transparency in the work environment, with 45.9% thinking it was low or very low. The other important concerns were about relations between manager and staff (33% thinking it is low or very low) and work awareness and commitment (31.2% thinking it is low or very low). The work aspect with the least concern was preserving public money and materials, with 24.8% thinking it was low or very low. Details of the participants' perspectives on these aspects of work responsibilities and commitment are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE OF WORK RESPONSIBILITIES AND COMMITMENT

Question	Very low		Low		Fair		High		Very high	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Work awareness and commitment	8	7.3	26	23.9	53	48.6	15	13.8	7	6.4
Preserve public money and materials and feeling responsible	9	8.3	18	16.5	53	48.6	15	13.8	14	12.8
Transparency in work environment	12	11.0	38	34.9	42	38.5	14	12.8	3	2.8
Relation between manager & staff	5	4.6	31	28.4	51	46.8	16	14.7	6	5.5

Regarding work environment and work satisfaction, the participants' main emphasis was on improving the financial situation (96.3%), providing continuing professional development training courses (89.9%), implementing modern systems, equipment, and programs (84.4%), and providing clearance when transferred to another workplace (79.8%). The participants also emphasized the need to be qualified to get the annual increase in salary (68.8%) and had concerns about using positions to get

personal benefits (54.1%). They also emphasized that alert disciplines are not leading to delays in salary increase (57.8%) and the importance of avoiding presents and incentives from attendants (59.6%). Most participants were satisfied with the workplace (71.6%), the relevance of education to the type of work (73.4%), and the relevance of the services provided at the workplace (76.1%), as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: PERSPECTIVES OF EMPLOYEES ABOUT DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF WORK

Questions	Yes		No		Don't know	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Officials and employees use position to get personal benefits	59	54.1	15	13.8	35	32.1
Improving financial situation and incentives affect employee's capacity	105	96.3	4	3.7	0	0.0
Implementing modern system, equipment and programs make better protection	92	84.4	9	8.3	8	7.3
Is there a need for continuous activating practical training courses?	98	89.9	7	6.4	4	3.7
Are you satisfied with your workplace?	78	71.6	22	20.2	9	8.3
Is your education relevant to your work?	80	73.4	22	20.2	7	6.4
Should each employee qualify for an annual increase in the salary?	75	68.8	27	24.8	7	6.4
Alert discipline leads to delay in the salary increase	20	18.3	63	57.8	26	23.9
Can employee benefit from presents or incentive from attendants?	23	21.1	65	59.6	21	19.3
The employee has right to a three day holiday each month whether fixed or not	80	73.4	18	16.5	11	10.1
The employee needs to provide clearance when transferred to another workplace	87	79.8	14	12.8	8	7.3
The services provided at your workplace are relevant	83	76.1	19	17.4	7	6.4

Regarding how to make employees feel responsible, the participants emphasized the importance of educating the employees about this aspect from the first date of starting work, providing incentives for good work and discipline for neglect, and providing training and seminars to raise awareness of employees. The employees thought they needed training courses in administration, computer, languages, and communication skills. Regarding the type of services the employees need to improve their work, the participants suggested having transportation from home to work and providing computers and internet facilities.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a lack of work awareness and commitment among employees. The participants thought that the sense of preserving public money and materials and the feeling of responsibility among employees was low. The employees were not much satisfied with the relations between managers and employees. Several factors within the working environment can influence job satisfaction,

including the working hours, wages, the autonomy of employees, organizational structure, and communication [23]. In many organizations, employees might have problems with their supervisor forgetting the deserved respect. Also, supervisors might show tough behaviors toward employees, making them uncomfortable sharing innovative ideas [2,24]. The level of job satisfaction can be improved when appropriate attention is given to recognition, supervision, and interpersonal relationships [25]. Another factor that significantly influences work satisfaction is creativity at work, which is influenced by personal characteristics, the work environment, and the relationships with colleagues and superiors [26].

Most participants thought that improving the financial situation would affect the employees' capacity, and implementing modern systems, equipment, and programs would improve protection at work. Different variables, such as workload, stress, salary, and family conflicts related to the job, can lead an employee to dissatisfaction, resulting in a possible turnover. In the end, these independent

factors can have a negative impact on organizational performance [27].

Many participants were satisfied with their work and thought that their education was relevant to their work. Sometimes employees are not satisfied with their assigned tasks. They might not be confident about factors such as unsafe working conditions, limited rights, noncooperative co-workers, lack of respect from the supervisor, and non-involvement in the decision-making process. These factors make the employees feel detached from the organization [14]. Several psychosocial and work environment variables directly impact job satisfaction, where even a raise in rewards will not improve the employee's dissatisfaction level [28].

Few participants thought that alert discipline leads to delays in the salary increase. The need for continuous activation of the practical training course was recognized. The study revealed the importance of making employees feel responsible, providing training courses in different fields, and providing services and work facilities as contributing factors to improving working conditions. Many motivational factors can help employees find their worth concerning their value in the organization. These factors include the nature of work, the recognition and responsibility granted, the sense of achievement, and personal development opportunities [29]. Organizations must identify the employees' needs and satisfy them to ensure the effective achievement of their goals [30].

The study participants emphasized the importance of having an appropriate and motivating working environment. An appropriate working environment enhances employees' loyalty, increases commitment, and ensures efficiency and effectiveness. It also enhances productivity and might develop a sense of ownership among employees. Eventually, this will increase the effectiveness and reduce the lost cost from unsatisfied employees [2,31].

The factors recognized in this study and emphasized by the study participants can be classified under the main motivation and hygiene factors responsible for work satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as described in Herzberg's theory. Although our findings go in line with the Herzberg two-factor theory, the theory itself has several limitations. The theory has been criticized for being inconclusive as it is limited to some professions as some professionals might like responsibility and challenging jobs while the employees in

general work are motivated by payment and other benefits. Therefore, the effect of the two-factor theory may be reversed on some other categories of people. The second limitation is that the primary emphasis of Herzberg's theory is on job enrichment and has completely ignored the workers' job satisfaction. It does not provide adequate importance to status, payment, or interpersonal relationships, which are usually considered great motivators. The third limitation is the subjectivity type of information or data and the potentially biased methodology. However, Herzberg's theory has been criticized for its non-conclusiveness, subjective and biased methodology, and primary emphasis on job enrichment [10,11].

Although we based our study on Herzberg's theory, recent research has recommended that organizations should aim to consider McClelland's theory in motivating their employees. The main reason for such a recommendation is that the theory looks so factual that it flawlessly fits into real-life situations because people need change through life experiences and cultural opinions [10].

This study has some limitations. This study only included one work setting at the ministerial level. Employees at other settings and the directorates or institutes levels might have completely different perspectives and concerns. We did not include a sample size calculation and random selection of the study sample. The two limitations above might affect the representativeness and generalizability of our findings. Due to the specific characteristics of the data and variables included in this study and the lack of specific data on the participants' variables, analytical statistics, and assessment of relationships between different variables and concepts were not applied. Another limitation of this study is the lack of a clear conceptual base and a theoretical framework for the study, with a poor empirical analysis required for explorative testing of the model. This study was indirectly based on one particular model and framework, Herzberg's two-factor or motivation-hygiene theory. This study did not develop its explorative model or theoretical framework.

Further studies need to consider samples from other settings and institutions. As work performance was not well defined and conceptualized in this study, further studies should also include other working conditions and work satisfaction variables, including performance elements such as competence, work process, and tasks.

CONCLUSION

Low work awareness and commitment existed among employees. The working environment was an important factor in the job satisfaction of employees. Inappropriate working conditions limit the opportunities to render the capabilities of employees to achieve their full potential. Employers must realize the importance of an appropriate working environment. It is important to make employees participate actively in the decision-making process, provide flexible working hours, provide less workload, apply a teamwork approach, and ensure supportive management to affect the employees' performance positively. This can increase job satisfaction and promote work commitment, motivation, and productivity. Further studies should also assess job profiles and link them with the related knowledge, skills, and competencies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

IAM and NPS designed the study. IAM and SAS collected data. AMS and NPS interpreted the results, prepared all tables and figures, wrote the manuscript. All authors reviewed it before submission.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

This study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Hawler Medical University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining all the details of the study to them. All methods were performed in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations.

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