Can Better Workplace Communication Serve to Improve Job Satisfaction and Reduce Absenteeism? A Case Study of Nilai University College Library

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship of the workplace communication, job satisfaction and absenteeism of the student workers in the Nilai University College library. The result of the study indicates that there is no significant relationship between the three variables. Stepwise regressions show that there is negative correlation between workplace communication and job satisfaction; and absenteeism. Result also shows weak correlation between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

Keywords: *communication, job satisfaction, absenteeism, library, Nilai University College.*

I. INTRODUCTION

People associate jobs with money, long hours, co-workers, benefits, breaks, or livelihood. These people spend over half of their lives at jobs for one or more of the reasons mentioned. Looking at how the organization affects the workers is something that scholars have investigated for many years.

Yet with all of the investigating and theorizing though, it seems to be very difficult to change the work atmosphere. For example, many people still work within very structured / vertical organizations that do not take into consideration the feelings of the employees.

Since communication is downward and feedback is limited with such companies, employees feel like they have no voice and are unimportant. Many employees within this kind of organization do not like working and find it hard to attend work. Employees are not going to work because they want to do things in life that are more satisfying, so absenteeism is becoming an issue in many workplaces.

However, on the other side of the coin there are organizations that do take into consideration their employees` feelings and thoughts. Maister (2001) discussed that an organization that works to satisfy and cares about employees will have employees reciprocate their actions by working harder and increasing profits.

These companies have the philosophy that if employees are satisfied, then more work can be completed and lead to more profit. Employees might like the job because the organization is concerned with their thoughts and might guide them into more often because it is a place of enjoyment and fulfillment. Interestingly, satisfaction is a concept

that has been examined by organizational communication scholars because being satisfied is something people strive for within the society.

Employees want to like their jobs. Usually, when employees are satisfied with their jobs, they will attend work more often. Communication affects every aspect of our lives and in particular the business world. We are accustomed to hearing that ineffective communication can make or break a business. Breakdowns in communication can occur when different implications are placed on the same idea. It is common for people to interpret the same words in different ways.

Looking at the relationship between employee`s communication satisfaction, job satisfaction and absenteeism is something that merit one`s attention because organizations have to illustrate, especially with the work environment, that they are concerned about their employees. This concern can in turn help the organization in retention of the good employees and making it an organization that everyone wants to work for.

As every nation and organizations are chasing after a service-oriented economy, employees are more frequently in contact with customers of the business. Consequently, they become an integral part of the image that a customer has of the business and play a pivotal role in determining the success of firm (Bitner, 1990; Britner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990).By understanding and responding to the needs and concerns will experience with a firm (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1998). Greater customer satisfaction will in turn lead to repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth communications (Britner, 1990).Such actions on the part of customers should result in greater market share and higher profits for the service firm.

Due to potential impact that employees have on the business, it is imperative that management of organizations understand the specific dimensions that help shape employees` attitudes towards their jobs. Over the past decade, considerable attention has been given to role conflict, role clarity, job tension and job satisfaction as four very important determinants of the performance of individuals and their impact on the operational effectiveness of the organization (Kelly, Gable & Hise, 1981; Lusch & Serpkenci, 1990). Subsumed within these four concepts is the necessity for effective communications among managers, employees and customers (Zeithaml et al., 1998). Without effective communications, employee job satisfaction suffers as well as the quality of the service encounters between the firm`s employees and the firm`s customers (Schneider and Bowen, 1985). This lack of effective communications will potentially lead to a decrease in role clarity, an increase in job tension and a decrease in job satisfaction and invariably possible absenteeism.

The question on whether job satisfaction is important seems rather obvious. After all, it seems logical that a happy employee is a "better" employee, which is often defined as a "more productive" employee. However, thousands of studies have been carried out seeking to establish a positive and unmistakable correlation between high job satisfaction and high productivity with nothing conclusive being proven. Researchers have attempted to correlate job satisfaction with efficiency, absenteeism, turnover, and various other aspects of performance with decidedly mixed results. The fact is, however, that sometimes satisfied employees perform better, and sometimes they do not.

The unfortunate consequence of this lack of a clear cause and effect relationship is that when management discovers there is no guarantee of one-to-one correlation between individual satisfaction and individual productivity, interest usually declines.

Issues of communication, job satisfaction and absenteeism are rampant in most Malaysian organizations and private higher education institutions are exceptions. These issues have either gone unnoticed or unreported. After all, which organizations would reveal high records of absenteeism or mismanagement to external parties?

One of the major issues in the management of academic libraries is the management of staff. Using the Library of Nilai University College as a case study, this project investigates whether communication is a determinant of student worker job satisfaction and would help to improve absenteeism.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Organizations of all types have changed in recent years due to advancements in technology, e-commerce, global economics, voicemail, email, etc. Yet the individuals who make up the organizations are still the key. There needs to be that one-on-one interaction between organizational members to make decision, set the organization`s course, resolve conflicts, motivate, and reward. Without a trusting, open relationship, productivity falters, motivation drops, performance suffers, and neither the individuals, nor the organization, will be as successful as they could be. Technology will change, method will change, process will change, but the need for people to interact effectively with others in order to make the system work will not. Almost everyone has experience in an employer-employee relationship. This type of interaction is significant to us as human beings because what happens to people at work carries over into everything else they do.

Nilai University College (NUC), a private higher education institution, employs a librarian and some officers for its academic library functions. Due to service demand from students, the institution also employs existing students as support staff in its service counter. There are currently 48 student workers employed at the Library at Nilai University College (NUC). Due to some electrical wiring complications in January 2008, the supervisors` office was moved from directly behind the circulation desk where the student workers sit, to about 60 feet across the library from the student workers. Ever since the move, there have been changes in the relationships between the supervisors and student workers. For example, it was observed that some of the supervisors are unable to oversee the workers as much as before, and perhaps as a result, mistakes and errors of the workers have seemed to increase. However, more importantly and from casual observation, some of the supervisors and student workers do not communicate and interact as much as they did before. Based on feedback from the librarian, these supervisors even admit to not knowing the names of some of the new freshmen student workers. And due to interactions before the office move, it is the older returning student workers who have more interaction with the supervisors. More returning workers, due to past proximity, who have had continued communication with the supervisors than new workers, and perhaps consequently, shown increased job satisfaction, had indicated a lower number of absences.

A high level is understood to be costly and disruptive. High absence may indicate low morale or wider organizational problems (Income Data Services, 2005).

NUC reported high absenteeism among student workers especially from the library in the management meeting sometime in July 2008. Statistic provided by the HR department indicated that there were 40% absences between the periods of February 2008 to June 2008. Compare with the same period the year before, there were only 5% absences. This is an astounding increase in absence percentage. Absence costs and paying for temporary staff to cover adds additional expense to the monthly staffing bill. In a time when cost-effectiveness and excellence is being sought in NUC strategic plans, value for money, in this case in the library, must be seriously reviewed. Although there were other reports on academic and administrative staff absences, no research has been conducted to determine the degree to which absenteeism affects NUC library service provision.

Absenteeism damages library effectiveness because service delivery is undermined when staff is not at work to do their job. Of course, staff should not feel pressurized to come to work when unfit or unwell. The entitlement to take "sick leave" when genuinely unwell is enshrined in law and is an entitlement that also protects well staff from infection by unwell staff that is inappropriately present at work. A lot has been written about absence management in general (for example: Bennett, 2002; Berry, 2006; Dunn, 2002; Griffiths, 2007) and this case study explores some factors that could prove significant for change.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Study indicated that knowing the organizational communication preferences and job satisfaction levels can be useful in enhancing an effective and dynamic organization like NUC. Weigel (1994) suggests that effective communication and job satisfaction can build morale, reduce misunderstanding, retain productive employees, and reduce conflicts and most importantly, absenteeism. Prior literature and research review have not adequately addressed the understanding and impact which communication type and job satisfaction have on organizations. When NUC administrators and policy makers understand the source of job satisfaction and communication type preferences among student`s workers, more prudent decisions can be made for its library function.

Communication satisfaction occurs when expectations are met and an understanding exists (Hecht, 1978). A greater sense of satisfaction can result from the interpersonal communication and one`s sense of inclusion. Furthermore, poor communication can lead to high level stress and self-doubt. Therefore, the value of an accurate communication assessment, and degree of communication satisfaction, lies in the need to create an understanding of the current organizational communication effectiveness, determine organizational communication strengths and weaknesses, and develop communication strategies that enhance supervisor/subordinate working relationships. The result of effective communication is a common understanding of information between sender and receiver.

The paper goes some way to addressing the research gap by exploring absenteeism within a Malaysian private higher education institution academic library environment, and by showing the strategic importance of effective communication. With relevance within the library community, the study will look at some of the issues surrounding absence management and ways of reducing absence levels, so reducing the costs to the employer.

Therefore, the study attempt to explores the issues mentioned by determining if communication serves to improve the library student`s worker`s job satisfaction and thus reducing absenteeism.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
1. Is there any relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers?
2. Is there any relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism of student workers?
3. What is the mediating role of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers?

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To examine the relationship of workplace communication among supervisors and absenteeism of student workers.
2. To investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism of student workers.
3. To examine the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism.

V. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH
The scope of the research covered the entire student workers employed at the institution library in NUC. The problem as mentioned earlier although was also rampant in other similar institutions, the researcher started with NUC first. Further research was anticipated in a larger scale in the near future.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH
There has been so many research work done on this problem, so also a number of articles have been written in the area of absenteeism, organizational communication and employees` job satisfaction. However, the significance of this current study was to cover a specific aspect of communication and how it affects student workers` absenteeism and job

satisfaction in an educational setting. As it seemed, the limitation for this research as mentioned earlier had been put in place to cover a larger aspect of problem by investigating all private higher education institutions (PHEIs). By identifying the issues and problems associated with job satisfaction in PHEIs, it is believed that PHEIs practitioners were facing similar problem which could be tackled in its own ways in relation to the objectives set for the organization's mode of operation. Effective communication and employees` job satisfaction are critical to organizational success, may it be private or public setting (Drucker, 1998). Employee job satisfaction and effective communication affect several aspects of organization such as, productivity, organizational climate, customer service, culture, teamwork, job satisfaction, personal development (Appelbaum, Anatol, Hays, Jenson, Porter & Mande, 1973), given the extent of how job satisfaction and communication affect organizations.

Communication has been leading in research topics few year decades back. More than 889 articles were published in different 61 academic journals researching on the significance organizational communication. These articles dealt with linking effective communication to positive bottom line outcomes (Allen, Gotcher & Seibert, 1993).

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW
Communication is essential in every aspect of our lives. Interaction of any requires some forms of communication; from personal relationships to business relationships. Many studies have discovered this type of relationship to affect employee`s dissatisfaction, and create problems with efficiency, productivity and absenteeism in an organization.

VIII. ABSENTEEISM
Previous studies` findings have shown that communication within an organization indeed have effects on job satisfaction. It is noteworthy that job satisfaction has been known a predictor and moderator of other factors like absenteeism (Scott & Taylor, 1985). Consistently, job dissatisfaction has been proved to be associated with high levels of labor turnover; dissatisfied employee demonstrates absenteeism at higher level. This explains that there is tendency for employee to absent from work temporarily when the work circumstances seem to be unpleasant. (Bakker, Demerouti, Boer and Schaufeli, 2003). There is likelihood that dissatisfied and uncommitted employees absent and leave their work (Amdot, 2004). Findings of studies that investigated the relationship between absenteeism and job satisfaction were varied; sometimes they correlate while other times they are not. It has been suggested that specific methods adopted for the measurement of absence from work may influence the extent of its relationship with job satisfaction.

March and Simon (1958) distinguished voluntary and involuntary as two types of absences controlled by employee, which are possibly reflect job satisfaction (Sagie, 1998). Organizational commitment and job satisfaction were found to be strongly related to the number of occurrences and voluntary absences, not of involuntary absences. It was assumed by Ilgen and Hollenback (1997) that if constraints were eliminated, ultimately, employees` absenteeism behavior could be clarified by job satisfaction. Among the factor that can influence absenteeism is external constraint which can lead employee to behave differently than if job satisfaction was the only factor considered.

Role pressure such as family responsibilities, perceived pressure such as pressure demanded by employees to attend to work, job structure such as, pile up work, and value system pressure such as believe that absence from work is wrong. All these have one influence or the other on employees` absence from work. Though, there is variance in correlation between absenteeism and jobs satisfaction, there is tendency that relationship do exist in all ramifications. A study which was carried-out on blue and white-collar employees in Turkey (Yucelt, 2000) found out that employees` absence from work inversely related to job satisfaction. However, the most significant factor that correlated with number of days lost at work was satisfaction with supervisor and their availability and ability to give instructions.

VIV. COMMUNICATION

A study carried out in United Kingdom on her economy which was carried out on 65 companies shows that above two-third of the sampled employees held the feeling that employees` job satisfaction and effective communication within organisation significantly influence the firm. (IRS Employment Review, 2002). It was also found out by Yukl (1989) that supervisors` consideration and supports are obviously a significant determinant of employees` job satisfaction in several work environments. (Griffin, Patterson and West, 2001).

Soonhee (2002) submitted that, previous research has shown that employees are motivated to work, not only by their extrinsic needs but equally by job-associated factors like clarity of job and social interactions at work. If these factors are adequately motivated by effective communication within an organization, therefore; employees` occupational achievements may not be forthcoming. Furthermore, Emmert and Taher in their own study (1992) found out that social environment and job-associated feedback are major determinants of employees` job satisfaction at all levels. Orpen (1997) affirmed that both work motivation and job satisfaction are affected positively by the quality of communication established within an organization.

X. MEDIATING VARIABLE (JOB SATISFACTION)

Job satisfaction seen to be a reflection of how people feel or perceive their jobs. It lays emphasis on task environment where an employee carries out duties and reflects more on certain tangible aspect of the work environment (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Factors or determinants of job satisfaction are promotion, supervision, job conditions, work itself, job security, pay, benefits, co-workers and communication. In a situation whereby an employee feels existence of discrepancy between what was expected and what was received in any of these factors or more, such employee may experience a decrease in job satisfaction especially with the factors viewed as important to employees (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). In similar vein, theoretical model of contract violation by (Wolfe Morrison & Robinson, 1997) has proposed that when an employee perceives a discrepancy in promises made by employer, such employee`s response may exhibits a job dissatisfaction which may result to constant absenteeism from work and later developed to turnover intention. (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Hackett, 1989).

X1. METHODOLOGY

This study`s theoretical framework as depicted below shows how NUC library workers` communicate with their supervisor which affect workers` job satisfaction, and how their job satisfaction translates to worker`s absences.

During the course of carrying out this study, it was estimated that was shown to be mediating absence from work, and therefore could inversely correlated to number of absences from work. It was also discovered that students who worked in those years preceding this study have worked with supervisors closely than those student workers who were working as at the time of carrying out this study. It is believed that returning student workers would have established a friend relationship with supervisors, hence; their level and mode of interaction would be different, it was assumed that their communication level of communication would be better and greater than the one existing between new student workers and their supervisors.
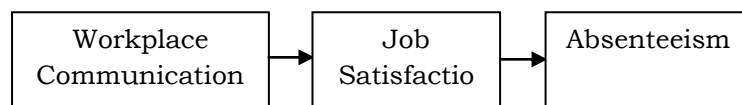
Workplace Communication	Job Satisfactio	Absenteeism

Fig. 1 Schematic diagram of theoretical framework.

XII. HYPOTHESIS

This study was carried out on the student workers of NUC Library with the assistance of the Librarian, it considered three variables namely: workplace communication, job satisfaction and absenteeism as diagrammatically presented in Figure 1.

The study`s hypothesized as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers.

H2: There is a significant relationship between workplace communication and job satisfaction of student workers.

H3: There is significant relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism of student workers.

H4: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers.

XIII. SAMPLE

As a result of semester break, 48 student workers were located with the assistance of Librarian to participate in the study. 3 out of the total population of participants declined and were excluded. Due to personal data collection process which indicated (by hand, fax or email) chosen by the researcher, semester break handicapped the researcher from obtaining data from all the student workers, as a result of that; only 13 student workers did not partake in the study left the response rate to be 30 at the percentage of 62.5% which quite reasonable and impressive. The Downs/Hazen (1997) Communication Questionnaire was adopted for the study, it analyses eight stable dimensions of communication which were found to be relevant for this study.

XIV. DATA COLLECTION AND ORGANISATION

Every questionnaire sent out on workplace communication, job satisfaction and absenteeism were answered and returned. Thereafter, researcher transferred the responses to a cumulative data sheet in Mircosoft Excel program for better in preparation for analysis.

XV. DATA ANALYSES

Research adopted the use of descriptive analysis and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data from field. Descriptive analysis which includes the value of frequency such as (mean, standard deviation e.t.c) and inferential statistics which includes regression procedures, and correlation coefficients calculations. All the data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 for windows and MS Word 2003.

XVI. RESULTS OF THE FINDINGS

Correlations

	1	2	3
Absenteeism	1	.042	-.114
Job Satisfaction	.042		
Workplace Communication	-.114		

	Model Summary			
	R	R Square	Std Error	Sig
Absenteeism,W/Comm.&J.S	.118[a]	.014	.21408	
Absenteeism and W/Comm.	.114[a]	.013	0.21030	.547
Absenteeism and JS	.042[a]	.002	.21150	.826

Absenteeism	Coefficients[a]			
	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.590	-	14.589	.000
Job Satisfaction	.008	.027	.141	.889
Workplace Comm.	- .040	-.111	-.575	-.570
Constant	3.612	-	19.150	.000
Workplace Comm.	-.041	-.114	-.609	.547
Constant	3.472	-	26.314	.000
Job Satisfaction	.012	.042	.222	.826

	Descriptive Statistics		
Dependent Variable, Workplace communications and Job Satisfaction	Mean	Std Deviation	N
Absenteeism	3.4997	.20800	30
Job Satisfaction	2.2917	.71343	30
Workplace Communication	2.7360	.57854	30
Absenteeism and Workplace Communications			
Absenteeism	3.4997	.20800	30
Workplace Communication	2.7360	.57854	30
Absenteeism and Job Satisfaction			
Absenteeism	3.4997	.20800	30
Job Satisfaction	2.2917	.71343	30

H1 proposed that there is a significant relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers. However, this study`s finding shows that there is no significant correlation since (P value > α = 0.05) between 2 variables. The negative sign indicates a negative correlation, which statistically indicates that when workplace communication increases, absenteeism decreases. H3 proposed that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism of student workers. This study shows that there is no significant correlation between absenteeism and job satisfaction. H2 proposed that there is a significant relationship between workplace communication and job satisfaction of student workers, while H4 proposed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers. Regression result of this study shows that the model was not significant.

Therefore, the regression results do not support H2 and H4. There is no mediating effect to support H4 due to insignificant results of the independent variable and dependent variable, and mediating variable and dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

This study finding statistically indicate that approximately 1% of the variation in absenteeism is explained by the two variables, while the other 99% could be due to other predictors that future studies would assist to explain.

XVII. DISCUSSION
Reflecting on the result of the findings, there was no significant relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism of student workers; although it does not indicate mild relationship by a negative correlation at (R =-0.114, p = 0.274) impliedly, when workplace communication increases, absenteeism decreases.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is not supported because there w no strong correlations was found between the variables. However, other previous research shows that; once the employees are satisfied with their managers (McFarlane, Newton & Thornton, 1990) then it will lessen absenteeism and improve the retention of employee. On the contrary, data from this study found out that job satisfaction did not influence to come to work more often.

XVIII. CONCLUSION
It is concluded that result obtained from this study do not support already formulated hypotheses which postulates that "job satisfaction mediates workplace communication and absenteeism" and that "there is significant relationship between workplace communication and absenteeism" and job satisfaction and absenteeism of student workers at the NUC library.

XIX. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

It is recommended that future researcher should extend this type of research to other private higher education institutions (PHEI) both in Malaysia and beyond in order for other libraries to learn from this study. It is equally recommended that other libraries can examines ways in which they can build on their strength and work on their weaknesses to attempt to bridge the gap.

Also, many other university libraries face similar budgetary and personnel (manpower) limitations to those described at NUC, and while this is not an excuse for the education institution`s libraries to give-up on efforts to improve the issues presented, it does not provide an impetus for real efforts to improve aspects of job satisfaction and workplace communication that are more doable.

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