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Shared Work Load and Team Spirit. Correlations Between University Students and University Personnel

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ABSTRACT

The felt load of life is often mirrored to the well-being of the individuals. Typically, organizations are looking at the workload of their staff because that is a thing which organizations can affect and adjust to affect the staff members' well-being. In this study we are looking for how university students and personnel feel about their workload and how they feel about their team spirit and overall mood. Former research has shown a correlation of felt justice between students and staff. This means that in the situations where school staff members feel fairness and justice from their leadership, students also feel same from the staff. The empirical part of the research was conducted by utilizing two different questionnaire tools, one to measure the workplace satisfaction of the staff members and the other one to measure the students' satisfaction. The collected data was analyzed with Excel and SPSS. The study aims to find out if there is a correlation between 1) workload for university students and staff, and 2) team spirit and relationships in organization felt justice in students and personnel. If so, how can this correlation be interpreted and what conclusions can be made? According to the results there are no correlations between staffs' and students' felt workload. Correlations between students' feeling that teachers treat them in an equal and fair way and students' mood, and their feeling about overall self-management was supported by the results. Future research aspects and practical recommendations will also be issued in the paper.

Keywords: Leadership, Organizational behavior, Team spirit, Workload

INTRODUCTION

Students' felt workload in studies is one of the most interesting pieces of information for universities in student questionnaires. How loaded the students are and how the universities could adjust the study related workload guarantee that it will be manageable also in the future. The reasons why some students are more easily coping the burden of studies are always important when developing the education and curricula as well as execution plans. This same question of felt workload is equally important when thinking the staff of university, or actually any organization.

Reunanen and Taatila (2021) have already shown that there is a correlation between students' and staff member's feelings in their research regarding

student satisfaction and personnel's felt justice. This paper aims to widen the overall question about the correlations related to the work/study-satisfaction between students and staff. It discusses about if and how the felt workload is seen in student groups and does it correlate with staff's situation. The staff and students are also analyzed as individual groups.

Equality theories' beginning could be placed in Stouffer's theory of relative deprivation. Idea for it is that person's satisfaction towards e.g., workload is not absolute, but relative (Stouffer 1949). Homans (1958) and Adams (1965) explained that people are sensitive for imbalance in normative exchange. Peter Blau who first integrated justice and fairness to work organizations and to exchange ratios between workers and leader. Blau (1964) as well as Homans and Adams, saw that people compare their situation to others in similar situation or their own former situation. Felt justice has been presented to affect atmosphere and results of the organization, as well as on the health, commitment and the job satisfaction of the workers (Al-Zu'bi, 2010; Ambrose, et al., 2007; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Fassina, et al., 2008; Hausknecht, et al., 2004; Li & Cropanzano, 2009a). Walumbwa, et al. (2004) have shown that transformational leadership style is positively correlated with employee's job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In the similar vein, Colquitt, et al. (2002), Li, et al. (2007), Rupp, et al. (2007) and Whitman, et al. (2012) have presented results that fairness in leadership produces a working environment that is more favorable for positive results than an environment with lower level of leadership justice. This could be derived that felt fairness can be felt also in is seen between staff and their supervisor and staff and students. Li and Cropanzano (2009b) have shown that the experience of fairness works also at unit level, and it has effects on important organizational variables like unit performance, workers' mental health, and their behavior as organizational citizens. Organizational fairness is thus important to organization's cultural structure (Taatila, 2004), regarding organizational performance. There is a large body of literature, which argues that the overall social climate of a school is associated with the pupils' academic performance and wellbeing (Anderson, 1982; Han, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Karvonen, et al., 2005; Maddox & Prinz, 2003; Elovainio, et al. 2011).

When looking the possibility to handle workload and productivity the Confederation of Productivity Science states that productivity has three components: effectiveness, efficiency, and occupancy. (Saxena 2019) Effectiveness for an activity is that it has a genuine need. Efficiency means that the activity is accomplished so that no more time or other resource than really is needed is used. Occupancy means that the effective and efficient time has no interruptions. (Harung 1998). But out of these three components, it must be recognized that effectiveness is the primary and driving component. According to Harung (1998), Dahl (1990) has stated that efficiency is irrelevant if the whole activity is something that we should not do at all. Therefore, it can be said that efficiency, workload, and stress may or may not be connected to each other's.

The theoretical discussion was derived to the hypotheses (H1) and (H2), and a research question (RQ1): (H1): There is a correlation between staff

and students felt workload. (H2) There is a correlation between students' felt justice and students' spirit. (RQ1): If these correlations exist, how can they be interpreted and what conclusions can be made?

RESEARCH

Initial Sample

This empirical research was based on material gathered from Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) in the years 2019 and 2020. It was conducted by utilizing two different questionnaire tools called Eezy Spirit (for the staff) and Student Barometer (for the students). Eezy Spirit is a questionnaire, which has been developed to study employee experience and it is widely used in Finland in several industries. It was chosen to be the one for studying the staff experience since it has questions towards workload, stress and effectiveness of work. Student barometer is a questionnaire for higher education students within TUAS. Its' objectives are to provide data and information for researchers, research institutes education developers and decision makers in the institute. Student barometer handles a variety of different matters from student life by asking students' opinions from quality of studies to their civil life activities and their expectations of the future. The Eezy Spirit questionnaire was sent to whole personnel of TUAS. The number of respondents varied from 602 in 2019 (88% response rate) to 633 in 2020 (91%). Respondents answered to propositions in Likert scale 1–4 (1 = totally disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree and 4 = totally agree) and "I don't know". The "I don't know" answers were excluded from this research. Number of propositions varied slightly between the years from 63 to 65. Total number of analyzed respondents were 375 in 2019 and 413 in 2020. As the research question is to scrutinize the felt justice of the personnel, four different propositions from Eezy Spirit-questionnaire were selected as the basis of analysis:

- P1) My work is not too stressful
- P2) Workload in my school is usually reasonable
- P3) In my school, we are ready to do more work than expected
- P4) Work in our school is efficient
- P5) My superior is interested about my work stress management and supports me if needed.

The respondents were grouped by the competence areas (schools), which are the basic units for personnel and degree programs and therefore also for the students. As the comparisons were conducted per competence area, only the responses of those units have been included in the comparison, i.e., the administrative units of TUAS have been excluded from the research.

The student barometer data consists of 2905 individual students as respondents in the year 2020 and 1989 individual students in the year 2019. They answered at most to 201 different questions and propositions. As the questionnaire was dynamic and depended partly on the previous answers, not all the questions and propositions were targeted to all of the students.

Students' satisfaction was studied by selecting five propositions for analyses. These propositions were:

- SP1) I will earn study credits as planned during this academic year
- SP2) Teachers treat students equal and fair way
- SP3) I'm going to manage my studies well
- SP4) Estimate your strength to cope with the burden of your studies
- SP5) Estimate your mood.

First, second and third propositions were to be answered with scale 1–5, where 1 was strongly disagree, 2 was disagree, 3 was neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. SP4 and SP5 were to be answered with scale 1–4 where 1 was bad and 4 was good. Also, the students' responses were grouped by their degree programs to the competence areas (schools), which makes it possible to compare the felt workload, stress and effectiveness of the staff members to that of the students per each competence area. Competence areas (schools) in this research were: Chemical industry, Construction industry, Entrepreneurship and sales, Fine arts, Information and communications technology, Logistics, services and industrial management, Media arts, Nursing, Paramedicine, public health nursing and midwifery, Performing arts, Rehabilitation, oral health and diagnostic services, Social work and early childhood care and Technology industry.

Analysis

Samples were taken from the data mass and were composed to a statistical model with excel spreadsheet. Staff members as well as students were grouped under schools and arithmetic averages and standard deviations were calculated to each proposition. First it was tested how well the schools were correlating to each other. The result was very clear: All the schools had a statistically relevant correlation with all the schools. All were as followed $n = 20$ r was between 0,712–0,976 and $p < 0,001$.

Second analysis was made between the individual propositions. Correlation analyses were done so that every proposition was analyzed towards each other. All propositions had two samples, one from year 2019 and other from 2020. This gives 20 X 20 matrix as a result. Since the result matrix is too large present totally in this paper the handling of correlations are done so that non correlating parts left out and from correlating propositions.

The results regarding correlation between P1-P5 from the year 2019 didn't correlate to any proposition from students. When looking at the correlations from P1-P5 from the year 2020 four correlations were found but they seem to be random. At a general level, there is no clear reason why P1 and P2 are negatively correlating with SP1 (Students feeling about will s/he earn study credits as planned) or why P4 (efficient work) is correlating with SP2 (feeling of rightness) nor there is no rigid evidence why P3 (willing to do more than expected) and SP3 (Managing studies) are correlating. Even though it would be possible to build some theory based on the last correlation with the of result $n = 13$ $r = 0,500$, $p = 0,041$ there is no direct indication that this

Table 1. Staff propositions Pearson correlations, 1 tailed. n = 13.

	P1 19	P2 19	P3 19	P4 19	P5 19	P1 20	P2 20	P3 20	P4 20	P5 20
P1 19	1	,841**	,203	,685**	,008	,676**	,846**	-,165	,082	-,038
P2 19		1	-,071	,567*	,066	,720**	,802**	-,176	,060	,016
P3 19			1	,685**	,182	,132	,110	,615*	,632*	,082
P4 19				1	,322	,517*	,666**	,399	,578*	,135
P5 19					1	,338	,316	,501*	,806**	,847**
P1 20						1	,852**	,247	,341	,346
P2 20							1	,077	,341	,225
P3 20								1	,731**	,516*
P4 20									1	,648**
P5 20										1

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table 2. Student propositions Pearson correlations, 1 tailed. n = 13.

	SP1 20	SP2 20	SP3 20	SP4 20	SP5 20	SP1 19	SP2 19	SP3 19	SP4 19	SP5 19
SP1 20	1	,077	,495*	,280	,429	,835**	-,011	,626*	,385	,495*
SP2 20		1	,060	,566*	,495*	,275	,126	-,258	,126	,316
SP3 20			1	,181	,159	,258	-,016	,731**	-,071	-,030
SP4 20				1	,934**	,374	,330	,165	,681**	,710**
SP5 20					1	,467	,390	,242	,780**	,875**
SP1 19						1	,308	,456	,445	,613*
SP2 19							1	,170	,495*	,605*
SP3 19								1	,192	,212
SP4 19									1	,886**
SP5 19										1

*p<.05, **p<.01.

result would be meaningful separately. Thus, these correlations have been omitted from the following analysis.

After this the rest of the results should still not be let without scrutinization. The Table 1 presents the correlating results between the staff members' propositions.

First note can be made that all propositions are correlating with corresponding proposition between different years. Quite unsurprising is that when staff members feel that their work is not too stressful, they also seem to feel that workload is reasonable. Interesting results is that when 2019 this not too stressful work was correlating with unit's efficiency, its not correlating anymore in 2020. The same shift can be seen when looking at the proposition P2 and units' efficiency. In 2019 its correlating with P4 2020 it isn't anymore. Actually, the P4 is one of the most interesting propositions as it correlates with P1, P2 and P3 in 2019 but it does not correlate with P1 and P2 anymore in 2020, only with P3. Also, the results of superiors' interest and support towards stress management was quite unexpected. In 2019 no correlations with other propositions were found. In 2020 P3 and P4 were correlating.

As with in the staffs' results the first note is that also all propositions are correlating with corresponding proposition between years with the exception of SP2. In a matter of fact, the SP2 in 2019 is not correlating with any other proposition. SP2 on the other hand correlates with SP4 and SP5 in 2020. SP1 in 2020 is correlating unsurprisingly with SP3 in same year and SP1 and SP3 in year before. What is more interesting is that SP1 is not correlating with SP3 in 2019 since the propositions both indicate managing studies well and planned. SP4 is correlating SP5.

RESULTS

With that strong correlation between schools, it could be concluded that there is a strong indication that all schools are in quite similar situation when looking at the matters the studied propositions represent. Naturally there are differences between actual means, but the relations between means are correlating well and it seems to provide quite strong evidence that despite of each schools' actual zero-point all the schools are trending in the same pattern.

As no reasonable correlations were found and only vague results between propositions with no direct evidence on how to link them together, it could be said that there are no correlations found between staff's and students' felt workload with this approach. The only statistically found correlation was between staff's willingness to do more work than expected to students' confidence of managing studies. This leaves room for speculation that could it be explained by the schools' "can-do" attitude. However, this is still just a speculative result and it can't be explained with this research setting alone. Thus, H1 is not supported.

Noticeable thing is that all the propositions were correlating with corresponding propositions between different years, except one. Students feeling towards righteous treatment from teachers is not correlating in 2019 with any other proposition. 2020 same proposition correlates with students' estimations in strength of managing themselves and mood. This seems plausible since there are earlier results supporting this result (Reunanen & Taatila 2021).

An expected result is that when the staff feels that they have reasonable work load the work is not considered too stressful. What was not as expected was that when 2019 not too stressful work was correlating with unit's efficiency, it wasn't correlating with it anymore in 2020. This result gives a possibility to speculations. The efficient work can be stressful or not. The efficiency is not bonded to stress and it's not the driver of good results. The realization of this is seen when looking proposition felt workload and units' efficiency. In 2019 workload is correlating with units' efficiency and 2020 it isn't anymore. When considering the place of efficiency after effectiveness, the efficiency is one of the most interesting place of propositions as it correlates with positively for bearable stress and workload as well as willingness to more than expected in 2019. All of this is lost in 2020 except correlation of willingness to do more than expected. Could this be explained by covid pandemic or is there some other explanations? The unexpected situation may have altered the staff members' willingness and psychological capability to cope with the stressful moment, thus producing surprising results in their answers.

The results of superiors' interest and support towards stress management was quite unexpected. In 2019 no correlations with other propositions were found. In 2020 only willingness to more than expected and units' efficiency were correlating. Somehow the staff members don't see that there is much in common between superiors' interest and support and their work. This is interesting result and should be studied more in future. There might be explanations for both ways, either the superiors have not shown interest towards followers, or it could be so daily basis that it is not even seen or maybe the situation has been so that even the superiors could not have possibility to affect to it, or at least staff feels so. But, since this can't be seen from this study these are just wild speculations.

From students' propositions there were a couple of strong correlations. Students' confidence towards earning study credits correlates the feeling that they are managing their studies well in 2020. Interesting lack of correlations is that those propositions didn't correlate in 2019. This raises a question whether there is difference in earning study credits and managing studies. The presented study can't answer to that and thus the topic should be studied further.

A more mysterious result is that the results didn't show any correlations between managing studies and managing their strengths. This might even have something to do with overall management of life -capability. Other expected correlation was found between students' feeling of how well they'll manage their strengths and their mood. Correlations between feeling that teachers treat students in an equal and fair way and students' mood and their feeling about overall management is quite clear. This result is supporting the former research (Reunanen & Taatila 2021) that righteous treatment of students has positive effect to students' satisfaction. Thus, H2 is supported.

CONCLUSION

This research didn't found correlations between staffs' and students' felt workloads. This doesn't mean that there is no such, but this approach could not verify any. To strengthen the results, similar research should be repeated with other sample groups or over a longer time period. Research did find correlations between students' felt justice and their spirit. When students felt righteous treatment from teachers they also had better and mood and feeling of self-management. These results are supporting former studies that felt fairness is contributing better environment and wellbeing, but the results are not indicating connection between felt fairness and better felt academic performance. This connection may occur, and several studies show this connection, but this study gave controversy results. This gives a good possibility for speculation where i.e., felt academic performance may differ from actual one. This could be verified by scrutinizing different schools' graduations lead times and grades compared to felt fairness. The limited sample and time phase when questionnaire was made may bias these results too.

Interesting results were still found within the staffs' and the students' groups. Staff opinions towards efficient unit was found peculiar and needs

further scrutinization. The staffs emphasizing effectiveness could give approach for new research since effectiveness and time management are connected (Harung 1998; Drucker 1967; 2005) Also, superior's role in workload and stress management was somewhat invisible in this research and this should be studied more. The question is why reasonable workload, stress levels in work or willingness to exceed expectations are not correlating with supervisors' support. The actual stress levels and workloads should be scrutinized in unit levels. Are the workloads so much different or are they relative and therefore same units are feeling that their work is more stressful, and they bear larger portion of burden of the work. Fortunately, this difference wasn't seen in results of students' confidence of managing studies or life or even their mood.

From students' propositions correlations results probably raised more questions than gave answers. The results raised question of how students' overall self-management and management of life is connected to their studies. To get more reliable results, this research should be repeated with other samples and execute new research where possible other variables direct, or mediator ones are scrutinized. However, it is possible that the unprecedented situation of COVID-19-pandemic played havoc with the answers. It is not a very far-fetched proposition that such a devastating situation would have major effect on the psychological well-being of people. When the first annual questionnaire was conducted in the year 2019 and the other one in the 2020, this potential effect can't be neglected. Thus, it would be advisable to collect a longer sample with the same questionnaire tools and see how the results have changed over the years.

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