Employees' Perceptions of Supervisor Communication and Job Stress in the Work Environment
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Abstract

Employees experience supervisor communication problems potentially resulting in job stress in the work environment. Person environment fit theory was the framework for the study with six questions used to flesh out participants' real life experiences. Findings indicated participants' stress levels were affected but not fit in the work environment.

Problem

Exploration of the qualitative literature and its methodologies as applied to the real-life experiences of employees and his or her perceptions of the quality of supervisor communication, stress, and fit in the work environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to tell the stories of **30 participants'** personal experiences of having participated in mediation with his or her supervisor as a result of communication concerns with a supervisor, stress, and the work environment. Knowledge of employee perceptions may serve as a catalyst for organizations to pay closer attention to the employee-supervisor relationship.

Relevant Literature

PE fit theory was formulated by French during the 1960s to explain the nature of the interaction between employees and the work environment (Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993, p. 254). The better the fit, interaction, or match with the work environment, the less stress an employee experiences (French et al., 1982, p. 27).

Job stress, fit in the work environment, and supervisor communication were examined in the study

- An asymmetry between the demands of the job and the ability of the employee to respond to the demand (McGrath & Tschan, 2004).

- Some part of the work environment causes job stress (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2006; Elfering et al., 2005; Frone, 2008; Ivancevich et al., 2003; Lundstrom et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2004).

- Supervision has been discussed in relation to employees and has included burnout (Yagil, 2006), job satisfaction (Miles et al., 1996), ethical stress (Miller et al., 2005), and negative feedback, which is a form of communication (Yeager et al., 1985).

Research Questions

1. *Research Question 1*: What is an employee's perception of his or her supervisor's communication?
2. *Research Question 2*: What is an employee's perception of the work environment that has concerns about supervisor communication?
3. *Research Question 3*: How does an employee with supervisor communication concerns fit into his or her work environment?
4. *Research Question 4*: How does an employee with supervisor communication concerns react to his or her supervisor's communication to them? What does the employee think could improve communication between him- or herself and the supervisors?
5. *Research Question 5*: What comes to mind when an employee with supervisor communication concerns hears the word stress and thinks of how his or her work life is associated with stress? How does an employee with supervisor communication concerns describe stress?
6. *Research Question 6*: How does an employee with supervisor communication concerns cope with feelings of stress related to his or her job?

Procedures

- **Qualitative study** was used
  - Phenomenological method as the means to collecting data.

  - Each participant received an e-mail with the cover letter, informed consent form, and demographic questionnaire once permission was obtained.

  - Freeconferencecall.com was utilized to allow for collecting data that was later transcribed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

1. Transcription

2. Data was read over several times as a whole for clarity, as suggested by Tesch (1990).

3. Began looking for themes that are related to the research questions.

4. Coded data by breaking down the information into similar thoughts and themes to see what similarities in thoughts there are among the participants (Creswell, 2003).

5. A list of each topic was made and similarities were sought.

6. Themes were labeled (coded) by topic.

Findings

Research questions were answered, albeit not always as expected. It was expected that all participants would not fit well if the supervisor's communication was poor.

- The majority of participants reported they do fit into the work environment.

- The participants reported having supervisor communication that was both poor and good with most reportedly fitting well into the work environments and being stressed on the job.

Limitations

Social desirability could have been a problem, as those participants who were supervisors may not have wanted to acknowledge a communication problem. Nederhof (2006) stated that when interviewers have a choice of subjects, it can reduce social desirability.

Conclusions

- PE fit was partially validated as the results showed that interaction between the employee and the work environment caused stress.

- The theory was partially invalidated because of varying results that some exchanges between an employee and work environment (supervisor) did not induce perceptions of job stress and not fitting into the work environment.

Social Change Implications

Supervisors would benefit from

- Improving communication to employees

- Improvement in supervisor communication

- Relief of stress could potentially lead to improved customer service, creativity, and increased bottom line for organizations.

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