

CLARIFYING THE MANAGEMENT ROLE IN DEALING WITH EMPLOYEES PERSONAL ISSUES IN THE LEBANESE ORGANIZATIONS

Abdallah Kamal Eldine

ISG University, Lebanon

Abstract:

The majority of workers have many occasional difficulties that sometimes become a problem affecting the worker's performance. When this will repeatedly fail to meet expectations, a serious problem may become the main reason which contributes to the job decline. Therefore, a pattern of reduced performance indicates the need for a supervisory action from managers. Poor performance could be reflected under three main categories, such as employee availability, employee productivity, and employee conduct. The reasons and causes of this poor performance could be a personal issue related to the employee. Many types of personal problems are affecting the job performance in organizations, such as marital strife, financial difficulties and child care complication. More serious difficulties and the abuse of these problems-if not resolved-may cause unending issues at work.

This problem is highly important especially that it can affect the job performance and the company income. Moreover, it can simply result in the failure of the employee to meet the performance standards, which kills productivity.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory phenomenological study is to clarify the management role in dealing with employees personal issues in the Lebanese organizations as perceived by the lived experience of managers. The research instrument which will be used is a face-to-face structured interview with six managers of the major functions in different Lebanese organizations. The sample type will be by convenience.

Keywords: *Conflict , Job Performance , Performance, productivity, personal issues*

1. Introduction

Many managers believe that employees' personal issues are irrelevant to job performance. They consider that employees should leave behind all their personal problems when they walk through the office door. Therefore, managers, with this belief, consider employees like robots. They ignore their personal problems by treating them all the same way and just focus on the work (Harwell, 2011).

Managers seeking to improve the quality of their employees should pay attention to their employees' personal problems and stimulate the internal continuous communication. Employee motivation is considered critical to maintain productivity. Managers should understand the role of communication in employees motivation and the relationship with co-workers. Therefore, maintaining strong relationships in the workplace helps employees achieve a high level of production and will support staff motivation (Werbler, 2009). Communication between managers and employees is essential in developing and improving the employees' job skills and to motivate them to succeed. Communication in the workplace can improve the overall organizational culture. A solid organizational communication can eliminate barriers and is able to resolve problems (Berger, 2008).

An employee with personal problems affecting his behavior may not respond to management orders and techniques that might otherwise be effective. Therefore, the manager may feel frustrated, angry, guilty, inadequate, and even fearful for the employee personal welfare. So, it is essential for the manager to acknowledge these things and then consider how much these cases may affect the objective assessment and the monitoring of this critical problem.

Problem Statement

According to (Harwell ,2011), as organizations continue to diversify, the risk for workplace problems will be intensified. Small business managers typically face an important problem related to employees' issues. Individual employee problems can be related to many factors such as personal conflicts, supervisor issues, personal distress, or company structure oriented. Management should study the cause of the problem and the factors that keep fueling the fire.

According to (Azouri ,2012), Lebanese employees are facing increase demand in the workplace in addition to having many problems in their personal lives, the fact which is putting greater pressures by forcing them to tell how they should cope and try to maintain a balance. When pain and stress enter into the employees personal lives, it can spill over the workplace. The result can be a disagreeable attitude which reduces productivity and creates a lack of

cooperation and a lack of focus. When an employee has a major personal problem, it would not be possible for him to focus on work. Moreover, the majority of the Lebanese organizations are facing many problems related to low employees morale. The high morale is associated with high productivity (Azouri, 2012). This low morale among the Lebanese employees is affecting the organizations for not achieving their desired result.

At the end and in order to clarify the management role in dealing with employees personal issues in the Lebanese organizations, the following research question has been formulated:

How can the management role in dealing with employees personal issues be understood as perceived by managers of companies in Lebanon?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory phenomenological study is to clarify the management role in dealing with employees personal issues in the Lebanese organizations as perceived by the lived experience of managers in different Lebanese organizations. The research instruments that will be used in this research is a face-to-face structured interview with the managers responsible of the major functions in companies in Lebanon. The population will include the managers of the major functions in different Lebanese organizations in Lebanon. The sample size will be six managers or more from these companies depending on to the data saturation principle, and the sample type will be by convenience.

Research Questions

Every employee is considered as an individual with his own personal strengths and issues. Managers cannot expect to take advantage of an employee's strengths without taking into consideration some personal issues. In order to clarify the management role in dealing with employees' personal problems in the Lebanese organizations and to study what improvement can be done while dealing with employees' personal issues, the following research question will be formulated:

How can the management role in dealing with employees personal issues be understood as perceived by managers of companies in Lebanon?

Significance of the Study

Studying the management role in dealing with employees personal problems in the Lebanese organizations is very important as it will shed the light for managers to focus on the importance and the necessity to take into consideration the employees' personal issues and not just to focus on work. Moreover, it helps managers to rethink how they should help employees with their personal problems in order to improve the company performance. This study will also clarify some tips on how to help employees to deal with their personal problems in such as it is sometimes enough to listen to the employee, to be sympathetic and to say to him some words of encouragement. Moreover, this study would assist managers on how to deal with employees' personal issues in order to deal with their personal quality of work. Therefore, good managers know how personal problems can make productive employees useless and they also know that many have potential that will never be realized because of increasing personal issues (Deal, 2008).

Definitions

A Conflict - A conflict is a disagreement or friction through which the parties who are involved perceive a threat to their need or interest (Toomey, 1998).

Job Performance - Job performance refers to whether an employee performs his job well. It is considered an extremely important criterion related to the success and organizational outcomes (Campbell, 1990).

Performance Standards - Performance standards provide employees with specific performance expectations necessary for each major duty. It explains how the job should be done plus the results that are expected for satisfactory job performance (Barye, 2011).

2. Literature Review

Work Motivation

Motivation is important for employees in the workplace. If a person is not driven to do the job, then, the work will not be successfully accomplished. It is necessary to feel happy about going to work in the morning. Yet, every individual does not experience this feeling. Employees are motivated to work by many ways; it can be everything from cash money to a flexible schedule, or to a good employees-managers relationships. Therefore, the employees personal life situation and external circumstance are the main decisive factors. This shows that motivation is extremely personal; even if two individuals are exposed to one same situation they will react in different ways and be motivated by using totally different factors (Gudmundson, 2009).

Motivational Theories

Many theories were formulated in order to explain motivation. In this research, I will summarize the three classical need theories; Maslow's Hierachy of needs, Hezberg's Two-Factor Theory and Lawrence's Four-Factor Theory. These theories are still very popular even though they are quite old in the field of work motivation. These theories are linked to one another in some way and can be applied and used in real life situations. According to (Molander,1996), need theories explained that it is possible to identify human needs, and according to these needs it is possible to find out what motivates employees and, moreover, how their needs can be fulfilled.

- a- Abraham Harold Maslow
- b- Frederik Herzberg
- c- Paul Lawrence

Tips to Motivate Employees

Employees are considered as the building blocks of an organization. The success of any enterprise depends on the collective efforts of all the employees. Therefore, when they are motivated, they will collaborate ensuring the organizational growth.

- Managers should do a self-evaluation of themselves. It is highly important for a manager to understand, encourage and control his own behavior before motivating, encouraging and controlling his staff behavior.
- Managers should be well familiar with their staff in order to invite staff commitment and loyalty. Therefore, a cordial superior-subordinate relationship is a main point in job satisfaction.
- Managers should give their employees some financial and other benefits such as vacation, insurance and holidays.
- Managers should provide feedback to the staff constantly. Staff should know how they are performing by giving them a regular and constructive feedback. Feedback should be based on facts and on personal observations not assumptions.
- Managers should ensure effective time management by having control over time to ensure that tasks are doing in the right ways. Staff should have closed times like few hours with no interruption in order to focus on performing their task. Also, they should have open hours in order to freely interact, express and communicate.

How Managers Should Deal with Employees Personal Issues

Many managers, all around the world, believed that employees' personal problems are irrelevant to the job improvement and at the end managers may ignore this fact. They considered that employees should forget all their personal life while they are working and focus only on the job at hand. But, in fact, people are not like robots and they cannot leave behind their personal problems when they walk through the office door. Therefore, managers cannot ignore the effects of personal life on a person's work (Harwell, 2011).

Managers could not consider that employee's personal life is part of their business, but performance is considered under their responsibilities. Managers' job is to get the best work of their employees by keeping them motivated in order to contribute for the long term. Managers should treat employees as individuals by helping and supporting them through some of their personal issues that influence their ability to their work in the best way.

According to (Harwell, 2011), there are eight ways to deal with employees personal issues:

- 1- Listen: Managers should be sympathetic with their employees, listen to them and offer them kind encouragement words. It is extremely crucial to pay close attention to the difference that exists between listening to an employee and solving his personal problems. The employee should solve his personal problems without the intervention of managers. Managers should only listen and should not be a part of getting in charge of the solution.
- 2- Refer employees to appropriate resources: Managers should steer employees toward professional counselors. For example, managers can take advantage of their personal experience with a similar problem and describe it to them with the solution they got. Managers should not forget that this case is about employees not them and they should keep focusing on their employees. Moreover, they should gently push employees to find their own personal solution not to force their own solution on the employee or try to give them advice.
- 3- Accommodate short-term needs: Managers are required to be flexible as much as they can in making temporary accommodations to help the employee who is facing personal troubles. But managers should inform the employee clearly that these changes are in reality temporary.
- 4- Be flexible in working hours or working location: Managers can give the employee a short time off, vacation or sick time.

How Managers Should Counsel Employees with Personal Issues

At any moment, employees may face many personal problems that delay their job performance. Sometimes, these problems are not serious and employees can sooner go back to the normal productivity. But in other situations, deeper employees' personal problems can cause ineffective long time performance and productivity. According to the HR Specialist and to the U.S. Labor Department (2013) six steps should be used by managers to maintain an effective interaction:

- 1- Managers should stay alert to signs in order to determine if this is a personal problem, a bad attitude or a skill deficit.
- 2- Managers should document the performance problem as it can help alert the troubled employee to the harm his problem is impacting on the organization. Moreover, these notes may help the manager to defend himself in case of certain or probable complaint.
- 3- Managers are required to invite employees for an informal interview in order to discuss the poor performance and the policy violation, if any. (Moore, 2008).
- 4- Managers should focus on the work related facts as the main issue is the work performance. As managers, they should avoid focusing on employees' personal problems, and kindly remind employees that they are responsible of the work regardless of what they are doing at home. Managers should respect their employees and do not embarrass them with emotional comments such as "you seem drunk" or "why you are depressed".

3. Research Method and Findings

The triangulation method was also explained in detail which will help to analyze the data collected. The assumptions, limitations and delimitations were also listed. Finally, the ethical assurance principle was ensured such as protecting the respondent from any harm. Right to privacy and the informed consent were also discussed in details.

In order to clarify the management role in dealing with employees' personal issues in the Lebanese organizations as perceived by the lived experience of managers, face-to-face structured interviews were made with managers of the major functions in different organizations in Lebanon. The sample size was six managers from these companies depending on to the data saturation principle, and the sample type was by convenience.

First, brief information about the companies' names, the position and educational background of the interviewees will be given, and then the results of the interview questions will be separately presented for each company. The interview questions were open-ended, all in all seventeen questions. The major purpose of this study was to explore the importance of management role in dealing with the personal problems of employees. Therefore, only relevant information to the areas needed to be covered will be discussed.

Question one was asked to collect background information about the participants. Many of the respondents have higher educational background within the field of management, human resources, finance, marketing and sales. All of them started to work at Lebanese organizations directly after graduation and have worked there since then. It is also noticeable that a couple of the managers have had various tasks during their employment, which has to do with the size of the organizations where there is opportunity for work in several employment posts.

Question two helps to find what motivates managers of different functions in the Lebanese organizations. Here, it is helpful to get most of the answers to support the study.

Question three was asked to see how much managers rely on employees' motivation in their organization. They all reinforced the need of motivation as it is essential to increase productivity, lead to a greater revenue and create more challenges and ambitions in the workplace. It helps employees to be more creative.

Question four described how the organization employee structure is built up. All respondents gave similar answers as people are working as a teamwork following a clear structure to maintain order and resolve problems. A clear framework is established within which all the group members are organized.

In question five, when discussing the importance for an organization to have motivated staff, the interviewees agreed that the majority of the staff needs to be motivated in order to drive the organization forward. Some respondents believed that motivation is important in the daily work.

In question six, the participants gave their suggestions on how to increase motivation among employees such as giving one common target to be attained by group, assigning practical assumptions to be worked by a group of employees and to start a project from the beginning to the end. These motivation ways have impacted positively on the organization revenue. Moreover, maintaining a good internal relationship is also essential.

In question seven, all respondents agreed that relationship between supervisors and employees must be a team whole relationship. A healthy relationship should be based on a teamwork and be more informal than formal as well as honest.

In question eight, they added that they always maintain a perfect, strong, and very close manager-employee relationship.

In question nine, they all listed common types of personal problems affecting their employees' short term job performance such as personality conflicts, marital issues, couple personal problems and child care complication. Some added personal trauma or organization structure and team problems. All agreed on financial difficulties and family problems.

In question ten, all respondents described in the same way how they manage employees' personal problems. They refer to the Employee Assistance Department to discuss their case.

In question eleven, they all reinforced the idea to encourage the troubled employee to refer to the Employee Assistance Program and to benefit from its available support. It is essential to listening to him and giving valuable advices.

Question twelve elaborated what supervisors should know upon facing employees with personal problems affecting their behavior. They all agreed that managers should be aware and prepared to any change in behavior because the employee is passing through a difficult time. The employee may refuse to abide by management rules and decisions. Managers may feel guilty and frustrated about his employee case. They should be prepared on how to monitor the situation as it is sometimes difficult to expect the employee reaction.

In question thirteen, managers explained when confrontation is necessary with the troubled employee. All respondents agreed that the managers' job is to confront the undesirable employees' job behaviors. Moreover, they should not postpone the confrontation as it should be done immediately when the problem is discovered.

Question fourteen explained how managers are conducting the corrective interview with their troubled employees affecting their performance. All respondents are following the main steps while planning the corrective interview as follows:

- Comparing job performance in terms of standards and expectations in identifying the problem
- Checking the employee file
- Fixing a meeting with the employee

In question fifteen, managers explained how they perform the corrective interview. They will start by creating an open relaxing atmosphere, reminding the employee about the objective of the meeting which is to improve the job performance. Also, they all provide supporting documents revealing the effects of the problem on performance. They all confirmed to have a 100% listening and at the end they will put a plan to be followed in the near future.

In question sixteen, managers explained in the same way how they do carry out the follow-up of the corrective interview with the troubled employee by controlling the performance and comparing it all the time with the problem on hand. They all agreed on the importance of controlling the execution of the main points fixed on the interview. They should keep reminding the employee about the performance. If he didn't succeed he will be transferred to the Employee Assistance Program.

In the question seventeen, all respondents suggested to maintain an effective communication process and good relationships with their employees. They should support their employees when they have personal problems affecting their performance.

Comparing the Interview Results with the Literature Review:

On the basis of the previous interviews, I have come to the conclusion of the following model including all points that have been seen in the theoretical framework. The model has been compiled on the basis of my understanding and the empirical findings of previous researcher Wiley (1997), beside other researchers mentioned in the literature review which was intended to identify key factors which influence motivation at work. The results in Figure 1 present the most important matters for employee's motivation, communication and personal issues:

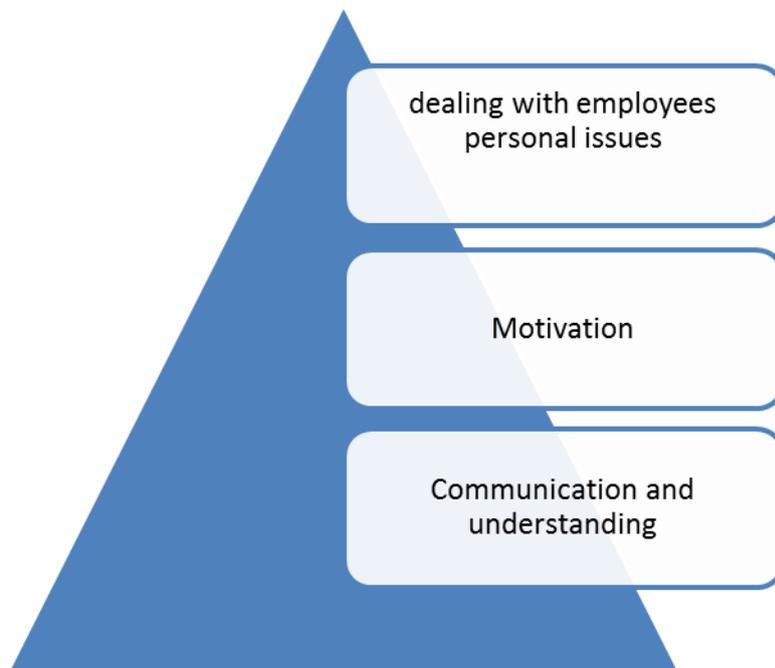


Figure 1: Most important matters for employee: motivation, communication and personal issues

The Table 4.1 presents the most important steps to be followed by managers to deal with employees personal issues based on the results of the interviews and matched the ones of other researchers discussed in chapter two.

By doing the triangulation between the findings and the literature review concerning the Motivational Factors, table 1 illustrates a summary of the common results:

Table 1: Summary of Motivational Factors

Interviewees Results	Other previous researchers results (literature Review)
Good Working conditions	Good Working environment (Herzberg, 1959)
Respect, Recognition	Appreciation (Wiley, 1997)
Healthy relationship with supervisor and colleagues	Strong relationships in the work place (Werbler, 2009)
Having a flexible work schedule	Gudmundson (2009)
Individual growth and career development	Individual Growth and Development (Deal, 2008)
Opportunity to do creative and challenging work	The drive to learn and to defend (Berggren, Gustavsson & Johnsson, 2009)
Financial benefits	High salary (Wiley, 1997) (Moore, 2013)

This research gives the following conclusion: Motivational factors are dependent on which situation the individual is in. If an employee has a high salary, he/she will focus mostly on the job itself. In the opposite situation, an employee with low salary will consider things more important, such as working condition climate or having a good relationship with colleagues.

An interpretation of findings supports the propositions in the literature. The first proposition suggests that employees' motivation depends on personal circumstances. Results in this research imply that the proposition is correct; employees are motivated differently depending on many factors such as family situation and others.

A comparison between the results of findings and the literature review concerning how managers should deal with employees personal issues is illustrated in the table 2.

Table 2: the literature review concerning how managers should deal with employees personal issues is illustrated

Interviews Results	Other Researchers (Literature Review) (Harwell, 2011)
100% listening, motivation	Listen, encouragement
Advise him to the employee assistance program	Push employees to professional counselors
Give him short term benefits	Short term needs
Change the work schedule	Flexible working hours
Change or give him less harder work	Assign different work
Keep reminding him that these modifications are for short term	Make it clear that these accommodation are short term
Managers should support their employees not forcing them to solve the problem	Provide support
Motivate them on career development and keep reminding him to focus on job performance	Career advancement and focus on job

Finally, table 3 summarizes the findings obtained and compared with the literature review concerning the role and the process to be followed by managers in monitoring the troubled employees:

Table 3 summarizes the findings obtained and compared with the literature review

Findings Analysis	Literature Review
Informing the employee about a private meeting	Planning the corrective interview
Performing the meeting	Performing the corrective interview
Controlling the execution of points suggested in the previous interview	Following up the corrective interview

4. Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Employees personal issues cannot be ignored by managers, especially that they can affect the job performance and managers should be aware as how to deal with these issues. This research was done and results were concluded according to the information collected from managers of major functions in the Lebanese organizations who accepted to participate in the interview. I greatly hope that the results of this research may serve readers, managers and decision makers so that they can care more about dealing with employees personal issues in order to avoid the decline in job performance.

Data was collected mainly through the interviews and results were presented in tables which were high enough to be supportable to the findings after being analyzed.

The main research question was: How can the role of management in dealing with employees personal issues be understood as perceived by managers of companies in Lebanon?

The sample included six managers of major functions in different Lebanese organizations and since a qualitative methodology with a convenience sampling type was applied, the purpose was not to generalize the results. However, since the research reached the data saturation, it is possible to generalize the findings.

Also, in consideration to the interviews, the presence of the researchers might have affected the choice of respondents as being one of convenience.

Recommendations & Future studies

During the last six months of working on this research, I have gathered a lot of information and knowledge about what motivates employees in the Lebanese organizations and the effect of internal communication on employees' motivation. The main focus was to show how managers should deal with employees personal issues. I suggest conducting a further quantitative study on the same topic to test the linkage between the management of employees' personal issues and job performance in the Lebanese organizations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory phenomenological study was to explore the management role in dealing with employees personal issues in the Lebanese organizations as perceived by the lived experience of managers in different Lebanese organizations. In order to do so, the motivational factors in organizations were identified and analyzed and the following conclusion is drawn in that motivation is highly personal and differs from individual to individual. Work motivation is not consistent over time. The factor which motivates an individual today will most likely not be the same one a year before or after. This depends on the situation of the employee as a special motivation can be offered in case the employee is facing personal problems affecting his job performance. A common denominator between all the interviewees is that what motivates employees depends on personal circumstances, where the family and personal conditions play a significant role.

The results in the Lebanese organizations showed that the propositions discussed in the literature review appeared to be correct and identical.

Therefore, it is essential for managers in the Lebanese organizations to consider that employees' personal lives may affect the job performance which is under their responsibilities and to understand what motivates employees. Through this understanding, organizations have the ability to adopt motivational techniques and good internal communication process which can lead to competitive advantage and ensure the success of the enterprise. Managers are required to exert more effort to communicate with troubled employees and should counsel them.

References

- Azouri M. (2012), *Effective Communication on Employees Motivation*, Koumeh Publishers.
- Barye, G.P. (2011) , *Work Motivation; History, Theory, Research, And Practice*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Berggren, M., Gustavsson, J. & Johnsson, E. (2009) ,*Motivation at Work*. Bachelor dissertation, Lund University, 2009.
- Bruce, K. Berger (2008), *Employee organizational Communications*, Institute for Public Relations.
- Deal,, C.C. (2008), *Work motivation; Theory, Issues, and Applications*, Glenview: Scott Foresman and Company.
- Gudmundson W. (2009), *Motivate and Reward: Performance appraisal and Incentive Systems for Business Success*, Norwich: Curran Publishing Services.
- Gudmundson, F. (2009), *Work in the twenty first century*, Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Harwell (2011), *8 ways to deal with employees personal problems*, Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Herzberg, F., (1959), *The Motivation To Work*. London: Chapman & Hall Limited.
- John Wiley & Sons, S. (1997), *How To Retain High-Performance Employees*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, Vol.2 pp. 291-298.
- Molander, C. (1996), *Human Resources at Work*. Lund: Student literature.
- Moore Claude (2013), *Managing the troubled employees*. Health Science Library. University of Virginia
- Toomey, S. (1998.) , *Intercultural Conflict Styles, Theories In Intercultural Communication* pp. 213-235. Newbury Park: Sage.

- US Labor Department. Human Resources Specialists (2013), How to Counsel Employees Who Have Personal Problems, McAfee Secure.
- Werbler, C. (2009), Effective Communication Positively Impacts Employee Motivation Levels, London Library Limited.

Appendix A: Interview

Interview Questions:

Company:-----	Date:-----
Employment status:-----	
Age: -----	
Gender: Female ----- Male-----	

1- Can you tell me a little about your background – education and work experience?

Employees' motivation and communication questions:

- 2- What motivates you in your work?
- 3- Do you believe employee motivation is important for the organization? In what way?
- 4- How is the company's employee structure built up?
- 5- Do you believe employee motivation is important for your organization? In what way?
- 6- How can the organization increase the motivation among employees? Suggestions for improvement?
- 7- How can you describe the healthy relationship of employees with supervisors and colleagues as an important factor in work motivation?
- 8- How does the relationship between you as a manager and your employees look like?

Employee's personal issues questions:

- 9- What types of personal problems can affect your employee's short term job performance?
- 10- How do you manage employee's personal problems, especially when the worker's performance repeatedly fails to meet expectations?
- 11- Do you encourage troubled employees and how?
- 12- What supervisors should know when facing an employee with personal problems affecting his behavior?
- 13- When do you think confrontation is necessary?
- 14- How do you conduct the corrective interview with the employee with personal problems affecting his performance?
- 15- How do you perform the corrective interview?
- 16- How do you follow-up the corrective interview with the troubled employees?
- 17- Is there anything more you would like to add concerning this subject?