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Well-being and the Role of Working-Environment Factor: Research and Assessment

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Abstract

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Orientation research on the study of the strengths of the person, as opposed to traditional studies, paying more attention to weaknesses personality, contributed to the formation and expansion of scientific interest in the issues of human well-being in the workplace and in everyday life. This article discusses the concept of «subjective well-being», the concept of «job satisfaction». The method for the determination of industrial environmental factors that have a positive or negative impact on the well-being in the workplace, based on the principles of cognitive approach has been proposed. The article shows that testing of this methodology in the survey of employees of several enterprises (definition of personal constructs workers, and data processing methods of factor analysis) reveals the mental structures. They are formed in the minds of workers under the influence of external stimuli (reconstruct their perceptions of reality). The study confirmed the sensitivity of the technique to a system of subjective perceptions of the individual. The article proposes a new direction of research, by the term "world of work". The article discusses the distinction between traditional definitions of research in the field of employment and the concept of the "world of work".

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1. Introduction

The factors affecting labor activity are well represented in modern scientific literature. This list extends far beyond the wage system and it incorporates almost everything that has any significant impact on the process of labor.

Previously, the traditional themes of research activities of employees in an organization were the conflict, violations of labor discipline, staff turnover. F. Luthans, S. Youssef and B. Avolio (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) (after analyzing the materials research in this area) came to the conclusion

that the ratio of works devoted to dysfunctional behavior of employees and the positive aspects of the work is related as 375: 1. However, the situation began to change with the appeal of President of the American Psychological Association M. Seligman to return to a forgotten goal of Behavioral Sciences (to promote a healthy and happy people, focused on their professional activity) (Seligman, 1999). The situation also began to change with the publication of the work of K. Cameron, J. E. Dutton and R.E. Quinn (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).

Reorientation of psychological research to the study of the person's strengths (as opposed to traditional studies, paying more attention to weaknesses of the individual), helped to form the direction indicated by the term "positive psychology".

A number of authors defines positive psychology as a scientific field that is reviewing ways and means of helping people in their ambition to experience more positive emotions and happiness (Gavin, & Mason, 2004, Wright, Bazzhina, 2006).

This concept has been recognized also in economic studies (Kaz, 2007, 2009, 2011). The scientific works, devoted to the analysis of the positive aspects of working life, making life more meaningful and substantive, are increasingly recognized. Extending the concept of non-classical rationality (Kaz, 2007) promoted the development of this direction of research in Russia (Kaz, 2003, 2005).

The widest category, reflecting the positive aspects of work, of course, has become the concept of "subjective well-being". It covers such aspects of labor activity as professional growth, goals, intentions of employees and relationships with co-workers (Diener, & Lucas, 1999, Keys, & Magyar-Moe, 2003).

Famous Hawthorne experiments, which subsequently led to the formation of the concept of "job satisfaction", laid the foundation for these studies.

Today it is established that:

- the subjective feeling of well-being is an important factor in job satisfaction (Judge, & Watanabe, 1993);
- the level of perceived "subjective well-being" employees of the company more reliable predictive indicator of staff turnover than the indicator "job satisfaction" (Wright, & Cropanzano, 2007);
- high involvement of employees increases the perceived subjective well-being (Harter, & Schmidt, 2003).

These arguments allowed T. Wright to conclude: "an organization that fosters subjective wellbeing may create for itself a distinct competitive advantage in the looming competition for employees" (Wright, & Cropanzano, 2007).

A common statement is job satisfaction is a key factor. Many aspects influence it and itself has an impact on many aspects of the production environment. T. Parsons in his work "The structure of social action" wrote: "The most common category, which can be applied in the study of motivation ... - it seems to be "satisfaction". Individuals are interested in those things and ways of behavior that bring them satisfaction" (Parsons, 2000).

2. Research problem area

The modern practice of evaluation representations employees about a production environment includes a wide variety of models that take into account the factor of "job satisfaction" from simple to complex. Some models estimate directly the connection between satisfaction and individual aspects of the working condition. In others, the complexity of interactions are postulated previously. However, the basis of both models is a paradigm of satisfaction. At the same time, the analysis of the results obtained by several researchers showed that not everyone is able to identify the strong correlation between satisfaction and various aspects of the production environment. The authors of many works conclude that there is a weak correlation between satisfaction and industrial environment.

Thus, the authors of the monograph "The man and his work," could not have found a strong correlation between job satisfaction and content of work. N.F. Naumova has defined the diapason of variation of coefficients correlation between the aspects of the working environment and work satisfaction from 0.06 to 0.25.

F. Herzberg also believes that studies of job satisfaction have some conflicting results. Half of these studies gives a positive answer to the question of the effect of job satisfaction on productivity, but in other cases were obtained directly opposite or neutral results.

Another researcher K. Erickson notes that there are sufficient reasons to assume that the correlation between satisfaction and working environment, to put it mildly, is very uncertain. V.D. Patrupov, N.A.Kalmakan also have noticed it. They point out that many researchers have had difficulty in the use indicator of "job satisfaction", as they have not found any strong, sustainable correlations between the degree of job satisfaction and the objective measures of attitude toward work.

D.S. Sink names a model is "oversimplified" which is based on the approach to motivation P. Drucker notes that the relationship between the results of work and employees satisfaction - is "half the truth".

Several authors hold the view that the cause of failures is in the complex nature of the correlation between pithiness of work and individual factors that determine the level of meaningfulness of work. Without understanding the nature of this relationship, in their opinion, is impossible to assess the degree of interaction of the work's meaningfulness on work satisfaction.

Many authors see the origins of little credibility collected in the process of practical research results, as the deficiencies in the concept "job satisfaction", and the methods of its evaluation. K.Erikson, considering assessment methods "job satisfaction", pointed out that the questions that would normally appear in the study of job satisfaction were too blunt an instrument to examine the reasons for of alienation. T.M. Fraser says on the matter that it should be recognized at least one: a study may include installation of complier of the questionnaire. Methodology aimed at assessing the subjective sensations, in many cases, weakly reflects the "systematic differences between the assessment of the labor situation and the objective characteristics of employment" (Naumova, 1988). This requires testing approaches based on different methodological grounds.

The basis of most methods aimed at understanding the subjective perceptions of employees, based on the principles that have emerged in the course of numerous research material components

production environment. A retrospective look at the position of the main directions in this field allows us to clarify the origins of the above drawbacks.

A lot of in modern approaches to the assessment of the production environment comes from the principles developed in the course debate of the XX century about the nature of labor's scientific organization. Initially, according to some theorists, the scientific organization of labor represents a set of views about the impact on human exclusively material production environment.

In the 60s - 80s finally approved the idea that the work environment is wider than the material factors of production and nervous tension caused by work. It is increasingly recognized the point of view according to which, the work environment is only a stage on which the action unfolds. It is stationary. On the stage activities can be developed in the different ways. Which will be implemented - it depends on the person.

How the described change has impacted on method of valuation of working environment?

Authors working in this area, started to include in the study design not only an assessment of the elements of the working environment by experts, but also the analysis of employee's opinions directly operating in this environment. However, the transition from the study of objective parameters of the working environment to the study of subjective perceptions had little impact on the principles of such a study. Questionnaire has remained the main instrument.

In traditional questionnaires, the particular person appears as a point in space defined regulatory issues. She or he is replaced by a plurality of individual assessments by the formulated of researcher questions. However, every person is a researcher who does not simply react to stimuli, but puts forward a reasonable hypothesis, checks them in practice, developing a system of ideas about working environment. The adequate method of investigation should identify the specific system of subjective perceptions of the individual, but not to impose it from the outside.

The required technique must obviously be descriptive, focused on the description of the individual employee as a special unique integrity. It should allow us to "look at the world through the eyes of another". The method for definition of opinions of respondents should have, as noted by Ulric Neisser, ecological validity (Neisser, 1981).

These requirements are consistent with the principles of the cognitive approach, set the task to investigate the system of human representations of the environment.

Application of the data collection's methods and processing of information, developed within the cognitive approach (in particular technique of construction of a repertory grid personality), seems to us promising.

The methodology is the belief that "all of us though and look at the same world, but from the different windows". In this case, the windows means like a system of categories - especially individual for each person, in which he/she thinks and sees the world and explains the reality. The English economist M. Starr brings another successful analogy, which can be paraphrased as follows: reality is like an apple that can be cut into pieces in different ways. As a result of the cut, made in a certain way, the apple is different than other cut (Starr, 1968). In this case, each slice is individually representations. However, the world is perceived by man so differs from the cut of apple, it is not a replica of a strictly correspond to reality, but rather its an unique way.

The conducted among employees of some enterprises study (definition system of personal constructs workers, and data processing methods of factor analysis) confirmed the sensitivity of the technique to a system of subjective perceptions of the individual. It allows define of mental structures formed in the minds of workers under the influence of external stimuli (reconstruct their perceptions of reality).

A comparative analysis of perceptions of the work environment of the two employees have the same responsibilities are shown below.

Factor analysis shows that the dominant system of representations of the employee "A" are factors "psychological distress" (the first factor explains 37.2% of the variance) and "decreasing of-wage" (the second factor explains 32.2% of the variance). The formation of the image of the working environment in the mind of the employee "B" are influenced by "qualitative characteristics of the labor process" (the first factor explains 43.3% of the variance) and "problematic aspects of the work" (the second factor explains 29.1% of the variance).

These factors form a personalized space of subjective perceptions of each. Thus, the head for the employee "A" is closely linked with the concept of "fear". While the head for the employee "B" is closely linked with the concepts of "competence", "care", "accuracy", "difficulties". Worker "B" sees the statements in terms of "complexity", "importance". Worker "A" sees the statements only as a source of slightly smaller discomfort than the relationship with the head, tax inspector, penalties and overtime.

According to the studies some features of the work lead to deformation of the image (Sorokin, 1992). Thus, the first employee of the constant psychological discomfort cannot distinguish between the real complexity of the labor process. They do not fall into his field of vision. The second employee is focused on labor process.

This particular example cannot get an adequate explanation in the framework of classical rationality and illustrates the formation of a new cognitive situation.

According to the study subjective space workers differ in both composition elements and their qualities. P. Sorokin, emphasizing the specificity of the surround, wrote: "The values... create tangible causal interdependence ... where on the basis of the biophysical properties of such a link does not exist" (Tversky, 1981).

Value component occupies a significant place in the structure of the image of the working environment. According to the study, almost all the elements that belong to the group of antropus, endowed with value-conscious features in the mind. As for the elements related to a material medium, they are endowed with values in consciousness 46% of cases. This confirms the idea that, "the boundary is conditional between the organism and the environment ... the external environment, a member of the "extended subject" includes both natural objects and cultural artifacts" (Lektorskij, & Lektorskij, 2008).

Thus, we can conclude that the work environment in the minds of the employee presents filled with the concepts rather the notion. The concept, according to D.S. Likhachev, is "an algebraic expression meaning" (Lihachev, 1993). He, in contrast to the notion, contains a "bundle of perceptions", which not only thought, but also experienced. The concepts are subject of emotions, likes, dislikes, and

sometimes collisions (Stepanov, 2001). We fixed this new object of research in the notion of «world of work». This concept can be represented as a unity of three aspects of work (Figure 1):

- organizational and technological;
- management;
- socio-cultural.

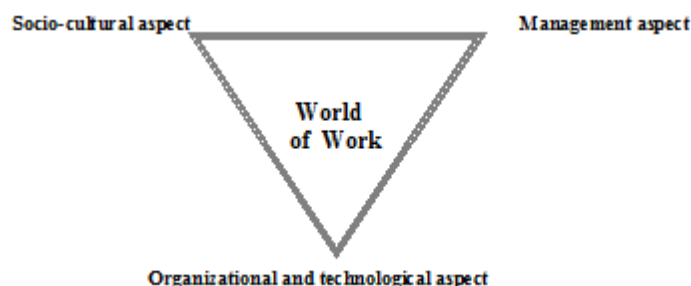


Fig.1. Three aspects of the world of work

"World of work", in contrast to the production environment, includes the structure of meanings that are produced in the process of human interaction. It allows to consolidate the idea that reality (about that a man judging or in which it operates) – according to the apt remark of the philosopher Ortega-and-Gasset - is a structure created by man from the material at hand, at his disposal.

This scheme (Figure 1) illustrates the difference between traditional definitions on labor issues and more general concept "world of work". This concept introduces a new subject of study, representing the unity of organizational and technological (the organization of the labor process in the workplace), management (schemes and methods of labor management) and socio-cultural aspects of labor (norms, principles, values, traditions, views employees).

3. Conclusion

"World of work" as an object of study, highlights unexplored the unity of the party earlier, properties and relations that significantly impact on employment. It argues that the research in the sphere work should aim to capture and explore the features of reality that the worker considers the most significant and meaningful, and not to reconstruct theoretically "literal copy of the original". The term "world of work" captures the attention of the priority review of all of the types of interrelations between subject and object from the position of the subject: as a cultural phenomenon. This will allow to reveal new regularity in interactions employee with the material work environment.

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