



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

MENTAL HEALTH AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AMONG IT PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

Workplaces of the present have witnessed unprecedented changes both inside and around them. Globalization has had an impact on the culture of organizations as well. An understanding of organizational culture is thus crucial for maintaining the wellbeing of employees. Organizational culture is the collection of values, beliefs and customs being followed in organizations. The present study is an exploration of the relationship between mental health and organizational culture among IT professionals. Data from a sample of 104 IT/ITES professionals was collected using the Mental Health Continuum and Competing Values Framework questionnaire. Results show that there is a significant positive relationship between mental health and hierarchical and team cultures. Demographic variables differentiate the respondents on mental health, but there is no association between demographic variables and organizational culture. A discussion on the implication of the results is also included.

Keywords: Mental Health, Organizational Culture, IT Professionals

1. INTRODUCTION

One change that modernity brought along with it in the lives of people is the vast arena of opportunities like never before. Geographical boundaries were defied with the advent of technology. It became possible for people to work together, even while sitting at two extremes on the globe. This also introduced a number of new challenges and issues, both at the personal level, and in the social sphere. The changing workplace puts a number of issues before the employee, and one of these is the environment that exists in the organization. Even though the environment is an abstract concept, there are concrete facets to it that can be studied and understood, so as to make the workplaces better, and organizations more productive. This environment can influence the well-being of its employees to a great extent. The task for researchers in the areas of mental health and well-being is to identify the organizational factors that help the employees maintain their levels of well-being and thereby lead more productive and satisfying lives.

1.1 IT Professionals

The modern workplaces are increasingly becoming prone to producing work stress, and the IT/ITES industry is no exception to it [1]. The nature of job and the demands on the employee that exists in the IT industry are unique to it. There are deadlines to be met. One has to update his/her work-related knowledge constantly. Diversity in the workplace – both in the real sphere and the virtual one – is on the rise. This has been predicted to add to the issues of the already existing organizational climate [2]. Workplace stress can also be a source of long-term problems for the employees [3]. Such problems faced by employees can have ramifications at the personal level

and also in the way they perceive their workplace environments. And employee perceptions may shape organizational culture to an extent [4]; [5].

1.2 Mental Health

Mental health has been an important topic of study in the realm of work [6]. Mental health is crucial to the personal efficacy of individuals in an organization, and also to global organizational effectiveness. The construct of mental health has also undergone sweeping changes in its definition, understanding and applications [7]. An accepted understanding is that mental health involves “subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others” [8]. Such an understanding based on well-being is crucial to approaching mental health research from a positive angle, which focuses on what an individual can achieve, rather than what one lacks. Mental health thus establishes itself as a construct which is not on the same continuum as mental illness. Most people spend a significant amount of their life in workplaces and hence any research on well-being has to take into account the workplace as an important determinant of the overall quality of life. And specifically, it has been suggested that contextual factors are crucial in mental health research [9].

1.3 Organizational Culture

Society is constituted of social institutions and culture is a key one that is a binding force and also a mark of identification. Culture is also about power relations existing in an institution, and the ways in which power is regulated and exercised. Organizational culture has been defined as “the collection of values, beliefs and customs being followed in organizations” [10]. Organizational culture can have lasting impact on how employees behave inside the organization, which in turn can influence the behaviour of the individuals. The leadership style followed by managers, priorities given to various processes and outcomes, the shared values, all can have a direct influence on the well-being of employees. Thus an analysis of the culture that is prevalent in an organization is indispensable to understanding the factors that mediate the levels of mental health of its employees.

Kinman and Jones [11] suggested that employees' perception of job stress and the subjective meanings attached to it are diverse and have to be studied from particular organizational contexts. Stansfeld and Candy [12] concluded from a meta-analytic review that mental health of employees may be associated with a mismatch in effort-reward imbalances and demand-decision latitude. Helfrich, Li, Mohr, Meterko, and Sales [13] did a factor analytic validation of the competing values framework used for organizational culture assessment in healthcare research and suggested that context-specific validation may be needed for tools that measure organizational culture. Llana-Nozal [14] found out from a multi-country study that the conditions at the workplace and work status could greatly influence mental health of employees. Dextras-Gauthier, Marchand, and Haines III [15] advanced an integrated framework that unifies organizational culture with mental health and work conditions. They have argued that this could provide a wide canvas to study the complex work-stress relationship. Brougham and Haar [16] provided an interesting insight into the role of collectivism and cultural factors in moderating employee mental health. Krog [17] studied the relationship between organizational culture and work engagement, thereby offering support to previous attempts in the same direction. Sasaki et al. [18] have offered fresh insights in to the usage of the competing values framework in more diverse contexts and obtained interesting results.

1.4 Need For The Study

The landscape of our workplaces has evolved over the decades. An optimal approach to management should try to provide an environment that will provide individuals with satisfaction and motivation at work. Work should become an integral part of one's quest for meaning. There has been strong empirical support for the relationship between organizational culture and mental health outcomes [15]; [19]; [20]. Even though organizational culture is such an important determinant of various personal level outcomes, the volume of research that examines the relationship between mental health and organizational culture in the Indian context is inadequate at best. Thus there is a need to investigate these variables in the milieu of the new generation Indian workplace.

1.5 Hypotheses

1. Mental Health and Organizational Culture of IT professionals are significantly related to each other.
2. IT professionals differ in their mental health on the basis of selected demographic variables.
3. IT professionals differ in their organizational culture on the basis of selected demographic variables.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Survey method was employed for this study. Sample was drawn from employees in IT/ITES field working in India. Standardized tools were distributed among the respondents and follow-up was done to retrieve the data. 104 responses were used for the analysis.

2.1 Mental Health Continuum by Keyes [21]

The 14 short form of the Mental Health Continuum (MHC-SF) is answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale. It is built on the tripartite structure comprising of the dimensions of Emotional Well-being, Psychological Well-being and Social Well-being. It has been tested

for, and found to possess very good internal consistency ($>.80$) and discriminant validity. The scale has also shown good test-retest reliability.

2.2 Competing Values Framework Questionnaire by Marchand et al. [19]

The tool is based on the competing values framework [22]; [23], which is widely used in organizational culture research. There are 14 items measuring the four culture types, Entrepreneurial, Hierarchical, Team, and Rational. The items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale. The tool has been validated on different populations, and found reliable and valid.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistical analysis of the obtained data was performed using statistical software tools. Tables with results of the analysis in the light of the stated hypotheses, along with discussion are presented below.

Table 1: Relationship between Mental Health and Organizational Culture among IT Professionals

Organizational Culture Types	Pearson' s 'r'
Entrepreneurial	.027 ^{NS}
Hierarchical	.305*
Team	.203*
Rational	.191 ^{NS}

*- Significant at 0.05 level; NS- Not Significant

From Table 1, it can be seen that the hierarchical and team cultures are significantly correlated with the mental health of the respondents. The hierarchical culture is typical to formal organizations and is rooted on structure and control, which is true to the nature of most companies in the IT sector. Given the nature of work undertaken by these firms, it is natural for them to follow a hierarchical culture. The adherence to uniformity in a hierarchical culture makes it a default for such an industry. However there are findings that there is a relationship between job stress and hierarchical organizational culture [24] and this should be taken into consideration while drawing inferences on this relationship. The other significant relationship is between team culture and mental health. A fundamental aspect of the team culture is collaboration. The nature of assignments in the field is composed of large jobs divided into tasks, which are assigned to teams and the collaboration between team members is crucial to the outcomes and performance, Hence the emphasis on team culture is also intuitive, and is supported by research findings that correlate a team culture to better engagement in work [17].

Table 2: Difference in mental health among IT professionals based on selected demographic variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean	SD	't' value
Time Zone	IST	92	40.24	13.84	3.54*
	Non-IST	12	54.75	8.4	
Work Experience	Upto 5 Years	59	38.49	15.57	2.94*
	More than 5 Years	45	46.40	10.42	
Marital Status	Married	39	46.77	12.33	2.81*
	Unmarried	65	39.00	14.36	

*- Significant at 0.05 level; NS- Not Significant

From the table, it can be seen that there is a significant difference in mental health of those working on Indian time and those working according to non-Indian time zones. The non-Indian time zone professionals are generally paid more than those working in Indian times. This could be a reason for the difference, as some longitudinal studies have demonstrated a relationship between low income and higher risk for mental health issues [25]. Employees with a work experience of more than 5 years are also found to have higher levels of mental health, which can also be linked to the previous finding. Married respondents were having higher levels of mental health, on comparison with their unmarried counterparts.

The only significant difference in Organizational culture is seen in the dimensions of Team culture and Rational culture, where unmarried respondents have rated their organizations as being high in these two. This is an exceptional finding since both these

dimensions are placed on the same spectrum of the competing values framework. The unmarried respondents, who are understandably lower in age, have rated their organization as friendly and as promoting teamwork. The unmarried respondents have also rated their organization as one based on competition and a focus on getting things done. This points to the single individuals putting a premium on results and goals.

Table 3: Difference in dimensions of organizational culture among IT professionals based on selected demographic variables

Entrepreneurial Culture	Category	N	Mean	SD	't' value
Time Zone	IST	92	14.83	3.08	1.40 ^{NS}
	Non-IST	12	13.50	3.10	
Work Experience	Upto 5 Years	59	14.31	3.24	1.34 ^{NS}
	More than 5 Years	45	15.16	2.8	
Marital Status	Married	39	14.54	3.14	0.34 ^{NS}
	Unmarried	65	14.75	3.08	
Hierarchical Culture	Category	N	Mean	SD	't' value
Time Zone	IST	92	13.12	2.96	1.46 ^{NS}
	Non-IST	12	14.50	4.01	
Work Experience	Upto 5 Years	59	13.41	3.11	0.48 ^{NS}
	More than 5 Years	45	13.11	3.12	
Marital Status	Married	39	13.69	2.82	1.05 ^{NS}
	Unmarried	65	13.03	3.26	
Team Culture	Category	N	Mean	SD	't' value
Time Zone	IST	92	11.23	2.41	1.41 ^{NS}
	Non-IST	12	12.25	1.87	
Work Experience	Upto 5 Years	59	11.32	2.32	0.19 ^{NS}
	More than 5 Years	45	11.38	2.47	
Marital Status	Married	39	10.54	2.91	2.77*
	Unmarried	65	11.83	1.86	
Rational Culture	Category	N	Mean	SD	't' value
Time Zone	IST	92	11.38	2.37	0.50 ^{NS}
	Non-IST	12	11.75	2.56	
Work Experience	Upto 5 Years	59	11.56	2.44	0.67 ^{NS}
	More than 5 Years	45	11.24	2.32	
Marital Status	Married	39	10.77	2.55	2.20*
	Unmarried	65	11.82	2.20	

*- Significant at 0.05 level; NS- Not Significant

4. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to assess the relationship between mental health of IT professionals and the organizational culture prevailing in their respective organizations. The relationship of important demographic variables to both the variables was also examined. A significant relationship has been established between mental health and organizational culture among IT professionals. This finding

has applicability for managements where studying and managing the components of organizational culture may lead to better mental health of the employees, which is beneficial to both the employees and to the organization.

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