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Abstract

Supervisor's perceptions about the productivity of prompt workers were assessed. A total of thirty-six subjects participated in the study by completing a Likert scale and short-answer survey. Results indicated that supervisors perceived prompt workers to be more conscientious, responsible, and productive. Several implications for management decisions and further research were discussed.

Perceptions of the Effects of Worker Promptness on Worker Productivity

Psychologists have studied worker productivity in varied ways. Yet, little research exists about the correlation between worker promptness, or the employee's ability to arrive at work on time, and worker productivity. Do supervisors merely perceive prompt employees to be more efficient? Is it logical to assume that workers who are consistent about prompt attendance will also have consistent performance or be more committed and diligent?

As already stated, research on the integrated topics of promptness and productivity is limited. Most of the research available concentrates on productivity. DeMeuse (1987) assessed the relationship between research productivity and perceptions of doctoral program quality. Productivity ratings were compared with program perceptions taken from another study (Greenberg, 1978). Productivity of researchers was

analyzed by determining how many *Journal of Applied Psychology* articles a particular program had.

DeMeuse looked at 4,579 articles published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* from 1917 to 1977 and 734 articles that were published from 1978 to 1985. DeMeuse found that "the relationship between a university's research output and perception of industrial/ organizational doctoral program quality was significant." (DeMeuse, 1987)

Das (1986) wanted to determine if information feedback and goal setting concepts can be applied to a repetitive production task to improve productivity. Experiments were conducted on 56 male and female college students who were paid $3.50 an hour to drill four holes on a steel plate while in a seated position. Worker productivity was assessed in terms of quantity and quality. Das found that the combination of quantity and quality feedback had a positive effect on productivity.

Argote (1989) looked at agreement about norms and work unit effectiveness. She defined norms as "behavioral rules, ideas about how categories of people ought to behave in specific situations, and expected

behavior sanctioned by systems." (Argote, 1989) Argote wanted to focus on norm structures, or the interrelationship among norms. She defined two dimensions of norm structure: normative complementarity and normative consensus. Normative complementarity was defined as "the amount of agreement existing between groups about norms governing their relationship." (Argote, 1989) Normative consensus was defined as "the amount of agreement existing within a group about norms in general." (Argote, 1989)

Argote's subjects were emergency room staff members. Argote pointed out that if there is agreement about a norm, responses of staff members are generally compatible. Time that could be better used to attend to patients is not taken up with a discussion of a plan of action. The number of subjects in Argote's study was as follows: 248 emergency unit physicians, 278 nurses, and 215 hospital physicians.

Normative complementarity was assessed by asking nurses to give responses on a five-point scale as to how much difference existed "between the way a hospital sees the job of nurses in the emergency units and the way in

which nurses see their jobs." (Argote, 1989) Normative consensus was assessed by the "amount of variance characterizing nurses perceptions of how frequently work problems in their units were solved by having 'clear and detailed job definitions for all involved'." (Argote, 1989) Effectiveness, or productivity, was assessed by measuring the promptness of care, quality of nursing care, and quality of medical care.

Argote found that "agreement about norms within and between interacting groups is positively associated with the effectiveness of emergency units."(Argote, 1989) According to Argote, norms increase the probability of specific responses for individuals. Agreement about norms helps compatibility and improves productivity or effectiveness. An interesting point that Argote brings up is that agreement about how to solve a problem should be more important than the problem-solving method selected.

One interesting study on time management exists. (A.E. Woolfolk and R.L. Woolfolk, 1986) Woolfolk and Woolfolk's purpose in studying time management was

to assess whether "pre-service" or student teachers would have more effective time management skills after receiving instruction in "setting specific goals, making written plans, and self monitoring time use." (Woolfolk and Woolfolk, 1986) The researchers conducted their study by choosing 81 student teachers, 68 female and 13 male, at a large state college. These subjects were senior undergraduates enrolled in a required student teaching seminar. Subjects did not differ in "age, grade-point average, final grade for the seminar, self report of initial ability to manage time, or promptness in completing the first class assignment (due before training began)." (Woolfolk and Woolfolk, 1986) Twenty-six subjects were randomly selected to be in a control group, 35 subjects were randomly selected to be in experimental group one, and 20 subjects were randomly selected to be in experimental group two. The control group received no time management training. Both of the experimental groups read a book on time management and saw a film on the subject. Group one received supervision and practice in making daily lesson plans and self-monitoring time use. Group two attended a

lecture on time management. Subsequently, both groups were required to implement procedures they had learned from training or lecture.

The effectiveness of the time-management training was evaluated by comparing performance on an "intermediate deadline task", a "delayed deadline task", and a "self report of time management". (Woolfolk and Woolfolk, 1986) The researchers found that brief training in time management can have immediate and long term effects on the performance of pre-service teachers at a period in their training when time pressures are great. Based on subject comments, the time management skills taught in this study were quite helpful to the study participants. The researchers concluded that even brief training in time management can have beneficial effects for teachers.

Even more closely related to the question of worker promptness is an article by Aiken (1992), who explored legal problems with staff who did not arrive on time to work. She wanted to determine when the employer had a legal right to take action against a consistently late

employee. Aikin outlines what the law has to say about late workers: "It is the employee's responsibility to get to work at the required time." (Aikin, 1992) When workers decide where to live and how to get to work, they must consider this responsibility. If an employee is late due to terrorists, weather conditions or sickness, the employee is not legally held responsible. This is not a breach of the employee's contract of responsibility, because getting to work on time is out of the employee's control. However, it is the right of the employer to determine what constitutes lateness, and if an employee is consistently late, the employer has the legal right to impose wage penalties or terminate the employee.

The purpose of the current study is to assess supervisors' perceptions about worker promptness and its relationship with worker productivity. It is hypothesized that supervisors will perceive prompt employees to be more productive.

Methods

Subjects

Data for this research was collected at Plant and Service Operations (PSO), located on the Southern Illinois University at Carbondale campus. Subjects were supervisors of student workers. Subjects were given approximately one week to complete the survey.

Instruments

This study used survey response data. The survey consisted of fourteen close-ended questions and five open-ended questions. The fourteen close-ended questions used a Likert scale format (1= Strongly Agree, 5= Strongly Disagree). The open-ended questions asked for yes/no and short responses based upon past experience, and established ways in which employee promptness was assessed by the supervisors, as well as the number of student workers supervised. Fifty surveys were distributed by the director of PSO and thirty-six

were returned within a one week period. Distribution included a personal memorandum from the PSO director. (See Appendix A)

Procedure

The analysis procedures used were descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were used for analysis of the Likert scale close-ended questions. Percentages were used for analysis of the open-ended questions.

Results

Mean responses and standard deviations of the close-ended questions of the survey were assessed and indicate affirmation of the hypothesis. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis of the open-ended questions indicated that high percentages of supervisors acknowledged or rewarded prompt student workers for their timely behavior. In addition, a majority of supervisors provided negative feedback or negative consequences for consistently late student workers. Only a very small percentage of supervisors felt that their own actions encouraged late behavior in student workers. Response percentages of assessment of student worker promptness are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Response percentages for the open-ended questions and range of students employed are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

Results indicated an affirmation of the statement that supervisors perceive prompt employees to be more productive. The descriptive statistics supported a general response of agreement on the first thirteen questions. However, responses on four of the first thirteen questions indicated a level of support that was closer to neutrality than to agreement. Two of those four questions had to do with assessment of productivity. Specifically, the first two neutral response questions stated that counting the number of tasks is an adequate way to measure productivity, and that productivity also includes creativity and inventiveness in problem solving. The other two were concerned with supervision and responsibility. Specifically, these last two neutral response questions stated that prompt student workers require less supervision, and that prompt student workers can handle more responsibility at work. The descriptive statistics also supported a general response of disagreement on the fourteenth question which stated that there is no

difference between late student workers and prompt student workers.

Examples of specific answers, as well as consideration of the percentage of yes/no responses provide a descriptive analysis of the last five open ended questions. When asked if they acknowledged or rewarded prompt student workers, 69.4% of supervisors responded in the affirmative. Some examples of rewards were as follows: home-cooked food, permission to leave early on Fridays, raises, freedom in requesting a day off, and positive verbal feedback, such as "Good job" or "I appreciate your promptness."

A majority of supervisors also indicated that they provided negative feedback or consequences for workers who were consistently late. Some examples of negative feedback or consequences were as follows: termination after a set number of warnings, "docked" pay, admonitions that lateness is a bad habit that will develop into a lifelong pattern, and a reminder of the student's responsibility to the organization. A couple of supervisors maintained that the effects of negative

feedback or consequences were mixed; student workers would come to work on time immediately following the feedback or consequences, but then would eventually return to their late behavior.

The third open-ended question asked for supervisors to decide whether their own behavior might encourage lateness in their student workers. While 94.4% of supervisors replied negatively, 5.6% responded in the affirmative. Affirmative answers were explained by either being too "forgiving" and "understanding", or by not having enough time with the students to discuss the importance of being prompt.

The manner of assessment of a student worker's promptness was attained through the fourth open ended question. Sign-in sheets were used by 55.6% of supervisors, while 38.9% used personal observation. A small percentage of supervisors (5.5%) used time clocks.

Approximate number of student workers supervised was the subject of the final open-ended question. The respondents supervised a total of 161 student workers.

One individual responded that he/she was indirectly in a supervisory capacity for 300 student workers.

Aikin (1992) reported that consistent lateness is a breach of contract and constitutes possible grounds for termination. Many of the supervisors in the current study echoed this statement by declaring that late student workers would be terminated after a set number of warnings. Since warnings had only a transient effect, other types of interaction might be indicated. For example, the student teachers in Woolfolk and Woolfolk's (1986) study found the time management training that they received to be very helpful; perhaps, a training session in time management might be helpful for student employees as well.

The findings of Das (1986) are especially relevant to this study. Das found that positive feedback had a positive effect on productivity. The information that the supervisors supplied in the present study provides support for this finding. Supervisors who rewarded prompt employees with positive feedback generally felt that their prompt workers were more productive.

Argote (1989) found that agreement about work norms improves productivity. In the present study, a few of the supervisors indicated that having a discussion with employees about work norms, such as expectations of promptness, were helpful in promoting efficiency. Discussions between students and supervisors about work norms might lead to an increase in normative complementarity, which is agreement about norms between groups governing their relationship. It might also be valuable to assess normative complementarity, between workers and supervisors, by surveying student workers with an instrument similar to that used in the current study. Comparing the answers of student workers to those of supervisors would demonstrate how much difference exists between the expectations supervisors have about student employees and the way in which students perceive their jobs. This is important because a large difference between supervisors' expectations and students' perceptions would indicate that more communication between the two groups about work norms is needed.

A pilot study for the current research was conducted at SIUC's Morris Library and the Clinical Center. Although there does appear to be at least a degree of consensus among student worker supervisors, assessment of student worker supervisors at the library and the Clinical Center yielded much stronger agreement on the Likert scale questions than was obtained at Plant and Service Operations. Little neutrality existed about questions in the pilot study. The disparity between the library and clinical center and PSO may be due to difference in setting or job type. Surveying several diverse organizations that employ students in a variety of jobs might be helpful in establishing a consensus that better reflects the student worker supervisor population as a whole. Determining the actual productivity of student employees might also enrich the current study. However, creating instruments to assess productivity might become difficult. When determining productivity, specific job duties, as well as the difficulty of tasks, must be taken into consideration.

A task that requires much concentration or physical effort should not be rated the same as a simple task. Allowing for problem solving and creativeness might be useful when creating an instrument for measuring productivity, because merely counting the number of tasks completed may not be an adequate measure.

Implications of the survey findings are that supervisors may now realize their full opinions of consistently late employees and may also realize that brief time management training or work norm complementarity between supervisors and students could increase efficiency. A further implication of this study's findings might be that an employer would have a way to determine who his best workers are by looking at their time cards.

A limitation of the study was that it measured the responses of so few subjects. In addition, no attempt was made to assess student employee opinions about the relationship between promptness and productivity was another limitation.

Specific suggestions for future research would be to include a larger sample size, and assess the time

management behavior and productivity attitudes of student workers. Determining adequate ways to measure productivity would also be helpful. If productivity could be assessed, responses about productivity could be compared with actual productivity, which would demonstrate the degree of honesty participants used while completing the survey.

References

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Appendix A

Memorandum

Date: March 27, 1995

To: PSO Unit Managers & Supervisors of Student Employees

From: Nancy Hartman

Subject: Student Employee Survey

Plant and Service Operations has agreed to assist Ms. Sara Kulier, an undergraduate student in the SIUC honors program, collect data for her undergraduate thesis. Ms. Kulier's project focuses on supervisor's attitudes and perceptions regarding student employee productivity based on their promptness in reporting for their scheduled workblocks. Her cover letter and survey are attached.

As part of PSO activities focusing on the observation of National Student Employment Week, civil service supervisors of student employees are asked to

participate in Ms. Kulier's project by completing the survey. Copies of the survey are being forwarded to each manager for distribution to supervisors. This survey should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. **Please have completed surveys returned to Nancy Hartman at PSO by Friday, April 7, 1995.**

Your participation in this project is encouraged and appreciated. This is another opportunity for PSO staff to support the educational mission of SIUC.

Survey

My name is Sara Kulier. I am an undergraduate, completing my senior honors thesis in psychology at SIUC. This survey is part of a study on supervisors' perceptions of student worker promptness and productivity. After finishing this survey, please return it, by Friday, April 7, to Nancy L. Hartman, Plant and Service Operations Office, Room 107B. If you would like further information about the results of the study, my phone number is (618) 684-2545. My thesis

director is Dr. Judith Seiters. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

To indicate your answers on the first fourteen questions, circle the number that corresponds to your response. Please mark only one response to each question.

1= Strongly Agree (SA) 4= Disagree (D)

2= Agree (A) 5= Strongly Disagree (SD)

3= Neutral (N)

Questions 15 through 19 ask for Yes/No answers and/or for short responses. Try to answer all questions. Responses will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation in filling out this survey.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.Student workers who arrive on time to work are generally able to accomplish more tasks than those who arrive late.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Student workers who arrive on time for work are more consistent and stay "on task" better than late workers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Prompt or on-time student workers are efficient.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Late student workers are not committed to their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Prompt student workers require less supervision.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Prompt student workers can handle more responsibility at work.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Late student workers are not committed to their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Late student workers lack time management skills. This affects how many tasks they can complete.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Prompt student workers are motivated.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Prompt student workers have positive job attitudes.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Prompt workers are committed to their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Counting the number of tasks completed is an adequate way to determine productivity.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Productivity also includes creativity and inventiveness in problem solving.	1	2	3	4	5
14. There is no difference in productivity between late student workers and prompt student workers.	1	2	3	4	5

15. Do you in any way acknowledge or reward student workers who are regularly on time for work? If yes, please briefly describe what you do.

Yes No

16. Do you provide any feedback or negative consequences for students who are regularly late for work? If yes, briefly describe what you do and indicate whether your actions cause student workers to arrive more promptly.

    Yes No

17. Do you feel that your behavior may sometimes encourage lateness? If yes, please explain.

    Yes No

18. How do you assess a student worker's promptness? Do you use personal observation, sign-in sheets, or a time clock?

19. Approximately how many student workers do you supervise?

Table 1

Mean Responses and Standard Deviations of Likert Scale Questions

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	2.00	0.894
2	2.14	0.683
3	2.47	0.810
4	2.44	0.969
5	2.56	0.909
6	2.58	0.996
7	2.39	0.964
8	2.25	0.779
9	2.28	0.659
10	2.25	0.732
11	2.50	0.655
12	2.94	1.013
13	2.25	0.604
14	3.72	0.849

Table 2

Response Percentages of Assessment of Student Worker Promptness

Method	% Response
Personal Observation	38.9
Sign-in Sheets	55.6
Time clock	5.5

Table 3

Response Percentages of Open-Ended Questions and Total Number of Students Supervised

	% Response	
Question	Yes	No
15	69.4	30.6
16	86.1	13.9
17	5.6	94.4

Total number of students supervised= 161