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Development and Implementation of problem-solving systems in the workplace: The role of human resource management

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Abstract

People with different backgrounds and perspectives must collaborate effectively in diverse workplaces to achieve common goals. However, various issues can affect employee efficiency and organizational performance. Human Resource Management (HRM) teams address, manage, and prevent these problems. The paper aims to review the relevant literature, focusing on the most common work-related problems and the role of HRM in effectively managing and preventing them.

Keywords: Human resources management, workplace, burnout, job stress, interpersonal conflicts

1. Introduction

Workplaces can be complex and demanding, involving individuals with different personalities and communication styles interacting to deliver results. Differences in employee expectations and what the organization offers can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, resulting in stress and tension. Employees face various challenges at work, spanning from lack of communication and interpersonal conflicts to discrimination and physical or mental fatigue (Atanasoff & Venable, 2017; Estryn-Béhar *et al.*, 2007; London, 2014; Patel *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003) [4, 11, 34, 47, 56]. These experiences can adversely affect employees' mental health, job satisfaction, and overall well-being and should be promptly and effectively addressed. The Human Resource Management (HRM) department plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effective operation of any organization. HRM's primary missions are to manage employee relationships, address workplace challenges, and promote a healthy work environment. The HRM departments are expected to manage the workforce to ensure employee happiness, productivity, and engagement (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Kumar & Kapoor, 2019; Markos & Sridevi, 2010) [3, 28, 37]. Power dynamics, peer cooperation, and different expectations can cause problems in the workplace. This paper outlines the main problems that occur in the workplace and their effects, as addressed in the relevant research literature. It also explores how HRM departments can effectively prevent and manage these problems to ensure the smooth running of organizations.

2. Methodology

The paper presents a focused literature review that outlines key workplace issues and their impacts, as well as potential strategies for HRM departments to address them. It begins by presenting three key problems: work conflicts, burnout, and job-related stress. Following, it explores potential functional strategies for HRM departments to address these issues promptly. The review follows specific criteria and employs the PRISMA approach (Page *et al.*, 2021; Rethlefsen *et al.*, 2021) [45, 52] for the search strategy, utilizing various databases such as Google Scholar, CORE, DOAJ, and BASE. Protocols included individual indicators and a combination of indicators relevant to the topic under investigation (e.g. HRM, workplace problems, burnout, occupational stress, interpersonal conflicts). The selected studies for analysis consist of the most recent and/or most cross-referenced, while excluding doctoral and master's theses, studies with weak methodological approaches, and those with few cross-references (Table 1).

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Table 1: Basic eligibility and exclusion criteria of relevant literature

Bibliography Eligibility Criteria	Bibliography Exclusion Criteria
Empirical research in the international context.	Doctoral and postgraduate theses on the subject.
Articles from authoritative research journals in the field with many cross-references.	Studies with weak methodological approach
Modern research from books and authoritative research journals in the field.	Research with a small number of cross-references

3. Most common problems in the workplace and their effects: Workplaces can become complex and demanding environments where different personalities work together to achieve the goals set. The process can become complicated given the different levels of authority that govern employee relations and the diverse personalities involved. In such working environments, it is almost inevitable that frictions, tensions and problems of all kinds would not arise, hindering the organization's mission and imposing psychosomatic effects on employees. Workplace problems are usually intertwined with the effects they cause on employees and, by extension, on the organization's effectiveness.

In a study conducted by Harvey *et al.* (2017) ^[17], twelve work-related risk factors were identified as potential causes of common mental health issues namely: depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. The research revealed that high job demands, low job control, insufficient social support in the workplace, an imbalance between effort and reward, low levels of organizational justice, job inequality, organizational change, job insecurity, temporary employment status, informal work, long working hours, interpersonal conflicts, bullying, and unclear job responsibilities and objectives were significant risks to employees' mental health. The American Psychological Association (APA) emphasizes that job insecurity and lack of support in the workplace can exacerbate these issues. Literature concurs that the three most common job-related problems relates to work are: conflicts, burnout, and stress, each presenting distinct characteristics that must be considered when addressing them.

3.1 Work conflicts

It's important to note that conflicts in the workplace can stem from various factors such as a lack of resources (e.g., time, position and budgets), differing values (e.g., political preferences, beliefs, religion, morals, social values), personality differences, misinterpreted events, perceptions, worldviews, or any combination of these. Workplace conflicts can be categorized into two sub-types: work relationship conflict (arising from disagreements about tasks) and interpersonal relationship conflict (resulting from interpersonal friction, personality conflicts, etc.) (Guerra *et al.*, 2020) ^[16]. A high frequency of interpersonal conflicts within a work group can have negative impacts on employees and organizations.

In terms of employees, increased tensions resulting from frequent and unresolved conflicts can lead to anxiety, insecurity, reduced trust in colleagues and the organization, lower job satisfaction, and decreased performance (Friedman *et al.*, 2000) ^[13]. Escalating conflicts may also lead the parties involved to avoid contact and withhold information (Riaz & Junaid, 2011) ^[53].

In organizations, poor conflict management directly or indirectly affects productivity (Wang *et al.*, 2020) ^[63]. A significant amount of productive time is lost to conflict management each week, with studies showing that work

time lost dealing with mismanaged conflict ranges from 0.9 hours to 3.3 hours per week (Raines, 2019) ^[51]. Since conflict affects the health and well-being of employees, it results in absenteeism from their duties or responsibilities (Huang *et al.*, 2019; Sparks, 2001) ^[18, 60], making it difficult for organizations to function smoothly. Conflicts create a hostile work environment where creativity and innovation are reduced, employee trust is compromised, morale is low, deadlines are missed, and severe communication problems arise (Isa, 2015) ^[20].

3.2 Burnout

Burnout syndrome is a widely recognized consequence of workplace challenges. It is a psycho-social condition characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement at work (Montero-Marín *et al.*, 2009) ^[42]. Burnout is defined as a persistent, negative work-related state that affects generally healthy individuals (Moczyłowska, 2016) ^[41]. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently categorized burnout as a phenomenon associated with job dissatisfaction (Schult *et al.*, 2018) ^[57] and characterized by chronic stress. Burnout encompasses emotional exhaustion, a negative emotional state, and reduced professional effectiveness, impacting almost 25% of the working population (Leitão *et al.*, 2021) ^[32]. The syndrome typically develops gradually and is primarily the result of disparities between job-related expectations and the realities of professional life (Demerouti & Adaloudis, 2024) ^[9].

The 'Survey of Workplaces (AWS)' model of burnout, developed by Leiter and Maslach (2003) ^[33], focuses on these differences. The model measures the harmonious coexistence levels between employees and the organization. Harmonious coexistence is associated with the absence of burnout and higher work involvement (Leiter & Maslach, 2003) ^[33]. On the contrary, if any of the six factors (fairness, values, control, rewards, workload and community) included in AWS do not satisfy employees, it could disturb the harmony between employees and organizations. Disturbance of this harmony leads to burnout syndrome.

3.3 Job Related Stress

Work-related stress is deemed one of the most common workplace problems (Lamontagne *et al.*, 2007; Spielberger & Reheiser, 2020) ^[29, 61]. Though they share common qualitative characteristics, work stress and burnout are distinct entities (Iacovides *et al.*, 2003) ^[19]. According to Mimura and Griffith (2003) ^[40], work stress develops when individuals face constant and overwhelming pressure in their workplace. High demands, strict deadlines, excessive workload load and role-related issues affect employees' mental state and mood. According to a research by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2019), up to 30% of employees experience occupational stress. As a result, 20% report fatigue being a common consequence of work stress. Additionally a 15% of workers report frequent headaches, and 20% of those suffering from cardiovascular

diseases have experienced intense work-stress situations. A post-analysis carried out by Kavosi *et al.* (2018) ^[25] revealed that increasing workload, role conflict, role ambiguity, workplace conflicts and increasing working hours increase the likelihood of job-related stress.

In conclusion, the literature review highlighted three primary sources of workplace problems: conflicts, burnout, and stress (Diagram 1).

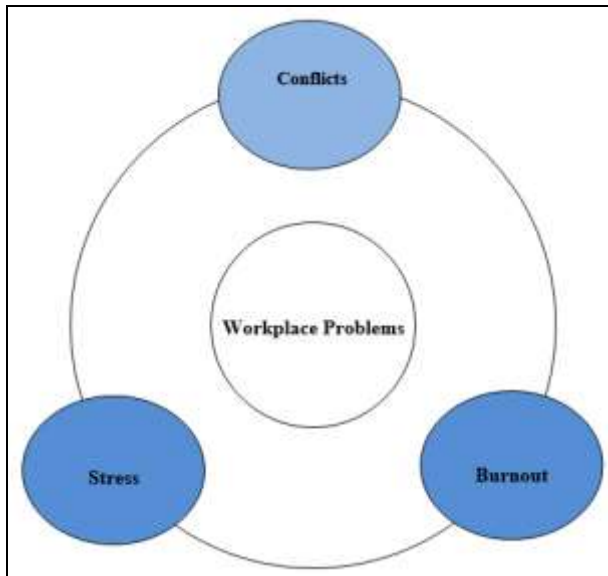


Diagram 1: Most common sources of problems arising in the workplace

4. The Role of HRM in dealing with and preventing problems in the workplace

An organization's most important 'asset' is its human resources (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Ammirato *et al.*, 2023; Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011) ^[1, 2, 23]. The term human resource emphasizes the significant role of the human factor in modern organizations (Prajogo & Oke, 2016) ^[50]. The qualifications and know-how of employees, their willingness to work conscientiously, their enthusiasm, their receptiveness to changes or innovations, the satisfaction they receive from their work, their collective competence and their commitment to achieve goals, often shape and influence the effectiveness of organizations (Rivaldo & Nabella, 2023) ^[54]. Humans also have the capacity for creativity and innovation, characteristics that cannot be found in any other of the organization's resources. Furthermore, employees, are the ones who make decisions about all other resources (Ma *et al.*, 2014; Yahya & Goh, 2002) ^[35, 65].

According to Opatha (2021), HRM involves the adoption of various functions and activities to effectively leverage employees, within an organization, to achieve its goals and contribute positively to the working environment. It also encompasses the formulation, implementation, and continuous maintenance of strategies, policies, procedures, rules, practices, and employee management systems in a strategic and sustainable manner (p.31). Essentially, HRM involves managing employees, their interpersonal relationships, and their relationships with the organization. By effectively implementing HRM practices, an organization can successfully address workplace issues and significantly minimize their impact on both the organization and its employees.

An organization is a formal group of individuals with shared objectives. Within these organizations, employees can exhibit intricate and unpredictable behaviors, giving rise to a variety of problems that require prompt and efficient resolution. The first step in addressing any issue is to identify it. HRM officers should be cognizant of potential problems, their nature and their origins, so to take proactive measures to identify and address issues before they escalate (Malik *et al.*, 2020). It is crucial that they consistently listen to employees, stay attuned to any complaints or problems, spanning from compensation, benefits, and workplace safety to discrimination, interpersonal conflicts, and harassment (Podgorodnichenko *et al.*, 2020) ^[40].

4.1 Managing Work Conflicts

Work conflicts are a frequent challenge for HRM departments (Mills & Mene, 2020) ^[39]. Conflicts often stem from disagreements, misunderstandings, grievances, and employee dissatisfaction within organizations, leading to negative consequences for both the organization and its employees. Therefore, effectively addressing and resolving conflicts is pivotal, while ensuring that the parties involved are not emotionally distressed during the resolution process. Preserving the emotional well-being of the individuals involved is paramount for successful conflict management. HRM staff must have a clear understanding of the nature of conflict, its causes, and the complexities involved in conflict management.

It is also imperative to be aware of practical methods (approaches) to resolve conflicts (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020; McKenzie, 2015) ^[21, 38]. Once the problem is identified, HRM staff are expected to take immediate action to resolve it. Conflicts should be considered thoroughly by gathering information from all parties involved (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011) ^[8]. Such information could be obtained by interviews, reviewing documents, or consulting with experts such as legal or professional psychologists. An important parameter, of course, is compliance with all legal requirements and regulations when managing these problems. One of the most critical aspects of the HRM team's role in problem-solving is effective communication with all parties involved to instill a sense of justice and trust (McKenzie, 2015) ^[38]. Another critical factor in managing conflicts is to establish transparency. Achieving this objective entails ensuring that, throughout the problem management process, the steps taken to address the issues, the anticipated schedule for resolution, and the ultimate results are clearly communicated and meticulously documented for all relevant parties. (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020) ^[21].

4.2 Managing Burnout Syndrome

The HRM sectors are called upon to address burnout syndrome (Kloutsiniotis *et al.*, 2022) ^[27]. This can be accomplished through targeted interventions to empower employees in managing their work. Effectively managing and treating factors leading to stress and burnout, such as overwhelming workloads, unfair treatment, lack of control, inadequate rewards, dysfunctional work environments, and overtime (Bottini *et al.*, 2020) ^[6], is crucial in preventing their occurrence and escalation within an organization. In order to effectively address this issue, HRM departments should implement interventions focusing on both employees and the organization. Such approach helps prevent burnout

while promoting occupational well-being and creating conditions for more sustainable and efficient organizations (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015) ^[62]. Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) ^[14] propose interventions at five levels to reduce burnout phenomena in organizations: (1) Stress management interventions, (2) Empowering employees to have control and be active masters of their work, (3) Cultivating and encouraging social support, (4) Participation and employee engagement in decision-making, and (5) Implementing and managing high-quality performance (p. 191). Job satisfaction is an essential regulatory factor in the manifestation of burnout. HRM departments should create work environments where creativity, freedom, mobility, and recognition are encouraged and also particular emphasis should be placed on resistance to burnout, including active participation and flexibility (Judge *et al.*, 2020) ^[22].

4.3 Managing work stress

HRM departments can contribute to reducing work stress. Work environment plays a vital role in work stress, and this stress can be reduced if HRM departments. At first HRM should regulate working hours properly: working hours should be monitored at intervals; extra working hours lead to excessive stress and adversely affect the work-life balance (White *et al.*, 2003) ^[64]. Secondly they need to methodise ways to recognize the contribution of employees: The work or performance of employees must be recognized and appreciated through the provision of rewards, incentives, promotions, etc. (Brun & Dugas, 2008) ^[7]. Lastly, fair treatment in the workplace should also be established because unfair treatment, the presence of favoured groups in the workplace and the lack of a sense of justice are parameters that lead to an increase in the level of stress (Demmke, 2020; Lavelle *et al.*, 2009) ^[10, 30]. It is widely acknowledged that the workplace environment plays a vital role in increasing or decreasing the level of stress. Generally, a happy, healthy and fair environment that recognizes employee effort will reduce work stress and keep employees refreshed and energized, making them more engaged and efficient at work (Kapoor & Chhabra, 2022) ^[24].

4.4 Preventing work related problems

Solving workplace problems could have positive results in any organization. HRM departments should also work proactively to prevent similar problems (Bardoel *et al.*, 2014) ^[5]. Employers are responsible for implementing appropriate policies and procedures that ensure their workplace is fair and free from discrimination, harassment, or other mistreatment. Through intervention programs, HRM departments should provide suitable training, empowerment and support to employees to successfully self-manage any issues that may arise (Yin *et al.*, 2019) ^[66]. Such an approach could create a respectful and professional work environment where all employees feel valued and respected. HRM departments are also expected to constantly evaluate the effectiveness of their problem-solving efforts. They should constantly assess whether work problems are resolved satisfactorily if further action is required, and whether changes should be made to the organization's policies or procedures (Soltani *et al.*, 2004) ^[59]. This would ensure that the organization continues to improve and that similar problems do not arise in the future.

4.5 Implementing sustainable human resource management

The Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) approach, is defined as the set of formed or developing HR practices designed to aid the achievement of the organization's economic, social, and environmental goals while at the same time, preserving the HRM basic mission. SHRM, beyond environmental and economic sustainability, involves other issues, including fairness, employee engagement, mental health and well-being, and employee development. Such an approach promotes a culture of trust and cooperation in the organization, emphasizing employees' participation, which ensures their loyalty and commitment. The soft HRM approach included in the SHRM, aims to politically build a more functional and fair employee-organization relationship, which can potentially drastically reduce the problems that commonly arise in the workplace. SHRM approach increases the levels of trust, encourages collaboration, improves productivity, leads to greater levels of engagement, and facilitates the implementation of creative ideas to achieve organizational goals (Kim & Shin, 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021) ^[26, 48].

5. Summary - Conclusions

It's crucial for organizations to acknowledge that conflicts, burnout, and stress can be influenced by employees' personalities, expectations, perceptions, and organizational operations. These issues can significantly impact the mental health, performance, and commitment of employees. Human Resource Management (HRM) departments play a vital role in managing and preventing these problems to ensure that employees are content, productive, and committed.

HRM staff should possess the necessary expertise to understand the nature and origins of potential workplace problems and effectively address them, ideally preventing them altogether. The primary objective of HRM departments is to establish a positive, healthy, and fair work environment by implementing appropriate policies and procedures that prevent discrimination, harassment, or any other form of mistreatment. Intervention programs should aim to empower employees make them feel secure and provide them with knowledge and skills to effectively manage any challenges that may arise in the workplace.

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