



Supervisor Feedback, Ergonomics and Job Performance: A Study at One of Malaysia's Frontline Government Agency

**Muhamad Khalil Omar^{1*}, Noor Azura Dahalan², Idaya Husna Mohammed³,
Maimunah Mohammed Shah⁴, Nurul Nadiyah Mohammad Azman⁵**

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia, ²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia, ³Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia, ⁴Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia, ⁵Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia. *Email: khalil.omar@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

A well-managed organization usually sees an average worker as the root source of quality and productivity gains. Such organizations do not look to capital investment, but to employees, as the fundamental source of improvement. Therefore, in order to increase employee performance, many factors such as supervisor feedback and ergonomics are very important especially for organization that involves frontline staffs who has to entertain customers all the time. Hence, this study focuses on effect of supervisor feedback and ergonomics towards job performance among employees at one of Malaysia's frontline government agency. The study was quantitatively conducted using standardized questionnaires that was participated by 82 respondents. The results showed that supervisor feedback and ergonomic were significantly and positively impacted job performance. Thus, this study provides references to academics and practitioners on the effectiveness of giving quality feedback and good ergonomically working conditions towards improving performance of frontline staffs.

Keywords: Supervisor Feedback, Ergonomics, Job Performance

JEL Classifications: M54, M12

1. INTRODUCTION

Weaknesses in the public sector have been reported frequently. Many factors can be listed as the cause of this issue such as bureaucracy, incompetent staff, and traditional system of work, poor use of technology, law enforcement, recruitment, productivity and others. So many things need to be done for improvement. To change the main policies and procedures will involve the concern of many parties and factors, including the relatively long period of time. However, small changes or improvement can be made in certain area before management can be excellently evolved. Therefore, in this challenging world with increasing awareness of customers demanding services exceeding expectations have lead the government agency to be ready in strengthening the performance of its delivery system. In Malaysia's public sector, most of the front offices have made numerous improvements

and innovations including better key performance indicators and yearly assessments. Nevertheless instead of focusing towards employee performance to ensure customer satisfaction only, the employee satisfaction is also important in impacting overall organizational performance. Hence the work environment i.e., the processes, systems, structures, tools or conditions in the workplace plays an important requirements that would impact favorably or unfavorably individual performance and productivity.

Therefore, there might be various work environment factors that lead to employee's job performance. Based on the researchers' observation in one of a Malaysia's government agency that provide counter services to the public, there were lack of quality feedbacks given by supervisor to the employees and at the same time the ergonomics criteria such as body postures were not been taken seriously although the staffs sometimes need to work

long hours especially during school holidays and peak seasons. It is very important for the counter service to be given quality feedbacks since it is the main factor in order to maintain and keep improving their job and organization performance. Based on the results of preliminary interviews with some of the staffs in the studied organization, some of them did not received feedback on their performance even during their yearly performance appraisal process although theoretically it actually should be done continuously. In order to motivate and ensure that employees keep good performance, supervisors need to play an active roles by giving some feedback towards what their subordinates had done, no matter it is either positive or negative feedback.

In terms of ergonomics conditions of the studied organization, the researchers' observation found that there were some staffs that did not have their own proper workstations to do their job, instead, some of them used the counter service desk to settle their work when there are no public to attend to since they were needed to attend and provide services to the public for the whole day of working hours. Additionally, based on informal interviews with the frontline staffs, some of them have suffered neck and back pain as well as sore eyes, which might be of poorly designed work furniture and lack of workstations which lead to tiredness. This is because front line staffs were needed to key in data that they received form customers in the computer system that required them to look at the computer screen for long hours. Those situations might be worst when there were high absenteeism and employees who took emergency leave on busy days. So those employees who were available were needed to relief others especially those who attached at the service counter. So based on these problem, this research was focused on employees at the studied organization. The main objective of this study was to investigate on the effects of quality feedback of supervisors and ergonomics element of body posture towards employees' job performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Supervisor Feedback and Job Performance

According to Wolf (2012), feedback usually given to employees by superior or supervisor, and represents an estimate of the employees job performance and efforts in and for the organization. It should be noted that feedback is usually displayed and discussed among two or more people. Employees who receive more feedback from their supervisor will be more likely to know the standards of good performance, to believe that performing well will lead to desired rewards, and be more likely to use feedback to improve their own performance (Steelman et al., 2004). The value and importance of feedback to direct and motivate behavior is well known. Meaningful feedback can be used to guide, motivate and reinforce effective behaviors and put a halt to ineffective behaviors. Negative feedback, indicating one's job performance is not meeting expectations, is clearly of developmental value to an individual and of strategic value to organizations. Supervisors have a primary responsibility for making and communicating organizational decisions to their subordinates. Thus, they exert greater influence and power, especially in the arena of dispensing organizational rewards and punishments (Steelman et al., 2004). Employees must be satisfied enough with their job and try to create

good relationship with the supervisor by listening and take an action on some feedback given by them on the job that had been done in order to achieved high job performance.

It stated that supervisors might collect a number of specific behaviors to support feedback processes in the organization, where it might lead to an enhanced manager and subordinate relationship and satisfaction (Anseel et al., 2007). Anseel et al. (2007) also found that perceptions of feedback accuracy (i.e. acceptance) were positively related to employees' intentions to use feedback for improving job performance. Other than that, there are only 50% of those who received feedbacks were capable of displaying job-improvement after feedback session given by the supervisor. If the person is not able to accept comments and critique, he or she is bound to suffer from setbacks, feeling of helplessness, and bitter disappointment that will interfere with his or her work in the future (Wolf, 2012). Therefore the following hypothesis is derived:

H_1 ; Supervisor feedback has a significant positive effect towards job performance.

2.2. Ergonomics and Job Performance

Based on a study done by Wilson (2000), ergonomics is the theoretical and fundamental understanding of human behavior and performance in purposeful interacting sociotechnical systems, and the application of that understanding to design of interactions in the context of real settings. Ergonomics is derived from the combination of two Greek words *ergon* (work) and *nomos* (natural laws). It is a discipline involving arrangement of work environment to fit the people in it. The ergonomic process is basically aimed at prevention of work place illness and development of best possible workplace design. Ergonomics is concerned with designing jobs by integrating socio-technical factors of the job and characteristics of job holder. It is the science of balancing between employees and the work they do. It provides a safer and comfortable workplace solution for amplified efficiency and improved productivity. The principles of ergonomics are being used to improve man machine system so that an employee can perform the job successfully. In a workplace, human characteristics must match the machines, tools and furniture that people have to use. Ergonomics demands innovative thinking to provide comfort to employees. Adapting the design of furniture to people sizes and shapes and considering employees' physical strengths and weaknesses while designing workstations, also come under the purview of ergonomics (Ramesh and Munirathinam, 2011).

It is even more important when referring to the performance of work, for improving the ergonomics of a workplace is not just a matter of changing one component. Since it is people, not machines, who do the work it is a matter of seeking a match between the workers objectives, the equipment and the work environment. According to Finna (2010), ergonomics is based on the connection between the employee and its work environment. Work environment consists of different areas, such as the actual physical environment (including temperature, lighting, noise, equipment in the office, the employee's personal space and right posture), the psychological and social environment (such as labor demand, personal connections, work relationships, the physical

and psychological characteristics of the employee) and it also includes the effects of how work is organized and what tasks are delegated. A well-developed office - which suits the employees' needs can contribute to higher work performance. A strategic ergonomic approach can optimize human well-being and on the whole system performance. Whereby for example, continuous work with the computer may expose soft tissues in these areas to repetition, awkward postures and forceful exertions especially when workstations are not properly setup long hours of exposure to computers and wrong postures may cause eye strain, neck and shoulder pain and headache to employees. Sitting long hours in the office and uncomfortable furniture will naturally worsen their health problems. Workstations that do not fit the employees can cause musculoskeletal disorders to them.

Many employers today are not going to make the facilities easily available to every employee in the workplace; however, it is the duty of the authorities at the controls of affairs to ensure that the principles of ergonomics are applied in the best possible way to minimize the employees' health problems. According to Corlett (2009), it is even more important when referring to the performance of work, for improving the ergonomics of a workplace is not just a matter of changing one component. Since it is people, not machines, who do the work it is a matter of seeking a match between the workers objectives, the equipment and the work environment. For example, it is an immediately evident that, a seated computer keyboard operator must maintain a static posture of back, neck and arm to do the job. In addition to this, Makhbul et al. (2008) also advised and asserted that working in the same position for prolonged periods is unhealthy. For example, sitting still for hours, no matter how good, neutral and comfortable the working posture is will only cause too much pressure on the intervertebral discs.

Based on Davies (2003), to allow business to function with more people in less space, creative design solutions are needed. Good office design also helps to change organizational culture and improve the job performance of employees. An ergonomically office environment can probably increasing efficiency, productivity, and performance in the organization (Fritsher-Porter, 2003). Based on Hameed and Amjad (2009), where in a study survey of 31 bank branches showed that comfortable and ergonomic office design motivates the employees and increased their performance substantially. On the other hand, conducted studies certify this reality that using ergonomics is effective in improving quality of work life and performance, decrease in musculoskeletal disorders and increase in productivity and in attention to high differences of using ergonomics among developed and developing countries (Scott, 2008). Therefore the following hypothesis is derived:

H₁: Ergonomics has a significant positive effect towards job performance. All the hypotheses derived earlier are illustrated in a research framework as per Figure 1.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project uses a causal study which allows us to investigate the relationship between the independent variables,

supervisor feedback and ergonomics and the dependent variables, job performance. The outcomes of the study are analyzed based on individual level. Personally administered questionnaires were utilized during this study. This allows better control and monitoring of the questionnaires, other than helping to obtain a higher return rate. The sampling technique chosen for this study is convenience sampling. All measurements used in this study were adopted from previous researchers i.e., job performance (8-item) from Borman and Motowildo (1993) and Gellatly et al. (2006), supervisor feedback (5-item) from Steelman et al. (2004) and Ergonomics (body posture – 8-item) from Makhbul et al. (2008).

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

For the demographic profile of respondents, 40% (33) respondents are male and 60% (49) respondents are female. This might be because of government intake for female workers are more than male. This indicates that female employees are dominant in this government agency. The result shows that 46% (38) of respondents are 30-49 years old followed by 31% (25) of respondent in range of age 18-29 years old and 23% (19) respondents of 50 years and above. The highest number of respondent comes from age range between 30 and 49 years; it may be because they have the intention to permanently work there until retirement. Second highest, for those who age range from 18 to 29 years, usually at these range of age, they are still young, able and qualified to search for new job at other place. It is known that 80% (66) respondent are married while another 19% (16) of respondents are single. This result shows that the largest group of the employees at this agency were already married.

The findings for all variables indicate a good reliability i.e. job performance indicates at 0.854, followed by ergonomics at 0.693 and lastly supervisor feedback at 0.687. Noted that, according to Table 1, the job performance acquires reliability above 0.8 which is very good, while both ergonomics and supervisor feedback acquire above 0.6 which is moderate. It shows that the entire questions are reliable, acceptable and sufficient for this study. Table 1 also shows that there is significant relationship between job performance and Supervisor feedback at the 0.000 significant levels and it is the highest correlation rather the other variable (significant 0.732)

Figure 1: Research framework

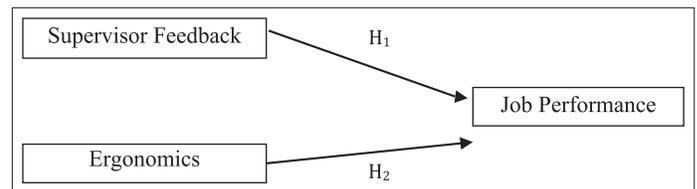


Table 1: Correlation analysis

Variable	Mean	Job performance	Supervisor feedback	Ergonomics
Job performance	5.09	(0.854)		
Supervisor feedback	4.87	0.732**	(0.687)	
Ergonomic	5.03	0.636**	0.386**	(0.693)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed); Entries in parenthesis indicate Cronbach alpha values

Table 2: Regression analysis

Model	Dependent variable: Job performance				Significant
	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	-0.389	0.495		-0.786	0.434
Supervisor feedback	0.590	0.061	0.648	9.722	0.000
Ergonomics	0.556	0.100	0.372	5.587	0.000
F value	79.351				
Significant	0.000				
Adjusted R ²	0.336				
R ²	0.363				

followed by the second highest correlation which is ergonomics (significant 0.636). From the data extracted, the variable job performance is achieved at a significant contribution towards dependent variable. It also shows that all the variables have connection to one another. The correlation between supervisor feedback and job performance are in a very strong relationship. While the correlation between ergonomics and job performance is in a strong relationship.

According to Table 2, the model explains that there is approximately 36.3% ($R^2 = 0.363$) of the variance in the job performance. The significant values (significant) of the independent variables (supervisor feedback and ergonomics) are <0.05 . This indicates that all predictor variables in the model have significant impacts on the employee job performance. The coefficients of each factor that contributed to the predicted scores using the equation of model of job performance = $-0.389 + 0.590$ (supervisor feedback) + 0.556 (ergonomics). Table 2 also shows a statistical measure that attempts to determine the strength of the relationship between one dependent variable (job performance) and a series of other changes variables (supervisor feedback and ergonomics). From this equation, supervisor feedback ($b = 0.648$, $P < 0.002$) and ergonomics ($b = 0.372$, $P < 0.002$) was found to be the independent variable with significant impact on job performance. This hypothesis 1 and 2 are supported. From this analysis also, the researcher found that supervisor feedback is the strong factor that effect employees job performance at this government agency with the highest beta 0.648.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The researcher found out that there is a significant correlation between feedback and job performance. It is because Pearson correlation (r) score state as $r = 0.832$, $n = 82$, $P < 0.001$. From the data it is clearly showed that supervisor feedbacks have a very strong relationship with job performance and it also clearly proves that supervisor feedback does lead to job performance among employees of a government frontline department. The research found that it is clearly shows that ergonomics had a strong relationship towards job performance because Pearson correlation (r) score for this variables state as $r = 0.559$, $n = 82$, $P < 0.001$. It also prove that ergonomics do effects job performance among employees. From the result, researcher indicates that supervisor feedback is the primary factor with the result show that the correlation coefficient Pearson correlation (r) score state as $r = 0.832$, $n = 82$, $P < 0.001$ rather than ergonomics with the

score states as $r = 0.559$, $n = 82$, $P < 0.001$, which is lower than supervisor feedback score. Thus, the study that investigates the effects of supervisor feedback and ergonomics, where if individual receive feedback and work in a good environment (ergonomics), their job performance also will increase, and *viz.*

On the other hand, there are some recommendations that are worth mentioning. Firstly, feedback has been recognized as the factor that influences employee's job performance. In order for the organization to increase job performance among the employees, this factor needs to be taken into deep consideration especially on how to improve it. One way that might improve feedback system is by improving the communication skills of the supervisors or managers by giving related training to them. Besides, it is very important to the organization to provide comfortable working environment in order to increase the sense of employees job performance especially regarding the matter of supervisory and relationship among workers. Secondly, for ergonomics, management should be aware on the office work environment and safety in order to ensure all employees can do their job efficiently in comfortable work environment. Management may try to expose the employees towards 5S program, give a talk or courses regarding ergonomics awareness and so on. Other than that, management can use creativity by create a sticker note regarding ergonomics at every PC at employees workstation to make them aware of the importance of ergonomic towards themselves. In the future research, it is suggested for future researcher to explore and look at others factors that affect employees performance in the public or private sector since this study had done the research on supervisor feedbacks and ergonomics. Even though quantitative research was conducted and was suitable for this study, it is suggested that qualitative research should be conducted for future research because it would allow for better understanding of employees perceptions and views as well as the organizational and wider context in which they work.

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