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Pandemic; Employee; Work Behaviour;
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Abbreviations

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibilities

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How Stress of Pandemic Shaped Employee Work Behaviours

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Abstract

The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have extended from the business segments to individual employees, who are found to experience job stress that resulted in demolishing work behaviour. Nevertheless, CSR is found to be an effective means to mediate the negative effect. This provides a breakthrough precaution strategy to management against crisis and further justifies the investment in CSR. The current paper serves as a research note that provides the framework of the research study.

Introduction

To confront the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world have imposed stringent entry and transportation measures that have resulted in a significant effect on businesses. The gambling industry that depends highly on visitors is amongst the ones that experienced the most colossal strike. To maintain the continuity of business, companies have imposed varying practices to reduce the cost and expenses, most of which will impact the employees [1]. When employees observed the non-welcoming conditions of their work, they may alter their professional convictions and suffer from job insecurity [2]. Such impacts can be long-term and merit considerations for advanced exploration. There are limited studies on how stress affects work behaviours and what factors can mediate the negative influence of stress on behaviour. The current study was thus carried out to investigate how employees are affected during the pandemic in terms of stress and work behaviours and to identify potential mediators on the effects of stress. Quantitative method of survey was applied and more than 800 completed questionnaires from participants working in the service industries were collected. It was found that the work behaviour of employees was significantly affected by the pandemic, while employees did value the commitment of their company in exercising Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR).

Work Behaviour and Job Satisfaction

Behaviours are shaped by rehashing rituals over time and work behaviour are developed through both time and practice (Verplanken & Melkevik, 2008). Original habits are always indestructible until one is aware of the danger approaching [3]. However, when the existing habits are deemed too risky or costly, people will attempt to break the status quo and change their habits [4]. Changes usually result from the stress produced by a great happening, where people no longer find maintaining a behaviour worthwhile (Youngblood, 1984). Stressful employees will change their work behaviour to avoid responsibility and reduce their involvement in work [5], which will affect their job performance. Job satisfaction is a subjective experience that can be categorized into affective, cognitive and behavioural components [6]. It can come from appraisals of the job; when work stress can be the results of heavy workload [7]. Work stress was found to reduce the level of job satisfaction [8]. Past literatures revealed that job satisfaction will bring upon more cooperative and citizenship behaviours.

Corporate Social Responsibility

As one of the major stakeholders, employees are generally in favour of CSR actions [9]. CSR is a key driver of employee engagement that is paramount to the success of an organization through an increase in productivity and internal reputation, while decreasing attrition [10]. CSR is a bond between the corporate and employees. Many companies have understood that sustainable success relies on employees' approval of the company's socially responsible performance [11]. They praise themselves as a morally-based organization in society. They emphasize the significant role of CSR in the service delivery chain in sight of the principle [12] that satisfied employees (internal customer) serve satisfied customers (i.e., external customer). From the employees' view, CSR refers to perceived corporate behaviours, which are beyond the organizational profit and regulatory requirements, to mainly fulfil stakeholders' basic economic expectations, maintain legal and ethical work environments, and obtain career prestige and welfare care [13]. It is defined as organizational acts focusing on the best interest of the people and society. Those acts will meet the needs and mission of the organization without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Past literature found that job stress and CSR impose opposite effects on the job habits of employees.

Methodology and Findings

The current study was part of a larger research when the quantitative survey was utilized. The data collection was carried out within employees of the service industries in hybrid mode for a period four weeks. The collected data was processed through three rounds of data cleaning and the ultimate analysis included more than 800 completed surveys. The questionnaire included eight areas that covered 105 items, when the scales were developed based on past literatures. For the part on work behaviour, preventive measures summarized in Smith (2006) were utilized with the additional of preventive measures that were broadly embraced due to the pandemic. The data was analysed by SPSS version 26 and process. The final measurement model has excluded six of the habits that were made mandatory as precaution measures to avoid bias, and four habits that either had factor scoring below the threshold or did not have significant casual relationships with the independent latent variables. The data accomplished a high Cronbach alpha at 0.88. Results on stress from the pandemic were consistent



between the varying sample segments, except for the category denoting very severe impact when significant difference is found at $p < .01$. This result reflected that work behaviour of service industry employees did alter when the work was influenced at the extreme level. At those times, employees were aware of the hazard of losing their work. Subsequently, they feel the need to alter their work behaviour. The majority of the employees in the service industry were found to be affected by the pandemic. Amongst the seven influences identified from the industry, most employees have suffered from periodic no-pay leave (45.9%), followed by decrease in salary (27.5%), loaded with additional work (20.9%), decrease in fringe benefits (19.6%), forced to take long leave without pay (13.4%), assigned to work in other departments (4.6%) and worsened peer relations (4%). These influences, which would affect the living standard, increased monetary pressure. Results indicated that stress had a significant negative correlation with job satisfaction ($r = -.215, p < .01$) and exerted direct negative effects on it ($\beta = -.195, p < .001$). This showed employees had lower job satisfaction when the level of stress increased.

Expected Contributions

The findings demonstrated the particular circumstances that employees would more likely alter their work behaviour. For company that battles the fortification of preventive measures among the employees, the management ought to put in effects to communicate the dangers of the business to the workforce, so they can visualize or made mindful of the potential destructive results. In doing so, employees may be more willing to comply with the new required work behaviour. The findings also illustrated that employees value the commitment of their company in fulfilling the CSR, likely because it reflects the initiatives which their company is taking to make positive contributions. This finding further justify the investment in CSR, when the focus of returns in past studies are mostly in qualitative means and reflected in the long-term. Management should take note that it is essential to incorporate CSR into the internal training program or internal information sharing as part of the pre-crisis preparation. The delivery of the importance of their initiatives in CSR fulfilment would help increase the awareness and appreciation of the value of CSR among the employees if crises happen. It is significantly beneficial in helping corporates to get through the crisis by raising employees' morale to defend against the crisis. Downplaying the value of CSR is therefore short-sighted. If the corporates still try their best to take their responsibilities, they are likely to realise a united working atmosphere. This paper serves as a research note that intends to bring upon on the importance to investigate the undesirable effects of work stress due to the pandemic on employee behaviour. It also demonstrated the potential to utilize CSR as an effective strategic tool to mediate the effect, when the value on the implementation of CSR was broadened from merely an improvement in company image to a beneficial investment that can stabilize the emotional status of internal employees.

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