

A RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE MONITORING AND JOB STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Employee monitoring activities are becoming increasingly widespread with the technological opportunities that are developing day by day. Organizations are monitoring their employees' performances, behaviors and personal attributes at any time and as often as they like, using very different methods. Organizations perform monitoring activities by setting reasons such as security, justice, legal obligations, quality and productivity improvement. This situation causes problems such as decreasing privacy, motivation, performance and health in the organizations. Being watched and evaluated by a couple of eyes can disturb the employees, and create work stress on them. The aim of this study is to reveal the perceptions of employees towards workplace monitoring, and examine the relationship between workplace monitoring and job stress. In this context, the application was carried out in companies operating in Denizli. A total of 218 questionnaires were received from the employees of the companies. The results obtained were analyzed in the SPSS program and then, were evaluated.

Keywords: *Monitoring, Workplace Monitoring, Job Stress*

INTRODUCTION

The activities to monitor workplaces and employees in the organizations are becoming increasingly widespread with the technological opportunities that are developing every day. Organizations can monitor employees' performance, behaviors, and personal attributes as often as they want by using a variety of methods. Organizations perform monitoring activities by setting reasons such as security, justice, legal obligations, quality and productivity improvement. This situation causes problems such as decreasing the privacy, motivation, performance and health in the organizations. Monitoring activities carried out by organizations can create job stress on the employees. Nowadays, the causes of stress and the effects of stress by nature are intense, so they are considered as epidemic diseases. More than 40 million employees in the EU are faced with the stress problem, and one of every three employees is having health problems due to working under stress. The cost of the stress problem reaches 20 billion euros a year.

We encounter elements that create stress in all area of our life. There are many stressful factors in our job where we spend most of the day. It is disturbing the employees to be watched and evaluated by a pair of eyes. And trying to achieve certain targets at limited time causes the stress in humans. It is a serious source of stress when the system is not fair and reliable, and there is a discrimination among employees, and the evaluation results are not evaluated in

promised areas. This living stress can affect the physical and mental health of the employees in a negative way, and can lead to negative behaviors in private life, and in the life of the organizations. Beside all of these, there is also a certain level of stress that motivates employees, provides a sense of purpose and goal, energizes and boosts self confidence in the workplace. Therefore, we must not always perceive stress as something negative.

CONCEPTUAL BASIS

Workplace Monitoring

Workplace and employee monitoring constitutes a dimension of a surveillance activity in a broader sense. Employees, customers, and even the entire community can enter the scope of surveillance, which means that a small number of people are watching a large number of people (Erdemir, 2008). In traditional sense, the supervision activities conducted by the managers in order to supervise and manage the employees have become a monitoring activity with developing technological facilities. Monitoring of the workplace and employees in terms of today's applications can be defined as the collection, analysis and reporting of the information on the activities or performances of one or more employees via electronic hardware and software (Alder et al., 2005).

Workplace monitoring is not a new practice in the sense that the organizations try to obtain information in a variety of ways about themselves and the employees for various purposes. About a hundred years ago, Henry Ford was in the process of monitoring employees on the production line for the purpose of rationalizing their lives outside the work. However, the opportunities provided by today's developing technology, and the diversity of the threats they have caused, have made the workplace monitoring more and more intense. A limited amount of the information about employees could be collected in the past. But today, more information about employees can be reached much more quickly. Despite the fact that in the previous period, employees were generally aware of when they were being monitored, today's technology has evolved to the point where the employees can also be monitoring outside the workplace (Erdemir, 2008).

Workplace Monitoring Methods and Its Causes

The main reasons for monitoring workplaces include ensuring the efficient use of the organization's resources, enhancing the quality and the customers' satisfaction, ensuring the employees and the company's information and property, preventing crime, collecting data for planning and performance, and pursuing a number of abuses (Cozzetto et al., 1997). The reasons we have mentioned are confronted by the reasons seen and evaluated by the viewpoint of the employees evaluating the workplace monitoring. The results such as intervention in their private life, the increase of managerial pressure, the negative influence on the employees' motivations, the increase of intention to leave the job, and the job stress are all on the agenda (Townsend, 2005).

The methods that organizations use for monitoring workplaces include monitoring computers, recording activities in the workplace by video camera, listening to phone calls or office spying, reading letters, search offices, tracking e-mails, and monitoring movements in the building. It is known that the important parts of the organizations are performing workplace monitoring



activities. The most intensive monitoring activity is known as e-mail and computer monitoring, and it is known that the ratio is 60% (Mishra et al., 1998).

The Workplace Monitoring Results

Workplace monitoring activities have different meanings in terms of the organizations and employees' points of view. Considering the results of monitoring the workplace, different discussions can be made. It is known that the workplace monitoring activity differs from the employee's privacy, and therefore different legal arrangements have been made (Table 1).

Table 1. Regulations Regarding Workplace Monitoring of Different Countries

| | Listening to phone call | Monitoring by video camera | Monitoring of e-posta | Monitoring of internet access |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| USA | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Free | Free |
| Germany | Depend on a permission | Forbidden | No regulation | No regulation |
| Australia | Forbidden | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission |
| Belgium | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | No regulation | No regulation |
| Finland | Forbidden | Forbidden | Forbidden | Forbidden |
| France | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission |
| Holland | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission |
| England | Depend on a permission | No regulation | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission |
| Sweden | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | No regulation | No regulation |
| Italy | Depend on a permission | Depend on a permission | Forbidden | Forbidden |

There are studies advocating that workplace monitoring is only a managerial tool, while workplace monitoring activities have negative effects on employees such as morale, motivation, performance, job satisfaction and job stress (D'urso, 2006; Bradley, 2004). Another point of view is that the workplace monitoring activity is a right and inevitable necessity when it is evaluated by the organization owners. Because of this, it seems that the business owners and employees have contrasting ideas about workplace monitoring. However, there are some arguments that declare the workplace monitoring activities should be examined in every aspect. These arrangements could be favorable for both sides, and the work done by developing an approach in this respect would be more productive for both sides (Townsend, 2005; Wen et al., 2005).

The results of the studies have shown that the workplace monitoring activities vary depending on what perspective you are looking at. From an organizational point of view, workplace monitoring seems to be a right and a necessity, whereas when viewed from the point of view of the employees, it seems to be a violation of privacy. The most constructive conclusions have been made to carry out workplace monitoring by making arrangements that could be favorable for both sides.



Stress

There are many definitions that express the concept of the stress. The concept of the stress first introduced by Hans Selye in 1930 who defined it as 'a mental and physical movement and the reaction of an individual in order to provide necessary adaptation against any physical and psychological stimulants' (Baltaş et al., 2004; Eren, 2004). Eroğlu (2000) describes the word stress as a rough and harsh effect that is caused by physiological and pathological agents on the organism. Cox (1996) defined stress as 'a mediating and threatening part of a complex and dynamic interaction system between the individual and the individual's environment'. According to another definition, stress is a sign of danger for people's well-being, a physiological and biological response that is perceived as warning, and is therefore not evident and undefined in the events that are handled inadequately (Klarreich, 1999). Eren (2004) refers to stress as a concept that affects individuals and their behavior, work efficiency, and the relationships with other people. However, with its simplest and clearest expression, stress is a force that makes the individual give up or respond to a need, and at the same time from the inside or outside of the individual, it leads to tension and depression (Başaran,1982: 218).

Stress is considered as a bi-directional concept. In addition to being negative, there is also a positive aspect of it. Stress has a positive side which motivates the individuals, acts on behalf of seeking, working and creating new ones, that is enhancing their performance, which is called a positive stress. However, it is also stated that this positive aspect of stress is related to its level (Baltaş et al., 2004, Işıksan 2004). Signs of useful stress can be ranked as job satisfaction, positive attitudes towards work and life, volunteering to listen to others, smiling, applying the knowledge, the creativity and high productivity (Polat, 2008). Accordingly, the concept of stress in the scientific sense, like encountering the negative factors, can also include changes in the organism's positive life events that it is exposed to (Eroğlu, 2000).

Stress which is a concept that is almost used by everybody in everyday life, is a situation that its existence has been felt since the days the human beings were created, despite the increased works or studies done in recent years. The difficult, competitive and overworked industrial life of the 21st century has led to a more pronounced stress factor at work and has become a major threat to people (Cartwright et al.,1997).

Job Stress

Today, an individual working in an organization spends most of his time in a business environment. In this environment, besides fulfilling the duties expected from him, he communicates with other people in the organization and tries to adapt to the values and norms of the organization. These processes require the employee to demonstrate a strong adaptation effort, which reveals the concept of job stress in the organization. As in the various definitions of stress, different definitions have been made about job stress. One of these includes the worries that the employees experience in connection with their work life which constitutes the job stress (Eren, 2004). In another definition, the job stress is a situation that occurs with the limitations of an individual's ability, physical or psychological factors which create tension in an individual (Clegg, 2001).

Individuals may be exposed to stress due to the circumstances surrounding them, the opportunities they face, and the physical or psychological demands. A simple definition of job stress is defined as the interaction of the individual with the environment (Luthans, 1995). In today's management approaches where human being is more important, the psychological



situation experienced by the employees, the attitudes of the employees towards their jobs, and the other employees they work with, are influential in the management of the organization. In this respect, it is an inevitable necessity to determine the sources of stress and find solutions.

Job Stress Sources

The sources of stress in the workplace are situations that cause beneficial or harmful consequences, change the situation of the individual, activate the methods of coping with internal or external circumstances (Sullivan, 2001). The sources of work stress can be grouped under three main headings (Ataman, 2001).

Job Specific Stress Sources: includes physical working conditions, time pressure and limitations, overload and liability, lack of personnel, working time and non-standard working hours, salary, status, prestige and job changes (Sullivan 2001). This can be explained by the desire to do more than the amount of work a person can do, the very different work to be done at a certain time, and the fact that the work to be done is physically heavy and exhausting. However, the dangers that the employees are exposed to when doing their job are also a significant source of stress. Normally, there is no or only a minimum level of danger in some of the jobs. But in some jobs, the probability of a job accident is relatively high. Employees who work in jobs where the dangerous situations are a concern, are forced to work with all their attention because of fear and tension (Eroğlu, 2000).

Organizational Stress Sources: These can be grouped into four groups.

- Related to the role; role uncertainty, role conflict and pressure, level of control over work, responsibility for people or objects (Eroğlu, 2000).
- Related to the working group; lack of group support, insufficiency of group support, intra-group and inter-group conflict, pressure to force group cohesion.
- Related to the organizational structure and airspace; lack of the effective counseling of the institution or department, lack of the support from the managers or feeling of pressure, job insecurity, monotony, unequal payment, little use of skills, qualitative and quantitative labor conflict, difficulty in transferring responsibility.
- Related to the professional development; overdevelopment, underdevelopment, lack of job security, obstruction of competitor, success and status incompatibility (Bumin et al., 2000).
- Outside Job Life Stress Sources: Depressed life style, stressful life events due to various stressors, requests of husband, children and their families from working women (Baillon et al., 1999).

Individual Specific Stress Sources: Interaction between work and individual traits, age, education, occupation, gender, health status, level of need, personality structure, tolerance of uncertainty, ability to cope with changes and motivation can be included in this group (Eroğlu, 2000).

Studies on Workplace Monitoring and Job Stress

It is also the case that the workplace monitoring activity has negative effects on the employees. For example, in a study by Botan (1996) on workplace monitoring and the effects on the employees, the employees who feel themselves more under supervision than their colleagues have experienced a loss of job stress, along with an increase in uncertainty in the workplace, and a decrease in communication.



In Aiello's work (1993), it is stated that the workplace monitoring activity has changed the balance of power between the employer and the employee in favor of the employer. The workplace monitoring activity does not only change the power relations, but also argues that the nature of social relations changes depending on how technology is used.

The study by Alder and Tompkins (1997) showed that workplace monitoring activities resulted in reduced privacy and ethical negative consequences for privacy violations. It also indicated that the stress creates tension on employees, and naturally make them stressed out. However, it has been determined that the workplace monitoring activity forces employees to sacrifice the quality and service, which negatively affects the productivity and quality.

Moorman and Wells (2003), stated that the over-emphasis on the continuous monitoring and monitoring results, takes the job control from the employees and gives it to the manager. If the employees are not consulted, and the information is not provided while the monitoring activity is being carried out, some problems can be made between the employees and the managers. In the face of this situation, employees perceive that this action, which is made without consultation or without informing them, is caused by the lack of confidence in the management itself, and naturally such negativities increase tension and stress in employees.

It has been seen that the workplace monitoring has created a tension between the employers' right to control the working conditions and circumstances and the employee's privacy. The continuous monitoring and increased work pressure can lead to work stress and stress-related health problems, the decreased morale and motivation. And the data collected by the employer can be used for punishment.

METHODOLOGY

Today, there is an intense competition in all the sectors. All the organizations keep making innovations continuously, strengthen their technology more and more, and save big sources. In this study, the tendencies of workplace monitoring activities and the job stresses they cause, have been examined. The method used, and the sample, scale and findings obtained in the study, are given below.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between the workers' perceptions of workplace monitoring activities and the job stress. In this study, it has been tried to determine the relationship between the workplace monitoring activities, and the related variables depending on the positive or negative perceptions of the employees.

Sample and Data Collection

The research was conducted in companies in different sectors operating in the province of Denizli. A sample method was used to collect the research data, and a total of 218 questionnaires were obtained. It was decided that the most effective method of collecting data was the questionnaire. After the selection of the questionnaire method, a questionnaire was prepared. The first part of the questionnaire was related to the workplace monitoring and the scale created by Oz et al. (1999) and the reliability tests were carried out in the country by Erdemir & Koç (2006). The second part of the questionnaire was related to the job stress and the scale created by Cohen and Williamson (1991) and the reliability tests were carried out in the country by Baltaş and Baltaş (2004). By using the questionnaire, it was aimed to determine



the relationship between the attitudes of the employees towards the workplace monitoring situation and the job stress. In the final section, there were questions to learn about the personal characteristics of the employees such as position, gender, age, education status and working time in order to obtain the participants' demographic data. The results of the study were analyzed in the SPSS program and explained in the findings.

Hypothesis

The research hypotheses were developed and created by considering that the workplace monitoring activities would have negative effects on the employees causing work stress on them. In this context, supportive studies have also been available in the literature (D'Urso, 2006; Bradley, 2004). The hypothesis in this case is as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the negative perception of the workplace monitoring activity and the work stress.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE EVALUATION

In this section, the characteristics of sampling are given first. However, the reliability of the questionnaire forms has been tested. Finally, the findings that reveal the relationship between workplace monitoring and job stress are given.

Demographic Findings on the Employee

As a result of the questionnaire survey, a total of 218 valid questionnaire forms were obtained. The statistical results of the control variables of the questionnaires, in other words the demographic data, are given in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table 2. Demographic Findings

| Variables | | N | % | Variables | | N | % |
|--------------|------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----------|--------------|------|------|
| Gender | Male | 128 | 59,0 | Age | 25 and below | 28 | 13,0 |
| | Female | 90 | 41,0 | | 26-35 | 83 | 38,0 |
| Education | High School | 100 | 45,9 | | 36-45 | 79 | 36,2 |
| | Vocational High School | 37 | 17,2 | | 46+ | 28 | 12,8 |
| | Undergraduate | 70 | 32,0 | Positon | Worker | 159 | 73,0 |
| Postgraduate | 11 | 4,9 | Medium level manager | | 43 | 19,6 | |
| | | | | | Top manager | 16 | 7,4 |
| Total | | 218 | 100 | Total | | 218 | 100 |

When the demographic information about the employees participated in the research was gathered, it was observed that the majority of them were males with 128 (59.0%), the number of females were 90 (41.0%). When the educational backgrounds of the employees participated in the research were examined, 100 (45.9%) of them graduated from high school, 37 (17.2%) were vocational graduates, 70 (32.0%) were undergraduates, 11 (4.9%) were postgraduates. The majority of them including 159 (73.0%) of the participants were workers, 43 (19.6%) were medium level managers, and 16 (7.4%) were top managers.



Table 3. Average and Range Values of Age, Work Experience and Work Experience at the Same Position

| Variable | Average | Range |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Age | 32,08 | 23 - 52 |
| Work Experience | 7,92 | 1 - 28 |
| Work Experience at the Same Position | 5,07 | 1 - 22 |

It was determined that the average age of the workers participating in the survey was 32,08, and the age of the employees was between 23 and 52 years. The total work experience of the employees ranged from 1 year to 28 years, and when the work experiences of the employees participating in the survey were evaluated, it was determined that the average work experience was 7.92 years. When the employees participating in the survey were evaluated in terms of their work experience in the same position, it has been seen that that was between 1 to 22 years, and the average experience was 5.07 years.

Sectoral Findings

The study was carried out in different sectors and companies. Information on the related sectors and companies is given in the following table.

Table 4. Sectoral Findings

| Variables | | N | % | Variables | | N | % |
|-----------|---------|---|------|---------------|-------------|---|------|
| Sector | Paper | 2 | 13.4 | Company Scale | Small | 2 | 13.4 |
| | Glass | 1 | 6.6 | | Medium | 9 | 60.0 |
| | Textile | 6 | 40.0 | | Large | 4 | 26.6 |
| | Marble | 4 | 26.6 | Company Age | 1-5 years | 1 | 6.6 |
| | Food | 2 | 13.4 | | 6-10 years | 3 | 20.0 |
| | | | | | 11-16 years | 6 | 40.0 |
| | | | | | 16-20years | 5 | 33.4 |

Considering the sectoral findings about the research, it has been seen that 40.0% textile, 26.6% marble, 13.4% paper, 13.4% food and 6.6% glass sectors were investigated in the research. 60% of the companies in the study were medium scaled, 26.6% were big scaled. Also, when the age of the companies were evaluated, a significant rate, i.e. 73% of them have 11 years and above, and 27% have 1-10 years old.

The Reliability of the Questionnaires

The scales used to measure the workplace monitoring and the job stress were tested for the reliability. Eight questions on the workplace monitoring scale, and 15 questions on the job stress scale did not raise any questions providing the expected reliability levels. The scales used to measure workplace monitoring and the job stress cases were subjected to the reliability test, and the scales provided a level of reliability. For this reason, no question was raised on the scales. The results of reliability analysis for these scales are given in the following tables.

Table 5. Workplace Monitoring and Job Stress Questionnaires, Reliability Results, Mean and Standard Deviation Values

| | Number of Questions | Mean | Standart Deviation | Alpha |
|----------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|-------|
| Workplace monitoring | 8 | 3,25 | 0,829 | 0,743 |
| Job Stress | 15 | 2,29 | 0,470 | 0,745 |

It can be seen that the table above has an acceptable value for the research, because the alpha value of the reliability coefficients for workplace monitoring and work stress is above 0.6.

Result of the Correlation Between Workplace Monitoring and the Job Stress

The following table shows the correlation analysis that reveals the relationship between workplace monitoring activity and the job stress.

Table 6. The Correlation Variables Between the Workplace Monitoring and the Job Stress

| | | Workplace Monitoring | Job Stress |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Workplace Monitoring | Pearson Correlation | 1 | ,088 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | ,335 |
| Job Stress | Pearson Correlation | ,088 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,335 | |

Evaluating the results of the correlation analysis conducted in order to reveal the relation between workplace monitoring and the job stress cases, pearson's correlation coefficient was 0,088 which was close to 0, indicating that the relationship between the two variables was very weak. In addition, the significant value of 0,335 which was higher than 0,05 indicated that there was no linear relationship between the two variables.

The Result of Regression Between the Workplace Monitoring and the Job Stress

In the regression analysis, workplace monitoring was considered as an independent variable, and the job stress was taken as a dependent variable. Table 7 shows the results of the regression analysis between the workplace monitoring and the job stress.

Table 7. Regression Variables Between Workplace Monitoring and Job Stress

| Independent Variables | B Values | Standart Deviation | Beta Values | t Values | Alpha |
|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|-------------|----------|-------|
| Constant | 2,132 | ,173 | | 12,315 | ,000 |
| Workplace Monitoring | ,050 | ,052 | ,088 | ,967 | ,335 |

Dependent Variable: Job Stress

When the test results for the significance of the regression coefficients were examined, it has been seen that the workplace monitoring does not have a significant determination on the job stress. These results indicated that the hypothesis that considered a positive relationship between the negative perceptions of the workplace monitoring and the job stress was not



accepted, and was not significant. This means that the negative perceptions of workplace monitoring did not cause job stress and the hypothesis was rejected.

Considering the descriptive statistics, it has been observed that the average answers about the workplace monitoring were done with 3.25 value which was the average of the responses given to the workplace monitoring. In addition, it was appeared that the results of the monitoring can be obtained considering the employees' privacy. However, when the average of the responses to job stress was taken into consideration, it was found that the sense of work stress was rarely perceived, with a value of 2.29.

CONCLUSION

In this research it was aimed to reveal the levels of the perceptions, and the job stress of the employees at workplace monitoring activities, and the relationship between these concepts. In this context, parallel to the literature, the hypothesis that "there is a positive relationship between negative perceptions of workplace monitoring and job stress" was examined by considering that the monitoring activities performed in the workplaces were negatively perceived by the employees, and that this negative perception resulted in the job stress.

Regarding the results obtained by the employees participating in the study, the management considers that the monitoring can be carried out within the organization, and the workplace monitoring activity can increase productivity, and there can be positive consequences such as preventing theft and abuse at work. However, a significant majority of the respondents who attended the survey thought monitoring can harm the privacy of the employees, and may affect the morale and motivation of the employees in a negative way and decrease the success of the work.

As observed, these contradictory thoughts at the same time revealed that the monitoring activity is indeed inevitable by the employers, but the workplace monitoring activity can be realized taking into account the employee's privacy. In other words, it is not possible for the employees to perceive the performance of the monitoring activity negatively when considering some aspects of the workers. The average outcome of the workplace monitoring can be interpreted as the fact that workplace monitoring activities are not yet very widespread in the country, and the expectations of considering the employees' personal privacy due to the general economic conditions are not at least as high as those in developed countries.

The average values of the data obtained for the work stress also indicated that the workplace monitoring activity of the workers rarely causes the work stress. In this case, the hypothesis that 'there is a positive relationship between negative perception of the workplace monitoring and work stress' was rejected, and the workplace monitoring activities have an average value. And in this case, the results of the analysis presented that the workplace monitoring activities that did not cause any stress on the employees participating in the research.

Some studies in the literature declared that there can be development efforts that are favored by both sides through examining the conflicts of the interests between the employers who consider the workplace monitoring activity as a right, and the employees who do not like enduring work stress because of the lack of privacy, low motivation, and low productivity.



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