

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES IN HUNGARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF HYGIENE DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Our aim with this paper was to describe the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 and the issue of liability. The research was conducted in Győr-Moson-Sopron County in Hungary, and the results were examined within the framework of quantitative research. We investigated the values experienced by the economic operators. The behavior of the employees was also evaluated from a psychological point of view. During the crisis, health protection and hygiene have become of particular importance. We found that governments and health authorities are usually questioned when examining liability, but employers and employees can also play a significant role in preventing infections and saving lives. We discussed in our study the former and current attitudes of the organizations towards ensuring general, food and sanitary hygiene, as well as behavior patterns of the employees. We believe that the findings and lessons of this article are well applicable and can be used in both present and post-pandemic situations.

Key words: hygiene, pandemic, corporate responsibility, behavioral patterns, eating and sanitary circumstances

JEL Code: O15, D91, H12

Introduction

A relatively rare topic studied by researchers is the vulnerability and expectations of workers in their workplaces, even during a pandemic. There are growing appeals for acting. If we do not take action, we will lose even more active and valuable labor force (ILO, 2020). We believe that our publication will fill a gap and be exploratory. We start our literature review on the history of epidemics because we can learn from the past (Diamond, 2019). When creating our model, we consider the lessons and the characteristics of the pandemic and society and identified four interdependent leaders. In our publication, the focus is on

employees, so we deal not only with the tasks and reactions of the management but also with the human resources (HR) department.

The previously mentioned HR organization has a significant role in developing and combining atypical and standard work schedules. After all, we point out that the development of occupational health and safety requires two factors: one is the responsible company, and the other is the mature personality of the employees. We conclude our theoretical summary by presenting the pathogens and emphasizing the importance of food and personal hygiene. We believe that a quantitative procedure with online questionnaires is the most appropriate for our research. Although we cannot provide representativeness, we can shed light on essential contexts related to our topic. Thus, we examine, among other things, the relationships between managerial effort and employee compliance and further employee expectations and compliance as well.

1 Theoretical background

As mentioned in the introduction, our literature review covers several disciplines. In our view, the following information plays an essential role in compiling a cognitive questionnaire that fits our topic and in making a study that is suitable for testing our basic idea.

1.1 History of epidemics

At the level of society, it is essential to distinguish between wars and epidemics among the threats lurking for humanity. Related to this topic is the book Diamond (2019). According to the author, wars and murders accompany our history, however, the technical development and the attitude arising from intelligence have a significant influence on their outcome, on the number of deaths. Due to the low population density in tribal societies, epidemics are less destructive, wars are much more common, while in densely populated areas, infectious diseases are mentioned as the most common cause of death, and wars and murders are less common (Reyes et al., 2013). In this connection, it should also be mentioned that a number of studies have also highlighted that in densely populated regions, higher levels of health care often result in lower levels of communicable diseases and morbidity (Hamidi, Sabourih & Ewing, 2020). Various researches have also shown that, out of these two threats examining their effects, epidemics are the winners because they claim far more lives than wars and terrorist attacks. One of the most important findings of the author is that we can successfully prepare for the challenges of the future if we intelligently understand everything possible from

the past (Christopher et al., 2004). In every crisis, there is the potential for development, for positive changes, for exploiting the opportunities arising from the crisis (Diamond, 2019).

In addition, of course, we may encounter new areas and challenges where old, well-proven methods cannot be applied without modification. We can only rely on our previous knowledge. It is worth mentioning the epidemics that have wreaked the most significant devastation locally or globally in human history. The plague, also known as the Black Death, struck Europe in the 14th century, killing millions of people, 60-70% of the population in some countries. Overcrowded areas and poor sanitary conditions accelerated the spread of the infection. In order to prevent the spread of the disease, the quarantine institution was first applied in Italy. The word 'quarantine' means 40 days. During this pandemic, the actual and potential carriers of the disease were first isolated (Forrai & Barcs, 2018). Many people are familiar with the great plague in London, which claimed nearly a hundred thousand lives. During this time, the importance of social distancing became clear (Robb, et al., 2021).

The most effective defense in the fight against epidemics is the development of vaccines. In 1796, Edward Jenner, an English physician, invented the first vaccine in the world. He extracted the active ingredient of the smallpox vaccine from the blood of dairy girls who had previously undergone the infection (Opriessnig, et al., 2021). The coronavirus, released in 2019, caused health and economic damage in all countries worldwide in the following year. Effective defense required innovative researchers and doctors like Edward Jenner. Hungary is proud of Katalin Karikó who comes from Hungary and has played a crucial role in developing the COVID - 19 vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine does not contain the entire genome of the virus, and it does not cause infection. More than 900 innovators and business people participated in an empirical research. Close to half of them believe that the lesson of the pandemic is that decision-makers, business people, and politicians all over the world may realize that much more money needs to be spent on education, science, and health care from the budget. They can satisfy themselves that teachers who teach the future generation, researchers obsessed with finding solutions to eternal problems, and doctors, nurses who save us by putting their lives at risk, deserve our respect and financial esteem (Hargittai & Hargittai, 2021).

1.2 The model that forms the basis of our research

According to the model found in the literature related to our research, health protection includes proactive and preventive measures that became common during the pandemic.

Proactive elements include steps to physically prevent the spread of the virus, such as making the use of a face mask mandatory, hand disinfection, frequent surface disinfection, and plexiglass walls when many people are working in large areas and the use of gloves. Preventive tasks aim at screening for potential infections. Among other things, special attention is paid to thermometry and monitoring of employees showing signs of infection. If there is a likelihood of illness, the worker is temporarily banned from work, is required to undergo quarantine at home, after which he or she can return to work if the coronavirus test is negative (Cirrincione, et al., 2020). Our own model identifies four responsible elements: government, media, organizations, and individuals. The actors consciously and unconsciously influence each other's actions. In the analysis, we focus not on the elements of the model but on the relationships between them.

1.3 The impact of the pandemic on the operation of companies and HR activities

International survey on Covid and HRM

A large-scale, international survey was conducted with the participation of several universities in Hungary, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, which examines the changes in corporate and human resource management activities during the three phases of the pandemic (Poór et al., 2021a).

One of the critical issues of the research is the change in the order of importance of human functions. In the present case, we focus only on health-preserving activities. Health care plays an increasing role among HR functions during the crisis, moving from 8th to 6th place in the three phases of the pandemic. According to another survey conducted in Slovakia, teleworking did not reduce employee satisfaction. The number of people working from home has increased nearly seven times. Many people have only met this atypical form of employment during the pandemic and based on their experience, would continue to work from home to some extent. However, organizations need to be careful that isolation, barriers to the flow of information, and marginalization of career opportunities do not override the unquestionable benefits (Karácsony, 2021).

1.4 Mature personality

Setting the criteria for a mature personality is worth starting from Erik Erikson's theory of development. According to Erikson, the characteristics of a mature personality can be formulated concerning the current developmental state of the individual. Solving the crises

and problems that arise in certain stages of life plays an essential role in this evolution. Unresolved crises can result in bottlenecks but are necessary for maturity to enter the next stage of development (Chen, et al., 2021).

As a result of early childhood traumas, when a person grows up, he still sees the world the same way. In the absence of proper emotional care, fixed relationship patterns make it difficult to adapt to society, the individual's personality may be distorted, and harmful patterns may develop. These include the emotion deprivation scheme, which means that the individual cannot expect an empathic attitude and does not even ask for it after a while. Another such scheme may be low self-esteem, which causes that the person responds to criticism with excessive sensitivity (Bach, et al., 2018).

Berentés (2012) developed the complex model of the mature personality. The author is a university lecturer and also practices as a psychotherapist. In the model, she outlined the human qualities necessary for success and happiness. The mature personality model, supplemented by other significant characteristics identified by other psychologists and researchers, is summarized in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Characteristics of a mature personality

Source: Authors' own research

Examining the characteristics included in the model, we can conclude that, without exception, all of them play an important role in managing the situation and effectively curbing the

pandemic. Responsible, mature employees take the use of protective equipment seriously. Their behavior is honest, and if they perceive the symptoms of the disease, they go to quarantine. They face the problems caused by the viral situation, and if disagreement develops with any of their colleagues in a stressful situation, full of fear and uncertainty, they try to resolve it in a mature, patient manner. They realistically perceive the situation and evaluate the rules necessary for defense. They treat their immediate co-workers with understanding, acceptance and patience. They do not give control to the ego.

They are not dominated by selfishness, and they put the community's interests first instead of individual interests. Dedicated employees also consider it important that the organization can continue its operation smoothly and that the required number of employees can work at all times. To this end, they seek to curb the spread of the infection and use protective equipment.

Last but not least, we must not forget that individuals with mature personalities are grateful for all the good things they have, including their health, which is the most significant value in life, and its importance in the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 has become even more significant. As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer briefly stated: "Health is not everything, but without health, everything is nothing."

2 Empirical research

2.1 Aim of the research, methodology

Our research aims to examine the responsibility of the individual and the organization based on the outlined model. The study was conducted in the region of Western Hungary. Our research problems includes the hygiene expectations of employees towards their employer in general and during the pandemic; the role of the mature personality in preventing the spread of the virus; and the managerial and subordinate behaviors that can increase the risk of infection. Significant differences in hygiene expectations and performance play an important role in our research (Figure 2).

As part of the quantitative study, we performed computer-assisted data collection. After cleaning and filtering the data, we processed 150 valid responses. Our questionnaire contained only closed questions, and a six-point Likert scale was applied. We used IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and MS Excel programs to process the data. We examined the percentage distribution of opinions. Demographic differences were controlled by t-test.

Fig. 2: Differences in hygiene expectations and performance

Source: Authors' own research

2.2 Results and discussion

During the quantitative survey, we received 150 evaluable responses. There were 91 women and 59 men who helped us. Regarding the age distribution, the majority of respondents (37%) are between 25 and 34 years old, while a significant group (28%) are between 35 and 44 years old. The proportion of people under 25 years and between 45 and 54 years, is almost the same, 15% and 16%. The proportion of the respondents over the age of 54 is 4%, but as employment was a condition for completing the questionnaire, we could not expect too many older respondents. The distribution of respondents by position is characterized by the predominance of white-collar workers (54%). Blue-collar workers are represented by 21%, while the proportion of entrepreneurs and different levels of management remained below 10%. Forty-one people work in the industry, seven people in agriculture. Forty-one respondents work for large companies and 40 for medium-sized enterprises. Thirty people declared as employees of small businesses, 29 work for micro-enterprises and ten people are self-employed.

We measured the importance of food and sanitary hygiene on a six-point Likert scale. In both cases, we formed four categories: current real hygiene, currently expected hygiene, actual hygiene before the pandemic and expected hygiene before the pandemic.

In our analysis of hygiene expectations, we must also take into account that the gender ratio in the workplace has changed. Typically, the working hours of male workers decreased, women remained at home due to layoffs or family coercion (Eurofound, 2021). During a pandemic, the expected level of food hygiene is higher. The average values calculated on a scale of 1 to 6 are 5.125 and 5. Expectations are strikingly higher than the actual level of hygiene (5.125 and 4.625). Based on Figure 3 we found similar correlations concerning sanitary hygiene. (Average value of actual hygiene during a pandemic: 4.625; the average value of expected hygiene during the pandemic: 5, the average value of the actual hygiene before a pandemic: 4.25, the average value of the expected hygiene before a pandemic: 4.875). In the case of extreme opinions, intense fear or the lack of it is observed, and the attitude focused on the workplace is stronger. However, in the case of moderate fear or caution, life outside the workplace is a more significant source of danger.

Fig. 3: Importance of sanitary hygiene now and before the pandemic

Source: Authors' own research

Conclusion

We found some significant outcomes in our study. Based on the respondent's position, the expected food hygiene in the workplace is different, and we experienced higher demand for white-collar workers ($p < 0.001$). Demonstrated on the respondent's position, the expected sanitary hygiene in the workplace is different, and there is higher demand for white-collar workers ($p < 0.001$). Verified on the respondent's position, the degree of observance of hygiene rules is different in the workplace. There is a high level of compliance with the rules among senior managers and entrepreneurs ($p < 0.001$). Based on the number of employees,

toilet hygiene is different in the workplace during the pandemic à individual workers are in a better position, worse hygienic conditions can be observed in large companies ($p = 0.015$). The efforts of the management are considered to be greater and the workers wash their hands more often ($p = 0.001$). As a result of the managers' efforts, the value of cleaning increased or cleanliness had a high value in the past ($p = 0.001$). There are physical causes of workplace infections. However, there are also so-called background reasons that create physical causes. We examined them based on employee opinions. The order of the hazards and the average value are the followings: inattention (average: 3.125), behavior of colleagues (average: 3), lack of leadership, attention (average: 2.75), work activity (2.625). Each constraint is also a chance to continue the research. The analysis was performed in Hungary, but data collection in Slovakia is already underway for comparison, considering Hofstede's cultural dimensions if possible. We only collected employee opinions, but there is the opportunity to examine employer views. Our research took place during the third wave of the pandemic and sometimes we also asked respondents about the times before the crisis. It would be advisable to carry out a study covering the whole period to follow the changes. The global labor market will definitely change as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We can state that occupational hygiene can become a goal of human resource management. Cleanliness of the work environment is part of employee well-being.

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