WORKPLACE HABITS THAT INFLUENCE LABOR PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

Labor productivity is the relationship between the resources used to generate a product or service and the value of the product or service itself, so it is a key element in business competitiveness and that both academics and businessmen are trying to understand better every day. The objective of this work is to determine the work habits that influence labor productivity in some public and governmental economic sectors of Norte de Santander (Colombia). For this purpose, phenomenology is used as a method and 25 executives of small and medium-sized companies are used as key informants. The main findings indicate that the habits that influence productivity in the sectors studied are: Attitude, Ethical acting, Creativity, Time management Teamwork, while the habits with the greatest negative influence are: Lack of attitude, Poor time management, Interpersonal relationships, Goal-focused thinking and Ethical performance. These findings allow organizational leaders to adjust their hiring and training strategies to enhance positive habits and minimize the negative effects on job performance.

INTRODUCTION

The business world in the modern era is characterized by great competition and this has brought countless challenges for organizations such as productivity in the workplace. Therefore, many studies focus on determining what productivity is and how to create workspaces where the habits and customs of individuals improve their performance. In this sense, several researchers propose categories, taxonomies or classifications of habits in the workplace that help to understand how they are present in organizations and how they can positively or negatively influence labor productivity.

According to Plunkett, Allen and Attner (2013), productivity is the relationship between the number of inputs needed to produce a certain amount of products and the value of the product itself, so it is the first objective and responsibility of every manager (Robbins & Judge, 2009). In this context, the main objective of this research is to determine the work habits that influence productivity in some sectors of government and private enterprise such as manufacturing, commerce, education, health, services, software and transportation in Norte de Santander.

The main results found indicate that the habits with the greatest positive influence on work competitiveness are: 1) Attitude, 2) Ethical performance, 3) Creativity, 4) Time management and 5) Teamwork, while the five categories with negative influence are: 1) Lack of attitude, 2) Poor time management, 3) Interpersonal relationships, 4) Goal-oriented thinking and 5) Ethical performance.

This article initially presents the theoretical bases on the work habits that positively and negatively influence work performance, then describes the phenomenological research method, which uses as key informants the executives of small and medium-sized companies in some public and private sectors of the regional economy. Subsequently, the results are presented, and discussed and some fundamental ideas are concluded.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Several studies consider that a worker's work habits can have positive or negative effects on his or her performance. Waal (2012) points out that five factors improve the financial and non-financial results of a group of workers, as follows: 1) continuous improvement and renewal, 2) openness and action orientation, 3) quality of management, 4) quality of the workforce, and 5) long-term orientation. Waal points out that, when these factors are present in the workplace, job performance is higher than when these conditions are absent.

In the same sense Uddin, Luva and Hossian (2013) consider that organizational culture affects the quality of performance and productivity of employees since when habits or values are more ingrained in the mind and actions of a worker, the result of performance can have a negative or positive charge depending on whether or not that habit is performed correctly. That is to say that when the organization incorporates key elements to the organizational culture such as communication, process development or the use of technologies, the result is that labor productivity changes depending on how assimilated these factors are (Rapert & Wren, 1998). Therefore, organizations should incorporate in their policies the learning and incorporation of these factors into their daily life.

Concerning the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), Koning and Gelderblom (2006) found that older people have greater difficulty in learning and applying ICT than younger workers, and therefore have a considerable disadvantage in their work performance, especially considering that ICT are increasingly being incorporated into the daily activities of companies.

On the other hand, Posthuma, Campion, Masimova and Campion (2013), propose nine categories that allow for determining job performance and focusing on the strategies of human resources managers. 1) Compensation and benefits; 2) Job and job design; 3) Training and development; 4) Recruitment and selection; 5) Employee relations; 6) Communication; 7) Performance management and evaluation; 8) Promotions; and 9) Turnover, retention and exit management. According to these authors, high-performance work systems should be designed to enhance organizational performance by improving the capability, commitment and productivity of each individual, through the consolidation of these categories in the workplace.

Another study that analyzes the influence of work systems on their performance is conducted by Jensen, Patel and Messersmith (2013), which focuses on traditional variables such as individual anxiety, overload and turnover. These authors believe that the negative effects could be avoided with labor control mechanisms during the selection, recruitment, selection and training of personnel, seeking greater efficiency and productivity of each employee based on the motivations that each of them has.

In the same sense, Langfred (2013) and Cequea et al. (2011), consider that the motivation and autonomy of each person in the workplace have to do with two perspectives: 1) individuals desire autonomy that leads to greater job satisfaction and 2) people desire autonomy to have greater rewards. Langfred concludes that those who opt for autonomy that generates personal and job satisfaction, through the exercise of their work, have higher productivity than those who are motivated by rewards.

Other variables that have been studied concerning the positive influence on job performance refer to personal motivation, individual practices, organizational culture, work-life balance, commitment, job stability and loyalty to the organization (Dever & Morrison, 2009; Brown et al., 2011; Forde et al., 2006), which have a positive or negative influence as the individual has ingrained these types of habits, so organizations should seek to select people with the right profile and permanently reinduce the individual in each of these aspects.

Additionally, other studies found that the attitude of the worker is a factor that affects his behavior and therefore productivity (Charness & Kuhn, 2007); participation in the benefits of companies helps positively to improve performance (Doucouliagos, 1995); teamwork with highly committed staff generates synergy in the other team members (Mas & Moretti, 2009); and employee satisfaction reduces labor costs and therefore the competitiveness of the company (Abel, 2013).

As can be seen, there is a wide range of studies that propose various taxonomies of employee habits in the workplace that can positively or negatively affect job performance, so more specific studies and empirical evidence are required for each sector, on the behavior of individuals and their

consequent job development. In this sense, this research points out which are the work habits of the workers of companies in some sectors of the economy of Norte de Santander.

METHOD

For this research, the qualitative paradigm, exploratory design was used to identify and categorize the positive and negative work habits that increase or decrease productivity in some companies in various sectors of the economy, so that the leaders of the organizations opt for strategies that enhance positive work habits and reduce the behavior of negative habits.

Key Informants

Twenty-five company executives from various sectors of the economy of Norte de Santander were interviewed in depth, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Key informants

Sector	Quantity
Manufacturing	5
Commerce	4
Government	3
Education	3
Health	2
Services	2
Software	2
Transportation	1
Total	25

Source: Own elaboration.

The selection criteria of the informants were limited by the number of executives who agreed to attend the interview. The questions that gave rise to the interview were: What are the work habits of the employees in your organization that could lead to positive productivity? and What are the main work habits of the employees in your company that could have a negative influence on productivity?

Information Processing

The information provided by the informants was classified into two specific research topics: the first question provides information on what executives consider to be the most important work habits that an employee should follow to maintain and increase productivity in the workplace. The second question is used to gather details on what leaders consider to be the most detrimental work habits that an employee should avoid because those practices reduce productivity in an organization's workplace. The information collected was digitized and using Altas.ti software, axial coding was performed to evaluate the data more closely and to specifically identify categories and codes of information on which top leaders agree. Selective coding was also used to identify the main themes, constructs and concepts of the study, as stated by Strauss & Corbin (2002)

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The information provided by the executives interviewed was processed using Atlas.ti software, where 11 general categories with their respective codes (characteristics or attributes) were identified. The participants in the research indicated that from their perspective, work habits are made up of the following major groups: 1) attitude, 2) respect for rules, 3) ethical behavior, 4) thinking focused on objectives, 5) creativity, 6) interpersonal relationships, 7) problem solving, 8) time management, 9) leadership, 10) teamwork, and 11) personal and professional development (See Table 2).

Table 2. Categories of the most significant workplace habits.

Positive workplace habits		Negative Workplace Habits	
Attitude	52%	Attitude	48%
Ethical performance	40%	Time Management	44%

Creativity	40%	Interpersonal Relationships	32%
Time management	32%	Goal-focused thinking	28%
Teamwork	28%	Ethical performance	28%
Personal and professional development	28%	Creativity	24%
Leadership	20%	Respect for rules	20%
Interpersonal Relationships	12%	Leadership	12%
Goal-oriented thinking	12%	Personal and professional development	12%
Respect for rules	12%	Problem-solving	12%
Problem solving	12%	Teamwork	12%

Source: Own elaboration

Based on the number of mentions made by executives about each habit, both positive and negative habits are classified from highest to lowest, as shown in Table 2. From this information it is highlighted that the highest number of mentions received as positive habits in the workplace are Attitude, Ethical Performance, Creativity, Teamwork and Interpersonal Relationships; while the negative habits, considered by the executives, are order Attitude, Time Management, Interpersonal Relationships, Goal-focused Thinking, and Ethical Performance. It stands out from this list that Attitude, Ethical Performance and Interpersonal Relationships share the list of both positive and negative habits most cited by the key informants, although not in the same order.

Based on the above information and according to the hierarchy of the categories, the following is the interpretation of each one of them, according to the considerations made by the executives interviewed and the theoretical bases exposed.

Attitude

Attitude is defined as the predisposition to respond positively or negatively to an object or situation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Oskamp, 1984). In this case, it is the disposition towards work and the need for companies to achieve the highest possible productivity. Attitude represents an individual's behavior, but not his behavior itself, so it should be interpreted as a symptom and not as a definitive fact (Papua, 2002; Garza & Canett, 2005). It is a mental aspect or disposition towards work and is the result of previous experiences and interactions that the worker has had, or the reference that other individuals have given him/her about the job.

Table 3. Habit characteristics Workplace attitude.

Positive workplace habits	Negative Workplace Habits
• Attention at work	• Mediocrity
• Pride in belonging to the organization	• Arrogance
• Cooperation with other employees	• Disrespect
• Innovative	• Indifference
• Willingness to change	• Nonconformity
• Easy to receive and give orders	• Carelessness
• Respectful	• Lack of attention
• Open-minded to new ideas	• Low commitment
• Professionalism	• Low motivation
• Sense of humor	• Lack of commitment
• Willingness to learn	• Refusal to change
• Balance between work and family	• Individualism
• Winning spirit	• Individualism

Source: Own elaboration

In this study, attitude is reported by the informants as the most important positive and negative work habit that an employee can adopt in the organizations under study. Fifty-two percent of the executives commented on attitude as a positive habit and 48% as a negative habit in the workplace. Some positive characteristics of the attitude category refer to attention to work, sense of belonging, cooperation with others, sense of innovation, willingness to change, and ease of taking and giving orders by employees in the workplace. These aspects, from the informants' perspective, make up a positive attitude in the workplace, which translates into labor productivity, that is, achieving greater goals with the same resources (Table 3).

On the contrary, Attitude has some negative characteristics that affect labor productivity and refer to mediocrity, arrogance, disrespect, carelessness, indifference, low commitment, resistance to change, and individualism. The SME leaders interviewed consider that these habits make the worker's Attitude negative and affect labor productivity (Table 3).

Ethical Performance

"Ethics is a type of knowledge that aims to guide human action in a rational sense; that is, it aims to make us act rationally" (Cortina, 1994, p. 17). It is practical knowledge that facilitates rational action in which goals and priorities are intelligently ordered. Ethics implies interpersonal relationships that build social fabric and exemplary performance in life and work where there is knowledge of a moral system that allows differentiating between what should and should not be done.

Table 4. Characteristics of the habit of acting ethically in the workplace

Positive workplace habits	Negative Workplace Habits
• Honesty • Environmental awareness • Responsibility for your work • Moral integrity • Respect for the organization's authority and norms • Sense of belonging	• Mistreated to the customer • Corruption • Inappropriate behavior • Use of inappropriate language • Lies • Contempt for the organization and co-workers

Source: Own elaboration

The second category found in the study for workplace habits is Ethical Performance, in which 40% of the interviewees made some type of positive comment and observation, while 28% commented on this worker habit as negative. The main positive and negative observations regarding Ethical Performance are coded in Table 4.

Some positive characteristics of Ethical Performance in the workplace refer to honesty, environmental awareness, responsibility in the workplace, moral integrity, respect for authority and the rules of the institution, and a sense of belonging. These characteristics of ethical performance on the part of workers have a positive effect on labor productivity.

In contrast, some characteristics that have harmful effects on Ethical Performance have to do with customer abuse, corruption, inappropriate behavior, use of inappropriate language, lying and contempt for the organization and co-workers. Each of these attributes, or all of them together, causes labor productivity to be negatively affected.

Creativity

In terms of Brown and Mobag (Rown & Moberg, 1990), creativity consists of the generation of original and unique ideas to solve a problem or develop an alternative solution, that is, a perspective out of the ordinary but always linked to reality. In this sense, the third category of habits in the workplace refers to Creativity, in which 40% of the executives interviewed made some positive comment or observation and 24% of them had some negative comments. The positive and negative characteristics of this habit are codified in Table 5.

Table 5. Characteristics of the Creativity in the Workplace Habit

Positive workplace habits	Negative Workplace Habits
Commitment	Poor quality in its activities
Reliability	Resistance to control mechanisms
Permanent search for best practices	Resistance to change
Sense of self-improvement	Reactive approach
Initiative	Unmotivated
Intellectual curiosity	Doing only what he/she is ordered to do
Learning from mistakes	
Decision-making	
Proactive	

Source: Own elaboration

According to the information found, some positive characteristics of the Creativity habit in organizations refer to commitment, reliability, permanent search for best practices, sense of self-improvement, initiative, intellectual curiosity, learning from mistakes, making their own decisions and being proactive. These characteristics contribute positively to creativity and therefore improve labor productivity in companies.

On the contrary, some aspects that can negatively affect Creativity have to do with the poor quality of the activities performed, resistance to control mechanisms, resistance to change, and reactive approach, i.e. waiting for the problem to happen before reacting in search of a solution, lack of motivation and performing only what is necessary. In the opinion of the executives interviewed, these attributes affect creativity and therefore negatively impact productivity at work.

Time Management

To increase efficiency and productivity at work, managers require strategies that particularly address proper time management, which involves leadership, organization and punctuality (Oluseyi & Hammed, 2009). In the same direction, the executives interviewed consider that the fourth most important habit in the workplace is time management, so 32% stated that it has positive effects, while 44% consider that not doing it correctly has negative effects on productivity at work (Table 6)

Table 6. Characteristics of the Time Management Habit in the Workplace

Positive workplace characteristics	Negative characteristics in the workplace
Arrive on time	Wasting time on trivialities
Punctuality	Not being timely
Planning of activities	Delaying commitments
Allocation of the correct time to each task	Delay in meeting goals
Timely delivery of commitments	Unable to complete work
Working until the goal is reached	Failing to meet agreed-upon schedules

Source: Own elaboration

Some statements about the negative aspects that make time management positive refer to being on time, being punctual, planning and executing activities, assigning the right time to each task, delivering on time, and working until the goal is reached even with extra time. These attributes contribute positively to proper time management and therefore to work productivity.

Similarly, the interviewees reported some characteristics that negatively affect time management such as wasting time on trivial things that do not add value, not having the notion of opportunity, procrastinating on commitments, reaching goals later than stipulated, being unable to complete the work because of lack of time and not complying with established schedules. This set of attributes, or each one on its own, affects labor productivity performance as a result of efficient time management.

Teamwork

People are part of a company when their activity allows them to contribute directly or indirectly to achieving their own goals, so to that extent, they are willing to form teams that make the most of their skills and those of their colleagues (Vroom & Deci, 1992; Parra, 1998). One of the categories of habits found refers to the commitment and competence to work in teams. According to the opinions

of the interviewees, 28% of the executives made positive comments, while 12% considered that its misuse produces negative consequences for work performance (Table 7).

Table 7. Characteristics of Teamwork

Positive workplace habits	Negative Workplace Habits
Confidence in the team	Individualism
Good communication	Shyness
Organized work	Selfishness
Common objectives	Lack of solidarity
Sense of belonging	Inappropriate work environment
Empathy	Low level of trust
Coordination	Lack of communication
Participatory attitude	Lack of commitment
Multiculturalism	Intolerance
Respect for difference	Lack of awareness of reality

Source: Own elaboration

Some of the attributes that contribute to teamwork and therefore to work productivity refer to trust, good communication, organized work, understanding of objectives, sense of belonging to the organization, empathy with colleagues, bosses or subordinates, coordination of tasks, participative attitude, understanding of multiculturalism and respect for the differences among participants.

In contrast, some characteristics that negatively affect teamwork and consequently labor productivity refer to individualism, shyness, selfishness, lack of solidarity, inadequate work environment, low level of trust, lack of commitment, low tolerance for difference and lack of knowledge of the business reality by one or more workers.

Personal and Professional Development

Professional development refers to the expectations of qualification, motivation and orientation that contribute to the development of their human and academic capacities, allowing them to build a life project through the exercise of their work (D'Angelo, 2002). The fifth category found in the study is personal and professional development. Twenty-eight percent of the executives commented that this habit contributes positively to productivity, while 12% believe that some attributes have a negative influence (Table 8).

Table 8. Personal and Professional Development Characteristics

Positive workplace habits	Negative Workplace Habits
Expectation of personal and professional growth	Little desire to excel
Ability to learn	Conformity to their state of comfort
Persistent	Unwillingness to take risks
Willingness to learn	Limited vision
Willingness to take on challenges	Self-doubt
Self-confidence	Lack of recognition
	Anxiety

Source: Own elaboration

Some characteristics pointed out by the informants as elements that positively affect personal and professional growth refer to expectations, learning capacity, capacity for persistence, willingness to learn, willingness to take risks and challenges, and self-confidence.

As attributes that generate negative consequences on the desire to grow personally and professionally, the following were found: little desire to excel, conformity in their state of comfort, little willingness to take risks, limited vision of their growth, insecure personality, lack of motivation and recognition by the entity and anxiety to change.

Other categories can also contribute positively and negatively to the organization such as Leadership, Interpersonal Relationships, Goal Focused Thinking, Respect for organizational and system norms, and Problem-Solving Ability. However, the six described above are considered to be the most

representative and group together the greatest number of mentions made by the executives interviewed.

CONCLUSIONS

Several previous studies show the correlation between work habits and labor productivity, which on some occasions have a positive influence and have to do with the worker's attitude, adaptability, ethical performance, professionalism, personal and work motivations and commitment to his job; while on other occasions habits also negatively affect work performance and refer to the lack of respect for the rules, ethics and responsibility, in addition to having economic aspects as the only motivation.

The objective of this research was to determine the worker's habits that influence labor competitiveness, for which 25 executives of small and medium-sized companies from various sectors in Norte de Santander were used as the main source of information. The key informants belong to governmental and private sectors such as manufacturing, commerce, education, health, services, software and transportation, who according to their experience and perspective considered that some habits have a positive or negative influence on the worker's performance.

The results show that the habits with the greatest positive influence on work competitiveness are: 1) Attitude, 2) Ethical performance, 3) Creativity, 4) Time management and 5) Teamwork, while the five categories with negative influence are: 1) Lack of attitude, 2) Poor time management, 3) Interpersonal relations, 4) Thinking focused on objectives and 5) Ethical performance. Although these are the main categories, others were also found, which have a lesser degree of positive or negative influence, but which are present daily and determine the employee's work performance.

By scrutinizing in greater depth each of the habits found, specific characteristics are found that help to understand how the influence can be and in what sense, according to how it is rooted in the mind and habits of each individual, and the sum of all the workers of the organization. Some of the Attitude characteristics that have a positive influence refer to attention to work, institutional belonging, winning spirit, willingness to change, etc., while some negative characteristics refer to arrogance, mediocrity, indifference, carelessness, etc.

As for ethical performance, the positive characteristics refer to honesty, moral integrity, respect for authority, etc., in contrast to customer abuse, corruption, and improper use of language that would produce a negative effect. The main characteristics of creativity that positively affect job performance are commitment, reliability, sense of self-improvement, intellectual curiosity and initiative, while the attributes that have a negative influence are resistance to change, reactive approach, demotivation and conformity.

Concerning time management, the study indicates that punctuality, planning of activities and timely fulfillment of commitments are attributes that have a positive influence. Finally, the Teamwork category is characterized by good communication, a sense of belonging, empathy, participative attitude and trust in the team.

Although most of the studies found focus on identifying and categorizing the habits that influence productivity, making various taxonomies, classifications or categories, this study has the particularity that they are carried out in a border area, with high influence on the economic ups and downs between the two countries that affect the different public and private economic sectors. Therefore, the findings serve as a basis for other studies to try to establish more specifically how this influence between the two variables observed occurs and at what level. At the same time, the study contributes to focusing the efforts of recruitment, selection, hiring and re-induction of workers in the observed sectors, to enhance the positive attributes and neutralize the negative ones.

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