Traditional Job-Related Factors and Career Salience in IT-Based Workplace

Aminu Ahmad, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Nigeria
Hartini Ahmad, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Despite growing academic and practical concerns about IT-transformed workplaces, little research empirically investigates these concerns. This paper adopts a unique approach to address these concerns by evaluating the appropriateness of traditional drivers of career salience in high IT working environments. Building on established measures of role stress, participation in decision making, job involvement and career salience, questionnaires were distributed to staff working in high IT organizations in Nigeria. Multiple regressions were run from a valid response of 223, resulting in the three traditional drivers accounting for 25% of the variance in career salience. Similarly, standardized β coefficients indicate job involvement (0.46) makes unique significant contribution to career salience. This finding is in line with sociotechnical theory—that changes in technical sub-system affect the social sub-system and vice versa. The finding also provides indirect exploratory support for the decreasing importance of non-IT factors in the evolving digital workplace. Other implications, limitations and direction for future research are highlighted.

Keywords: Career Salience, Information Technology, Job-Related Factors, Sociotechnical Theory, Workplace

1. INTRODUCTION

Sociotechnical theory (STT) argued that organizational success relies on firms’ ability to achieve good blend between its technical and social sub-systems (French & Ball, 1999). Hence, understanding the right alignment between human resource and information technology (IT) is critical in today’s IT transformed working environment (Tafii, Mithas, & Krishnan, 2007). Similarly, the importance of career salience (CS) in the increasingly changing working environment cannot be overstressed given the huge monetary expenditure associated with losing employees (Sanjay, 2006) and high number (40%) of staff vigorously searching for new jobs (Maroney, 2007). Prominent among the list of factors redefining workplace is IT. As organizations become ‘extremely dependent on computers and the communication devices’ (Smith & Faley, 2001, p. 8), new workplace challenges emerge. Stanton and Stam (2003, p. 152) for example observed that firms often encroach on staff privacy via monitoring telephone

DOI: 10.4018/jtd.2010070104
records, web usage, email recipient addresses and email messages. Similarly, American Management Association (AMA) survey indicate 82% of employers engage in some form of e-monitoring, while globally around 27 million workers are under e-monitoring (Alder, Schminke, Noel, & Kuenzi, 2008). On the other hand increasing usage of IT (particularly internet) for job advertisement and recruitment makes it easy for employee to track and apply for employment online.

In addition, a number of theoretical gap underscores the need for research on job-related factors vis-à-vis CS in the evolving digital working environment. For example, even though ‘traditional negotiation processes surrounding duties, rights, procedures, and policies including security and surveillance were redefined by the presence of the new IT system’ (Stanton & Stam, 2003, p. 171) few research are conducted to study workers attitude to the new workplace atmosphere. Hence Danziger and Dunkle (2005, p. 3) observed ‘despite the ever more pervasive presence of technology in the workplace, there have been few empirical studies of the effect of computer use on job satisfaction.’ The limited literatures largely focused on strategies for avoiding defection, effects of personality traits on job/career satisfaction, or exclusively on e-monitoring such as Sanjay (2006), Lounsbury, Moffitt, Gibson, Drost, and Stevens (2007), and Alder et al. (2008) respectively. As a result this exploratory research aims to examine the empirical validity of these concerns by investigating the generic and specific influence of traditional job-related drivers of CS in IT-based work environment. A number of benefits can be drive from this research/approach. It will enable us know whether the traditional job-related drivers of CS are appropriate in increasingly IT-dependent working environment; which (if any) of the factor(s) is/are critical in today’s IT-workplace; and hence offers inputs for a more comprehensive model that may explain greater variance of CS. The next parts of the paper include literature exploration, methodological issues, analysis, discussion and conclusion in that order.

2. CAREER SALIENCE AND IT CHALLENGE

STT provide a good theoretical premise for the research framework, in its simplest form the theory argued that organizations consist of two interdependent sub-systems, a social system and a technical system, and changes in one system significantly affects changes in the other (French & Ball, 1999). Accordingly, the social-sub system comprises of organizational employees as well as their knowledge, needs, interactions and commitments. The social sub-system is critical given that vast majority of IT failure is as a result of human/organizational setback not technological problems (Kontoghiorghes, 2005), as such Pasmore (1988) view the social sub-system to be the main source of organizational innovation and adaptation. It becomes imperative for organizations to cultivate employee creativity via participatory management, flattening hierarchies, feedback, and encouraging and rewarding team performance. Building on role theory, Lu and Lee (2007) argued that role conflicts and ambiguity (RCA) are key drivers of workplace stress, employee dissatisfaction and low productivity. Similarly, job involvement (JI) and participation in decision making (PDM) have long been empirically ascertained drivers of employee satisfaction and salience see for example (Dreher, 1980; Lawler, 1986; Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991) and (Daley, 1986; Spector, 1986; Soonhee, 2002) respectively.

Meanwhile, the technical sub-system of the organization consists of tools, techniques, procedures and knowledge used by organization (Kontoghiorghes, 2005). The technical sub-system is no less important as technological advances have radically altered the nature of work, the working environment, and employee–employer relationships (Alder et al., 2008, p. 481) and has direct effect on organizational productivity (Pasmore, 1988). Based on the foregoing, we hypothesize that the increasing infiltration and reliance on IT (the technical sub-system) has altered the social sub-system, and consequently redefine the key determinant of CS. The next part of the review
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