

Report on:

***The Moderating Role of Age in the Job
Characteristics–Absenteeism Relationship: A
Matter of Occupational Context?***

Course:
Business Psychology (GE - 402)

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Introduction:

The theme of this article was to identify the relationship between job characteristics and sickness absenteeism, under two vital boundary conditions- age and occupational group. Job characteristics considered here are job demand, skill variety, autonomy, supervisor support and colleague support. Based on the psychological and sociological theories that explain age-related differences in workplace, several hypotheses were formulated and tested concerning age, occupational group and job characteristics mentioned earlier.

All hypotheses were tested based on an archival sample of 5,175 employees taken from French National Survey of Employment Conditions. The study was made focusing mainly on two occupational groups-clerks versus blue-collar workers.

Clerks are low-level service and non-manual workers that are mainly sales clerks, secretarial and reception workers, and caretakers. Blue-collar workers include manual employees mainly factory workers, and maintenance workers etc.

Hypotheses & Findings:

Job demands refer to what a worker has to deal with when performing the job. It includes not only the physical components of the job but also encompasses psychological and emotional demands as well. Hypotheses regarding 'Job Demand' are-

(1a) Age moderates the positive relationship between job demands and sickness absenteeism such that older workers with high job demands will be more absent than younger workers.

(1b) Occupational group moderates the interaction between job demands and age on sickness absenteeism such that older blue-collars with high job demands will be absent more than older clerks.

Considering the two-way interaction between age and job demands, hypothesis (1a) were supported i.e. the relationship of job demands with absenteeism were moderated by age. Accordingly, we observed that job demands were positively associated with absences only for older workers – who may experience a decline

in different types of capabilities (e.g. cognitive, physical) that may generate a larger mismatch between job demands and one's resources and ability to attend work.

And hypothesis (1b) were not supported as job demands were not significantly moderated by the occupation. The findings were quite the same whether it was clerical service or blue-collar work.

Job autonomy can be defined as the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom and independence to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out. Following statements were hypothesized regarding 'Job Autonomy':

(2a) Age moderates the negative relationship between autonomy and sickness absenteeism such that older workers with high autonomy will be less absent than younger workers.

(2b) Occupational group moderates the interaction between autonomy and age on sickness absenteeism such that older clerks with high autonomy would be less absent than older blue-collar workers.

Hypothesis (2a) were not supported as age did not play a significant role in moderating the relationship between autonomy and sickness absence.

Hypothesis (2b) were supported. High autonomy were mostly beneficial to clerical works. According to the study, the number of sickness absence days of older clerks is 81% lower when job autonomy is high compared to older blue-collar workers.

Skill variety indicates the range of skills one needs to use when performing a job. It is one of the main characteristics defining an enriched job. Hypotheses related to this job characteristic are as follows:

(3a) Age moderates the negative relationship between skill variety and sickness absenteeism such that younger employees with high skill variety will be less absent than older employees.

(3b) Occupational group moderates the interaction between skill variety and age on sickness absenteeism such that young clerks with high skill variety would be less absent than young blue-collars.

Hypothesis (3a) were supported by the study. Higher levels of skill variety would better fit with the growth-oriented motives of younger workers who tend to be less absent from work when they are stimulated and challenged to acquire new competences; on the opposite, older workers may react to high skill variety as to an overstimulation particularly if the job requires learning new skills rather than using those they possess & thus it can turn into a source of stress for them contributing to higher absenteeism.

The study did not support hypothesis (3b). Because the study didn't provide any significant differences between those two occupational groups considering interaction between skill variety and age on absenteeism.

Supervisor support is undoubtedly so helpful for younger workers. A supportive supervisor can motivate and encourage the younger ones to perform better. Following two hypotheses were tested on this -

(4a) Age moderates the negative relationship between supervisor support and sickness absenteeism such that younger employees with high supervisor support will be less absent than older employees.

(4b) Occupational group moderates the interaction between supervisor support and age on sickness absenteeism such that younger clerks with high supervisor support will be absent less than younger blue-collars.

Supervisor support were associated with lower absences of younger employees because such support from an authoritative figure would fit well with their motives for growth and advancement in the career. Conversely, it might be possible that older workers were not concerned with future-oriented motives, relied on their bosses' support to call in sick when their health conditions were not good resulting in absences. So hypothesis (4a) were supported in a significant manner.

Hypothesis (4b) were supported as well. Younger clerks, who have the possibility to progress more in their career as compared to younger blue-collars, are more likely affected by a supportive supervisor and would react by being less absent.

Colleague support can be so vital for workers who are experiencing high work-stress level. It is especially important for older employees. Following hypotheses are made on this topic:

(5a) Age moderates the negative relationship between colleague support and sickness absenteeism such that older employees with high colleague support will be less absent than younger employees.

(5b) Occupational group moderates the interaction between colleague support and age on sickness absenteeism such that older clerks with high colleague support would be absent less than older blue-collars.

According to the study, hypothesis (5a) were not supported. Any age-related difference for colleague support were not found until specific occupational group were taken into consideration.

But this study did support hypothesis (5b). Within the blue-collar group, receiving more support from colleagues was not associated with fewer absences for older workers as we expected, but it did so in the clerical group. It might be due to the way the work is structured and the different types and levels of interdependence. While clerks are more likely to work in a pooled interdependence and interact directly with their colleagues, the blue-collars often work either independently from one another or in sequence.

Conclusion:

The study demonstrated the complex relationship between job characteristics, age and absenteeism. As per the study shows, organizations should take occupational group and age differences into account to improve HR policies about sickness absence and get a better outcome.

The End

