




Permanent connectivity – Challenges for healthcare professionals

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ABSTRACT

In today's medical organizational environment, work-life balance has become an essential component of motivational management strategies. In an increasingly competitive organizational environment, continuous activity at a sustained pace becomes a certain reality, especially in the context where ensuring work-life balance is also becoming a major challenge for motivational management. This paper is an analysis of the impact of continuous activity and extended work hours on the motivation and satisfaction of employees in the medical sector, as well as how organizations can support this balance through various means of rewards. Professional stress, well-being, zest for life and burnout are just a few of the terms introduced into the current vocabulary of employees today. This fine balance between professional and personal life varies depending on expectations, motivation, the psychological profile of the employee, social factors, or family climate. The balance of private life versus professional life has a major influence on the well-being and performance of the team, and its imbalance can lead to a decrease in productivity through employee exhaustion and the emergence of mental health problems or physical exhaustion.

Keywords: sustained rhythm, private life, the medical organizational environment, competitive organizational environment

INTRODUCTION

In today's medical organizational environment, work-life balance has become an essential component of motivational management strategies. In an increasingly competitive organizational environment, continuous activity at a sustained pace becomes a certain reality, especially in the context where ensuring work-life balance is also becoming a major challenge for motivational management.

This paper is an analysis of the impact of continuous activity and extended work hours on the motivation and satisfaction of employees in the medical sector, as well as how organizations can support this balance through various means of rewards.

Professional stress, well-being, zest for life and burnout are just a few of the terms introduced into the current vocabulary of employees today.

This fine balance between professional and personal life varies depending on expectations, motivation, the psychological profile of the employee, social factors, or family climate.

The balance of private life versus professional life has a major influence on the well-being and performance of the team, and its imbalance can lead to a decrease in productivity through employee exhaustion and the emergence of mental health problems or physical exhaustion.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Healthcare settings are demanding work environments due to the complexity of patient treatment and care, the ethical dilemmas they face, and the high workload.

They face a perennial threat of burnout among professionals, characterized by emotional exhaustion, a depersonalized attitude toward patients, and a low sense of personal accomplishment.

The methodology used to carry out this study is based on the critical analysis of the specialized literature, aiming at the rigorous identification of the applied methodologies and the outline of perspectives on motivational management strategies aimed at the balance between professional and personal life, through extensive research of relevant sources, using prestigious scientific databases, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science by analyzing relevant scientific works from the period 2010-2024.

Information sources, electronic search strategy, study selection, bias minimization methodologies, data extraction and additional analyses are fundamental elements of the analysis, ensuring the transparency of the results [1].

The search strategy was based on criteria such as terms, publication boundaries, language and syntax, to include all relevant studies. Study selection involved initial assessment based on titles and abstracts, followed by a detailed review to ensure their eligibility.

The research aimed to identify relevant studies on work-life balance and organizational management effectiveness. The inclusion criteria minimized the risks of bias and ensured the impartiality of the process.

The data collection method focused on the qualitative aspects of the subject, and additional analyses addressed topics such as the boundaries between personal and professional life, the definition of organizational management, human resource relationships, the use of free time, and improving the quality of life.

The criteria for eliminating the works initially selected for this research study were established based on the following fundamental aspects:

1. Irrelevance to the research topic, excluding studies that do not have a direct and clear connection with the research topic addressed
2. Low methodological quality, eliminating studies with low validity or reliability of the data
3. Papers that do not contain information necessary for the development of the papers
4. Papers that present contradictory results or are not supported by solid evidence
5. Duplicate studies, namely studies that have the same research topic
6. Studies that do not justify a coherent theoretical framework
7. Studies that do not fall within the chosen period.

Following the deduplication process, our analysis identified 1,563 unique references. Subsequently, examination of titles and abstracts led to the selection of 238 articles for full-text review. Of these, 20 studies met the inclusion criteria. A subsequent update of the search led to the identification of 4 additional studies. The selection process, including reasons for exclusion, is summarized in the PRISMA flow chart, as shown in **Figure 1**.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CONTINUOUS CONNECTIVITY ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Stress and Burnout

The notion of stress has become a normality in common language, being used very easily, sometimes perhaps without knowing exactly what it refers to, what the implications are, and, most seriously, the consequences.

Staff burnout has become a pressing problem because it can be associated with mental health problems as well as with the occurrence of undesirable results in the workplace.

One of the problems that very often appear in the workplace is stress. In order to prevent and manage it, we need to understand it because it is linked to a wide range of socio-demographic factors, with the profession and the country having a significant influence.

According to the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, stress is defined as any environmental factor (trauma, emotions, cold, heat, etc.) capable of causing a state of tension and an alarm reaction of the body in humans and animals, sometimes causing serious illnesses. By extension, stress also refers to the unfavorable effect produced on the

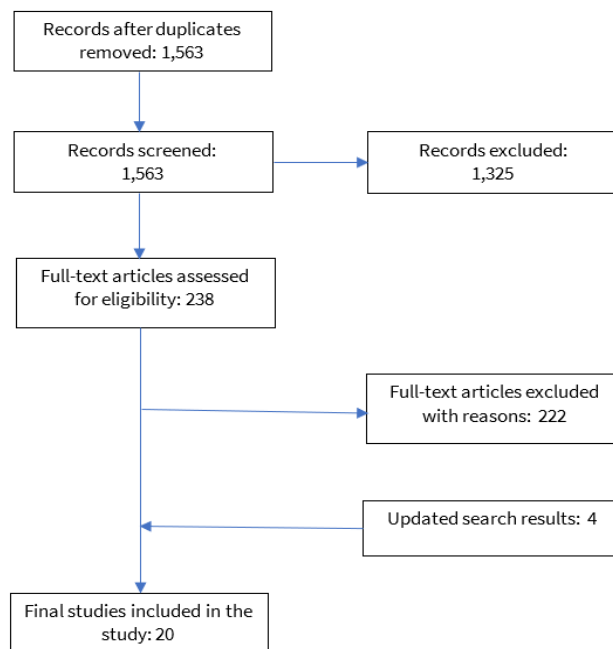


Figure 1. Studies highlight both positive and negative aspects related to the continuous connectivity of employees to work-related activities (Source: Authors' own elaboration)

body by such a factor (dexonline) (webdex.ro). In a medical context, stress describes the abnormal reaction of the human body to various environmental factors, trying to defend itself and maintain its basic balance.

Personal performance, professional category, and the relationship between various professional categories seem to influence the state of exhaustion through negative attitudes superimposed on the level of work and shortcomings at the workplace.

The most harmful form of physical and mental stress at work arises when professional demands do not match the individual profile, capabilities, and expectations of the employee. This leads to internal conflicts, frustrations, and misunderstandings both at work and in the family. All of this leads to the impairment of physical and mental health and, implicitly, a drop in performance at work.

For health workers, emotional interactions between patients and professionals constitute one of the causes of burnout. Many of these emotions, dissatisfactions, and negative attitudes of patients can be included in what is known as stigmatization toward medical personnel [2].

Emotional exhaustion caused by patient suffering is a leading cause of workplace stress. Emotional exhaustion was the largest contributor to physician turnover intentions compared to retention [3].

Workers with high depersonalization scores are more likely to be involved in poorer-quality patient care, and those with high emotional exhaustion scores are more likely to express intentions to leave their jobs [4].

Emotionally exhausted workers are less able to engage in positive interpersonal teamwork, triggering a vicious cycle: negative interpersonal team interactions negatively affect cognitive-behavioral teamwork and vice versa [5].

Studies in the field describe both “good stress” (eustress) and “bad stress” (distress) and it is essential to permanently find the optimal level of stress that ensures good health.

Beneficial stress occurs in situations of internal competition between employees as a result of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. However, this situation taken to the extreme is manifested by the failure to successfully meet the proposed objectives, leading to exhaustion, stress and the feeling of failure.

Therefore, stress inevitably appears in the workplace in all its forms. Individual specificity, personality, and adaptability make the difference between employees who can become potential victims or who can continue to carry out their work tasks in a balanced manner.

There are stress factors at the executive and managerial level, stress factors at the operational level and general stress factors that can act synergistically or antagonistically on the employee.

At the executive and managerial level, the reality expressed by employees is that with increasing responsibilities comes overload with tasks and the level of stress increases due to the pressure of time to complete tasks that become much shorter. The responsibility that personal decisions can impact or influence the actions of other people, colleagues, subordinates, or collaborators can increase the level of individual stress and concern. Stress is also amplified by the fact that the responsibility of accountability to superiors appears but on the other hand they must find solutions in full resonance with the requests of subordinates.

At the operational level, the most common forms of stress are caused by inappropriate working conditions, inadequate job design, or the incompatibility of the individual with the work performed.

When it comes to skills, a variety of techniques are used, including hiring and selection procedures, as well as training and development programs, to ensure that employees have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform a particular job. Similarly, incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, are used to encourage people to achieve their performance goals. These incentives are based on performance evaluation [6].

General stressors are related to job insecurity, legislative changes, difficult family problems or situations, human quality, and climate change.

This definition emphasizes the importance of understanding stress not only as a physical reaction but also as a psychological one, significantly impacting the health and efficiency of organizations.

Professional overload, also known as burnout, has a significant impact on organizational efficiency highlighted by a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress at work.

Perfectionism is a personality trait in which an individual sets unattainable goals and pursues idealism while critically evaluating their behaviors [7].

Psychological exhaustion is positively associated with socially prescribed perfectionism and is negatively related to self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism [8].

Disruption of Family Life and Personal Relationships

Work-life balance, globalization, the introduction of new technologies into personal life, and overlaps between work and family time have become current issues of concern in everyday life [9].

Many researchers have focused on the consequences of work on the family and the effect of family on work has been neglected [10].

Work-family conflict and work-family facilitation predicted work and family satisfaction. Similarly, both types of satisfaction (work and family) predicted feelings that, in turn, result in life satisfaction [11].

Pressures generated at work interfere with family activities and demands or pressures generated at family interfere with work activities [12].

Therefore, due to factors such as long work schedules and excessive stress at work, work and family affect each other, with events in one place affecting the other.

Job satisfaction can be defined as the pleasant emotional state resulting from an individual's evaluation of the job. On the other hand, family satisfaction is the extent to which an individual is satisfied with their life or family situation [13].

Individuals who prioritize both their career and family feel balanced when they are satisfied and effective in their work and family roles. Any disruption in these roles can lead to imbalance [14].

Given that healthcare professionals are mostly women, they have the role of maintaining family balance. In the context of a demanding, exhausting activity with major risks and responsibilities, women become overworked, no longer able to cope with all the duties related to their professional and personal lives. In this context, the role of the family of origin is defined as ensuring the sustained support shown to them.

Long-Term Productivity and Quality of Work

Healthcare professionals often spend more time in their professional lives than in their private lives due to excessive workload, increased work pressure, and demands.

In the medium and long term, continuous connectivity with professional activities amplifies the feeling of frustration due to insufficient time left for family, friends, and other social and relaxation activities. Working without a break causes the onset of fatigue, and emotional and physical exhaustion which leads to an increased rate of absenteeism due to illness or quitting the job.

Burnout first develops in response to high demands and overload, and then this precipitates detachment and negative reactions towards people and work (depersonalization or cynicism). If this continues, then the next stage would be feelings of inadequacy and failure (low personal achievements or professional inefficiency) [15].

By allowing the balance between family life and professional activity to be maintained, the effect on job satisfaction is undeniable, increasing stress resistance and adaptability to working conditions.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF CONTINUOUS CONNECTIVITY ON THE BALANCE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Although there is general agreement that work engagement is a productive and fulfilling state in the occupational field, there are differences in its definition. For some burnout researchers, engagement is considered to be the opposite of exhaustion and is defined in terms of the same three dimensions as burnout, but the positive end of those dimensions, rather than the negative one. From this perspective, engagement consists of a state of high energy, strong involvement, and a sense of efficacy [15]. How occupational health and safety management is integrated into the total management of the organization plays a determining role in contributing to the achievement of positive effects by ensuring well-being at work and maximizing the work capacity of individuals.

The development of the human resource management system also involves the development of leadership and leaders within organizations. Investing in people is very good because people are one of the most valuable resources of an organization [16].

The ability of leaders to know their employees facilitates finding methods to mitigate work overload.

In the field of health, the occurrence of complex and challenging situations determines the activation of individual cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Stress, in its positive stimulation (eustress), is a motivational factor of performance and plays a role in increasing the ability to adapt.

Eustress favors the growth of resilience, improves problem-solving processes, and strengthens the ability to manage critical situations. It also strengthens professional skills and adaptability in the workplace.

Active involvement in the medical act generates professional satisfaction and an increased sense of self-efficacy. Health professionals who feel that their work has a positive impact on patients develop a high level of intrinsic motivation, which determines increased efficiency and reduced burnout. Furthermore, the existence of a clear purpose and social recognition associated with the medical profession contributes to increasing professional commitment, and to develop a sense of importance in the community to which they belong.

The constant challenge of analytical skills, critical thinking and decision-making skills, interaction with patients, and various pathologies contributes to the growth of emotional intelligence, enhancing empathy and the ability to manage one's own emotions. The process of self-improvement is an essential element of the medical career, promoting innovation, creativity, and the development of a complex set of multidisciplinary skills.

The medical environment, by its interdisciplinary nature, optimizes interpersonal relationships, strengthens teamwork, ensures an efficient operational flow, reduces the incidence of errors, and increases the quality of the medical act, while effective communication enhances mutual trust and develops a harmonious organizational climate.

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING STRESS AND INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

Continuous connectivity is directly associated with increased stress levels and increases in absenteeism at work, as well as with employees' intentions to leave their jobs. That is why employers are looking for solutions adapted to current times and the typology of employees to eliminate the causes of stress associated with the increase in working time spent on solving work tasks.

The de-robotization of the individual from professional activity is a mandatory concern especially for employers interested in respect for human values.

Practically, policies to mitigate the impact of continuous connectivity at work are based on the abolition of human leasing at work in favor of establishing a democratic climate [17].

Healthy organizations attract, develop and retain valuable managers who demonstrate leadership capabilities, who possess and apply active knowledge that they transmit in an efficient and effective manner.

The possibility for employees to be able to flex their work schedule in which to perform their work tasks gives them a state of comfort and peace, while also finding solutions to problems that arise much more easily. They can rest and concentrate better, leading to increased creativity and work productivity.

Employees can better utilize their working time and can use their free time with their family, for personal needs or by participating in various personal development courses, thus reducing the feeling of overload [18].

Providing the employer with the opportunity for the employee to have their own control over the prioritization of their tasks reduces pressure and stress [19]. Employees can choose to complete certain work tasks when they feel ready or when time allows.

By increasing access to technological resources that facilitate online work meetings, employees can solve some of their work tasks regardless of where they are, facilitating communication between colleagues or superiors and subordinates, and reducing time pressure on them [20].

By permanently improving aspects related to accessibility and flexibility, continuous connectivity can contribute to achieving a better balance between personal and professional life.

A new approach to organizations is based on the concept of Well-Being. It includes several directions such as happiness at work, work productivity, and the personal and professional development of the employee.

The goal in today's society is for people to improve their productivity by making work more efficient in an optimal work environment that enhances their well-being.

Well-being programs primarily focus on the uniqueness of the employee and encourage talents and concerns specific to each individual.

SOLUTIONS FOR INCREASING WORKPLACE CONNECTIVITY

Improving organizational culture is suggested as an approach to help attract and retain healthcare professionals [21].

The solutions identified at the organizational level depend on several factors such as level of training, background, social status, health status, family influences, etc.

Inclusive work-life and life policies for other household structures, such as single people, are necessary to improve overall organizational well-being [9].

Improving working conditions, and a positive work environment reduces employees' intention to leave and improves their outcomes through the level of job satisfaction and patient outcomes quantified by increasing their satisfaction.

The work environment is defined as "the internal setting of the organization in which employees work" and represents the physical environment in the context of functions, tasks, and roles in the organization.

In the field of healthcare, a positive work environment is characterized by respect and trust between employees at all levels, cooperation and effective communication, recognition and appreciation, managerial support, and a safe work environment both physically and psychologically [21].

For healthcare organizations, creating and sustaining a positive work environment begins with understanding employees' current perceptions of it. A stronger perceived organizational culture is associated with lower levels of burnout symptoms [22].

Diversity and inclusion in organizations are associated with corporate performance in terms of innovation, profit, and employee engagement and retention [23].

Strong peer relationships among healthcare professionals can be a factor of mutual support, exerting a protective role against moral distress and the transmission of negative effects of occupational stress to the personal sphere.

Burnout among healthcare professionals is linked to medical errors and patient care outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Although necessary in a modern and dynamic work environment, continuous connectivity involves a series of risks to mental health and work-life balance.

The negative impact of working conditions on healthcare personnel is profound and multidimensional, with implications for their mental and physical health, interpersonal relationships, and the efficiency of the medical act.

Chronic stress and professional burnout favor the emergence of anxiety and depressive disorders, reducing decision-making capacity and increasing the risk of medical errors.

The imbalance between professional and personal life determines the deterioration of family and social relationships, with possible consequences on emotional state and professional motivation.

Decreased productivity and diminished quality of work, caused by fatigue and stress, affect not only patient safety but also the overall efficiency of the healthcare system.

Although continuous connectivity can have a negative impact on professionals in the medical sector, it should not be overlooked that this phenomenon can be transformed into a factor for increasing employee productivity and well-being.

The positive effects of working in the medical field are manifested through a synergy between increased professional performance, continuous personal development, and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Eustress acts as a catalyst for resilience and adaptability, increasing the ability to manage critical situations and make decision-making. Active involvement in the medical act generates a sense of self-efficacy and professional satisfaction, leading to high intrinsic motivation and reducing the risk of mental exhaustion. In addition, the process of self-improvement, essential in the medical field, promotes continuous learning, innovation, and increased emotional intelligence. A well-coordinated medical team not only optimizes the operational flow and the quality of the medical act but also contributes to a collaborative and harmonious work environment, in which mutual trust and effective communication become fundamental elements. Thus, the balance between professional development, psychological health, and teamwork dynamics can be considered the pillars of a functional and sustainable medical system, capable of effectively responding to healthcare challenges.

Therefore, the negative effects produced by work in the medical system manifested through chronic stress, professional exhaustion, disruption of the balance between personal and professional life, decreased productivity and quality of the medical act, as well as the positive effects, reflected in the stimulation of resilience and adaptability through them, the strengthening of the sense of self-efficacy and professional development of work optimize the aspects of work development, maintaining performance, psychological health and the sustainability of the health system.

It is essential that organizations implement clear policies that support disconnection and promote an organizational culture based on respect for employees' personal time, in order to optimize the impact of technology on their productivity and well-being.

Implementing well-being strategies is a modern concept, adapted to the current times, with healthy benefits for the organization and employees.

Organizational interventions, such as increasing recognition, supervision and clarity of roles, seem to be suitable solutions for improving professional achievements.

Providing support and resources by implementing employee assistance programs, offering counseling and support for mental health and access to resources to help manage stress, creating a positive work environment by promoting a positive organizational culture in which communication is open and recognition of merits and mutual support are encouraged are just some of the measures with a positive impact on employee performance.

Professional development by providing employees with training and professional development opportunities that develop their skills suggests that investments in human capital represent one of the safest medium and long-term investments in an organization.

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