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Original article

The role of self-efficacy and job satisfaction on absences from work

Le rôle de l'autoefficacité et de la satisfaction professionnelle dans les absences au travail

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 April 2012

Received in revised form 27 August 2012

Accepted 29 August 2012

Keywords:

Self-efficacy

Job satisfaction

Absences from work

Privatized organization

Mots clés :

Autoefficacité

Satisfaction professionnelle

Absences au travail

Organisation privatisée

ABSTRACT

Introduction. – Absenteeism is a relevant and costly issue for organizations, constantly looking at its antecedents in order to reduce the phenomenon.

Objective. – This study aims to deepen the concurrent role – that has been rarely investigated in predicting absence – of self-efficacy and job satisfaction, testing both a direct as well as an indirect relation.

Method. – Self-efficacy and job satisfaction were measured in a sample of 1160 white-collars from the main Italian delivery company, a privatized organization. Then, the self-report questionnaire was matched with objective data on absences (i.e., the total days lost at work over 12 months).

Results. – The results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) lent support to the indirect relation between self-efficacy and absences from work via job satisfaction, but not to the direct link.

Conclusion. – These findings show that training in self-efficacy can lead to higher job satisfaction and therefore to greater work attendance.

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R É S U M É

S'intéressant aux origines de l'absentéisme professionnel, cette étude a eu pour objectif d'approfondir le rôle joué – peu analysé jusqu'ici pour prédire un comportement absentéiste – par l'autoefficacité et la satisfaction professionnelle, en testant tant les relations directes qu'indirectes (entre l'absentéisme et ces deux facteurs). L'autoefficacité et la satisfaction professionnelle ont été mesurées sur un échantillon de 1160 cols blancs appartenant à la principale entreprise italienne de livraison, une organisation récemment privatisée. Dans un second temps, le self-report questionnaire a été croisé avec un ensemble de données objectives relatives aux absences au travail (comme, par exemple, le total des jours perdus au travail sur une période de 12 mois). Les résultats du Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) ont permis d'appuyer la thèse d'une relation indirecte entre l'autoefficacité et les absences au travail, via la satisfaction professionnelle, mais non celle d'un lien direct. Comme en débattent les auteurs de cette étude, ces résultats ont des implications pour la formation professionnelle et la gestion des talents, et ouvrent la voie à d'ultérieures opportunités de recherche.

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1. Introduction

Employee absenteeism is a relevant personnel issue that has traditionally raised the attention of scholars and practitioners concerned with its spiraling labor costs and deteriorating profit (Gründemann & Vuuren van, 1997). The fourth European Survey on Working Conditions conducted in 2005 revealed that in Europe

23% of workers, on average, took at least one day off from work as "health-related leave" in the 12 months prior to the survey, and that in Italy the percentage was even higher, raising to slightly higher than 25%. This is probably due to the fact that under times of economic recession, like the ones that many European countries are currently living, there is a paucity of job opportunities that reduces turnover (Parent-Thirion, Fernández Macías, Hurley, & Vermeylen, 2007). Thus, given these external circumstances, if individuals experience a misfit with their job they are less inclined to leave the organization (i.e., less turnover), but they are more likely to take a day-off from work, increasing the absenteeism rate. In addition, the economic recession and the consequent unemployment rate represent psychological stressors that negatively impact employees'

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well-being, further increasing absenteeism — which is known as the Catalano and Dooly (1983) economic stress hypothesis (Shoss & Penney, 2012).

The phenomenon is relevant both for private organizations, where the majority of the studies have been conducted, and for the public sector. Public administrations, in fact, are often characterized by high levels of absenteeism (Dibben, James, & Cunningham 2001; Scoppa, 2010). This result may be explained by the frequent use of standardized employment practices in public organizations that ensure job security (Boyne, Jenkins, & Poole, 1999). It could also be related to the large dimension of some public organizations, where high levels of absences become more difficult to control (Paton, 2005; Scoppa, 2010).

In literature, the most investigated antecedents of absenteeism are individual characteristics and work attitudes. The individual factors include demographic variables, such as gender and organizational tenure (Hackett, 1990; Thomson, Griffiths, & Davison, 2000), and personality traits, such as conscientiousness and openness (Darviri & Woods, 2006; Furnham & Bramwell, 2006; Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997).

Among attitudinal correlates of absenteeism, job satisfaction has been broadly studied (Hackett, 1989; Lambert, Edwards, Camp, & Saylor, 2005), under the theoretical assumptions that the more the individuals are satisfied with their job, the more they would attend work (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). A long-standing tradition in Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychology has considered job satisfaction as a “mid-term” psychological process that would turn more stable variables into actual behaviors (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). However, few studies have explicitly explored the mediating role played by job satisfaction, have shown inconsistent results, and have focused on demographic and contextual variables as predictors more than on psychological characteristics (Goldberg & Waldman, 2000; Steel, Rentsch, & van Scotter, 2007).

Among psychological characteristics, self-efficacy represents an important predictor of absenteeism as well as of other organizational behaviors (Vancouver & Day, 2005), because it is a key self-regulatory process that influences behavior directly and through its impact on other factors such as affective dispositions, perceptions of obstacles and relationships. Moreover, research has also shown that self-efficacy is positively related to job satisfaction (Bandura, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2001) which, in turn, is a mediator of the relationship between relevant individual variables and counterproductive behaviors (Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006), including absence behaviors (Viswesvaran, 2002). Thus, job satisfaction is likely to act as a mediating process between self-efficacy and absences from work.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of research investigating the concurrent role of self-efficacy and job satisfaction in relation to absences from work. Consequently, our contribution aims to test a conceptual model (Fig. 1) in the former Italian Ministry of Telegraph and Communication that has been recently privatized, in order to:

- investigate the role of self-efficacy in directly predicting absences from work;
- corroborate the relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction and between job satisfaction and absences from work;
- examine the mediating role of job satisfaction between self-efficacy and absences from work, controlling for gender and organizational tenure.

1.1. Self-efficacy and absences from work: the direct link

Self efficacy is defined as the confidence of being able to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments; it refers to people’s beliefs to exercise control over the quality and direction of their life (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy is known in the literature as the strongest predictor not only of job performance, but also of wellbeing and withdrawal behavior (e.g., turnover, lateness; Heuven, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Huisman, 2006; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Few studies, in which self-efficacy was broadly conceptualized as a relatively stable personal characteristic, have found a non-significant relationship between self-efficacy and absenteeism (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006; Punnett, Greenidge, & Ramsey, 2007). On the contrary, the majority of studies have conceptualized self-efficacy as a malleable personal characteristic enabling an individual to attend work, and have observed a significant negative association between those two variables (Busch, Göransson, & Melin, 2007; Labriola et al., 2007). Thus, low self-efficacy was positively associated with prolonged sickness absences while high self-efficacy was related to more rapid recovery from diseases.

The self-regulatory perspective on human behavior (Vancouver & Day, 2005) and some preliminary empirical findings (Latham & Frayne, 1989) show how training in self-management decreases employees’ absenteeism. In particular, the self-regulatory skills (e.g., anticipation, self-regulation, self-reflection), that underlie self-efficacy, allow employees to: anticipate positive outcomes for their action, in terms of external incentives and internal self-reactions; act according to high goals and personal standards; and analyze their experience in order to capitalize on it. Thus, the self-regulatory processes support employees in managing problematic situations and effectively responding to personal and social obstacles, which in turn increase job attendance (Frayne & Latham, 1987; Latham & Frayne, 1989).

Thus, self-efficacious employees would not withdraw even in problematic situations at work, due to their confidence in generating effective action-plans, figuring out ways to exercise control and to handle difficult tasks and relationships in the workplace, managing their emotions, stress and anxiety, keeping calm and in a good mood (Bandura, 2012).

Given this theoretical framework, we assume that self-efficacy, a state like characteristic, is critical for absences from work and we believe that self-efficacious employee would attend more than

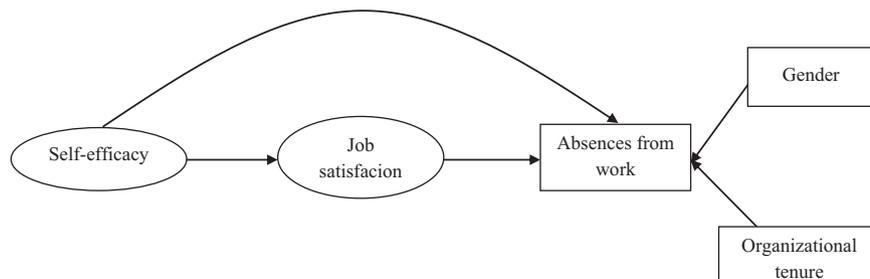


Fig. 1. From self-efficacy to absenteeism: the mediating role of job satisfaction.

De l'autoefficacité à l'absentéisme: le rôle médiateur de la satisfaction professionnelle.

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