

Crisis management during Covid-19 pandemics: special focus on employees' mental and physical health in IT sector

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INTRODUCTION

During Covid-19 pandemics, working environment changed rapidly in many sectors. As we know, COVID-19 global health crisis is one of the unprecedented examples of crisis events. Health behaviour researchers have speculated, that restrictions and unfavourable changes in healthy lifestyle routine had a negative impact on workers' physical and mental health. Therefore, in order to deal with such crisis events successfully, the employer has to pay attention to workers' resources to deal with changed situation and seek ways how to support workers' psychosocial and physical health. The overall **aim of the study** was to evaluate the psychosocial risks and physical fitness among IT workers in Estonia with following research questions:

- How is healthy lifestyle appreciated, valued and practically realised among IT workers during pandemics?
- How the healthy lifestyle correlates to psychosocial risks factors among IT workers during pandemics?
- How is physical and mental health correlated with job performance of IT workers?
- Which are the enabling and inhibiting factors that affect IT workers' physical and mental fitness?
- How can leaders support IT workers' mental and physical health during pandemics?

METHODOLOGY

A large telecommunication company was selected for the study (N=2110 employees). The data collection took place in Spring and Summer 2021. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. In quantitative study, self-administered questionnaire was distributed with elements from validated questionnaires (COPSOQII and IWPO). Statistical analysis was performed. In qualitative study, six semi-structured online interviews were conducted. Content analysis was performed and main conclusions made.

RESULTS

While analyzing the results, we first applied the Healthy Workplace Model (Fig 1) which considers four different areas where the employer can influence the health status of employees as well as the efficiency and productivity.

The results indicated that there are several statistically significant relationships between physical health, mental health and job task or contextual performance. For example, we were able to identify weak positive relationship between physical fitness and job task performance ($r=0,185^{**}$, Pearson's coefficient) as well as weak positive relationship between mental health promotion activities and contextual performance ($r=0,173^*$, Pearson's coefficient).

We were also able to find statistical relationships between psychosocial job stressors and job task or contextual performance.

- Work-life conflict was found to be in mild negative relationship with job task performance ($r=-0,303$, $p=0,01$).
- High workload was also found to be in mild negative relationship with job task performance ($r=-410$, $p=0,01$).
- Meaning of work was positively correlated both with job task as well as with contextual performance ($r=0,321$, $p=0,01$ and $r=0,316$, $p=0,01$, respectively).
- Possibilities for development was found to be in mild positive relationship with contextual performance ($r=0,357$, $p=0,01$).

Qualitative study showed that IT workers' lifestyle routines were changed during the pandemics but either to positive and negative direction, depending on the person's priorities, marital status and parental commitments, living location etc. There were several indications that mental health has been affected during the pandemics and workers expect support also at work which enables them to deal with different occupational stressors.

CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND NOVELTY

The current study contributes to existing knowledge and scholarship by proposing a framework that incorporates both dominant perspectives: physical and mental health in order to maintain workers' job performance and to meet the challenges during the turbulent pandemic time. Crisis management model was developed and applied in order to find the best solutions for maintaining physical and mental health of IT workers.

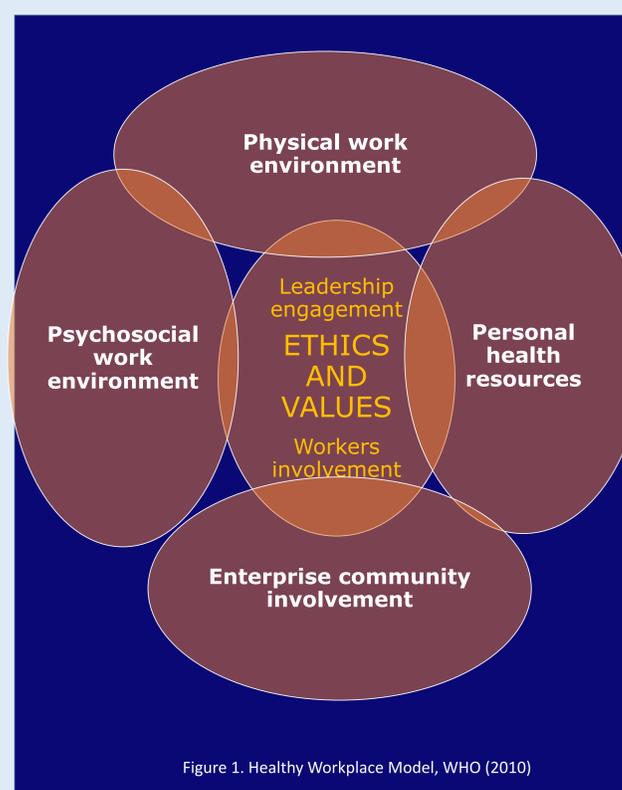


Figure 1. Healthy Workplace Model, WHO (2010)

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