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Psychological Well-being of Employees of a Philippine State University in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The study explores the level of psychological well-being of employees of a Philippine State University during the pandemic. It utilizes a quantitative design using a descriptive survey. A total of 136 employees participated in an online survey. Most of the participants are female, who are in middle adulthood, teaching, and are in permanent status. Results reveal that among the factors of psychological well-being, participants show high well-being in fairness. Significant differences were found in the factors of company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, business continuity, and role enablement when compared with personnel type. Implications for human resource improvements are further discussed.

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The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) was declared as a Public Health Emergency on 30 January 2020 and was first reported in China on 31 December 2019 (WHO, 2020). It affects more than three million people worldwide as of 29 April 2020; thus, it is a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The first case in the Philippines was reported by the Department of Health (DOH) by a 38-year old female Chinese national, and the first local transmission was confirmed on 7 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). On 16 March, Metro Manila was placed under community quarantine with 111 cases and eight deaths (GMA news online, 2020). Davao City was placed under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) on 4 April, with 104 cases as of 25 April (Argullas, 2020). Based on the guidelines on enhanced community quarantine, movement is limited as classes and school activities are suspended, mass gatherings are not allowed, mass public transportation are suspended, travel (land, sea, air) was restricted, and observance of strict home quarantine (officialgazette, 2020). The situation brought about by COVID-19 affects the individual's psychological well-being.

The American Psychological Association (2020) defined well-being as a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life. People with high psychological well-being reported feeling happy, capable, well-supported, and satisfied with life (Winefield, Gill, Taylor, & Pilkington, 2012). In 2019, WHO reported that, in emergencies almost all affected people would experience psychological distress, which is the opposite of well-being. Psychological distress is a set of painful mental and physical symptoms associated with normal fluctuations of mood, and, in some cases, may indicate the beginning of major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, somatization disorder, or a variety of other clinical conditions (APA, 2020). Depression and anxiety are commonly experienced in emergencies (WHO, 2019). They are also known as psychological ill-being, referring to negative psychological states or traits such as depression, anxiety, and negative affect (Hernandez, Bassett, & Boughton, 2017). People worldwide face psychological ill-being during the COVID-19 pandemic (Raja, 2020).

The objectives of the study are to determine the level of psychological well-being of the employees, and identify if the psychological well-being of the employees varies according to personnel type. The present study identifies psychological well-being indicators such as company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, business continuity, role enablement, fairness, and support. These indicators were based on an online survey developed by Human Resource Specialists (www.cultureamp.com). The psychological well-being indicators gauge the resilience of employees amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The indicators depict the PERMA theory. Positive emotion displays the employees' happiness and satisfaction as they show confidence in the organization. Role enablement depicts the engagement of the employees in the organization. They feel absorbed and focused on what they are doing. Relationship is the most influential determinant of well-being as it is measured by leadership, communication, fairness, and support. Meaning exists in the policies that were formulated so that they can be able to serve the students amidst the pandemic. The continuity of the University to function amidst the pandemic shows the achievement in adapting to the situation.

The University of Southeastern Philippines (USEP) changed employees' work schedule on 16 March 2020. Based on memorandum 20200319-01, offices were identified to render a skeletal workforce during the community quarantine. However, full work home scheme was implemented when the government declared ECQ, including Davao City. The Human Resource Management Division (HRMD), in coordination with the University Assessment and Guidance Center (UAGC), conducted an initial survey about the mental health conditions of the employees (faculty and staff) on 24 March 2020. Two employees contacted the UAGC for assistance. Anxiety is common for those who sought for assistance. It has been more than a month since Davao City was under ECQ. It is the goal of HRMD to gather

responses from employees to design appropriate steps to be considered during this COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences of employees are significant during critical times. They provide valuable information to help the organization in setting its priorities and showing its commitment to the welfare of its employees. Therefore, it is the intention of the study to seek answers to these questions: (1) to what extent the employees experience psychological well-being; (2) does their psychological well-being vary as to personnel type? The result of the study can help the Administration, through the HRMD, to strategize in assisting the employees, especially during times of crisis.

Review of Literature

Psychological Well-being

Well-being is highly studied in the field of psychology and social sciences. Ryff (2013) synthesized scientific studies conducted about psychological well-being into six thematic areas: (1) development and aging; (2) personality correlates; (3) family experiences; (4) work and other life engagements; (5) health and biological research; and (6) clinical and intervention studies. She further analyzed that well-being is often investigated as outcome or dependent variable in these studies; however, in some studies, it is as an antecedent or predictor variable. Psychological well-being includes inter- and intra- levels of functioning, which consists of one's relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal growth (Burns, 2016). Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2019) suggest that cultivating optimal well-being requires consideration of a broad set of measures, rigorous studies, and public and private interventions is needed. Seligman (2011) hypothesized the elements of well-being as PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement). The PERMA-Profilers allows individuals to monitor their well-being across multiple psychosocial domains (Butler & Kern, 2016).

Psychological Well-being and COVID-19

The pandemic brought about by COVID-19 has affected the psychological well-being of employees across the globe. In an online survey conducted by King Saudi University during the peak of lockdown in Saudi Arabia, results show that majority of faculty and staff have suffered from anxiety, depression, and insomnia (Alfawaz, Wani, & Aljumah et al, 2020). Hamouche (2020) reported the negative impact of COVID-19 on employee's mental health affecting their well-being as they experience stressors that include perception of safety, threat and risk of contagion, infobesity versus the unknown, quarantine and confinements, stigma and social exclusion as well as financial loss and job insecurity. In addition, a study conducted among healthcare workers displays that significant factors associated with anxiety and depression, which include burnout, dender, safety attitudes, and job; wherein health workers demonstrate a significant burden of burnout, anxiety, and depression (Denning, Goh, Tan, et al., 2021).

Psychological Well-being and Personnel Type

Studies about employment status and psychological well-being deal about unemployment. The subjective well-being was found to be unaffected by the social norm to work for unemployed men and women (Stam, Sieben, & Verbakel, 2015). However, a strong association between being unemployed and low psychological well-being was found in previous research (Flint, Bartley, & Shelton et al., 2013). Moreover, the experience of job displacement also lowers subjective well-being (Song, 2018). The domains of psychological well-being, such as experiencing feeling of loss of dignity and belonging as a human being, are prominent among those who have lost their jobs (Hiswåls, Marttila, Målstam et al., 2017). A study

conducted by Chambel, Lorente, & Carvalho (2016) shows that temporary agency workers have high well-being at work regardless of their employment status. Nevertheless, there is a difference in well-being depending on the type of job contract (Kauhanen & Natti, 2015). On the other hand, resilience has been found to be important among teachers than non-teachers (Pretsch & Schmitt, 2012). The sense of well-being of teachers was fostered by the growth of their students and support from their colleagues (Elcan, 2017). Additionally, a study conducted about wellness reveal that administrators generally show more positive condition about their wellness compared to teachers or support personnel (Sackney, Noonan, & Miller, 2000).

Theoretical Basis

People with high psychological well-being show resiliency despite living in adverse situations (Winefield, Gill, Taylor et al., 2012). At present, the adverse situation that people experience is the COVID-19 pandemic. Seligman (2011) explains the construct well-being using the PERMA theory, the abbreviation of the five elements, namely: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishment. Positive emotion refers to happiness and life satisfaction (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014). Engagement refers to a psychological state in which individuals report being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing; while, the relationship has been recognized as one of the most influential determinants of well-being for people of all ages and cultures, as it entails social support, which is the belief that one is cared for, loved, esteemed and valued (Forgeard, et al., 2011). Meaning refers to belonging to and serving something bigger than the self (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014). Achievement is defined in terms of achievement, success, or mastery at the highest level possible within a particular domain (Forgeard et al., 2011). The multifaceted nature of well-being will help policy-makers understand which domains of well-being should constitute priorities for public policy (Forgeard et al., 2011).

Methodology

The design of the study is quantitative, specifically descriptive design using survey as a tool for data gathering. It describes the psychological well-being of the participants and the comparison with personnel type. The survey method is a convenient way of gathering data to large number of participants.

A total of 136 employees participated in the study, comprising 37.5% males and 62.5% females. Majority of the participants are females. In terms of age, 45.6% are young adults, 49.3% are in middle adulthood, and 5.1% are in their late adulthood. Out of 136, 2.2% are holding administrative positions, 78.7% are teaching, and 19% are non-teaching. With regards to the employment status, 3.7% are in probationary status; 89.7% are permanent; 5.9% are contractual, and .73% answered others.

The survey is adopted from the online open resource *www.cultureamp.com*. It collects feedback from employees with regards to the perceptions in the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was designed to understand the experience of the employees during the pandemic. The survey was uploaded online using Google form. It consists of 35 items using 5-point Likert scale. The factors measured by the survey are company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, business continuity, role enablement, fairness, and support.

Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were considered in gathering the data. The participants were informed about the study through an e-mail sent by the Records Division. Each employee received the e-mail in Google form containing the informed consent statement, data

privacy, and the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and mean were used in analyzing the data, specifically pertaining to the socio-demographic variables and psychological well-being of the participants. Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used in determining the significant difference between psychological well-being and personnel type. Results were published in aggregated form to protect the anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality of the participants.

Results and Discussions

The study intends to determine the psychological well-being of the employees and test the significant difference in their well-being when compared according to personnel type.

Table 1

Level of Psychological Well-being of the Participants (N=136)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Company Confidence	3.89	.72
Leadership	3.98	.71
Communication	4.05	.70
Policy	3.75	.84
Business Continuity	3.78	.81
Role Enablement	4.05	.69
Fairness	4.23	.69
Support	3.97	.75

Table 1 presents the level of psychological well-being of the participants. The identified factors for well-being are company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, business continuity, role enactment, fairness, and support. According to Ryff (2013), well-being is often investigated as an outcome, which is measured in the study as the dependent variable. Results show that fairness has the highest mean of 4.23, with a standard deviation of .69. Participants show high well-being in terms of fairness as they believe that they have been treated fairly by their colleagues during the pandemic.

Moreover, they agree that the University has treated people from all backgrounds fairly during the pandemic. Aside from fairness, participants also show high well-being in communication and role enablement, which have the same means of 4.05 with the standard deviations of .70 and .69 respectively. Role enablement underscores that participants viewed that they have flexibility in their work schedule allowing them to look after their families. They also believed that the leaders in the University have demonstrated that employee health and well-being are a top priority. They also understand the health and safety responsibilities in relation to the pandemic. Communication highlights the participants' perception that they are receiving timely communications from the University about the pandemic that are helpful, relevant, and reassuring to them. Based on Seligman's PERMA theory, the participants experienced engagement and relationship amidst the pandemic. Role enablement depicts the engagement of the employees in the organization. They feel absorbed and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard et al., 2011). Relationship is the most influential determinant of well-being as it is measured by leadership, communication, fairness and support (Forgeard et al., 2011). In some areas of well-being, the participants can function amidst the pandemic conferring to Burn (2016), that psychological well-being includes inter - and intra - levels of functioning, which consists of one's relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal

growth.

Table 2

Significant Mean Difference of Psychological Well-being according to Personnel Type

Psychological Well-being	Personnel Type			H	p-value
	<i>Administrative Mean</i>	<i>Teaching Mean</i>	<i>Non-Teaching Mean</i>		
Company Confidence	4.6667	3.7921	4.1827	10.114	.006*
Leadership	4.6667	3.8953	4.2615	8.527	.014*
Communication	4.5833	3.9766	4.2981	6.820	.033*
Policy	4.2500	3.6565	4.0673	6.446	.040*
Business Continuity	4.0000	3.6916	4.1346	7.026	.030*
Role Enablement	4.6000	3.9738	4.3231	9.519	.009*
Fairness	4.3333	4.1869	4.3846	1.688	.430
Support	4.6667	3.9065	4.1667	4.389	.111

Table 2 presents the significant difference between personnel type and psychological well-being. Results yield a significant difference in most factors such as company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, business continuity, and role enablement with p-values of .007, .014, .044, .045, .037, and .025, respectively, which are less than .05 level of significance. The administration has high mean scores in company confidence ($m=4.6667$), leadership, communication ($m=4.6667$), policy ($m=4.2500$), and role enablement ($m=4.6000$) compared to the teaching and non-teaching personnel. The mean score of non-teaching personnel is higher than the administration and teaching personnel in the factor of business continuity ($m=4.1346$). Administrators perceived that they were confident and able to provide leadership amidst the pandemic. This is further explained in a study by Sackney, Noonan, and Miller (2000) about wellness wherein administrator displays more positive condition compared to teachers or support personnel. Conversely, the non-teaching personnel perceived that they could be able to adapt to the changing work arrangement and be able to perform their job despite the pandemic. Generally, people with high psychological well-being reported feeling happy, capable, well-supported, and satisfied with life (Winefield, Gill, Taylor, & Pilkington, 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Participants show high well-being in fairness as they believe in having been treated fairly by their colleagues during the pandemic. They also perceived that the University had treated people from all backgrounds fairly throughout the pandemic. Administrators show high well-being in the factors of company confidence, leadership, communication, policy, and role enablement compared to teaching and non-teaching personnel. Administrators show that they are confident and can provide leadership amidst the pandemic. Whereas non-teaching personnel displays high well-being in the factor of business continuity. They perceive that they can adapt to flexible work arrangements and are capable of performing their job despite the pandemic. In relation to Seligman's PERMA theory, the participants have experienced engagement and relationships amidst the pandemic. Role enablement depicts the engagement of the

employees in the organization. They feel absorbed and focused on what they are doing (Forgeard et al., 2011). Relationship is the most influential determinant of well-being as it is measured by leadership, communication, fairness, and support (Forgeard et al., 2011). In some areas of well-being, the participants can function amidst the pandemic conferring to Burn (2016), that psychological well-being includes inter - and intra - levels of functioning, which consists of one's relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal growth. In contrast, Hamouchi (2020) reported the negative impact of COVID-19 on employees' mental health affecting their well-being. Wellness programs can help to increase the psychological well-being of employees.

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