The Role of the Public and Employee Relations Department in Increasing Social Support in the Diverse Workplaces of the United Arab Emirates

LE RÔLE DU SERVICE DES RELATIONS PUBLIQUES AVEC LES EMPLOYÉS DANS LE SOUTIEN SOCIAL EN MILIEUX DE TRAVAIL DIVERSIFIÉS AUX EMIRATS ARABES UNIS

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Abstract: This paper examines the social support available to foreign employees in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through the Public and Employee Relations departments of their employers. The research reports on how foreign employees find social support and who mentors them in the first year. Information was collected and analyzed from interviews with both new employees and with members of the Public and Employee Relations departments. It addresses the questions of what are the main problems and stressors that new workers face, what kind of social support foreign workers receive in their first year, and the response of Public and Employee Relations departments. It concludes with recommendations for improving the support structure for diverse new employees.
Key words: Employee Relations; Public Relations; Human Resources; Social Support; Stress and Buffer theory; Immigrants; United Arab Emirates

Resumé: Cet article examine le soutien social offert aux employés étrangers aux Emirats arabes unis (EAU) à travers les services des relations publiques avec les employés de leurs employeurs. La recherche présente la façon dont les employés étrangers trouvent le soutien social et qui sont leurs mentors dans la première année. L'information a été recueillie et analysée à partir d'entretiens avec à la fois les nouveaux employés et les membres des services des relations publiques avec les employés. Il aborde les questions de ce que sont les problèmes principaux et les facteurs de stress confrontés par les nouveaux travailleurs, quel genre de soutien social des travailleurs étrangers reçoivent dans leur première année, et la réponse des services des relations publiques avec les employés. Il conclut l'article en faisant des recommandations d'améliorer la structure de soutien pour les nouveaux employés.
Mots-clés: Relations Avec les EmployÉS; Relations Publiques; Ressources Humaines; Soutien Social; ThÉOrie de Stress Et de Tampon; Immigrants; Emirats Arabes Unis

INTRODUCTION

Societies are becoming increasingly diverse worldwide, and the United Arab Emirates is a particularly salient example given it has one of the world's largest net migration rates and immigrant/native ratios in the world. Here diversity is an ongoing challenge, as social workers, care providers, educators, international businesses (Laudicina, 2010), and others

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must accommodate the needs of diverse populations (Edelman, 2010) to develop effective relationships and promote support systems for increased individual success and self-efficacy. Researchers have long been interested in discovering in particular what types of support mechanisms individuals starting work in a new, foreign culture require in order to successfully adapt and develop positive coping strategies to their own and their companies' benefit (Hill, 1949; Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007).

The term "social support" has been defined formally in several ways. Social support is a group of family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who are available at all times for psychological, physical and financial support (Liebler & Sandefur, 1998). Studies reaffirm the relationship between social support systems and the ability of people to adapt to stress (Clogg, 1995), and to develop effective coping strategies that allow for improved health (Peters & Kaiser, 1985) or personal performance. Social support includes social integration, or the structure and quantity of social relationships, such as the size and density of social networks and the frequency of interaction (Taylor, 2007). Conversely, individuals lacking a strong social support system often develop depression or other negative emotional or psychological conditions (Kenneth, Myers, & Prescott, 2005), especially during times of stress:

> Social support has been widely studied both in the specific area of mental health and in the social sciences more broadly. The quality of social relationships predicts general health and mortality, psychiatric symptoms and disorders, and the emotional adjustment to stress (Kendler, et al, 2005, p. 250).

A lack of social support, or a perceived lack of support, can result in a variety of emotional, psychological, and physical health problems." A vast amount of research has documented an association between social support and numerous mental health variables, including depression, self-esteem, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and anxiety disorders" (Neely, et al, 2006, p. 1). Understanding how social support systems affect individuals can impact the development of methods to help people learn to navigate personal relationships and personal experience. "Social resources can provide emotional support that bolsters feelings of self-esteem and belonging, as well as informational guidance that aids in assessing threat and in planning coping strategies" (Saltzman & Holoman, 2002, p. 309).

While many research studies validate the value of social support to individual well-being, the "specific mechanisms through which support operates have remained poorly understood" (Saltzman & Holoman, 2002, p. 309). Researchers are currently investigating support mechanisms and their effects under different circumstances. Studies have shown that different groups show different responses to social support systems (S. L. Brown, R. M. Nesse, A. D. Vinokur, & D. M. Smith, 2003). For example, Kendler (2005) found men and women respond differently to stress and social support:

> A large literature has examined whether high levels of social support act directly to reduce risk of illness or act indirectly by buffering the effect of adversity. At least in women, we here found a strong direct effect of social support on risk for major depression." (p. 250).

According to Mashood, Verhoeven and Chansarkar (2010), hundred of foreign employees enter the United Arab Emirates each year to work in local and international public and private companies. This work experience helps employees gain knowledge and skill in the UAE professional environment and the foreign population brings cultural diversity to organizations, enhancing the experiences of both local emirati and other foreign workers from various cultures. Ultimately, foreign employees seek the same goals as any other worker group—an educational background that will promote their careers and enhance their future lives (Knoll, Schwarzer, Pfüller & Kienle, 2009). Workers invest heavily in an effort to succeed. In their first work year, beyond the typical anxiety of those leaving home for a foreign country, these employees are under a great deal of additional stress (Revenson, Kayser & Bodenmann, 2005). They are foreign workers who have never been outside their home countries. They are far away from home, in a foreign country, facing a foreign language, and trying to adjust to an unfamiliar culture. Unfortunately, social support systems for these employees are often inadequate and sometimes non-existent (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007). Employers need to understand social support mechanisms required to help foreign employees adjust.

A key organizational domain for developing an understanding of social support falls within what in the West is commonly known as the "employee relations" (ER) function of a human resources department. In the UAE sites studied, the employee relations function (the support for internal employees) was often combined with the public relations (PR) function (the handling of a company's external communications and public image). But in the UAE the two fell under the umbrella "Public Relations" department. To avoid conflation with departments with only a dedicated public relations role, this paper will refer to the "Public and Employee Relations" department (PER) for describing these departments within the UAE organizational structure. The distinction and tension between the ER function and purely PR function will prove important in our analysis.

This project spans multiple organizations with diverse workforces. The research explores the link between their PER departments and social support systems that offer individuals coping strategies enhancing individual and institutional well-being and success. The way in which mentorship plays out is a key area of focus as the paper explores a number of stressors international employees commonly faces particularly junior workers in their first year.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Social Support, Stress, and Well-Being

When people are under stress, they develop responses to mediate the situation causing the stress as best they can. Some people are more successful than others in this regard (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1991). McDonald (1998) notes hundreds of studies showing the relationship between stress and illness. When people have too many stressors at once, they have an impaired immune system and an increased risk for illness. Several studies have examined entire families under stress, to determine why some families seem unable to cope with crises and stress, while others survive to become stronger. McDonald (1998) discusses the work of Hill (1949), who originally studied families during the Depression. He found two complex variables that buffer a family hit by intense stress. One variable is the complex of internal and external family resources available, a part of social support. This form of social support was the degree of social connectedness, not just outside of the family, but within the family itself. According to Hill, socially isolated families experience significantly higher stress levels than families with support systems. The other factor that improves the ability of a family to cope with stress is the "perception factor." This second complex factor refers to a shared family cognition and perception held about the stressors, e.g., the extent to which the family perceives a major change as a disaster or an opportunity. Hill suggests families had positive appraisals whey they could make changes, which increased their ability to accept their circumstances (McDonald, 1998, p. 1).

Wise and Stake (2002) provide a more precise discussion of the nature of the first factor, social support:

> Social support refers to social assets, social resources, or social networks that people can use when they are in need of aid, advice, help, assistance, approval, comfort, protection, or backing. It summarizes information that one is cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communications and mutual obligations. As such, social support will contribute to well-being (Vedder, 2005, p. 269). When people face stressful situations, their ability to cope is affected by the way they interpret the situation, and the strategies developed to help them cope with the stressors involved.

Lakey & Cohen (2000) advance a major theory linking stress and coping strategies to social support. According to the theory, people experience negative results from stress when they are unable to apply effective coping strategies to their circumstances. However, when people have effective social support systems, the support acts as a buffer to the negative effects of stress. Social support promotes adaptive appraisals and better coping abilities.

Drawing from Pugliesi and Shook (1998), Wise and Stake have examined the second factor, perception of social support. Their research suggests that perceptions of social resources (i.e., social support) have moderated the relationship between stressors and functioning by fostering well-being, by reducing distress, and by buffering the stress experienced by individuals. Conversely, low levels of perceived social support have been associated with poor mental health (Wise & Stake, 2002, p. 109). How people perceive their support, or ability to receive support if needed, is based on their particular history. To be helpful, "this perception should directly reduce negative appraisals of stressors" (Lakey & Cohen, 2000, p. 2).

Interestingly, the *perception* that support is available is often more important to the well-being of a person than the actual support (Vedder, 2005). In Lakey's (2002) formulation, perceived (or "functional") support is the belief or judgment on the part of a person that he or she has the support of family and friends whenever needed. When people have a strong perceived support system, they feel they can count on family and friends for assistance in a time of crisis. Perceived support is distinguished from "enacted" support. Enacted support entails the same type of assistance as that perceived, but enacted support is in actuality provided, while perceived support is support individuals believe they will receive. "Surprisingly, perceived and enacted supports are only modestly related" (Lakey, 2002, p. 1).

Wise & Stake (2002), found when people have high expectations of support systems in the workplace, they can cope with a variety of stress factors, including conflicting dual expectations from superiors. They were able to develop coping methods for the complexities and pressures of the workplace much more effectively than people who did not believe their work place offered much support. Self-esteem is also important regarding the ability to address stress. People with high self-esteem exhibit more adaptive coping strategies under high stress situations. High self-esteem is also related to strong support systems that provide positive assessments of people and their behaviors. Nevertheless, the perceptions people have about how much social support they might receive is often related to their social environment. "Based on social support theory… individuals in a positive social environment would show lower levels of strain when exposed to Stressors than would individuals in negative social environments" (Bliese, 2001, p. 425).

1.1 The Relationship between Human Resources and Social Support

There is an integral relationship between PER and social support. They are closely related in the multiple facts of PER work. This includes producing and maintaining files of material about their company's activities, such as newspapers,

brochures, booklets, and magazines, for distribution among employees (new employees can participate by reading and writing their opinions in their publications); planning and creating various employee support programs; answering calls from new workers and the public; writing and circulating news releases, speeches, articles and other company related communications; preparing invitation lists and details for press conferences; and accompanying visitors and clients on tours of the company.

Public and Employee Relations departments can benefit workers by fostering the development of internal organizational social support in multiple ways. For example, if a co-worker is encouraged through the actions of a mentor, this can make a meaningful difference their and their company's success (Garvey and Megginson, 2004). Workers need to feel they exist in a caring environment that includes emotional and social support (Gale Reference Team, 2010). At a different level, PER can attend to accommodating the physical requirements of employees, for example, by instituting changes like wheelchair access, adaptive office equipment,. and private rest areas.

Another element of social support that PER can develop is the establishment of employee support groups. Support groups are organized meetings often run by mental health professionals and intended for helping people who sometimes do not know each other (Wu, 1983). In a support group, people provide each other with different types of help, usually nonprofessional and nonmaterial, for a particular issue in their lives. The help may take the form of listening to and accepting others' experiences, providing relevant information from personal experience, and helping enhance or establish social networks.

Public and Employee Relations can also support policies, forms of communication, and behaviors that at first might seem tangential or external to company business, but in the long run may prove reinforcing to an organization. The aforementioned support group may also work to inform the public or engage in advocacy about a learning experience at work (Lentfer, 2011). By encouraging wide (Yamagishi, Toshio & Karen, 1993) family and friend networks (activities as simple as going out with friends, visiting relatives, working out, preparing activities and meals, and joining a hobby group–all of which may or may not involve coworkers), PER can help the employee avoid the serious negative effects of real or perceived isolation, especially in times of crisis McKinney (2010). Uehara's (1990) work stresses the importance of employees keeping in touch in general with colleagues and supervisors when away from work through means such as telephone calls and postcards as a way to foster social support.

Clearly employees need to keep and understand benefits, such as health and disability insurance, given the complexity of these benefits and their importance for treatment and employee well-being (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). By helping employees with their benefits, PER also enhances out of work networks and can positively influence employee health. Progressive policies related to out of work living – like flexible schedules, part-time work, working from home – are all forms of employee assistance that PER can promote. While particularly important for employees struggling with health issues, these are increasingly important for all employees. In one striking example of how such support can feed back positively for an organization's internal social networks, colleagues fighting cancer who lost their hair were shown a welcome return by employees who shaved their own heads in solidarity (White, Douglas & Karl, 1983).

2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND QUESTIONS

The United Arab Emirates, or UAE (total pop. appox. 8.2 m), situated in the southeastern portion of the Arabian peninsula, is a federation of monarchies ruled by emirs, and consists of the emirates Abu Dhabi (the capitol), Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain. Islam is the official religion, and Arabic is the official language. Expatriates account for 90% of its population, including residents from South Asia, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Iran, northern Africa, and Western countries. The UAE's ethnic diversity is a result of having one of the world's highest net migration rates. Large migration may be attributed to several factors, among them changes in economic and political systems and the differential acknowledgment of human rights by countries across the world (Sarkin, 2000). The UAE are under increased pressure to appropriately employ and manage people of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds (Walck, 1995). Thus the skillful management of diversity in the workplace through various means (Norman, 2010) has emerged as a new priority in the UAE.

Foreign employees working in the UAE face many stressors from their environment, especially during their first year when their language skills are usually inadequate for extensive socialization. Many are far away from home, and the support systems of family and friends that represents, for the first time. Unlike many locals, foreign workers cannot easily return to their home-based support systems because of distance. If the worker is coming from a culture that is very different from the UAE, and many do, they also face a change in location, climate, food, language, customs, norms, values, clothing, and even body language. This type of experience will undoubtedly shape their expectations of what kind of social support to expect from their sponsors. Even if their work environment offers support, foreign workers may not perceive the support in as positive a way as it is intended.

How do worker in the UAE navigate this territory and handle the stressors endemic to new and/or international workers? This paper will discuss the following research questions:

- What main problems and stressors do new foreign-born workers in the UAE face?

- How do PER departments foster the social support systems of these workers?

- Do foreign workers have inaccurate perceptions about the kind of social support they can/do receive at their workplace?

- Do these workers have a hard time actively receiving support due to culturally-based fears and anxieties?

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Two qualitative methods were used to conduct research and analyze data.

First, text analysis was conducted with data from online sources identified through internet and library research.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with key participants from two groups:

Table 1: The Characteristics of the Sample (Group One: Eight Relatively New Employees)

Characteristic	Sample	Number
Gender:	Males	4
	Females	4
Education:	Bachelor degrees:	8
	B.A	5
	B.S	3
Occupation:	Governmental employee	6
	Private employee	2
Age:	Less than 30	3
	30 to less than 40	2
	40 years and more	3
Nationality	India	2
	Australia	1
	USA	2
	UK	1
	Philippines.	2
Marital status:	Single	2 single females
	Married	2 married Females, 4
	Divorced	married males
		0
Work Places	Dubai Municipality, Ras Al-Kimah Municipality, Al-Ain Hospital, Al-Ain Airport, UAE University, the Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones in Abu Dhabi, the integrated government services center, Etisalat (telecommunication company) in Al-Ain, Dubai and ADNOC (petroleum company).	
Job Rank	First-year foreign workers in the UAE	8
Emirates	Dubai	2
	Ras Al-Kimah	1
	Al-Ain	4
	Abu Dhabi	1

Table 2: The Characteristics of the Sample (Group Two: Six P.R practitioners)

Characteristic	Sample	Number
Gender:	Males	4
	Females	2
Education:	BA	6
Occupation:	Governmental employee	4
	Private employee	2
Age:	30 to less than 40	5
	40 years and more	1
Nationality	UAE	6
Marital status:	Single	2 females
	Married	4 males
	Divorced	
Work Places	Dubai Municipality, Al-Ain Hospital, the Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones in Abu Dhabi, the Al-Ain educational zone, ADNOC (petroleum company), Etisalat (telecommunication company) in Abu-Dhabi.	
Job Rank	P.R practitioners:	
	P.R Manager	3
	P.R employee	3
Emiarets	Dubai	2
	Al-Ain	2
	Abu Dhabi	2

Qualitative methods were used for these interviews because there are limited numbers of Public and Employee Relations professionals available in the sampled UAE institutions, which made quantitative methods ineffective. Interviewed to place face to face, in their offices, and by phone in cases where travel was not possible. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes.

3. 1 Interview Questions:

3.1.1 Group 1 (New Employee) Questions

1. How long you have been in this work?

2. In the first year of your job, did you get orientation help from anyone, or you did you depend on yourself, and why?

3. Do you have a person in your work that supported you like a mentor? Who? And how so?

4. How much do you learn from him/her? Examples?

5. Do you think he / she is a good supporter? Why?

6. Are you satisfied with your supporter and the help given to you?

7. Did you face problems in your work? How do you solve them? Did you express your opinions to your supporter? Why?

8. Did you try to solve your problems with your supporter? Or did you search for alternative?

9. Who is your alternative supporter?

10. Did you fully trust to this person, or did you sometimes do just what you thought was expected?

11. After becoming more experienced at work, did you depend mostly on yourself, or did you still rely on someone else?

12. Do you give advice to co-workers?

13. How do you evaluate the PER department people and their support for your work? Did you get any support from this office or Department? If yes? What kind of support you did receive from them?

14. Do you think that the PER department takes care of new employees? How?

15. If you had a conflict in your work, did you ask the PER people to help you, and why?

16. Should PER departments in local organizations focus more on developing employee supports? What do you suggest for improving PER staff responsibilities?

3.1.2 Group 2 (Public and Employee Relations Staff) Questions

1. What are your main public and employee relations responsibilities in the PER department?

2. What is the meaning of social support for new employees in your opinion?

3. What are the difficulties facing new employees? How do you support them?

4. What kinds of assistance do PER practitioners offer new employees? Ex: welcoming and meeting guest in the airports...etc.?

5. What are the difficulties facing PR professionals when they have tried to support new employees? How did they address them?

6. Did your work environment play a role in your work? Do you receive encouragement in your work? Did you get the motivation to support others?

7. What are the main characteristics of the supporter role in employee relations?

8. What kind of activities has your department offered for new employees who faced cultural shock or depression? How do you support them?

9. What difficulties has the PER department faced when dealing with new employees?

10. Do you think that new employees trust your department? Have they called the PER department to get suggestions, advice, training …etc.?

11. What do you suggest as ways to improve PER staff in their role supporting new employees?

3.2 Research Themes

Collected and analyzed data divided into six themes based on the initial research questions:

a) Group 1 (new employee) Themes: Sources of support, employee relations versus public relations, internal employee conflicts, new employee recognition.

b) Group 2 (PER staff) Themes: Welcoming new employees, employee workshops, supportive staff qualities, supportive printed materials.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As Kendler, Lakey and Cohen, and other researchers have shown, social support can act as a buffer for stress and adversity, and that buffer is often personified in the form of a mentor, but how much mentorship did participants receive from PER staff? For two interviewees who worked at the Tam integrated government services center, the answer was: none. In their two years working at the job, they received comfort of support, but from each other rather than from the PER department. Another interviewee stated "I get my assistance from the manager and the other staff within the company." Indeed, employees usually chose their own mentor as best they could manage.

Some interviewees did have satisfying experiences after connecting with a PER staff member. One stated that he knows his mentor very well and still learns from him. He believes he got a fine mentor who understands his circumstances and the organization's environment; his mentor encouraged him to develop his personal skills and helped him sign up for different workshops. This employee did recognize the need for better leadership from PER departments in leveraging manager mentorship. She suggested PER offices arrange and organize relevant suggestions and feedback for the heads or managers in the organization to define clear directions, instructions and models for mentorship.

The mixed results in Group 1 might reflect differing individual capacities to cope with stresses, in agreement with Lakey & Cohen's (2000) findings that some people are more successful in facing stressors in their work environment than others. Yet they might also reflect strengths and shortcomings at a given site. Many interviewees said they tried to adopt the new culture by watching other groups at work, while others indicated they first tried to communicate with other employees to find new friends. So, work environment differences may have played a big role in reflecting their behavior.

A major issue with PER departmental support stems from its dual role in employee relations and public relations. Several Group 1 participants felt that attention to public relations far exceeded efforts to accommodate the needs of employees, especial new immigrant workers. New workers understood in a general way that the PER department was supposed to give them assistance, but felt their efforts wore oriented more externally than internally. One new worker expressed his opinion on a reason why: "Public and Employee Relations departments in non-profit organizations usually consider internal staff first because they are not looking for profit; we can see the lack of interest for orienting new employees in many for-profit organizations that consider clients and customers first."

External over internal concerns factored the assessments by Group 1 employees of PER performance with respect to resolving conflict. Again, there was awareness of the need, from direct experience: "In my first year, I faced a problem with other employees and one of them told me that I was not following the company rules…upsetting me at this level is against the employees' social support. I think if the organization applied the best processes they could to meet the best ethics for staff, we as employees would succeed very quickly." He added that he felt the PER department does not care about internal conflicts. Another interviewee agreed that the PER departments are more likely to solve customer complaints and conflicts to benefit the organization: "Ignoring conflict among staff is a normal, but careless, action of a PER department."

At a minimum, PER departments were expected to produce and make available important literature that new employees could reference to teach themselves the ins and outs of adjusting to work. One interviewee described the function as follows: "Numerous up-to-date PER publications, such as booklets, pamphlets, magazines, brochures, blogs, newsletters, and websites program announcements, are a good indicator of supportive organizations. It means that employees' news is regularly distributed by the PER department and the organization has strong communication." Yet, some workers felt that new employees do not always get needed materials: "without distributing the main manuals regarding each department in any organization or company, of course we as employees will face struggles in our work. For example, if I do not know anyone in this company and I got a job here, and no one supported me or gave me instructions, that means I do not know my tasks and I will not be active like other staff." While aware of general expectations, many interviewees felt they lacked information about the PER office's responsibilities ind detail. When they started work, they did not know the extent to which the PER office was a resource for them. Most employees received information and orientation from the PER office, but they were still confused regarding the actual responsibilities of PER practitioners. At times the written information and publications were not well-circulated among the organization's members. In addition, missing information regarding roles, heavy workloads, and cultural differences add to the stress experienced by new foreign employees.

Group 2 (PER staff) participants, as one might expect, were much more willing to discuss the philosophies and successes of their departments and staff than to introduce criticisms. All PER practitioners agreed that they welcomed new employees from different cultures. In several organizations, mostly those with numerous PER members, they mentioned the existence of official training programs and workshops for new employees from different cultures. In smaller organizations, "new employees work under the guidance of experienced staff members." Therefore, PER staff did feel that guiding, advising, and counseling new employees was part of their specialty. For example, some PER staff felt it was their duty to meet new employees at the airport and offer them good accommodations. "Workers from different cultures have their own assumptions; they always get confused and misinterpret information in the beginning of their stay…such as when choosing small houses with low rents or nearby locations" He added that the PER office tries to communicate with them first, by providing them with formal online forms and options. The forms are filled out before they arrive to limit problems."

PER employees noted the function of coordinating with local institutions and suggesting interactive workshops with local people, especially for new employees, who can meet local people, exchange information, and working with new groups. The also stated that foreigners always need special courses, such as ones in learning the Arabic language, local dialects, and local customs. All PER practitioners believe that activities are vital to the organization. Conferences, lectures, presentations, workshops, and training courses were highlighted as essential tools organized by the PER offices to assist new employees. Regarding communications, one mentioned a method for enhancing both communication and a sense of self-esteem by integrating employee opinions in company publications. Putting new employees in groups with PER practitioners to share their ideas was said to improve their confidence and limit their work stress. "Good communication is awesome in such a stressful atmosphere."

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on data from both new employees and PER staff members, the following practices are recommended:

Offering time: Time limitation and work stress for PER practitioners working in busy offices is normal. Deadlines and tight work schedules can be stressful for them. But new employees create demands that must be met, forcing PER employees to re-organize their time and divide their schedules between PER and employees. PER staff must seek a balance between external duties, such as contacting the media, and internal duties, such as improving communication between themselves and other employees.

Clearly Designated Mentors: Mentors are critically needed in the first year, and selecting the best mentors will best support new employees. The mentor must understand the roles, personal skills, and efforts of the new employees. He or she must support the employee by helping limit his weaknesses and increasing his strengths. Whether taken from PER staff directly, or leveraged from managerial staff, the clear designation of mentorship responsibilities from the moment an employee begins work is crucial.

Education and training: Supporting employees and increasing internship opportunities in public and employee relations provides workers with valuable experience and training, and is the best route to entry-level employment. Some organizations and companies, particularly those with big PER teams, have formal training programs for new employees. All interviewees suggest improving the PER offices by providing practical and unique training courses solely for new employees – services lacking in many PER offices.

Literature: Both internal communication and a sense of new worker self-esteem can be enhanced by integrating employee opinions in company publications. Putting new employees in creative groups with PER practitioners to share their ideas can improve their confidence and limit their work stress...

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It has been well documented that people living in a foreign culture for any length of time often experience a lot of stress from culture shock. Employees from distant locations who work in the UAE are often away from home for the first time. They are often overwhelmed by feelings of isolation, fears of being unable to manage everything, stress, anxiety, and so forth as they attempt to adapt to a variety of stressors in their environment. Foreign workers face challenges of language barriers, discrimination, unfamiliar customs, a strange climate, strange foods, and so on. They are particularly vulnerable because they often lack a social support system they can turn to deal with multiple stress factors. Some organizations are more successful than others in helping foreign members by providing a supportive environment where the members can form social support systems.

Both the new employee group and the PER staff group were in general agreement on the basic needs of new employees and what should be the proper role of the PER department. But the two differed significantly in their awareness and evaluation of the effectiveness of PER activity. New employees were often dissatisfied with the level of PER support they had received, while PER staff themselves were often, though not always, lacking in their discussion of the limitations of company support for new employees, who expressed the typical need for a company orientation and for developing their skills.

Future Research

Some issues need further research, related to foreign workers who form personal social support systems with other foreign workers employed by the same company; do they have an important buffer from the adverse effects of the stress they face? Since this study focused on foreign employees who mainly work with native employees and few other foreign members, future research must focus on foreign workers who form personal social support systems with other foreign workers employed by the same company.

It is important to study the tangible support systems assisting employees in their work and their own, unofficial, support networks. What qualities and characteristics are found in these supportive environments? What kinds of programs seem most successful in helping members cope?

More in-depth research is needed into the composition and workings of new employee support networks, particularly examining the manner in differences based on race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and other aspects of identity shape employee relation buffering networks and coping mechanisms. More research connecting the physical and emotional health of foreign UAE workers to human resource functions is also needed, for example, considering the physical accommodations for disabled workers. Leveraging this study's findings regarding divergent evaluations of PER performance, more studies are needed to tease out the differences between perceptions and realities for foreign workers and PER staffers. Finally, more studies are needed on the impact of worker involvement in PER publications and its effects on individual self-esteem and employee/company satisfaction.

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