



A mini review on the impact of workplace response on employee health and well-being during viral disease outbreaks in three multinational organizations: a personnel psychology viewpoint

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Abstract

Background & Aims: This review presents the connection between personnel psychology and infectious viral diseases, which has important implications for public health and workforce management. Infectious viral diseases can have a significant impact on the workforce, causing absenteeism, decreased productivity, increased healthcare costs, and psychological distress. Therefore, understanding this link is crucial for developing strategies to prevent and manage outbreaks, promote employee well-being, and maintain productivity.

Materials & Methods: The study adopted a qualitative analysis method using search queries carefully crafted to target specific aspects of the strategies employed by organizations such as Kaiser Permanente, Marriott International, and Google during the Ebola outbreak, COVID-19 pandemic, and swine flu, respectively.

Results: The study deliberates on the nature of infectious viral diseases, their impacts on individuals and organizations, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. It also explores the relationship between personnel psychology and infectious viral diseases, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the epidemiology, pathogenesis, and transmission dynamics, as well as social and behavioural factors.

Conclusion: The article concludes by suggesting that organizations should take measures to prevent the spread of infectious viral diseases, support affected employees, and implement policies for sick leave and remote work, infection prevention training, and mental health support.

Keywords: Employee well-being, Infectious viral diseases, Outbreak prevention, Personnel psychology, Workforce management

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Introduction

The link between personnel psychology and infectious viral diseases is crucial for public health and

workforce management. Personnel psychology is the study of individual differences and their impact on work-related behaviours, attitudes, and outcomes (1).

Infectious viral diseases, on the other hand, are caused by the transmission of viruses between individuals, leading to illness and even death (2). The impact of infectious viral diseases on the workforce is significant, with the potential to cause absenteeism, reduced productivity, and increased healthcare costs (3). Additionally, the psychological impact of infectious diseases on employees can lead to anxiety, fear, and stress, further impacting work-related behaviours and outcomes (4).

Understanding Infectious Viral Diseases

Infectious viral diseases are caused by viruses that invade host cells and replicate within them (5). These diseases are often transmitted through direct contact with infected bodily fluids or indirect contact with contaminated surfaces or objects (5). Some of the most common infectious viral diseases include influenza, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C, measles, mumps, rubella, and Ebola. Influenza is a respiratory illness that causes fever, cough, and body aches (6). HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted infection that weakens the immune system, making the infected person susceptible to other infections and diseases (7). Hepatitis B and C are viral infections that can cause liver damage and lead to liver cancer (8). Measles, mumps, and rubella are highly contagious viral infections that can cause fever, rash, and other complications (9). Ebola is a severe and often fatal viral disease that can cause haemorrhagic fever and internal bleeding (10). Understanding the nature and transmission of these infectious viral diseases is crucial in developing effective prevention and control measures. In addition, understanding the impact of these diseases on the psychological well-being of individuals and society is also important. This is where personnel psychology comes in, as it focuses on the behaviour and experiences of individuals in the workplace. Effective management and prevention of these diseases require a comprehensive understanding of the epidemiology, pathogenesis, and transmission dynamics of the causative viruses, as well as the social and behavioural factors that contribute to their spread.

Infectious viral diseases have significant impacts on both individuals and organizations (11). On an

individual level, these diseases can lead to severe illness, hospitalization, and even death. They can also have long-term health consequences and increase the risk of chronic diseases. For organizations, infectious viral diseases can result in decreased productivity due to employee absences and increased healthcare costs (11). Additionally, outbreaks can disrupt supply chains, halt production, and impact the overall economy (11). The recent COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of the widespread impact that infectious viral diseases can have on individuals and organizations (12). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the link between personnel psychology and infectious viral diseases to develop effective strategies to mitigate their impact.

Personnel Psychology

Personnel psychology, which can also be referred to as industrial-organizational psychology, is a branch of psychology that focuses on how psychological theories and principles are used in the workplace (13). Understanding how people and groups interact within businesses is a key component of the profession, as is learning ways to increase both organizational effectiveness and employee well-being (14). Personnel psychology is a field that encompasses a wide range of themes, such as employee assessment and selection, performance reviews and evaluations, training and development, work analysis and design, organizational development and change, leadership, and job satisfaction (15). Personnel psychologists investigate these issues and offer evidence-based recommendations to businesses through research methods such as surveys, experiments, and observational studies (15). The ultimate goal of personnel psychology is to improve the well-being and effectiveness of organizations, enabling them to perform better and achieve their goals (15).

To achieve this objective, personnel psychologists may plan and implement interventions to improve working conditions, train and develop staff to increase their knowledge and skills and establish better management and leadership techniques (16). They aim to help companies enhance employee performance and achieve organizational objectives by providing

practical solutions based on sound scientific research (16). Through their work, personnel psychologists seek to create a positive impact on both the employees and the organizations they work for.

The Link between Personnel Psychology and Infectious Viral Diseases

Infectious viral diseases can have a significant impact on individuals in the workplace (3). The symptoms of these diseases, such as fever, fatigue, and coughing, can reduce an individual's productivity and ability to work (17). In severe cases, the individual may be absent from work for an extended period, leading to a loss of income and potential career setbacks (18). Additionally, infectious viral diseases can cause psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression, which can further impact an individual's work performance and overall well-being (19). Furthermore, infectious viral diseases can spread rapidly within a workplace, leading to absenteeism and decreased productivity among a large portion of the workforce (18). This can result in increased workloads for those who are still able to work, potentially leading to burnout and further decreases in productivity. In some cases, workplace outbreaks of infectious viral diseases can even result in the closure of the workplace, leading to significant economic losses for the organization and potential job losses for employees (18). As such, organizations need to take measures to prevent the spread of infectious viral diseases in the workplace and to support employees who are affected by them. This can include implementing policies for sick leave and remote work, providing education and training on infection prevention, and offering mental health support to employees affected by the psychological impacts of infectious diseases (20, 21).

Infectious viral diseases can have a significant impact on organizational behaviour. When a contagious disease such as the flu or COVID-19 spreads through a workplace, it can cause significant disruptions to the normal functioning of the organization (22). Employees may need to take time off work to recover from illness or care for sick family

members, resulting in decreased productivity and increased costs for the organization (23). In some cases, entire departments or facilities may need to be shut down temporarily to prevent the spread of the disease, further disrupting business operations (24). Additionally, the fear and anxiety associated with infectious diseases can lead to decreased employee morale and engagement (20). Employees may be concerned about their health and the health of their colleagues, leading to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction (20). This can result in decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher rates of employee turnover (23). Furthermore, the response of the organization to an infectious disease outbreak can impact employee perceptions of the organization's culture and values. If an organization is seen as prioritizing profits over employee health and safety, this can damage employee trust and loyalty (25). On the other hand, organizations that prioritize employee health and safety during an outbreak can improve employee morale and engagement (25). Overall, the impact of infectious viral diseases on organizational behaviour is significant and should be taken into consideration by organizations in their response to outbreaks (25).

Personnel psychology can play a crucial role in managing infectious viral diseases in the workplace (26). One important aspect is to promote health and safety practices through training programs and communication strategies (26). This can include educating employees on proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and other infection control measures (26). Additionally, personnel psychology can be used to identify and address factors that may contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, such as workplace policies that discourage sick leave or inadequate sick leave policies (27). Personnel psychology can also help with the development and implementation of strategies for managing outbreaks (28). This can include creating emergency response plans, establishing protocols for identifying and reporting cases of infectious diseases, and providing support to employees who may be affected by the outbreak (28). In addition, personnel psychology can

be used to address the mental health impacts of infectious diseases, such as anxiety and stress (20). Finally, personnel psychology can play a role in the development and dissemination of policies and guidelines related to infectious diseases in the workplace (21). This can include working with public health officials and other experts to develop evidence-based recommendations, as well as ensuring that policies and guidelines are effectively communicated to employees and other stakeholders (21). Overall, the integration of personnel psychology in managing infectious diseases can help to promote a safe and healthy work environment while also ensuring the well-being of employees.

Criticisms and Gaps in Applying Personnel Psychology to Infectious Disease Outbreaks

There are several key challenges in effectively managing public health crises within organizational settings. One prominent criticism is the lack of integration between personnel psychology, which focuses on individual behaviours and attitudes in the workplace, and infectious disease management strategies (29). Traditional approaches in personnel psychology often prioritize organizational productivity and employee well-being without adequately considering the implications of infectious diseases on workforce dynamics (30).

One notable gap lies in the limited attention given to infectious disease outbreaks within the realm of personnel psychology research and practice. While there is recognition of the psychological impact of infectious diseases on individuals, such as increased anxiety and fear, there is a dearth of comprehensive frameworks or interventions within personnel psychology to address these issues proactively (22). As a result, organizations may struggle to effectively manage outbreaks and support employees during health crises (22).

Another criticism is the tendency to overlook the broader societal and environmental factors that contribute to infectious disease transmission within organizational contexts (31). Personnel psychology

traditionally focuses on individual-level factors, such as job stress and work-life balance, without adequately considering the external factors that may exacerbate disease spread, such as community transmission rates, behaviour changes or host susceptibility (32).

Additionally, there is a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration between personnel psychology and public health disciplines in addressing infectious disease challenges (33, 34). Despite the interconnected nature of these fields, there remains a siloed approach to addressing health-related issues within organizational settings. This fragmentation hinders the development of holistic strategies that integrate psychological insights with epidemiological knowledge to effectively mitigate disease risks (35).

Addressing these criticisms and gaps requires a concerted effort to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and develop tailored interventions that integrate principles of personnel psychology with infectious disease management strategies (29). This may involve enhancing training programs for organizational leaders and human resource professionals to recognize and respond to infectious disease threats, as well as promoting research initiatives that explore the intersection of personnel psychology and public health (36, 37). By bridging these divides, organizations can better prepare for and respond to infectious disease outbreaks, ultimately safeguarding both employee well-being and organizational resilience.

Data Source and Methodology

The study focused on examining the application of personnel psychology principles within organizational contexts during viral epidemics. Rather than following a systematic review approach with predefined databases and keywords, the study adopted a qualitative analysis method. To ensure comprehensiveness, variations of the search terms were employed to capture relevant articles and case studies. Each search query used on the Google search bar was carefully crafted to target specific aspects of the strategies employed by organizations such as Kaiser Permanente, Marriott International, and Google during the Ebola outbreak, COVID-19 pandemic, and swine flu, respectively. The keywords were as follows:

1. “Google Hyderabad office closure swine flu”
2. “Kaiser Permanente Ebola outbreak crisis communication strategy”
3. “Marriott International COVID-19 response case study”

Case Studies and Analysis

One case study that can be examined is the response of the technology company Google to the 2009 H1N1 pandemic (38). Google's personnel psychology team designed and implemented a comprehensive response plan that included communication strategies, guidelines for sick employees, and alternative work arrangements such as telecommuting (39). By quickly implementing the plan, Google was able to maintain productivity and reduce the spread of the virus among employees. Another case study is the response of the healthcare organization Kaiser Permanente to the 2014 Ebola outbreak (Greene & Ferguson, 2018). The organization developed a response plan that included guidelines for identifying and isolating infected individuals, training for staff on infection prevention and control, and communication strategies for both internal and external stakeholders (40). By quickly implementing the plan and working closely with public health officials, Kaiser Permanente was able to prevent the spread of the virus and maintain continuity of operations (40). A third case study is the response of the hospitality company Marriott International to the COVID-19 pandemic. The company developed a response plan that included enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols, guidelines for sick employees, and alternative work arrangements such as telecommuting (41). The company also implemented measures to ensure the safety of guests and employees, such as social distancing and the use of personal protective equipment (41, 42). By quickly implementing the plan and adapting to changing circumstances, Marriott International was able to maintain operations and protect the health of employees and guests (41, 42).

In analyzing the role of personnel psychology in organizations that have successfully managed infectious viral diseases, several key themes emerge. First, these organizations prioritize employee well-

being and safety, recognizing that healthy employees are essential for a productive and effective workforce. Second, these organizations communicate clearly and regularly with employees about infectious viral diseases and the measures being taken to prevent their spread. This communication helps to build trust and a sense of shared responsibility among employees. Third, these organizations provide support and resources to employees to help them cope with the impact of infectious viral diseases, such as offering paid sick leave, flexible work arrangements, and mental health support. Fourth, these organizations adapt and modify their policies and procedures as necessary to respond to changing circumstances, such as implementing remote work arrangements or modifying sick leave policies. Fifth, these organizations work closely with public health authorities to stay up-to-date on the latest guidance and recommendations for preventing the spread of infectious viral diseases. Finally, these organizations recognize that managing infectious viral diseases requires a multi-faceted approach that involves all levels of the organization, from senior leadership to frontline employees. Overall, personnel psychology plays a critical role in managing infectious viral diseases in the workplace by providing a framework for understanding and addressing the complex interplay between individual behaviour, organizational culture, and public health considerations. By prioritizing employee well-being, communicating effectively, providing support and resources, adapting policies and procedures, working closely with public health authorities, and taking a multi-faceted approach, organizations can successfully manage infectious viral diseases in the workplace while maintaining productivity and effectiveness.

The case studies analyzed suggest that personnel psychology plays a critical role in managing infectious viral diseases in the workplace. Some of the key lessons learned from these case studies include the importance of communication, leadership, and organizational culture in preventing the spread of infectious viral diseases. Additionally, the case studies highlight the importance of implementing policies and procedures that support employee health and well-

being. There are several implications for future research and practice based on these findings. First, future research should focus on identifying effective communication strategies and leadership styles that can be used to promote employee health and prevent the spread of infectious viral diseases in the workplace. Second, research should examine the impact of organizational culture on employee health and well-being, and how it can be improved to support infectious disease prevention efforts. Third, future research should explore the effectiveness of different policies and procedures for managing infectious viral diseases in the workplace, such as sick leave policies, flexible work arrangements, and remote work options. Finally, there is a need for more research on the long-term effects of infectious viral diseases on employee health and well-being, as well as the economic impact of these diseases on organizations.

Conclusion

Understanding the impact of infectious diseases on individuals and organisations, as well as leveraging personnel psychology concepts, can promote a safer and healthier work environment, resulting in increased employee productivity and organisational success.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this research.

Data Availability

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

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