Workplace Environment and Employee Morale:
A Study of Selected Organizations in Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

Employers need to create pleasant workplace environmental conditions in order to enhance workplace relationships, bolster employee morale, and increase organizational productivity. This study analyzed the relationship between workplace environment and employee morale using a descriptive co-relational research design. Convenience sampling was used to select 30 respondents from target organizations to complete a questionnaire addressing the research objectives.

The results revealed a positive relationship between physical workplace components such as comfortable furniture, work-related tools and resources, and a suitable working environment. Career advancement opportunities also boosted morale and helped to create a healthy working environment. However, poor working relationships between employees and front-line supervisors overshadowed the positive influence of these physical amenities and led to low morale, stagnant productivity, and high turnover rates in these organizations.

Keywords: *Workplace environment, organization, employee, employee morale, working conditions*

Introduction

In today's competitive and globalized world, organizations face the challenge of turnover – losing skilled and experienced employees to other organizations which offer better working conditions (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2014). Moreover, because of the lack of satisfactory workplace conditions, many employees have lost their morale to work in organizations, which in turn affects the productivity and quality of organizational outcomes (Bakotic & Babic, 2013; Aiken, Clarke & Sloane, 2002; Leblebici, 2012). Employee morale implies the total satisfaction that a person derives from a job. It is not static; it changes and depends on working conditions. Employee morale is expressed through loyalty and productive work for an organization.

A key factor affecting employee morale may be that managerial priorities are not aligned with those of their employees, due to a focus on profit maximization. Instead of boosting employee morale and organizational productivity by creating a conducive workplace environment, employees find themselves in work conditions that pose risks to their well-being. The causes of these can be factors such as the physical structure of the workplace, office set-up, and the social environment, which also play important roles in boosting employee morale. When the workplace environment is unsafe or too noisy, lacks adequate furniture, proper air circulation, lighting, or protective gear for workers, or if the potential for disease contamination exists, employee morale and performance will be negatively affected (Chandrasekar, 2011). This is reiterated by Leanman and Bordass (2005) and McCoy (2005), who indicate that office equipment and infrastructure play a crucial role in employee morale. On the other hand, there are also other factors such as changing employee tasks or jobs, misunderstandings, providing unclear guidance for job orientation, a lack of open communication with management, and empowering non-qualified persons for certain tasks that affect employee morale (Morgan, 2017). When any of these conditions persist, an organization will typically see high turnover rates, complaints, and absenteeism, all of which are evidence of low morale (Roelofsen, 2002). Unfortunately, most of these factors have been ignored by employers. This is perhaps due to the lack of understanding by many employers, who believe that organizational productivity can be improved by motivating employees through monetary rewards. Nonetheless, it is not just a matter of providing a safe and adequate physical equipment that will enhance employees' morale. Heathfield (2016) argues that regularly providing employee recognition, while empowering employees with a framework of goals, measurements, and organizational expectations, will create high morale and

employee engagement. When employees have high morale, an organization's profitability, which is dependent upon outcomes from its activities and services, may also be positively affected.

As discussed above, employee morale may not depend on motivational factors put in place by many organizations that are based on financial rewards and incentives. Employees deserve good workplace conditions and interaction from supervisors in order to earn their loyalty and engagement in achieving the organization's goals. Failure to provide a conducive atmosphere in offices and adequate workplace conditions could lead to problems of losing qualified and committed employees who are affected by poor workplace conditions. This leads us to the question of whether adequate workplace conditions, office environment, tools, equipment, physical facilities, and interaction with supervisors and co-workers would positively or negatively affect employee morale in selected organizations in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Hence, the current study aims to analyze the relationship between workplace environment and employee morale. The study was guided by the following objectives: (1) to analyze how the physical components of workplace environments affect employee morale; (2) to find out how behavioral components of workplace environments affect employee morale. The study's results were tested by using the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between workplace environment and employee morale in selected organizations in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study focused on workplace environmental factors that included physical factors, comfort level, and workplace relationships, interaction with supervisors and co-workers, training, motivation, and incentives as independent variables, and employee morale and job satisfaction as dependent variables.

Physical environment refers to physical conditions in the office environment such as windows, air-conditioning, other conditions of the environment such as noise and temperature, and tools used in the organization. These conditions make up the workplace environment and are crucial factors that enhance human interactions and relations, playing a role in shaping one's satisfaction towards his/her job (Chandrasekar, 2011; Tjambolang, 2013).

Workplace environment refers to the location and context where employees are serving the organization. The analysis of this component was done from employee opinions using the following measurements: strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Employee morale refers to the overall outlook, attitudes, satisfaction, and confidence felt in the workplace by supervisors and co-workers (Heathfield, 2016). The factors were measured based on respondents' positive and negative responses ("Yes" or "No") to statements provided in a survey questionnaire.

Job satisfaction refers to the integrated set of psychological, physiological, and environmental conditions that encourage employees to acknowledge that they are satisfied or happy with their jobs (Bakotic & Babic, 2013; Aiken, Clarke & Sloane, 2002).

Behavioral components of employee morale refer to attitudes toward different factors such as interaction and relationships with supervisors and colleagues, training, motivation, and workplace incentives.

Based on this framework, the study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:
1. What was the impact of physical environment factors and the comfort level of furniture on employees' satisfaction with workplace environments?
2. What was the impact of workplace relationships on employee morale?
3. Were the following significantly related to each other:
   a. Physical environmental factors and the role of supervisors to improve working conditions?
   b. Career advancement/rewards plans and employee job satisfaction?
   c. The quality and adequacy of tools and resources, and supervisors' behavior and assistance to boost employee morale?

Literature Review

According to Chandrasekar (2011), two major areas which increase employee morale have been ignored: personal motivation, and a conducive working environment. Spector (1997) observed that most managers ignore environmental conditions within their organizations, which results in an adverse effect on the performance of their employees. Tjambolang (2013) indicated that lighting, noise, color, air conditioning, office layout, office furniture, and equipment are key physical factors of the workplace environment to keep employees' morale high.

For Asghar (2014), workplace environment should be considered as a fundamental organizing element in people's lives to provide not just extrinsic rewards such as paychecks and other benefits, but intrinsic value like identity and a commitment to increase employee morale. When employees' morale is high, there may be a subsequent enhancement in human interactions and relations, which will increase organizational productivity (Chandrasekar, 2011). Other aspects such as a sense of achievement from work, recognition, respect, and opportunities for personal growth add value to their work and services in the organization, and may also improve morale and productivity (Baah & Amoako, 2011). In summary, there are many variables involved, as Sell and Cleal (2011) indicate, wherein different physical and psychosocial motivational factors from the work environment have a direct impact on employee morale and job satisfaction.

Keeping employee morale and maintaining a productive workplace increases the loyalty of employees and organizational productivity (Lancaster, 2015). According to Positive Employee Morale (n.d.), developing and maintaining employee morale starts from the time of orientation after hiring. According to McFarlin (2016), when employers treat their employees with respect, they are not only improving their morale, but also helping employees treat their customers and other employees with respect whilst maintaining their confidence at the workplace.

Hibberd (2014) presents the fact that not all business owners can afford to put their employees in a nice building and maintain good conditions in the working environment. Providing good equipment, an adequate supply of stationery, and keeping offices clean are simple things that are expected from every organization, yet ignored by many managers. Furthermore, it was observed by Blankenship (2014) that leaders spend their time, resources, and energy seeking out the best and brightest employees who can bring their best to the organization. But once they are in place, no care is provided, and the focus changes to organizational profitability instead of maintaining employee morale. Thus, the major challenges for supervisors and managers are to provide job security, stable businesses, conducive workplace environments, unlimited mobility, and fair compensation to increase employees' morale and personal well-being (Ali, 2017).

Even though many studies have demonstrated that the working environment has an impact on employee morale, if workers do not believe that supervisors/managers are genuine, honest, and practice high levels of integrity, any efforts made to improve morale will be vain. In the absence of trust, employee morale decreases and self-protectionism becomes the rule (Schaefer, 2017). Hence, there are consequences for employers who do not care to increase employee morale. Blankenship (2014) reported that failure to improve morale issues in the workplace may result in the following: decreased productivity, high rates of absenteeism and conflict, employee turnover, loss of competitive advantage in the market, etc. Further, the study revealed that some organizations unnecessarily spend resources due to high rates of turnover.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive and co-relational research design with a quantitative approach. The descriptive method was utilized to describe workplace environmental factors and employee morale, while the correlational approach was used to analyze relationships among the variables and determine the extent to which workplace environmental factors affected employee morale in the selected organizations. Workplace environmental factors included physical factors, comfort level, workplace relationships, training, and incentives as independent variables, and employee morale and job satisfaction as dependent variables.

The study population included employees who were working in the offices of small businesses in Jakarta, Indonesia that supply fast food and transportation services. The data were collected from September to November 2016. Convenience sampling was used to select 30 respondents who were willing to respond to a survey questionnaire. Ethical considerations observed included not disclosing the identity of respondents or targeted organizations.

The researchers used a self-administered questionnaire made up of three sections, consisting of items inquiring about respondents' personal information, workplace environmental factors, and employee morale and organizational productivity. The instrument consisted of close-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale. Due to distance, the questionnaires were distributed with the help of research assistants in each organization using a Google form to collect the data.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to describe the workplace environment and employee morale factors. To determine the relationship between workplace environment and employee morale, Pearson's correlation was computed and the decision was to accept the effect if the significant level calculated is less than 0.05. If greater than 0.05, the decision rule was to reject the effect stating that there is relationship between workplace environment and employee morale. Appropriate software was used to group and organize the output in tables.

Results

Respondents Demographic Characteristics

The respondents' demographic characteristics are shown in the table below.

Table 1 Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	16	53.3
	Female	14	46.7
Age	20-29 years old	27	90.0
	30-39 years old	1	3.3
	40 years and above	2	6.7
Period of Service	Less than 1 year	22	73.4
	1-5 years	6	20.0
	6-10 years	1	3.3
	11 years and above	1	3.3

The findings in Table 1 reveal that more than half of respondents were male (n=16; 53.3%), most of them were less than 30 years old, and a majority had less than one year of experience working at their respective companies.

Physical Components of Workplace Environment

The study analyzed the physical conditions of the office environment: windows, air-conditioning, noise, temperature, and tools used in the workplace.

Results in Table 2 (please see following page) show that respondents agreed that physical conditions at work influence their productivity (Mean = 4.23). They also reported that office conditions were conducive to carrying out their work duties, and that they had adequate tools and resources to do their jobs well. While respondents agreed that unfavorable workplace conditions such as noise or heat may decrease their productivity (Mean = 3.90), they also felt that favorable environmental conditions do not necessarily increase productivity (Mean = 2.27).

Table 2 Physical Components of Workplace Environment

Items Rated	M	SD
The physical conditions at work influence my productivity.	4.23	.77
The number of windows in my work area supply my need for fresh air and light.	3.83	.83
My office is open enough to see my colleagues working.	4.07	.98
Favorable environmental conditions (less noise, suitable temperature, etc.) in the office building will increase my productivity at work.	2.27	.64
Unfavorable environmental conditions (noise distractions, unsuitable temperature, etc.) in the office building will decrease my productivity at work.	3.90	.76
My workspace serves multipurpose functions for informal and instant meetings.	3.70	.84
I have the tools and resources to do my job well.	3.97	.67

Scale: < 1.50   Strongly Disagree
          1.51-2.50   Disagree
          2.51-3.50   Undecided
          3.51-4.50   Agree
         > 4.51   Strongly Agree

Leblebici (2012, p. 39) suggested that "to achieve high levels of employee productivity, organizations must ensure that the physical environment is conducive to organizational needs facilitating interaction and privacy, formality and informality, functionality and cross-disciplinarily." This study's findings indicated that while employee productivity is not helped by a comfortable working environment, it may be hindered by a lack of such conditions. This implies that while employees may not demonstrate appreciation for comfortable working environments, their productivity may be adversely affected if workplace conditions fail to meet their needs.

Comfort of Workplace Environment

The level of comfort in the workplace environment was measured through the condition and the quality of furniture used.

Table 3 Comfort of Workplace Environment

Items Rated	M	SD
My furniture is flexible to adjust, rearrange, or re-organize my workspace.	3.77	1.01
My furniture is comfortable enough so that I can work without getting tired till 5 pm.	3.53	1.14
Adequate and comfortable furniture will affect my productivity positively.	4.57	.73

Scale: < 1.50   Strongly Disagree
          1.51-2.50   Disagree
          2.51-3.50   Undecided
          3.51-4.50   Agree
         > 4.51   Strongly Agree

The findings in Table 3 show that respondents strongly agree that adequate and comfortable furniture positively affects their productivity (Mean = 4.57). This implies that inadequate workplace furniture will probably have a negative effect on employee productivity. But according to Hibberd (2014), not every business owner can afford to put employees in a nice building in a good working environment with comfortable furniture. However, these results indicate that productivity will be enhanced if organizations provide employees with adequate and comfortable workplace furniture.

Satisfaction with Working Environment

The next set of questions focused on respondent opinions and personal satisfaction regarding job accomplishment, interaction and information sharing, serving customers, and opportunities for career advancement.

Table 4 Satisfaction with Working Environment

Items Rated	M	SD
My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.	4.27	.64
When a customer is dissatisfied, I can usually correct the problem to their satisfaction.	3.97	.56
My satisfaction with the information received from management on what's going on in the company.	3.57	.94
My satisfaction with the opportunity to get a better job in this company.	3.90	.85

Scale: < 1.50   Strongly Disagree
        1.51-2.50   Disagree
        2.51-3.50   Undecided
        3.51-4.50   Agree
        > 4.51   Strongly Agree

The results in Table 4 reveal that respondents agreed that their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment (Mean = 4.27). They were confident of their ability to solve most customer problems and felt that their company offered promotion opportunities, but were slightly less satisfied with the amount of information received from management (Mean = 3.57). This implies that employees are generally satisfied with their work and working environment in terms of personal accomplishments, opportunities to assist customers, and career advancement possibilities.

Workplace Relationships, Career Development, and Employee Morale

The analysis of workplace relationships, training, incentives, and workloads was based on employee attitudes toward different workplace factors. The questions focused on interaction with workplace supervisors, employee relations with coworkers, training, motivation, and incentives.

The responses to this set of questions are shown in Table 5 (please see following page), and revealed a much lower level of satisfaction than with other parts of the workplace environment. Respondents strongly disagreed that relationships with colleagues or supervisors increased workplace morale, or that supervisors had improved working environments. They were also noticeably cooler to the notion that training or incentives had improved organizational productivity or increased morale. As noted in Table 1, 73% of respondents had worked for less than a year in their positions, and poor workplace relationships – along with a lack of training and incentives – may explain the high turnover rates being experienced by these organizations.

Table 5 Workplace Relationships, Career Development, and Employee Morale

Items Rated	M	SD
My supervisor helps me by playing his role to improve the working environment in the organization.	1.47	.82
My morale and productivity level have been increased in the workplace.	1.47	.82
Good relations with coworkers help to play a role in developing a good working environment in the organization.	1.00	.00
Good relations with coworkers help me to increase my level of morale for productivity on the job.	1.20	.55
Good training and a good development plan help me to increase my level of morale for productivity in the organization.	1.13	.51
Good incentives and a rewards plan helps in playing a role to develop a good environment in the organization.	1.13	.51
An adequate and reasonable workload helps to increase my level of morale for productivity in the organization.	1.20	.61

Scale: < 1.50   Strongly Disagree
　　　　　1.51-2.50   Disagree
　　　　　2.51-3.50   Undecided
　　　　　3.51-4.50   Agree
　　　　　> 4.51   Strongly Agree

These findings are consistent with those of Leblebici (2012), who indicated that a positive social atmosphere and comfortable physical environment in workplaces are important elements in maintaining and improving employee morale and organizational productivity.

Relationship between Workplace Environmental Factors and Employee Morale

A Pearson correlation analysis was used to find out the relationship between selected workplace environmental factors and employee morale. Results of the Pearson correlation analysis in Table 6 (please see following page) revealed that physical factors such as less noise, suitable temperature, lighting, safety, etc. were negatively correlated with supervisors playing their role to improve the working environment for employee morale ($r = -0.364$, $p = 0.048$). This means that employee morale is decreased by supervisors' behavior even though the workplace environment is favorable for employee morale.

The results show that there is a positive relationship between provision of multipurpose workspaces that are suitable for informal meetings and creation of a good working environment ($r = 0.0458$, $p = 0.011$). These findings agree with the idea that the nature of work, a sense of achievement from work, recognition, and opportunities for personal growth and advancement help employees to value their work and service to organizations (Baah & Amoako, 2011). The results also support Sell and Cleal (2011), who indicated that different psychosocial and work environment variables like social support have a direct impact on employee morale and job satisfaction. Further, the results show that when employers treat their employees with respect, they not only improving their morale, but they also help employees treat their customers and coworkers with respect and maintain their confidence in the workplace (McFarlin, 2016).

Employee comfort level results revealed a negative relationship between tools and resources allocated for the job and supervisor efforts to improve the working environment ($r = -0.0531$, $p = 0.003$) and increase employee morale ($r = -0.374$, $p = 0.042$). While management provides tools and resources, supervisors evidently do not take much interest in making additional workplace improvements. Providing suitable office equipment, adequate supplies, and keeping offices clean are simple things that are expected nowadays in every organization. However, many employees also long

Table 6 Relationship between Workplace Environment and Employee Morale

	Supervisor plays role to improve working environment	Morale level increased by help of your supervisor	Incentives/rewards plan plays a role in developing a good environment
Favorable environmental conditions (less noise, suitable temperature, etc.) in the office building will increase my morale at work.	−.364* (0.048)		
My workspace serves multipurpose functions for informal and instant meetings.			.459* (0.011)
I have the tools and resources to do my job well.	−.531** (0.003)	−.374* (0.042)	
How satisfied are you with information you receive from the management?	−.394* (0.031)		
How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in this company?			.367* (0.046)

* p ≤ 0.05   ** p ≤ 0.01

for emotional support in workplaces in the form of an understanding and sympathetic ear, words of encouragement and appreciation, and a kindly concern at times of personal difficulties. Yet such simple but effective measures are ignored by many managers.

A positive relationship was also noted between career advancement opportunities and incentive/reward plans (r = 0.367, p = 0.046). This means that the organizations that were studied evidently offer incentives and rewards to employees who are promoted.

There was a negative relationship between information provided by management and the role played by supervisors to improve working environments (r = − 0.394, p = 0.031). This reinforces the finding that relationships between employees and managers – as mediated through supervisors – seem to be quite poor, as evidenced by high turnover. Unless employees believe that managers are genuine, honest, and practice high levels of integrity, any efforts made to improve employee morale will be in vain. In the absence of trust, morale plummets and self-protectionism becomes the rule (Schaefer, 2017).

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

This study's findings show that respondents agreed that physical components of workplace environments have a positive influence on their productivity. This means that employees need adequate and comfortable furniture in order to be productive in their organization. Employees are also mostly satisfied with their jobs and working conditions. However, relationships between workers and supervisors appear strained, and relations with colleagues did little to improve employee morale. The highest negative correlation was between having adequate tools and resource to do their jobs well (r = − 0.531) and supervisor efforts to improve workplace environments. The highest positive correlation was between workspace ability to support informal meetings (r = 0.459) and the role of incentives in creating a good working environment.

The results also revealed that workers' negative relationships with supervisors have had an adverse effect on both morale and productivity. Other studies have demonstrated that unless employees believe that their managers are genuine, honest, and practice high levels of integrity, efforts to improve employee morale will be in vain, and self-protectionism will become the rule (Schaefer, 2017). The high turnover rates shown in Table 1 are a likely indication that self-protectionism has become the norm in these organizations.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

- Organizations should create comfortable physical and working environments by providing appropriate furniture, lighting, and interior design, and also make efforts to minimize noise and create an atmosphere that increases employee morale and organizational productivity.
- Organizations should monitor supervisors'/managers' relationships with their employees in order to create good working environments based on trust and confidence.
- Quality assurance of workplace environments should be done to determine internal and external factors that affect employee morale in organizations.
- Seminars and workshop should be conducted by organizations to create better working relationships between employees and supervisors.

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