



The Interplay Between Quality of Work Life, Work Stress, and Performance Outcomes among Gen Z Employees

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The objective of this paper is to analyze the influence of Quality of Work Life (QWL) on employee performance by examining the mediating role of work stress among Generation Z employees in Solo. The objective of this study is twofold: first, to elucidate the inconsistent findings in prior studies regarding the impact of QWL on performance, and second, to identify the mechanisms through which work stress shapes this relationship.

Methodology/approach – The study utilizes a quantitative research design, employing data collected from 120 Generation Z employees in Solo through the administration of structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach to assess both direct and indirect effects between variables.

Findings – The findings reveal that QWL significantly influences employee performance both directly and indirectly. Work stress acts as a mediating factor, with higher QWL reducing stress levels, while excessive stress negatively impacts performance. These results highlight the importance of a supportive work environment in maintaining productivity and well-being.

Novelty/value – This study offers empirical evidence of work stress as a mediator between QWL and performance among Generation Z employees, providing insights for organizations to enhance work-life quality, reduce stress, and boost performance in the digital workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly competitive era of globalization, companies must be prepared to compete with high-quality human resources (HR). Quality human resources are valuable assets for companies in achieving their goals and objectives. Therefore, human resource development is very important (Hadidjah, 2022). Through careful human resource planning, companies can create an environment that supports increased productivity and workforce efficiency, leading to improved overall work performance (Simbolon et al., 2023). The level of success achieved by a company in achieving its



goals is the foundation for employee performance (Al Akbar & Sukarno, 2023). Therefore, companies must comprehensively understand the elements of stress management that need to be addressed in order to optimize profits and increase employee satisfaction (Pandey, 2020). Poor quality of work life (QWL) has been proven to have a negative impact on work stress, anxiety, and burnout, which ultimately leads to a decline in work performance (Sumiati & Ramadani, 2020). The impact of QWL and work stress on employee performance is a complex and significant phenomenon that requires careful consideration by companies (Sumiati & Ramadani, 2020). Therefore, companies must prioritize the identification and mitigation of these factors in order to create an environment conducive to improving employee performance.

One of the most common problems that arise in companies or organizations is usually related to individual behavior, performance, and attitude. These issues frequently stem from interactions among individuals and groups, as well as from within the organizational structure itself. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as organizational behavior. Human Resources (HR) frequently utilizes organizational behavior to address workplace issues, including work quality (Dewi et al., 2022). Quality of Work Life (QWL) is an organizational development technique that aims to improve organizational functioning by humanizing the workplace, making it more democratic, and involving employees in decision-making (Dewi et al., 2022). QWL has been shown to provide substantial support for employee democracy at all levels of an organization, actively promoting the involvement of employees in the process of decision-making (Sumiati & Ramadani, 2020). In addition to quality of work life (QWL), work stress is another component that affects employee performance.

In the contemporary business environment, human resource management faces the challenge of facilitating collaboration between three generations within an organization, with the aim of achieving competitive advantage. Consequently, the actions of organizational members, comprising both groups and individuals, exert a direct influence on performance or work ability, given that their motivation will affect the overall performance of the organization (Pratama, 2020). The advent of Generation Z coincided with the rapid development of the internet and information technology, which emerged as an attractive technological marvel, replacing the conventional toys of previous generations, namely Gen X, Gen Y, and baby boomers. Consequently, Generation Z is regarded as a generation that is marked by innovative and creative tendencies in the domain of information technology (Tambuwan & Sahrani, 2023). The predominant preference among Generation Z members is for employment opportunities that provide flexible systems, enabling them to self-determine their work schedule and location. Furthermore, they prioritize a work environment that fosters autonomy (Saragih et al., 2024). In such contexts, the role of a conducive work environment is significant in achieving organizational goals, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing factors such as absenteeism and performance (Suriyana et al., 2020).

The concept of Quality of Work Life (QWL) has garnered considerable attention in recent years. This concept is defined as an organization's efforts to provide opportunities for employees to influence their work and contribute to the overall performance of the organization (Yusuf et al., 2022). The concept of QWL (Quality of Working Life) encompasses the quality of life experienced by workers or employees in their workplace. The concept of quality of work life (QWL) plays a significant role in the field of organizational performance and sustainable business growth (Ishfaq et al., 2022). The concept of quality of work life underscores the significance of empowering employees to proactively engage in decision-making processes pertaining to policies that affect their work, the development of their work environment, and the fulfillment of all elements necessary to achieve their professional aspirations (Siregar et al., 2022). The enhancement of quality of work life (QWL) is imperative for the augmentation of employee motivation, productivity, and organizational performance, particularly in the context of digital transformation and sustainable growth (Leitão et al., 2021).

A body of research has demonstrated a negative correlation between high levels of stress and employee performance within a company or organization (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Work stress can be defined as an imbalance between the resources a person has to meet work demands and the

resources they have to meet those demands (Anggraini et al., 2023). Conversely, when stress levels are minimal, employee performance tends to be stable and effective. Conversely, in high-stress environments, performance tends to decline, potentially leading to reduced effort and motivation (Sumiati & Ramadani, 2020). These findings align with the conceptualization of work stress proposed by Stanton et al. (2001), who define it as any aspect of the workplace that is perceived as threatening or demanding, or that causes feelings of discomfort (Asya Anaya & Putri Mega Desiana, 2023).

The findings of a study conducted by Hapsari (2024) on employees of Bank BPD Bali, Negara Branch, demonstrate that the quality of work life exerts no significant effect on employee performance (Hapsari et al., 2024). In contrast, the findings of a study conducted by Raudhotunnisa & Husniati (2022) at PT Sankyu Indonesia International Krakatau Steel In Site Cilegon demonstrate a substantial impact of quality of work life on employee performance (Raudhotunnisa & Husniati, 2022). The impetus for this study was the identification of a research gap by the researchers, specifically the absence of research on factors that influence employee performance. In order to address this research gap, the researchers examined the relationship between QWL and employee performance in greater depth by considering work stress as a mediating variable. In accordance with prevailing theoretical frameworks, positive QWL has been demonstrated to reduce work stress, thereby enhancing employee performance. Consequently, this study makes a substantial contribution to the extant knowledge base by offering a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between QWL and employee performance, particularly in the context of work stress as a mediating variable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality Work Life (QWL)

Dessler (2012) states that Quality of Work Life (QWL) refers to conditions in which employees can fulfill their important needs within the company. This concept underscores the notion that QWL fosters an organizational environment conducive to employee participation in decision-making processes pertaining to policies that impact their work environment. Consequently, this facilitates the development of a workplace that aligns with employees' needs and objectives. The philosophy of Quality of Work Life (QWL) management is a comprehensive approach to managing human resources and the organization as a whole. This philosophy is predicated on the premise that management is profoundly concerned about the impact of work on people, organizational effectiveness, and the crucial role of employees in overcoming organizational challenges. The Quality of Work Life (QWL) paradigm constitutes a systematic concept in organizational life, emphasizing worker involvement in determining their work and the contributions they can make to the company to achieve company goals and objectives (Farmi et al., 2021). It is imperative for both employees and companies to consider Quality of Work Life. Organizations have the capacity to establish a Work Life Quality environment that fosters employee well-being, thereby facilitating optimal performance. Zin (2004) posits that Work Life Quality (WLQ) can be assessed through a variety of indicators, including growth and development, participation, innovative reward systems, and work environment..

Employee Performance

According to Ludfi (2015), the term "performance" is derived from the words "work performance" and "actual," which signify "work performance" or "achievement." The prevailing argument in this field posits that work performance is the result of individual efforts within the context of work. Performance can be executed by individuals or groups within an organization or company, in accordance with their authority and responsibilities, with the aim of achieving objectives. Employee performance constitutes a pivotal element in the success of a company. As posited by Saputra & Rahmat (2024), employee performance constitutes a pivotal element for the success of an organization. Employee performance is defined as the results of work performed by individuals within a certain period of time in accordance with established standards, regardless of individual abilities, efforts made, and organizational support. In their seminal work, Pitaloka et al. (2019) developed a multifaceted



framework for evaluating various aspects of performance, including quality, quantity, cooperation, and responsibility.

Work Stress

According to Navinés et al. (2021), work stress is when job demands exceed an employee's ability to cope, resulting in pressure that is not commensurate with their knowledge and skills. Sumiati & Ramadani (2020) argue that work stress is a feeling experienced by employees when facing their work, which can cause emotions such as instability, dissatisfaction, loneliness, and sleep problems. In addition, employees often complain about the influence of their superiors and coworkers on their stress levels. Work stress is a complex phenomenon, so companies need to prioritize the mental well-being of employees and equip them with effective stress management skills to reduce its detrimental effects. According to Robbins & Judge (2017), the assessment of work stress can be based on several indicators, including role ambiguity, role conflict, excessive roles, and interpersonal demands.

Hypothesis Development

Quality of Work Life (QWL) on Employee Performance

Quality of work life (QWL) describes the level of satisfaction and support that employees feel towards their work environment, including aspects of work safety, life balance, and job satisfaction. High QWL has been proven to increase innovative behavior, loyalty, and employee commitment to the organization (Taufik & Supriyadi, 2025). Key elements that contribute to high quality of work life include open communication, a fair reward system, job security, a satisfying career, supportive supervisors, and involvement in decision-making processes (Wyatt & Wah (2001). Additionally, Hermanto et al. (2024) emphasize that QWL encompasses employees' perceptions of personal growth and development, as well as their sense of security and satisfaction in their work. Research conducted by Sumiati & Ramadani (2020) shows a significant influence of Quality of Work Life (QWL) on employee performance, indicating that employees with higher QWL tend to show higher performance levels Sumiati & Ramadani (2020).

H1: Quality of work life has a positive and significant influence on employee performance.

Quality of Work Life (QWL) and Work Stress

The quality of work life (QWL) and work stress are interrelated phenomena. According to Kandi (2023), the improvement of working conditions within the organizational environment has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy for reducing work stress in individual employees. Consequently, QWL emerges as a pivotal factor in mitigating work stress, thereby enhancing employee performance. This finding underscores the robust correlation between QWL and work stress. This relationship demonstrates a negative direction, indicating that an enhancement in the quality of employees' work life results in a reduction in their work stress (Kandi, 2023). Consequently, to avert employee exhaustion stemming from work-related demands, companies must accord priority to enhancing the quality of their employees' work lives Supriadi & Setiadi (2023).

H2: Work stress has a negative and significant impact on quality of work life (QWL).

Work Stress on Employee Performance

According to Chen (Chen, 2019), employees who encounter elevated work demands may experience stress, a condition characterized by the onset of physiological and psychological responses indicative of pressure American Psychiatric Association (2013). An individual's capacity to manage challenges in the professional setting can be adversely affected by excessive stress. This assertion aligns with the findings of Toscano & Zappalà (2020), who contend that work stress can be conceptualized as an imbalance between an individual's capacity to fulfill job demands and the resources available to address those demands. As posited by Navinés et al. (2021), the phenomenon of work stress arises from a disparity between an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities and the

demands and pressures imposed by their occupation. Consequently, it is imperative to understand the impact of workplace stress on employee performance. This phenomenon also serves as a foundation for the development of effective stress management methods and the establishment of a conducive work environment (Anggraini, et. al., 2023). Research conducted by (Iskamto, 2021) demonstrates that work stress exerts a substantial influence on employee performance. The study indicates that work stress conditions have a substantial impact on employee performance.

H3: Work stress has a negative and significant effect on employee performance.

The Role of Work Stress as a Mediating Variable

According to Gunawan & Amalia (2015), the concept of employee performance is influenced by various factors, including internal and external factors. Internal factors, which act independently, include elements such as competence, skills, knowledge, motivation, attitude, and experience. On the other hand, external factors, or those that act from outside, include individuals who occupy positions within the organizational environment, such as superiors, communication partners, training providers, and performance evaluators (Gunawan & Amalia, 2015). In the context of employee performance, the absence of adequate quality of work life (QWL) has been shown to cause work stress, anxiety, and fatigue (Leitão et al., 2021).

H4: The role of work stress has an influence in mediating quality of work life (QWL) on employee performance.

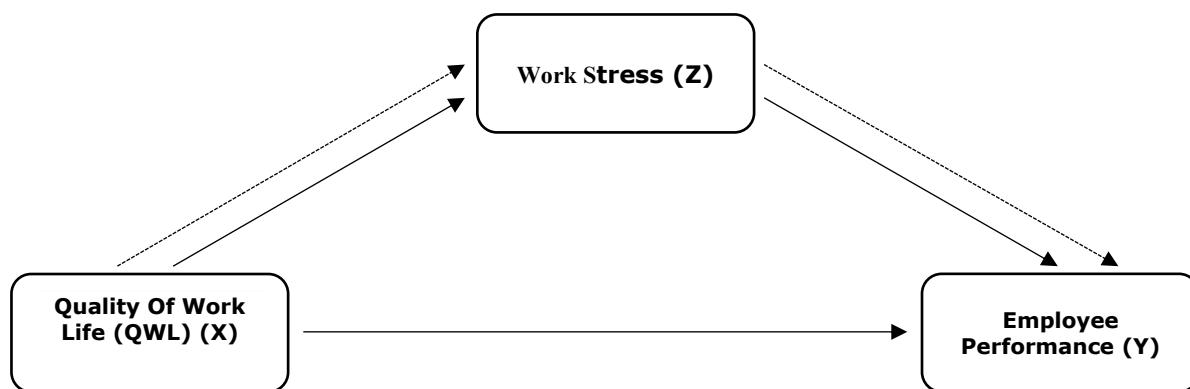


Figure 1. Research model

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research method to analyze the influence of Quality of Work Life (X) on Employee Performance (Y), with Job Stress (Z) serving as a mediating variable among Generation Z employees in Solo. The population consists of Generation Z employees (born between 1997–2012) who have been employed in Solo for at least three months, regardless of gender. The sample was determined using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, ensuring the inclusion of respondents with relevant characteristics. Based on Hair's (2013) formula, the required sample size is 120 respondents (10×12 indicators).

Data were collected from primary sources (questionnaires distributed to employees in the Greater Solo area) and secondary sources (literature and supporting references). The measurement utilized a Likert scale (Sugiyono, 2019). Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), incorporating multiple regression analysis to test the research hypotheses. The path equations followed the model proposed by Ghozali and Latan (2015):



$$M = \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon_1 \quad (1)$$

$$Y = \beta_2 M + \beta_3 X_1 + \epsilon_2 \quad (2)$$

M = *Quality of Work Life (QWL) (mediating variable)*.
 X₁ = Work Stress (independent variable).
 β₁ = Path coefficient indicating the effect of work stress on QWL.
 ε₁ = Error, which is another factor not explained in the model that may affect QWL..
 Y = Employee Performance (dependent variable).
 β₂ = Path coefficient for the effect of QWL on employee performance.
 β₃ = Path coefficient for the direct effect of work stress on employee performance in a model with mediation.
 ε₂ = Error, which is another factor not explained by the model that affects employee performance.

The objective of this model is to ascertain the manner in which occupational stress may exert a direct or indirect influence on employee performance, with QWL serving as a mediating variable. The present study will employ the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method to test the hypothesized causal relationship between the variables under investigation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 1. Outer Loading Factors

Variables	KK (Y)	QWL (X)	SK (Z)	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
X1		0.800				
X2		0.787				
X3		0.802				
X4		0.808				
X6		0.858		0.928	0.940	0.634
X7		0.742				
X8		0.794				
X9		0.794				
X10		0.776				
Y2	0.791					
Y4	0.746					
Y5	0.722					
Y6	0.810			0.903	0.922	0.596
Y7	0.793					
Y8	0.810					
Y9	0.730					
Y10	0.768					
Z2		0.805				
Z6		0.758		0.709	0.837	0.631
Z7		0.819				

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

The evaluation of the measurement model commenced with an assessment of convergent validity, which was determined through the outer loading values of each indicator. Preliminary findings from the SmartPLS 3 analysis, as presented in Table 1, indicate that all indicators measuring the variables of Quality of Work Life (QWL), Employee Performance (KK), and Job Stress (SK) have outer loading values that exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70. The QWL indicators demonstrate outer loading values ranging from 0.742 to 0.858, the KK indicators exhibit a range from 0.722 to 0.810, while the SK indicators display values between 0.758 and 0.819. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct exceeds 0.50, indicating that the construct is capable of adequately explaining the variance of the indicators and that convergent validity has been fulfilled. Specifically, the QWL construct has an AVE value of 0.634, the KK construct has an AVE value of 0.596, and the SK construct has an AVE value of 0.631.

Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. The analysis of the test results indicates that all constructs have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values that exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, with QWL ($\alpha = 0.928$; CR = 0.940), KK ($\alpha = 0.903$; CR = 0.922), and SK ($\alpha = 0.709$; CR = 0.837). These findings confirm that each construct has adequate internal consistency, thereby ensuring the reliability and suitability of the measurement instruments for further analysis in structural models.

Table. 2 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
QWL	0.928	0.940	0.634
KK	0.903	0.922	0.596
SK	0.709	0.837	0.631

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct. The AVE values for QWL (0.634), KK (0.596), and SK (0.631) exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50. This indicates that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators, confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Table. 3 Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
KK	0.772		
QWL	0.606	0.796	
SK	0.642	0.709	0.795

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

The square root of the AVE values (diagonal elements) for each construct is greater than the inter-construct correlations. This result confirms that discriminant validity is achieved based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

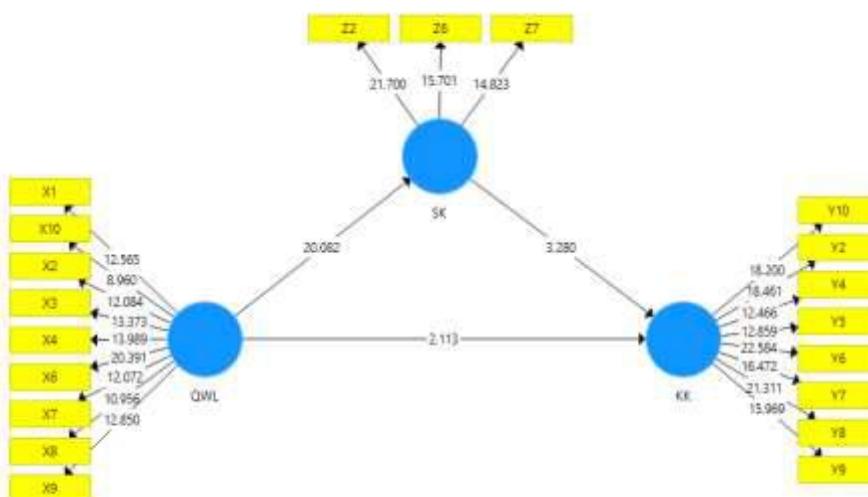
Table. 4 HTMT Ratio

KK	QWL	SK
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KK	
QWL	0.656
SK	0.790 0.864

The HTMT analysis indicates that the value between Job Stress (SK) and Quality of Work Life (QWL) is 0.864, which slightly exceeds the conservative threshold of 0.85 but remains below the extreme cut-off value of 0.90. Consequently, discriminant validity is regarded as adequate. While both constructs are conceptually related, Job Stress is defined as psychological pressure arising from job demands, whereas Quality of Work Life is defined as an individual's ability to balance work and personal life (sources).

Figure 2. Structural model



Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

Goodnes of Fit

$$\begin{aligned}
 GoF &= \sqrt{(Average AVE) \times (Average R^2)} \\
 GoF &= \sqrt{(0.62) \times (0.48)} \\
 GoF &= 0.546
 \end{aligned}$$

Interpretation:

The Goodness of Fit (GoF) test results show a value of 0.546, which is above the threshold of 0.36. This indicates that the research model has a high level of suitability, so that the measurement model and structural model are declared good and feasible for use in hypothesis testing. This is consistent with the SRMR value, which shows a figure of $0.069 < \text{threshold of } 0.08$, so that the model is declared feasible for use in testing the relationship between variables.

Table. 5 Goodnes of Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.069	0.069

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

Table. 6 Direct Test

Effect Size Test	Original Sample	T-Stats	p-values	Status
QWL -> KK	0.303	2.113	0.035	Accepted
QWL -> SK	0.709	20.082	0.000	Accepted
SK -> KK	0.427	3.280	0.001	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

Table 6 presents the results of the direct effect hypothesis testing. The quality of an organization's work environment exerts a substantial influence on the performance of its employees and their experience of job stress. Consequently, job stress exerts a substantial influence on employee performance. Consequently, all of the proposed direct hypotheses are supported.

Table. 7 Indirect Test

Effect Size Test	Original Sampl	T-Stats	p-values	Status
QWL -> SK -> KK	0.302	3.118	0.002	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS3 output processed in 2025

Table 7, the findings of the mediation analysis reveal the indirect effect of Quality of Work Life on Employee Performance through Job Stress. The findings indicate that job stress significantly mediates the relationship between quality of work life and employee performance. This finding indicates that enhancements in Quality of Work Life exert a direct influence on Employee Performance and, moreover, an indirect influence through the reduction of Job Stress. This outcome serves to substantiate the existence of a mediation effect within the structural model.

Quality of Work Life on Employee Performance

The findings of the study demonstrate that Quality of Work Life (QWL) exerts a positive and significant influence on employee performance. The findings of this study indicate a positive correlation between the quality of work life experienced by employees and their performance levels. Quality of work life (QWL) is a critical factor in establishing a supportive work environment, encompassing aspects such as work-life balance, work facilities, compensation systems, and career development opportunities. These conditions have been shown to promote enhanced employee performance, increased focus, and greater responsibility for the tasks they undertake.

This finding aligns with prior research that has identified QWL as a pivotal factor in enhancing employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. When organizations are able to meet the professional and personal needs of employees in a balanced manner, employees will demonstrate a greater degree of commitment to the organization. Consequently, enhancing QWL exerts a dual influence: it impacts individual well-being and directly contributes to the enhancement of employee performance.

Quality of Work Life on Work Stress

The findings of the analysis demonstrate that Quality of Work Life (QWL) exerts a substantial influence on work stress. These findings suggest that an enhancement in QWL does not invariably result in a reduction in work stress. In the context of this study, an enhancement in the quality of work life may in fact be associated with elevated demands, responsibilities, and performance expectations that employees must meet. In the absence of adequate support from the organization, these conditions have the potential to engender psychological pressure.

This finding underscores the necessity for the development of QWL improvement programs to be meticulously designed. It is imperative for organizations to prioritize not only structural aspects, such as facilities and career opportunities, but also to acknowledge and address the psychological dimensions of employee well-being. In order to ensure that improvements in quality of work life



(QWL) do not become a new source of stress for employees, it is imperative to provide support from leaders, clarify roles, manage effective communication, and oversee workload management.

Work Stress on Employee Performance

The findings of the study demonstrate that work stress exerts a positive and significant influence on employee performance. These findings suggest that work stress does not

invariably have a detrimental effect; rather, it has the capacity to enhance performance when it is moderate. In specific circumstances, occupational stress has been demonstrated to enhance concentration, self-control, and enthusiasm in employees, thereby promoting the execution of their professional duties with greater proficiency.

However, the positive effect of work stress on performance is contingent upon the level of stress and the employee's capacity to manage it. In instances where occupational stress reaches a heightened level, its repercussions may manifest in a detrimental manner, exerting an adverse influence on the physical and psychological well-being of employees. This, in turn, has the potential to engender a decline in overall performance. Consequently, organizations must endeavor to maintain optimal levels of work stress through the implementation of flexible work policies, the provision of psychological support, and the creation of a conducive work environment.

The Role of Work Stress as a Mediating Variable

The findings of the mediation analysis demonstrate that work stress functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between Quality of Work Life and employee performance. This finding suggests that QWL exerts a direct influence on performance and an indirect influence through work stress. Consequently, fluctuations in the quality of work life can exert an influence on the degree of work stress, which in turn exerts an influence on employee performance.

However, the mediating effect of work stress is comparatively weaker than the direct influence of QWL on employee performance. This finding suggests that work stress is not the sole mechanism through which QWL influences performance. Consequently, organizations must collaborate to enhance QWL by implementing effective stress management strategies, thereby optimizing the positive impact on employee performance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that Quality of Work Life exerts a significant influence on the enhancement of employee performance, manifesting in both direct and indirect ways through the medium of work stress. The enhancement of QWL has the capacity to engender a more productive work environment; nevertheless, it also possesses the potential to elevate work pressure if not meticulously administered. Consequently, organizations must prioritize maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between the demands of their professional environment and the support they provide to their workforce.

These findings suggest that work stress does not invariably have a detrimental effect on performance, provided that it is maintained at a manageable level. Consequently, organizations are poised to create working conditions that support optimal performance while maintaining employee well-being in the long term by integrating QWL improvement policies and stress management strategies.

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