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Investigating the Impact of Sleep Quality on Workplace Productivity: An Analysis of Influencing Factors and Improvement Strategies

Yingsha Xu[1,a,*]

[1]*Beijing International Bilingual Academy, Yumin Street, Beijing, China*
a. 2027bxu@biba-student.org
**corresponding author*

Abstract: In today's fast-paced business environment, improving productivity is the key focus of organizations in many industries, and sleep is one of the factors which may significantly productivity. This paper aims at exploring the relationship between sleep and productivity, as well as the factors that are considered influential to individuals' sleep quality. Factors that are considered influential to sleep quality can generally be categorized into four categories: environmental, physical, psychological, and behavioral. These factors have been proven to have influences on sleep, which in turn would have influences on workplace productivity. With employees who consistently have low-quality sleep are likely to be negatively impacted on multiple aspects, including cognitively, psychologically, and physically. These negative impacts that poor sleep have on individuals are not only damaging to their own health but would also decrease their productivity at the workplace as employees. This paper also discusses the methods that can be used by both employers and employees which could help improve employees' sleep quality, as it is crucial to workplace productivity.

Keywords: Sleep quality, workplace productivity, stress management.

1. Introduction

Productivity in the workplace is crucial to the success of both employees and organizations. Consequently, an extensive amount of research has been conducted focusing on this topic. In today's highly competitive business environment, organizations are becoming more eager than ever to find effective methods to increase employee productivity. This has led to even more research being conducted on productivity and its predictors.

The impacts that sleep can have on employee productivity were overlooked for a very long period. In recent years, however, as our understanding of sleep science deepens, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the connection between individuals' sleep quality and their workplace performance, with growing research highlighting its importance.

As one of the fundamental needs for human survival, sleep takes up a huge amount of time in most people's daily lives. It plays a huge part in both physical and mental wellness. A meta-analysis conducted by Cappuccio et al. has shown that both short and long durations of sleep are positively correlated with a higher risk of death [1]. Conversely, there has been research which shows that the amount of time an individual spends on their sleep is negatively correlated with the amount of time

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that they spend in the labor market and their wage [2]. Nevertheless, more recent research highlights the positive correlations between quality sleep and earnings [3].

Understanding the importance of sleep is not only crucial to individuals' wellbeing but is also important for organizations aiming to develop a more efficient and healthier workplace environment. By recognizing the factors that may impact sleep and sleep's impacts on employee productivity, businesses can take action to help employees achieve better quality sleep and increase their levels of output.

Despite the amount of attention academia and businesses are paying to sleep science and its relationship with productivity, there is a lack of consensus and standard definition for the term "sleep quality". In this paper, the definition of sleep quality will be based on a recent concept analysis which defines sleep quality as "an individual's self-satisfaction with all aspects of the sleep experience". These aspects are sleeping efficiency, sleep disturbances, sleep latency, sleep duration, and wake after sleep onset (WASO) [4].

This paper aims to discuss the factors that impact the quality of sleep and how poor-quality and high-quality sleep affect individuals and their productivity. By comprehensively analyzing existing research, the study seeks to provide individuals with ways to improve their productivity and health, and to offer organizations methods and tactics to enhance their employees' productivity.

2. Factors Influencing the Quality of Sleep

Before looking at high-quality sleep and low-quality sleep, we will first examine the factors which impact the quality of sleep. According to Nelson et al., major factors that may influence an individuals' sleep quality can be categorized into one of environmental, physiological, psychological, or a combination of these factors. However, there are factors, such as caffeine intake, which does not exactly fit into any of the above three categories. Therefore, this study will add another category for behavioral factor to achieve more accurate categorization.

2.1. Environmental Factors

Light is one of the most important zeitgebers for humans, as it suppresses the secretion of melatonin, a hormone that impacts the initiations of sleep [5]. Because of this, exposure to light increases the amount of time that it takes to fall asleep. Research which used polysomnography to objectively measure the sleep quality of participants under different lighting conditions shows that sleeping with lights on increased stage 1 sleep and arousals [6]. Based on this research, it can be concluded that exposure to light has a negative impact on sleep quality as it interferes with both sleep latency and WASO.

Ambient temperature is also a factor which has significant impact on individuals' sleep quality. An experiment conducted in 2020 shows that as bedroom temperature increases by 1 Kelvin, sleep efficiency decreases by 1.04%. As seen here, ambient temperature has a negative impact on sleep efficiency and therefore impacts sleep quality [7].

One other factor which impacts the quality of sleep is ambient noise. A study conducted specifically focusing on the sleep quality of hospitalized patients shows that the most frequently reported reason for poor sleep is noise [8]. Another research shows the noise level is negatively correlated with sleep efficiency [9]. Based on this research, it can be concluded that noise has a negative impact on sleep quality, especially on sleep efficiency.

2.2. Psychological Factors

One of the most influential physiological factors for sleep quality is age. There is a negative correlation between age and duration of sleep. According to Visvalingam et al., there is a 1.06-fold

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increase in the likelihood of having poor sleep quality and a 1.05-fold increase in the likelihood of having shorter sleep duration [10]. This study used the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) to determine participants' sleep quality. The index includes items measuring all five aspects related to sleep quality. With these results, it can be concluded that increase in age negatively impacts sleep quality, especially sleep duration.

Recent research has also found that body mass index (BMI) is a factor which influences sleep quality. Multiple research projects concludes that overweight and obesity has a negative impact on sleep quality [11, 12]. Both studies state that there is evidence which shows that obesity's impact on sleep quality is independent of sleep duration. According to Vargas et al., sleep disturbances are most relevant to overweight, while sleep duration is less relevant [13, 14]. From this, it can be concluded that obesity and overweight have a negative influence on sleep quality, specifically sleep disturbances.

2.3. Behavioral Factors

Caffeine consumption is one of the several behavioral factors which may influence sleep quality. Caffeine consumption is linked to a decrease in multiple aspects of sleep quality, including sleep duration, sleep efficiency, and sleep latency [15]. WASO is also increased after caffeine consumption. It is also important to note that older adults' sleep quality is more likely to be influenced by caffeine compared to younger adults and that the influences of caffeine on sleep may involve individual differences.

Screen time is another behavioral factor that have an impact on sleep quality. Sleep initiation is controlled by melatonin, a hormone suppressed by light. Exposure to artificial light will influence sleep as it influences the secretion of melatonin. A study found that longer average screen time near self-reported bedtime is associated with poor sleep efficiency and sleep latency, while longer average screen time in general is associated with shorter sleep duration and sleep efficiency [16].

It is important to note that although exercise is often considered to increase sleep quality, there is a lack of sufficient evidence which clearly shows that there is a positive correlation between exercise and adults' sleep quality. However, there is evidence which shows that exercise may be a factor which increases sleep duration [17].

3. Sleep Quality Analysis

Sleep quality is defined as "an individual's self-satisfaction with all aspects of the sleep experience", including sleep efficiency, sleep disturbances, sleep latency, sleep duration, and WASO. Sleep efficiency is defined as the ratio between the amount of time that an individual spends asleep and the amount of time they spend in bed and is represented as a percentage. Generally, sleep efficiency of over 85% is generally considered healthy, while sleep efficiency of below 85% is unhealthy [18]. Sleep disturbances are disorders or problems in initiating or maintaining sleep. This includes sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, insomnia, and restless leg syndrome. Snoring, which is commonly seen in many people, is also considered a sleep disturbance. Sleep latency is defined as the amount of time taken for an individual to fall asleep. Sleep latency of below 30 minutes is healthy, while sleep latency of above 45 minutes is generally considered to be unhealthy. Sleep duration is defined as the total amount of time that an individual spends in sleep. Generally, sleep duration of above 7 hours is healthy, while sleep duration of below 7 hours is seen as unhealthy [19]. Wake after sleep onset is defined as the length of time spent awake from the moment sleep onsets to the final awakening. Less than four awakenings of over 5 minutes after sleep onset is considered as healthy, while more than four awakenings of over 5 minutes is considered unhealthy.

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4. Analysis

The relationship between sleep and productivity involves different dimensions. Adequate sleep is essential for cognitive functioning, psychological wellness, as well as physical health, which are all essential aspects in achieving high employee productivity.

4.1. Cognitive Impacts

Cognitive functioning encompasses a variety of mental abilities. Some of these abilities include learning, reasoning, thinking, remembering, making decisions, and paying attention. So far, there has been clear evidence showing that poor sleep impacts individuals' abilities to pay attention, remember, and make decisions.

In terms of the impact that sleep has on attention, research shows that sleep deprivation results in more frequent errors when carrying out tasks that are attention-intensive [20]. Attention is a key component of productivity in the workplace. Employees with strong attention skills can maintain high levels of performance and carry out attention-intensive tasks more accurately. For example, in the medical field, when carrying out surgeries, sustained attention ensures accuracy and reduces the likelihood of surgical errors. In less extreme settings, such as when encountered with complex problems at the everyday workplace, the ability to focus on tasks and carrying them out with minimal error is also important for. With insufficient sleep, employees' ability to focus is impaired. This will likely lead to more errors in their tasks and therefore a decrease in productivity.

Sleep also has an impact on memory. With sleep deprivation, working memory performances decline [20]. When employees get quality sleep, their working memory functions more effectively. This allows for them to follow complex instructions and multitask effectively. For example, an employee with a well-functioning working memory can efficiently switch between different tasks with minimal disruptions, allowing for them to handle multiple complex tasks at the same time, especially if the tasks are urgent. This will increase productivity. On the other hand, employees who receive low-quality sleep may struggle with remembering important details from meetings or important requirements from managers. This could result in mistakes, reduced efficiency, and therefore lower overall productivity.

In terms of sleep's impact on individuals' decision-making skills, research has shown that performance on complex cognitive tasks, such as decision-making, are impaired by sleep deprivation [21, 22]. This impacts employee productivity as effective decision-making is a crucial part of being productive. For example, a well-rested manager is more likely to evaluate project proposals more rationally, delegate tasks according to individual strengths, and predict potential challenges. This leads to higher overall productivity. Moreover, in today's competitive and fast-changing business environment, innovative thinking and the ability to adapt plans according to new information is more important than ever. However, according to Harrison and Horne [23, 24], sleep deprivation has been proven to impair innovative thinking and the ability to adapt to new information. This not only has a negative influence on productivity on an individual level, but can also influence team morale over time, which has a negative impact on team productivity.

4.2. Psychological Impacts

Stress is an important psychological aspect which could be impacted by sleep. There is a reciprocal relationship between stress and sleep [25]. High levels of stress often impair sleep quality, while poor quality sleep leads to higher levels of stress. Stress can impact both self-assessed and others-assessed productivity [26]. Because stress also has an impact on sleep, overtime, individuals' levels of stress can further increase while their sleep quality further decreases. This impacts individual wellbeing and has a negative impact on their overall productivity at the workplace. This also has a broader impact

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on the team dynamics within organizations. With team members that have high levels of stress, team morale can be influenced. This would have an impact on overall team performance and productivity. In general, sleep has a negative impact on employees' levels of emotional stability, as sleep-deprived individuals are more emotionally aroused [27]. As one of the Big Five personality traits, emotional stability is positively correlated with overall job performance. An employee that has high levels of emotional stability would be less sensitive to negative emotions as well as recover from them quicker. This is crucial to workplace productivity. Employees that are more emotionally stable will be able to recover quickly from setbacks and focus on carrying out their task, while a less emotionally stable employee may focus on their emotions and become less able to focus on their work. This may hinder task completion, reduce the quality of their output, and decrease their overall levels of productivity.

4.3. Physical Impacts

Sufficient sleep leads to higher levels of alertness during daytime [28]. High energy and alertness are essential for employee performance and productivity at the workplace. When employees are alert, they process information and respond to emergency situations more quickly. For example, employees in fast-changing industries like finance and healthcare have to maintain high levels of alertness in order to respond to new situations in time and carry out actions according to the situation. Alertness can directly influence the quality and speed of their work, leading to better outcomes and higher productivity. On the other hand, a lack of alertness can have a negative impact on workplace productivity. Fatigued employees are more prone to errors and have slower reactions times. This could lead to an overall decrease in productivity.

Moreover, there is a correlation between sleep quality and multiple physical illnesses [29]. For example, according to Cappuccio et al., people who consistently have sleep durations of less than five hours per night are at high risks for cardiovascular diseases [30]. Besides the obvious impacts that poor sleep has on individuals' physical health, it can also have a negative influence on workplace productivity. Less severe physical illness resulting from inadequate sleep can lead to increased absenteeism, where employees miss workdays due to illnesses. This would result in a decrease in the productivity of the employee, as their work progress is hindered. More serious chronic conditions can have a larger impact on both individuals' lives and organizations' overall productivity. Employees with severe health issues may decide to resign from their jobs, which impose additional burdens on businesses. This could temporarily lower the organization's overall level productivity.

5. Improving Sleep and Enhancing Productivity

To improve sleep quality for employees and therefore increase workplace productivity, both employers and employees can take specific actions. Employers can implement certain policies and provide resources, while employees can develop habits that would help improve their sleep quality.

5.1. Workplace Policies and Practices

There are methods which organizations can use to help their employees achieve better sleep quality and therefore higher levels of productivity. These methods include starting stress management programs and promoting sleep education.

As mentioned, stress has a reciprocal relationship with sleep. This makes managing employees' stress levels a crucial aspect to improving their sleep quality and productivity. Organizations can start stress managing programs to achieve that purpose. These programs can include various activities, such as mindfulness and time management trainings. Moreover, access to counseling can also be an important component of these stress management programs so that employees can receive professional guidance when needed.

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Promoting sleep education at the workplace can also be beneficial to employees' sleep quality. Programs like these can cover a range of topics, ranging from the basics of the sleep cycle to the impacts that poor sleep may have on individuals' health and performance. Employees can also be informed of individual tactics and practices they can implement to achieve better sleep quality.

5.2. Individual Practices

Employees can improve their sleep quality through multiple methods, such as managing their bedroom environments and limiting behaviors that are likely to influence their sleep quality.

5.2.1. Creating an Environment Suitable for Sleep

As previously mentioned, environmental factors such as ambient light, noise, and temperature can influence individuals' sleep quality. Employees can improve their sleep quality by managing their bedroom environments.

Employees should aim to keep their bedroom environment as dark as possible before going to bed. This can be achieved by using blackout curtains to block out external natural and artificial light. This could be especially important in urban areas where streetlights are commonly seen during nighttime. For those who need some light, using dim lights in the evening can decrease the amount of melatonin secreted in the body, which helps prepare them for sleep.

Noise control is another critical aspect of improving employees' sleep quality. Employees can improve their sleep by reducing noise in their bedroom through various methods. For example, they can use earplugs to block out any noises or play white noise to cover up disruptive sounds. Using soundproof windows and doors in the bedroom can also be effective, especially in noisy neighborhoods.

Temperature regulation in the bedroom is also important for achieving high-quality sleep. Employees should aim to keep their bedroom temperature at 26ºC or less to prevent overheating [31]. It is advice for individuals to have good ventilation in their bedrooms. Using air conditioning, especially in the summer, can also help maintain a cool and comfortable sleeping environment in order to achieve better sleep quality.

5.2.2. Managing Behaviors that Impairs Sleep

Managing certain behaviors, such as screen usage and caffeine consumption, can help improve sleep quality as well.

Screen time management is essential for achieving better sleep. Blue light emitted by screens can interfere with the production of melatonin. This would influence sleep quality, and especially sleep latency. To improve sleep quality, employees should aim to reduce screen time in the evening. In order to do so, individuals can try turning their phones off around one hour before bedtime. They may also try to keep their devices away from their beds or out of their bedrooms before sleep.

Caffeine consumption is another behavior that influences sleep quality. Employees should be mindful of their caffeine intake throughout the day, especially in the afternoon and evening. Research shows that coffee should be consumed at least 8.8 hours before bedtime in order to achieve quality sleep at night. For example, if an employee plans to go to bed at 11 PM, they should not drink any coffee after around 2 PM. For individuals who would like to consume caffeine-containing drinks in the afternoon, they can consider consuming decaffeinated coffee or tea.

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6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the relationship between sleep quality and workplace productivity, emphasizing that sleep is a fundamental factor influencing employee productivity on cognitive, psychological, and physical levels. Organizations that are trying to achieve higher levels of employee productivity in today's competitive business environment should understand the factors that affect sleep, which can be categorized into environment, physiological, psychological, and behavioral factors. Poor sleep quality can impact individuals' attention, memory, decision-making abilities, stress, emotional stability, energy and alertness, and physical health, all of which are crucial for maintaining high productivity levels. To avoid these negative impacts that poor sleep can have on individuals and their productivity, both employees and employers can take actions to improve sleep quality. Employers can start stress management programs and promote sleep education among employees, while employees can eliminate disturbances in their sleep environments and manage habits which may influence their sleep quality. Future research may consider focusing on the testing the long-term effectiveness of the sleep-improving methods proposed in this paper through longitudinal studies. By further exploring the relationship between sleep and workplace productivity, organizations can develop more effective approaches to achieving higher levels of both employee well-being and productivity.

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