

Is cultural activity at work related to mental health in employees?

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Cultural activities at work vary according to business cycle and have a statistical association with mental employee health, particularly with emotional exhaustion. Cultural activity at work may protect the employees against subsequent emotional exhaustion.

Objective

To examine relationships between work-based cultural activities and mental employee health in working Swedes.

Hypothesis

A positive relationship between frequent cultural activity at work and good employee health was expected.

Methods

A postal questionnaire with questions about cultural activities organised for employees and about emo-

tional exhaustion (Maslach) and depressive symptoms (short form of SCL). Employee assessments of the manager function and work environment (standardised demand/control questionnaire) as well as socioeconomic variables were covariates.

Random samples of men and women in the working population in Sweden participated on three consecutive occasions in 2006 (n=5037), 2008 (n=9623, when participants were added) and 2010 (n=8912). The sample was almost doubled in 2008.

The participants starting 2006 were followed until 2010 and so were those starting 2008.



Results & Conclusions

Main outcome and results

Any cultural activity at work was reported by 46.4%, 52.7% and 44.8% during the three consecutive years (figure 1). The most frequent response category was “some time per year” whereas more frequent activity was very uncommon. There was a lower frequency of cultural activities at work during the period of high unemployment during 2010.

During the most culturally active year in the work sites in 2008, the linear multiple regression analysis showed that going from “never” to “some time a week or more often” on the “culture at work scale” statistically corresponded to a decrease of one third of the emotional exhaustion score standard deviation. After additional adjustment for “listening manager” and “psychological demands”

and “decision latitude” at work the statistical effect was reduced one seventh of the standard deviation. The effects on emotional exhaustion were more significant than those on depressive symptoms (see table 1).

The corresponding prospective analysis (table 2) showed that a high level of cultural activity at work was significantly protective in relation to emotional exhaustion two years later even after adjustment for work environment, manager style and demographic variables.

No similar findings were made for the period 2006 to 2008. And there was no significant predictive value of cultural activities at work in relation to subsequent development of depressive symptoms.

Conclusions

Cultural activities at work vary according to business cycle and have a statistical association with mental employee health, particularly with emotional exhaustion. Cultural activity at work may protect the employees against subsequent emotional exhaustion. Such an effect was observable when the business cycle in Sweden went from “good” conditions (which meant higher level of cultural activity at work) to poorer conditions with rising unemployment rates.

Implications for future research

There are particularly pronounced statistical protective effects of frequent cultural activity at work on likelihood of emotional exhaustion among employees.

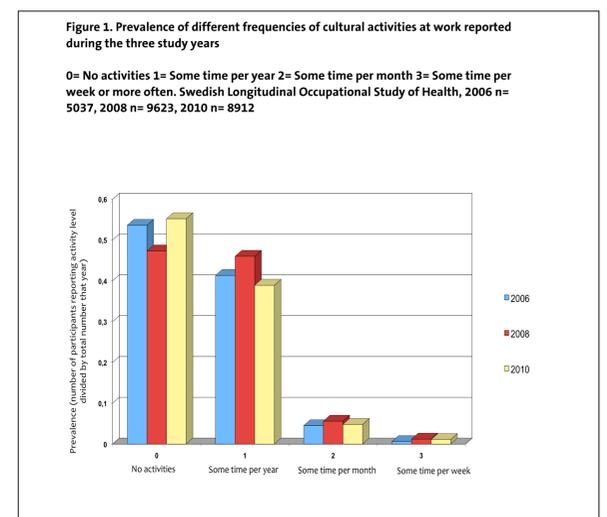
Table 1 Cross-sectional multiple standardised linear regression coefficients (B) for independent statistical “protective contribution” of cultural activities in relation to ill health in the different steps. Each year has been analysed separately.

Year	2006	2008	2010
Alternative a (adjusted for age, gender and income only)			
Exhaust	0.063 *** (n=4955) T=4.44	0.073 *** (n=9381) t=7.26	0.065 *** (n=8671) t=6.09
Depr	0.031 * (n=4946) t=2.28	0.051 *** (n=9414) t=4.96	0.042 *** (n=8729) t=3.98
Alternative b (adjusted for same as a plus “Does your boss listen?”)			
Exhaust	0.031 * (n=4826) t=2.20	0.048 *** (n=8564) t=4.53	0.030 *** (n=7964) t=2.73
Depr	0.007 NS (n=4816) t=0.47	0.021 * (n=8586) t=1.96	0.014 NS (n=8020) t=1.27
Alternative c (adjusted for same as b plus demands and decision latitude at work) (n=3420)			
Exhaust	0.023 (*) (n=4660) t=1.70	0.029 ** (n=8297) t=3.07	0.010 NS (n=7677) t=0.97
Depr	0.006 NS (n=4655) t=0.42	0.004 NS (n=8318) t=0.30	0.000 NS (n=7721) t=0.05

(*) p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 2 Multiple linear regression results for the prediction of emotional exhaustion score in 2010 from the situation in 2008. Regression coefficients (B) with standard errors of means (SEM), t-value, p and relative beta coefficient n=6214

Variables	B	SEM B	t	p	Beta
Intercept	7.63	1.12	6.83	0.0001	
Gender	0.42	0.12	3.53	0.0004	0.037
Age	-0.05	0.01	9.10	0.0001	0.101
Nlog (Income SEK/yr)	-0.26	0.15	1.70	0.090	0.023
Non-listening manager	0.13	0.08	1.65	0.099	0.017
Psychol. demands	0.14	0.02	5.63	0.0001	0.063
Decision latitude	-0.06	0.02	2.41	0.016	0.026
Emotional exh. 2008	0.57	0.01	52.21	0.0001	0.602
Cultural activity/w	0.18	0.09	2.09	0.036	0.021



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