Gratitude Intervention at Work: It’s Impact on Well-Being, Job Satisfaction & Organisational Commitment

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Abstract

Purpose: The current study is examining the efficiency of 5 days gratitude intervention where to list 3 things that employee was grateful for at workplace in daily basis. Method: The design of the study is experimental design that uses two groups, gratitude and control. It uses also work related intervention journaling-listing approach. The sample is employees in education and retailer sectors in Bahrain (N=145). Participants are measured at two point of time pre-test and post-test. The measurements used are self-report five scales; dispositional gratitude questionnaire, subjective well-being questionnaire, Positive and negative affect scale, Job satisfaction questionnaire and Affective Organizational Commitment. In addition, two questions to explore how employee evaluate their gratefulness towards specific events, people and experience and how do they prefer their managers to express their gratitude towards them at work. Findings: In term of the demographic result, most of the participants are female 56%, belongs to (24-30) age group, 90% from education sector, 80% are married, 65% earns average monthly income between 751 and 1000, 73% are bachelor holders and 97% Muslims. The outcomes have revealed that the gratitude intervention used was not effective since the independent t-test was not statistically significance. 91% of employees preferred word of gratitude and thankfulness from their boss as an appreciation expression towards them. More than 97% of the participants were grateful to their good health and to their family, spouse, children and parents. Conclusion and recommendation: The insignificant results of the used intervention in the current study may suggest for future studies to consider other methods to facilitate gratitude in the workplace. Finally, Gratitude is important in both general life and work place. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Gratitude, Intervention, Job satisfaction, Workplace, Appreciation, Bahrain, Thankfulness, Organizational commitment, Subjective well-being.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem and Research Objective

With the increasing interest from the researchers to explore more of the positive psychology the focus in Gratitude concept and field is developing as well; Gratitude is feeling the thankfulness for what an individual has or experienced [1].

There are lots of studies that have focused in the outcomes of the gratitude and have stated the benefit of expressing and feeling it. Most of them have found that grateful people show positive behaviour and seem better such as having an improved mood, happier, show more confidence and express trust [2] and [3].

The workplace is usually challenging, highly demanding and stressful place that an employee should meet plenty of expectations and targets to hit and deadlines to meet.

Sometime work is appreciating the hard work and rewarding the employees but in general, most of people feel that their job is not the best part of their day. So the best way to correct this view or prospective is to start with the employees and to cultivate the gratitude in order to bring to the table a positive work environment. It has been studied by several authors that gratitude interventionis effective in increasing the positive emotions and decreasing negative symptoms such as illness and stress [4].
While there are many studies focusing on the topic of gratitude, still the problem that there are little studies on gratitude in the workplace persisting. As a result the research is briefly discussing the impact of gratitude interventions on the important work attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The purpose of this paper is to address the gaps in the field of gratitude intervention in order to provide the management with the required knowledge so they can benefit from gratitude at work place.

Significance of the Study
This study redounds to the benefit of the society and individuals as gratitude considered playing an important role in the positive psychology today. The greater demand for effective employees in the workplaces justifies the need for more positive work environment by understanding the importance of the gratitude to enhance it.

This research might be of particular value to the business industry as it would guide the managers and business owners to consider how to cultivate the gratitude in the workplace.

The study as well, could be the extension of all improvements and efforts have been contributed towards assessing how well the employees perceive the gratitude as a motivating factor in the workplace. Thus, workplaces that increase the gratitude activities and increase the positive vibes among their employees as derived from the results of this research contribute to increase the job satisfaction and job performance and the productivity as they are all related. And for managers, to make the corrective steps and actions to make better successful job environment that accelerate the wheel of economy in Bahrain.

The results of this study are distinctive than other studies as they provide support for the idea that gratitude is, in fact, an important aspect of ones’ working life and that an individual’s gratitude may be predictive of positive future outcomes at work. Finally, it supports the importance of gratitude in the workplace in addition to the importance of gratitude in general that should be investigated further in Kingdom of Bahrain.

Organization of the Research
The research contains the introduction where the problem has been defined, purpose of the study and significance of the research. The literature review and previous studies that have been conducted on the gratitude in the workplace and employees’ perceptions issues is outlines. Then, the methodology used in collecting information and the required data about the study. After that the results are combined and presented. And finally the conclusion, recommendations and the limitations of the study is presented.

Literature Review
The Challenge of Defining Gratitude
Gratitude is a subject that has been taught through the science of philosophy and theology for centuries by different religious traditions and instructions specifically the major religion such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hindu and Buddhism [5, 6]

Understanding the word gratitude is important to understand the whole concept of gratitude. Thus, ‘Gratitude’ is coming from the Latin origin ‘gratia’ which means favor and ‘gratus’ which means ‘pleasing’. The derivatives of this Latin origin have a relation with the meaning of kindness or generosity, or giving something with no return most of the time depends on the context to understand the word [7]. Oxford dictionary has defined gratitude” The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness” [8].

However, [7] are suggesting that the term gratitude has a sophisticated definition. In addition, it is an explanation of the feeling of an individual that have experienced receiving a benefit from someone else and that benefit was valued or appreciated through the interpersonal exchange. Moreover, Gratitude is an intellectual state which is related to receiving a personal benefit but was not justified, planned for, seeking for, or earned as perceived in contrast that individual receive this favor because of the good intention of the other individual [3].
Buote [1] has defined Gratitude as the feeling the thankfulness for what an individual has or experienced. This definition is the most comprehensive definition from the researcher point of view and is adopted in this study.

In general, it is well known and there is a common tendency to respond to others goodwill and kindness in a positive way and even not returning the kindness with harm [7-8].

**Gratitude at Workplace**

Many authors such as [4] and [1] consider gratitude as an important part of the workplace. It is important to understand this fact as many of the companies and institutions is neglecting the role of gratitude in the workplace. Moreover, it is not common as well for the employees to express and reflect things that they are grateful for in the workplace [1]. A study have been made in America by John Templeton Foundation showed that there are few employees expressing gratitude to their colleagues and even fewer employees who are expressing gratitude to their boss several times a week [9]. These findings have revealed that the culture of gratitude at work is ignored.

Moreover some studies has shown that grateful employees are usually open minded, agreeable and better in accepting others’ different views or new ideas, which has its effect for the workplace [10].

The sociologists have divided the gratitude into state gratitude where people are experiencing a temporary change in gratitude level. And the other kind is the dispositional gratitude which is the long-lasting or stable level of gratitude [1].

Furthermore, recent studies have found that in both kind of gratitude; the state gratitude and the dispositional gratitude has achieved higher job satisfaction and predict the relationship between them which implies to the necessity of cultivating the gratitude among employees [11]. This is our main concern here in the regard of job attitudes.

As a result, it becomes important to cultivate the gratitude in the workplace. There are several ways to encourage this behaviour. For example, motivating employees to express the gratitude by saying grateful and appreciations words. Or another way is simply asking the employees to journal a list of things in the work that are grateful for. By cultivating the gratitude among the employees a positive environment is going to be common and better job satisfaction level and higher organizational commitment levels [1].

**Gratitude Interventions**

Many experimental researches that have been conducted under strict conditions have studied the positive outcomes of gratitude. Scientific researchers have explained that cultivating gratitude through journaling exercises; which is one way of gratitude intervention; has its positive impact on the mood and health.

Furthermore, individuals who were keeping a journal in daily or weekly basis, they have reported less physical illness, more life satisfaction and they were more optimistic, in comparison with individuals who have not journaling or who have been journaling hassles or neutral life occasions [3].

Likewise, these studies have also found that the surrounding people of the participants of the daily or weekly gratitude journals such as family, spouses, partners or others have noticed them to be happier and more engaging and pleasant [10].

Correspondingly, cultivating gratitude in short time is different from just feeling grateful consistently. The reason behind this is Gratitude is a virtue and not a temporary emotion. Grateful persons enjoy the practices that enhance the grateful thinking such as the psychological, physical and spiritual as many studies have shown [10].

**Gratitude, Well-being and Job Satisfaction**

Subjective well-being is related to the mental and emotional responses in how people perceive or judge the quality of their life [4]. Typical persons call the subjective well-being Happiness. Happiness has been proven to have an association with good health, love, wealth, and many other positive effects [7] Positive affects has been
defined to be emotions that shows a satisfying and pleasant level of environmental engagement [12].

Hence, subjective well-being or Happiness includes four important components: Satisfaction with life, Satisfaction with vital life area such as marital relationship or work, which is our concern here, high positive effect and low negative effects [13]. Happiness also, as many studies has found, is related to job satisfaction, high job performance, physical well-being, positive relationship and ethical manners [13].

Job satisfaction is one of the most important areas in work attitude that employers and researchers are considering. Job satisfaction is an inner state that is evaluating cognitively the job taking into the consideration the degree of favor or disfavor [14]. In other word, job satisfaction is how individual realize and think about the work domain specifically while in the concept of well-being it consider the whole individual life and it is broadly affected by many factors [14].

Gratitude and Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is another important work area and job attitude to be explored and it matters to the employers and researchers. It is defined to be the emotional bond between the organization and the employee that he or she is less likely to break that bond and leave the organization freely [15]. This attitude is very important as it is tied to the employee’s turnover intention and the actual [15]. Thus, it is valuable to study the likelihood of decreasing turnover by increasing the organizational commitment through using the gratitude interventions. Allen and Meyer [15] have reviewed organizational commitment to be three facets: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Our study is concerning only in the affective commitment which results if an individual commit to their organization only because the reason of their will.

It is necessary to include both variables; job satisfaction and organizational commitment as they are independents and both are predictors to the productivity and turnover [4].

Research Discussion and the Gab of Knowledge

Watkins et al. [2] had theorized that gratitude is an ignored concept in the science of psychology. This concept is applied also in the workplace. Many researchers have studied the relationship between gratitude and well-being or well-being and job attitudes while still the need to bridge the gap between gratitude and job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) is persistent.

The current research is an experimental manipulation of a gratitude intervention to study the relationship between gratitude, well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The aim is to generalize the findings of previous researches that have used gratitude interventions into employee and into workplace. Keeping in mind the various and contradictory results of the previous studies may be justified in the current experiment. In order to achieve higher significance result it is necessary to use an easy to do intervention. Participants were asked to complete a daily online work specific journal at the end of each day.

Hypotheses Testing

As such, the following hypotheses are suggested:

**H01:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will not report higher levels of gratitude than the control group.

**HA1:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will report higher levels of gratitude than the control group.

**H02:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will not report higher levels of positive affect and well-being, and lower levels of negative affect than the control group.

**HA2:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will report higher levels of positive affect and
well-being, and lower levels of negative affect than the control group.

**H03:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will not report higher levels of job satisfaction than the control group.

**HA3:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will report higher levels of job satisfaction than the control group.

**H04:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will not report higher organizational commitment than the control group.

**HA4:** Participants in gratitude group after the gratitude journaling intervention will report higher organizational commitment than the control group.

**Methodology**

This Experimental study is designed to examine the efficiency of a gratitude intervention for employee’s well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. A questionnaire consisted of 5 measurements in addition to the demographic data was used, processed and analysed in order to assess the hypothesised efficiency of a gratitude intervention. The valid and reliable measurements were adopted from ([4] paper in addition to [9] questionnaire.

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between dispositional gratitude and Well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment therefore the unit of investigation is the employee in Bahrain regardless of whether they are Bahraini or not. However, this segment is very broad and it is estimated to be 717,218 workers according to the latest official statistics from Labour Market Regularity Authority as Table 1 shows.

In a matter of fact, it will be more useful to turn our attention to vital and dynamic fields that to concentrate on them and study the effect of the intervention on them. So it has been decided to focus in the sector of education and sector of retailers in Bahrain. Hence, the population of this study is all Bahraini and Non Bahraini employee who are working in the education and retailer sectors.

These sectors were chosen, as they are the most stressful working fields. In addition, these fields are demanding and required lots of efforts. Where Bahrain 2030 vision are concentrating in increasing and developing the economic. These sectors in Bahrain play an important and vital role in pushing forward the economic development wheel.

**Table 1: The research population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total employment</td>
<td>717,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bahrainis</td>
<td>158,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non-Bahrainis</td>
<td>559,036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bahrain Labour Market indicators - 3rd quarter 2015

Because of time restriction and the design of the experiment, a sample of 145 participants from the population was chosen by the non-probability technique of convenience sampling because of their convenient accessibility beside the time limitation and to ensure the commitment of the participants to the study. Moreover, the population is very large and hard to be reached.

**Procedure and Timeline**

First of all, an online consent was distributed to the participants to make sure they would like to continue with the study.

The consent was explaining the purpose of the study with the expected benefits to the participants they have asked to click to a “yes” or “No” buttons to participate or not to the study. After that, participants who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to either control group or gratitude group by using electronic random draw.
As figure 1 shows the period of the study is seven consecutive days where it consists of two elements: controlled group, gratitude group and the participants are assigned to each group randomly. This study uses a pretest post-test design where both groups at two points of times which are at day 1 to complete questionnaires consisted of 5 measurements in addition to the demographic data and two questions that measures the preference and perceptions and day 7 to complete the same questionnaires.

The variables were measured to understand the differences between pre-test and post-test and to investigate whether changes have occurred in employees’ well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment or remain the same. From Day 2 to Day 6 the 5 days journaling experiment included the gratitude intervention. The researcher has asked the intervention gratitude group to complete and write in a daily basis through online journal several things that they were grateful for in the workplace. While for the control group, there was no intervention journaling and the participants were waiting.

**Result and Outcomes**

Quantitative data analysis is used in this research with two kinds of quantitative statistics: descriptive statistics and the second one is the inferential statistics.

**Managers’Expression of Gratitude**

Different aspects that were measured as discussed previously. First of all, analysing
how employees prefers their managers to express gratitude towards them that 40.7% prefer a word of thanks and gratitude and they have ranked it in the first place. Then 31.7% employee preferred to be promoted as a gratitude expression from their manager and have ranked it to be the first in the place. A professional development was ranked as first preference for gratitude expression from their boss with 12.4%. Then financial rewards was ranked first place by 8.3% participants of the sample. 4.8% preferred other ways not listed and only 2.1% of the sample preferred a letter of appreciation.

Feeling of Gratitude towards Important Aspect of Life

Then how participants perceived to which extent they are grateful to some experience and important aspects in life was assessed. 97.2% was found perceived themselves to be grateful to their family, spouse, children and parent. 64.1% feel themselves to be grateful towards the freedom in this country, Kingdom of Bahrain.

87.6% consider themselves grateful to the fact that they are living in kingdom of Bahrain.

People who was grateful to the good health they enjoyed is 97.2% and 92.3% was grateful for their closest friends.

91.7% of participants perceived themselves that they are grateful for the freedom of practicing the religion freely.

Participants were grateful to the educations received by 95.2%. For the treatments available and the medical care, 84.2% of the participants feel grateful towards them. 91% of people were grateful to the modern technology.

The Effect of the Intervention

In order to understand the changes that occurred to the participants the mean and standard deviation for each group were calculated; the gratitude and the control group for the five measurements before and after the interventions at each point of time, which was done in the previous part. After that, paired sample t-test was used to investigate if there were any changes within the subjects to make sure that the outcome of the intervention was effective. Then, as well the difference between each group for both pre-test and post-test was calculated. Obtaining the differences will allow us to use independent sample t-test to measure the significance differences between the subjects to test the hypothesis. And then the correlation analysis between the dispositional gratitude at the end of the experiment and the other variables of interest was obtained to investigate the relationship between them after the intervention. As follows:

The level of the trait of gratitude in employees of Bahrain was estimated from the study to be as 80% before the gratitude intervention in all participants, which can be considered a little bit high. And to be specific for gratitude group before the intervention they were approximately 79.5 % have the trait of gratitude and after the gratitude intervention the percentage was similar. But, for the control group the before and after the gratitude intervention they was 80% feeling grateful. In all of the groups and through time, the percentage of dispositional gratitude is considered high.

The subjective well-being level for all participants at the baseline of the experiment was 67%. Comparing the subjective well-being level for both groups as a whole after the gratitude intervention the result have shown that the subjective well-being has increased level to be 70%.. Analysing the difference between groups before and after the gratitude intervention it was found that before gratitude intervention the level for the subjective well-being of the control group is almost similar to the level of subjective well-being for gratitude group.

The level for control and gratitude groups is 68% and 66% respectively. And the level of well-being for control group and gratitude group after the intervention was 71% and 68%.

Assessing the positive affect level, it can be found that for all participants the positive affect was similar for both point of times before the intervention and after the intervention and it was 73%. However, it has decreased compared to pre-test result it was 73% and became 72% in control group. For gratitude group it has increased from 73% to 74%.
Pre-test negative effects level for all participants was 47%, which considered being slightly low. Then the post-test negative effects level for all participants was 45% which considered to be low as well and it has decreased. Moreover, for both groups was almost similar at the beginning of the experiment, the control group 47% and the gratitude group has achieved 46% and it was also similar after the gratitude intervention for both groups. The control group 47% and the gratitude group has achieved 44%.

Assessing the job satisfaction measurement, it is found that for all participants the job satisfaction has increase from 69.5% to 71%. It also has increased in both groups. For control group it has increased from 71% to 73% and for gratitude group, it has increased from 67% to 71%.

For all participants the level of organizational commitment was 69% before the intervention. However, this level has increased for all of the participants and become 71%. For control group the organizational commitment also has increased from 71% before the intervention to 73% even that they have not experience the gratitude listing intervention. This result may be justified that for the purpose of increasing the response rate it was explained to the participants from both groups the expected outcome and benefit before the random selection. This may affected the result and made the participant to think more positively. For gratitude group the organizational commitment level has increased from 67% to 69%.

It was found that the there is a significance relationship between the dispositional gratitude and well-being; the cognitive aspect includes the personal judgment of satisfaction with and the second aspect is the affective elements of Subjective well-being that involves the positive and negative emotions. Furthermore, there is a significance relationship between the trait of gratitude and the job satisfaction and the organizational commitment. Although the relationship is not considered strong.

**Correlational Analyses**

The correlational analyses were conducted to have further examination of the relationship between the dispositional gratitude and the other variables. It was found that all of the variables are significantly correlated to the dispositional gratitude. However, the Negative effects are correlated negatively with the trait of gratitude. The Pearson correlation factors are for positive affect (r = 0.224), Negative effect (r = -0.328) subjective well-being (0.399), job satisfaction (0.276), and organizational commitment (0.364).

**Testing the Hypothesis**

The objective of this section is to provide a discussion of the effectiveness of the gratitude after presenting the importance of the gratitude in the workplace and so the independent sample t-test was used.

In order to test the first hypothesis independent sample t test was run and so it was found that not to reject the null hypothesis since the P value is greater than 0.05 (t=-0.116, P=0.908). Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the two conditions. In addition, since there is no statistical difference it is concluded that the gratitude intervention was not efficient.

To test the second hypothesis Independent sample t-test is run for SWB and Positive and Negative effects. It was found that for Subjective well-being that p-value is greater than 0.05 where (t=-0.766, P=0.445) and it was also greater than 0.05 in both positive and negative affect (t=-0.862, P=0.390) for positive affect and for negative affect (t=-0.504, P=0.615). Thus, not to reject the null hypothesis and so there is no statistically significant difference between the two conditions. In addition, since there are no statistical difference it can be concluded that the gratitude intervention was not efficient for positive and negative affect and subjective wellbeing.

To test the third hypothesis Independent sample t-test was run for Job satisfaction. It is found that for job satisfaction that p-value is greater than 0.05 where (t=0.200, P=0.842) and. Consequently, not to reject the null hypothesis and so there is no statistically significant difference between the two conditions. In addition, since there are no statistical difference it can be concluded that the gratitude intervention was not efficient Job satisfaction.
To test the final hypothesis, Independent sample t-test was run for Organizational commitment. It was found that p-value is greater than 0.05 where \( t=0.117, P=0.907 \) and. Consequently, The null hypothesis is not rejected and so there is no statistically significant difference between the two conditions. In addition, since there is no statistical difference. It can be concluded that the gratitude intervention was not effective for organizational commitment.

In summation, the main aim of this paper was to investigate the effectiveness of the gratitude journaling intervention on Bahrain employees at the workplace. These results suggests that there are no effect from the gratitude journaling intervention however it has proven in this paper that gratitude has a significance relationship to the other outcomes that were tested.

**Conclusion**

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Despite that the hypotheses of this study were not supported by the findings. It can be concluded that another gratitude intervention technique should be explored in the work domain in the future studies. The present study tried to extend the previous study by focusing in work specific gratitude listing intervention and to replicate this process in daily basis instead of a weekly basis.

Due to the insignificant result of the used intervention in the current study, future studies may consider other methods to facilitate gratitude in the workplace specially that previous studies have showed the effectiveness of gratitude intervention to increase the positivity in the individual keeping on mind using true control condition. The reason behind it is to make sure to draw a meaningful conclusion of the effectiveness of gratitude innervation in comparison to a waiting list condition.

Moreover, gratitude that has been measured at the end of the study has been proved that it is correlated positively to other variables, which indicates the importance of gratitude in a person life and a person work domain. The main aim of this paper was to investigate the impact of gratitude interventions. However, the current study did not provide a valid evidence that gratitude listing interventions can improve the dispositional gratitude, affects and well-being as many previous studies have proved [3]. Therefore, for future studies as [4] has recommend researchers can use job satisfaction as a moderator between gratitude intervention and the trait of gratitude. In other words, keeping the criteria of only job satisfied employees to participate in the gratitude intervention. In general, the need of more studies that investigate the gratitude in the workplace persists and discovering the appropriate mechanism is a priority as well.

**Implications of the Study**

The applied setting of this study may support the finding as important implications as some of the organizations would like to cultivate the gratitude in their work environment. Therefore, according to the result of our study it shows that the traditional gratitude journaling is not suitable to be applied in the workplace. Managers can use other methods to cultivate gratitude in the workplace such as increasing the gratitude expressions and be openly grateful as managers towards the employee. As it was found that, the most desirable way of gratitude expression is a word of gratitude from the managers to the employee with no cost. Thus, it would be practical to cultivate the gratitude by other methods than gratitude listing in the workplace. It can be learned from this, that small informal interventions such as word of gratitude are powerful and can have greater effects than the usual listing method.

This research might be of particular value to the Management as it would guide the managers and business owners to consider how to cultivate the gratitude in the workplace. The study as well, could be the extension of all improvements and efforts have been contributed towards assessing how well the employees perceive the gratitude as a motivating factor in the workplace. Thus, workplaces that increase the gratitude activities and increase the positive vibes among their employees - as derived from the results of this research contributes to increase the job satisfaction and the job performance and the
productivity as they are all related. And so to make the corrective steps and actions to make better successful job environment.

**Limitations of the Study**

The current study has shown some strong outcomes, however, there are some limitations. First of all, the time limitation was critical in this study as the study could not measure participants in the follow up time point in order to examine the persistence and existence of the effect of gratitude because of the limited time available. In addition, the study has focused in educational and retailers sectors, which provide us with limitation in generalization of the result.

Moreover, the sampling technique which is convenient that have been used. Due to again the time limitation and the difficulty to bring participants who were welling to continue and commit to the study for seven consecutive days. The drawback of convenient sampling is result may not be generalized.

Finally, the assessment measures used was all self-assessment and there is a possibility that the result was impact with self-deception and impression management.

**References**