

Work Attitudes, Role Stress and Health among Professional Singers and Call Center Employees

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ABSTRACT

Background

In the literature on artists and health, very few studies have taken work conditions and their impact on well-being and health into account. Exceptions are, for instance, Kenny, Davis & Oates (2004) investigating opera chorus artists and Parasuraman & Purohit (2000) examining orchestra musicians. Both studies make another important contribution by using validated measurements. Research on effects from work conditions on health among artists seems to be challenged regarding how these work conditions can be assessed.

In the present paper, it is suggested that the specific work conditions of artists can be conceptualized as boundaryless work (Allvin, 2008), i.e. work conditions are becoming more individualized, unpredictable, geographically dispersed as contemporary work life is going through structural changes with the consequence that, for example, fewer individuals can rely on finding permanent employment. Boundaries in time and space are broken down.

However, artists rarely know of any other work conditions, than those in line with boundaryless work, while having irregular working hours and having to rely on short term employment. They work autonomously and are to a high degree personally responsible for the preparation and also the result of their efforts. Moreover, artists are expected to perform on a consistent and superior level throughout the career in order to be regarded as reliable professional artists (Sandgren, 2005).

Professional classical singers might constitute a highly selected group of individuals who are successful in coping with complex work conditions. Already in childhood, they are engaged in choral singing, that offers them extensive informal music training, and later they start formal music training in secondary school and continue at music conservatories. Yet, singers do not appear indifferent to work-related stress. Professional classical singers report higher stress levels and lower well-being, compared to amateur singers, at a singing lesson with their regular vocal coach (Grape et al., 2002). Opera chorus artists experience increased occupational role concerns unrelated to levels of trait or state anxiety (Kenny et al., 2004).

Professional classical singers are in focus for the present study. For comparative reasons, an additional sample of professional voice users, call center employees, was included. Research shows that call center employees have to deal with time pressure, constant monitoring of performance and high production goals to reach, consequently low level of job control and high level of high demands that affect their health status (d'Errico et al., 2010; Sprigg, Smith & Jackson, 2003).

The work conditions of singers and call centers employees were assumed to be implicitly represented by background

factors relating to boundaryless work such as working part time and being active in more than one profession as well as experiencing pressure to perform.

Aims

The aim of the study was to explore work attitudes, role stress and health indicators in two samples of professional voice users; classical singers and call center employees.

Due to the lack of studies on artists using validated measurements for work conditions, well validated measures from work and organizational psychology were included.

Method

Participants were 74 professional classical singers (women n=37, men n=37, mean age =43.8 years, sd=10.5) and 69 call center employees (women n=42, men n=27, mean age =34.5 years, sd=8.1). Most singers (81%) and call center employees (57%) were cohabiting or married. Half of the group of singers (49%) and employees (49%) had children. A larger part of the singers (96%) had completed studies on college or university level compared to call center employees (24%).

One third of the singers (30%) worked full time and one fifth of employees (17%) worked full time in their respective professions. One third of the singers were freelancing as concert and/or opera singers. There were 24 sopranos, 9 mezzosopranos, 4 altos, 15 tenors, 18 baritones, 3 bass-baritone and 1 bass.

The two convenience samples were asked to fill in a questionnaire covering background factors, work attitudes, role stress and health issues at their work places at home. Participants were given information on the aim of the study and assured anonymity and confidentiality.

Work attitudes were assessed with four scales; a) Work intensity, five items (Brown & Leigh, 1996) (e.g. "When there is a job to be done, I devote all of my getting it done"), b) Job autonomy, four items (Sverke & Sjöberg, 1994) (e.g. "I can make my own decisions on how to organize my work"), c) Experienced responsibility for work outcomes, three items (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) (e.g. "I feel I should personally take the credit for the results of my work on this job") and d) Task completion ambiguity, four items (Hellgren et al., 2008) (e.g. "I know when a job assignment is finished").

Role stress was measured by two scales; a) Qualitative role overload, four items (Sverke, Hellgren & Öhrming, 1997) (e.g. "I feel unreasonable demands in my work") and b) Quantitative role, three items (Beehr, Walsh & Taber, 1976) (e.g. "It fairly often happens that I have to work under a heavy time pressure").

Health indicators and job satisfaction were assessed by three scales; a) Mental health complaints, 12 items (General Health Questionnaire, GHQ-12, Goldberg, 1972) covering non-psychiatric disorders b) Job induced tension, seven items

(House & Rizzo, 1972) (e.g. "If I had another work, my health would probably better") and c) Job satisfaction, three items (Hellgren, Sjöberg & Sverke, 1997) (e.g. "I am satisfied with my job").

Cronbach's alpha for all measurements ranged .52-.93, with Job autonomy and General Health Questionnaire showing the lowest internal reliabilities.

Results

Concerning work attitudes, results showed significant differences between singers and call center employees on Work intensity ($t(141)=2.394$, $p<.02$), Job autonomy ($t(141)=2.006$, $p<.05$) and Experienced responsibility ($t(141)=3.365$, $p<.001$). No significant result was found for Task completion ambiguity ($t(139)=.206$, $p<.84$).

Singers reported higher levels for Work intensity ($m=3.82$, $sd=.32$) and Job autonomy ($m=3.18$, $sd=1.09$) and Experience responsibility ($m=4.36$, $sd=.62$) compared to employees ($m=3.58$, $sd=.79$, $m=2.76$, $sd=1.40$, $m=3.82$, $sd=1.25$, respectively).

With respect to *role stress*, results indicated significant differences between singers and call center employees on Qualitative role overload ($t(141)=-8.077$, $p<.001$) and Quantitative work overload ($t(141)=-2.110$, $p<.04$).

Singers reported lower levels for Qualitative role overload ($m=1.93$, $sd=.87$) and Quantitative work overload ($m=3.06$, $sd=1.02$) compared to employees ($m=3.40$, $sd=1.29$, $m=3.36$, $sd=.65$ respectively).

Regarding *health and job satisfaction*, results showed that levels of Mental distress ($t(141)=-2.013$, $p<.05$), Job induced tension ($t(141)=5.406$, $p<.001$) and Job satisfaction ($t(141)=6.767$, $p<.001$) differed significantly between singers and employees.

Singers showed lower levels of Mental distress ($m=1.89$, $sd=.47$) than employees did ($m=2.04$, $sd=.41$). Moreover, singers reported higher levels for Job induced tension ($m=3.49$, $sd=.85$) and Job satisfaction ($m=4.00$, $sd=.83$ in comparison to employees ($m=2.51$, $sd=1.29$, $m=2.75$, $sd=1.31$, respectively).

Conclusions

Results showed that professional singers and call center employees differed on self-reports of the impact of work conditions on health indicators. Singers found their work more satisfactory, they worked autonomously and felt that they are in charge as in assuming responsibility for the work process and outcome to a higher degree than call center employees do. In contrast, singers experienced less work overload compared to employees. Regarding health, singers report higher job induced tension and slightly better mental health compared to employees.

Limitations of the study were that data from two convenience samples were collected that limit the generalizability of the findings, and that the theoretical basis of boundaryless work conditions was more assumed than explicitly tested. Moreover, further data analyses are suggested, in particular regression analysis, to test if work attitudes and work overload predict health status.

The contribution of the present study is twofold; firstly, the study is one of very few studies on specific work conditions and health issues among artists, secondly, the design included

well-validated measurements from work and organizational psychology. As classical singers appear to favorably cope with extraordinary work conditions, future studies are suggested to investigate how singers and other artists cope with boundaryless work conditions while still enjoying and performing on a superior and consistent level.

Keywords

Singers, call center employees, professional voice users, work attitudes, role stress, health, boundaryless work.

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