

AN IMPLICIT MODEL OF ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDE TO HEALTH OF SPECIALISTS IN AN ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

Attitude to health can be considered as one of the most important factors of efficiency and professional success of employees today, as a regulator of human behavior in a challenging and controversial professional situation. Studies of psychologists (starting with R. La Pierre's phenomenon, 1934) often fix the discrepancy between the declared attitude to health and true attitude and behavior. The imperfection of methods of diagnostics of attitude to health may be one of the reasons for such discrepancy. The authors suggest studying the attitude to health of specialists in an organization not only by traditional survey methods (for example, R.A. Berezovskaya's attitude-to-health questionnaire, a questionnaire on studying the barriers of health seeking behavior by Nikiforova G.S. and Dudchenko Z.F.), but also by means of an implicit method (based on the priming effect, implicit associative test). The article presents the results of the study conducted by using the implicit methodology for studying the attitude to health, which is based on a model of polar values.

Keywords: *Implicit method, attitude to health, occupational health, dual model.*

1. Introduction

The relevance of the study of attitude to health with the purpose of predicting an employee's professional conduct in situations related to a high level of stress, hazardous production and the importance of a clear and rapid response to a professional situation is acute in organizational psychology, where there is a likelihood (and sometimes it is very high) of life- and health-threatening situations (in the profession of oil refining industry specialists, specialists responsible for the life and health of other people, pilots, engine-drivers, doctors, etc.). For some professions a stress factor is concurrent, it is associated with experiencing mental tension due to the highest responsibility in making decisions. Under current conditions, health gains an economic value and there is no doubt about the relevance of maintaining occupational health. Prediction of an employee's behavior in such situation is one of the key tasks that can be resolved by psychological methods.

Attitude to health is understood as "a system of individual selective links of a person with various phenomena of the surrounding reality, contributing to or, conversely, threatening human health, as well as determining personal assessment of physical and mental state" [Zhuravleva I.V.].

A number of authors (G. Allport, 1935; Haber and Fried, 1975; Rokic, 1960) think that attitude leads to certain behavior, i.e. attitude determines behavior.

A concept of "implicit personality theory" was proposed by J. Bruner and R. Tagiuri in 1954 and is still used to denote the unconscious hierarchical system of ideas about the mental structure of other people. Two main approaches are distinguished in the study of implicit personality theories – traditional and alternative (psycho-semantic) ones. The traditional direction is represented by the works of J. Bruner and R. Tagiuri, common sense psychology by L. Ross, a causal attribution theory by G. Kelly, D. Shader, etc. An alternative approach, which was called like that by its ancestor J. Kelly, originated in line with a personal construct theory and was developed as a psycho-semantic direction (P. Vernon, V.F. Petrenko, A.G. Shmelev, and others). Representatives of the latter approach, in addition to highlighting the substantial components of the implicit personality theory, conduct a factor analysis, which allows evaluating and combining the qualities and links between separate components into a personal semantic space.

In recent years, when psychological studies of social attitudes were conducted, interest in the use of a special subgroup of indirect measuring methods (implicit methods) has grown significantly

(Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998; Nosek & Banaji, 2001; De Houwer, 2003; Fazio & Olson, 2003, T.G. Stefanenko, 2008). The active use of these methods in this area of research was due to the fact that they allow to study “true” and not only declared socially desirable attitudes, as well as to avoid the effect of insufficient introspection, the “Rosenberg effect” and other distorting effects. The authors have suggested that such implicit methods may also be applicable to the attitude to health; however the authors do not know such works.

2. Methods

In the framework of this project the authors aim to explore the possibility of predicting human behavior in tense and dangerous professional situations based on an employee’s “attitude to health” profile. For this purpose, the following tasks have been formulated: 1) to analyze existing methods of study of the attitude to health (identifying rather a declared attitude to health) and to develop an implicit method that would allow to study the deepest level of attitude to health, 2) to empirically test a dual model of attitude to health, 3) to analyze the results of the implicit diagnostics of attitude to health and distinguish types of employees in relation to real (objective) data on health groups.

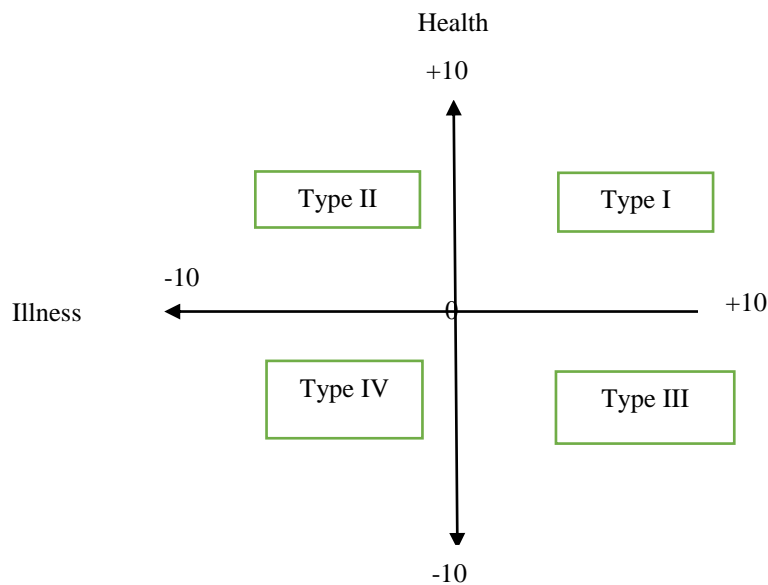
In the study the authors used an implicit method, which has recently become widely used in the study of attitudes. This method is based on the priming effect, measuring the time of reaction of test subjects (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998; Nosek & Banaji, 2001; De Houwer, 2003; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Stefanenko, 2008). Allowing excluding a factor of social desirability, this method reveals the inner, hidden attitudes of a person. In this study an implicit method is used to study the attitude to health, which is a relatively new approach.

One hundred and fifty-two people engaged in professional activities took part in testing the model. The average age of respondents was 26 years old. At this stage of the study the authors did not take into account the scope of activities, it was important for us that respondents worked in organizations. Besides, such indicators as self-assessment on a health scale, a health group and quality-of-life assessment were an important criterion for assessing the results. The study contains the data on internal/external goals (Desi and Ryan’s concept).

3. Findings and discussion

Implicit characteristics of attitude to health and illness are studied in a dual model. A model is understood as an object that reflects the most important features of the studied phenomenon, object or process. In our case, these are attitudes to such concepts as “health” and “illness”. The authors assume that there may be several variations of models of one and the same object and several objects can be described by a single model. In our study, the authors propose a dual model, which is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. A dual model of attitude to health



Hypothetically, four types of employees are distinguished in this model; they have qualitative characteristics and belong to risk groups, where Type I is the lowest risk group, Type IV – the highest risk group, which includes employees, who are most at risk of losing health and prone to occupational injuries. It is dangerous to engage such employees in the work on challenging and stressful work sites.

Implicit assessments of the attitude to health and illness were confirmed in health groups of the respondents: Health Group 1 (employees who get sick very rarely) included Type I and Type II respondents (positive attitude to health), Health Groups 2 and 3 included Type III respondents and Health Group 4 (employees who get sick very often) included Type IV employees. Thus, an implicit attitude to health and illness is directly related to the respondents' quality of life and the number of illnesses (health group). At the same time, the self-assessment of one's state of health is not related to the implicit attitude. The authors got a direct correlation of health self-assessment with a positive attitude to illness, i.e. employees really assess an illness as a positive state and highly assess their state of health.

Interesting indicators were the data on the ratio of types of employees with behavioral characteristics that contribute to maintaining a healthy lifestyle (sporting activities, active recreation, the ratio of work and rest, cold water treatment, balanced diet, etc.) or, on the contrary, causing the adherence to destructive lifestyles (alcohol consumption, eating junk food, etc.). At the same time, Type I and Type II employees adhered to behavioral characteristics of a healthy lifestyle, unlike Type III and Type IV employees. The largest distribution of destructive behavioral norms was observed in the group of Type IV employees. A qualitatively significant difference in rational habits of maintaining a healthy lifestyle was observed in Type I and Type II respondents. Type I respondents actively kept a healthy lifestyle through a balanced diet, an active lifestyle, but their average duration of sleep and rest was statically significantly lower than that of Type II employees.

Thus, the implicit attitude to health was confirmed by behavioral manifestations of the respondents and the objective data on health indicators (health group). Besides, the authors have not revealed a connection between the self-assessment of the attitude to health and implicit evaluations.

4. Conclusion(s) and recommendations/future directions

The study of the attitude to health in the context of professional activity is clearly of interest, since it reveals not only the possibilities of preventing the specialist's health problems, but also gaining theoretical and practical knowledge that allows creating conditions for preservation and development of regulatory properties of the organism, its physical, mental and social well-being. In turn, this ensures high reliability of professional activity, career longevity and maximum life expectancy. In this case, it is important to develop models of a professionally healthy employee and methods of diagnostics of the attitude to health.

The authors assume that not a single model can fully replace the studied object, since it displays only some of its properties. But sometimes, when solving certain tasks, in our case – the identification of types of employees that can be successful in a tense and dangerous professional activity, the dual model of attitude to health can be interesting and practically significant.

The study of the ratio of the true profound attitude to health and professional behavior also remains relevant. There is a need for a theoretical model of "occupational health" based on the identification and classification of implicit and explicit factors that shape the attitude to health.

The authors suppose that the study of a person's attitude to health, to the issues of maintaining occupational health can fully reveal the nature and structure of a healthy personality, solve theoretical-methodological and methodical issues in developing programs of psychological support for specialists in maintaining occupational health.

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