

DO WE HAVE THE MOST APPROPRIATE HUMAN RESOURCE IN A HIGHLY MORTALITY SALIENCED WORLD? EVIDENCE FROM TURKEY

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Abstract

In this research, how increase in mortality salience, that is, awareness level, will affect the effectiveness of White-collar workers of the future was investigated. Within this scope, it was tried to determine the effect of increase in notifications of mortality saliency to which we are exposed almost every day on “creativity” and “Ethical Values”, which we can consider to be the most important factors in the professional life. Within the framework of this purpose, in the research conducted on 248 senior students who were separated according to test and control groups, on the contrary to findings obtained from most of the research performed in the literature, it was found that increase in the level of mortality salience has no statistically meaningful difference on the perceptions of subjects aimed at their creativity levels and ethical values.

Keywords: Mortality Saliency, Creativity, Ethical Values, Terror Management Theory, Human Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Death anxiety has always been kept up-to-date nowadays when media is full of the news of mortality, in which existence of humans ends, almost every day (Maheswaran and Agrawal, 2004:213). This condition is valid for both domestic and foreign media. Developments in the world have the nature to increase this anxiety continuously.

September 11 attacks in the USA, Terrorist action in Paris called September 11 of Europe, chaos experienced in the Middle East and Afghanistan accompanied by the constant news on death are the occurrences that the workers in the professional life active all around the world hear almost every day and they are affected from these somehow, and form an environment that they reflect them on the works they perform. In such an environment, understanding the effect of the perception related to death on the individual and how the effect reflects on the behaviors and attitudes in the professional life has become a subject which the researchers working on organizational behaviors should take into consideration.

When foreign literature is investigated, it is seen that there has been an important increase in the researches aimed at determining how the mortality salience affects the workers in the professional life. (For example, Florian, Mikulincer and Hirschberger, 2002; Leary and Schreindorfer, 1997; Maheswaran and Agrawal, 2004; Burke, Kosloff and Landau, 2013; Routledge and Juhl, 2012). However, in spite of importance of the subject, studies aimed at effect of mortality salience on some variables which are important in the professional life are still insufficient.

It will not be wrong to say that primary ones of the variables mentioned are the subjects of ethics and creativity. When the importance of works on ethics and subjects of ethics thought in universities in not only national professional life but also international professional life is considered, it is seen that academic importance given to the subject of ethics is increasing (Furman, 2004; Garofalo, 2003; Howard, 2010; Valentine and Kidwell, 2008). On the other hand, innovative and creative thinking competence which has the biggest share in catching a sustainable competition advantage in order to be successful in the professional world has become prominent in the literature of the business (Gurteen, 1998; Roffe, 1999; Man, 2001; Escribá-Esteve and Montoro-Sánchez 2012; Božic, & Ozretic-Doše, 2015; Cook, 2016).

In the research conducted within the scope, the effect of increase in notifications of mortality salience to which we are exposed almost every day on “creativity” and “ethical values” that we can accept to be among the most important factors in the professional world and in addition, which we will study in two different dimensions, individually and socially was tried to be determined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term of mortality salience dealt with within the scope of the research entered the literature with Terror Management Theory (TMT) presented after being inspired from the works of Ernest Becker (1962, 1973, and 1975) in the foreign literature. Terror Management Theory, as a social psychological Theory, informs us about our understanding the potential effect of mortality awareness on ourselves and social behaviors (Mert, 2010: 57). That is, TMT is a term remarking that people act with the urge of self-defense as a result of their awareness about mortality.

Physical Death is an indispensable part of life. (Vail and Juhl, 2015: 1021). According to TMT, fear of death is the oldest human worry (Tassell-Matamua & Lindsay, 2016: 71). There may be a number of possibilities for the death of a human. The most prominent characteristic of death is that no one living has experienced it (Body et al., 2017: 117). Although we don't know when and how, we are aware that we will die one day (Tassell-Matamua & Lindsay, 2016: 71). However, from the point of TMT, managing the people's awareness of death, effort they make to deal with the awareness may sometimes cause harmful social results (Vail and Juhl, 2015: 1021). The primary Theory under TMT is that the people are hunted by their mortality (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2016). Therefore, TMT, setting off after being inspired from the works of anthropologist Ernst Becker (1962; 1973), became the subject attracting the attention of academicians (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski, 1997).

In reality, although human mind and ability of awareness that the mind provides to people are advantage, they also annoy people. Because, thanks to his mind and consciousness, people are aware that they are mortal and it creates a mental terror emerging with worry (Aksüt, 2008: 5-6).

Mortality Salience is that human is conscious he will die one day. Person living with this consciousness and emotion feels fear and he sometimes controls this fear or sometimes not (Aksüt, 2008: 7-8). Although the Theory "People get stressed with the fear of death" TMT put forward looks as a simple perception accepted by almost all the people, those theorizing it proved that this simple acceptance can be used in explaining most of human behaviors (Leary and Schreindorfer, 1997: 26).

There are a number of researches conducted on TMT, and thereby mortality salience. Including its effect on humor (Hackney, 2011), it is seen that those examining the effect of mortality salience on the creativity came to the fore. When it is considered that creative thought emerges after human thinks differently beyond traditional ways, why researching what kind of effect mortality salience will form come to the fore can be understood. (Amabile, 1983; Chi 1997; McCrae 1987; Ohlsson 1992). In the researches conducted, it was generally determined

that this effect is negative.(Routledge and Juhl, 2012; Routledge et al., 2008; Huimin, Brucks and Guo, 2013). However, it is wrong to say that mortality salience always moves the creativity into the background and increases the conservative attitudes (Burke, Kosloff and Landau, 2013: 195).

Effect and importance of work ethics in the professional life have become a subject of many scientific studies which is getting emphasized more and more. On the other hand, when the claims that TMT defends are considered, investigating effect of mortality salience on ethics came to the fore as an academic and practical requirement.

However, on the contrary to creativity, it is seen that the number of studies researching the effect of mortality salience on ethics is a bit less. It is thought that this research conducted with this aspect may contribute to closing the gap in the foreign literature.

In this research, it is targeted at conducting a research to take a step aimed at determining the condition in our country related to mortality salience which cannot have the importance it deserves in the domestic management literature much and at comparing the findings to be obtained with those in foreign literature and discussing the effect of cultural difference on the subject.

Hypothesis of the research prepared within the scope were determined as below;

H_{1a}: There is a meaningful difference between the creativity levels of participants whose mortality salience is high (individual interests become prominent) and of those whose mortality salience is low.

H_{1b}: There is a meaningful difference between the creativity levels of participants whose mortality salience is high (serving social benefit) and of those whose mortality salience is low.

H_{2a}: There is a meaningful difference between the levels of ethics of participants whose mortality salience is high (towards themselves) and creativity levels of those whose mortality salience is low.

H_{2b}: There is a meaningful difference between the levels of ethics of participants whose mortality salience is high (aimed at the general) and creativity levels of those whose mortality salience is low.

METHOD

In the research, whether increase in the level of mortality salience has effect on the perception of subjects aimed at creativity levels and ethical values was investigated. The research was conducted by analyzing the data collected with survey method. Analyses made within the scope of the research were made with SPSS 19 program. Information and related to scales used in the research and the samples of the research are below.

Samples of the Research

As a sampling method, selection was made among business and economics departments' senior students in two different universities in Ankara with simple random sampling method. Within the scope of the research, thoughts and perceptions of 248 senior university students of business and economics departments which will comprise the white-collar workers of the future were tried to be detected via questionnaires prepared. The participants were comprised of senior students of business and economic departments in two universities in Ankara. 162 (65%) of the students were male. The research is a test modeled research in which a control group is used. In the similar researches conducted in foreign literature, it was observed that samples were chosen from among senior students of universities, so samples in the research were chosen from among the senior students of universities in order for the findings to be compared with those obtained in the researches in which similar samples were used in the foreign literature.

Scales of the Research

First of all, effect of mortality salience on creativity was researched in the study. Similar to the researches started by Rosenblatt et al. (1989) in the foreign literature, guidance from scenarios being created were utilized. The effects of mortality salience increased in the participants when both creativity serving personal benefit in which individual interest are brought forward and another creativity serving social benefit are the points in question were determined. At the second stage of the research, similarly, the effect of mortality salience on ethics was investigated. Ethics was handled within the scope of both ethics and social ethical perception aimed at ethical values of the society where mortality salience exists and it was investigated in two dimensions.

Increasing Mortality Salience: First of all, participants were separated into two groups, test group and control group. In order to increase the mortality salience of the participants in the test group, two open-ended questions were asked and requested them to write their thoughts about those; *What thoughts and feelings does your death remind you?*, *Write your thoughts about what will happen to you when you die?* With these questions, they were enabled to think about death and so, it was aimed at increasing their mortality salience.

Control group was not asked any questions related to mortality salience. They were requested to write their experiences in the dentist's.

Measuring Creativity level: Creativity levels of participants of both test group and control groups were tried to be determined in two different in two dimensions. The first is the creativity level taking individual interests to the forefront and the other is creativity level serving social benefit.

In order to be able to determine creativity levels serving personal benefit in which individual interests of participants are brought to the forefront, they are requested to design a t-shirt. With this purpose, the sentence *“You are a person working in the textile sector. You want to design a t-shirt which has you gain more money. Create a new and creative T-Shirt”* was put into the questionnaire.

In order to be able to determine their creativity levels serving social benefit, they were requested to write about their thoughts related to our education system. With this purpose, the sentence *“In order to contribute to welfare of our country by increasing the number of patents international arena, write down the creative changes that may be made in our education system.”* was put into the questionnaire.

Drawings and writings of the participants were evaluated by two separate researchers independent from each other on the basis of 20 points and averages were taken. Evaluations which had 4 or more differences between were handled again by both researchers again; points which were thought to have emerged because of reasons such as carelessness etc. were refocused and agreed.

Measuring Ethical Perception Level: In order to measure ethical perception levels of the participants in terms of both their values and those of the society in which they are, 15 ethical scenarios developed by McCuddy and Peery (1996) and which was adapted by Mert (2003) in Turkish were used. Scenarios reflect unethical conditions that the students may encounter in the university environment and they are requested to state at which point they disagree with such unethical conditions according to 7-point likert scale (1=strongly agree, 7= strongly disagree) in terms of themselves and their environment. Arithmetic averages of evaluations that the participants made according to 15 different scenarios were taken in terms of each participant and individual ethical perception point and social ethical perception point were determined.

Two of the ethical scenarios used in the research are below as examples;
“Teacher of Sami decided to try a new evaluation system that will create a competition environment in the class. According to this system, the teacher would give certain number of A’s, certain number of B’s, certain number of C’s and certain number of F’s. In order for Sami to continue his scholarship, he must get A. When the Professor gave the resources of the assignment to the class, naturally, the first person to go to the library was Sami. Having

completed his assignment with the resource book, he decided to hide the book on another shelf. So, he would be advantageous against his class mates. According to Sami, it was just putting the book to another place.”

“Ayşe was given a term assignment in sociology course. She noticed that one of the subjects advised for the assignment was similar to that she prepared for the composition course last year. She decided to give the assignment she prepared last year as the assignment of sociology course with small changes. After all, because it was her own assignment she prepared, she thought that it was not wrongful.)”

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Before starting testing hypothesis of the research, whether the data obtained are compatible with normal distribution is control with Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test in order to determine the analysis method to be used and it was determined that they showed normal distribution characteristics.

At the second stage of the research, whether there is a statistically meaningful difference between the evaluations of creativity levels focused on individual interests, creativity levels focused on social interests, individual ethical perceptions and social ethical perceptions of the test group whose mortality salience is considered to be high and of control group whose mortality salience is considered to be low was tested with T-test analysis.

Within this scope, first of all, whether there is a meaningful difference between the creativity levels of test and control groups focusing on individual interests is analysed with T-test. Analyses were made between 99% trust range. Results of the analysis are in Table-1. According to these results, at the level of 99% meaningfulness level ($p < 0,01$) it was found that there is no statistical meaningful difference between individual creativity levels of test and control groups. According to this result, H_{1a} hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1. Results of T-test made related to creativity levels focusing on individual interests of groups whose mortality saliences are low and high.

| Variable | Group | N | Ave. | s.s. | s.d. | t value | Sig (2-tailed) value (p) | No difference | difference | H_{1a} Hypothesis |
|-------------------|------------------|-----|------|------|------|---------|--------------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------------|
| T-shirt Design | Test Group | 168 | 8,64 | 5,28 | 246 | 0,672 | 0,502 | √ | | rejected |
| | Control Group | 80 | 9,14 | 5,83 | | | | | | |

Then, whether there is a meaningful difference between creativity levels of test and control groups focusing on social interests was analyzed with T-Test between 99% trust range. The results of the analysis are in table-2.

According to these results, at the level of 99% meaningfulness level ($p < 0,01$) it was found that there is no statistical meaningful difference between social creativity levels of test and control groups. According to this result, H_{1b} hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2. Results of T-test made related to creativity levels focusing on social interests of groups whose mortality saliences are low and high.

| Variable | Group | N | Ave. | s.s. | s.d. | t value | Sig (2-tailed) value (p) | No difference | Difference | H_{1a} Hypothesis |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----|------|------|------|---------|--------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| Increasing the number of Patents | Test Group | 168 | 6,06 | 4,53 | 246 | 0,768 | 0,444 | √ | | Rejected |
| | Control Group | 80 | 6,51 | 4,19 | | | | | | |

As the last one, whether there is a meaningful difference between both social and individual perception evaluations of test and control groups is analysed with T-test between 99% trust range. Analyses were made between 99% trust range. Results of the analysis are in Table-3 and Table-4. According to these results, at the level of 99% meaningfulness level ($p < 0,01$) it was found that there is no statistical meaningful difference between social and individual and social perception levels of test and control groups. According to this result, H_{2a} and H_{2b} hypotheses were rejected.

Table 3. Results of T-test made related to individual ethical perceptions of groups whose mortality salience is high and low.

| Variable | Group | N | Ave. | s.s. | s.d. | t value | Sig (2-tailed) value (p) | No difference | Difference | H_{1a} Hypothesis |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----|------|------|------|---------|--------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| Individual Ethical perceptions | Test Group | 168 | 3,93 | 1,13 | 246 | 0,069 | 0,945 | √ | | Rejected |
| | Control Group | 80 | 3,92 | 1,16 | | | | | | |

Table 3. Results of T-test made related to social ethical perceptions of groups whose mortality salience is high and low

| Variable | Group | N | Ave. | s.s. | s.d. | t value | Sig (2-tailed) value (p) | No difference | Difference | H _{1a} Hypothesis |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----|------|------|------|---------|--------------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Social Ethical Perceptions | Test Group | 168 | 4,05 | 1,06 | 246 | -1,299 | 0,195 | √ | | Rejected |
| | Control Group | 80 | 4,24 | 1,12 | | | | | | |

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATIONS

According to findings obtained in the study we conducted, it was determined that the participants which will comprise the white-collar workers of the professional life soon do not change their creativity potentials and ethical values negatively by being affected from mortality salience, different from foreign literature in general. No statistically meaningful relation was able to be found between the variables in the hypotheses of the research. So, all research hypotheses were rejected.

It is thought that national cultural characteristics should be considered when unclosing such a result obtained. Because, while the samples whose mortality salience was increased in the researches conducted by using similar sampling and methodology in the foreign literature were found to be negatively affected and to reflect the negativity on the work they performed as compatible with the results that Terror Management Theory claimed, no findings were obtained in this research.

With this aspect, it is evaluated that human resource potential of ours will be a human resource desired in the future which will not reduce the effectiveness of the work it performs by not being affected or by being effected relatively less from the negative environment of today and the future. So, it will not be wrong to evaluate that we have professional executive candidates who are not affected from mortality salience to beactive in multinational environments in the future when tolerance to be shown to other cultures will be indispensable.

The result obtained in the research can be explained with the criticism and complementary approach directed towards Terror Management Theory by Mert (2010). Mert (2010: 70-71) emphasized the importance of bravery stating "Individual's Bravery level's being low will motivate the individual in order to close this insufficiency aimed at being a stronger part of the group he is in. Because, individual, as a part of group, will assimilate the bravery of the group with his own, so he will use this power to cope with the fear and worry emerging with the

death anxiety.” And he puts forward the necessity for bravery to be taken into consideration in the hypotheses of Terror Management Theory. In other words, it is possible that differences focused on bravery of different cultures differs reason-result relations that Terror Management Theory put forward. Within the scope of this research, with the highness of bravery level, it will be possible for the bravery that individual/society has against mortality salience will assume the buffer task between the fear felt and behaviors that the fear will cause.

The research was carried out with cross-sectional data obtained from the questionnaires and the sample group is comprised of the students of two different universities’ business and economics departments students. So it may be said that they are the limitations of the study. The study is planned to be repeated in different universities and sample groups. Another saying; samples comprising of only university students can be chosen as a restriction of the research. Participants who are relatively young are not in fear of mortality salience because of possible bravery their ages give or although they feel the fear, they may not be affected negatively from this fear because of their ages. It will be beneficial to include variables aimed at determining whether those feel the fear against mortality salience to similar studies to be conducted later by considering this condition.

In addition to this, it is evaluated that international researches that will be able to reveal the differentiation between the cultures related to the subject are need. Besides, it is thought that examining not only in national culture dimension but also organizational dimension of the claims that Terror Management Theory defends will contribute the literature related to the subject.

It is evaluated that it will be required for the variable of “bravery” which was emphasized and which was underlined in explaining the result obtained above to be measured in the studies to be conducted in the next researches. Within this scope, the effect of variable “bravery” in the interrelation between the variables used in measuring effects of Terror Management Theory will be able to be determined more clearly and accurately. Thus, if the importance of bravery (Mert, 2007: 9) in catching the correct, understandable and primary core which is one of successful management examples which have been applied since the first day when human came to existence is considered, it is evaluated that studies to be conducted in this direction will contribute to the related literature.

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