The Factors of Employee Performance: A Study of SearchNEasy

Kok Ban Teoh[1], Miguel Cordova[2], Sin Ni Hor[3], Chung Hong Lim[4], Li Khuan Yeoh[5], Amitha Madhu[6], Uma Warrier[7], Jia Jun Chan[8], Daisy Mui Hung Kee[9], Florence E-Vern Tan[10], Jia Xin Chia[11], Yan Jin Chuah[12]

SENTRAL College Penang[1,3,4,5]
3, Penang Street, Georgetown, 10200 George Town, Penang.
Pontifical Catholic University of Peru[2]
Avenida Universitaria 1801, San Miguel 15088, Lima, Peru.
Jain (Deemed to be) University[6,7]
No. 17, Seshadri Road, Gandhi Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560009.
Universiti Sains Malaysia[8,9,10,11,12]
Jalan Sungai Dua, 11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
Correspondence Email: derickteoh@sentral.edu.my
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3252-8531

ABSTRACT

SearchNEasy is a Malaysia-based Web Development Company providing leading customized web solutions for worldwide business over the past 20 years. People, process, and technology are three elements for successful business transformation. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic affects the workload of employees as the demand for the company's service for web design increases due to the Movement Control Order (MCO), where the Malaysian government commands the closure of all private and government sectors, except those deemed as essential needs. This research intends to understand the factors contributing to employees' performance. This study was conducted through primary and secondary research with respondents and existing data. Through this study, employees' performance, job stress, job demand, organizational culture, and organizational rewards were analyzed. It was shown that job stress is one of the factors of employee performance in SearchNEasy due to the increase in workload and lack of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Employees' Performance, Organizational Rewards, Organization Culture, Job Demands, Job Stress, SearchNEasy

INTRODUCTION

SearchNEasy is a pioneer Web Development Company providing leading customized web solutions for worldwide business over the past 20 years. They are one of the world's leading companies that specializes in Website Content Management System, eCommerce Solutions, eBusiness Solutions, Customizable Web Application, Customizable Web Development, Customizable Web Portal Development, Multi-Level Marketing Development, Customer Relationship Management, Enterprise Resource Planning, Material Requirement Planning,

Search Engine Optimization, and System Integration. Their business slogan is '*We analyze, we set up, we implement, we customize to your business needs*'.

SearchNEasy is experienced and has extensive knowledge in database programming for more than 20 years. They make efficient and streamlined business processes by using technology through enterprise applications. They customize businesses, analyze customers' business needs, provide custom business intelligence solutions, and upgrade websites to the latest content management system version smoothly.

They have a high reputation for their commitment to customer service from several countries, which include Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Australia, Qatar, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom. Therefore, an employee with high job performance is a significant asset to the company. Employees in SearchNEasy must fulfil their job duties by delivering quality and effective service to its customers.

SearchNEasy has received various awards and recognition in delivering customer needs. In the aim of providing innovative solutions driven by customer needs globally, SearchNEasy must pass on a message to its customers through different marketing channels and its strategies to ensure that employees are engaging well with the customer needs.

As we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the world devastatingly and all aspects of lives have been affected. During this pandemic, most businesses are struggling with challenges, but one sector that has seen in demand is internet traffic and e-commerce. According to Kniffin, et. al. (2020), Covid-19 pandemic has caused an increase in workload and shortage of staff to companies. As a result, SearchNEasy, a web development and website design company in Malaysia also affected.

In these times, most of the population are most often staying indoors, and web design is seeing a substantial increase in demand. Hence, many people need web designers to create websites in order to start their online business. This pandemic is seen by many individuals as an opportunity to start a new website or revamp an existing web presence for their online business. For example, individuals with existing offline businesses see this as an opportunity to pursue e-commerce to raise their sales, and for the new stores that open regularly during these tough times to earn more income, even restaurants are trying a new way to boost up their sales through online websites. Therefore, the demand for web design will increase.

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2020), the internet traffic of Malaysia has increased by 23.5% since the implementation of MCO, and this issue cannot be ignored. Hence, SearchNEasy could not hire new employees and train them due to their existing employees being occupied with their current workload during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Picincu (2019), this will affect employee performance since there is an increase in the workload during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The company's goal is to help their clients to achieve their goals, and most importantly to increase profit from sales. As a result, the employees of SearchNEasy have an increase in workload and stress while they are occupied with their ongoing tasks. Therefore, there is inefficiency in the employees of SearchNEasy due to the pressure.

Nobody knows how long the pandemic will continue, and all the businesses will likely need to transition to a new reality around isolation and distancing in the near and foreseeable future. As a result, there will only be more and more people relying on e-commerce. These new circumstances are leading to a high demand and affect the job performance of web designers, especially for those who specialize in e- commerce facilitation.

Literature Review

Employee performance is considered the backbone and the foundation of an organization as it directly affects organizational productivity and profit. This literature review covers four factors influencing employee performance which are the organizational rewards, organizational culture, job demands, and job stress. Even though this literature review presents these factors in various contexts, this research will primarily focus on how these factors affect or contribute to employee performance.

Employee Performance

Before having a thorough discussion on how the selected factors contribute to employee performance, let us examine what is employee performance. Colquitt, et. al. (2018) referred to employee performance as the employee's behavior that contributes to an organization, either positively or negatively, to accomplish the organizational goals (Campbell, 1990; Borman & Motowildo, 1997). The definition of job performance includes behavior in the employee's work situation and behaviors which are relevant to the organizational goals. Employee performance will be assessed and defined as quantity and quality of outputs (Shahzadi et al.,2014). For example, some companies will provide rewards such as "*Best Employee of the Month*" to the highest sales employee.

Sonnentag (2002) agreed that employee performance must differentiate between behaviors and outcome aspects of performance (Campbell, 1990; Kanfer, 1990; Campbell, et. al., 1993; Roe, 1999). Outcome aspects of performance refer to the result and outputs of the employee's behavior. The behavioral engagement and outcome aspects are related to one another, but there is no apparent relationship among the constructs as it can be influenced by other factors (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). For example, a promoter for rice did not perform well by approaching the customers, but the rice sales are high because there are high demands for rice. According to Yang (2008), employee performance could not be verified. At the same time, he asserted that bonuses and rewards are given to an employee based on the performance when the employee performance is noticeable.

Various behaviors are relevant to job performance, but those behaviors can be fit into three broad categories (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Task performance refers to employee behaviors which include assigned job responsibilities as a part of the job description. The employee will transform the organization's resources into products and services produced by the organization. Task performance can be categorized into three parts which are routine, adaptivity, and creativity based on the job context.

The second category is citizenship behavior. Citizenship behavior is defined as voluntary employee activities which contribute to the organization by improving the workplace's overall performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Employees give larger benefit to the organization by being loyal to the organization, working hard to improve its operations, and supporting the organization (Coleman & Borman, 2000). The employees also help and develop colleagues. They help each other without expecting any rewards in return.

Lastly, counterproductive behavior is defined as employees' activities that intentionally hinder the organizational accomplishment. Counterproductive behavior can be grouped into four main categories which are deviance in property, production, political, and personal aggression. (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Marcus, et. al., 2013). For example, some employees will harm the assets and possessions of the organization by sabotage and theft. Moreover, some employees reduce the efficiency of work output by wasting resources and abusing substances. Furthermore, counterproductive behavior also includes gossiping, harassment, and abuse that happened among employees.

Organisational Rewards
It is a general term for all forms of payment including monetary incentives or non-monetary rewards given to employees at the organizational levels as a reward for their services (Armstrong & Murlins, 2012). It is given to motivate employees for their positive contributions and high commitment to achieve the goals. According to Armstrong and Murlins (2012), rewards are given to motivate employees and it will be effective when it is awarded at an appropriate time. Armstrong (2012) identified that the main goals of organizational rewards are to attract qualified and talented people to the organization, decrease the organization's turnover, and motivate employees to deliver higher accomplishments.

Generally, there are two types of organizational rewards which are intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic rewards are known as cashless rewards or rewards that have no physical existence (Ajmal, et. al, 2015). For example, intrinsic rewards can consist of recognition and acknowledgement from management, empowerment to perform tasks, respect, and appreciation (Mahaney & Lederer, 2006). Intrinsic rewards strengthen the feelings of self-esteem and accomplishment (Honig-Haftel & Martin, 1993). They derive from job content, which includes challenging work environment, responsibility of task appointed, variety, creativity, opportunity to carry out one's skills and abilities, and adequate feedback according to the person's efforts (Mottaz, 1985). In contrast, extrinsic rewards are known as cash rewards or rewards that have a physical existence (Ajmal et al., 2015; Sundararajan et al., 2020). They consist of salary, bonuses, incentive payment, promotions, and private office space (Mottaz 1985, p. 366; Mahaney & Lederer, 2006, p. 43). These two types of organizational rewards motivate the employee to achieve better working performance and increase employees' satisfaction. Organizational rewards also help to explore and retain the talents that have excellent working performance.

Organisational Culture
Taylor (2004) interpreted organizational culture as what is created from the information received on how people are expected to behave in the organization. Anthon in House, et. al (2004) defined organizational culture as the set of values, beliefs and comprehension shared among an organization's employees and it is ranked among an organization's most potent component. Organizational culture is also an independent set of beliefs, values, behavioral tendencies, and tools that become common that the organization maintains over long periods (Bergh, 2011). Contemporary organization culture has normally been interrelated to management (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Organizational culture includes both observable and unobservable characteristics in an organization. Observable characteristics made up of dress code, jargon, and distinct behavior patterns, whereas unobservable characteristics includes shared values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions of the organization's members (Bergh, 2011). These two types of characteristics are an invisible guide for employees in the sense of which behaviors

are acceptable and will be rewarded. It is also an assisting indicator in helping the management team to evaluate the employees' performance.

Employees would also refer to these organizational cultures as an indicator when they perform a certain task. For example, in Japan, many corporate companies promote the culture of a community mindset which treats their workers as family members. This culture strengthens the employees' commitment and performance as the workers regard company as their own home and always strive for the best performance when they work. The organizational culture also affects how managers and employees solve problems, serve customers, react to competition, and execute tasks (Armenakis, 2011).

Job Demands

Job demands can be known as the job's features requiring sustained effort and results in incurring several costs (Beutell, 2010). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) interpreted job demands as the job aspects which are needed in terms of physical, psychological, social, or organizational requiring sustained physical and psychological effort and associated together with certain physiological and psychological costs. There are four types of job demands which are capable to contribute to employee performance, they are quantitative demands, shift work, emotional demands, and physical demands (Al-Homayan et al., 2013). Firstly, quantitative demand refers to the workload, where employees are expected to discern them (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Secondly, physical demand is referred to as the required physical exertion throughout the working process (Nahrgang, et. al., 2011). Third, emotional job demands refer to the emotional element of work and the degree of emotional reactions to stressful situations because of one's job (Emmerik & Peeters, 2009). Fourth, shift work refers to a work system in which employees work by taking shifts to ensure the availability of services all the time (Karriker & Williams, 2009).

Moreover, job demands can also be differentiated into challenge demands and hindrance demands (Teoh & Kee, 2018; Teoh & Kee, 2019). Challenge demands refer to the job demands which provide opportunities for personal development whereas hindrance demands refer to the job demands which are perceived as barriers to personal development (Ahmad, Saffardin & Teoh, 2020; Teoh & Kee, 2020).

Job Stress

Stress is a psychological, physical, or social response to demands that arise when individuals realize that the harmful factors or strains, they face may surpass their capacity and resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Arnold & Feldman, 2000; Greenberg & Baron, 2007). Stressors are the demands causing individuals to feel stressed, while strains are the negative consequences of the stress response (Colquitt, et. al, 2018). Individuals will experience job stress when there is an imbalance between the work environment's demands and individuals' abilities. Different individuals may experience different stress levels based on how they can perceive and evaluate stressors (Colquitt et al., 2018).

Stress can be defined into two general forms, which are eustress (positive stress) and distress (negative stress) (Kazmi, 2008; Rizwan, Kotteeswari & Sharief, 2014; Bukhari & Waseem, 2014). Eustress makes individuals feel challenged because they may need to deal with additional responsibilities (Vijayan, 2018). It also has a positive impact on individuals by providing energy and achieving the organizational goals effectively. These kinds of stressors are also known as challenge stressors and recognized as opportunities for growth, learning and achievement (Cavanaugh, et. al., 2000). Distress happens when an individual recognizes failure or risk that badly affects the individual (Kolt, 2003). The

employees need to deal with picky customers and tons of complaints. These kinds of stressors are also called hindrance stressors due to the fact that employees perceive the stressors as hurdles which hinders achievement (LePine, LePine, & Jackson, 2004). Different types of stress will affect employees' performance in different ways. Positive stress can be considered as an advantage because it motivates employees to perform better. However, negative stress may bring a negative impact on employees' performance.

In short, employees' performance is not solely decided by employees' behavior. Employees' performance is also determined by other factors such as organizational rewards, organizational culture, job demands, and job stress in many situations. These factors would affect the employees' performance either positively or negatively.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methodology refers to the methods used to meet the study's objective with valid and reliable information (Chaurasiya et al., 2020). In this research, we identify the factors of employees' performance in SearchNEasy through structured interviews with a sample size as many as 10 and represents 91% of the employees in SearchNEasy. One of the employees was left out of the interview process due to in charge of the business.

The research based on primary data and secondary data that we have collected from various sources. The primary data is collected from the managers and employees of SearchNEasy by using a structured interview schedule. The interview was conducted through the Zoom application and the duration of the interview with each participant was 30 minutes on average. All the interviews are conducted with the consent of the participants that the interview will be recorded. Notes were also taken according to the response of the participants. Questions of the interview were structured and open-ended to capture the factors of employee performance in SearchNEasy. The questions asked using structured interviews were related to job stress, organizational rewards, organizational culture, and job demands.

After the response is collected from the participants, we paraphrased to ensure the points' correctness by noting down the points. The responses collected are discussed in the results and discussion.

Apart from the primary data, the secondary data is collected from various research papers, journals, and books (Husna, et. al., 2020). Research literature which are available from the last two decades were also considered for review.

Research Limitations
This research has a few limitations. First, scheduling an online interview with the employees of SearchNEasy is one such limitation. As a result, they are occupied with their current workload and server migration. Therefore, we had to reschedule the interviews several times to be able to suit their convenience.

Second, the lack of data and information is another limitation. Due to the current pandemic of Covid-19, we experienced difficulties in finding journal articles for references because we could not visit the library. Therefore, we had to rely on journal articles that can be accessed through the Internet and most of the articles online are not free to access. Thus, the study might lack critical information which relates to our research.

Lastly, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to the population, due to the fact that this research is solely conducted and focused primarily on the employees to determine the factors of employee performance in SearchNEasy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational Rewards

Throughout the interview, the participants showed that they are rewarded with incentives for doing the extra workload in SearchNEasy, as organizational rewards play a vital role in affecting SearchNEasy's productivity. The benefits and rewards provided by SearchNEasy are the increase of salary, the increase of bonus, and the increase of annual leave. Employees feel more motivated and it will increase their efficiency in job performances with these benefits and rewards. Most employees in the organization are satisfied and well-motivated with the organization's rewards and benefits.

> "I am satisfied with the benefits offered by the organization because they usually take us on holiday trips once a year before the pandemic happens. During the MCO, our bosses increased our salary and gave us more annual leaves as we are especially busy this year due to the pandemic. In my opinion, I am satisfied with my own salary and I am motivated to work harder." (Male, 48)

Eight responses collected were similar and showed that SearchNEasy's employees are rewarded with extrinsic rewards by the organization. These rewards significantly impact employees' work performance as they are motivated by the organization to achieve higher targets (Omolawal & Bawalla, 2017). According to Omolawal and Bawalla (2017), rewards must be able to motivate employees because motivation will help them to achieve higher job performance.

In addition, the participants said that organizational rewards affect their job performance.

> "I am getting incentives from my organization for completing a project each time. However, it will greatly increase my performances if I am getting a higher salary or bonus for my work." (Male, 35)

> Five responses collected were similar and pointed out that higher incentives and salary improve their performance. Omolawal and Bawalla (2017) also added that organizational rewards are an effective way to motivate employees to be more efficient in their job performance.

Furthermore, the participants agreed that there are opportunities for career growth I SearchNEasy.

> "I get to learn new skills and techniques by working through big projects. Thus, I can see that there is an opportunity for me to become a technical director or higher level when working in SearchNEasy." (Male, 28)

Eight responses collected were similar and most of them pointed out that there is an opportunity for higher-level career growth. It is shown that SearchNEasy's employees can get recognition for their performance and promotions from management.

Organizations need to give employees opportunities for job promotion and advance in the hierarchy as organizational rewards (Omolawal and Bawalla, 2017).

Organizational Culture

According to the interview conducted with the participants, it clearly showed that employees are satisfied with the organization's culture. The management has been actively communicating with the employees and has helped them in their work. From the interview, some of the participants said the management had been actively communicating with them.

> "The management always discusses with us before accepting a new project especially when we are busy with the server migration that happens throughout the year." (Male, 30)

Five responses collected were similar and it has shown that the management has been actively communicating with the employees. According to Rukmana, et. al. (2018), employees will be motivated and productive when there is good communication between the management and the employees which improves employees' performance in the organization. In addition, most of the participants stated that the management had helped them in their work.

> "My manager has been really helpful and whenever I face any problems in my work, he is always there to support me and gives me feedback, moreover, I am one of the junior coders in the Information Technology department" (Male, 28)

Six responses collected were similar and it has shown that the manager had been giving feedback to the employees. According to Bucata and Rizescu (2017), good feedback provides job satisfaction to employees and motivates the employees to work better and feel appreciated by the company. Most of the participants also said that they are encouraged to give suggestions for organizational improvement.

> "During meetings, our bosses always encourage us to speak up and ask for any opinions on how we can improve ourselves as a team and whether there are any areas that should be improved. This is one of the reasons working here gives me satisfaction because our opinions are always being appreciated." (Male, 35)

Nine responses collected were similar and showed that the management parties encouraged and appreciated the opinions from the employees. According to Osborne and Hammoud (2017), employees want to be appreciated by organization when they work. Therefore, it is vital to provide a platform for employees to communicate the difficulties they faced.

The participants from the Information Technology department mentioned that if the organization offers courses or training, it will improve their performance in their work.

> "If the organization provides training, I will be able to finish my task better as a programmer and able to work more efficiently. The programming languages and software I use in my work may be different from what I know, and it would help me greatly if I am taught about it beforehand." (Male, 28)

Two responses collected were similar and pointed out they can efficiently complete their task if training is offered to the employees. According to Shahzadi, et. al. (2014), training

is useful for employees as it will help to improve skills to handle their work effectively. It also helps the employees to be able to meet the customer's needs and demands.

Job Demands

The interview with the participants showed that SearchNEasy's employees do not face any psychological or physical impacts. SearchNEasy has provided its employees with job resources as they do not face many obstacles when carrying out their work. It also shows that they have given their employees sufficient time to complete their job. From the interview, most of the participants said they have enough tools, information, and time to carry out their work.

> "The organization has provided us with sufficient tools and information for us to carry out our work, and most of the time we can complete our job within the time frame given by them." (Male, 33)

Eight responses collected were similar and can complete their tasks by using the organization's tools and information. According to Al-Homayan, et. al. (2013), organizations can maximize their employees' performance by providing enough job demands to avoid unnecessary effort when carrying out their work. In addition, most of the participants do not face any pressure when completing their tasks. However, some of the responses collected face pressure in completing their tasks.

> "I feel depressed in trying to complete my tasks because I have to come with plans to market our services to attract more sales and at the same time, I have to try to hit my monthly target." (Male, 33)

Two responses collected were similar. The employees of SearchNEasy face quantitative demands where they face time pressure against the number of tasks that must be completed. According to Al-Homayan, et. al. (2013), employee's job performance can be affected by the amount of work given to an employee as they feel pressured by the workloads. Furthermore, all the participants stated the relationship with their co-workers did not hinder their work.

> "My co-workers do not hinder me at work, instead they are very helpful, and I enjoy working with them. Whenever I look stressed out during working, they will approach and talk to me, and it helps me to feel better and continue my work." (Female, 30)

Employees of SearchNEasy show that they support each other when their co-workers face obstacles and feel stress. According to Newman, et. al (2012), organizational support from management is essential to employees as it supports and motivates them to achieve higher performance. Most participants show that they can decide on the time they needed to complete their task.

> "I can estimate the time I need to complete my tasks. For example, I can estimate that I may take several weeks with my co-workers to complete the server migration." (Male, 32)

Eight responses collected were similar. SearchNEasy's employees point out that they can estimate the time they require to complete their work. According to Al- Homayan et al. (2013) job performance can be affected by time pressure and employees feel pressured when they cannot complete their tasks by the deadline.

Job Stress

The interview with the participants clearly showed that the company goal is to achieve the target sales, and as a result, the increasing workload of employees is the most important source of work stress in SearchNEasy. The other sources of work stress in SearchNEasy are the allocation of work, understaffing, and deadlines. Due to these reasons, there is a reduced efficiency in the job performance of the employee. From the interview, most of the employees in the organization are stressed which affects their productivity. Most of the participants said that they feel stressed when they have a high workload.

> "My workload is high! I find it very difficult to do my task systematically and that is why it takes time. I become more stressed when I am getting so many tasks and I have to work for extra time to complete my works" (Male, 30)

Six responses collected were similar and pointed out that high workload puts them under pressure especially when they need to perform and complete several tasks in a short timeframe. According to Vijayan (2018), workload is one of the main factors which will affect employee's efficiency and productivity. Employees that face high workload will have effects which result in poor concentration and decision-making during their work. Most of the participants also mention the understaffing problem results in an increase of workload to do the work.

> "I am currently the only staff in administration, so I usually have a lot of workload on hand. It will be good if we have more staff to help me out when I have a lot of tasks on hand. So that I can focus on my other tasks better." (Male, 33)

Seven responses were similar and pointed out that the employee is stressed when they face a high workload and cannot share the workload with other employees. According to Panigrahi (2016), understaffed is one of the main factors of stress in the workplace. Employees are stressed out when there is a lack of support and an uneven workload leading to stress and affects employees' performance. The participants from the marketing department said that meeting the sales target by the deadline causes stress in employees of SearchNEasy.

> "We are all actively working on all of our tasks, due to the high workload we won't be able to meet the deadlines and achieve the target. I feel stressed and have a heavy workload the week before the deadline." (Male, 33)

Three responses were similar, and they pointed out that deadlines and sales were the reasons of being stressed among employees. According to Khan and Khurshid (2017), employees feel stressed when they cannot meet the deadlines, affecting employees' productivity and performance. A few of the participants said long working hours and demands from clients are reasons for being stressed.

> "When project development is closing, we have to multitask to somehow meet the goals and deadlines. I must work longer to complete the task allocated. I feel so occupied and stressed." (Male, 48)

Three participants only said that long hours of working are the reasons for stress. According to Khan and Kurshid (2017), long working hours affect work productivity and

employees long term health.

CONCLUSIONS

This research aims to identify the factors of employee performance in SearchNEasy and the company has 11 employees. Hence, it is important to emphasize employees' wellbeing as it will affect the employee performance (Bryson, et. al, 2015). From our research, the approach of SearchNEasy by providing benefits and rewards is a good approach to increase their employees' productivity as their employees will feel more motivated. Therefore, it is recommended that SearchNEasy to continue providing incentives and rewards to keep their employees motivated.

The employees of SearchNEasy are satisfied and comfortable with the organizational culture in the company. The management has done an excellent job of having a close-knitted team by actively communicating with the employees. They also try to help their employees whenever the employees have any problems during their work.

The job demands of SearchNEasy suits their employees and they can perform their task smoothly with the materials and tools required. However, some employees feel depressed when they must achieve their monthly targets. The employees are also having good relationships with their colleagues and they help each other by hearing them out when they look stressed.

The employees of SearchNEasy are highly stressed especially when they face a high workload during the pandemic of COVID-19, they have to complete their task in a short time. The understaffed issue has also caused an increase in the workload due to the uneven workload among employees. Employees from the marketing department feel stressed in meeting the sales target within the deadline set by the management. Due to the high workload, the employees had to work long hours in completing their work.

In accordance with participants' suggestion that SearchNEasy can consider to provide vehicles or living accommodation as company benefits. These may improve their employees' job performances as they are well satisfied and motivated by the company benefits. Furthermore, SearchNEasy can increase their employees' work efficiency by helping them keep up with the industry through training and courses. Lastly, SearchNEasy should hire new employees to solve the understaffed and high workload issue in the organization.

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