

A Review of the Effects of Social Loafing on Firm's Performance

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effect of social loafing on overall firm performance. It reviewed numerous research articles on social loafing and a conceptual model was developed to assess the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. The review discovered that negative effects of social loafing on work group performance have an adverse effect on the productivity and goal accomplishment of the firm. Therefore, the study recommends that in order to improve employee performance and achieve organizational goals and objectives, social loafing can be reduced by minimizing free riding, encouraging team loyalty and assigning of distinct responsibilities for each team member. This will in turn encourage originality and creativity, which will motivate the employees to put in more effort to work, thereby enhancing the achievement of organizational aims and objectives.

Keywords: Social loafing, firm performance, productivity, free riding

1. Introduction

In modern business world, companies place a high value on employee performance and the variables that could impact it, all in an effort to keep up with the ever-evolving needs of their customers and technological business innovation. Every organization is therefore, made up of several workers who get together as a team to collaborate in order to accomplish the aims and objectives of the firm. When the entire workload is divided among several groups, it will be easier to complete the task within the allotted time frame and result in a lower workload for individuals (Haritha, 2022). However, the concept of social loafing is believed to have emerged when group of workers begin to produce the least amount of work that they can accomplish, or when they are unable to produce at the required standard level of production. It happens in different kinds of assignments, not just in organizations, but even when classmates collaborate on a group project for a class, most group members most likely did not work as hard enough to complete the task at

hand and it is one of the main reasons that causes failure for organization to complete their projects on stated time.

Literature on social loafing demonstrates that people typically work less hard on collective assignments than they do on individual ones. In the meantime, individual's instincts may tell them that teamwork inspires people to perform above and beyond what they would if they were working alone. Yurdakul and Oneren (2020) assert that firms are searching for a range of strategies to either stop performance deterioration or boost it. Officially speaking, social loafing is the decrease in drive and effort between working individually or cooperatively and working in groups. When people collaborate, they do it in the actual or perceived presence of others, pooling their individual contributions to create a single group output (Karau & Williams, 1993).

Max Ringelmann was the first scientist to observe this psychological phenomenon in action in the early 1900's. Mis-coordination was Ringelmann's conclusion as to the origin of this phenomenon. Ringelmann's research exposed an astonishing circumstance as individual performance is substantially higher than collective group performance, which decreases significantly with group size. Even in the organizations, the same thing applies. As a result, management attempts to guarantee that workers are making every effort to raise and enhance the organization's productivity. In the meantime, collaborative effort consistently yields better results than solo work (Haritha, 2022). Thus, the primary goal remains unfulfilled.

Employee performance in the organization reveals both financial and non-financial results. It is closely related to the organization's prosperity as well as its performance. Hence, managers must assess the issues that employees face within the company and work to create regulations that will maximize employee behavior in areas like job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational trust, among others. Meanwhile, achieving goals and targets while maintaining the highest level of efficiency at the lowest possible cost is a shared objective shared by all businesses or organizations. The labor force is crucial to the implementation of this concept.

Understanding the nuances of social loafing and its effect on team dynamics and productivity is crucial for firms aiming to enhance overall performance. After the brief introduction, the paper is structured into five sections. Section one is a brief introduction, section two presents the concepts of social loafing as well as firm performance. The types, causes and way forward of preventing social loafing in the organizations are presented in the third section. The fourth section presents the impact of social loafing on firm performance, social loafing and the productivity of workers in manufacturing Firms as well as how social loafing affects the performance of sale agents in the manufacturing industries. empirical as well as theoretical reviews are also presented. Thus, the last section presents the findings, conclusion and further gives recommendations.

2. Literature Reviews

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The following are the basic concepts highlighted for this study.

2.1. Concept of Social Loafing

Different authors and researchers have defined social loafing in different ways. The psychological phenomena known as "social loafing" describes how certain group members exert less mental, bodily, or perceptual effort when working in a group than when working alone (Karau & Wilhau, 2020). In social psychology, it is a word used to describe what happens when an individual works less hard because they feel like they are being judged as a member of a group (Wooll, 2022). Meanwhile, they pay little attention or give less or no contribution to the specific task or job. It is thus a phenomenon that occurs regardless of age and nature of the activity.

Doğan et al. (2012) asserts that social loafing is a state in which a person's propensity for productivity is lower when working in a group than when working alone. Meanwhile, Ilgın (2013) laments that social loafing occurs when someone puts in less effort than is expected when working in a group, but Bayram-Candan (2017) believes that social loafing occurs when people lose focus on their work when other group members are around. As a result, some members give less than others or nothing at all. Thus, all the above definitions point towards the withdrawal or exertion of an individual to work when working in a group task.

Moreover, Social loafing is particularly apparent in assignments when it is difficult to identify a single person's contribution since the group's combined effort is combined to produce a group outcome. This suggests that social loafing is the tendency for one person to put in less effort and delegate most of the work to the other highly talented members of the group which occurs more frequently in high achiever groups.

Hardy and Latane, (1988) simply see it as when people put in less effort in group projects compared to individual study. Hence, people engage in social loafing for a variety of reasons such as the size of the working group, the importance of the job and the belief that their efforts will go unnoticed. Studies have shown that social loafing is more common in larger groups and in situations where individuals don't feel responsible for their actions.

This is due to the fact that in larger groups, each member's unique contribution is less apparent and they feel less accountable for the task's completion. Any team activity can involve social loafing, and once it has been proven, researchers should concentrate on identifying the people and situations that make it happen (Boren & Morales, 2018). People who do not feel a part of the group or who do not think the work is important might also make social loafing worse. Hence, it is exacerbated that when individuals do not feel connected to the group or do not believe in the importance of the task or it is the reduced effort of individual team members in completing collaborative work.

However, social loafers are the classic freeloaders who do not contribute much at all to group projects, assume that others will compensate for their inaction, and still expect to reap the same benefits as their more diligent colleagues (Jassawalla, et al, 2009; Pieterse & Thompson, 2010).

As a result, they are perceived as people who let other team members do tasks with little to no effort on their part. The perceived standing of the social loafer on the team may have an impact on how the characteristics of a social loafer are evaluated. Meanwhile, how the traits of a social loafer are assessed may depend on how the social loafer is seen inside the team.

2.2. Concept of Firm Performance

Several elements determine a firm's performance, regardless of its size whether small or large. A range of methods and technical details are taken into consideration in order to measure the performance of an enterprise. It's possible that metrics used to assess a firm's performance in one industry won't be suitable for measuring performance in another. There isn't a single, accepted set of guidelines for assessing a firm's performance, as a result, the phrase "firm performance" is ambiguous and can refer to several things as long as it has to do with organizational performance, the operation of the company and its results.

According to Carroll (2004), there are several ways to describe and assess a firm's performance, including growth, profitability, total return on shareholders and customer satisfaction.

Thus, it refers to the entire functioning of the organization, encompassing the creation of goods and services, the operation of the many divisions within the company, the productivity of its personnel, and the end products of their collective labor. The business growth of the organization according to Taouab & Issor, 2019) can also be viewed from a wider angle as a component of firm performance, since it encompasses managerial, economic, and marketing performance that supports effectiveness, efficiency, and corporate structure.

Furthermore, Tian and Zeitun (2007) state that financial outcomes including profit maximization, maximizing profit on assets, and maximizing advantages to shareholders are fundamental to a company's efficacy. The empirical literature tests the impact of certain corporate ownership indicators on business performance using a variety of performance measures. With so many goals to pursue, such as growth, profitability, employee satisfaction, productivity, social responsibility, and the ability to adjust to a continuously changing environment, measuring firm performance can be difficult for firms (Waiganjo, Mukulu & Kahiri, 2012). As a result, opinions regarding performance metrics are divided (Lausten, 2002).

Since SMEs are measurable, there are actually many ways to evaluate a company's performance. The first are accounting measurements, which are determined by accountants using standards and

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based on previous performance, while the second are a set of market metrics that look ahead and are determined by supply and demand for easily assessing a firms performance.

2.3. Types of Social Loafers

Basically, Pabico et al. (2008) suggest that group members with social loafing behaviors have two different roles. They are the free-riders and suckers.

Free-riders are those individuals who do not contribute to group duties but nevertheless earn the same reward as other group members. When a group member doesn't put out as much work because they know that others will make up for it, this is referred to as free riding. Social loafing reduces when group members are unable to take advantage of others because they feel more accountable and do their jobs well (Kerr & Bruun, 1983).

The other team members thus lose motivation and feel awful about their jobs. When they see that social loafers are taking advantage of them, these engaged members also stop working. We call this phenomenon the "sucker effect of social loafing." The morale of diligent workers is actually being negatively impacted by this consequence.

Conversely, suckers are viewed as a distinct kind of social loafer; who assume the obligations and responsibilities that other group members or free-riders fail to perform (Öge & Kurnaz, 2017). The other members of the group or team believe that they have too much work to do because of the free-rider effect. This is due to the fact that they are now required to perform the duties of these freeloaders as well, without receiving any extra credit.

The other team members thus lose motivation and feel awful about their jobs. When they see that social loafers are taking advantage of them, these engaged members also stop working. We call this phenomenon the "sucker effect of social loafing." The morale of diligent workers is actually being negatively impacted by this consequence because they feel sucked from doing the work alone.

Furthermore, there is a phenomenon that arises when an employee feels that they can share their responsibilities with other members of the group, hence putting in less effort. Although a manager might assign tasks to subordinates, but the responsibility lies to manager itself. This has to do with authority delegation (Haritha, 2022). However, when individuals see that there is a way to distribute their responsibilities and activities, they will be tempted to do so in an effort to lighten their workload. This is referred to as diffusion of responsibility.

2.4. Causes of Social Loafing

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In the literature, there are many causes of social loafing in each working environment. The major causes considered in the study are;

- i. Lack of motivation: In the first study that looked into social loafing, Ringelmann found that motivation was a major factor and one of the key causes of social loafing. Working in a group reduces people's motivation and drive to complete a task, which results in a lack of effort and people become less motivated to accomplish a goal just by being around other people.
- ii. Lack of accountability: this indicates low interest at work and it can also result from unacknowledged circumstances or inadequate compensation. As a result, some team members believe they might not need to work as hard because they won't be evaluated separately.
- iii. Complex objectives: The opposite of simple activities holding true for complicated tasks is also true, with participants feeling that the work at hand is hard to complete. When people don't understand the task or the value it adds, the task's complexity may increase. Laziness is encouraged by robust or multilayered goals that don't highlight the unique contributions that each member can make.
- iv. Inadequate perception of one's own abilities or contributions: It's advantageous to have each team member perceive their own ability accurately in order to use the team successfully. Loafing is likely to happen when team members believe they have little more to offer to the group and believe other members can perform those duties better.
- v. Expectations of co-worker performance: According to the social compensation hypothesis, people are more likely to work hard in a group setting than in a solo setting when they anticipate their coworkers to perform poorly on important tasks that they need to complete (Williams & Karau, 1991).
- vi. Larger group sizes- the larger the group, the smaller an individual's contribution may seem for the assignments that need to be finished.

Other major causes of social loafing in organizations include lack of commitment and lack of clearly defined goals.

2.5. Measures of Preventing Social Loafing

Several actions can be taken to mitigate the effects of social loafing in organizations. These include:

- i. Creating Individual Accountability: the idea that each member of the group is being evaluated independently is one factor that boosts group productivity. Consequently, social laziness tends to decline as identity grows (Hardy & Latané, 1986).

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- ii. Divide large groups into more manageable teams: It is easier to spot free-riding in smaller groups. This is so that every contribution has a greater impact and a group orientation should be implemented. To give individual recognition, describe how each employee contributed to the achievement of the goal by outlining their task, roles and responsibilities.
- iii. Reducing Unrestricted Riding: Minimizing free riding is another essential step that organizations can take to cut down on social loafing. When group members are compelled to share, social loafing decreases because they feel more accountable (Kerr & Bruun, 1983).
- iv. Assign distinct responsibilities: Each team member should have a unique contribution to make. Without clear objectives, organizations and their members are far more likely to veer into the realm of social loafing.
- v. Combine cooperation and communication into a single tool: Social loafing can happen very fast when there is a communication gap or poor communication. Loafers often fall between the cracks, so as a manager, you're likely to miss the signs that a staff member isn't giving it their all if you have a poor grasp of team communication (Pejatovic, 2022).
- vi. Meet regularly with each team member to keep them accountable: Have regular meetings with every team member to hold them accountable and make sure that each team member takes responsibility for their work. Don't only get the squad together and assess their performance as a unit. Set up individual meetings with every member of the team once a week. Jot down the contributions that every individual has made.
- vii. Set Explicit goals: According to Hopkins and Szymanski (1989), setting explicit goals encourages group members to be more productive and reduces social loafing. The objectives must also be reachable; they shouldn't be overly simple or complex.
- viii. Promote a culture of loyalty at work: By making team members feel more involved in the group, you can counteract the inclination of members to slack off. When individuals of a group experience an overall increase in their sense of contribution and recognition, they tend to be more productive. Increasing each member's sense of loyalty causes them to place a higher importance on team goals and devote more of themselves to group tasks.

On the other hand, it is quite important for employees to know how they might lessen their social loafing attitudes at work. Naturally, some steps can be taken to lessen the likelihood of social loafing as it is frequently the result of internal forces. They include: keep open lines of

communication, accept responsibility for their job, Boost motivation and engagement and establish individual objectives.

2.6. Impact of Social Loafing and Firm Performance

The major impact of social loafing on firm performance include:

- i. Team efficiency: social loafing can lead to reduced team efficiency as individuals may rely on others to shoulder the workload. According to Karau & Williams, (1993) this phenomenon can cause delays and lower the quality of work.
- ii. Resource Allocation: inefficiencies stemming from social loafing often require additional resources to compensate for lost productivity leading to higher operational cost (Jones, 1984).
- iii. Output quality: lower individual efforts often results in outcomes affecting the firms overall output quality which can hinder the firm's ability to meet performance standards and client expectations (Latane, Willliams & Harkins, 1979).
- iv. Recruitment and training: employee disengagement and turnover due to social loafing necessitated increased spending on recruitment and training (kidwell & Bennett, 1993).
- v. Service quality: reduced efforts and engagement can directly affect the quality of customer service, leading to decreased customer satisfaction and potential loss of business.

2.7. Social Loafing and Productivity of Workers in Manufacturing Firms

Social loafing can impact the productivity of workers in manufacturing firms where team-based task is common. The assembly line workers and quality control teams feel their contributions is not crucial. Hence, the major impact of social loafing on productivity of workers include:

- i. Reduced overall output; This is the case whereby some group members reduce their effort which makes the overall productivity of the team to decline (Haritha, 2022).
- ii. Lower morale: if hardworking employees notice others loafing, it tends to decrease their motivation and job satisfaction.
- iii. Decreased quality of work: lower quality of work can lead to low quality of work which will affect the final product.

2.8. Social Loafing and Performance of Sale Agents and Manufacturing Industry

Social loafing impacts the performance of sale agents in manufacturing firms, thou the approaches might differ from those in production or assembly roles, the causes of social loafing in sales agents include:

- i. Perceived inequity- if sales agents feel that rewards and recognition are not fairly distributed, they might reduce their efforts.

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- ii. Shared targets- when sales targets are set for the entire team rather than individuals, some agents might rely on the efforts of their colleagues to meet the goals.
- iii. Lack of direct supervision- sales agents often work independently or remotely making it difficult for managers to monitor individual efforts closely.
- iv. Ambiguous roles- without clear delineation of responsibilities, agents may assume others will take care of certain task.

2.9. Theories on Social Loafing

The following are the major theories of social loafing as asserted by different scholars. They include:

2.9.1. Social Impact Theory

Latané (1981) developed the social impact theory which emphasized how people can either be sources or targets of social influence. According to this, there are fewer sources and fewer targets in social loafing trials, which lowers the effort put out by each target. According to the notion, social influence is shared by group members when people collaborate, and as a group gets bigger, the influence of each new member decrease. Hence, Latané (1981) defined social impact as any influence on individual feelings, thoughts, or behavior that is exerted by the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of others.

This theory examines the impact of other people's presence and activities on individuals in order to take a basic look at the phenomenon of loafing inside teams. It evaluates how people's behavior is affected by other people's perceived or actual presence. People often behave differently when they are with other people. The theory proposes that because organizations facilitate the spread of social influence, loafing occurs inside them.

This contributes to the explanation of the idea that groups become less effective as they grow in size because social influence disperses more broadly in larger groups. The size of the group also affects a person's capacity to influence others, as it tends to encourage indolence. Hence, the primary benefit of social impact theory appears to be its ability to detect group size effects. The theory itself has been criticized for ignoring the strength and immediacy aspects and for neglecting to address the underlying psychological processes it portrays (e.g., Mullen, 1985).

2.9.2. Self-attention Theory

Mullen (1983) tried to explain social loafing by comparing the level of self-attention people sustain when working on communal versus individual tasks, however there is currently no empirical evidence to support this argument. According to this hypothesis, participating in group tasks causes a person's self-awareness to decrease.

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By contrasting the amount of self-attention people maintain when working on group versus individual tasks, Mullen (1983) attempted to explain social loafing; however, there is currently no empirical evidence to support this theory. This theory states that taking part in group activities lowers a person's level of self-awareness. Specifically, the person becomes less conscious of their role in the group and pays less attention to the demands of the activity.

This theory proves that people's level of self-attention decreases when working on group projects compared to when working on individual assignments. People tend to contribute less in group settings due to differences in their levels of self-awareness and a decrease in interest, concern, and participation to group tasks coincides with a decrease in self-attention or role awareness. It therefore explains why people tend to laze around in groups without any contribution.

2.9.3. Arousal Reduction Theory

Jackson and Williams (1985) propose that in the use of the arousal reduction theory, people's poor effort during group tasks can be linked to their decreased drive during group work. According to the arousal hypothesis of motivation, each person has an ideal level of arousal that influences their level of production. Because of this, different people have different needs; some people function well at high levels of arousal, while others do better at lower levels. This idea is related to the drive reduction hypothesis in a group setting. Jalt proves that people tend to be less motivated or aroused to work when they have colleagues around.

The current investigation has several theoretical and practical implications, as such, the theory suggests that the presence of other coworkers in a group lowers an individual's motivation to complete a task, which contributes to the body of knowledge already available on social loafing behaviors. Finally, the theory presents a leadership mechanism (trust) that can be used to decrease social loafing behaviors.

2.10. Empirical Review

A study conducted on hotels by Gucer, Demirdag, Pelit, and Keles (2017) examined the effect of social loafing on departure intention. A total of 422 surveys were used due to issues such as incomplete or wrongly filled out 450 questionnaires that were distributed to nine five-star hotels in Lara/Antalya, each with 50 surveys. A high positive association has been seen between the intention of participants to quit their occupations and their judgments of social loafing behaviors, as indicated by the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients and internal consistency coefficients for the reliability of the scales employed in this study.

On the effect of social loafing and employee performance in the Telecom sector, Ahmad, Jamshid and Rehman (2018) collected data from 207 employees through a well-structured questionnaire which was analyzed through SPSS using statistical tools of pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results indicate a significant impact on employee performance in the telecom sector.

Sharma and Joseph (2020) examined the environment of social loafing and how it affects the productivity of organizational labor. The preventive measures of social loafing include promoting active participation and contributions that make employees feel valued, fostering a work environment that lessens stress, organizing healthy competition among employees through rewards and appraisals, and emphasizing employee retention programs to ultimately increase employee confidence in the company.

The impact of social loafing on team performance at businesses situated in Tehran University's Science and Technology Park was investigated by Akbari, Jahanshashi, and Dielami (2020). The study looked at how team social capital mediates this link and whether or not team performance strengthens this association. The study employs a deductive technique, a surveying strategy, and positivism as its ideology. Consequently, samples of 124 staff members were given a questionnaire with 23 questions to fill. Using Smart PLS software, the gathered data was put through a fitness test, correlation matrix, and structural equation model analysis. The results of the study showed that the relationship between social loafing and team performance is moderated by team social capital.

Haritha (2022) examined the impact of social loafing on productivity, analyzing how it affects an employee's own productivity as well as the overall productivity of the company and industry. The conclusion is that social loafing reduces an individual's output. In addition, as workers will always collaborate to achieve a common objective, there won't be a detrimental impact on the company's total productivity.

Kumar, Wen and Marimuthu (2022) conducted a quantitative and cross-sectional study to investigate the influence of self-efficacy, group cohesion and task interdependence in predicting social loafing behaviors among university students in Malaysia. The online survey tool Qualtrics was used to collect data and purposive sampling was used to recruit 350 college students. Through cooperative groups, the project hopes to improve student learning and raise awareness among higher education educators and institutional bodies of university students' tendency toward social loafing. The potential for a relationship between the predictors and social loafing behavior is determined by using Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) and Pearson's Product-Moment correlation. According to the findings, self-efficacy, task interdependence, and group cohesion did not individually significantly predict social loafing, but they did when combined.

Kim, Jeung, Kang, and Paterso (2023) examined the relationship between employees' social loafing behaviours and their trust in their supervisors (TIS), as well as the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS), in their empirical study of social loafing behaviour among Public Officers in South Korea. Additionally, it examined the ways in which TIS and social loafing behaviours, POS and social loafing behaviours, and TIS and POS were influenced by perceived

organizational politics (POP). A sample of 260 individuals were recruited from Korean local government employees and the findings imply that supervisor trust, which is mediated by POS, has a detrimental effect on social loafing behaviours. Additionally, POP was found to lessen the impact of TIS on POS and POS on social loafing behaviours. These findings imply that political activities taking place in companies could be the root of social loafing.

Many studies have been conducted regarding the subject matter in different sectors and organizations in most developed and developing countries, only a few were conducted in Nigeria. As such, most researchers try to figure out the effect of social loafing and how it affects the organization and to what extent it can be lessened among employees in the organization.

3. Result and Discussion

The study findings indicate that social loafing is more prevalent in larger teams and in task with low visibility and accountability. Furthermore, the negative impact of social loafing on individuals and team performance can be quantified through metrics such as productivity levels, quality of output and employee satisfaction. As such, addressing social loafing requires a multifaceted approach using strategies such as enhancing individual accountability, setting clear and achievable goals, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual responsibility.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations face a variety of challenges, such as improving the working environment, better managing human resources, hiring more carefully, ensuring organizational loyalty and reducing undesirable employee behaviors. In addition, it won't have an adverse effect on the company's total productivity because as long as workers collaborate to achieve the same objective, the end result will always be positive, hence, the objectives will be achieved at a lesser cost and in less time. This paper highlights the effect of social loafing on firm performance and concludes that people who consider their work as relevant, significant and worthwhile are less likely to engage in social loafing conduct.

As a result of individual differences, social loafing happens in a variety of organizations. Some put forth more effort and are more willing to work than others, which has an impact on the efficiency and productivity of the firm as well as how well it operates.

To increase employee performance and meet the company's stated goals and objectives, social loafing can be reduced by reducing free riding, promoting team loyalty, and giving each team member specific responsibilities in the organization. Furthermore, larger team or groups should be divided into more manageable teams so that each and every employee can participate in the assigned job or task. By reducing social loafing, collaboration amongst management levels and overall productivity will both rise when a team works together. It will also encourage originality

and creativity which will motivate the staff to put in more effort. Therefore, the study recommends that firms should promote a healthy interpersonal relationship among workers as to create bridges for proper utilization of ideas and collaboration of workers especially while working in a team or group. Hence, this dimension will boost workforce and increase greater effectiveness.

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