

WORK CONDITIONS AND STRESS AMONG EMPLOYEES IN ORGANIZATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

The paper examined work conditions and stress among employees in organizations and their implications for productivity. It observed that work conditions in organizations are the major determinants of productivity level as they are also core sources of stress, especially when an employee performs a boring and monotonous job. The paper delved into various sources of stress and noted that work related stress has serious negative effects on a person's health. It observed also, that it is not good for a person to stay without stress, but should not be at the highest level. A challenging job can make a person to experience eustress which act as a motivator to perform well. The study further observed that poor conditions of work, stress and noisy environment was capable of making workers to become sick. Good working conditions, the paper observed has the capacity of stimulating workers to higher productivity. The Nigerian environment is full of stress, some of which are man-made. The paper made particular reference to the currency redesign policy of the Nigerian Central Bank which placed everybody on stress due to unavailability of cash in the country. Some recommendations were made among which were that employers should create good working environment for employees and ensure that salaries and allowances are paid as at when due to help in reducing workers stress. It concluded that organizations should cater for the welfare of employees to reduce stress in the work place.

Keywords: Work Conditions, Stress, Employee, Organizations, Productivity.

Introduction

The conditions of work in any organization are important determinants of the level of productivity in such organization. In a fluctuating economy like Nigeria which is characterized by the twin evils of inflation and recession, leading to capacity underutilization

and unemployment, one of the most viable strategies of combating inflation and workers dissatisfaction is increased productivity.

Productivity is the ratio between what is put into production, for example, machine, money, natural resources and human efforts, skills and knowledge, and what is obtained from such inputs. It could be said to have increased when profitable outputs exceed inputs (Fauce 2017).

A broad-based concept of productivity is that it is no longer an end measurement of input but a means by which resources are utilized to create an improved quality of work and workers conditions. This approach is not “an anti-labour tool” but a means that can bring labour in the work organization and management together to forge common cooperative strategies that would serve their respective interests (Uchendu 2013). This is important, not only for suggesting an area where the harmony of interest between labour and management can be cultivated, but more fundamentally for suggesting improvement in the overall effectiveness of the organization and management system itself. This approach sees human beings (the workers) as important in the production process and is a step towards reducing workers stress which is often built up by management's total concern for productivity at the expense of work conditions.

The concern of this paper is therefore to examine work conditions and stress to ascertain their contributions to increased or decreased productivity in organizations.

The Concept of Work Conditions and Stress

Work conditions are core sources of stress for employees in almost all organizations, be it private or public. A boring and monotonous job can make an employee feel depressed thus stifling the motivation to perform optimally, but on the other hand a challenging job can make an employee experience eustress which enhances the motivation to perform well. Eustress is constructive and progressive in the sense that it is inevitable. It is that which puts employees ingenuity to task and stretches their abilities to seek attainment of greater heights. (Fauce, 2017). Distress on the other hand is stagnating and retrogressive. It makes a person unproductive, counter productive and irritably dependent. This form of stress emanates from the workplace roles that do not effectively and efficiently utilize employees' abilities or exceed their ability to cope and adjust appropriately.

As rightly pointed out by Ekennia (2008), stress is an occasional attribute of every person's ecology and no single individual is immuned from experiencing stress, which can simply be described as pressure, tension or worry resulting from problems in meeting the challenges of life. Stress is closely associated with anxiety which is commonly experienced

as general uneasiness, a sense of forbearing and a feeling of tension.

Stress, however, has its positive aspects. The human body generally expects to experience some measures of stress which it is well equipped to handle. The absence of stress in one's life could lead to death (Agulana 2013). Moderate stress has the capacity of motivating an individual to actions necessary for adaptations that come as a result of some changes in the world. The bad effects of stress arise when stress reaches an overdosed level which is disabling, disorganizing and disorienting. Behaviourally, stress is characterized by anxiety, anger, depression, intrinsic thoughts, images and obsessions. It could lead to altered motivation and impaired intellectual activities. Other features of stress are aggression, substance abuse, avoidance, insomnia, lack of concentration and interest in activities that were eagerly sought before the onset of stress (Ekennia (2008).

People in high stress jobs, for example jobs without occupational security, handle stressful situations on daily basis and oftentimes end up with myriads of negative effects from too much stress. Ihejiamaizu (2003) and Denga (2006) state that stress is a generalized, non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it. It could be described as physical and psychological reactions or responses of the body to demanding stimulus, events which tend to disrupt its equilibrium. Stress encompasses occupational strain, job stress, work tension and burn out of job demands. It could equally be seen as environmental pressures such as work-overload or real conflict on the individual.

Stress and Work Organizations

The phenomenon of stress is global. It affects all countries and professions. Work-related stress or occupation stress is a term used to define ongoing stress in the work-place. The stress may have to do with responsibilities associated with the work itself, or caused by conditions that are based on the corporate culture or personality conflict. Work stress as rightly observed by Denga (2001) can eventually affect both physical and emotional well-being if not managed effectively. Work related stress can affect a person's health if the work-place stressors exceed an employee's ability to have control over or cope with the situation.

The incidence of stress in work organizations in Nigeria is firmly tight to work conditions which nourish stress. These conditions range from poor remuneration, irregular payment of salary, stressful work environment, lack of incentives, medical care for workers, to mention just a few. Increased work performance engenders some level of stress. However, when an individual mobilizes the physiological resources to defeat stress and succeeds, this will go along way to help in successfully meeting the job demands. But when stress levels

become very high, they become debilitating and the individuals work performance may decline to zero (Ihejiamaizu 2013). When stress is permitted to reach high levels, it impacts negatively on work organizations by reducing the level of productivity and subjecting the worker to serious and deadly illnesses, for example, stroke (Agyris 2009).

Psychological Sources of Stress

A greater percentage of lecturers in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria experience psychological stress. It emanates from psychological states such as anxiety, depression, compulsive competitive drive to be ahead of others, negative self-evaluation, prolonged emotional trauma, profound degree of introversion, fear of being sacked from work or with-holding of salaries as was the case during the long strike in 2022 by University lecturers in Nigeria which led to refusal by government to pay their eight months salaries for the period of the strike.

The management style of some organizations in Nigeria constitute serious cause for concern among workers as symptoms of psychological stress are visible everywhere. Workers exhibit phobias of being sacked from work, suspended without pay or demoted for minor offences. These, in some cases are tight to ethnic considerations, religious affiliations and outright hatred. In order to keep their jobs, employees in these organizations become introverted and resort to quietude, detachment and self-imposed loneliness because of fear that any statement made on any little thing could be used against them (Handy 2016). Workers who are deprived of love, sense of belonging, affiliation, self-actualization, arising from management-imposed rules and conditions exhibit feelings of insecurity, alienation and deprivation which contribute to mental and physical stress. These are the characteristics of work-centered management which has no concern for the welfare of workers in an organization. (Bass 2015).

Administrative Sources of Stress

This type of stress in any organization is a symptom of work overload arising from inadequate or untrained staff. Some organizations, in their concern for profit maximization find it difficult to recruit workers to fill positions of those who have retired, died or dismissed from service. This brings about unnecessary stress for the few remaining staff who are made to perform the functions of so many people, sometimes with little, or no incentive to ameliorate stress from additional work-load. Work overload, either physical or mental is a source of stress for employees in organizations. As observed by Ihejiamaizu (2013), some

executives carry official files to their homes, in addition to the work they carry home in their heads. As they eat or sleep, they still think about their work. They have little leisure to shed-off some of the pent-up anxieties about their work and sometimes without the ability to delegate or share responsibility to offer some relieve, but again, not all responsibilities can be shared. Academic work for example, cannot be shared or delegated to anybody, just for the sake of seeking relieve or reducing stress. Academics belong to specialized areas and anybody cannot help in teaching their courses or marking examination scripts. Academic field is totally different from administration which one could assist another when he is shown what to do. Aside from teaching, administering tests, assignments, examinations and marking of scripts, coupled with research activities, lecturers must attend conferences, seminars, workshops and publish papers in journals and textbooks to earn them promotions. They are equally involved in administrative duties as assigned to them from time to time, and other community services. The work of lecturers are enormous and diverse. They need good and less stressful conditions to enable them perform optimally for maximum productivity to be achieved.

Environmental Sources of Stress

Environmental conditions are sources of stress for worker. Some jobs require calm and quiet environment to operate optimally. A noisy, environment is a generator of stress and can inflict same on the workers. Lecturers, for example require concentration, less distraction and calmness of the brain and comfortable offices to be able to function properly. These are lacking in most institutions of learning in Nigeria and are serious contributory factors to low productivity in the country's ivory tower.

The environmental conditions under which employees operate in some organizations in Nigeria do not encourage serious commitments to work and the consequence is low productivity. In Nigeria, most organizations operate in very noisy environments which are not good for the health of workers. The situation becomes more devastating for an employee who resides in a non-serene environment and equally works in similar environment. These are usual sights especially in industrial towns in Nigeria such as Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, just to mention a few of these towns (Denga 2001).

Also, an excessively hot weather could make workers not only uncomfortable but possibly suppress the intellectual initiatives and ingredients, or generate conditions that are inimical to the maximum functioning of workers abilities. Some staff offices in organizations have poor ventilation, poor lighting, and are made worse by epileptic supply of electricity or

outright lack of it. Lack of constant electricity as in the case in Nigeria is a serious contributor to workers' stress. Almost every organization and private homes are using generators to produce light for use. Pollution and noise from these light generating sets are sources of stress for workers and oftentimes result in illnesses. The negative impact of these on workers, especially those in academics could best be imagined considering the nature of their profession. When academics find themselves in these type of conditions, productivity would certainly be low with negative effects on the students and the country's man-power in general (Thejiamaizu 2013).

Economic Sources of Stress

Economic distress is one of the major sources of stress for workers in Nigeria today. Take home pay does not take workers home. Salaries cannot purchase much and in some cases, workers are paid late. The cost of basic food items and other goods have skyrocketed in recent times coupled with high cost of education for the children. These are fundamental sources of stress (Denga 2006).

The recent currency redesign policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria which made workers to use fifty percent (50%) of their salaries to buy their monthly salaries constituted serious economic stress for the workers. It created a condition in which parents found it difficult to withdraw money from their accounts in banks to take care of the family needs. It painfully led to purchase of money at impoverished and exorbitant charges from Point of Service (POS) vendors. These were stress causing conditions which led to untimely death of Nigerians and threw up sicknesses that doctors found it difficult to diagnose and treat. Ultimately, it led to low productivity and stress on the part of workers in both the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy as they found it difficult to pay their way to offices and even when they manage to get there, the thought of how to go back was another source of stress.

The Nigerian Policy makers oftentimes attempt to replicate what happened in Uganda during the reign of General Idi Amin Dada who made policies based on his dreams. The grave consequences of the president's actions could be vividly recalled. Good and successful policies are made through research, analysis and due consultations, not through dreams, prophetic revelations and consultation of oracles. The aftermath of the Nigeria's Central Bank policy on naira redesign attests to this and the hardship it brought to Nigerians would not be forgotten in a jiffy (Akpan, 2023).

Implications for High Productivity

The influence of work conditions and stress on workers productivity in organizations cannot be overemphasized. Poor conditions of work and stress have the capacity to reduce or completely mar productivity. All the activities of an enterprise are initiated and determined by the people who make up the organization. All else that a modern firm uses are unproductive except for human efforts and direction (Likert 2013). Work conditions and stress in Nigeria derive from the capitalists quest for profit maximization at the detriment of workers and inability on the part of government to provide an enabling environment for businesses to thrive. The Nigerian government has to a very large extent contributed to the problem through its inability to provide constant electricity, good roads and incentives to private investors (Agyris 2009; Beach 1998).

When an organization provides good and conducive environment for workers, they are motivated to put in their best towards achieving the set goals of the organization. Workers will be happy and committed, stress will reduce and consequently, productivity will increase and profit will be maximized. Human beings are at the centre of productivity in all organizations and should be encouraged to put in their best to achieve maximum productivity for the organization. Workers need good working conditions to enable them perform optimally. In modern management, human relations play an important part. Human beings are no longer seen or treated as machines, but as humans working with machines to achieve mass production with ease. It is no longer “man as machine but “man and machine”.

Recommendations

The way forward to reducing stress among workers in organizations for increased productivity is to try and do the opposite of what generate stress in the workplace. Among the antidotes to stress are:

- i) A good working environment for employees.
- ii) Regular payment of salaries as at when due.
- iii) Training and retraining of employees through workshops and seminars.
- iv) Promotion of workers as at when due and implementation of financial benefits without delay.
- v) Provision of noise-proof doors and windows in staff offices that are located in noisy areas or environments, especially in institutions of learning to create a conducive atmosphere for lecturers to operate.
- vi) Employees should not be over-loaded with work. More workers should be

- employed to fill available vacant positions and job specifications.
- vii) Organizations should keep on reviewing workers salaries from time to time to meet up with current economic realities.
- In their contributions to measures aimed at combating stress, Denga and Ekpo (2014) recommend the following:
- i. Sufficient sleep as a means to recover from daily burdens.
 - ii. Participation in physical exercises to keep the heart pumping regularly.
 - iii. Avoidance of over-indulgence in social activities that would increase stress.
 - iv. Avoid being over-ambitious to achieve much in a very short time.
 - v. Have regular medical check ups to ensure that your entire body is functioning properly.
 - vi. Try not to brood over burdens of life. Take life easy and know that when there is life there is hope.

These recommendations, if adhered to, have the capacity of freeing an individual from unnecessary stress or at least reducing it to minimum level for easy management and control.

Conclusion

The quest for higher productivity in any organization implies the making of demands on staff to perform optimally. But just as machines cannot function properly in the production process without constant greasing and oiling, human beings who are the ultimate in organizations should be properly catered for if effectiveness and efficiency must be achieved.

This means that salaries paid must be commensurate with work performed while authoritarian management style should be jettisoned in favour of the human relations approach which promises harmony and peace in the organization, leading ultimately to higher productivity, and profit maximization.

Good working conditions have the capacity of stimulating workers to higher productivity and reducing stress. The state of mind of the worker determines his or her level of stress. A lecturer for example, who prepares for work, but has it at the back of his mind that electricity light will not be available in the office to charge his laptop, illuminate the office, and activate his air conditioner or fan is already under work-stress before leaving home to the office. These should be looked into if high productivity must be

achieved from the workforce. Nobody gives a blunt matchet to a labourer with poor payment offer and expect him to clear the bush perfectly. This applies to all types of work whether in the public or private sectors.

Also, where management fails to appreciate the contributions of the workers to the growth and sustenance of an organization by motivating them through increment in salary, incentives, staff development and training, stress will certainly set in, and productivity will fall (Nwachukwu 2015). Employees in most organizations are victims of lack of motivation, irregular payment of salaries, pay cuts, non-payment of promotion arrears and delays in implementation of promotions. These have contributed significantly to stress on the part of the workers with negative impact on productivity in organizations. Poor work conditions and stress are silent killers, and as captured elsewhere in this paper, are the major cause or causes of illnesses that sophisticated medical equipments cannot detect or diagnose, which sometimes lead to untimely and unpredictable deaths which in our clime are attributed to witchcraft and other devilish acts which are unverifiable.

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