

Leadership Strategies for Managing Workplace Stress in Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract

Stress is a major problem that has impacted negatively on employees' health and well-being, job performance and overall organizational growth. The paper therefore focused on leadership strategies for managing workplace stress among employees in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The need for strategic leadership efforts towards stress management in higher education institutions in Nigeria is necessitated by the fact that the prolonged unaddressed problems of poor funding, poor work environment, heavy workload, and role ambiguity among others have for long induced stress on employees thereby hindering performance. The paper found that low productivity, poor concentration, job dissatisfaction, procrastination, absenteeism, withdrawal and even death are among the notable negative effects of workplace stress in higher education institutions in Nigeria. However, the major conclusion of the paper is that workplace stress among higher education employees in Nigeria can actually be curbed through conscious pro-active efforts of effective leadership. Therefore, the paper recommended among others that: leaders should support employees to ensure safe and effective removal of stressors in the workplace; leaders should be continuously monitoring without bias employees reactions to their work environment so as to stop stress before it arises.

Keyword: Effective Leadership, Managing, Workplace, Stress, Staff, Higher Education, Institution.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership role to influence and direct the actions of subordinates for the growth and development of the organization has been the primary responsibility of institutional leaders at all times. In effect, employees are expected to function optimally under a strong leadership in a conducive work environment for the attainment of organizational set goals. Often times, work environment which constitutes the system of work, job design, working conditions and the ways in which subordinates are treated at work become notable sources of worry, anxiety and stress to subordinates as observed in modern day organizations including the higher education institutions in Nigeria. It is not an over statement that no high education institution in Nigeria is evidently sanitized of the possible forces of stress.

Nwadiani and Ofoegbu (2006) opined that despite the enormous financial resources accruing to the country, educational system is still confronted with excessive inadequacy of

infrastructure and facilities for teaching and research which have remained a source of worry to staff and a clog in the wheel of effective leadership of the institutions. Personal observations also support this assertion that higher education institutions in Nigeria whether federal, state or private lack the basic facilities, resources and friendly work atmosphere needed to make work easier and enjoyable for staff. Obviously, higher education institution employees face life threatening, harmful and worrisome situations emanating from dilapidated buildings, ill-equipped laboratories and libraries, inadequate and obsolete teaching and learning materials, inconsistent power and water supplies, poorly equipped recreation parks, delayed payment of salaries and earned allowances, gratuities and other fringe benefits. In addition, the advancement in science, information and communication technology has also intensified competition among organizations including higher education institutions to a point that employees are busier than ever before and consequently stressed up. Unarguably, the ‘rat race’ by higher education institutions have caused each institution to consistently plan, set new goals, change policies and procedures in a bid to survive and meet the goal of producing the best of the much needed professional manpower in the society.

Consequently, these managerial actions and inactions induce stress on staff who serve as policy implementers and goal drivers. Unarguably, modern organizational management has identified stress and anxiety as a major factor hindering employees’ optimum performance causing discomfort and even death, yet to be given an expert attention and public awareness it deserves in Nigeria by stress management professionals. The employees with human bodies that work like machines are prone to wear and tear. The heavy workload, role ambiguity and the pressure to meet deadline among other factors have heightened the rate of stress and stress related illnesses and death of staff in most higher education institution in Nigeria. Studies have shown that many workers in the Nigerian universities suffer one stress related health problem or the other. Many of them are seen struggling with depression, chest pain, waist pain, inability to relax, rapid heartbeat, general body pain, hypertension, dizziness and increased likelihood of coronary diseases. Reports have it that the number of stroke cases and deaths relating to strokes among higher education institution workers in Nigeria is attributed to stress.

However, stress-related work conditions and its associated health problems have left so many households without parents or guardians, lowered organizational workforce and productivity. Therefore, considering the fact that workplace stress is a common occurrence but could be avoided or controlled by adopting healthy lifestyle under an effective institutional leadership hence, the researcher is concerned about what strategy higher education institutional leaders should employ to curb stress among their staff in the higher education institutions in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

What is Stress?

Etymologically, the term stress came from Latin word “stringere” which means “hold tight, tender, turn off, and offend”. In its regular application, stress represents two connotations: (1) as an impression of suffering along with anxiety, depression and physical symptoms or the stimulation and excitement required in modern life. (2) As a concept, that may refer to both the causes and effects and the state in which it puts an individual. The concept of stress was first used in the field of medicine and biology by Hans Selye, an Australian born medical scientist

working in Montreal Canada in 1926 (Sharmilee, Abdul & Zubair, 2017). Since the introduction of the concept into bio medicine, stress has been proved to be too difficult to define. Hans Selye viewed stress from the physiological dimension with little or no attention given to its psychological components. Selye as cited in Omoniyi (2013) defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand. Blix and Mitchell (2004) identified stress as emotional disruption that is physically injurious and occurs when the job does not require or connect with the worker's skills, resources and needs. It implies that stress is an adaptive response resulting from any environmental action, prevailing unpleasant situation, or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical demands on an individual.

Akingboye and Adeyemo (2002, in Udeh, 2007) defined stress as an ineffective and unhealthy reaction to change. It is the body's response to any undesirable mental, physical, emotional, social or environmental demand. According to them, stress describes physical trauma, strenuous exercise, metallic disturbance and anxiety which challenge the body well-being. Stress describes the wear and tear that stressors cause on the human body including the distortion of mental and behavioural patterns. These stressors include work changes, unexpected and sudden noise, terrors, panic, electric shock, uncontrollable situations, physical ailments, surgery, threats to life, daily conflict, sleep deprivation, work over load or under load, social isolation and so on (Andohol & Asom, 2012). Nwachukwu in Udeh (2007) viewed stress as any factor, mental and physical, which its pressure can adversely affect the functioning of the body, or undue strain exerted upon mind or body which is liable to cause impairment of mental or physical functioning; whereas Robbins (2001) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which the individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and essential. Stress results from a mismatch between the demands and pressures on the person, on the one hand, and their knowledge and abilities, on the other. It challenges their ability to cope with work. This includes not only situations where the pressures of work exceed the worker's ability to cope but also where the worker's knowledge and abilities are not sufficiently utilized and that is a problem for them.

Stress as defined by Arnold and Feldman (1986) in Sharmilee, Abdul and Zabir (2017) is a response of a person caused by a new or hostile situation in a working environment. Stress is a reaction from either psychological or physical and, internal or external factors of a situation in which the adjustability of an individual could be over extended. Workplace stress is a complex psychological state that arises when job task does not "marry" with employee's capabilities or with the right or available resources, both physically and emotionally will react and respond dangerously and that is a symptom of stress. Nwadiani and Ofoegbu (2006) described stress as physiological or psychological strain caused by adverse stimuli, physical, mental or emotional and internal or external that tends to disturb the functioning of a human being which he naturally desires to avoid. It is a biological phenomenon that is experienced by every person regardless of their socio-economic status, occupation or age. It is the way individuals respond to conditions that anger, threaten, scare or excite them. People may feel stressed when they have workload, have important deadline to meet or have too little time to finish all their tasks.

Stress is a disruption of the emotional stability of the individual that induce a state of disorganization in personality and behaviour. However, The Health and Safety Executive (2012) viewed stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them when a person is confronted with situation he cannot cope with. In a similar vein, The Health Information Publication (2005) defined stress as the emotional and physical strain

caused by one's response to the outside world. This implies that stress arises from our relationship with the constantly changing world. Therefore, as a major health related issue, stress is any harmful, physical or mental response occurring due to individual's incompatibility with his/her ability which might lead to aggressive behaviours, occupational injuries, physical diseases and even death.

Workplace Stress in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

Nigeria is plagued with life threatening, harmful and excruciating situations in which its school workplaces are not exempted. The prolonged unaddressed problems of funding, poor teaching and learning environment; inadequate infrastructural and instructional materials have been the daunting challenges of the education sector in Nigeria. Also, stress inducing are the 'publish or perish' policy, extensive workload in a limited time frame and strenuous research efforts among others. However, Omoniyi (2013) stated that these series of challenges have generated much stress among the university staff.

Learning environment in Nigerian universities is seriously compromised by over congested classrooms, overcrowded laboratories, scarcity of water most of the time, and poor electricity to run equipment. Laboratory reagents seem to cost too much for the school budget (Omoniyi, 2013). The office spaces and classrooms are ill- equipped with out-dated furniture, lightings and fittings, yet, staff are expected to perform optimally teaching academic knowledge to students, moral values and administration without the basic facilities.

The prevalent and unfriendly conditions for staff promotion as upheld by the Appointment and Promotions Committee (A&PC) for teaching and non-teaching staff respectively every three years is a source of stress and worry in the university workplace. In most universities, computer literacy has been adopted as a requisite condition for staff promotion without regards to staff training in computer literacy. More worrisome is the fact that staff are rarely provided with computer sets to work with and where the computers are available, power supply and internet network is another issue. The university staff are also ill-motivated with regard to delay in salaries, poor health facilities, poor accommodation, poor promotion system, lack of career development and good policies that could reduce economic stress (Uzoeshi, 2012, 2017). All these can be said to account for stress among university staff.

What are the Possible Causes of Stress?

Stress is a ubiquitous nuisance that looking for its source is perhaps a tiresome exercise (Andohol & Asom, 2012). It is a complex condition that is not easy to attribute to any specific cause (Denga, 2015). Concerning the causes of stress, most studies have pointed at the incidence of stress as resulting from overwork as Graham (2008) was of the view that poor management is the major cause of stress. He argued that stress is not the inability to cope with excessive workloads and the unreasonable demands of incompetent and bullying managers; but a consequence of the employer's inability to provide a safe system of work as required by law. Organizational causes of stress could be referred to as organizational and extra- organizational stressors or group and individual stressors as, Akingboye (2002) identified the following as causes of stress in workplace: Low pay, promotion problem, job insecurity, lack of job satisfaction, office politics, heavy workload career development and achievement factors, conflict at work, meeting deadline, burn-out, new management technique, office politics, long work hours, redundancies, bullying and harassment. The National Women's Health Information

Centre (NWHI, 2003) also identified traumatic accident and death or emergency situation as causes of stress.

Denga (2015) opined that the behaviour patterns exhibited by workers identified as experiencing stress can help to indicate the possible causes of stress. To him, certain behaviours associated with stress include; excessive competitive drive, chronic sense of time urgency, internalized hostility, deep-seated insecurity, fierce impatience, frustration and genetically induced stress. In their view, Andohol and Asom (2012) indentified lack of planning and bad time management, lack of trust in one's employees, over-ambition, lack of rest and relaxation as causes of stress in the workplace. However, Ahsan, Abdullah, YounGunfle and Alam (2009) identified management role, relationship with others, work load pressure, home work interface, role ambiguity and performance pressure as determinants of job stress in organizations.

Emphasizing on the causes of stress among Nigerian workers, Uzoeshi (2017) noted late payment of salaries, poor remuneration, lack of promotion, work under load, poor communication, isolation in decision making and extra-organizational sources as stress factors effecting workers in Nigeria. However, any circumstance that affects the psychological, emotional and social state of an individual is liable to induce stress. Therefore, other causes of stress in the workplace include: low emotional intelligence, poor social skills, autocratic leadership, and lack of recognition, ageing, and sensory factors such as noise, trauma, malnutrition and fear of retirement among others.

In-depth and timely stress-related issues among organizational staff will definitely offer organizational leaders with the required knowledge to manage workplace stress. The knowledge of behaviour patterns as manifested by employees undergoing stress in the workplace could reveal the possible causes of stress in the workplace (Denga, 2015). However, employees experience stress in the workplace as a result of the following:

Poor time management/working to meet up deadline: Time management is the process of planning and exercising conscious control of time spent on specific activity in order to work smarter than harder (Sandeep, 2019). It implies that time management is not all about doing more in less time but also to reduce the urge to delay and procrastinate over important tasks. When an employee has the tendency of poor time keeping while it is expected of him to complete his jobs within a specific time frame, it puts him in the condition of working under pressure” in order to meet up.

Heavy workload: Workload refers to a specific requirement level for a task at any time (constraints) and the consequences of this task (restraints) once accomplished (Casabat, Barthe & Cascino, 2019). The issue of stress at work arises at the outset, and in a manner closely linked to an increase in workloads of employees. This suggests that these two aspects go hand in hand. From a scientific point of view, the concepts of stress and workload have long been the subject of a great deal of research, but independently in different disciplines as one cannot be considered without the other (Falzon & Sauvagnac, 2004). Rehman et al. (2010) High level of stressors like heavy workload and uncertainty about supervisor's expectations are associated with physical symptoms. Stress also gets caused when an employee does not fulfill the demand of job and supervisor (Schnall, 2011) Excessive workload and conflicting expectations are the good examples of working conditions. In this case, when an employee is saddled with what more than a single person can do at a time it leads to stress. Uzoeshi (2017) reiterated that overloading the worker with many responsibilities is one of the major causes of stress especially in the universities where lecturers are to teach, conduct researches and execute community services.

Poor physical work environment: It has been acknowledged that physical environment is central to stress theory (Leather, Zarola & Santos, 2010) which states that all biological systems must self-regulate and adapt in the context of changing environmental conditions (Evans & Cohen, 1987). In a situation where the physical work environment is not conducive. For instance, mal-functional instruments or equipment can be frustrating to the teacher which could consequently stir up stress. According to Denga (2015), lack of basic facilities such as good office space or residential accommodation, electricity, Pipe-borne water, excessive heat, lack of recreational facilities, convenience and so on constitute poor working environment and are liable to inducing stress.

What are the Possible Signs of Stress among University Staff in Nigeria?

The possible signs of stress among employees in the workplace can be classified generally as:

- Physiological;
- Psychological and/or
- Behavioural signs

Physiological signs: These signs manifest as changes observed in the body systems functioning of the employees undergoing stress. They include among others, the change in one's metabolism; increase in heart beat; and breathing rates; increased blood pressure; obsession; constant headache and migraine; heart diseases and cardiac arrest; chest pain, weight loss; emaciation; and stroke.

Psychological signs: These signs are emotionally rooted. They reveal the emotional state of the individual experiencing stress. They are: emotional instability; lack of concentration; job dissatisfaction; tension; anxiety; boredom; procrastination, laziness, anger; frustration; temper tantrum; loss of self-esteem; withdrawal; poor interpersonal relationships and aggression.

Behavioural signs: These are signs relating to changes in employees usual behaviour as a result of stress in the workplace. Behaviourally related stress symptoms include: changes in eating habits, increased smoking or drinking (Azagba & Sharaf, 2011), rapid speech; sleep disorders; stammering; fidgeting; quarreling; absenteeism, low productivity; wanton destruction of property in the workplace.

Types of Stress

As identified by Imeokparia and Edigbonya (2013), these are the following types of stress in the workplace:

Eustress: This is a positive stress; it provides immediate strength to the individual. It results from having achieved an outstanding feat in one's life such as passing an examination with good grades, child birth, winning an award. This stress often occurs for a short period of time and it creates a sort of imbalance within the individual. Eustress or positive stress in an individual is characteristics by high motivation, feeling of excitement and the tendency for improved performance.

Distress: This is a bad stress (negative) because it makes an individual vulnerable to illness. Unlike positive stress, distress is characterized by anxiety, unpleasant feelings, decreased performance and can lead to mental and physical problems. Distress whether short or long term could be caused by excessive job demands, conflicts with colleagues, making presentations in front of colleagues, unproductive and time consuming meetings associated with the school system.

Acute stress: This is a psychological condition arising from the body's response to a terrifying or traumatic event. The ensuing physiological changes constitute a major part of the acute stress responses. Acute stress can be acute eustress mostly in small dose (pleasant, cheerful, thrilling, exciting stress) or an acute distresses mostly too much (cause of mental health problem and physical difficulties, tension, headache, stomach upset). The symptoms of acute stress usually appear within minutes of the impact of the stressful stimulus and disappear within 2-3 days (often within hours).

Chronic stress: This is usually the grinding stress that wears people away day after day, year after year. In chronic stress, the stressor is always around for a long period of time. It destroys the body, mind and life of the individual passing through it as it wreaks havoc through a long-term attrition. Chronic stress is the type of stress observed among very poor families, dysfunctional families, individual locked in an unhappy marriage or in a despised job or career. It is a stress without hope, the individual gives up searching for solution.

Time stress: This is a type of stress induced by time constraints. There is bound for hormonal imbalance within an individual as he/she perceives that there may be no enough time to complete a given task. This is common among people in all walks of life.

Anticipatory stress: This is the kind of stress that one can experience arising from an upcoming event e.g. upcoming paper presentation, by lecturers, job interview, probation and comprehensive examinations, promotion interview and events. Anticipatory stress is usually occasioned by fear of failure or the unknown.

Situational stress: This kind of stress is always sudden and normally places the individual under pressure resulting from series of hormonal discharge. Increased heart beat and shivering have been identified as common symptoms of situational stress in individuals whereas conflicts have been noted to be the major cause of situational stress.

Encountered stress: This type of stress occurs as a result of contact with other people. Some persons by virtue of their profession or occupation are made to have contact with members of the public that may be stressed and thereby encounter stress in the process e.g. guidance counselors and academic advisors being stressed up after attending to students and staff undergoing stress.

What are the Possible Effects of Stress on University Staff Performance in Nigeria

Chase and Aquilano in Mark (2012) stated that Work-related stresses may be responsible for organizational outcomes such as decline in performance, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and commitment, and an increase in absenteeism and turnover. There is no doubt that working in the

Nigerian universities is stressful considering the workload and role ambiguity associated with it in a poorly equipped work environment. However, stress is a subjective phenomenon that meant different things to different people. People respond to stress differently. Extreme stress can be dangerous and can result in health challenges and psychological malfunctioning (Uzoeshi, 2017). The following are the possible effects of stress on job performance in the Nigerian university system:

Poor job performance: Meneze (2006) defined performance as the employee's ability to produce work or goods and services according to the expected standards set by the employers, or beyond the expected standards. Mathis and Jackson (2000) defined performance as a measure of the quantity and quality of work done considering the cost of the resource it took to do the work. Steers (1991) believes it is useful from a managerial standpoint to consider several forms of counterproductive behavior that are known to result from prolonged stress. Stress affects the normal emotional, physical and general functioning of the stressed individual in the workplace thereby, hampering productivity. Excessive stress at work results in increased human errors and accidents, as well as negative effects on employees' productivity and their overall job effectiveness (Akinmayowa, 2009; Armstrong, 2006).

Lack of concentration: The difficulty concentrating at work resulting from tiredness and emotional stress is a normal and periodic occurrence amongst employees (Kasper, 2019). This implies that concentration problems are characterized by certain physical and psychological factors. As commonly observed, the issues of heavy workload, role ambiguity leading to stress among university staff in Nigeria has been on the increase by the day whereas staff are still, expected to be versatile, flexible and present at work all the time. There is no doubt that staff are usually overwhelmed and absent minded at work due to these factors which eventually affect their performance.

Job dissatisfaction: Job satisfaction is the affective orientation that an employee has towards his/her work. It can be considered as an overall feeling about the job or as a related constellation of attitudes about various aspects of the job (Lu, While & Barriball, 2001). This implies that stress can result to psychological strain characterized by deviation from normal functioning of an employee in the workplace. One of the effects of these strains in the workplace is job dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction is an indication of negative feelings employees have regarding their jobs or aspects of their job (Specter, 1997). Stressed employees are usually strained psychologically and may eventually develop negative feelings about their job. Researchers have shown strong correlation between dimensions of workplace stress and job satisfaction. High levels of work are associated with low level of job satisfaction as job stressors are predictive for job dissatisfaction and a greater propensity to leave the organization (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

Procrastination: This is the avoidance or postponement of a task resulting from a psychological and physiological state produced by a variety of unpleasant events (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). Kelly and Edwards (2006) also described procrastination as the tendency to delay what ought to be done in order to reach a goal. It refers to the postponement of planned or scheduled activity. Studies have shown that people who procrastinate feel more stress and vice-versa (Roxana & Elena, 2016). Stress as a condition or emotions felt by an individual when the demands of a situation exceed his or her personal and social resources (Lazarus cited in Roxana and Elena

(2006) leads to behavioural and decisional procrastinations, anxiety and depression and worry (Spada, Hiou & Nkcevic, 2006). Personal observations reveal that stress causes employees' voluntary delay in carrying out intended or assigned official tasks especially among the lecturers.

Absenteeism: Stress is the most common cause of long-term sickness and absence for both manual and non-manual employees (CIPD, 2010; 2011). Studies have revealed that increase in job strain induced by high job demand and insufficient job control are related with employee absence caused by illness (Kondo, Kabayashi, Hirokawa, Tsutsumi, Kabayashi, Haratani, Araki & Kawakami, 2006). Perceived job stress can act as a stressor and may increase employees' vulnerability to psychological and physical health problems through stress induced responses such as fatigue, lack of enthusiasm, lowered attention and cognitive abilities (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). This implies that increased job stress might lead to excessive use of alcohol and tobacco as palliative which might also result in absence. In effect, the frequent occurrence of stroke incidence and other stress related illnesses resulting to prolonged absence of affected staff has negatively hindered the performance of the university system especially in Nigeria.

High turn-over rate: Malik (2011) stated that employees having no control over their work, lack of financial rewards, unsupportive management system face serious physical problems, such as heart disease; increase in blood pressure and headaches. Pediwal (2011) mentioned that on the job, stress affects the physical, psychological and financial balance of the employees. In effect, stressed employees absent from organization and loose working hours. Shehzad (2011) stated stress increases the employee turnover from the job, which influences the employees as well as organizational performance. The rate at which employees in the university work force mostly lecturers disengage for foreign universities is on the increase due to stressful work environment coupled with the economic hard time in the country.

Withdrawal: Staff withdrawal from an organization can take many behavioural forms such as turnover, absenteeism and lateness. It may also be psychological i.e. loss of job involvement. Whichever form of staff withdrawal from work, it is a common antecedent of unsatisfactory working condition or job stress (Herzberg, Mansner, Peterson & Capwell, 1957).

Death: Several studies have shown that stress at work can lead to extreme depression and work-related suicide, which is also referred to as the silent death. The Encyclopedia of Occupational Health (2011) noted that workers in not only high strain jobs but also active jobs could be at high risk if they have extremely high demands and are enthusiastic in their work, they may not control their working hours; such workers may be at risk of death from over work. Correlations have been found between stress and the top six causes of death: cancer, lung ailments, heart disease, liver cirrhosis, accidents, and suicide ("How Does Stress Affect Us?" 2016). Obvious of the fact that working in the university is demanding, employees face high level of stress as confirmed in the rampant cases of stress related issues such as heart rate and blood pressure increases. High stress level increases the risk for heart attacks and heart failure mostly among university staff. It has been commonly observed among university employees in Nigeria that long simmering period of stress, sudden stressful situations and potentially an undying heart condition have led to the death of many.

Leadership Effectiveness: An Essential Prerequisite for Functional Stress Management Strategies in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria.

Central to leadership effectiveness is the contingency theory which states that group effectiveness depends on interactions between leaders and the degree to which situations enable leaders to exert influence. In the words of Peter F. Drucker 'leadership is doing the right things'. Leadership is an interpersonal dynamics concerning the process of influencing group members to willingly work together towards attainment of predetermined objectives(s). Leadership effectiveness is one key factor for the success of any organization which results in enabling and empowering group members to do what they ought to do. It is not about coercive and manipulative tactics used in forcing people to act according to the wishes and aspirations of the leader. According to Robbins (1998), effective leaders are capable of influencing their subordinates in their daily goal attainment efforts to perform beyond the actions dictated by formal authority. This implies that an effective leader is one who can make others innovate and create a vision; has a passion for a cause; holds certain values; has a vision and confidence; has humility; communication and interpersonal skills.

Leaders of higher education institutions are statutorily appointed except for deans and heads of departments who are sometimes elected into positions of leadership. These leadership positions are assigned with responsibilities that are directed towards the achievement of set goals with which effectiveness is measured. According to Nkwor (2018) Leadership is termed effective when the leaders are able to achieve the established organizational goals in their day-to-day leadership efforts. This assertion corroborates Jaiyeoba (2011) who stated that educational leadership effectiveness is determined by its productivity, stability, morale, turnover rate, degree of integration, maximization of individual staff potentialities and values contributed to the society.

In the view of Balogun (1980) as cited in Basse and Basse (2011), posited that leadership effectiveness of higher education institution leaders is measured by the congruence between expected leadership behaviour of leaders in relation to their leadership tasks. It then implies that leaders' behaviours to subordinates can act as a boost or leverage in any situation they find themselves at workplace. On the contrary, ineffective management of men, money, time and material resources can induce stress on staff to the detriment of institution's effective performance. Therefore, since stress is associated with both psychological and physiological state of individual staff resulting from changes around them and; its effective management a part and parcel of leadership excellence in corporate institutions, it is believed that open-minded leadership style, display of flexibility towards staff, championing diversity, communicating global vision, being technologically knowledgeable and; fostering institutional culture and teamwork will go a long way in equipping the higher education institution leaders in Nigeria to handle stress issues among their staff.

Managing Workplace Stress: What Strategies should Higher Education Institution Leaders Adopt to Address Stress Issues?

Stress management according to Gale Encyclopaedia of Medicine, (2008) refers to a set of technique, strategies and or programs intended to help people deal more effectively with stress in their lives "by analyzing the specific stressors and taking positive actions to minimize their effects.

Workplace stress can be acute or chronic depending on what constitute the stressor(s). The campuses of higher education institutions in Nigeria are constantly plagued with stressors that impact on the psychological and physiological wellbeing of both the teaching and non-teaching staff. However, the realization of the fact that one is in total control of his life is the foundation of stress management in any organization as stress management is all about being in charge of one's life style, thought, emotions and the way of dealing with everyday problems. Therefore, the utmost aim of higher education institution leaders in Nigeria should revolve around breaking the hold which stress has on staff.

Health and Safety Authority (HSA, 2017) noted that the goal of primary interventions to manage workplace stress is the elimination or avoidance of the stressors which require proper methodical identification of the stressors that are embedded in the work system. The following measures should be adopted by leaders of higher education institutions in Nigeria as part of management practice to handle work-related stress issues among members of staff.

Employ workers that are suitable for the job: Staff recruitment is purely a leadership function which deals with careful identification of the quality of staff needed for the job, advertising, interviewing and selecting them. However, as the saying goes that, "a bad workman quarrels with his tools". An inexperienced (unsuitable) employee manifests immense social anxiety, nervousness, clumsiness and trembling which in turn reduce his effectiveness and general performance. An inexperienced employee easily manifests the feeling of sadness, low activity, self-criticism, pessimism, indecisiveness and indifference. The effects of these are that they reduce the amount of warmth between staff and the students in the workplace. Therefore, educational leaders should consider employing suitably experienced staff to avoid incidents of stress in the workplace.

Lead by example: When it has to do with career success, many especially the younger staff see their bosses as role models and would want to follow their footsteps. It has been observed that principal officers, deans and heads of department who arrive office early in the morning, have breakfast and lunch on their desk every day and stay late every night are likely to have staff that will do the same or grumble. When a principal officer, Dean of faculty or Head of department whose responsibility is to establish and promote the culture of the university creates a culture of long work hours and little work/life balance, he becomes a major factor in his staff's stress levels. The leaders of institutions of higher learning should encourage staff to commit to better work/life balance by taking breaks and having life outside the office.

Reduce employee workload: There is no doubt that working in Nigerian University is horrible. Staff, especially lecturers are saddled with heavy work load which cause them to work under pressure and eventually get stressed up. If course allocation and sundry responsibilities are assigned without bias, stress cases will be reduced. Therefore, leaders of higher education institutions should minimize employees' workloads and structure their daily activities in such a way that they can accomplish them without being overstressed. Work over load is usually high risk factor in over dose stress (Uzoeshi, 2017).

Encourage staff to engage in regular exercise: Exercise is the use of the body or mind that involves effort or activity. Physical exercise improves cardiovascular function by strengthening the heart muscles, causing greater-elasticity of the blood vessels, increasing oxygen throughout

the body and lowering blood levels of fats such as cholesterol and triglycerides. All these mean less chances of developing heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure. Therefore, in order to ensure that staff avoid being stressed up, the principal officers, HODs, Deans and Directors should introduce regular exercise for staff such as the monthly “walk-to-live exercise” introduced by the 2nd vice-chancellor of Ignatius Ajuru University of education, Port Harcourt for staff and students was intended to assist the members of the university community to ease off work stress.

Develop good policies on workplace stress: The leaders should consider how stress affects people emotionally, cognitively, socially and behaviorally and develop policies that could serve as a guide against possible stress inducing scenarios prevalent in the workplace. These policies should be made in consultation with employees. Certain policies in the work place are unfriendly and energy sapping on employees while trying to implement them. Of course, promotion policies such as ‘publish or perish’ and number of publications among others are stress inducing on employees. Another obnoxious and stress inducing policies are the ones concerning students’ extermination, marking and compilation of results. For instance, in a situation where a lecturer administers examination for a class of over four thousand students with a work deadline of only two weeks to get their results ready or forfeit the month’s salary must surely put the lecturer under pressure. The management should be humane to avoid such stress inducing policies in the workplace.

Provide proper education for staff on stress: As the saying goes, ‘knowledge is key to better living’. The university leadership should ensure staff are properly informed on how to avoid being stressed up. For instance, having time for relaxation, recreation, social activities, exercise, laugh and feel happy always. Again, employees should be educated on: common sources of stress and how to avoid them; having good time management and planning; sharing problems with trusted friends; being optimistic always; eating balanced diet and avoiding high alcohol intake and taking medication to control high blood pressure. Ross (2003) and Goodman (2005) in their different studies observed that an emotionally disturbing situation triggers changes in the bio-chemical and endocrinological systems of the body leading to the appearance of psychosomatic illnesses such as hypertension, indigestion, anxiety, depression, stomach ulcers and so on. However, through adequate counseling services provided by effective leadership, employees can be well informed on how to avoid or cope with various stress inducing factors in the workplace.

Improve on the organizational communication system: Policies, decisions, resolutions, time-tables, academic calendars and course allocations are usually made by the management and communicated downward to subordinates. Most times, the information concerning these is not always clearly stated in understandable terms and circulated which may consequently induce stress in employees trying to comprehend them. Leaders should create the opportunity to discuss with their staff one-to-one and face-to-face; allow staff to communicate openly and; be patient to listen to them. It is imperatively advisable that institutional leaders improve on their ‘institutions’ communication systems to help employees avoid being stressed up as a result of ‘this’. This could be done by ensuring that campuses are connected to the internet (ICT) and staff trained and provided with all necessary information and communication gadgets.

Determine job objectives and ensure proper description of tasks and responsibilities:

Researches have shown that role ambiguity is one of the major stress inducing factors in the work place. When employees have a clear view of what they are expected to do, they do it without much stress and achieve more. The management should ensure that employees understand clearly what constitute their job roles at any point to avoid conflict resulting from role ambiguity. Observation has shown that employees who have good understanding of their job objectives –the why and how their jobs are assigned to them, are always at ease doing it without being stressed or pressured. The management should be concise on the objectives of job roles and how employees are assigned duties to avoid situations that may induce stress on the employees. There should be proper determination and explicit definition of job objectives and, how roles are given to employees by the management to avoid situations that could induce stress.

Develop records of actions/control measures: When hazards have been identified as being possible stressors for a place of work, the next is to prioritize them, and assess their likelihood and planed actions to address them where possible in consultation with all stakeholders, especially the staff. Adopting this reasonable approach by leaders means facilitating such actions in order to ensure the place of work is safe as far as damage to mental or physical health is concerned. This requires a phase of planning in relation to how staff can be protected from probable exposure to stressors so that they are eliminated or controlled with a view to minimizing potential adverse stress reactions.

Introduce stress management programmes for staff: Consideration of stress management programmes for staff who are at risk of exposure to stressors will help to ensure that coping skills are at their optimum for the particular stressors identified and to enhance employees' ability to deal with difficult emotions and thoughts. The focus of these programmes should be on the after-the-fact experiences to build resilience.

Introduce and develop peer support teams: Research indicates that peer support from colleagues provides feelings of security and belonging that can reduce mental and emotional strain. It is recommended that occupational groups which have a high likelihood of being exposed to higher stressors may benefit from peer support systems. Tertiary educational institution leaders should introduce and encourage this measure while ensuring that employees are aware of the support system and also, have access to it.

Encourage staff to take responsibility of their health: Leaders should encourage staff through proper education, training and workshops to take responsibility for their own health by giving them information on safety, health and welfare about their own health and well being. Staff should be encouraged to belong to gymnastics and sports clubs as physical exercise and healthy lifestyle are very essential in reducing work stress. Leaders should initiate free routine checkups for staff such as blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure.

CONCLUSION

The study has identified that stress is a major impediment to organizational performance especially in the higher education institutions. The prolonged unaddressed problems of poor funding, poor work environment, heavy workload, role ambiguity and working to meet deadline have been the major sources of stress in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. The scourge of stress among staff of tertiary education system has not been given the required attention

irrespective of the fact that it is a sudden-silent killer hence, the need for this study. The reason that a greater percentage of those undergoing stress are not aware calls for the attention of the higher education leaders to step up action by providing effective leadership strategies for controlling stress on the campuses in Nigeria. A major conclusion of this paper is that leaders of higher education institutions in Nigeria can actually be effectively pro-active to perform their roles in curbing, if not eliminating workplace stress among employees.

Recommendations

Based on the identified realities about workplace stress prevalent in higher education institutions, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be continuous managerial support for the employees to ensure that all the necessary measures are put in place to allow for safe, effective removal of the stressors in the workplace.
- There should be continuous and unbiased monitoring of employees reactions to their work environments so as to nip stress situations at the board.
- The leaders of higher education institutions should endeavour to establish Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) to professionally educate staff regularly on:
 - How to avoid stressful situations
 - How to alter stressful situations;
 - How to adapt to stressful situations;
 - How to accept stressful situations which one cannot change;
 - How to make out time for relaxation and fun;
 - How to adopt a healthy lifestyle i.e. exercise and so on.
- Leaders of higher education institutions in Nigeria should explore other strategies of stress management adopted elsewhere as alternative sources of stress management to enhance staff performance.

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