Management of Work Stress for Enhanced Job Roles Among Academic Staff: Implications for Effective Planning and Administration of Higher Education in Cross River State, Nigeria

DR. MARTHA DANIEL EKPE

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Cross River State

Abstract- The study centred on management of work stress for enhanced job roles among academic staff: implications for effective planning and administration of higher education in Cross River State, Nigeria. Work stress arises when teachers perceive work demands as exceeding their capabilities to manage them. Symptoms can include irritability, difficulty concentrating, cynicism, and even a desire to leave the profession. Addressing these stressors is vital for effective planning and administration of educational needs and aspirations. The paper addressed possible ways to manage work stress, such as practising self-care through exercise, healthy eating, and mindfulness, setting realistic work-life boundaries, developing time management skills, building a strong support network with colleagues, and seeking professional development to improve skills and resilience. Recognising personal stress promotes effective management of work, which is a crucial component of a comprehensive stress management approach. The study finally concluded, including implications for effective planning and administration of higher education within and outside the borders of Cross River State.

Index Terms- Management, Work Stress, Job Roles & Effective Planning and Administration

I. INTRODUCTION

The need for effective job performance cannot be undermined in the academic environment. This is because job roles stem from their crucial role in driving organisational success, increasing productivity, improving quality, and fostering employee satisfaction and retention. Effective work leads to better resource management, higher profits, and adaptability in a changing environment. Organisations fulfil this need by providing clear goals, constructive feedback, training, and a supportive culture that encourages growth, engagement, and a sense of accomplishment for their employees. However, most academic staff have exposed themselves to excessive work pressure, which has resulted in stress. Exposure to stressful situations is among the most common human experiences, especially in a country like Nigeria that is plagued with bad governance, corruption, insecurity and leaders' insensitivity towards the plight of employees. Individuals, regardless of race, cultural background, and social and occupational status, experience stress in different ways. As such, stress is a universal element which the human race around the globe is currently experiencing as a result of recurrent or dynamic routine tasks. It is an acknowledged fact that the current human dispensation lives in a stressful age where the need to remain competitive is utterly critical for the survival of man and even the organisations. In their quest to be proactive, people are often confronted with barriers and streams of life's demands, which can either affect them negatively or positively. The work-life of individuals remains an important part of their daily lives, which is not free from a great deal of stress. Stress is undeniably an unpleasant condition at the workplace that negatively affects an individual's overall well-being and performance.

Ndum and Okey (2013) noted that stress among academic staff is growing in number, kind, and complexity. The current university context is clearly more challenging than in the past. The levels of stress and the available means of management are much

more far-reaching than ever before. In short, society has changed, and so has the university. Stress could be a simple feeling of being overwhelmed. It is a psychological and physiological reaction to an event or condition that could be a threat or challenge. Stress can affect you physically and mentally, including your metabolism, emotional memory and immune system. Stress indicators can be

i. Psychological or emotional – Anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem, feeling helpless, indecisiveness, etc.
ii. Physiological or physical – uneasiness, tension, heart palpitation.
iii. Behavioural – Aggression, increased taking of substances, change of mood etc.

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The existence of a man on earth, to a large extent, has never been judged to be stress-free and every decision of a man that is driven by any form of activities, either in the family, business or career, shares a strong correlation with stress either positively or negatively. Most times when a human mind is constantly troubled by challenging issues of life where the man in question has no control to bring forth a sudden desired change to the pending situation, the man may lose control of himself and tend to forget things he would have remembered with ease. People tend to attribute different determinants to such manifestations, but it is only a few who can rightly infer what the root cause of such weird behaviour of a man is all about. It might not be out of place to infer that our dynamic society, with its complexity, has subjected many employees to carriers of burdens with different degrees of pain, which could be emotional, psychological and physical, that could be traceable to relationship conflict at home, places of work, churches and marketplaces. This situation makes it difficult for victims of broken homes and failed relationships to function well amidst their agonies.

Besides, Bassey (2015) reiterates that different people respond to stress differently and this is based on individual differences. What may serve as a source of stress to some people may not instigate stress in others. Stress, according to Bassey, occurs when an individual is susceptible and this easily triggers the manifestation. An individual's response to stress is dependent on the mode and emotions. A man who is fragile as a result of life problems is vulnerable to becoming stressed through the influence of human decisions, roles, workload, relationship conflict and many more.

Moreover, the magnitude of discomfort that comes to employees as a result of increased demands at the workplace, which are unavoidable, can engender stress if not well managed. Some of these responsibilities are sometimes without financial benefits to the employees and such responsibilities are mostly done under compulsion with a time deadline that is inconveniencing thus exerting much pressure on employees, leading to stress with a detrimental effect on job performance. The accumulated workloads often have a repressive effect on the staff especially when such staff are already experiencing some discomfort, such as financial strain, loss of loved ones, health problems and other factors from the work environment, such as physical hazards like noise and extreme temperature, which majorly culminate in triggering the manifestation of stress on employees.

Coetzee and Villers, (2010) defined workload as the amount of stress experienced by individuals due to the perception that they are unable to cope or be productive with the amount of work allocated to them. Notwithstanding, Coetzer and Rothman (2017) identified work relationships as one of the instigators of occupational stress among employees in an organisation. They noted that work relationships, the relationship between employer and employees, is a foundation for effective job performance. A situation where there is a poor relationship with colleagues and/or managers can become a potential source of stress. More comprehensively and concisely, Good and healthy relations among staff in any organisation are a strong force that facilitates effective job performance because the existence of cordial relationships offers staff the opportunity to work as a team, but in a situation where there is relationship conflict, teamwork cannot be realistic. It is on these premises that the study on management of stress instigators for enhanced job roles among academic

staff: implications for effective administration and planning of higher education in Cross River State was conducted.

Some common indicators of stress
Heavy workload and its role in academic staff job roles

Work life and its role in academic staff job roles
Long working hours and their role in academic staff job roles

Role ambiguity and job roles of academic staff
The major cause of job stress in most hierarchical organisations is mostly based on unclear instructions from the manager who is not ready to communicate with the employees in clear and simple terms the expectations governing any assigned task or responsibility. This often results in a situation that places the employees in danger of struggling to perform the task as he/she has little or no understanding of the expectation. A situation like this tends to make an employee vulnerable to stress. The efficiency and effectiveness of an employee in a job can be determined only when the roles regarding a task are well communicated in a manner that is simple and clear for the implementer to follow and execute the action. Most times, when there is no clarity regarding what to do, how to do it and when to do it, it may put an employee in distress to either redo what has been done haphazardly or be punished to stay overtime at work to correct the mistake that happened, all because of role obscurity (Hayford& Amos, 2014).

According to Abbasi and Janjua, (2016), role stressors refer to anything about an organisational role that creates negative consequences for employees. It represents conflicts and tension due to roles being enacted by a person at any given point in time (Devi &Rani, 2016). The role stressors discussed within the limit of this thesis are in the dimensions of role ambiguity and role conflicts. Role ambiguity occurs due to a lack of clarity or when people are uncertain about their expectations within a certain role in a workplace (Palomino & Frezatti, 2016). Further ambiguity may occur when academics struggle to juggle the academic activities assigned to them, such as teaching, researching, academic development and so forth. In a similar vein, role conflict occurs as a result of expectations from multiple roles. This can be

observed in an academic setting where academics are expected to teach, research, perform administrative duties, participate in community engagement, as engage in professional development. Research studies have found the negative impact of role conflict and role ambiguity on job performance among academics (Palomino & Frezatti, 2016).

Kalbers and Cenken (2018) relate role ambiguity to a lack of confidence that an employee perceives in his or her responsibility. In another perspective, role ambiguity is said to occur when an insufficient amount of information is given to an individual to perform a role, and it is also commonly seen as a condition when disagreement happens in the work of the community, with little understanding on the employee side of what is expected.

Yousef (2020) describes role ambiguity as a situation where the individual does not have a clear direction about expectations for their role in the organisation. Role ambiguity arises when an employee feels that there is a lot of uncertainty in aspects of the employee's role or membership in the group (Lapopolo, 2012). Indicator of role ambiguity according to Rizzo (2017) employees are unsure of what is expected of them at work, job requirements are always unclear, employees often do not know what is expected of them at work, job assignments are clearly defined, employees know what must be done for every aspect of the job, and employees know what is expected to be done at the workplace with certainty.

Conflict at the workplace and job roles of academic staff

The term "interpersonal relationship" refers to a close relationship between people who work in the same establishment. Employees who work together should have a good relationship and be honest with one another to perform quality work and create a positive work environment. One way for organisations to cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships is to promote an organisational environment of interactional justice or respectful and neutral communication among employees (Maria, 2019). Büte (2011) mentioned that a good employer must avoid favouritism, make tough, often controversial decisions, show respect for subordinates without

seeming to be nosy, and not abuse supervisory authority. Supervisors must be friendly, approachable, fair yet firm, and use the proper language in their professional interactions with employees in order to satisfy their duties.

Maintaining a cordial relationship among staff in an organisation plays a significant role in moderating staff attitudes towards one another and fostering effective job performance. The absence of a cordial relationship among employees can result in an uncooperative work environment that impedes job performance. Conflict among workers in an organisation is inevitable. In the process of achieving organisational objectives, disappointments, disputes and conflicts will surely arise. This strongly suggests that the occurrence of bickering, backbiting, blame-shifting, gossiping and undermining of others can never be completely eradicated from any human society. Consequently, companies for some time now are faced with the problem of unionised and non-unionised agitations from employees at all levels. They are experiencing strikes actions of all kinds, unceremonious resignations, court actions and even the exchange of blows amongst co-workers. Co-workers' disputes, though common, are dangerous because they involve delicate

Excessive workload and job roles of academic staff
As stated by Lee, Kim, Gong, Zheng, and Liu (2020), employee work requirements vary even within the same organisation, since workers of the same level can be assigned different tasks. They also mentioned that educational qualifications, field of specialisation, and organisational status can all play a role in workload disparities. Employee workload variability is also determined by the department to which they belong in most organisations. However, there is no assurance that staff workload can be balanced even within the same department. Disaffection may arise from an employee's sense of workload balance or disparity as a result of perceived inconsistencies between his workload and that of other members of the organisation. Workload has a significant impact on job performance and cannot be overlooked. Lam, Wong, Lam, and Pang (2010) on the factors that cause stress among interns found that 90% of interns reported that workload and working hours were the top causes of distress for interns.

Workload occurs when the demand exceeds the employee's capabilities and there is a high expectation within a short time period. Smith (2017) indicated that work-related stress was greatly linked to demands concerning meeting changing targets and deadlines; longer working hours; workloads that kept on increasing; and regular changes in timetables or courses. Furthermore, this study noticed that more than 80% of educators mentioned that their workloads had increased over the past three years and had consequently increased their stress levels.

Managing stress instigators among academic staff for effective job performance
There are several administrative measures in which stressors can be managed and controlled such as focusing on self-care through exercise, and sufficient sleep, healthy eating, relaxation techniques, improving time management, setting limits, and seeking social support.

Self-Care Strategies
   i. Exercise regularly: Physical activity is a powerful stress reliever.
   ii. Eat a healthy diet: Nourish your body to better cope with stress.
   iii. Prioritise adequate rest: Aim for consistent, quality sleep to improve your mood and cognition.
   iv. Make time for yourself: Dedicate time to hobbies, relaxation, and activities you enjoy.
   v. Connect with others: Maintain strong social connections with friends and family.

Relaxation Techniques
   i. Meditate: Practice mindful meditation to focus on the present moment and reduce anxiety.
   ii. Use the Deep breathing tactics: Use deep, slow breaths to help your body relax.
   iii. Adopting Yoga and Tai Chi: These practices combine physical movement with mindfulness to relieve stress.
   iv. Avoid cheating nature: Being outdoors can help you relax and find perspective.

Changes in lifestyle practices
   i. Set limits on the timeline: Decline requests that would create excessive stress.

ii. Improve time management: Learn to manage your time more effectively to feel less overwhelmed.

iii. Avoid unhealthy habits: Stay away from alcohol and drugs as a way to cope with stress.

The basic "4 A's" are utilised in Stress Management
This framework helps you address the sources of stress:

i. Alter: Change the situation by expressing your feelings assertively or changing your environment.

ii. Adapt: Adjust to the stressful situation by changing your response or keeping things in perspective.

iii. Avoid: Stay away from unnecessary stress and people who cause it.

iv. Accept: Accept the things you cannot control.

Enhancing job roles among academic staff
To enhance job roles, organisations can implement strategies like job enrichment by adding responsibilities that increase skill variety, autonomy, and decision-making, and job enlargement, which expands tasks without increasing complexity. Ndum and Udoye (2020) observed that some methods include offering training, implementing job rotation, assigning ownership of projects, providing regular feedback, developing personalised growth plans, and aligning enriched roles with organisational goals to foster greater employee motivation, engagement, and growth.

Strategies for Employers

i. Implement Job Enrichment: Assign tasks that require critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving to increase employee engagement and skill development.

ii. Offer cross-training: Rotate employees through different roles to broaden their understanding of the organisation, expose them to new challenges, and build team flexibility.

iii. Delegate responsibilities adequately: Give employees more autonomy and ownership over processes, projects, or decision-making areas within their roles.

iv. Align with institutional aims and objectives: Ensure that enriched job roles support overall organisational objectives and contribute to the company's success.

v. Give room for consistent feedback and Recognition: Deliver consistent feedback to help employees understand their performance and recognise their contributions to reinforce motivation.

vi. Create Personalised Growth Plans: Work with employees to set career goals, identify skill gaps, and tailor enhancement efforts to their individual aspirations and performance history.

vii. Set Clear and achievable Goals: Establish specific, measurable/achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) professional goals to track progress.

Impacts on Administration and Planning of Education
Abbasi and Janjua (2016) stress that stress has several negative impacts on the planning and administration of education, as numbered below.

i. Decreased Productivity and Efficiency: Stressed employees are less productive and efficient, leading to lower output and quality of work.

ii. Increased Errors: Impaired concentration and poor decision-making result in more frequent mistakes, which can have significant costs for an organisation.

iii. Negatively affect work culture: A culture of chronic stress can foster disengagement, conflict, and a lack of trust, damaging overall morale and collaboration.

iv. Impacts on the Organisation:

v. Higher Turnover and Absenteeism: High-stress environments lead to employees leaving their jobs and increased absenteeism, resulting in higher recruitment and training costs.

vi. Reduced Innovation and Growth: A stressed workforce is less motivated and innovative, which can hinder the organisation's ability to adapt and grow.

vii. Poor Leadership: Leaders who are stressed may undermine their ability to make effective decisions, lead their teams, and handle emotional situations, leading to negative organisational outcomes.

Impacts on Individuals in relation to organisational goals attainment:

i. Affect job output: Stress leads to difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and poor judgment, hindering a person's ability to plan and make sound decisions.

ii. Burnout: Prolonged stress can lead to burnout, characterised by cynicism, detachment, and decreased performance, severely impacting motivation and job satisfaction.

iii. Psychological and health-related problems: Both physical and mental health issues arise, including anxiety, depression, headaches, cardiovascular diseases, and impaired immune systems, affecting an individual's ability to perform their job duties.

iv. Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms: Individuals under stress may turn to unhealthy behaviours such as overeating, smoking, or abusing alcohol and drugs to cope.

CONCLUSION

In the education sphere, avoiding teacher work stress is crucial because it negatively affects a teacher's personal well-being and professional performance, leading to burnout, high turnover rates, and poor student outcomes, such as lower academic achievement and decreased classroom motivation. Stress creates a vicious cycle, where stressed teachers create stressful classroom environments that further impact students' mental health and learning, ultimately harming the entire school community. In conclusion, work stress can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and increased turnover, negatively impacting teacher health, student achievement, and the overall school environment. Sources of stress often stem from high workloads, a perceived lack of control, and inadequate support. Consequences include mental health issues like anxiety and depression, as well as physical health problems. High stress levels in teachers can also lead to lower student engagement and poorer academic outcomes, contributing to a cycle of negativity in schools.

Implications for the effective administration and planning of higher education

In the academic environment, the teacher is saddled with a whole lot of responsibilities ranging from researching, community services and teaching. Stress is bound to occur. Stress significantly undermines effective administration and planning by reducing efficiency, increasing errors, impairing decision-making, and causing burnout, leading to lower productivity, absenteeism, and higher turnover rates. Unmanaged stress also creates a negative work culture, strains relationships, and negatively impacts the overall success and stability of an organisation.

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