

An assessment of the relationship between job stressors and faculty performance in selected private universities in Kenya.

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Abstract

This study aimed at assessing the relationship between job stressors and faculty performance private universities in Kenya. Data was collected from a sample of 384 full time and part time faculty members. Job stressors were broken down into three sub categories; work load, job security and career progression while faculty performance was evaluated as a component of research, teaching and service. Both descriptive and inferential statistics was applied in analyzing data. Results showed R-squared value of 0.499 while the beta coefficient for job stressors was -0.667, indicating an inverse relationship between job stressors and faculty performance. With p value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, revealing a statistically significant relationship between job stressors and faculty performance. The research findings imply that universities should have strategies to maintain low levels of stress for better faculty performance.

Key words: Occupational Stress, Job Stressors, Faculty Performance, Faculty, Higher Learning, University.

Introduction

Occupational stress is one of the challenges facing both employees and employers. Human resource managers have to deal with the high costs of addressing this phenomenon in terms of health complications arising due to occupational stress. Indeed Lambert, Lambert and Ito (2004) cite stress as a major contributing factor to corporate inefficiency, low productivity and increased health care cost for staff. This view has also been corroborated by Clarke and Cooper (2004); Rossi, Meurs and Perrewé (2015) and Bowman, (2013) who observe that a lot of working days are lost due to absenteeism due to stress related illnesses.

Employees in Higher Education (HE) in Kenya are no exemption to occupational stress. The HE has undergone sporadic changes in the recent past. In the past, an academic year was divided into two semesters, leaving one semester free for research and community service. Currently, an academic year is divided into three trimesters, with a very tight schedule to balance between the roles of research, teaching and service. Consequently the work life balance is negatively affected,

(Johann & Lauren, 2015), contributing to occupational stress. The faculty productivity and quality of work is jeopardized (John, Keith, Alison & Winnie, 2013).

Both private and public universities implemented other changes including mode of learning. Apart from the traditional mode of regular learning, other modes were introduced including; holiday based, weekend, evening, and distance learning modes. Such changes posed greater challenges and constraints to faculty. The introduction of such modes of learning came with diverse categories of students including mature working students. This meant that faculty have to be more flexible and dynamic to accommodate the needs of non-traditional students.

The changing trends in HE have also contributed to occupational stress (OS) among faculty. Universities have witnessed increased student numbers (Kimani, 2015), stiff competition amongst Universities, ranking of universities by different agencies and increased audits by regulatory bodies. According to the report by the Kenya Public Universities Inspection Board, (2006), there was tremendous growth of students with unequalled number of faculty members.

At the center of delivery of HE services are the faculty members who are expected to deliver excellent services. Their performance is of great interest to all the stakeholders including students, the government, regulatory bodies, employers, parents/guardians and sponsoring organizations. Such expectations may lead to stress, which may consequently affect performance.

Statement of the problem

Employee performance and performance management is one of the key HR practices that all employers are concerned with. To remain afloat and relevant, institutions must measure and account for the performance of its employees. Currently ranking of universities is regarded very highly. The performance of its academic staff in terms of research output is one of the main parameters used in ranking Universities.

A report on the State of the university education in Kenya acknowledged increase in student enrollment. Consequently, the quality of education may be affected (Mukhwana, 2015). Results of a study in Pakistan revealed that there was low research productivity among the academic staff in HEI (Anwar, 2014). In other studies Odhiambo, (2014) also note that the research productivity among faculty in Kenya is low, meaning that much more could be achieved. Considering that research is one of the key pillars of a University and a key performance indicator for faculty members, any indication of less than optimal performance in this area raises concern on factors that may be contributing to this low performance. Further research related to HE teaching and learning also indicate that faculty performance is less than optimal (Kimani, 2015).

Conversely, several studies show that occupational stress is a concern amongst employees in higher education. Studies in the UK (Tytherleigh et al., 2005), in South Africa Barkhuizen and Rothmann, (2008) and in Nigeria, Omoniyi (2013) have shown that faculty experience high levels of stress. A study on occupational stress in the private Universities in Pakistan (Warrach, Ahmed, Ahmad, & Khoso, 2014) showed that faculty were stressed mostly due to role conflict, inadequate monetary rewards and workload. A similar research from private universities in Ghana evaluating the causes of stress and coping strategies showed that faculty members experienced some level of stress Danku et al, (2017). In Kenya, a study on stress among employees in public universities (Karihe, Namusonge & Iravo 2015) shows that some of the stress determinants include working facilities, lack of motivation and work relationships.

The Kenya's vision 2030 supports the need for high quality education, therefore the need to build human capacity through quality training with the objective of driving the country's economy to the highest levels. The society largely looks up to the Universities for overall development of the country. When faculty members are stressed their quality of work and overall performance may be affected. This study is therefore, aimed at assessing the relationship between variables; job stressors and faculty performance.

Theoretical framework

Person –Environment fit (P-E) model

This study was based on the Person –Environment fit (P-E) model, which is a transactional model of stress developed by French in 1973. Person–environment fit is defined as the degree to which individual and environmental characteristics match (Caplan & Harrison 2010). It is grounded in Kurt Lewin's maxim, the behavior is a function of person and environment. They observed that an individual's personal characteristics while interacting with their work environment determines strain, consequent behaviour and health. The personal characteristics include skills, values, knowledge, interests and preferences. On the other hand, the work environment includes the profession's demands, rewards, job demands, characteristics of other individuals and the organizational culture and values.

A good person- environment fit is assumed to have positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, good performance and well-being. This model suggests that the match between a person and their work environment is key in influencing their health and well- being. Workers' attitudes, values, abilities, skills and resources should match the demands of their job. The work environments should meet workers' needs, knowledge, skills and abilities (Mark & Smith, 2012). Lack of fit in either of these domains increases strain and stress as demands exceed capabilities, and need exceeds supply (Sonntag, 2003). These strains can lead to health related challenges, lower productivity, and other work problems (French, Caplan & Harrison, 1982). Defense mechanisms, such as denial, reappraisal of needs, and coping also operate in the model to try and reduce subjective misfit.

According to Wilton (2016), an employees' performance is dependent on the personal and organizational influences. Personal characteristics such as ambition, previous experiences in job roles, coherence of personal values with those of the organization and relationships affect performance. Likewise the organizational strategy, policies such as reward management and job design all contribute to the performance of the individual employee. Stress results from an imbalance between the resources (ability to cope) and the demands (pressure).

Personal attributes and characteristics of faculty members to a large extent contribute to their delivery. Despite having wealth of knowledge and expertise, one may not deliver in the classroom due to their personality, temperament, communication skills and values. Coping with pressure from large numbers of students, technological advancement in teaching, conflicts amongst students, uncooperative and non- committed students, lack of support from management and limited resources all affects their performance. The outcome is increased turnover where faculty seek to change their careers coupled by other challenges such as strained relationships with colleagues, staff and students (Shikieri & Musa, 2012).

Occupational stress

Occupational stress (OS) is stress related to one's job or work. Stress is a concept that was developed by Hans Selye in 1956 to explain the physiological response of people to various environmental stimuli. It is viewed as a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances (Hemmings & Bouras, 2016).

Occupational stress (OS) is defined as inability of employees to manage the job pressure due to job demands and/or employees inability to fulfill the job needs. Occupational stress can therefore be viewed as a discrepancy between job demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands. OS is attributed to pressures in a job, perhaps because of a poor fit between someone's abilities and his/her work requirements and work conditions (Holmlund & Strandvik, 2005). Indeed, OS has also been referred to as job stress, which is manifested in the form of negative emotional states such as frustration, worry, anxiety and depression attributed to work related factors (Kyriacou, 2010).

The consequences of OS are enormous. Indeed, it has been observed that costs associated with workplace stress have escalated in the last few decades and various cases have been reported. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that 13.4 million working days were lost in Britain in 2001/02 due to stress, depression or anxiety ascribed to work-related stress (HSE, 2002). In the United States the number of stress claims increased, with fifteen percent of all workers compensation claims being for stress. Reports of high staff turn-over, increased health and workers' compensation claims and decreased productivity have also increased. Occupational stress leads to health problems like back pain, migraines and insomnia. Annually, many working days are lost (Kinman & Jones, 2003). According to data from the Labour Force Survey in the United Kingdom (UK), work-related stress, depression or anxiety affected an estimated 369,000 of its employees in 2011/12, with a total of 9,072,000 working days lost (Health and safety in HSE - Annual report 2012/13 - hsinhse1213). Within this total, teachers and educational professionals reported the highest average number of days lost per worker due to work-related stress, depression and anxiety. Occupational stress has become one of the most serious health issues in the modern world (Tangri, 2003).

Occupational stress has been cited as a root of increased costs and undesirable results for higher educational institutions. Indeed Ross (2005) indicates that employees of higher educational institutions exhibit unwanted feelings and behavior; poor physical health; and poor mental health due to unwanted stress. It has also been noted (Wiegner, Hange, Björkelund, & Ahlborg, 2015) that anxiety, burnout, fatigue, tension and stressor are all different concepts associated with the occupational stress. In the HEI in Africa, many studies revealed high levels of stress among the University staff (Bako & Ubangari, 2014; Karihe, Namusonge & Iravo, 2015; Ominiya, 2011). Indeed Morley, (2003) notes that it is a major oversight for managers to overlook the costs of stress among academic providers. This is because the effects of stress can also spill over into the family domain further leading to multiple complications in the society.

Factors contributing to occupational stress

Workload

Work demands could be stressful when they are excessive. Increased responsibilities can lead to academic overload amongst the faculty. Faculty continuous interactions with students and co-workers and the incessant and fragmented demands of teaching can lead to overwhelming pressures and challenges, which may lead to stress (Brown & Uehara, 2008). Universities are particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of stress on staff (Gohar & Roger (2013). Tremendous growth in the number of universities in Africa and other parts of the world led to increased student enrollment. However, faculty population has not been commensurate to the growth in student population (Samble, 2008). In Kenya for example, almost every University has constituent or satellite campuses around the country, which demands for more lecturers. Faculty have been trapped, crisscrossing universities to render their services.

Various studies show that over the last decade student enrolment in African universities has grown by significant numbers in response to the increasing demand for higher education. It is estimated that the number of students around the globe enrolled in higher education will reach 262 million by 2025, up from 178 million in 2010 (Chou, Kamola & Pietsch, 2016). In the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa demand already far outstrips supply. The number of university-age students across Africa is predicted to double from 200 million in 2015 to 400 million by 2045 (Cahalan, Perna, Pell 2015; Saint, 2004). Masuku (2015) notes that up to 1990, Zimbabwe had only one university while currently there are sixteen universities.

The disparity in student-staff ratios in Africa put tremendous pressure on faculty, a factor that has discouraged others from joining the teaching profession in higher education. A study carried out in universities in South Africa Barkhuizen & Rothmann, (2008) shows that many lecturers suffer burnout. This was a cross sectional survey which confirmed that job demands and lack of job resources contributed to occupational stress and burnout. Under the managerial reforms, institutions have pursued efficiency and cost cutting strategies. These reforms demand that teaching staff do more paper work, entrepreneurial work, community service and increase their teaching hours making the work-life balance a challenge to the majority. According to Bruggen (2015) more workload leads to decreased performance.

Faculty members no longer enjoy the freedom of long holidays. Semesters have been converted to trimesters and the time for research is very limited. These employees experience a great challenge in work-life balance.

Job Insecurity

In an effort to cut down on costs due to reduced budgetary allocations, many universities are relying on part time faculty. According to a study done across nineteen higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Shin & Jung, 2014) lack of job security is the main source of job stress. Levels of stress was measured using the ASSET model. It was concluded that job insecurity was the main source of stress irrespective the category of the employee. It was also noted that other factors contributing to stress among university staff were remuneration, heavy workload and relationships (Tytherleigh et al., 2005; Gillespie et al., 2001).

Results from a nationwide study carried out in Greece among educators from different levels of institutions in different regions, (Kourmoussi and Alexopoulos, 2016) showed that women and younger teachers suffer high levels of stress. This was a study aimed at exploring the sources of stress and its manifestation among different categories of teachers. The study revealed that work load and job insecurity contributed to stress among teachers. Many full time faculty feel stressed and strapped for time to teach, while part time faculty are unsure of their career prospects and tenure. Similarly, faculty are faced with the fear of the economic crisis and non-employability. The volatile external environment such as political climate, economic factors such as inflation and depression are all relevant and important determinants of psychological distress amongst workers. A study on organizational factors associated with stress amongst lecturers in selected community colleges in Malaysia by Ismail et al., (2015), revealed a direct relationship between OS and four organizational factors including; decision latitude, psychological job demand, social support and job insecurity.

Career advancement and promotion

Career advancement and professional recognition is critical amongst the teaching fraternity in higher education. Many of the faculty though working, continue to pursue post graduate and post-doctoral studies for career growth and economic development. Such pressure and imbalance also leads to stress. Work stress is experienced both at home and at work leading to the feeling of isolation. There are financial constraints, low confidence levels, lack of professional recognition and lack of collegial respect. Manzoor et al., (2011) cites survival skills as necessary in coping with stress experienced when pursuing education and career advancement. Clarke and Cooper, (2004) suggests that maintaining academic and professional standards whilst upgrading qualifications places staff in stressful positions. However, distance learning and E-learning are great developments in education that are helping faculty in managing career advancement. One can advance their career while staying close with their families and other support systems.

Majority of the Universities require faculty to advance academically. However, the financial burden is mostly borne by the faculty member. Time constraints and lack of other resources to achieve these objective is a great hindrance, strenuous and a cause of stress. Career development is either approached from the interests of the institution or from the interests of the staff. Promotions are pegged to academic advancement and research, making it difficult for majority of the faculty.

Faculty performance

Faculty play three major roles; teaching, research and service. Performance among the faculty in HE is very key in determining the overall performance of the institution. Faculty's roles as teachers, researchers and managers determine to a large extent, the quality of students' experience in a University. Consequently, students' learning has an effect on the contribution that such universities make to the society. To support this view, Karihe, Namusonge and Iravo (2015), in their study argues that the faculty is so important that its health and performance is an index of the state of higher education sector in any country.

Faculty performance is at the heart of every university due to three main reasons; first, it serves as a basis for the reputation of universities. Secondly, it can attract the most talented students and professors Franck & Schönfelder (2000) thus further improving the reputation of the university.

Thirdly, university administrators and grant agencies frequently use academic performance as a basis for making their funding decisions (Wollersheim, Lenz, Welpe, & Spörrle, 2014).

Faculty performance is therefore key in achieving the objectives of their institutions (Mahiri & Orwa, 2016) and in the overall development of the society. The society to a great extent looks up to universities to solve their problems and advance development. Faculty performance could vary from one HE institution to another. Indeed, it may vary from public to private universities.

Methodology

The Study was a cross sectional survey that was carried across selected private universities in Kenya. By using systematic random sampling, six private chartered universities were selected. These were universities that had attained their charter for fifteen years and above. The selected six universities total faculty population was 949. A sample size of 384 faculty members was generated by applying the Fisher's formula. A proportionate number of faculty per university was then calculated. Before data collection, approval was granted by the Ethics Board and the National Commission of Research, Science and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher also got approval from all the relevant authorities from all the six universities.

Questionnaires were used to gather data that was coded and tabulated in numerical values, allowing data to be expressed by use of statistical analysis (Wetcher-Hendricks, 2014). A non-experimental hypothesis testing design was adopted. Through the questionnaires, the study sought personal views, opinions and perceptions about causes of occupational stress (Silverman, 2013). Data was collected between July and October 2018 from both full time and part time faculty in the six selected universities. By applying inferential statistics, the relationship between job stressors and faculty performance was established.

Data analysis and findings

The job sub-variable consisted of fifteen items. Each item was rated on a five point Likert type scale rated from 1 for "Not at all" (NAT), 2 for Little extent (LTE), 3 for moderate extent (ME), 4 for Large Extent (LE) and 5 denoting "Very large extent" (VLE).

The average scale ratings ranged from 2.02 to 2.50. This indicated that the respondents had perceived low levels of stress associated to their job. The highest mean rating was 2.50 for the statement "There are many changes in Higher education that make me feel anxious and stressed (SD= 1.228, n=248). The composite average job stress scale was 2.2796 (SD =.74187) which was moderate rating indicating that on average, the faculty had moderate levels of stress emanating from their Job stressors.

From the results, it was noteworthy that there was a main concern from faculty about the frequent changes in higher education. Such frequent changes may be associated with the dynamism in the Higher Education sector around the globe. Some of the frequent changes may be emanating from the massification and internationalization in HE. The same is alluded by Marmion, McWhorter, Delello and Julie, (2018) noting that the emerging environment of HE is more turbulent, more competitive, and more threatening today than it was in the recent past.

Test of hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was used for the study.

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between job stressors and faculty performance.

Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Results show that the R-squared is 0.499 meaning that the job stressors was able to explain 49.9 % variations in the faculty performance in private universities while the rest were explained by the error term. The F-statistic is 244.929 with a p-value of 0.0000 which implied that the regression model was significant. Therefore, the t-statistics and p-values were reliably used to test the significance of coefficients in the model. Results revealed a beta coefficient of -0.667, ($p < 0.05$) and the model explained 49.9% variation in faculty performance.

The resultant predictive model was expressed as follows:

$$FP = 3.845 - 0.667JS + e, P < 0.05, R^2 = 49.9\%$$

Where;

FP= faculty performance

JS=Job stressors

3.845=y intercept; constant

-0.667=an estimate of the expected decrease in faculty performance corresponding to an increase in job stressors.

The beta coefficient for job stressors was -0.667. This indicates that a unit increase in job stressors would result in 66.7 % decrease in faculty performance in private universities. The t-statistic and corresponding p-value were -15.650 and 0.000 respectively. Therefore, at $P < 0.05$ level of significance the null hypothesis was rejected implying that job stressors had a significant relationship with faculty performance in private universities. The study concludes that there is significant relationship between job stressors and faculty performance.

Conclusion

Results from the study show that there is a significant inverse relationship between occupational stress and faculty performance. Increased levels of job stressors leads to a decline in faculty performance. Results show that the R-squared is 0.499 meaning that the job stressors was able to explain 49.9 % variations in the faculty performance. Results from the descriptive analysis also revealed that a main concern from faculty was the frequent changes in higher education. Today, the HE sector is faced with frequent changes that result to anxiety about job security among the faculty.

Recommendations

Over 40% faculty members recommended support for career development as one of the strategies that can be used to address OS for the purpose of performance improvement. Collaborations with other institutions are recommended as they may serve in offering career advancement opportunities. Partnering institutions may offer scholarships or learning opportunities, for example through faculty exchange programmes or through research collaboration teams.

Results of the study also indicated that majority of the faculty were anxious about the frequent changes in HE while many also felt insecure about their jobs. Employees do not thrive in an

environment of uncertainty. It is therefore necessary to lay strong foundations and strategies for stability, therefore creating an environment where faculty exploit their full potential. Alongside, institutions of higher learning should always prepare for change by laying strategies that take care of frequent changes. Strategies such as operations that are always efficient and effective to withstand the frequent changes are highly recommended. Of great importance is the improvement in students' learning outcomes in order to remain relevant and attractive to potential students. To achieve such objectives, it is recommended that institutions recruit and retain top faculty who can deliver. Such strategies may strengthen the institutions to face the challenges of frequent changes. Change management should be embraced at all levels in the higher education whereby both the managers and employees are trained and empowered through change management. Besides, all stakeholders should be encouraged to be flexible and embrace continuous learning which is strongly advocated for in HR. Each university should be a learning institution. Indeed, the higher learning institutions should be very well prepared for change and position themselves as change agents to empower all the other sectors.

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