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Stressors and their Influence on Job Performance of Career Administrative Staff in University Reform Implementation in Anambra State (Pp. 338-350)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine stressors and how they influence university career administrative staff in the implementation of reforms in Universities within Anambra state. The study, which was based on two research questions, adopted the descriptive survey design. The entire population of 183 career administrative staff in the three universities in Anambra State, were used in the study. A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. Mean ratings were used in answering the research questions. The findings of the study indicated that the university career administrative staff encountered stress due to workload, facilities, student management, administration and professional development. Stress influenced the staff in the implementation of reforms by poor job concentration, delay in meeting job deadlines due to stress anxiety, forgetfulness in conveying major university decisions to people concerned, and non-achievement of expected job results in university reform implementation. It was therefore recommended that government should match reform initiatives with adequate resources and management of universities should endeavor to take appropriate steps with respect to stipulating job deadlines, job specification and provision of physical facilities to reduce work over-load and its associated stressors among career administrative staff.

Introduction

Educational reforms are initiated to ensure that education meets with standards that can be said to be acceptable. Educational reform, as defined by Kolo (2007), is a set of plans and initiative intended to rescue the education system. Educational reforms are meant to bring a new lease of life to the education system. In Nigerian universities, several reforms are noticeable. These include distance learning, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), University autonomy, the consolidation of the tertiary and university education sub sector, emphasis on entrepreneurship training, etc. Okebukola (2003) noted that there is current emphasis on strategic reforms in the universities overall managerial and academic performance. The implementation of these reforms demand planning, resource generation, curriculum innovation, teacher education, and massive renovation of structures. This reform process must “be played out in a period of turbulence, scarce resources, increasing enrollment demands, deteriorating facilities, increasing technology, student indiscipline, and shrinking staff motivation” (Mbagwu, 2007).

These reforms, by implication, entail more career administrative job performance especially by university career administrative staff. Ajayi (2004) stated that the jobs performances of university career administrative staff include management of students’ affairs, planning for university activities, implementing policies and expectations of higher authorities, planning for staff development, trying to cope with allocating scarce educational resources and providing leadership in all areas of university management. University career administrative staff are also expected to service in various committees, communicate vital university information, keep record and files, and perform other tasks assigned to them by the university management.

In trying to meet the demands, which the reforms impose on them, university career administrative staff are likely to encounter stress. Stress refers to any stimulus that interferes with the biological and psychological balance of an organism. Ezeani (2002) defined job stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur with the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Ezeadili (2006) described stress as the adverse reaction people have due to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.

When career administrative staff experience stress due to inability to meet with the requirements of the reform process, the stressors might result in various outcomes that make or mar job performances needed for the

achievement of the university reforms. Benton (2001) reported that these staff are often faced with struggling to maintain a continual balance among the elements of envisioning the future, proper planning, dealing with people, displaying leadership, influencing and motivating, and taking part in the university community activities, which might be stressful to them. Ezeugbor (2004) agreed with this by saying that administration of Universities has been hindered by various outcomes including death of staff, frustration, unmet deadlines, role conflicts, low productivity, poor communication lines, low expectations and poor working relationships among staff.

The strong and widespread allegations that universities both in Anambra State and in the world at large had become incredibly stressful was validated through the work of researchers such as Manthey, (2001); Hastings and Greenshield (2002) and Ezeadili (2006). These researchers had primarily examined the causes, symptoms, and management strategies for stress related to workers rather than to administrators. In comparison to the massive literature on employee stress; very little research had been conducted on the existence or levels of stress among university academic career administrative staff and, the influence on their performance in implementing University reforms. It is against this background that the researcher considers it crucial to investigate stress and its influence on the performance of university career administrative staff in Anambra State.

Research Questions

Two research Questions were stated for the study.

1. What stress factors are experienced by career administrative staff of Universities in Anambra State?
2. In what ways do stress influence the performance of university's career administrative staff in implementing university reforms?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. According to Akuezuilo and Agu (2003) descriptive survey design is concerned with collecting data from members of a population in order to determine conditions that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on and effects that are evident regarding phenomena. This design is appropriate for this study and was used to collect data from career administrative staff of Universities in Anambra State in order to determine the stressors encountered and the influence of stress on the job performance of the staff.

This study was carried out in all the Universities in Anambra State. Anambra State has three fully recognized Universities situated in it (NUC, 2007). These include Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka (NAU), Anambra State University, Uli (ANSU), and Madonna Univerity, Okija (MADONNA). These universities serve diverse student populations and offer several accredited courses.

The population consisted of the entire career administrative staff in the three universities in the area of study. Data collected from the personnel departments of these institutions in August 2007 revealed that there are 64 staff in NAU, 33 in Madonna, and 86 in ANSU Uli. Altogether, there are 183 career administrative staff in the institutions. Since the population of the study was small, the census survey involving all the 183 respondents was used to avoid sampling errors and control maturation.

A researcher-developed questionnaire titled “Career Administrative Stress and Job Performance” (CASJP) was used to collect data. The questionnaire had three sections; A, B, and C. In section A, the career administrative staff were asked to provide information on name of institution and ownership of the institution.

Section B of the inventory consists of 24 stressors clustered under five factors; (1) curriculum, (2) Facilities, (3). Student management, (4) administration; (5) Professional growth and self-satisfaction. Each of the stressors is put on a 4-point scale of extreme stress(4), moderate stress(3), very mild stress(2), and no stress(1). A respondent is expected to tick a point on the scale that agrees with the degree to which the listed stressors brings stress to bear on them.

Section C of the inventory comprises 19 items that are formed to elicit information on the influence of stress on career administrative staff job performance. The 10 items are structured on a 4-point scale of: strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point).

Copies of the questionnaire accompanied by a letter of introduction were administered on the entire career administrative staff in their universities. The filled copies of the questionnaire were retrieved after two days of administration for each university. However, repeated visits with an interval of one week were made to collect the copies, which the researcher was

unable to collect after the initial two days. All the copies were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Experts who are lecturers validated the CASJP. Copies of the questionnaire, research problem, purpose, questions and hypotheses were given to two experts in educational Management and policy and two other experts in educational psychology in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The experts scrutinised the research questions and the questionnaires carefully and made necessary observations that led to some corrections.

The Cronbach alpha procedure was applied to determine the homogeneity of the instrument. This technique is appropriate for this study because it is ideally suited for providing a good estimate of the internal consistency of questionnaire items. Copies of the questionnaire were administered on a sample of 10 career administrative from Enugu State University, Enugu. Their mean responses for sections B and C of the instrument were arranged according to the number of items in each section. Then the Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated based on the clusters in the instrument. 0.84 was obtained for items in clusters 1, 0.81 for items in cluster 2, and 0.80 for items in cluster 3. A coefficient value of 0.83 was obtained for items in section C of the instrument. The standardized alpha value for the entire items was 0.80, which was considered adequate for the study.

The researcher used mean scores in analyzing data for the research questions. The responses were first of all collated and tallied. Then the total aggregate scores for each response were calculated before computing the mean for the item. To enhance computation, the options in Sections B and C of the instrument were weighted based on a four-point scale. The mean of 2.5 was considered as the acceptance level for the items.

Results and Findings

Research question 1: What stress factors are experienced by career administrative staff of Universities in Anambra State?

Table 1 show that the mean ratings of the respondents with respect to 7 items namely: items 11 –14, 16, 19 and 23 were below 2.50. Thus, the statements in these items were regarded as non-stress factors. The mean ratings for the remaining 17 items were between 2.99 and 3.88 showing that

the statements contained in the items constituted stress factors for the career administrative staff.

Research Question 2: In what ways does stress influence the performance of university's career administrative staff in implementing university reforms?

In table 2, it could be seen that the mean scores for items 25, 26, 31, 32, 41, 42, and 43 are less than 2.50. These indicate that stress do not influence the career administrative staff in the ways listed in the items. The mean scores for the remaining 12 items exceed 2.50 showing that stress influences the performance of the career administrative staff in the ways listed in these 12 items.

Discussion of Findings

It was found in the study that the career administrative staff encounters extreme stress due to workload, facilities, students' management, administration and professional. What these job stressors means is that the career administrative staff face several stressful situations in the performance of their jobs. This finding is consistent with that of Akande (1989) who found that dealing with disruptive students, struggling for professional growth, and discrepancies between university policies and directives from boss, are social sources of stress for workers. The majority of the university career administrative staff, in reporting about stressors, viewed budget sources and personnel issues as extremely stressful. The assertion by Giannini (2001) that unpredictable budgets causes stress for community college leaders further confirmed this finding. Many reported personnel grievance issues as creating high stress. Many of the university career administrative staff noted state governance and inadequate facilities as stressful. Information revolving around transportation issues reported by Boggs (2001) was reinforced in the present study because data indicated that delays in transportation were stressful.

This finding is expected. Career administrative staff of university must work hard to implement reform initiatives, render accounts of job performance, participate in university governance, as well as manage staff and students. However, the resources and information needed to perform these jobs are almost always grossly inadequate, thereby putting the staff under strain. As Ezeadili (2006) noted, because of strict recruitment policies in these universities, there is always shortage of staff to perform several university

career administrative roles. Hence, the available career administrative staff suffer extreme stress. Being in attendance at committee, departmental, faculty, or senate meetings, discrepancies between university policies and directives from boss, and elimination of examination malpractices of students could be extremely stressful. There is also general recognition that career administrative staff require professional growth and must meet appraisal/promotion demands. Hence professional growth activities present extreme stress to the staff.

The reason for this finding might be that the social support mechanisms such as study leave with pay, and sponsorship to in-service education are highly limited in the universities. Often times, the career administrative staff has to combine their work with further studies, which may be extremely stressful. Additionally, the career administrative staff work to maintain positive image for the university and manage students with challenging and sometimes aggressive behaviours. Generally, ambiguous directives from superiors and discrepancies in university policies and directives from boss, appears to be more of a problem. Furthermore, the existing resources in the universities are fast dilapidating without adequate maintenance and new ones are not being erected to replace the decaying ones.

It should also be pointed out that university reforms has added a burden of work overload as well as accelerating the pace of work, as a greater speed of response becomes the standard. Besides, a major feature of Nigerian management is the “fire-brigade/rapid response approach to institutional administration” (Ezeadili, 2006). University career administrative staff are given short periods to comply with reform policy directives. Keeping to deadlines can make career administrative staff feel pressured to spend more time working, reporting and encountering stress in their work life.

It was also found that the stress influences the job performance of the career administrative staff in many negative ways. Stress influence the career administrative staff in many ways such as making them: lose the zeal to participate in committees resort to work absenteeism, slow down work pace, delegate some jobs to incompetent staff, delay in meeting job deadlines due to stress anxiety, forgetfulness in conveying major university decisions to people concerned, non-achievement of expected job results, and non-achievement of expected job results. Due to stress, the staff carry out tasks grudgingly to avoid rebukes and disciplinary measures from the management, haphazard supervision of tasks and projects, delay in compiling vital career

administrative document when needed, and ambiguity in the content of personally written letters and circulars. Stress, did not however, influence the staff towards improved job concentration, respond promptly to needed information, Work harder (including evenings and weekends) nor did it motivate them to initiate activities towards improved job performance. This finding is consistent with other findings that workplace stress is having a greater impact on today's university workforce (McGowan 2001, Shader, 2001). This suggests that the negative influences of stress from the most frequently recognised sources have increased.

This finding is not surprising. These stress sources cannot be considered as new, but rather they appear to have increased in relative contributions to negative outcomes. The career administrative staff might have been exposed to extreme stress due to reform demands and this has adversely influenced their overall job performances. If this were so, then the influence of stress is becoming one of decreasing job zeal, concentration, and haphazard job performance. With these negative influences, one cannot expect maximum input from the career administrative staff in the implementation of university reforms.

Conclusion

Career administrative staff of universities in Anambra State face quite a lot of stress emanating from workload, facilities, personnel issues, budgeting, governance and policy issues, professional growth and students administration. These stressors led to delays, lack of zeal, forgetfulness, inadequate supervision and non-achievement of expected job results in the career administrative staff job performance. These, no doubt would limit the effectiveness of university reforms in the State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proffered;

- 1) Government should accompany university reforms with adequate resources needed for the implementation of the reforms
- 2) Management of universities should endeavor to take appropriate steps with respect to stipulating job deadlines, job specification and provision of physical facilities to reduce work over load and its associated stressors among career administrative staff.

- 3) Government should increase funding of universities and the financial benefits of their staff by providing decent accommodation, increases transportation allowances, enhanced pay packages, offices furniture and other work facilities.
- 4) Retreats and workshops designed to rejuvenate, motivate, and inspire toward a less stressfull oriented lifestyle should be available for university career administrative staff as well as other members of their institutions.
- 5) Stress management and motivational courses should be added to educational management and policy curriculums, addressing the magnitude, multiplicity, and responsibility of administration, incorporating techniques for overcoming and managing such concerns.

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Table 1: Mean ratings of the stress factors experienced by career administrative staff of Universities in Anambra State

	Stress Factors	\bar{X}	Decision
	work load:		
1	To what extent do you experience stress with the following:		
2	Stipulating to recommended job standards	3.54	ES
	supervising infrastructural projects or sub-ordinates	3.04	ES
3	Secretarial jobs, clerical jobs, accounting jobs, driving etc.	3.78	ES
4	Keeping records of school inventory such as personnel inventory, materials inventory , etc	3.40	ES
5	Doing office jobs such as treating files, typing letters	3.70	ES
	Facilities		
6	inadequate work apparatus, equipment and facilities	3.49	ES
7	accommodation problems	3.67	ES
8	transportation to and from the university	3.68	ES
9	ill maintained office spaces	3.31	ES
10	non-availability of safety devices in the workplac	2.99	ES
	Students' Management		
11	Handling students' registration	1.02	NS
12	handling cult members in campuses	1.61	NS
13	Attending to students complaints and needs	2.34	NS
14	Students' poor motivation to study	2.04	NS
15	dealing with disruptive students	3.42	ES
	Administration		
16	providing leadership	2.20	NS
17	ambiguous directives from superiors	3.76	ES

18	adjusting to policy changes	3.30	ES
19	lack of superiors' support over subordinates' decision	1.23	NS
20	Delay in promotions, performance appraisals or staff evaluation.	3.88	ES
	Professional growth and self-satisfaction		
21	meeting appraisal demands	3.79	ES
22	heading or being members of committees / boards	1.02	NS
22	inadequate financial resources	3.72	ES
23	lack of opportunity to attend in-service training.	2.04	NS
24	Working over-time in office thereby having little time for personal needs.	3.68	ES

Table 2: Career administrative Staff Ratings of the Influence of Stress on their Job Performance

S/no	Items on the influence of stress	\bar{X}	Decision
25	Improved job concentration	1.04	Strongly disagree
26	Motivation to initiate activities that enhance	1.72	Strongly disagree
27	Delay in meeting reform deadlines	3.78	Strongly agree
28	Forgetfulness in conveying major university reform decisions to people concerned	3.60	Strongly agree
29	Non-achievement of expected university reform results	3.70	Strongly agree
30	Work-role are carried out below the standards stated in reform	3.45	Agree
31	Report university reform implementation activities wrongly	1.49	Strongly disagree
32	Spend unnecessary time worrying over how to complete tasks in line with university reforms	1.67	Strongly disagree

33	Carry out tasks grudgingly to avoid rebukes and disciplinary measures from the management	3.68	Strongly agree
34	Antagonize subordinates and give unclear directives to workers under me	3.17	Agree
35	Lose the zeal to participate in university reform committees	3.76	Strongly agree
36	Resort to work absenteeism	3.14	Agree
37	Slow down work pace	4.00	Strongly agree
38	Delegate some jobs to incompetent staff	3.72	Strongly agree
39	Haphazard supervision of tasks and projects	3.87	Strongly agree
40	Delay in compiling vital career administrative and reform document when needed	3.87	Strongly agree
41	Ambiguity in the content of personally written letters and circulars on university reforms	1.12	Strongly disagree
42	Respond promptly to needed reform information	1.12	Strongly disagree
43	Work harder (including evenings and weekends)	1.16	Strongly disagree