

**FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG
ACADEMIC STAFF IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to assess the factors affecting occupational stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya. Specifically the study sought to determine the effect of organizational communication on occupational stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya. This study employed a cross-sectional survey approach. The target population was 5042 academic staff. Purposive cluster sampling was used to select a sample of 149 respondents. Linear regression analysis was used to determine relationship between stress factors and occupational stress management. The study revealed that organization communication affected occupational stress management as ineffective communication hinders employees accomplishing organizational and individual goals. The study recommends that management in learning institutions and other organizations should adopt effective communication to manage occupation stress in institutions.

Key Words: Occupation Stress, organizational communication and Occupational stress management

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is a frequent problem across occupations and it impacts on job performance. Mahiri and Orwa, (2016) in their recent study on 'Occupational Stress and Employee performance', argue that work performance in any organization is composed of such components as job design ,scheduling, interpersonal relationships , career concerns, management style and organizational characteristics. According to Catarano (2010), in his study on Occupational stress among Canadian Academic staff posits higher education institutions from all over the world have been confronted with a series of complex changes challenging their mandate, traditional practices, authority and organizational structures.

A pivotal part of the university sector is the academic staff. Academic staff has a major role to play in achieving the objectives of their institution (Mahiri & Orwa, 2016). The performance of staff, both as teachers, researchers and managers in an institution determine to a large extent the quality of student experience of higher education and have a significant impact on student learning, and thereby on the contribution that such institution can make to the society. Ng'ang'a, Namusonge and Iravo (2015), in their study on the 'Effects of working facilities stress factors on performance of employees in public Universities in Kenya argues that the academic staff is so important that its health is an index of the state of higher education sector in any country.

Recent surveys in the United Kingdom and Australia have reported a serious and growing problem of academic work stress with several deleterious consequences including decreased job satisfaction, reduced morale and ill staff. Findings of the studies also show that university staff experience high workload demands and long hours. Further there has been increased pressure where public funding of universities has been reduced Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, (2016) in their recent study on 'Percieved Stress amongst University. University education in Kenya expanded rapidly from the year 2004 as a spontaneous response to increased demand for higher education, following the introduction of free basic education. Today public

universities in Kenya are characterized by high student/lecturer ratios. In 2011, a major strike was held national wide in Kenya by all public university workers. This led to closure of several universities affecting learning programmes. According to Mahiri and Orwa, (2016), minimal attention has been given towards ensuring workers in public universities have been provided with the necessary resources, motivation, effective job allocation measures and management to avert continuous strikes.

Statement of the problem

Poor communication is probably the most frequently cited source of interpersonal conflicts (Armstrong, 2005). That there is a link between communication and employee satisfaction. He further says that management and individuals managers need to communicate to employees about terms and conditions of employment, what they are expected to do, learning and development opportunities, the objectives, strategies, policies and performance of the organization. With no effective organizational communication there exist ambiguities and lack clarifies tasks contributing to occupation stress (Robbins *et al*, 2015). Academic staff in Universities has a major role to play in achieving the objectives of their institutions. According to Ng'ang'a, *et al*, (2015), stress among staff in universities in Kenya is an ongoing issue of concern for those involved. From the reviewed literature on occupational stress, there is however no studies in occupational stress management in which the researcher is aware of, that investigates on the factors affecting occupational stress management among the staff in public universities in Kenya. It is against this background that this study attempted to determine influence of organizational communication factors that affect occupational stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya.

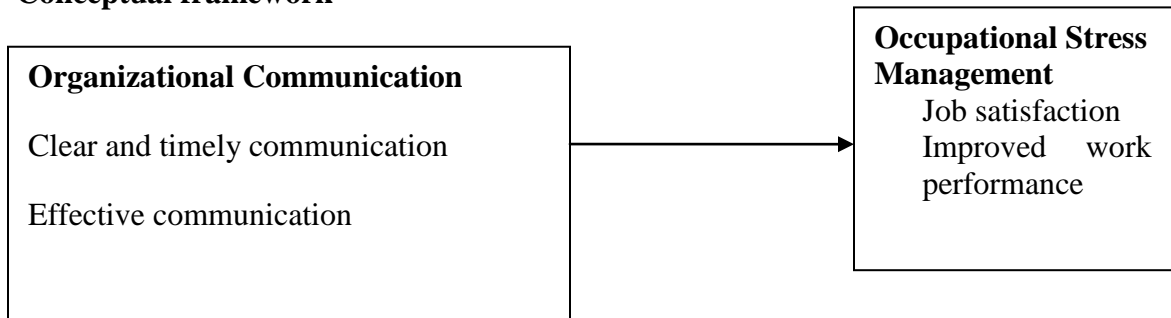
Objective of the study

To establish the effect of organizational communication on occupational stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya

Theoretical Review

The theory was proposed by Herbert Clerk and Susan, Brennan, (1985). The theory describes communication as a form of collaborative action. The criterion of grounding in communication is the mutual belief between conversational partners, that everyone involved has a clear enough understanding of the concept to move forward. According to the theory, for grounding to take place, the parties need to coordinate both the content of communication and the process. The grounding theory of communication states that interpersonal communication is conducted at two levels: establishing a common ground and exchanging substantive information. The process of grounding is to establish common knowledge of what is communicated and what is understood. The way messages are transmitted must be tailored in order to fit the people who receive them. When team members interact in co-located settings, shared visual fields allow more fluid and efficient information exchange. The theory presupposes that effective organizational communication provides a positive effect on improved work performance and job satisfaction. Adequate communication is absolutely necessary in order to avoid if necessary occupational stress.

Conceptual framework



Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Empirical Review

According to Robbins & Judge (2015), communication refers to the transfer and understanding of meaning. No individual, group or organization can exist without sharing meaning among its members. Communication is the glue that holds organizations together. It assists members to accomplish organizational and individual goals, implement and respond to organizational change, coordinate organizational activities and engage in virtually all organizational relevant behaviors Ivancevick & Matterson, (2006).

Robbins and Judge, (2015) asserts that communication modes can be oral, written or non verbal. Oral communication is used in speeches, formal one-on –one and group discussions and grapevine. It is considered the best way to get information to and from employees because of speed and feedback. Its only disadvantage is that message gets distorted whenever it passes through a number of people. Written communication includes letters, e-mail, instant messaging and organizational periodicals. Ivancevick and Matterson, (2006) argues that written communication is generally the most reliable for complex and lengthy communications and can be the most efficient for short messages .However written communication can be limited in its emotional expression.

According to Armstrong, (2005), Poor communication is probably the most frequently cited source of interpersonal conflicts. Communication serves four major functions within an organization namely:-control, motivation, emotional expression and information. According to Robbins and Judge, (2015), there is a link between communication and employee satisfaction. Less uncertainty by employees brings greater satisfaction. The less distortion, the more employees will understand goals, feedback and other management messages as intended. This in turn should reduce ambiguities and clarify the group tasks. There is a positive relationship between effective communication and worker productivity. Organizations will be as effective to the extent that their communications are effective (Ivancevick & Matterson, 2006).

Thus choosing the correct channel of communication, being an effective listener and using feedback can make for more effective communication. Robbins and Judge, (2015) state that management and individual managers need to communicate to employees about terms and conditions of employment, what they are expected to do, learning and development opportunities, the objectives strategies, policies and performance of the organization and any proposed changes to conditions of employment, working arrangements and requirements or structure and policies of the organization. Horizontal communication enhances social support. Members share their problems and joys with others and feel better. Lack of it brings stressful situations (Robbins & Judge, 2015).

From the reviewed literature it is clear that intensive and extensive work has been done on stress and more so on occupational stress management. There is agreement that occupational stress emanates from factors within the organization, factors to do with individual persons and factors from the wider environment. They have also argued that effects of occupational stress are physiological psychological and behavioral in nature. While many organizations have put in place measures such as wellness programs and sabbaticals to mitigate stress they are far from eliminating the challenge. Effective Organizational communication and Job design will address issues or factors of job stress. In addition, exposition of personal disposition factors and their effect on stress management will help to empower employees on how to mitigate occupational stress. This study therefore aims at establishing the factors affecting occupational stress management in public universities in Kenya. This study therefore wishes to establish the effects of occupational stress management among academic staff in public universalities in Kenya.

Research Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research survey design. Descriptive design involves gathering data that describe events and organizes, tabulates, depicts and describes the data. It involved collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The design help the researcher obtain information concerning the current status of the factors affecting

occupation stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya. The study is confined to the academic staff of the 6 public Universities. The target population comprises 5042 members. The design involved dividing the population into mutually exclusive groups (clusters), and then drawing samples from each group to interview. This was necessary so as to ensure that samples selected from each group are represented in the entire sample which was selected for the study. Fisher's formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size of 149 respondents. The study used a semi structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The questionnaire used because it guarantees confidentiality as respondents act with confident.

Data Processing and Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, measures of central tendency and dispersion were used. Measures of central tendency are mean mode and median while measures of dispersion include range, the standard deviation. This was done by the use of appropriate charts and graphs and tables. Further inferential statistics analysis was carried out to assess the strength of the relationships of the variables. The researcher used multivariate regression analysis and tests the outcome at 95% confidence level.

Results and Discussions

The study findings are presented on factors affecting occupational stress management among academic staff in public universities in Kenya. The data was gathered exclusively from the questionnaire as the research instrument. From the study, 121 out of 149 respondents filled-in and returned the questionnaires making a response rate of 81%. 4.2 General information. Majority 54% male while 46% of the respondents were female. Majority 59% of the respondents had post graduate level of education while 41% of the respondents had degree level of education.

The study sought on whether organization communication affects occupational stress management where majority 95% of the respondents indicated that organization

communication affects occupational stress management while 5% of the respondents indicated that organization communication affects occupational stress management. This implies that for effective occupational stress management employees need to feel that they are adequately informed and that they are valued.

Table 2 Factors of Communication and Occupational Stress Management

Factors of organization communication effect on occupational stress management	Mean	Standard deviation
No clear communication between managers and employees tasks	2.83	0.92
Supervisors give feedback on complaints	3.31	0.83
Horizontal communication is encouraged in Institution for social support	3.53	0.80
Grapevine channel of communication help to tap employee anxieties	3.57	0.84
Verbal communication is often used to convey routine messages	3.71	0.76
There is sufficient face to face communication between top managers and employees leaving no room for suspicion	3.36	0.97
Employees do not get feedback on their work Performance	3.09	0.97
Effective communication is fostered which leads to my Job satisfaction	3.07	0.94
Any change is always preceded by clear communication on its intention to employees leaving no room for worry	3.22	0.79
Memos used to communicate routine messages cause anxiety	3.33	0.95
Downward communication follow long red tape causing ambiguities	3.31	0.23

The study sought the respondents extent to which they agreed on the given statements related to organization communication factors affecting occupation stress management. From the findings in Table 4.6, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that verbal communication is often used to convey routine messages, grapevine channel of communication help to tap employee anxieties and horizontal communication is encouraged in the Institution for social support affecting occupation stress management as indicated by mean of 3.71, 3.57 and 3.53 with standard deviation of 0.76, 0.84 and 0.80.

Most of the respondents agreed that there is sufficient face to face communication between top managers and employees leaving no room for suspicion, memos used to communicate routine messages cause anxiety, downward communication follow long red tape causing ambiguities and supervisors give feedback on complaints,

decision making processes and our performance which reduces anxiety affecting occupation stress management as indicated by mean of 3.36, 3.33, 3.31 and 3.31 with standard deviation of 0.97, 0.95, 0.23 and 0.83. Most of the respondents agreed that any change is always preceded by clear communication on its intention to employees leaving no room for worry, employees do not get feedback on their work Performance so they develop anxiety and effective communication is fostered which leads to job satisfaction affecting occupation stress management as indicated by mean of 3.22, 3.09 and 3.07 with standard deviation of 0.79, 0.97 and 0.94. This implies that employees share their problems and joys with others and feel better thus effective occupation stress management. This is in line with Robbins and Judge (2015), who stated that there is a link between communication and employee satisfaction.

Level of occupational stress management

Table 3: Level of occupational stress management

Level of occupational stress management	Mean	Standard deviation
There is effective and clear communication at all times where there is organizational change	3.39	.88
There are clear lines of communication and reporting structures, providing employees with clear definitions of demands and responsibilities	3.44	.67
Good staff relations is fostered through open and transparent Communication and providing feedback on performance through one-on-one meetings	3.41	.87
Open and supportive work environment is created	3.50	.88
There is monitoring of work hours, rest periods and annual leave to ensure staff are taking appropriate breaks	3.71	.74
There is early intervention and resolution of interpersonal/group conflicts	3.55	.86
Staff are treated with dignity and respect	3.36	.79
Good horizontal communication with colleagues and managers is enhanced by fostering good working relationships	3.51	.61

From the findings, most respondents agreed that appropriate training programs were provided for staff to support work related difficulties as indicated M=3.72 and SD =

0.90), that there was monitoring of work hours, rest periods and annual leave to ensure staff were taking appropriate breaks as indicated by M=3.71, SD=0.74). The respondents agreed that existence of early intervention and resolution of interpersonal/group conflicts influence level of occupation stress management as M=3.55, SD=0.86, that good horizontal communication with colleagues and managers was enhanced by fostering good working relationships and that existence influence level of occupation stress management as indicated by M=3.51, SD=0.90) and that open and supportive work environment was created and influence level of occupation stress management at the Universities as M=3.50, SD=0.88. The respondents were neutral on whether existence of clear lines of communication and reporting structures, providing employees with clear definitions of demands and responsibilities influence level of occupation stress management as M=3.44, SD=0.67) and that respondents were not sure on whether there was effective and clear communication influencing level of occupation stress management as M=3.39, SD=0.88) . The finding concurred with Ng'ang'a, Namusonge & Iravo, (2015) who indicated that occupational stress may cause a loss of talent and an increase of cost due to high turnover.

Table 4 : Coefficient Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a		Unstandardized		Standardized		t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.967	.396			4.973	.000
	Organizational Communication	.720	.057	.679		12.683	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Occupational Stress Management

From the regression results found that Organizational Communication affected occupation stress management in public university significantly as indicated by $r= 0.720$, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$, $t=12.683$. This implied that ineffective organization

communication significantly affected occupation stress management .The study revealed that organization communication affected occupational stress management as ineffective communication hinder employees accomplishing organizational and individual goals, hinder coordination of organizational activities and engage in virtually all organizational relevant behaviors. Employees do not get feedback on their work Performance so they develop anxiety and ineffective communication is fostered job dissatisfaction affecting occupation stress management. From the regression results found that organizational communication affected occupation stress management in public university significantly.

Conclusions

The study concluded that organization communication affected occupational stress management as ineffective communication hinder employees accomplishing organizational and individual goals, hinder coordination of organizational activities and engage in virtually all organizational relevant behaviors. Adoption of verbal communication approach grapevine channel of communication help to tap employee anxieties and horizontal communication was encouraged in the Institution for social support hindering effective communication and resulting into ineffective management of occupation stress. lack of sufficient face to face communication between top managers and employees leaving no room for suspicion, memos used to communicate routine messages cause anxiety, downward communication follow long red tape causing ambiguities and supervisors gave feedbacks on complaints hindering effective decision making processes and causing anxiety among employees in public universities and affecting occupation stress management.

Recommendations

The study recommend that management in learning institutions and other organizations should adopt effective communication channel as help to tap

employee anxieties and reduce suspicion, provide feedbacks on complaints to promote effective decision making processes and reduce anxiety among employees in learning institutions and improve occupation stress management. The study recommends that policy makers should develop human resource policies that promote effective information sharing and communication in the learning institutions are well elaborated and clear to reduce misunderstanding and leave no room for ambiguity and reduce anxiety, improve commitment of top managers to support employees and improve employee's relationship lowering occupation stress among employees in institutions.

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