THE EFFECTS OF WORKING CONDITIONS ON ACADEMIC STAFF MOTIVATION AT AFRICA UNIVERSITY, MUTARE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: *A cross-sectional study of the effects of working conditions on academic staff motivation at Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe was undertaken. Through stratified random sampling, a sample of 35 academic staff who represent the three categories lecturer, senior lecturer and professor was selected from a total of 74. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the participants and the study revealed that the working conditions were unfavorable. Motivation was downplayed by factors such as uncompetitive salaries, non-collegiality decision-making, opportunity in career development and academic freedom. This study recommends that Africa University should work towards minimizing hygiene factors and improving motivators if the institution wants to attract and retain experienced and competent academic staff.*

KEYWORDS: Working Condition, Academic Staff, University, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Africa University is a private higher education institution founded by the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Mutare, Zimbabwe. The Africa University charter was proclaimed by the President of Republic of Zimbabwe in March 1992. With an initial student population of 40 in 1992, the University now has over 1,400 full-time students and an additional 1,500 students undertaking block release or parallel programmes. Africa University is pan-African by design with 7 academic faculties and an Institute of Peace Leadership and Governance (IPLG). Students come from 29 countries. Presently Africa University has 74 full-time academic staff. Despite its phenomenal growth in student population, Africa University has failed to attract and retain competent and experienced academic staff. Statistics from the Personnel and Administration office show that Africa University has lost a total of 40 lecturers between 2009 and 2013. This implies an average of 8 lectures per academic year. Moreover, lecturers who leave Africa University for staff development purposes fail to return after completion of advanced studies. The few, who make an effort to report back to work do not stay and move to other institutions in the region. Sometimes, they do not even give adequate notice when they resign from the institution. It is, therefore, imperative, to assess how work conditions such as salaries, collegiality in decision-making, opportunity in career development and academic freedom impact on motivation as measured by job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

LITERATURE

According to Tettey (2006) working conditions refer to a work environment. The role of working conditions is to promote the efficient performance of job tasks by employees (Tettey 2006). Gerber, et al. (1998) have pointed out that working conditions are created by the interaction of employees with their organizational climate. Several studies have indicated that the work environment has an impact on employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction and turnover (Kahya 2007, Buhai et al. 2008, Black et al. 2001, Böckerman & Ilmakunnas 2012, Bigirimana et al. 2015). However, views on what constitutes working conditions differ.

Kahya (2007), for instance, defines working conditions in terms of environmental conditions and hazards. Oswald (2012) expands Kahya (2007)'s definition beyond the physical environment and upholds that working conditions include a physical and a behavioural component. The physical component includes the level of comfort such as office building space and infrastructures (water and electricity) but also the presence of working tools and supplies. Oswald (2012) includes in physical working conditions the office layout i.e. the possibility of privacy. For Oswald (2012) the behavioural component of the work environment includes the level of interaction and level of distraction. For Gerber et al. (1998) working conditions include psychological work conditions and the physical layout of the job. Ali et al. (2013) define working conditions in terms of working hours and workload while Schaubhut, Adams, & Jex (2004) include in working conditions issues of occupational safety and health, maternity protection, work-family issues, home work, working time, wages and income, work organization, sexual harassment, violence at work, workload, worker's welfare facilities, housing, nutrition and environment.

The belief that there is a link between working conditions be they physical, psychological or psychological and job performance implies that the key to motivation is within an employee's job itself (Jex & Britt 2008). This view is supported by Herzberg (1959)'s two-factor theory. This theory is also known as the "motivation-hygiene" or the "dual-factor" theory. According to this theory, there are certain factors in the workplace that cause job satisfaction and others which cause dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al. 1959, Herzberg, 1966). Herzberg (1968) argued that high levels of what he dubbed "hygiene factors" (pay, job security, status, working conditions, fringe benefits, job policies, and relations with co-workers) could only reduce employee dissatisfaction but could not create satisfaction. However, "motivation factors" i.e. level of challenge, the work itself, responsibility, recognition, advancement, intrinsic interest, autonomy, and opportunities for creativity could stimulate satisfaction within the employee provided that minimum levels of the hygiene factors were reached (Herzberg 1968, Hackman & Oldham 1976). In other words, Herzberg (1968) argued against the view that money and compensation are the most effective ways of motivating an employee (Hackman & Oldham 1976).

Therefore, following Herzberg's theory employees can be motivated by job enrichment (Schultz et al., 2010). In other words, employees should be given opportunities to participate in planning, performing, and evaluating their work (Hackman & Oldham 1976, Herzberg 1968 & Schultz & Schultz 2010). In practice, Herzberg (1968) suggest the following: (1) Removing some of the control management has over employees and increasing the accountability and responsibility they have over their work. This strategy would in return increase employee autonomy; (2) Creating complete and natural work units where it is possible. An example would be allowing employees to create a whole unit or section instead of only allowing them to create part of it; (3) Providing regular and continuous feedback on productivity and job performance directly to employees instead of through supervisors; (4) Encouraging employees to take on new and challenging tasks and becoming experts at a task.

In a university context, working conditions is a key to understanding the teaching profession in the world today (ILO, 2000). Working conditions must be viewed as a whole in order to build up a proper understanding of what academic staff do, how much they are paid to do it and how much support and training they are given in order to continue doing it well (ILO, 2000). Working conditions have a direct bearing on the flows of lecturers entering or leaving the profession because they determine how appealing the profession is in comparison to other

types of employment (ILO/UNESCO, 2003). Most universities have been affected by a push for structural reforms that emphasize the adoption of private sector management practices (Hood, 1995). These reforms have resulted in increased emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, formal and explicitly measurable standards, and output controls (Hood, 1995). These reforms have created a tendency towards managing academic institutions with commercial-like managerial approaches (Watty et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2006).In the context of these reforms, it became imperative to examine the impact of human resources policies and practices on turnover, productivity and company financial performance (Huselid 1995).

Motivation can be defined as one's direction to behavior or what causes a person to want to repeat a behavior and vice versa (Huselid 1995). Motivation is used to explain behavior. Motivation represents the reasons for people's actions, desires, and needs (Huselid 1995). A motive is what prompts the person to act in a certain way or at least develop an inclination for specific behavior (Pardee 1990). There are several theories of motivation. They differ on whether one emphasizes natural processes (i.e. drives, needs, desires) or some kind of rationality (instrumentality, meaningfulness, or self-identity). Other theories differ on whether one emphasizes the contents i.e. "what" motivates or the process i.e. "how" to motivate. Systematically, motivation theories have been classified following on their basis on needs, cognitive processes, behavioural patterns and job characteristics.

Needs theories of motivation are based on Maslow (1943)'s hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow (1943) employees have five levels of needs that include physiological, safety or security needs, affective or social needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation. According to Maslow's theory, employees strive to satisfy their needs in a hierarchical order (Jex & Brit 2008). Maslow's theory has been criticized on several grounds. Gilligan (1982) for instance, has criticized Maslow's theory as male-biased and focused on the individual. Gilligan (1982) suggests that theories of human and moral development should include that the "care perspective," which means focusing on the needs of others in order to make an ethical decision (Kyte 1996). Alderfer (1969, 1972) modified Maslow's theory by collapsing the levels in Maslow's theory from five to three: existence, relatedness and growth. Alderfer's theory also called the ERG theory, does not propose that employees attempt to satisfy these needs in a strictly hierarchical manner. Another needs based theory is the Achievement Motivation Theory popularized by McCelland (1961, 1978). According to this theory, the need for achievement is associated with a range of actions which include intense, prolonged and repeated efforts to accomplish something difficult. Thee need of achievement implies working with singleness of purpose towards a high and distant goal (Murray 1938: 164, McCelland et al. 1976).

Cognitive theories of motivation have been dominated by the idea that intensity or persistence of behavior is determined by the combination of the value of the goal the person is trying to achieve and the expectancy that some behavior will be effective in achieving that goals (Brewin 1987). Biddle and Fox (1997) uphold that people are motivated to action in areas of their lives in which they are likely to experience positive feelings of competence and esteem. Likewise, low domain-specific self-esteem or low perceived competence is likely to reduce motivation in related activities (Biddle and Fox 1997). Cognitive theories of motivation have been divided into four groups, namely, equity theories, expectancy theories, goal-setting theories and cognitive processing theories. The equity theory explains motivation in the workplace as a cognitive process of evaluation, whereby the employee seeks to achieve a balance between

inputs or efforts in the workplace and the outcomes or rewards received or anticipated (Ambrose & Kulik 1999). Equity theory was premised on the works of Adams (1963) and the theory is described in two assumptions. The first assumption is that inequity will create a tension while the second assumption is that the tension created will serve as a drive to reduce that tension (Adams 1963). The expectancy theory is premised on the belief that the behavior selection is determined by the desirability of the outcome (Oliver 1974). The expectancy theory was developed by Vroom (1964) and upholds that employee effort will lead to performance and performance will lead to rewards. According to Vroom (1964) rewards may be either positive or negative. Positive rewards increase the levels of motivation among employees whereas negative rewards reduce motivation. According to Bowling et al (2010), higher education institutions can utilize expectancy theory in understanding the determinants of motivations for their academic staff.

Goal setting involves the development of an action plan designed to motivate and guide a person or group toward a goal (Grant 2012). The origins of the goal-setting theory is not certain but Carson et al. (1994) have attributed the first empirical study on the issue to Cecil Alec Mace. In contemporary literature, it is Locke who is considered as "the father" of the goal-setting theory. Locke's work span over thirty years (Locke 1968, Locke at al. 1981, Locke & Latham 1990, Locke 1996, Locke 2001, Locke & Latham 2006). Studies have shown that both feedback from the employer and self-efficacy (belief in one's capabilities to achieve a goal) within the employee must be present for goal-setting to be effective (Wright 1992). Studies by Locke and his colleagues have shown that the more specific and ambitious the goals are, the more they lead to performance improvement (Locke & Latham 2006).

Another cognitive theory of motivation is the social cognitive theory advocated by Bandura (1986, 2002). According to this theory when people observe a model performing a behavior and the consequences of that behavior, they remember the sequence of events and use this information to guide subsequent behaviors (Bandura 1986). In other words, people do not learn new behaviors solely by trying them and either succeeding or failing, but rather, the survival of humanity is dependent upon the replication of the actions of others (Bandura 1986). The underlying assumption to this theory is that people learn by imitation (Holt & Brown 1931). A behavior will be imitated depending on whether the model receives a positive or negative response consequences (Miller et al.1941). Bandura (1977) also linked social learning with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Ormrod 2006). Self-efficacy comes from four sources, namely, performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura 1997)

The behavioral approaches to motivation are based on psychological behaviourism as spearheaded by Skinner (1938). Skinner aimed at building a scientific study of behavior based on observable behavioural pattersns rather than mental or neural processes. For Skinner (1938:457) behaviour is either respondent or operant. Respondent behaviour is caused by an observable stimulus while operant behaviour is where there is no observable stimulus for a behaviour. The job characteristics theory (JCT) was put forward by Hackman and Oldham (1980). For them, any job can be described in terms of five key job characteristics: (1) *skill variety* i.e. using different skills and talents in performing work); (2) *task identity* (contributing to a clearly identifiable larger project); (3) *task significance* i.e. impacting the lives or work of other people is likely to have workers who feel their work has meaning and value. The fourth job characteristic is (4) *autonomy* i.e. independence, freedom and discretion in carrying out the

job and the fifth (5) is *task feedback* i.e. receiving timely, clear, specific, detailed, *actionable* information about the effectiveness of his or her job performance inspire the worker to feel the organization is authentically interested in helping to foster his/her professional development and growth.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a case study and the data collected are qualitative. A stratified random sampling method was used. The population comprises 74 academic staff who were were first stratified into faculties/institute before they were either randomly or conveniently selected from their strata in order to fit the categories lecturer, senior lecturer and professor. I was noted that some faculties do not have professors or associate professors. To remedy this situation, the stratifying process was modified to include one Phd holder, two senior lecturers and one lecturer from each faculty/institute. The final sample was as follows:

1 Ph.D. staff, one per Faculty/Institute   =   7

2 Senior Lecturers, two per Faculty/Institute =   14

2 Lectures, two per Faculty/Institute   =   14

Total sample size   =   35

The researcher personally distributed 35 questionnaires to the respondents who are academic staff at Africa University. The data was collected over a period of two weeks. The researcher received 32 questionnaires (91%), one of the questionnaires was returned blank, making a return rate of 89% of the respondents. The remaining 3 respondents did not return the questionnaires even after following up several times. The non-response rate was 11% including the returned blank questionnaire. Collected questionnaires were sorted out and incomplete questions were followed up. The respondents had an opportunity to ask the researcher questions that were related to the completion of questions. The researcher also explained all vague or unclear areas to the respondents who solicited for more information. The researcher tried to find out if all unanswered questions were omitted by error or intentionally and the researchers established that all the unanswered questions were intentionally omitted.

Data from questionnaires were complimented by document analysis. The data sources included published and unpublished documents, reports, administrative documents, email messages, newspapers or any document that is connected to the investigation.

FINDINGS

Remuneration

According to the Africa University Charter (1992) remuneration and work conditions are expected to be at least 25% higher than the Zimbabwe state universities. The report by the Report of the Africa University Compensation Committee (2011) noted that the AU salaries are at least 31% below average when compared to other universities in the region. The University has been facing challenges in meeting its statutory obligations as stated in its 1992 Charter.

Academic freedom and collegiality (N=31)

Most of the academic staff agreed that they cooperate and support each other in their academic tasks. This was mentioned by 48.4% of the academic staff, which was the majority. Those who disagreed with this statement were very few (Table 4.4). Consistently, 32.3% of the academic staff agreed that the academic staff share academic information with each other at all times. But, 25.8% disagreed and 16.1% strongly disagreed with the statement of sharing information at all times indicating a division among the academics with regard to this statement. This meant that while some of the academic workers were of the view that academic information is shared among the academic staff at all times, others did not think so.

Opportunities for Professional Development

The academics were also divided on the statement that said 'academic staff are given opportunities to express their professional experiences and developmental needs' with 32.3% agreeing and another 32.3% disagreeing with the statement (Table 4.4). About 22.6% of the academic workers neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement indicating that they were not sure about this aspect. The majority 41.9% of these workers disagreed that they are involved in the decision-making process from the faculties up to institutional level. This result further confirmed the earlier finding which indicated that Africa University management style does not allow for academic input in the decision making process. Lack of involving the academic staff in decision making processes is likely to increase staff turnover as their needs, concerns, and contributions are not valued or taken seriously. When they feel powerless in front of management, these professionals are likely to exit from the system. The literature reviewed suggested that, in a situation where individuals have to be part of the decision-making process in an organization but that opportunity is not granted, individuals feel dissatisfied. ….where decisions are hijacked by management to the disadvantage of the academics, the collegial importance of the decision-making process will be lost (ILO, 2000). On a more positive note, the majority 51.6% of the academic employees agreed that they enjoy their academic freedom at Africa University (Table 4.4). This aspect is one of the few positive aspects about Africa University that is likely to keep some of the academic staff at the university.

Table 5: Academic freedom and collegiality (N=31)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Academic staff cooperate and support each other in their academic tasks	16.1	25.8	22.6	32.3	3.2
Academic staff share academic information with each other at all times	9.7	32.3	22.6	32.3	3.2
Academic staff enjoy their academic freedom	9.7	16.1	22.6	51.6	0.0
Academic staff are involved in decision-making processes from faculties up to institutional level	9.7	41.6	16.1	25.8	6.5

Source: Questionnaire results

Research and outreach activities (N=31)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Africa University provides adequate research support to academic staff	13.3	46.7	26.7	13.3	0.0
Research and/or publications are used to promote academic staff	13.3	30.0	23.3	30.0	3.3
Africa University has a research ethics unit to guide research activities of academic staff	6.7	6.7	13.3	66.7	6.7

Source: Questionnaire results

An overwhelming majority (66.7%) of the academic staff members agreed that there is a research ethics unit that guides research activities of the academic staff at Africa University (Table 4.6). Some of them were however, not sure as they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The academics were divided regarding the statement which said 'research and/or publications are used to promote academic staff at Africa University', with 30% of them agreeing and another 30% disagreeing. About 22.6% were also not sure whether research and/or publications are used to promote academic staff at the university.

Results then revealed that the majortiy 46.7% of these academics disagreed that the university provides adequate research support to them (Table 4.6). These results suggested that because the University did not support research among the academic staff, it also does not use research and/or publications as a promotion criterion. These results were consistent with the earlier finding that the management style used at the University does not encourage the pursuance of a career path through staff development. Supporting research and publications among academic staff is one way of supporting their career path and development, which Africa University is failing to do.

Table 4.7: Distributive Justice

Distributive justice and support for academic staff (N=31)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
University provides equipment and resources necessary for the academic staff to execute duties	16.1	35.5	3.2	45.2	0.0
Academic staff salaries and benefits are paid according to qualifications and experience	16.1	38.7	12.9	29.0	3.2
The work of academic staff is evaluated according to the university's set standards	6.5	19.4	29.0	41.9	3.2
Disciplinary procedures are well documented and communicated to all academic staff	9.7	22.6	22.6	41.9	3.2

Academic staff are satisfied with their remuneration package	58.1	32.3	9.7	0.0	0.0
Deans provide sufficient feedback and guidance on evaluation and performance	6.5	29.0	38.7	22.6	3.2

Source: Questionnaire results

Results indicated that the majority 45.2% of the academic staff agreed with the statement that said 'The University provides the equipment and resources necessary for the academic staff to execute their jobs' (Table 4.7). But 35.5% of these workers disagreed with this statement and 16.1% of them strongly disagreed. These results suggested that the academic workers were divided in their views regarding whether Africa University provides the equipment and resources necessary for the academic staff to execute their jobs with some of them agreeing and others disagreeing with the statement.

Most of the academic staff disagreed that their salaries and benefits are paid according to their qualification and experience. This was mentioned by 38.7% of the academic staff and another 16.1% of them strongly disagreed with the statement. In contrast, a smaller proportion (29%) of the academic workers agreed that their salaries and benefits are paid according to their qualifications and experience. Lack of payment of salaries according to qualifications and experience is likely to discourage some academic workers and influence them to leave the institution especially when more qualified and experienced members of staff are lumped together with those with lower qualifications and fewer years of experience.

The study further revealed that the majority 58.1% of the academic staff strongly disagreed with the statement that said they are satisfied with their remuneration packages. Another 32.3% of them disagreed with the statement but none agreed. These results suggested that the academic staff at the University were strongly dissatisfied by their remuneration package. Other researchers found that poor salaries and working conditions have caused university professionals in Zimbabwe to leave the country in large numbers since the crisis in the 2000s.

While 29% of the academic employees neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that said 'the work of academic staff is evaluated according to the university's set standards', the majority (41.9%) of them agreed with this statement (Table 4.7). Most of them also agreed that disciplinary procedures are well documented and communicated to all the academic staff. But, most of them neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that said 'supervisors or Deans provide sufficient feedback and guidance on the academic staff's evaluation and performance'. This result was consistent with the earlier finding where most of the academic workers also took a neutral view when given a statement which said 'academic staff considers supervision and evaluation of their performance by the Deans to be fair and transparent' (Table 4.7). Both results suggested that most of the academic workers doubted whether their evaluation by Deans was fair and transparent. This could also mean that while some of them received feedback on their evaluation by Deans, others did not. Another author in the related literature reviewed asserted the need for the HRM to streamline the pay and incentive schemes and also administration policies in a fair and transparent manner to ensure that distribute justice is not just done but is seen to be done (Tetty, 2006).

Results related to the motivation of staff indicated that 38.7% of the academic employees strongly disagreed and 32.3% disagreed with the statement that said 'academic staff are involved in the decision-making process of the reward system' (Table 4.11). These results

further confirmed the earlier finding that academic staff members at Africa University are not involved in most decision making processes. Most of the academic employees either disagreed (48.4%) or strongly disagreed (35.5%) with the statement that said 'Africa University practices a fair and equitable reward system to encourage and motivate its academic staff'. In other words, Africa University's reward system is not fair and equitable and this discourages the academic staff.

Consistently, most of the academic employees were also of the view that the salary and benefits that they receive (outcome) do not match well with the work that they do (input). This was cited by 41.9% of the academics who disagreed and 38.7% who strongly disagreed with the statement (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11: Motivational Issues

Motivational issues of staff

Statement	Strongly disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Academic staff are involved in the decision-making process of the reward system	38.7	32.3	16.1	12.9	0.0
The university practices a fair and equitable reward system to encourage and motivate staff	35.5	48.4	6.5	9.7	0.0
Salary and benefits (outcome) you receive is in appropriate level in comparison to the work you do (input)	38.7	41.9	6.5	9.7	3.2
There is a difference between the motivation of academic staff who have been working for AU for long time and those who just joined the university	16.7	33.3	26.7	20.0	3.3

Source: Questionnaire results

These and the previous findings implied that most of the academic staff members at Africa University are dissatisfied with their salaries, which are not fair or equitable and do not match with the work that they do. This makes them likely to move if they find better opportunities elsewhere. Most of these workers were also of the view that there was no difference in motivation between older and younger academic employees of the university. Slightly smaller proportions of these workers were either not sure whether age differences in motivation exist or agreed that such differences are there.

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