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SOLVING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICTS THROUGH STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper has been on solving organizational conflicts through stress management for effective office productivity. Organizational conflicts and workplace stress is inevitable in life. However, stress management through early identification and detection, rationalization of issues, relaxation, disengagement from stress situations, distribution of workload and providing a conducive, favourable working environment are some of the measures that could be adopted in solving organizational conflicts. This paper submitted that effective office productivity could be achieved if recommendations such as meeting workers legitimate demands, avoiding conflicting demands on employees, encouraging efficient job distribution in line with skills and competency of workers, providing favourable working conditions and maintaining effective communication between employees and employers are implemented.

INTRODUCTION

Office work demands and pressure occur in all jobs. Heavy office load with decreasing human and material resources are common features in most offices in Nigeria. Increasing demand for higher job performance, the push for improved quality products are all realities of employment experiences of most individuals. When these experiences are combined with individual factors such as extreme shortage in personnel, high stakes accountability measures, diminishing decision-making power, lack of satisfaction and social changes that greatly impact on the work process, the result is extremely stressful conditions of individual worker.

George (2001) observed that stress arising from office activities is a major contributor to such costly problems such as low business output, occupational injuries, illness, poor employee morale, absenteeism and lack of job satisfaction. While stress is readily acknowledged to be a common feature of modern work life, it is often characterized as an organizational factor related to occupational demand.

Workplace stress as described by Mcshane and Glinow (2000) is an adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging or threatening to individuals or organizational well-being. George and Jones (1996) reported that workplace stress occur when workers are overworked, overloaded, perceived job insecurity, low turnover, job disorder and increasing incidence of under payment.

The concept of organizational conflicts

Conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being jeopardized or opposed by a group or another party. There is therefore some disagreement for a conflict to be established. Organizational conflict can be task related, socio-emotional, or conflict escalation cycle episode. Each of these types of organization conflict interrelatedly hinder organizational performance and productivity.

Task-related organizational conflict

This is a conflict ensuring as a result of task performance. Mcshane and Glinow (2000) reported that task-related conflict occur when an individual views the task related issues differently. Although this type of organization conflict can be easily resolved, it possesses the potential of causing confusion, disharmony and in-fighting between and within the organizational structure. When properly managed, task-related conflict may lead to discovery, innovation and shared knowledge, skills and high productivity.

Socio-emotional organizational conflict

In most establishments, interpersonal conflicts are allowed to escalate into emotional battle between employees. It is always personality related and indicated differences in opinion, issues, view points and understanding. Sometimes misapplication of information, misinterpretation of information and misunderstanding of information usually resulted in emotional battle between two or more individuals within the organizational structure.

managed at individual and organizational levels through the following means:

- * identification of stressors at individual and organizational levels,
- * addressing and preventing stress at all levels,
- * developing measure of coping with inevitable stressful situations at workplace,
- * assisting individuals to develop resistance to stress through relaxation, recreation and gainful occupations,
- * effective and efficient identification of symptoms of stress and conflicts,
- * reducing and preventing workplace and organizational conflicts which promote stress and stressful situations in establishment.

Personal and organizational stress management

There is no clear out demarcation between workplace and personal stress (Jones 2002). Workplace stress has been known to aggravate personal stress while most workplace stress are engineered by a combination of personal stresses. Stressful factors outside the work environment can engineer stress for employees and adversely affect their ability to perform their job.

Most importantly, personal problems involving, family, child care, health, job insecurity, job dissatisfaction and domestic violence can precipitate stress both at personal and organizational levels. Stress may also be caused and exacerbated by factors such as financial worries, debts, housing problems, spousal separation, divorce, worries and uncertainty and loss of a loved one. Chase (1995) observed that personal stress level depends largely on lifestyles, environment, and /or individual to cope with life's various demanding situations.

Individuals according to Somavia 1999 contented should be encouraged to make continuous adjustment in life and continuous effort to cope with personal as well as organizational stress and stressful situations. Every workplace is unique therefore, there is the need of customizing solutions to work place stress problems.

Effective communication is both vital and necessary in reducing stress and stressful situations at all levels. Management should communicate genuinely with employees and indicate that management is concerned about individual and workplace stress. It should also provide healthy work environment that ensure stress free workplace. The following

steps could be employed in reducing and preventing both personal and workplace stress and stressful situations:

- * identifying what causes stress and enlisting the situations and events that usually upset, angry or engineer stress,
- * enlisting expectations and plans to fulfil obligations and meet expectations,
- * recognizing human limitations in meeting expectations and fulfilling obligations,
- * prioritising and ranking individual and organizational problems and conflicts,
- * handling each problem and conflict at a time and within its merit,
- * discussing freely with experts the problems and conflicts so identified,
- * seeking professional help and assistance when appropriate,
- * taking sufficient and regular exercise, relaxation and recreation,
- * handling each day's job and demand separately,
- * reprioritising the days task to create balance and effectiveness,
- * eating balanced diet and staying healthy.
- * sharing responsibilities and working peacefully with co-workers,
- * creating industrial harmony,
- * ensuring domestic peace and harmony with spouse, children and others including neighbors,
- * maintaining positive attitude and taking issues of life easily,
- * reducing tensions through effective relaxation.

Solving organizational conflicts through stress management for effective productivity

Stress and stressful situations are part of every day life both at personal and organizational levels. The first step therefore is to recognize a stressful situation and all the elements surrounding it.

For effective productivity to be achievable, the following stress and stressful situation resulting from individual and organizational conflicts must be addressed through:

- * detecting personal stress and recognizing ones reaction to physical and mental stress,
- * reflecting on situations that are stressful and seeking individual as well as cooperate solution,
- * rationalizing, issues and remembering that tension can distort sense of direction and blow issues out of proportion,
- * relaxing by breathing deeply and loosening muscles when in stress,
- * allowing thoughts to flow freely by closing the eyes,

- * disengaging physically and mentally from stressed situation for a period of time,
- * adopting a few hours break in a quiet place to alleviate stressful moment,
- * adopting strategies for conflict management as effective means of handling tensions and regaining a sense of control,
- * utilizing stress relievers measures to ease tension before issues, events and circumstances escalate,
- * distributing workload and delegating responsibilities to accomplish organizational task,
- * encouraging volunteers in achieving organizational goal,
- * relieving extra-workloads as well as building interpersonal ties with subordinates and superior officers,
- * putting more energy into projects that increase productivity and job satisfaction,
- * focusing more on conditions in the workplace that hinder production and that need to be changed,
- * integrating employee that feels isolated by creating connections within the organizational system,
- * encouraging employees to stay motivated by sharing ideas and experiences,
- * encouraging proper rest, balanced diet and effective exercises as important tools in managing stress,
- * encouraging team work and team spirit,
- * encouraging workers to leave worries behind through relaxation and enjoyment of time spent nurturing other goal interest.

CONCLUSION

Stress and organizational conflict are inevitable. What is essentially inevitable are prolonged, escalated, recurrent and intense stress and conflicts. Stress could therefore be managed and controlled by dealing with stressful feelings, emotions and situations.

Organizational conflicts could be solved through reduction in tension, job burnout, improvement in interpersonal transactions and relationships. Efforts should therefore be made to identify and assess problem signals before they occur as these would help to improve morale and reduce stress and conflicts before they occur.

RECOMMENDATION

In line with the facts raised in this paper, the following recommendations are envisaged and made accordingly.

1. Management should realize that workers personal problems may impact negatively on their attitudes and behavior at work thereby reducing productivity and goal performances. Workers personal problems should be attended to.
2. Workers legitimate demands should be met especially those bordering on staff-welfare.
3. Conflicting demands should not be made on subordinates as not to create expectational conflicts.
4. Jobs distribution should be well designed to reduce over load and under load by matching skill levels with task and competency levels.
5. Unfavourable working conditions should be eliminated to ensure conducive environment for high productivity.
6. Employees should be give advance notice on issues affecting their work conditions, salaries, leaves and reduction in staff strength.
7. New employees should be properly informed of conditions of service, duties and responsibilities, as well as organization operations.

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