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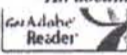
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THE INFLUENCE OF WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT ON WORKERS' WELFARE, PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

The study analyzed the influence of workplace environment on workers welfare and productivity in government parastatals of Ondo State, Nigeria. Two research questions are raised to assist the research. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type. The random sampling technique was used to select 350 respondents. A structured questionnaire with three sub-sections was used to collect data that were analyzed with mean values and simple percentages. The results showed that workplace features and good communication network at workplace have effect on worker's welfare, health, morale, efficiency, and productivity. It was recommended that industrial social workers should advocate with management to create a conducive workplace environment and good communication network that will attract, keep, and motivate its workforce for healthy living and improved productivity and guarantee virile employees, enthusiastic employers and sustenance of the organization.

Keywords: Workplace, Environment, Workers' Welfare, Performance, Productivity

Introduction

The environment is man's immediate surrounding which he manipulates for his existence. Wrongful manipulation introduces hazards that make the environments unsafe and impede the productivity rate of the worker. Therefore, the workplace entails an environment in which the worker performs his work (Chapins, 1995) while an effective workplace is an environment where results can be achieved as expected by management (Mike, 2010; Shikdar, 2002). Physical environment affect how employees in an organization interact, perform tasks, and are led. Physical environment as an aspect of the work environment have directly affected the human sense and subtly changed interpersonal interactions and thus productivity. This is so because the characteristics of a room or a place of meeting for a group have consequences regarding productivity and satisfaction level. The workplace environment is the most critical factor in keeping an employee satisfied in today's business world. Today's workplace is different, diverse, and constantly changing. The typical employer/employee relationship of old has been turned upside down. Workers are living in a growing economy and have almost limitless job opportunities. This combination of factors has created an environment where the business needs its employees more than the employees need the business (Smith, 2011).

A large number of work environment studies have shown that workers/users are satisfied with reference to specific workspace features. These features preference by users are highly significant to their productivity and workspace satisfaction, they are lighting, ventilation rates, access to natural light and acoustic environment (Becker, 1981; Humphries, 2005; Veitch, Charles, Newsham, Marquardt & Geerts, 2004; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Lighting and other factors like ergonomic furniture has been found to have positive influence on employees health (Dilani, 2004; Milton, Glencross & Walters, 2000; Veitch & Newsham, 2000) and consequently on productivity. This is so because light has a profound impact on

worker's/people's physical, physiological and psychological health, and on their overall performance at the workplace. Ambient features in office environments, such as lighting, temperature, existence of windows, free air movement etc, suggest that these elements of the physical environment influence employee's attitudes, behaviours, satisfaction, performance and productivity (Larsen, Adams, Deal, Kweon & Tyler, 1998; Veitch & Gifford, 1996).

Closed office floor plan, whether each employee has a separate office of their own or there are a few people in each closed office, allows staff a greater amount of privacy than an open plan office layout. They have the chance to work in peace and quiet, keeping them focused on the tasks in hand without getting overtly distracted by what their colleagues are doing. It offers employees a thinking frame or be creative without much interruption (Mwbex, 2010). In the open office plan, noise existence is stressful and demotivating, posses' high level of distraction and disturbance coupled with low privacy level (Evans & Johnson, 2000).

With technological development, innovative communication methods, virtual reality; e-market improvement and alternative work patterns, workplace continues to change rapidly (Challenger, 2000). To accommodate these rapid changes while maintaining or improving outcomes, organisations have increasingly turned to some version of environment such as open office space (Terricone and Luca, 2002). This type of work environment supports new styles of working and flexible workplaces which offers interpersonal access and ease of communication compared to fully enclosed private offices. This change to open plan office has increased employee's productivity compared to closed office spaces (Becker, 2002). Furthermore, it is easier to communicate with someone whom you can see more easily than someone adjacent/distant or separated by objects from you (J'Istvan in Business (2010). The open office creates egalitarian system with equal working conditions that reduces the distance between employees and improves communication flow (Brennan, Chugh & Kline, 2002, Hedge, 1986, 2000).

Noise is one of the leading causes of employees' distraction, leading to reduced productivity, serious inaccuracies, and increased job-related stress. According to Bruce (2008), study showed that workplace distractions cut employee productivity by as much as 40%, and increase errors by 27%. Also, Moloney (2011) citing Loftness study of 2003 confirmed the importance of natural light and air (ventilation) to worker productivity. The study showed a 3-18% gain in productivity in buildings with day-lighting system.

Effective workplace communication is a key to cultivation of success and professionalism (Canadian Centre for Communication, 2003). A company that communicates throughout the workplace in an effective manner is more likely to avoid problems with completing the daily procedures, and less likely to have a problem with improper occurrence and will generate a stronger morale and a more positive attitude towards work. When employees communicate effectively with each other, productivity will increase because effective communication means less complains and more work getting done (Quilan, 2001). It removes confusion and frees up wasted time that would have been otherwise spent on explanation or argument (Fleming & Larder, 1999). It makes workplace more enjoyable, less anxiety among co-workers which in turn means positive attitude towards work and increased productivity (Makin, 2006; Taylerson, 2012). Furthermore, another aspect of communication that affects productivity is noise level. Noise has negative influence on communication, frustration levels increase while productivity decreases in relation to persistence and loudness of noise. A reason adduced for this is that spoken communication becomes progressively more difficult as noise levels increase.

Hughes (2007) in a survey reported that nine out of ten workers believed that a workspace quality affects the attitude of employees and increases their productivity. Chandraseker (2011) also confirm that unsafe and unhealthy workplace environment in terms of poor ventilation, inappropriate lighting, excessive noise etc. affect workers productivity and health. Hameed and Amjad (2009) in a survey of 31 bank branches showed that comfortable and ergonomic office design motivates the employees and increased their performance substantially. Based on these findings and literature review, it is observed that most researches on workplace environment and productivity have been concentrated on profit oriented organizations and not much focus have been placed on social service organizations like government parastatals, it is against background that this study will analyse the influence of workplace environment on workers welfare and productivity in government parastatals of Ondo State, Nigeria. Two research questions are raised to assist the research, they are:

- i. What is the influence of workplace features on workers welfare, performance and productivity?
- ii. What is the influence of workplace communication on workers welfare, performance and productivity?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the ex post facto type to investigate the influence of workplace environment (workspace and communication) on workers welfare, performance and productivity. The populations for the study are employees of government parastatals in Ondo State. Three parastatals were randomly selected. They are, Ondo State Electricity Board, Ondo State Waste Disposal Board and Ondo State Hospitals Management Board. A total of one hundred and twenty respondents (management, middle and junior cadres) were randomly selected from each establishment to give a total of three hundred and sixty respondents. Three hundred and fifty respondents returned properly filled questionnaires for data analysis. The ages of the respondents ranged between 22 and 55 years. The mean age of the participants was 35.45 with a standard deviation of 4.18. Their academic attainment ranges from Secondary School Certificate to First Degree holders.

The instrument used for the study, with three sections (A-C) is a questionnaire that made use of existing structured scales with appropriate psychometric properties. Section A consists of questions that elicited socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, educational qualifications, and marital status. Section B was made up of six questions that were adapted from "Work Environment Survey by Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA) 2008". The re-established psychometric property though a pilot study was 0.87. Section C consists of nine questions that were adopted from "Work Environment Survey by Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2008". The revalidated psychometric property of this questionnaire is 0.89. Simple percentages and mean were used to analyze each item in the questionnaire so as to establish the opinion and analyze their feelings viz-a-viz the independent variables and workers performance.

Analysis of Results

From Table 1 (below), it is observed that employees ranked highest Lighting as the most motivating factor under workspace that will affect their performance (mean 3.36). This is because good lighting will promote employee's health, reduction of workplace accidents and increased productivity. Second to influence them under this sub-heading is absence of

noise in the office (mean 3.33). There is less distractions and full concentration on assigned duties. The third, fourth, fifth and six factors in descending order of magnitude of mean affect employees performance under workspace are close office space plan (mean 3.29); Clean and decorative office (mean 3.28); moderate room temperature/ ventilation (mean 3.17) and Open office space (mean 3.12). These findings show that adequate ventilation in any workplace is essential for good health and productivity. A well-designed and efficient ventilation system reduces exposure to airborne hazardous substances thereby preventing work-related illness, absenteeism and turnover.

TABLE 1: WORKPLACE FEATURES AND WORKERS' PRODUCTIVITY

	WORKSPACE	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN
1	Close office floor plan	59 (14.8)	203 (50.8)	99 (24.8)	39 (9.8)	3.29
2	Clean and decorative office	77 (19.3)	201 (50.3)	100 (25.0)	22 (5.5)	3.28
3	Lighting	70 (17.5)	170 (42.5)	107 (26.8)	53 (13.3)	3.36
4	Absence of noise in the office	52 (13.0)	206 (51.5)	99 (24.8)	43 (10.8)	3.33
5	Moderate room temperature /ventilation	84 (21.0)	151 (37.8)	134 (33.5)	31 (7.8)	3.17
6	Open office space	91 (22.8)	205 (51.3)	67 (16.8)	37 (9.3)	3.12

TABLE 2: WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION AND WORKERS' PERFORMANCE

	COMMUNICATION	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN
1	Staff meetings are regularly scheduled in my Division	88 (22.0)	210 (52.5)	88 (22.0)	14 (3.5)	3.07
2	I feel that my department does a poor job of orienting new employees	58 (14.5)	227 (56.8)	98 (24.5)	17 (4.3)	3.19
3	When I am given a task at work, I know what I am expected to achieve	66 (16.5)	219 (54.8)	97 (24.3)	18 (4.5)	3.17
4	Essential information flows effectively from senior leadership to staff	57 (14.3)	200 (50.0)	119 (29.8)	24 (6.0)	3.27
5	I receive meaningful recognition for work well done	55 (13.8)	202 (50.5)	104 (26.0)	39 (9.8)	3.32
6	If I were to suggest ways to improve how we do things, my manager or supervisor would take them seriously	102 (25.5)	214 (53.5)	74 (18.5)	10 (2.5)	2.98
7	I know how my work contribute to the achievement of my department's goals	67 (16.8)	239 (59.8)	80 (20.8)	14 (3.8)	3.10
8	I have opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect my work	84 (21.0)	196 (49.0)	98 (24.5)	22 (5.5)	3.14
9	I receive useful feedback from my manager or supervisor on my job performance	114 (28.5)	197 (49.3)	67 (16.8)	22 (5.5)	2.99
10	Easy receipt of feedback for job done	104 (26.0)	171 (42.8)	109 (27.3)	16 (4.0)	3.09

The meaningful recognition for work well done got the highest significance with a mean of 3.32. Many of respondents (79.0%) agree that giving them recognition for a job well done motivate them for greater productivity and increased performance. Essential information flows effectively from senior leadership staff ranked second with a mean value 3.27, since such communication system stimulate subordinates/employees to feel been wanted and recognized by the superior/management. The third rank with a mean value of 3.19 goes to the feeling that poor orientation to new employees affects workers performance. This is to show the need for appropriate communication with new employees to facilitate their good performance at the workplace. Next in ranking is having appropriate knowledge of what to achieve from an assigned task at work. It has a mean value of 3.17. At the workplace, task designation and outcome are clearly stated for the workers information, hence their focus to attain the stated objective initiate them to good performance and productivity. Having opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect workers work ranked fifth with a mean of 3.14. This show how involvements in decision making process motivate workers to efficient performance. Closely related to this and coming sixth is the fact that knowledge by workers that their personal work contribute to the achievement of departmental goals with a mean of 3.10. This is a clear indication of mutual communication and team work viz-a-viz good performance. Next is the regular schedule of staff meeting according to division with a mean of 3.07. Here workers have the freedom to exchange and express their opinions. Collective decision are taken and been involved in dialogue motivate them to good performance and increased productivity. Having a feedback by workers from their managers or/and supervisor (mean = 2.99) and taking suggestions from workers by managers or supervisors on ways to improve things (mean 2.98) ranked eighth and ninth respectively. This shows mutual trust by both managers and workers and giving each other the opportunity to lend their voices into production hence the improved performance/increased productivity of workers.

Discussion of findings

The finding shows that a quality lighting programme will boost productivity and performance reduce fatigue and eyestrain (assurance of good health for worker), thereby increasing organizational productivity. A better lighting at the workplace will help prevent accidents, help workers improve eye-hand coordination and thereby improve productivity and lower rejection/defective rates. The company also realizes intangible benefits that are associated with better employee morale, reduction in accident rates because workers can see what they are doing better. This is in line with the finding of Hameed and Amjeed (2009) that accomplishing daily task with dim light by employees causes eyestrain, headaches and irritability. Due to these discomforts employees performance are greatly reduced.

The finding showed that the absence of noise increased workers productivity due to less distractions and reduction in job-related stress. It is line with Bruce (2008) finding that reduction in workplace noise reduces physical symptoms of stress by as much as 27% and performance of data-entry workers increased with a 10% improvement in accuracy. Similarly, good ventilation and room temperature increased productivity and reduces stress in workers. Moloney (2012) confirmed this when it was established that controllability of system for thermal comfort and lighting improved productivity of workers between 0.2 and 3 percent.

Though workers are dissatisfied with “open plan” office because of distractions that prevent workers from concentrating on their tasks, however, the prevalence of this finding

shows that employers, on one hand, favour the open plan because it is cheaper to construct and more flexible to reconfigure them, the conventional private or cellular office layout, while employees, on the other hand, prefer the open plan because it facilitates communication and enables workers to exchange information rapidly and informally. Some employees agreed that the open office keeps all employees at the same level with the Managing Director of the company working in the same space as the newest member of staff. This finding is in line with Mwbex, 2010; O'Neil, 2008 that open plan office helps employees to engage with one another on a more regular and informal basis, and fosters an environment of mutual support and cooperation. In general, the physical layout of the workplace along with efficient management processes will guarantee the improvement of employees' productivity and organizational performance (Gensler, 2006; Uzee, 1999).

Another finding from the study revealed that communication plays a key role in the success of any workplace programme and practices. This is in line with the view of Taylerson (2012) who confirms that effective workplace communication helps organizations select and tailor their programmes and policies to meet the specific needs of their employees. By meeting the needs of employees, their morale is boosted, they are psychologically and emotionally stable to perform effectively and efficiently at work thereby increasing the productivity of the organization. Furthermore, it was found that good communication network helps to develop better rapport among employees which consequently makes them to be happier and more successful in their roles at the workplace. The improved morale in turn makes the employees to remain loyal to the organization. This is in consonance with Dunne (2011) that, effective communication makes employees more informed and naturally more trusting of their colleagues and surer that any dependent work is being done. This position is making the organization to be assertive of their survival and the employees' well-being.

Implication of findings for Industrial Social Work

- ⇒ With the introduction of modern technology and the intent to reduce cost of operations by employers, the industrial social worker should intervene by making sure that the cost reduction does not adversely affect workers. For instance, workspace decisions should be made to create an investment in employees' quality of life. Furthermore, the physical environment at work should be such that will better the employees' health. It would come in form of quality of indoor air (open office place), ergonomic furniture and lighting.
- ⇒ The industrial social workers should advocate in favour of good lighting at the workplace because investment in lighting is to enhance safety. Accident rates are greatly reduced, payment of lower insurance premiums, absenteeism reduced as a result of fewer accidents. This is nothing but improvement of employee's well-being.
- ⇒ The workplace space features are designed to promote collaboration and good interpersonal relationship without being detrimental to output. The industrial social worker should advocate for this because it supports mentoring, problem solving, routine communication and information sharing. The open environment is social, spontaneous and productive.
- ⇒ The industrial social worker should advocate with management to see to the need to create a work environment that attracts, keeps, and motivates its workforce. This is with the intent to make employees enjoy what they do (job satisfaction), feel like they have a purpose (goal orientation) have pride in what they do (job attainment) and can reach their potential (self-actualisation).

Conclusion

Poor and unsafe workplace environment, result in significant losses for workers, their families, and national economy. A conducive workplace environment that aid the performance of work automatically improves productivity improved or adequate lighting improves productivity, fewer rejects, enhanced safety, lower insurance premiums, better morale and increased customer satisfaction. A good workplace communication will involve employees in the development and implementation of healthy workplace practices, virile employees, enthusiastic employers and sustenance of the organization.

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