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Research Application Summary

How organizational behavior contributes to organization effectiveness: Perspectives from RUFORUM Secretariat

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Abstract

In today's organizations, striving to have a balanced work and personal life has become a trending issue worldwide. Psychologists say that in order to have an effective functioning of an organization, it must endeavor to understand individual behaviors of employees working in it, the different work groups and the structures within the organization at large. Employees come with different work experiences, from different backgrounds, practices and culture. When they join organizations, they are expected to relate to the new work groups, cope up with technology, fit within the structure and external social system of the organization. During this process of interactions their behaviors are influenced; - they voluntarily or non-voluntarily start changing the way they think, feel, and act at the work place. "Employees' behavior are greatly influenced by the organizations they work in. What these behaviors are, and how relevant they are in creating effective functioning of the organization is an issue this paper seeks to address. This paper also explains how an organization can nurture and take advantages of these behaviors to improve its productivity and effectiveness.

Key words: Employees, organizational behaviors, RUFORUM

Résumé

Dans les organisations d'aujourd'hui, la tendance s'efforcer d'avoir un travail et une vie personnelle équilibrés est devenu un problème dans le monde entier. Le psychologue dit que pour qu'une organisation puisse avoir un fonctionnement efficace, elle doit s'efforcer de comprendre les comportements individuels des employés qui y travaillent, les différents groupes de travail et les structures au sein de l'organisation dans son ensemble. Les employés viennent avec différentes expériences de travail, d'horizons, de pratiques et de cultures différents. Lorsqu'ils rejoignent des organisations, ils sont censés être liés aux nouveaux groupes de travail, faire face à la technologie, s'intégrer dans la structure et le système social externe de l'organisation. Au cours de ce processus d'interaction, leurs comportements sont influencés; - ils commencent volontairement ou non à changer leur façon de penser, de se ressentir et d'agir sur le lieu de travail. Le comportement des "employés" est fortement influencé par les organisations dans lesquelles ils travaillent. Ce que sont ces comportements et leur pertinence dans la création d'un fonctionnement efficace de l'organisation est une question que cet article cherche à résoudre. Cet article explique également comment une organisation peut nourrir et tirer profit de ces comportements pour améliorer sa productivité et son efficacité.

Mots-clés: Employés, comportements organisationnels, RUFORUM

Introduction

Organizational behavior is a very unique multi disciplinary field that draws its strength and has been influenced by various disciplines; sociology, psychology, economics, medicine, etc. The rise to organizational behavior has been due to today's challenges that comes with economic pressures, globalization, cultural and social changes; and working with people from different cultures, managing workforce diversity, and others. With the concept of the global village, there has been increased need to embrace diversity and technology changes;-high movement of labor from the western world to Africa from different professions, for example, teachers are being imported to work in the higher institution of education from Europe, Visiting professors are being recruited from Europe and other parts of Africa to teach in Uganda and other countries. Doctors are coming from Asia and Cuba to work in Africa, Students and teachers and being exchanged among countries on different programmes. During recruitments process for purpose of diversity and inclusiveness people from different countries are being enrolled. All these have a lot of implications in terms of the different cultures, behaviors, leadership styles, personalities, experiences etc.

For effective functioning of such institutions, it is therefore very important to understand workforce behavior in order for the employees to co-exist. Organization behavior looks at the impact individuals, groups and structure have on behavior within an organization in the process of relating to each other at work place and with external social factors (Müller, 1997). These behaviors are analyzed at different levels in an organization, i.e., individual levels, group levels and organizational level.

Literature review

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) is a member-based consortium of 114 Universities in 38 countries in Africa. The culture of RUFORUM subscribes to the values of ethical business, accountability, visionary leadership, trust, competence, quality service and excellent communication. It is an inclusive, voluntary, dynamic and influential platform of African Universities that co-operates positively and acts dynamically, creatively and with integrity. The primary objective of RUFORUM is to ensure that Universities play a constructive role in National and Africa-wide economic growth, development and transformation, and to create an environment in which African Universities of all sizes and in all agricultural and related sectors can thrive, expand and be competitive and sustainable.

In order to promote ownership of the member Universities while ensuring good international practices and quality, RUFORUM works closely through its governance structure that come from more than 38 countries within and outside Africa. RUFORUM Secretariat, whose major role is to provide technical, administrative and logistical support to Member Universities has recruited staff from the various countries it operates in to work in the organization Secretariat in order to meet its mandate of a regional balanced forum. Currently staff come from Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Key features of influencing organisation behaviour and performance. This paper reviews features that are important for fostering organisational performance as a result of organizational behaviors at individual levels. Organizational behavior at individual levels analyze the characteristics of individual employees and their thought processes that are attributed to their work, including the way they are motivated, how they perceive their working environments, their personalities, values and emotions intelligence level etc.

Personalities. Personality is one of the most important Organizational behavior that is directly linked to performance. Every individuals in the universe is difference from one another in various ways just as we have different DNA profiles. From birth each one is unique and as we grow to adulthood we even tend to have more differences among ourselves because of different work and life experiences, education, etc. Myers- Briggs Type Indicators explains the different types of behaviors:- extraverts, introverts, the sensing and intuition types, the judgemental and perceiving types of personalities, etc. Understanding different personalities at work place enables management to appreciate employee's differences and be able to approach problems in different ways, communicate effectively with supervisors, peers, improve teamwork, resolve conflicts and also be able to adapt to the different management styles at work place.

RUFORUM being a continental forum has embraced diversity in it's operation. It has staff from different countries whose personalities are different in terms of generational differences, ethnicity, professional status, faith and gender. Because of good leadership RUFORUM has been able to manage various projects across the globe with partners stakeholders from the different countries. Strong partnerships and donors relationships have been built. It is therefore evident that workers' personal lives are not completely detached from their employment/working life, and, therefore, understanding of individual life and personality is very important in order for an organization to achieve its effectiveness and efficiency.

Emotional intelligence. The capacity to manage or navigate through emotions in a working environment is important as workplaces consist of different types of people with whom we need to interact and work with despite the fact that we do not share personal lives with them. The ability to be aware of and manage other people feelings normally comes natural in some people, traits that help in improving individual and group work life. When an organization understands that employees are not the same, it is able to bring out the best in them and even each other. This fosters information sharing and constructive feedback, builds meaningful connections, mutual values, respect and trust among employees, fosters collaborative environment and innovations. RUFORUM open door communication and discussions where everyone's' opinions matters has greatly contributed to staff involvement and participation hence increased output. Staff are self-motivated, have good working relationship because one knows each others weaknesses and strengths. Organizations that are able to have active discussions among staff and give constructive criticism usually perform well and achieve harmony and common vision. Being self-aware also means that one is mindful of their own strengths and weaknesses. It is easier to know who is best placed to work on specific projects with specific people.

Less emotional intelligent people in organizations are found to be rigid, arrogant and rude with their own ideas and opinions, they feel they are always right in whatever they say

which in most cases is not realistic. Being emotionally intelligent enables such individuals to shift their perspectives to appreciate that discussions and exchange of ideas is how we learn from each other and improve projects by being open to change and other opinions. Emotional intelligence therefore is a trait that can improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency at work place, and every organization needs to embrace this.

Values. In every individuals there are those convictions that we have towards certain mode of conduct. We tend to believe that there are some conducts which are personally or socially preferable, desirables and non-desirable over others, and this means that at working environment there will be things that we shall agree or disagree to. It should be noted that because goals and employees life purposes are embedded in their values, recognizing and appreciating those different individual values is crucial if we are to build strong teams at work places. It enables management to know what responsibilities and task are to be allocated to individuals or groups, and this makes it easy to manage conflicts as well as in making critical decision by management. Understanding and appreciating people's values help in explaining and predicting the different behaviors leading to high level of staff commitment, loyalty, mutual respects to oneself as well as promotion of ethical behaviors leading to good working relationships and increased partnerships.

Attitudes. When employees join an organization, they come with past experiences, practices and certain customs with them which end up changing their behaviors and attitude about the current organization especially if it is not aligned to their pre –perceived thoughts. These attitudes can become either favorable or unfavorable concerning their work, people they are working with or even process and practices in that organization. This attitude changes over time as an employee gets engaged and involved in the organization, and subsequently employees are able to attach their self-worthiness to their jobs and identify with organizational goals.

In order to achieve organization effectiveness, it is important for management to create good working conditions, flexible and favorable work policies and practices that are fair and equitable to all employees. Staff should be encouraged to participate in decision making process through collective inputs and contributions, open door communication policy, etc. which all contribute to positive attitudes towards work and the organization at large. Cases of absenteeism, and turnover rate will be reduced by having highly motivated work force.

Perception. Peoples' perceptions are always different when faced with situations in a working environment. Two people can have different opinions on the same issue because they have gone through different experiences. Employees see work differently because they have different personalities, different motivation levels, different needs, demographics factors and different social surroundings. RUFORUM management uses different perceptions of staff to improve on its effectiveness. Perceptions during employment interviews have been used to influence hiring decision by hiring qualified labor force based on positive instincts. Such examples include perception regards to someone's work attitude, appearance, body languages, etc. Performance appraisal exercises have mainly been dependent on the perceptual process which are highly linked to outcomes of staff promotion, staff pay

rises, and renew of employment contracts. Organizations need to pay attention to the way it is perceived by staff by encouraging feedback on it's over all work systems. This will provide room for improvements in its performance.

Motivation. Human beings will naturally do things that are of benefits to them. Employees have different needs that they would like to fulfill and that is why they strive to perform to their best in an organization so that they are able to be rewarded for their work. No wonder this leads to the distinct difference between the quality of work of a motivated worker and a non-motivated one. When well motivated, employees' needs are fulfilled and they are able to focus on performance of task as explained in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. RUFORUM has used different motivation approaches to increase on work efficiency and increased productivity.

RUFORUM Management understand the different need patterns of its staff and has been able to create conducive working environment that satisfy every needs. Some of these motivational strategies include but not limited to: having office get together parties, annual leave days, end of year bonus, leave allowance, provision of medical insurance, international travels on different missions irrespective of staff positions, housing and transport allowances paid to staff, gratuity which enable staff to save for the future needs etc. All these have greatly influenced staff performance level and indeed high level of productivity. True, RUFORUM has had to periodically learn from similar organisations.

Organizational citizenship behavior. This is another critical area of organization behavior. Organ (1988) defines Organization citizenship as those behaviors employees exhibit yet are not explicitly rewarded for through the formal reward systems in organizations. Naturally and willingly these behaviors come out of employees and are not even directly linked to their areas of roles, responsibilities and not even requirements in their job descriptions in their employment contracts. Such behaviors have highly improved performance of organizations that nurture and promote them. RUFORUM nature of work requires high level of commitment, flexibility, and dedication, multitasking and going beyond just a "duty call" in order to effectively service the growing needs of the network yet with the same number of employees despite the growth. Half population of staff are always on international travels almost every month to lobby for Partnership, monitor progress of projects etc.

Altruism (Graham, 1989; Organ, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Williams and Anderson, 1991), in an organization are helping behaviors that facilitate work process and prevent work related problems. Such behaviors are directed to maintain peaceful working environment and cheering others to do their work. An example common at RUFORUM Secretariat is attending to guests in the absence of the front desk officer.

Courtesy behaviors are aimed at preventing creation of problems (Organ, 1988, 1990b). For example: serving teas for a colleague busy working on reports, making extra copies of meeting agenda when you are not the Secretary to the meeting, etc. Likewise, Sportsmanship behaviors promotes positive attitude towards work and in most cases the employees are self-motivated. Such employees tolerate inconveniences that come along while they are doing their work without complaining, they understand that things don't have to always go their ways and their suggestions

may or may not as well have to be taken. They sacrifice their personal interest for the good of the work groups (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1999). Other behaviors that have influenced performance also include organizational loyalty – which entails spreading goodwill, promoting, and defending the organization to the external environment (Morrison, 1996) whilst remaining committed to it even under adverse conditions such as dwindling resource base.

Organizations have rules, regulations and procedures in place which are supposed to be obeyed. However, not everyone obeys them. There are behaviors in organizations that just accept organization's rules, regulations, and procedures and adhere to them, even when no one observes or monitors compliance. Such employees who religiously respect compliance have been good organizational citizens and have improved on organizations performance in terms of implementation of organizational policy and influencing others to do the same. The related respect is Civic virtue behaviors in employees that creates their sense of belonging to their organization (Organ, 1988, 1990b). Examples include high commitment to participating in organizations' meetings all the time, always attending organizations functions and parties, representing the organization needs externally, expressing one's opinion about what strategy the organization should undertake, keeping up with changes in the industry that might affect the organization operations, etc.

Organizations that pay attentions to recognize, groom and reward organizational citizenship behaviors without doubt will always achieve their goals and objectives. These behaviors greatly promoted innovations and creativity at work places which improve one's task as well as overall organizational performance. It increases employee's morale, satisfaction, loyalty and commitment at work and also promote good working relationship among teams, supervisors and management. Employees feel the worthiness of commitment and approach work with extra enthusiasm and efforts to meet both individual, groups and organizational objectives and targets.

Organization behaviors at Group level

Individuals in organization work in a group together to achieve particular objectives whether formal or informal. Work groups are the basic building blocks of an organization that contributes to organizational effectiveness when goals are aligned with that of the organization. The strength and commitment of work group structures are normally determined by the trust employees have in the organization and its leadership. These are directly related to the quality of decision making, internal and external communication, conflicts and team management, use of Organizational politics and powers, etc.

Working in groups or teams are inevitable if an organization is to achieve its mission. Working in group provides a sense of security, belonging, mutual responsibility and accountability. For xample RUFORUM engages teams in Proposal writing and Training that involves teams across different units working together on particular projects. This has built positive interdepartmental relationship from the multi-disciplinary staff, promoted effective open communication channels, good negotiation and partnership skills have been built, diversity has been embraced, and it has been possible to blend the different personality to work together in harmony.

Leadership. The success of an organization is attributed to the type of leadership it has. Because leadership is ability and skills that cannot be taught unlike in management but it has influence over performance either positively or negatively. Organization that have adopted the most favorable leadership style have often seen improvement in performance levels. Use of democratic, pace setting and motivating leadership styles have proven to forge consensus and builds relationship that enhance performance. Pacesetting leaders set performance targets, involve the employees, empower and equip them to achieve these targets through mentoring, training and coaching. It is important to note that reward to high performance and achievements are key in order to motivate employees. Leaders need to be foresighted, mentor staff but also be decisive. A leader should certainly reward good performance but also sanction weak performance. Invariably, good performance has been rewarded through bonuses, education allowance and holidays, etc. However poor performance by staff have also been negatively rewarded through denial of some benefits; “Carrot and stick reward system”. Good leaders get results through involving the people in the decision making process and using participatory approaches in order to achieve results. It should therefore, be noted that, a good leader is not that who uses the best leadership styles. Rather one who is able to use all the different leadership styles as per the different organization dynamics and situations.

Power in organizations. The ability of one person or group of persons to influence the behavior of others to do things the way he/she/they want is called power (Kaplan, 1964). Power has both positive and negative consequences in an organization. When leaders within organizations use power to align the entire organization to move towards achieving its goals it becomes positive use of power. However, it can as well be very intoxicated and devastating when abused as seen in high profile cases in some heads of organizations and government leaders. “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Dalberg-Acton and Acton, 1949).

Power provides clear directions by leaders in authority, and helps to get fast access to decision makers in higher authorities, frequent contact with them, easy to manage processes and create structures within organizations as well as articulating organizational goals and helping employees improve on their performance. Powers should not be used by those who possess it to make orders or by threatening the employees with punishment if they don't comply, threats for demotions, cut offs, becoming so bureaucratic unnecessarily, bully, undermining lower positions, manipulating others, harassing and negatively influencing others, etc. but rather to motivate, reward, respect, recognize, empower, mentor, equip, appreciate, inspire and positively influence others to achieve the goals of the organization.

Politics in organization. In today's work place full of social networks, politics have become games played in most organizations to influence individuals to do what is wanted. Working in organizations require skills in managing conflicting interests and shifting power bases and relationships in order to achieve results. Politics is part of organization life and can be used during conversations, while executing roles, in meetings or at any event. It is required in order for things to run smoothly in organization and leaders use it to acquire and retain power that is used to accomplish major organization goals. Management ought to encourage positive politicking and avoid negative politics which behaviors are for self-gains and can effect performance, eg. Manipulation of people, intentionally controlling information flow within organization by making it secret and incomplete or even giving wrong information, forming

negative aspects on others, blaming others and not accepting one's faults, bypassing the chain of command to get approval for a special project, going through improper channels to obtain special favors, or lobbying high-level managers just before they make a promotion decision etc. These types of actions undermine fairness in the organization and because not everyone engages in politicking to meet their own objectives it may lead to resentment (Parker *et al.*, 1995).

In overly driven political organization employees become less committed to the organization, have lower job satisfaction, perform worse on the job, develop bad attitude towards colleagues and bosses, have higher levels of job anxiety and depression (Byrne *et al.*, 2005). It is therefore important to be aware of potential destruction of organization politics in order to reduce on the negative effects that can retard performance, morale and kills innovations.

Organizational behavior at Organization level. Policies, procedure, rules and regulation serves as the building blocks of organizational structures and culture with direct impact on human resource output. These when well managed contributes to high level of productivity, low turnover rate, motivated and satisfied work force and positive work place behaviors because focus is on how people and organization structure their working relationship with the external environment.

Organizational Change. Change is necessary for survival and growth of individuals and organization. Changes can be caused due to a number of factors in organization such as globalization, technology, organizational growth, work systems, change in structures, strategies, policies, procedures or even culture. Some times change is planned and sometimes not planned because of uncontrolled external factors. These can alter the way in which an organization operates and so management need to have effective people management in order for change to be used productively and also to retain knowledge base by coming up with clear retention strategies. It is important for management to plan for change and improvise effective strategies of introducing change through involving and participatory approaches in order to minimize resistance and associated impact of change like insecurities, stress, anxiety, demotivated, fear for uncertainty etc. But leaders most especially see change as a positive trend, requiring adjustments and avoiding sticking to the past ethics that do not casue forward movement in an organisation. This is often very challenging not only to the leaders but also employees. Part of the challenge relate to living in a 'comfortable Zone' not recognising the new demands, or keeping the old adage 'we have always done it this way' or we are untouchable.

Organizational structures. The degree to which an organization is centralized and formalized and the levels of hierarchies it has are very crucial in determining effective organizational structures because it determines organization innovativeness and effectiveness as well as behaviors of employees. With today's changing working environment of organizations there is need for have structures that facilitate information flow and reduce response time with limited reporting lines. These helps reduce on bureaucracy and it then becomes easy for decision making. Organization with lean and

decentralized structures have in most case performed well because of the high level of employees empowerment, fast decision making and employee equity at work places. Keeping the size of the organization structures tall results into greater opportunities for management to supervise and monitor employee activities, great job satisfaction and involvement (Peter and Siegel, 2006). However, thin structures are easier to coordinate and are generally effective. Much as such structure has limited opportunities for advancement and growth, management should put emphasis in providing sense of job security to staff in order to boost performance in an organization.

Organizational culture. Culture deals with past and current assumptions, experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, customs etc. RUFORUM has created a culture that staff feel proud to associate with. This is largely due to the fact that the focus on its beliefs and staff have built good relationship, made RUFORUM competitive in the market, improved on its brand image, and created good customer client relationship with its partners because of its culture. This has reduced turnover rate, attracted talented skilled personnel into the organization and also increased its visibility and reputation across the network. Staff sense of identity and belonging has increased as well as promoting commitment amongst employees to achieve organizational goals. This has led to its effectiveness both internally as well as with funders and partners.

It is important, however to note that RUFORUM has also had its ups and downs, especially as a result of changes in organisation growth, market changes especially in terms of national and regional policies and funders agendas. Moreover, rarely do organisations exist alone, they must operate in a very competitive and dynamic environments , requiring periodic changes and adaptations. Therefore periodic reviews of organisation set-up and requisite human and financial resource needs and alignment to policy and development agenda to become imperative.

Conclusion

An understanding and application of organizational behavior is important in an organization because it increases effectiveness by providing managers with a set of tools on how to manage its workforce behaviors. Organizational behavior equips management and provide great deal of practical approaches to manage organizational behaviors for effectively realization of organization goals and objectives. It should be noted that much as organizational behavior may not make up for organization deficiencies, may not substitute poor planning, inept organizing, or inadequate controls, it is one of the important Human Resources systems that organization need to pay much attention to because if not managed it can greatly affect performance of an organization within its social system. Peroidic reviews of organisational behaviour vis-a-vis environment on market changes thus a must for organisation effectiveness, competitions and survival.

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