Stress and Time Management Settings in University of Maroua, Cameroon

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The aim of this paper is to examine stress and time in educational management in Maroua University. These two phenomena are profound in educational issues in Cameroon due to the complex administration or management. Education comprised of diversity of activities ranging from administration, discipline, teaching, evaluation and learning. Each of these activities requires time schedule to avoid stress in the face of pressure. Administration requires planning, organizing, controlling, commanding, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. Each of these managing variables requires time, just as discipline, teaching, evaluation and learning should need. The situation may be affected by higher authority interference and cause a rush thus affecting every schedule in the system on this note, it is necessary that every administrator on management cadre should develop a list of activities such as admissions, examinations, sports, vacations and other ceremonies which requires his attention on daily, weekly, or monthly bases and there after allocate in a tentative fashion the most appropriate times for dealing with such activities. Some profile recommendations are: strict adhering to schedules to avoid overlapping or prolongation to other programs; the schedules should be pasted or placed at a convenient point in the office for reference to avoid forgetfulness: as an administrator, time should be allocated for meeting or consulting with visitors and subordinates; he should delegate functions to his accredited subordinates to crave chance or time for essential duty; he should review the school or organization programs on daily, weekly or monthly bases the degree to which his administration goals have been attained and he (i.e. administrator) should crave time for rest i.e. holidays, relaxation and various forms of physical exercises to revitalizes the body for subsequent activities. The paper recommends planning which is vital in management to avoid time waste which is scarce and organizing to avoid repetition and also derailed. Hence, a healthy climate may encourage staff participation in decision making, program, daily routines to avoid time constraint and stress, which by-products are hypertension, insomnia and poor or unsuccessful accomplishment of education programs in Maroua University in particularly and nation – wide in general.

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1. Introduction

Stress and time are two issues that are of profound importance to educators and educationists. In our efforts to place our schools on a sound footing and thereby enhance the attainment of positive school outcomes for the benefit of our society, the two issues need to be adequately and properly managed. However, their coincidental placement or presence as suggested by the topic under discussion should not put us under the illusion that the two concepts, time and stress, have anything more than a spurious association. For this reason, therefore, we would take the issues or concepts individually and discuss each of it at that level.

The concept of stress is popular among most Cameroonians definitions that different people do not readily agree on. Selye (1956) considers it simply as the rate of tear and wear in the body and has proposed the Generalized Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) to describe its mechanism, McGarth (1970) considers stress as a perceived substantial imbalance between demand and response capability under conditions where failure to meet demands has important perceived consequences. But generally, most people consider stress from the point of view of destabilization of the equilibrium of the body mechanism by external factors (Stressors) and the restoration of this equilibrium (homeostasis) is effected by stress responses. In essence, when our system (body) is assaulted by events or incidents that put it in a state of disequilibrium, it musters its available resources to achieve self-protection. It achieves this through stimulating the body organs in readiness to dissipate huge energy reserves in order to counter the assault.

Teaching and educational administration are both characterized are high stress occupations (Milstein and Golaszeweski, 1995). Teachers are generally stressed by the effects of violence, the disciplinary problems encountered in the course of dealing with students, the diminishing purchasing value of the Francs, the possibility that there may be no salary at the end of the month, the increasing social expectation that teachers metamorphose into magicians in order to cure society's ills (Spark, 1979). For administrators, they must cope with the growing and diverse demands from teachers, their own superiors, and the communities they serve. Both groups are often overwhelmed by the mounting paperwork and other time consuming tasks that stare them in the face. The end result of all these are that many talented men and women in the education enterprise who have high achievement expectation become dispirited and disillusioned. Some leave the profession. Those who stay must contend with a multitude of physical, emotional and behavioral stress – related manifestation (Walsh, 1979; Needle et al, 1982). In the Cameroonian situation, Denga (1991) has noted that the need for economic survival, the fight for political supremacy and all that go with it, the intense competition in the classrooms, the routine bustle and hustle of life have all together sentenced the citizenry with hard labor to stress and depression.

Stress may be manifested in various forms including physical exhaustion, hypertension, ulcer, lower back pain, insomnia, overeating, drug or alcohol abuse, mental fatigue, extreme sensitivity, diminishing sexual appetite, occupational burnout, absenteeism, fear of crime, disease, religious disturbances, rage, retirement, etc. the list is almost unending and, perhaps, should suggest the need to scrutinize our personal conditions or problems with a view to ascertaining whether or not they are stress-related.

Over the decades, researchers have worked tirelessly to isolate categories of organizational based stressors (Chernis, 1980; Cooper and Marshall, 1978; French and Caplan, 1972). From theirs and other studies, Milstein and Golaszewski (1985) have extrapolated the following five categories or sources or organizationally based stressors:

i. Relationships at Work:

The critical issue here is the degree of extent of interaction on the job among workers either on a horizontal or vertical dimension. The horizontal deals with interaction among individuals at the same level while the vertical relates to the interaction among those at different levels e.g. the student and teacher, principal and the school Supervisor, the Supervisor and the Director General in charge of the post Primary Schools Management Board. There is a direct relationship between the extent of trust demonstrated in the relationships among organizational members and their feelings in job satisfaction and well-being.

ii. Organizational Structure and Climate

This relates the degree to which individuals in an organization participate in decision making. Such participation engenders a feeling of belonging. In a school situation, it may include such diverse areas as whether school Supervisors provide effective Supervision and support to schools and teachers, whether communication across the various levels in the organization is clear and sufficient, and the degree to which limitations are placed on the behaviors of members of the system.

iii. Factors Intrinsic to the Job

Different occupations and jobs have their peculiar built in working conditions such as extent, type and place of work, the physical energy demanded of the job, the total number of hours and the specific hours of

the day or night spent on the job, the factors such as space, lighting, noise level and availability of private space.

iv. Role in the Organization

Stress may be induced by some job related factors such role ambiguity (confusion relating to scope and responsibilities associated with the job), role conflict (being pulled in different directions by incompatible demands), roles that are high in responsibility for people, and the perception that there is minimal authority or power associated with one's organizational role.

v. Career Development

These deals with whether or not there is some built – in career progression such as improved status, opportunity for advancement and salary increase, etc., for members. It also relates to job security, perception of low probability of reward for efforts committed organizational progress. The above stressors operate essentially in job-related organization and individuals who are incapable of coping satisfactorily with them soon begin to show manifestations of stress. Denga (1991) has also listed such other stressors of personal type (some individuals have greater drive for achievement), lifestyle, physique, lack of leisure environmental proneness to risk, etc. in all cases, there are two major pattern of stress, First there is the prolonged, degenerative and chronic pattern. This extreme pattern or type may lead to hypertension and various forms of heart diseases. The second type is the situational or transient form. These generally linked with specific environmental events or situation. Typical examples include test stress, marital stress, stress due to some forms of danger, etc. as soon as the object or event that induces the stress is removed, homeostasis is restored. Our concern for transient or situational stress arises from the fact that its occurrence may inhibit an individual effort to function maximally in an educational setting.

1.1. Dealing With Organizational Stress

In organizational situations, the tendency learns more towards creating an environment that is free of stress rather than allowing for the onset of stress and thereafter seeking strategies for its management. Stress strategies for creating a stress-free environment are:

i.   Encourage responsible interpersonal among members of an organization. An organization is made up of individuals. These individuals should be able to interact freely within the limits of organizational rules in order to generate feelings of security, trust and job satisfaction.

ii.   Create an atmosphere in educational and administrative settings in which members of the setting have ample opportunity to contribute to or participate in decisions making and the related processes. Apart from eliminating the related stress, such participation will generate a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Communication of organizational decisions must be made to all members in very clear terms with appropriate explanations where necessary.

iii.   The daily input by workers, in terms of number of hours into an organization should not exceed that needed to maintain them in optional functioning condition on a daily basis. There is very little to gain from a situation where overworked staff continually report of incapacitation due to ill-health. The issue of space and noise in school situations must be adequately addressed in order to promote better mental health and productivity.

iv.   Individuals functioning in official capacities in Schools and related professions must have their roles adequately defined in unambiguous manner for the purpose of clarity. As much as possible, situations where too much power or responsibilities are entrusted in the hands of a few officers must be avoided. Power and authority should be delegated to all those who can use them responsibly.

v.   There should be some School or organizational based mechanism that rewards hardworking individuals with career progression and opportunities for advancement in terms of status, salary and job security. Workers must perceive the probability that their efforts would be rewarded in some positive manner.

vi.   Administrators must on a regular basis conduct surveys using appropriate strategies such as questionnaires, interviews and observational schedules for the purpose of determining current levels of stress among workers and students. Only such a survey would provide the needed data for organizational intervention and also identify stressors operating in the academic, occupational, social and environmental Spheres.

vii.   Where the existing level of stress in an organization exceeds a threshold limit, appropriate stress reduction techniques such as relaxation technique, anxiety management, cognitive appraisal, emotive therapy, behavior modification internationalized dialogue, shared group experience, etc. may be applied by individuals with the experience. However, those with extreme levels of stress must see a doctor.

viii.   Educators and educational administrators must persistently encourage the habit of a good use of leisure time for relaxation, games, rest, physical activities and different forms of mental diversion.

1.2. Time Management

Time is a very important variable in the life of man. Evidence of the significance of time in our life is very apparent in such common statements as "Time is money", "Time waits for nobody", and "There is time for everything", "A tick of a clock is never regained". In an educational setting, the significance of time in the life of learners assumes a certain level of dimension. There is so much to be learned within so short a period of formal exposure to school learning that curriculum developers must apply some degree of selectivity to determining the educational experience to which learners are subjected. The element of selectivity in curriculum development underlines the critical importance of time in school related activities. Even at the administrative level of education, time is no less of critical importance. Yet our schools spend a depressing amount of their time trying to teach children to sit quietly and to act calmly when research resulting points to the fact that intellectual excitement is usually accompanied by physical, verbal and emotional excitement. Similarly, large muscular movements have been shown to facilitate certain kinds of learning. This in essence implies that we, as educators, waste time teaching children to vegetate at nearly aligned desks, and by our success, we hinder the process of education.

2. Literature Review

In educational literature review Carroll's (1963) model of learning has served as a focus for time-related studies. In this model, Carroll proposed that learning is a function of time needed and time spent. However, most studies of school time have concentrated on measurement of learning using such indicators as number of days in the year, weekly, monthly and daily school attendance; number of hours of exposure to instruction as well as proximate measures of time – use such as student attention or engagement. Such related studies do suggest that time spent is positively and moderately related to students' academic achievement. However, if we are to effectively understand the potentials of school time as an agent for ensuring greater or enhanced learning, there is very little to gain from global studies of the effect of time. An average effect size has less information to communicate than to hide since certain dimensions of time are not directly manipulative. Indeed, in order to effectively gauge the effect of time as an educationally relevant variable, there should be studies that accurately measure the link between student engagement and achieved level of learning. Similarly, to ascertain the potential of engaged time, there is also need for studies that document how engaged time is related to allocated time such as length of school term or day.

In the recent decades, legislative houses aiming at increasing academic achievement in schools have relied almost exclusively on increasing the number of days in a school year, number of hours in a school day, and number of minutes allocated to a given subject or topic. However, the actual use of scheduled time may vary depending on such school factors as students' school attendance, the erosion of instructional time by non-academic activities and events, and students' perception of a given instruction in a given subject as necessary for his future. On a general note, differential use of allocated time in classrooms and schools implies that studies of the effect of allocated time are or limited value for understanding the actual effect of increasing the school term or day. Thus, allocated time measures are too far removed from the variable of interest time engaged with instruction to unambiguously tell us about their impact on learning.

Cross-national comparisons of academic achievement and time indicate that in the U.S., the 180 days school year is significantly shorter than the 240 – day year in Japan and Taiwan. In the U.S.A., achievement at the elementary levels is behind that of a similar category of learners in Japan and Taiwan (Stevenson, 1983). Given the above fact, it has been implied that U.S. could achieve comparable academic levels as Japan and Taiwan by increasing U.S. time allotments. Such interpretations obviously ignore the necessary cautions for attributing causality in correlational studies. For it is very necessary under conditions to convincingly argue that time effects are indeed due to time differences and not to some other effects that masquerade as time. According to Karweit (1985), while difference in time allocations may vary with achievement differences, manipulating the time allocations may not drastically alter achievement because time per se may not be the cause of achievement differences. There is, however, the possibility that societal and cultural difference in education, not time differences, is largely responsible for achievement differences. In essence, allocating more time may or may not be a reasonable strategy for increasing achievement.

Given the above and other relevant data, it is apparent that we know very little about reasonable goals for how much of school day can be used for instruction and how much day allocations we may make towards increasing the school year. Similarly, we have little systematic data to guide teachers and students under different settings and for different types of tasks. What is needed is to examine the relationship between time and learning in studies that have measured time as engagement with learning. This is to say that as our present

knowledge is concerned; time management by way of increasing or decreasing length of school year does not have the relevant data to guide such nations.

A basic fact about good and effective time management is that it is a learned skill that an individual teacher or student may habituate once acquired. Habituation implies that ability to manage time effectively may ultimately become a routine part of the individual's day to day activities. It has such advantages as freeing the individual from unnecessary and unproductive dissipation of energy, ensures a much better use of available time and puts more time available in our hands for other productive ventures such as leisure and relaxation. Common sense knowledge indicates that students, teachers and administrators become more efficient on their respective jobs when they plan and manage their time adequately and effectively. Inability to plan an effective use of one's time often leads to indecision and mental conflict Students and administrators who lack time management skills often complain of having too much to at a given point in time. Generally, successful students are those who plan and use their time properly.

What time management calls for is an individual's effort to program his daily routines. It achieves its results by way of getting the individual started with specific tasks, drawing the individuals' attention to the variety of tasks to be accomplished, reminding him or her about leisure time and eliminating the practice of procrastination and thereby avoiding the possibility of a rush at the last minute.

2.1. Recommendations:

Suggestion of procedures for effective time management: The following are some suggestions for effective time management:

i. Every administrator, school principal, or classroom teacher must develop a list of activities that require his attention on a daily, weekly or monthly basis and thereafter allocate in a tentative fashion the most appropriate times for dealing with such activities. Experience or practice in adapting oneself to such a schedule may demand the need for modification, a radical change or for continuity in terms of allocated time in hours or minutes and in terms of the specific times of the day allocated for a specific activity.

ii. It may be essential to have such a schedule placed or pasted at a convenient point in the office where it may be referred to at will for the sake of guidance. Given the limitations of the human memory, a display of one's work schedule may become easily understandable. For administrators who enjoy the services of secretaries, the schedule may be kept and maintained by such a personnel while also maintaining the responsibility of acquainting or reminding the boss of the next schedule of activity. Once a schedule has been regularized and the administrator is therefore comfortable operating it, efforts must be made to, as such as possible, keep to it. However, the need for flexibility may be respected as demanded by specific occasions or events.

iii. Administrators are public servants. They require some time for meeting or consulting with visitors and subordinates. While such consultations are part of the administrator's daily routines, care must be taken to ensure that they do not consume the entire working hours of the administrators. Many administrators have developed the strategy of depicting conspicuous notices on their doors that specifically indicate times for meeting different categories of visitors. A good practice is to refer visitors with certain categories of need to subordinate officers to handle. An effective school principal will have no business settling a fight between two students. He would rather refer all such cases to the discipline master or, perhaps, the school guidance counselor.

iv. Administrators with subordinates must realize that a good component of their skills as effective time managers include ensuring that those under them do adequately and appropriately apply themselves to the responsibilities associated with their offices. To achieve this would require on the part of administrators some degree of supervision, effective communication, good relationship, motivation and organizational discipline. While some of the above factors do not appear to bear any relationship with time management, it would be apparent that their absence in an organizational situation may cause low productivity under which poor time management may be subsumed.

v. An important aspect of good time management requires an effort on the part of administrators to regularly review on daily, weekly or monthly bases the degree to which administrative goals have been attained and the obstacle encountered in a bid to implement one's official or personal schedules. Such a review need not be a personal responsibility of the administrator but should involve the subordinates and, where possible, some superior officers who may adequately contribute to identifying inherent problems related to the attainment of organizational goals.

vi. Avoid the practice of confusing or combining official with personal responsibilities. Taking out hours to receive and entertain personal guests either in the office or in one's personal residence is unproductive since these contribute nothing to the achievement of organizational goals. As also does the often observed

practice among administrators to move into their colleagues offices for the purpose of engaging in idle talks and gossips while members of the public needing their services must wait almost endlessly.

vii. Good and effective time management must be oblivious of the limitations of the human body and mind. While it is expected that public officers painstakingly commit a great deal of their time towards attaining organizational or social goals, wise administrators nonetheless do carve out some time for rest, relaxation and various forms of physical exercises. Excessive work that is not adequately cushioned with rest and relaxation would for sure lead to mental fatigue and physical breakdown – and the various forms of discomfort and loss in man – hours that are associated with them. The loser in such a situation is the individual and the society.

3. Conclusion

Effective time management and absence of stress are two social objectives that are of immense interest to organizational managers. The two objectives aim at ensuring members of an organization in University of Maroua in particular and in Cameroon in general should apply themselves the need to achieving specified social objectives while maintaining individual or personal mental health. These objectives have scarcely been met in Cameroon society given the productively level our economy and the large number of mental cases that stare us in the face on a daily basis. What these circumstances suggest is that most Cameroonians live a life that is full of stress. The entire problems have been the lot of the average Cameroonians for the last three decades. There is very little light at the end of the tunnel. This would suggest that part of the survival of the Cameroonian citizenry may be achieved through teaching citizens the requisite skills for coping with stress. On the part of organizational managers or administrators, they must learn to make every minute count towards their efforts at achieving social or organizational goals in University of Maroua.

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