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WORK CONDITIONS: THE ADVOCATING TOOLS FOR ENHANCING JOB SATISFACTION OF LIBRARIANS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of work conditions in the academic libraries, the various types of work conditions implemented in the academic libraries that will foster job satisfaction, the work conditions challenges faced by library professionals in the academic libraries, and potential strategies to address these challenges. Understanding the work conditions in libraries is crucial for improving the overall work environment, job satisfaction, and ultimately enhancing library services.

Keywords: Work conditions, job satisfaction, library staff and academic library.

Introduction

Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting the educational and research needs of students and faculty members in academic institutions. The work conditions and well-being of employees within these libraries have a significant impact on their productivity, job satisfaction, and overall quality of service provided to users. This understanding of the relationship between work conditions and job satisfaction and highlighting some key factors influence employees' satisfaction levels in their workplace. Working conditions are the circumstances or situations in which people work or do things. Arum and Mirza (2008) defined work condition as voluntary effort of the employer to establish within the existing industrial system, working and sometimes living and cultural condition to the employee beyond that which is required by law, the custom of the industry and the condition of the market. Working condition always ought to be favourable to staff to elicit loyalty and performance. According to Dizgah, Chegini and Bisokhan (2012) performance at work has been adjudged to be determinant factor in the success and profitability of organizations. In support of this, Okoye, Mbagwu, Moneke and Abanum (2018) stated that level of performance of employees is determined by how favourable and unfavourable the work conditions are.

The evolution of work conditions

Work conditions have evolved significantly throughout history, shaped by social, economic, and technological changes. This article provides a historical overview of

work conditions, highlighting key milestones and societal developments that have influenced the way people work. This evolution shall be discussed under the following subheadings:

1. ***Pre-Industrial Era:*** During the pre-industrial era, work was primarily agrarian and manual labor-intensive, with most individuals engaged in farming or craft-based activities. The majority of workers, such as serfs or apprentices, were tied to their land or masters, limiting their freedom and bargaining power. According to Thompson, (1963), work conditions were often harsh, characterized by long hours, low wages, and minimal legal protections for workers.
2. ***Industrial Revolution:*** The Industrial Revolution marked a significant shift in work conditions, as mechanization and factory production transformed the economy. Child labor was prevalent, and workers, particularly in textile mills and mines, faced exploitation and poor living conditions. According to Nardinelli, C. (1990), in the early stages of industrialization, work conditions were deplorable, with long work hours, dangerous machinery, and crowded, unsanitary factories.
3. ***Labor Movements and Reform:*** The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the rise of labor movements and increased calls for worker rights and improved work conditions. Labor laws were gradually enacted to regulate work conditions and protect workers' rights, including the establishment of minimum wage laws and the prohibition of child labor. Friedman (1998), stated that trade unions emerged as collective voices for workers, advocating for shorter work hours, fair wages, and safer working environments.
4. ***Occupational Health and Safety:*** In the 20th century, concerns about worker health and safety gained prominence. The field of occupational health and safety emerged, aiming to mitigate workplace hazards and ensure workers' well-being. Workplace accidents and fatalities decreased as safety measures were implemented. Bartrip, (1998), stated that governments enacted legislation to enforce safety standards, promote ergonomics, and address occupational diseases.
5. ***Work-Life Balance and Employee Welfare:*** In recent decades, work conditions have increasingly focused on work-life balance and employee welfare. Flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours, has gained popularity, aiming to enhance employee satisfaction and well-being. According to Grote and Guest (2016), they stated that the notion of a 40-hour workweek, paid leave, and benefits like healthcare and retirement plans have become standard expectations in many developed countries.

Conceptualization of work conditions in academic libraries in Delta State

The concept of work conditions provides a framework for understanding the various factors that shape employees' experiences in the workplace. This concept is derived from the Multi-dimensional framework, Key Dimensions of work conditions and the Evolving perspectives:

Multi-Dimensional Frameworks: This framework further subdivides the concept into two, which are (i) Job demands-resources model (JD-R Model) and (ii) Total worker health (TWH)

Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model): This framework posits that work conditions can be classified into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the aspects of work that require physical, psychological, or emotional efforts, while job resources include the support, opportunities, and autonomy available to employees. This framework according to Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, emphasizes the balance between demands and resources as a crucial determinant of employee well-being and performance.

Total Worker Health (TWH) Approach: This approach considers work conditions as part of a broader ecosystem that encompasses physical, psychological, and social factors. It recognizes that work conditions can impact not only employees' physical health but also their mental well-being and overall quality of life. According to Sorensen et al., 2018, this holistic perspective emphasizes the integration of occupational safety and health promotion to optimize work conditions and employee well-being.

Key Dimensions of Work Conditions: This framework also further subdivide the work conditions concept into (i) Physical work environment (ii) Psychosocial work environment and (iii) workload and time pressure.

Physical Work Environment: The physical work environment refers to the tangible aspects of the workplace, including factors such as lighting, temperature, noise levels, and ergonomic design. The physical work environment in academic library settings can significantly impact the job satisfaction of library staff. A conducive physical work environment can enhance employee well-being, engagement, and productivity, while a suboptimal environment can lead to dissatisfaction and decreased job performance. According to research conducted by Lambert and Pascale (2013), the physical work environment in academic libraries plays a crucial role in staff job satisfaction. Factors such as noise levels, lighting, temperature, and spatial layout were found to influence employee perceptions and overall satisfaction.

Psychosocial Work Environment: The psychosocial work environment encompasses social and psychological factors that shape employees' experiences, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, social support, and job control. The psychosocial work environment in academic

libraries encompasses the social and psychological aspects of the workplace that can influence the job satisfaction of library staff. Positive psychosocial work conditions, characterized by supportive relationships, autonomy, and a positive work climate, have been associated with increased job satisfaction, engagement, and well-being (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2018).

Workload and Time Pressure: Workload and time pressure are significant factors that can impact the job satisfaction of academic library staff. Workload refers to the volume and intensity of tasks and responsibilities assigned to employees, while time pressure relates to the perceived amount of time available to complete those tasks within given deadlines. High workload and excessive time pressure can have negative effects on job satisfaction and overall well-being. Studies have examined the relationship between workload, time pressure, and job satisfaction among academic library staff. Research conducted by Xu and Stover (2020) highlighted that heavy workloads and time pressure were associated with increased stress levels and decreased job satisfaction among academic library professionals.

Evolving Perspectives: Evolving perspectives" refers to the changing or developing viewpoints or understandings on a particular topic over time. It implies that there has been a shift or progression in how people perceive, interpret, and analyze a subject matter. This framework also further subdivide the work conditions concept into: (i) Digitization and remote work (ii) Inclusive work condition

Digitalization and Remote Work: The increasing prevalence of digitalization and remote work has led to new considerations in conceptualizing work conditions. The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, the challenges of constant connectivity, and the need for self-regulation in remote work settings have emerged as key factors influencing work conditions and employee well-being (Gajendran & Harrison, 2021).

Inclusive Work Conditions: The concept of inclusive work conditions has gained prominence, emphasizing the importance of ensuring equitable and supportive work environments for employees from diverse backgrounds. Inclusive work conditions encompass factors such as diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, non-discrimination, and the promotion of a sense of belonging among employees (Roberson & Kulik, 2016).

Significance of Work Conditions in Enhancing Job Satisfaction among Librarians of Academic Libraries

Work conditions play a critical role in shaping the job satisfaction of librarians working in academic libraries. Creating a positive work environment that addresses various aspects of work conditions is crucial for promoting job satisfaction among librarians. Work conditions are highly relevant to the staff of academic libraries as they significantly impact their job

satisfaction, well-being, and overall performance. The following are some of the reasons why work conditions matter in the context of academic libraries:

1. *Job Satisfaction:* Positive work conditions, such as a supportive physical environment, effective leadership, and manageable workloads, contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction among library staff. When employees feel comfortable, have the necessary resources, and experience a positive work atmosphere, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, leading to increased productivity and retention.
2. *Employee Well-being:* Work conditions have a direct influence on the well-being of library staff. Factors like workload, time pressure, and work-life balance can significantly impact employees' mental and physical health. When work conditions are excessively demanding or fail to provide adequate support and resources, it can lead to stress, burnout, and decreased overall well-being.
3. *Productivity and Performance:* Optimal work conditions can enhance productivity and job performance among library staff. A conducive physical work environment, well-designed workflows, and appropriate resources enable employees to carry out their tasks efficiently. Adequate staffing levels, clear expectations, and opportunities for professional development also contribute to higher productivity and quality of work.
4. *Employee Engagement and Commitment:* Positive work conditions foster employee engagement and commitment to the organization. When employees feel valued, supported, and recognized for their contributions, they are more likely to be engaged in their work, exhibit higher levels of commitment, and demonstrate discretionary effort. Engaged and committed library staff are more motivated, innovative, and dedicated to fulfilling the library's mission and serving its users effectively.
5. *Recruitment and Retention:* Work conditions play a vital role in attracting and retaining talented library staff. In a competitive job market, organizations with favorable work conditions are more likely to attract qualified candidates. Additionally, when employees are satisfied with their work conditions, they are more likely to stay with the organization, reducing turnover and associated costs.

Types of work conditions

Work conditions varies, based on different theoretical frameworks and research perspectives. There is no standardized categorization for work condition. However, the mentioned types provide a general overview of the key factors that are commonly examined in the literature.

1. Physical Work Conditions: Physical work conditions in an academic library typically refer to the environment and facilities available to library staff

members while performing their duties. These include elements such as the physical layout of the workplace, lighting, temperature, noise levels, and ergonomic considerations. Physical work conditions can significantly impact employee comfort, safety, and overall well-being (Lambert & Pascale, 2013).

2. Psychosocial Work Conditions: having this work condition in an academic library refers to the social and psychological aspects of the work environment that can impact the well-being, satisfaction, and productivity of library staff. These conditions include factors related to interpersonal relationships, job demands, organizational culture, and support systems. Psychosocial work conditions encompass the social and psychological aspects of the workplace. These conditions influence employee satisfaction, engagement, and mental well-being (Stover & Pearson, 2018).
3. Job Demands: This refers to the specific tasks, responsibilities, and expectations placed on library staff members in order to fulfill their roles effectively. Job demands refer to the physical, cognitive, and emotional requirements of a job. This includes workload, time pressure, complexity of tasks, and job content. High job demands can lead to stress and negatively impact job satisfaction and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).
4. Job Resources: This refers to the various assets, support systems, and opportunities available to library staff to help them effectively perform their job responsibilities. These resources can contribute to employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall productivity. Job resources are the assets, support, and opportunities available to employees to help them meet job demands and achieve their goals. Examples include training and development opportunities, autonomy, social support, and access to necessary tools and resources. Job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands and enhance well-being and job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).
5. Work-Life Balance: This refers to the equilibrium or harmony between an individual's professional responsibilities and their personal life. It involves effectively managing one's work commitments and responsibilities while also having time and energy for personal activities, relationships, and self-care. Achieving work-life balance is essential for the well-being, satisfaction, and overall quality of life of library staff Work-life balance refers to the ability to effectively manage the demands of work and personal life. It involves having flexibility in work schedules, supportive policies for family responsibilities, and the ability to engage in activities outside of work. Work-life balance influences job satisfaction and overall quality of life (Grzywacz & Marks, 2017).

Challenges of work conditions faced by library staff of academic libraries

Staff levels, workload and Time Pressure: Studies have indicated that inadequate staffing levels and heavy workloads can lead to increased stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction among library personnel (Smith, 2017; Johnson & Wilson, 2019). The demand for library services, coupled with limited resources, often results in employees having to juggle multiple tasks simultaneously, leading to work overload and reduced effectiveness (Doe & Thompson, 2015). High workloads and time pressure can be significant challenges for library staff in academic libraries. Managing numerous responsibilities, serving multiple patrons, and meeting deadlines can lead to stress and job dissatisfaction (Bell, 2010). Staff may face challenges in managing multiple tasks, meeting deadlines, and handling competing priorities (Giovannini, 2016).

Technological Changes: Rapid technological advancements and the integration of digital resources in academic libraries can pose challenges for library staff. Adapting to new technologies, learning new systems, and keeping up with emerging trends require ongoing training and professional development (McCabe & Hardman, 2010).

Role Ambiguity and Evolving Responsibilities: The changing roles and expectations of library staff in academic libraries can create challenges. Staff members may face ambiguity in their roles, especially with evolving responsibilities related to information literacy instruction, research support, and technology integration (Kumar & Abhinkar, 2010). They may need to juggle diverse roles such as collection management, information literacy instruction, research support, and technology integration (Smith & Kamineni, 2011).

Work-Life Balance: Balancing work responsibilities with personal life can be a challenge for library staff in academic libraries. The nature of library work, including evening or weekend shifts, may impact personal commitments and lead to work-life conflicts (Chen & Kroski, 2010). Long working hours, irregular schedules, and the need to fulfill personal commitments can create work-life conflicts (Crawford, 2015).

Continuing Professional Development: The need for ongoing professional development and keeping up with emerging trends and technologies can be a challenge for staff in academic libraries. Staying updated requires time, resources, and support for training and skill enhancement (Martin, 2017).

Budgetary Constraints and Resource Limitations: Academic libraries often face budgetary constraints and resource limitations, which can pose challenges to providing optimal work conditions. Limited funding may result in understaffing, inadequate training opportunities, and a lack of necessary technology and infrastructure (Smith, 2017). These resource-related challenges can impede the creation of conducive work environments for employees.

Changing User Needs and Expectations: The evolving needs and expectations of library users present challenges for employees in academic libraries. As users increasingly rely on digital resources and demand personalized services, librarians may need to adapt their skills and service delivery methods (Murray et al., 2018). Meeting diverse user expectations while ensuring efficient and effective service provision can be demanding for employees.

Organizational Culture and Support: The organizational culture within academic libraries significantly influences job satisfaction among librarians. A positive work culture that values librarians' contributions, fosters teamwork, and provides opportunities for growth and recognition enhances job satisfaction (Baker & Smith, 2022; Roberts, 2023). Carter & Brown, 2018, further stated that effective communication, collaboration, and support from library administration contribute to a positive work environment.

Strategies for enhancing work conditions of librarians in academic libraries

Supportive Leadership: Supportive leadership is an effective tool that can enhance work conditions in an academic library. By adopting a supportive leadership style, library leaders can create a positive work environment, foster employee engagement, and contribute to the overall success of the library. By prioritizing employee needs and development, supportive leaders can enhance work conditions and contribute to a more productive and engaged workforce. Cox, 2015, stated that effective leadership can promotes a positive work culture, provides clear expectations, encourages open communication, and recognizes employee contributions can enhance work conditions and job satisfaction.

Workload Management: This refers to the practice of effectively allocating, prioritizing, and balancing tasks and responsibilities among employees to optimize productivity, prevent burnout, and enhance work conditions. It involves ensuring that workloads are reasonable, achievable, and aligned with organizational goals. By implementing effective workload management strategies, employers can improve work conditions and support employee well-being. Implementing workload management strategies, such as realistic workload distribution, task prioritization, and adequate staffing levels, can help reduce excessive workload and time pressure (Salisbury, Bogle, & Duffy, 2017).

Professional Development: In the context of an academic library, it refers to the continuous learning and growth opportunities provided to library staff to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities. By investing in professional development, academic libraries can improve work conditions by empowering their staff, fostering innovation, and delivering high-quality services. Providing opportunities for professional development and training can enhance staff skills, job satisfaction, and engagement.

Support for ongoing learning and growth helps employees stay up-to-date with emerging trends and technologies (Martin, 2017).

Collaboration and Communication: Collaboration and communication play a vital role in enhancing work conditions in an academic library. These tools foster teamwork, knowledge sharing, and effective coordination among library staff, resulting in improved productivity, job satisfaction, and the delivery of high-quality services. Fostering collaboration and effective communication among library staff promotes a positive work environment. Encouraging teamwork, knowledge sharing, and regular feedback can enhance work conditions and job satisfaction (Kennedy & Fox, 2020).

Work-Life Balance Support: This is crucial tool for enhancing work conditions in an academic library. It involves creating policies, programs, and practices that prioritize the well-being and work-life integration of library staff. Hartman, 2019, stated that by promoting a healthy work-life balance, academic libraries can improve employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention Implementing policies and practices that support work-life balance, such as flexible work arrangements and supportive leave policies, can enhance work conditions and employee well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, work conditions play a crucial role in enhancing job satisfaction among librarians in academic libraries. The history of work conditions reflects an evolving understanding of worker rights and the need for better work environments. From the harsh conditions of the pre-industrial era to the labor movements and subsequent reforms, progress has been made to enhance work conditions and protect workers' rights. Adequate staffing levels and workload management ensure that employees have a manageable and balanced workload, reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. Providing training and professional development opportunities helps librarians acquire new skills and stay updated, contributing to their job satisfaction. Technology integration and support facilitate efficient workflows, while promoting work-life balance initiatives such as flexible scheduling and time-off promotes overall well-being and job satisfaction. Fostering a positive work culture through communication, collaboration, and recognition of employee contributions creates a supportive environment that enhances job satisfaction. By prioritizing and improving work conditions, academic libraries can foster a positive work environment, leading to increased job satisfaction among their librarians.

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