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Alfred Chan Huan Zhi, Mohd Dahlan Hj Malek, Ferlis Bahari

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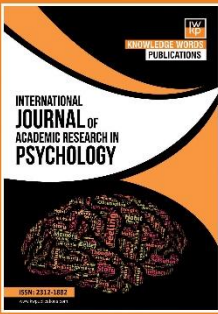
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Organizational Stressor of Staff Negative Behaviors among Higher Education Deans: A Post positivist Multiple Case Study

Alfred Chan Huan Zhi, Mohd Dahlan Hj Malek, Ferlis Bahari
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Email: alfred@ums.edu.my

Abstract

Organizations and institutions today are now seeing rise of organizational stress and how it is directly contributing to the rise of financial and personal cost of mental health issues among its workers (Patty, 2016). The all important field of higher education is not spared and is also undergoing a paradigm shift, as a historically low competition industry to a sudden highly competitive industry (O tara, 2015). With these drastic changes, higher education deans are now plagued by a myriad of organizational stressors. A qualitative case study approach was used to investigated this phenomenon, encompassing the interview techniques of Patton (2002) and the validity and reliability exercises of Creswell (2014). Deans from one institution was found to encounter staff related organizational stressors which consisted of lecturer low performance, lecturer going against dean, lecturer against lecturer, lecturer negative behavior, lecturer low work ethic, and administrative staff negative work elements. This confirmed on the existence of organizational stressors among higher education deans and may be used to spur future research to reduce or eliminated this phenomenon.

Keywords: Organizational Stress, Stressors, Deans, Qualitative, Case Study, Postpositivist.

Introduction

Organizations and institutions today are now seeing rise of organizational stress and how it is directly contributing to the rise of financial and personal cost of mental health issues among its workers (Patty, 2016). Stress-related ailments such as sick leaves, work injuries, absenteeism and compensations have been increasing in all industrial-developed nations of the world such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, European countries and Australia causing much damage to institutions and organizations (Murphy & Sauter, 2003). It is discovered with much evidence that individual exposed to chronic stress will show numerous physiological impairments, such as symptoms of accelerated biological aging, systemic inflammation and shorter telomere length (Humphreys, Epel, Cooper, Lin, Blackburn & Lee, 2012).

The phenomenon of stress is prevalent even in the context of Malaysia. In this country of Malaysia, more people are now expected to experience increased stress due to work pressures as described by the President of the Malaysian Psychiatric Association, Professor Dr. Nor Zuraida Zainal (Menon, 2016). Professor Dr. Nor Zuraida Zainal went on to note that most people in Malaysia find it hard to deal with the problems they face at work, and this may develop into major mental health illnesses such as depression, which is projected to be a major mental health illness among Malaysians by year 2020 (Menon, 2016).

The all important field of higher education is not spared and is also undergoing a paradigm shift, as a historically low competition industry to a sudden highly competitive industry (Otara, 2015). Barnett (2009) equivocally highlighted that over the past two to three decades, universities were faced with major challenges which resulted in significant transformations in the scope of their mission, governance, knowledge production and circulation, and relations with wider national, regional and global economies and societies.

Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, & Nies, (2001) had earlier noted that today's dynamic educational environment serves up challenges that early deans never encountered. For decades, as the authors reported, deans functioned in an environment that remained stable and change, over time, was slow, gradual, and incremental. The stressful component of holding an administrative position in a university has lead many researchers to believe university administrators experience high level of stress. This condition was discovered by Lazaridou, Athanasoula-Reppa, & Fris (2008) in their study that confirmed higher stress scores of university administrators in comparison with non-administrative workers. While many education scholars have written about the organization and governance of higher education, relatively little is known about the individuals who lead and support university faculties (Gmelch & Wolverton, 2002). The consequences of these lacking areas in deanship studies could be dire. As Messina (2008) reported, there seems to be less interest and enthusiasm among faculty lecturers to move into deanship positions as significant retirement from the Baby Boomer generation step down. Not only do they face responsibilities to carry out the day to day business of their respective faculties, they are also an important talent pool for the future leadership of educational organizations (Shults, 2001).

Literature Review

University deans are leaders of faculties, responsible for its academia objectives and production, student learning and progression, faculty members coordination, departmental equipments and budgets management, which are some of the responsibilities weighing on deans on a daily basis. They are also, as probably earliest cited by Dill (1980), as an extension of the presidency or vice presidency and not an extension of the faculty. The American paper-term presidency is equivalent to vice-chancellor in Asian institutions. Regardless of the terms, these groups of university personnel are not spared from the rigorous effects of stress upon their well being.

Earlier papers at the time where university presidents were given the focus of study, the deans of university were also receiving the same investigative treatment in mid 1980s. One of an earlier paper at this time, started investigating university administrators, and already started publishing reports of many organizational stressors which included budget management, recruitment and management of personnel, mediation of conflict, balancing, and balancing the demands of trustees, alumni, and governing agencies (Rasch, Hutchison, & Tollefson, 1986).

Soon after 1980s, the world of organizational stressors has published reports that investigated this group of academia leaders and on what they identified as stressors. Such as a 5 year period research that span across four states in the United States of America (Maryland, North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia) in identifying challenges facing the deans of universities. Major issues the 102 deans identified were very similar to the stressors previously reported in existing literatures. Fiscal problems, remained the very top of the stressors experienced by the deans, with funding, budget cuts, declining resources cited as the primary challenges (Watba, & Farmer, 2006).

An intercontinental study on deanship in the United States and in Australia was also successfully carried by Gmelch, et al (1999). Deans from schools of education business, liberal arts, and allied health profession participated and garnered a total of n=822 deans in the United States and n=196 deans from Australia. The top ten organizational stressors hampering American deans were discovered in the descending order; attending too many meetings, imposing excessively high expectations, having insufficient time to keep current in academics, trying to get financial support for college programs, balancing professional and personal lives, handling faculty conflicts, having too heavy workload, making tenure decisions, having frequent interruptions, and meeting report deadlines. Australian deans had reported similar results, with a slight difference in their ranking of interruptions as a much lesser stressor, but elevating balancing leadership and scholarship opportunities as belonging to the top ten stressors.

Specific research into deans continued to be carried out especially on U.S. deans. Bailey (2008) joined the fray by investigating the stresses and conflicts that U.S. deans encountered. This study yielded several difficulty themes suffered by these U.S. deans. The themes consisted of the difficulty of holding a diverse responsibility, working on a chaotic pace and being burdened with overflowing workload. A major concern identified in the study was the inability for the dean to have the necessary time to think, reflect, and process. Another common issue the study identified was that additional job responsibilities were added due to budget cuts, resulting in positions being lost. Unfortunately for the deans, this has made deans to take on even more responsibilities and, in turn, this has led to more work hours being required to meet the increasing demands.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research is a research approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or grouped ascribe to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research also provides the platform to study a real-world setting, discover how people cope and thrive in that setting, and capture the contextual richness of human experiences (Yin, 2011). Qualitative data are a source of well grounded, rich description, and thorough explanations of processes in a local settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Such approach is emulated in a study by Abela, McIntyre-Smith and Dechef (2003) where a qualitative narrative design was used to assess the life stress of their participants. This is in an effort, according to the authors, to more completely capture the meaning that the individual assign to occurring incidents.

In qualitative studies, Creswell (2009) had identified that this form of research consist of five of inquiry strategies. There are the narrative research, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory studies and case study. This current research will employ the method of case study to investigate the interweaving nature and experiences of the organizational stressor phenomenon

among higher education deans. Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, phenomenon of one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Stake (1978) had earlier made mention of case study existing within a bounded system, which bounds the possible candidates, field, location, time, and specific characteristics, in his early famous case study paper entitled 'The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry'. This study will additionally employ a multiple case study approach. Yin (2009) stipulated that a study may contain more than a single case, and when this occurs, this study is said to have use a multiple-case design. A single unit of analysis can be the subject of an individual case study, but if a study as a whole covers several unit of analysis, the study will then be known to use a multiple case design (Yin,2009). The author further iterated that multiple case designs have distinct advantages in comparison to single case designs. Multiple case design are usually preferred over single case design due to the vulnerability of utilizing a single case. In addition, multiple case design creates the opportunity for contrasting situations and the analytical benefits of having two or more cases may be substantial.

There are four types of paradigms or worldview that inform qualitative research, and identify how these worldviews shape the practice a research, and they are the postpositivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2007).

Post Positivism

The current qualitative research employs a belief system grounded in postpositivism, which is a somewhat scientific approach to research. Similar to the worldviews of postpositivism, this research aims to produce elements of being reductionistic, logical, and emphasis on empirical data collection, cause and effect oriented, and deterministic based of priori theories (Creswell, 2007). This approach are more commonly associated with quantitative research, and views inquiries as a series of logically related steps with the belief in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality and engages in rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. Postpositivism qualitative research such as this, will engage in multiple levels of data analysis for rigor, employ computer programs in analysis, uses reliability and validity approaches, and builds its works around a structure resembling quantitative approaches such as problem statement, research questions, data collections, results, and conclusions).

Interview Type

There are three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews which are the informal conversational interviews, general interview guide approach, and the standardized open ended interview (Patton, 2002). Formulated by the author, who is at the forefront of interview strategies and techniques, each interview approach has its purpose catered to specific studies. The third form of interviewing, the standardized open ended interview will be selected as the form required for the current study. Standardized open ended interview will have a series of questions that has been prepared, carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence as a replication logic approach (Yin, 2009). The intention with this interviewing method is to subject the respondent with the same sequence, the same question with essentially the same words.

Participants and Site of Study

To examine organizational stressors faced by higher education deans, all of the 13 faculty and center deans of a Malaysian public university were listed. They were selected to encompass a thorough study of organizational stressors of the institution. 9 deans resided at the main campus and another 3 deans resided at two different off campus location. They were selected as a purposive sample to explore wholesomely the organizational stressors faced by all deans in the institution. However, only 10 deans gave definitive consent to participate. The agreed 10 deans was thus selected as the final participants for the current multiple case study.

Data Collection

This qualitative multiple case study conducted two phases of data collection. The first was the pilot interview with a deputy dean, as a candidate with similar characteristic status to gauge the feasibility and effectiveness of the questions (Yin, 2009). The second phase of data collection was the main interview which incorporated adjustments and restructuring learnt from the pilot interview. The main interview was conducted on 10 higher education deans in one institution.

Pilot Study

Stake and Merriam (as cited in Turner III, 2010) were reported to not underline the crucially important function of pilot case study. However, a few notable figureheads articulated in favour of running a pilot phase such as Yin (2009). Thus, the current study will follow suit and acknowledge that an important element to the interview preparation of the current study is in the implementation of a pilot test. The pilot test will assist the research in determining if there are flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses within the interview design and will allow him or her to make necessary revisions prior to the implementation of the study (Kvale, 2007). Turner III (2010) recommended that a pilot test should be conducted with participants that have similar interests as those that will participate in the targeted study and that the pilot test will be able to assist the researchers with the refinement of research questions.

The pilot study was carried out on 1st March 2016 with a deputy dean to one of the main study higher education deans. This was in the attempt to find out the feasibility and effectiveness of the newly developed interview protocol. Upon the first question of 'do you ever feel any stress in your position', as an attempt to slowly open up the participant, the researcher immediately encountered objections, rejections, and hindrances when the pilot study's participants responded with 'no'. The researcher proceeded with the following questions, hoping to retrieve valuable insight. The pilot study's participant was found to be responding in an uncomfortable manner throughout, and at times rejecting certain questions. It seems the word 'stress' was also reported in the literatures to carry a somewhat negative perception. Carlin (2010) declared that the doctoral dissertation's interview protocols and questions had been meticulously chosen and were sensitive to the needs of the participants, however the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee emphasized that the word "stress" should not be included in any of the questions. The researcher of the current study had thus avoided using the word 'stress'. All developed interview protocol were adjusted back to not contain the word stress. Words such as challenges, difficulties, and discomfort were used instead and successfully yielded bountiful data from the upcoming main study.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) is a widely-used qualitative data analysis methodology. It is one of a cluster of methods that seeks to identify patterned meaning across a qualitative retrieved dataset. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development and revision.

The Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software was used throughout the data analysis stages of the current study. Atlas.ti is a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data, and offers a variety of tools for accomplishing the tasks associated with any systematic approach to unstructured data, i. e., data that cannot be meaningfully analyzed by formal, statistical approaches (Friese, 2013).

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Lewis and Ritchie (2003) relayed how both the qualitative angle of validity and reliability were still relevant and was found to be able to define the strength of the qualitative data as much as those used in quantitative approaches. Due to the sometimes polarizing terms used in qualitative validity, reliability and trustworthiness, this study will adhere to the qualitative terms of validity and reliability proposed by Creswell (2007). Creswell (2007) advocated that at least two validity strategies be engaged by qualitative researchers in any given study.

This current study employed the use of triangulation as a qualitative validity method. Two different sources of evidence were discovered in complementary with the verbal data extracted from interviewing. These two different sources similarly highlighted on the current case study phenomenon of organizational stressors uniquely faced by higher education deans. The first triangulation material was obtained from video feeds of one of the investigated higher education deans in facing elements of organizational stressor from students due to their dean's certain faculty decisions. The second source showcased the existence of the organizational stressor of deanship role ambiguity and one dean acknowledged on the difficulty by developing a guidebook for new deans towards the respective faculty.

The reliability exercise consisted of a cross-checking or intercoder agreement which was based on whether two or more coders agree on codes used for the same passage in the text (Creswell, 2014). The author suggest that it is not only that the person doing the intercoder agreement would code the same passage of the text but whether another coder would code it with the same or a similar code. This study had similarly enlisted an external expert to review on the coding. Instead of procuring the assistance of faculty peers, the researcher seek the assistance of the figurehead of higher education stress research, Professor Dr. Walter Gmelch from the University of San Francisco (U.S.). During a two month long evaluation period from June to August 2016, Professor Dr. Walter Gmelch, responded with: 'I have reviewed your 95 page document. It is valid and should be reliable. Per my review of the instrument I find the codes/themes are acceptable and would suffice in the research currently being launched.' The researcher acknowledged Professor Dr. Walter Gmelch with much gratitude and appreciation in assisting as an intercoder agreement evaluator.

Human Subject Protection

Yin (2009) strongly emphasized on the specific need for protecting human subjects especially in case studies where nearly all subject matters are about contemporary human affairs. This current case study will adhere to the human protection recommendations stipulated by Yin (2009). Participating higher education deans for the current case study were duly briefed on the nature of the study and what the study hopes to gain from their participation. All participants were assigned a numerical pseudonym in the form of numerals and were not asked of any demographic items for anonymity and confidential purposes.

Result & Discussion

All 10 investigated deans in the institution of Universiti Malaysia Sabah reported experiences of organizational stressor elements arising from their staffs. 4 areas of dean's staff were discovered to constitute as the phenomenon of organizational stressor uniquely experienced by deans. These areas are in the staff's negative behavior, conflict, performance, and ethics. Half of the total investigated deans similarly reported staff's organizational stressor in the areas of negative behaviors and in causing conflicts. A further 2 deans disclosed two identical characteristics of staff's low performance and bad ethics which generated elements of organizational stressor. The final 3 deans reported different staff organizational stressor elements coming from staff's negative behavior and ethics, from lecturer's low performance and from administration staff's low work ethics.

4 deans reported on the organizational stressor element of lecturers performing poorly. DEAN 20160405 and DEAN 20160322 made similar notions on the issue of poor publication performance. Difficulties of lecturers not performing adequately is consistent with a literature report on U.S. deans facing identical predicament on their personnel whom had given up in their academic pursuance (Messina, 2008). DEAN 20160504 and DEAN 20160405 on the other hand made similar remark on lecturers not being involved in application of research grants. Singular notion of this organizational stressor was made by 3 deans. DEAN 20160504 singularly commented on lecturers being deadwood, having no consultancy and being unable to cooperate. DEAN 20160421 additionally added a single organizational stressor element of lecturers not having high maturity and DEAN 20160405 illustrating the faculty/center's professor not being experts yet in their field of study as a cause for worry. These deans in having to manage unproductive personnel are consistent with reports of U.S. deans having to manage bitter personnel whom had long and somewhat disappointing careers (Messina, 2008).

A further 4 deans reported on the organizational stressor element of lecturers going against dean. 2 deans were found to experience similar scenario of lecturers rejecting dean's idea confrontationally and pushing for it to be replaced by their own. These blatant rejections are consistent with identical reports of U.S. deans facing a lack of cooperation from their lecturers (Walter & Keim, 2003). The remaining 2 deans were found to experience different form of this organizational stressor, with one dean facing lecturer's refusal to accept the dean's decision for termination on grounds of underperformance and another dean facing elements of lecturers bypassing the approval authority of dean. Only one dean commented on how the worst thing to experience is when lecturers are not happy with the given yearly performance marks. These stressors are consistent with reports of U.S. deans identically not having any form of acceptance by their faculty lecturers and staff (Walter & Keim, 2003).

The subtheme of lecturer against lecturer was discovered as one of the organizational stressor affecting some of the deans in the institution. 4 out of 10 investigated higher education deans reported this as an organizational stressor when their lecturers go against their own colleagues. All 4 deans whom disclosed this phenomenon of lecturer going against their own colleagues reported different accounts of this organizational stressor. DEAN 20160323B accounted the organizational stressor in the form of lecturers excluding a research leader name in paper publication while DEAN 20160323A gave confirmation of the constant existence of a group of lecturers fighting with one another. This prevalence of lecturers' infighting was similarly reported by Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton, and Sarros (1999) whom discovered both deans from U.S. and Australia rank dealing with lecturers' conflicts as one of the top ten stressors at their respective faculties. DEAN 20160321 discloses the rampant nature of lecturer disharmony of the faculty/center until the deanship was appointed solely to fix this stressor. This stressor was similarly identified in the study of Wolverton (2003) where deans reported on having to deal with lecturer to lecturer conflicts. Dealing with faculty conflicts was ranked the fifth in deans' top stressors (Wolverton, 2003). DEAN 20160316 provided the fourth different scenario of lecturer going against another in the form of a head of program bullying a program lecturer to forgo the ministry granted study leave and to return to take and teach subjects. The stepping in of DEAN 20160316 to deal with this matter is consistent with the existent of conflicting parties and the subsequent requirement of a dean to manage and sort out lecturers infighting (McErlane, 2014). These four descriptions of infighting is consistent to the report of Wild, Ebbers, Shelley, and Gmelch (1994) whom stipulated that deans are placed in a position to having to address conflicts among lecturers.

4 deans acknowledged on a phenomenon of lecturer behaving badly. In the faculty/center of DEAN 20160323B, these bad behaviors were found in a lecturer's verbal degradation of students during lectures. In another faculty/center of DEAN 20160322, lecturers displayed bad behaviors in times of team work obligations and proved very difficult to support a faculty/center's official function together. DEAN 20160321 provided a different account of this organizational stressor when the lecturers at the faculty/center displayed egocentric behaviors and a further refusal to change for the better. These deans in facing personnel bad behavior is consistent with a literature report of U.S. deans describing their certain faculty personnel as 'mean spirited' towards the faculty and the dean (Bouws, 2013). The final discovery of a faculty/center's lecturers behaving badly was reported by DEAN 20160316 where the faculty/center's lecturers look down upon its own journal and displayed further refusal to assist and improve it. Lecturers here further compounded on the stressor by thinking highly of themselves and in making detrimental judgments such as quitting prematurely. All these negative behaviors encountered by this study's deans are consistent with a literature report of Harvey, Novicevic, Sigersta, Thomas, and Paul, (2006). Here the author identified deans' problem with faculty member that seek to damage the institution by refusing to contribute efforts towards reaching faculty goals.

Lecturer low work ethics was subsequently discovered as one of the organizational stressor affecting some of the deans in the institution. The first similarities were 3 deans concurrently reporting on their lecturers' inability to follow dean's instructions to do and complete certain task. This form of lecturers in defiance of their deans is consistent with a literature report of a U.S. dean. Werner (2009), in illustration from experience, highlighted the existence of such phenomenon where deans and faculty members do not relate to one another as manager/subordinate. The second similar

element from lecturer's poor working ethics was experienced by 2 deans in the area of yearly performance ratings. In the research of Rieger (1999), one U.S. dean disclosed on identifying an assistant professor whom was deficient in the role of a lecturer as there was no publication achieved. However, the promotion and tenure committee together with an interim department head had decided to nominate the assistant professor for promotion and tenure, much to the shock of the dean.

Similarities, variations and differences in administration staff negative elements were found across the investigated deans. The highest similar occurrence of this organizational stressor was in the incompetency of administration staffs. Hopkins (2003) reported on the similar difficulty of poor administrative support encountered by U.S. deans whom equivalently denounced this as one of the factor contributing to their stresses. The second highest similarities found among organizational stressors from administration staff stemmed from their attitude problems. Administrative staff's attitude problems encountered amongst U.S. deans were similarly reported in the literature of Dowling and Melillo (2015). Through the study of the authors, one U.S dean was found to explain that the difficulty of having an uncommitted administration staff and without administration support, the development of the faculty would not be able to take place. The third highest similarities of administration staff negative element experienced by the investigated deans fell into the category of ranking power abuse. 3 faculties/centers belonging to DEAN 20160323B, DEAN 20160322 and DEAN 20160316 respectively, were reported to have occurrences of this organizational stressor. Incidents of administration staffs abusing their power ranged from of senior officers offloading all their work unto the junior officers, senior officers working in the capacity of just monitoring the junior officers, and one senior officer verbally abusing and shouting at junior officers. These staff and their unethical behaviors were similarly encountered by U.S. deans. Alford (2014) reported how the deans in the study spoke of the ability of many of the staff to 'work the system' and abuse the parameters of their employment.

Conclusion

The implication of this study, after applying the stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) on the multiple case study data, suggest the institution's deans had been subjected to the long range effects of stress, stemming from staffs' negative behavior. Gmelch and Torelli (1993) suggest the consequences can lead to headaches, ulcers, illnesses, or even disability.

One area in recommendation by the researcher is in the creation of a grievances process where all deans may meet to discuss on organizational stressors plaguing them and their respective faculty/center. All deans may meet to highlight on a certain issue or policy that need to be rectify to prevent continuing problems at the institution. This may be on staffs, students, certain department's shortcomings, current policies or inefficient procedures. Deans may also put in a vote as to which organizational stressors to attend to firstly. When certain discovered viable organizational stressors are not attended to, it will continue to exist. Or worse, it will continue to grow. However, should a concentrated effort of all deans be initiated towards an organizational stressor, the stressor element would then have a chance to be rectified, contained or even eradicated.

Future research can explore on the psychological and physiological aspect of higher education deans when encountering organizational stressors. Noninvasive measurements such as blood pressure or heart rate variability may shed more light on what happen to an academic dean when exposed to

stressor items. Psychological test could also be conducted on academic deans as to ascertain on the effects of experiencing organizational stressor. Some academic deans may be found to be more susceptible to stress than others and this can provide vital information on the likelihood of succumbing to the consequences of stress. This study will thus serve to promote the well being of higher education deans.

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