
Team Work as A Tool for Staff Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

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Abstract

The paper examined team work as a tool for staff performance in tertiary institutions. The paper adopted the desk study approach to review literature from textbooks, journals, internet and verbal engagements. Team work was discussed under: contributions of team communication, collaboration, and decision making to staff performance in tertiary institutions. Team leader, being the school administrator owes the team members communication role and vice-versa. Staff performance was viewed in the context of lecturers effectiveness that reflects on students' academic performance. The benefits of team work were highlighted to include job satisfaction and knowledge in the various field. The challenges of team work were identified as coordination cost and intellectual cost. The paper concluded that goal attainment is common goal among members of the team. Based on the reviewed literature, the following have been suggested: School administrators should be trained and retrained intermittently on team management skills, and effective communication should be encouraged.

Keywords: Teamwork, Staff performance, Tertiary institutions, Rivers State.

INTRODUCTION

To attain effective performance of school administration especially in tertiary institution there is the need for team work. No one staff can attain or achieve it alone because it is a collective responsibility. Tertiary institutions have the task of delivering services as defined and contained in the National Policy on Education. Educational goals of secondary education which include amongst others; providing all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of higher levels irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background, offer identified

curriculum to cater for the differences, provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades (National Policy on Education, 2014).To attain these stated goals of tertiary education, the school administrators in conjunction with lecturers and students should try as much as possible to handle conflict in a way that it will not escalate to violence.

Most literature on team work relationship in the work place had focused on small work groups and the goal of such team study is to identify the variables that predict team effectiveness. Thus, historically, the literature has focused on such variables as cohesiveness, size, team leadership, motivation, and group goals. Also, another focus of considerable attention about team work relationship in recent years is the role of conflict among teammates (John & Mannix, 2001). This begs the question of what factors predict whether a team will experience low performance. There is need to engender unity and co-operation between the team leader and team members. The leader in the case of tertiary institutions could be the school administrator (Vice Chancellor/Rector) or any other acting on his behalf. Service delivery is drawn from the National Policy on education and the curriculum. The ability of lecturers to interpret the curriculum and pass meaningful information to the students results to service delivery.

The implementation of teams in enhancing service delivery is fundamentally, an organizational change and development process. Teams are, therefore, susceptible to all the challenges that can occur during any organizational change process. In a tertiary institution, lecturers' resistance may result where lecturers are required to work with colleagues with whom they are unfamiliar with. In this case, the new teams are breaking up established social relationships thereby unable to enhance job satisfaction. In the team literature, there is no exact parallel to the effect of team work relationship on organizational performance. Many studies had examined the overall amount of communication among teammates while some studies had looked at how much each team member speaks (Brown & Miller, 2000) and who says what (Larson, 2012). It is against this background that this paper attempts to contribute to literature especially in Nigeria to examine relationship between team-work and staff performance in tertiary institutions.

Team Work

Team work is involving more than one person in a process to achieve a goal. An aspect of Team work that should be emphasized in the strategic management of a school organization is forming a working team that is active and able to work together to achieve organizational goals. In general, the team is a group built in order to create a rule that strive for excellence. Therefore, the success of the efforts of a group that was formed, the spirit of cooperation and good relations among group members need to be nurtured. Team work means staff collaboration, effective communication, and inclusiveness in decision-making to achieve set goals effectively and efficiently.

Asiabaka (2018) describes team work as the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient way. This concept is seen within the greater framework of a team, which is a group of interdependent individuals who work together towards a common goal. Here are certain characteristics that a team must have in

order to work effectively. These characteristics are interrelated. It is imperative that Group Cohesion is strong within the team. There is a positive relationship between group cohesion and performance. Communication is another vital characteristic for effective teamwork. Members must be able to effectively communicate with each other to overcome obstacles, resolve conflict, and avoid confusion.

School Administrators are expected to communicate with their lecturers and students effectively. Complaints and requests are expected to be attended to promptly. Feedback by every member of the team should be seen as a responsibility of all. Communication increases cohesion among lecturers, team leaders and students. Communication is important within teams to clearly define the team's purpose so that there is a common goal. Having a common goal will increase cohesion because all members are striving for the same objective and will help each other achieve their goals. Commitment is another important characteristic for teams. It occurs when members are focused on achieving the team's common goal (Allen, 2015).

This paper focused more on the importance of team work in schools that include: effective communication, quick decision making, improved work action, leaders and group work. This paper also covered the importance of team work among staff at the school that includes the interests of the spirit of cooperation, a sense of family, school administrator (Vice Chancellor or Rector) role in developing a spirit of cooperation, and to foster a spirit of cooperation and strategy formulation.

Examples of Teams in Tertiary Education:

Team Teaching: Team teaching is any group of professionals or lecturers involved in teaching the same course with different sub-topics in which one lecturer teaches the topic that falls within his or her field of specialization. Teachers gain most of their teaching knowledge and skills on the job, learning informally and experientially, and much less through engaging with formal courses or centrally organized educational development activities. Tertiary teachers belong to groupings such as their institutions, discipline, department or teaching team that can be seen as communities of practice, and it is in those contexts that their working knowledge and identities as teachers develop.

Functional Teams: Functional teams are permanent and include members of the same department with different responsibilities. School administrator is responsible for everything and everyone reports to them. This is the typical top-down management approach that most institutions operate. Across all organisational teams, it is necessary to prioritize school culture; the foundations of which are communication and trust.

Virtual Teams: Virtual teams are made up of individuals who work in different physical locations and who use technology and collaboration tools to achieve a common goal. It is important for virtual team members to be involved from a cultural perspective within your organisation. Having face-to-face video calls and giving your team members the opportunity to connect on a personal relationship level will help to improve rapport and moral.

Project and Seminar Supervision Teams: Universities staff and members equally form teamwork in research and development. The research in collaboration with students may occur in the form of students' project or theses or seminar supervision or vetting. No one person can successfully graduate a student. It requires the combined effort of others as partners in progress.

Applicable Ways of Teamwork in the University

Today, most higher education institutions highlight the necessity of including both hard and soft skills in their syllabus to meet the required personal, academic and professional demands for a successful career. Hard skills are considered to be the technical knowledge and experiences needed to carry out a job whilst soft skills are interpersonal qualities, also understood as an individual's set of social skills and personal attributes. Therefore, soft skills refer to a broad group of skills, behaviours, and personal qualities that enable individuals to function efficiently in their environment, have effective relationships, carry out their work professionally and achieve set goals (Tower, 2015). Soft skills are considered excellent complements to traditional hard skills at university due to their significant role in the current context. However, although soft skills are considered important as hard skills, there is a lack of consensus regarding their characterisation and implementation (Larson, 2016). The essence of this level of teamwork is to collaborate student's classroom experience with that of the world of work. Tertiary institutions are aware that having an adequate level of education and training not only implies a certain mastery of the contents of a given syllabus; students also need to fully develop the necessary skills to access the job market (Larson, 2016). According to John (2001), employers consider social skills to be significantly important attribute for job seekers, demanding that their new employees' soft skills are as well consolidated as their hard skills, given that current job positions require additional qualities that were previously not demanded (Brown and Miller, 2001). Thus, both employers and academic institutions are slowly becoming aware of the need to equip individuals with the competencies, skills and knowledge that will not only facilitate their incorporation into the job market after their studies but also support their professional development throughout their career so that they can successfully adapt to changes in the job market.

Within this context, teamwork skills, such as communication, collaboration and decision making have been gaining close attention, as they are considered essential competencies in an increasingly more globalised, dynamic and complex world.

Staff Performance

The staff in the context of this paper is identified as the school lecturer and non-teaching staff. The term staff performance includes the meaning of efficiency, improvement, quality, development, appropriateness, teaching task delivery and refers to the effectiveness of the system and the degree to which the objectives are achieved. High achievement orientation shared by lecturers and management and both the structural and cultural conditions of closely monitored learning are among the key elements of the effective school's model (Allen, 2005). In this sense, the effectiveness of the school is the extent to which the determined goals and objectives of an

institution are fulfilled in relation to quality, quantity, equality and quality of education (Okorie, 2000).

In the literature, different characteristics of lecturer performance are mentioned. These include: strong educational leadership, high expectations of student achievement and emphasis on key skills. Frequent assessment of students' progress in John (2016)'s empirical research on effective school's features are; strong teaching leadership, open and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, beneficial and encouraging school climate, atmosphere of high expectations, regular monitoring of student development, acquisition of basic skills, maximizing learning opportunities, parent participation, effective professional development and as a common decision-making process (Asiabaka, 2018).

Okorie (2000) characteristics of effective institutions include members of staff such as the vice chancellor or rector, lecturer, student, school curriculum and teaching process, school culture and climate, school environment and parents. Also, these features include; a safe and orderly environment, instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, positive home-school relationships, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task and high expectation climate for success (Lezotte, 2001).

Contributions of Communication to Staff Performance in Tertiary Institution

The word communication is derived from the Latin word “Communis”, which literally means trying to gain understanding. It means the transmission (encoding), receipt and interpretation (decoding) of messages by means of specific medium. Communication strategy is the blueprint for how information will be exchanged (John, 2016).

A school system is a melting pot of different people with different backgrounds and personalities, hence bringing out the best in them require effective communication skill which is one of the core components of team leadership (Ololube, 2018). Okorie, (2000) identified communication as one of the essential elements of team leadership and asserted it thus, it is the process of transmitting one's thoughts, ideas, wishes, attitudes and emotion to others. Several authors concurred with Okorie (2000) that communication is central to team leadership (Tower, 2013, Awamleh & Gardner, 2018). This implies that communication is the live wire of any given organization and the source through which the goal and aspirations of any organization is transmitted.

Communication in organizational life provides a basis for understanding virtually every human process which occurs in an organization such as conflict, cooperation, decision making, the use of power and authority, compliance gaining, resistance, morale and cohesion, and the creation and maintenance of relationships in an organization. Harnessing superior-subordinate communication in the organization, communication among colleagues and fellow employees are carried out to disseminate and retrieve information timely and efficiently, coordinate and complete job tasks, for decision making and finally to minimize or solve conflicts in the organization (Suffian & Mohammad, 2014). Similarly, Ejimaji and Ahiawe (2016) maintained that communication is the ingredient which makes organizations possible, the vehicle through which the basic management or administrative functions are carried out. Effective workplace

communication is based on interpersonal, professional relationships that are developed through a keen awareness of courtesy, attentive listening, active participation and appropriate body language. Communication plays a key part for team leaders in ensuring that people do the right thing instead of only doing things in the right way by carefully managing the internal and external relationship in supporting organizational growth (Zerfass, 2014).

Effective team communication is achieved when the staff you count on for everyday solutions feel secure enough to share their thoughts, ideas, and comments honestly and diplomatically. One of the most significant rewards one can look forward to as a result of striving for better team communication is better overall performance. Teammates who have learned they can rely on one another to be fair and supportive in their communications are more likely to enjoy positive interactions. Open and authentic interactions help increase the level of trust in a physical or virtual workplace. Lecturers in high-trust tertiary institutions are naturally more productive, have more energy at work, and collaborate better with colleagues. Teams that communicate well contribute the following to staff performance:

- Build a better appreciation for individual strengths, weaknesses, and ways of working
- Develop a greater capacity to plan and work successfully toward common goals
- Experience increased job satisfaction
- Lead to higher employee satisfaction levels during appraisal meetings.
- Lead to an unbeatable synergy that makes accomplishing goals and meeting projections efficiently seamless

Contributions of Collaboration to Staff Performance in Tertiary Institution

Collaboration is the act of individuals working together to make unified decisions. This means team members or colleagues working together and setting processes to make choices that all members agree on for a greater purpose. Ultimately, the goal of collaboration in tertiary institutions is to maximize the chances of success by administering an open, communicative, and collaborative experience among all members of an organization.

Ololube (2017) said that performance refers to results as well as behaviours, and fine-tuning organizational behaviours and work activities with the aim of achieving results or outcomes.

The behavioural aspect of performance has to do with what an individual member of a team does at work place. In a school set up this will include the teaching and learning process. For any behaviour to be subsumed under the performance concept, it has to be relevant to the organizational goals and managed by the team leader. On the other hand, the results aspect refers to the consequence of the individuals' behaviour. These results are however dependent on other factors apart from the individuals behaviour. In a school setup, the results aspect of performance can be defined but not limited to students test scores, examination results, students' capability to generally apply what is learnt and the graduation rate to institutions of higher learning.

The education system in Nigeria is characterized by examination orientated teaching where passing examination is the benchmark for performance because there is no functional internal system of monitoring learning education cycle. The ability of the students to pass both

internal and external examination form a major service delivery as observed by Edem (2007), examinations are generally accepted as valid measures of achievement. The responsibility of checking professional documents like lecturers' schemes of work and lesson plans lies in the hands of the school administrator. This may be done in person or he may delegate to the team member or the head of department.

Edem (2007) Outlined The Contributions of Collaboration to Staff Performance as Follows:

- i. Promotes problem-solving;
- ii. Spurs innovation;
- iii. Connects teams to the bigger picture
- iv. Boosts learning and skills-sharing
- v. Increases employee satisfaction; and
- vi. Aligns distributed or remote teams.

Contributions of Decision Making to Staff Performance in Tertiary Institution

Effective teams make best and quality decisions via sharing of knowledge and skills of team members. The decision is usually made within a short period of time because it involves the cooperation of all members as well as in quality. Effective team usually will discuss different views and in the event of a conflict of thoughts or opinion it will be resolved in the best way. The formation of a group requires internal and external elements called 'required system'; this includes employees acting and interacting between them to make a decision. Brown and Miller (2000) noted that decision making are closely related to the value of the team leaders. Team leaders should stand on their own feet and be ready to make decisions from time to time.

Allen (2015) revealed that certain situations leading to the productivity of a group will increase when the members have a cooperative rather than competitive relationship. Dr. W. Edwards Deming in the 1950s introduced 'Deming Round' where each individual must plan, collect data, analyze data, and form a team, or work and the group will continue to move according to the ongoing round without disconnect. The process is a rotating movement, interlinked between one another, and involves the interaction between the expert groups with the management system.

This cooperation must be based on understanding, otherwise, the process will be interrupted and might be a reverse rotation, consequently, could lead to disappointment and loss of effective decision making in the workplace can allow staff to: feel secure in their positions, feel a better sense of commitment to the school, increase overall staff engagement, and growth potential of an institution, overcoming consensus, increasing employee engagement, getting Buy-In from the people who need to implement, enabling collaboration and communication, and surfacing your own blind spot.

Benefits of Team Work in Schools

Teamwork teaches essential communication and social skills, such as active listening and effective speaking. When working as a team, students learn how to listen to their leaders and

coaches in order to perform their individual roles. Students learn how to listen to one another in order to function as a cohesive unit.

There are many advantages and benefits obtained when the individual is able to work in a team. According to Edem (2007), benefits or outcome of teamwork include knowledge in the various fields can be shared so that averted problems more effectively, job satisfaction and morale of lecturers can be improved when the attitude of collaboration nurtured in administration, share the problems of the various functions and parts to resolve it quickly and more effectively, and recommendations made via teamwork can be implemented more easily compared with recommendations made individually.

Team work allows teachers in a school to complement each other by leveraging flaws that exist. Teamwork teaches students how to respectfully and confidently express their ideas and opinions effectively in a group setting. In Edem (2007), teamwork teaches students that their voices are respected and valued. Knowing that she will be heard helps build a student's self-confidence, while encouraging further participation in group activities. Participation in team activities teaches students how to be better communicators, which in turn helps every member of the team feel valued and respected. One of the biggest benefits of teamwork is its potential to dramatically reduce the effects of bullying on students. When a student knows she is valued and respected by others, she will be able to rise above the hurtful acts or comments of a bully (Brown & Miller, 2000).

Being a part of a team that genuinely cares about its members will also give a student a strong support system. Ultimately, team members tend to stick together outside of collaborative settings (like sports practice and clubs), which means they can support one another in challenging settings. Furthermore, the self-confidence from team activities may empower a student to stand up for other victims of bully who may not have a similar support system. The benefits of teamwork almost always translate into success outside the classroom. As an employee in almost any industry, people are required to work closely with others (Asiabaka, 2018). That is why employers prefer to hire people who have demonstrated their ability to work as a part of a team.

Allen (2015) argued that introducing students to collaborative environments early in their school experiences present opportunities for them to be more productive and joyful as they work with others in a team environment. This satisfaction will be reflected in their job performance and career advancement.

Challenges of Teamwork in Tertiary Education

Coordination costs: Asiabaka (2018) identified coordination costs represent the time and energy that group work consumes that individual work does not, including the time it takes to coordinate schedules, arrange meetings, meet, correspond, make decisions collectively, integrate the contributions of group members, etc.

Coordination costs cannot be eliminated nor should they be: after all, coordinating the efforts of multiple team members is an important skill. However, if coordination costs are excessive or are not factored into the structure of group assignments, groups tend to miss deadlines, their work is poorly integrated, motivation suffers, and creativity declines.

Intellectual costs: This refers to characteristics of group behaviour that can reduce creativity and productivity. These include:

- Groupthink: the tendency of groups to conform to a perceived majority view.
- Escalation of commitment: the tendency of groups to become more committed to their plans and strategies – even ineffective ones – over time.
- Transparency illusion: the tendency of group members to believe their thoughts, attitudes and reasons are more obvious to others than is actually the case (Bee, 2011).
- Common information effect: the tendency of groups to focus on information all members share and ignore unique information, however relevant.

Allocating time: While group assignments may save instructors time in some areas (e.g., grading final projects), they may add time in other areas (e.g., time needed up front to identify appropriate project topics, contact external clients, compose student groups; time during the semester to meet with and monitor student groups; time at the end of the semester to ascertain the contributions of individual team members).

Teaching process skills: Functioning effectively in teams requires students to develop strong communication, coordination, and conflict resolution skills, which not all instructors feel qualified to teach. Many instructors are also reluctant to devote class time to reinforcing these skills and may be uncomfortable dealing with the interpersonal issues that can arise in groups. In other words, dealing proactively with team dynamics may push some instructors out of their comfort zone (Bee, 2011).

Teacher Capacity: Hetland and Sandal (2003) defined teacher capacity as creative and innovative ways of doing the conventional. It is the degree to which you encourage others to be creative in looking at old problems in new ways. According to Jones and Rick (2007), it is questioning old assumptions and the status quo.

In the field of education, the lecturers are seen as the moulders of the destiny of the nation hence it is important that their activities and methodology are brought up-to-date so as to meet up with contemporary trends in education. School Administrators should encourage the lecturers to go beyond the normal to ensure that their delivery of concepts is top notch. The practice of lecturers rehearsing lesson notes over the years only yields academically inept and stagnant students because there is no new knowledge being added even as the world is moving at a rapid pace.

CONCLUSION

Team work is required for effective staff performance. The paper has reviewed literature in line with team work with reference to student-lecturer, vice- chancellor – lecturer, and vice-chancellor-student-lecturer manner. The entire education is a team which goal is the delivering on the service of teaching and learning. The vice chancellor, rector, or any other school administrator in a tertiary education setting is the team leader and lecturers are team members. Team for lecturer capacity can also be achieved through effective conflict finding. In which case

the school administrator does capacity assessment needs of the lecturer for effective service delivery. Lecturer-student communication deals with the instructional delivery of the team leader, who in this case is the lecturer. Therefore, team work ensures that goal attainment is seen as common goal among members of the team.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the foregoing reviewed literature, the following have been suggested:

1. School administrators should be trained and retrained intermittently on team management skills.
2. Conflict resolution in the team group should be the responsibility of the team leader and team members. Participatory leadership should be encouraged amongst tertiary institutions.
3. Effective communication should be encouraged. Feedback from lecturers to vice-chancellors or rectors, vice-chancellors or rectors to lecturers, lecturer-students and vice-versa should be encouraged in tertiary institutions.

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