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Improving Librarians' Occupational Performance Through Stress Management Strategies: An Overview

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Abstract

Librarians occupational performance include their task, contextual and adaptive performance which are practical and strategic tools for achieving libraries' set objectives. Stress management strategies are activities, readjustments, methods and techniques that are employed in managing, dealing, coping, reducing and eradicating the harmful effects of stress. The paper discussed improving librarians' occupational performance through stress management strategies as an overview. It was established that stress management strategies help librarians in dealing, handling and coping with stress and its harmful effects. Librarians can achieve high occupational performance when they are stress free. The paper explored an overview of librarians' occupational performance, stress, concept of stress management strategies, individual stress management strategies and organisational stress management strategies and ways stress management strategies improves librarians' occupational performance. Based on the established facts in the discourse these recommendations are made: the library managements should create awareness programmes to sensitise librarians on the need for daily stress management practices; stress management programmes should be created for librarians in the library; body fitness and training centres should be established in the library complex; and librarians should frequently consult psychologists and physiotherapists for professional advice and care when stressed.

Keys words: Stress, Stress Management Strategies, Occupational Performance, Task Performance, Contextual Performance, Adaptive Performance

Introduction

One of the rationale for employing experts to man library house-keeping duties is for high level performance. Occupational performance is the actual conducting of activities and job

professional duties that satisfy the specified responsibilities in line with the standards indicating what should be done and how well it should be done. Librarians' efforts and interest must be to satisfy the three types of occupational performance which are task performance, contextual performance and adaptive performance. It is expected of librarians to carry out certain responsibilities and duties on a daily basis in line with their job descriptions and specifications.

Carrying out such specified responsibilities and duties determines the task performance. Díaz-Vilela, Rodríguez, Isla-Díaz, Díaz-Cabrera, Hernández-Fernaud and Rosales-Sánchez (2015) see task performance as the prescribed role librarians should comply with in order to attain organizational goals. Tripathy (2014) notes that task performance is labeled through setting strategic goals, upholding the necessary performance standards, motivating and directing subordinates to accomplish the job through encouragement, recognition, and constructive criticisms. Task performance is specified and detailed in line with organisational goals and objectives. The level of librarians' task performance can be used to measure the effectiveness and quality of the library services provided.

Contextual performance is the voluntary actions taken in order to enhance the library services. Such actions and behaviours are not specified in the job roles and duties. Díaz-Vilela, Rodríguez, Isla-Díaz, Díaz-Cabrera, Hernández-Fernaud and Rosales-Sánchez (2015) termed contextual performance as citizenship performance which involves those behaviors not directly related to occupational tasks, but having a significant impact on organizational, social, and psychological contexts. Whereas, adaptive performance is the ability to adapt and be productive amid situation changes in the libraries. Adaptive performance entails being capable to effectively handle emerging and unforeseen situations for high level performance. Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012, p. 280) state, "adaptive performance refers to the ability of an individual to change his or her behaviour to meet the demands of a new environment." Measuring and ascertaining the individual performance level of librarians is very important in the libraries. It will help the management in taking actions and for strategic decision making on recognition, punishment, reward, remark and motivation of the librarians' performance level.

So many factors or variables can negatively affect the performance level of librarians. Such factors or variables include but are not limited to leadership styles, poor amenities, excess workload, strained relationship with colleagues, changing roles in the profession, emergence of new technologies and tools, lack of appreciation, poor salary, poor incentives and poor welfare

packages. These factors/ variables often result to stress. Hence, are referred to as stressors (causes of stress). Nordqvist (2017) simply define stress as a feeling that people have when they are overloaded and struggling to cope with demands. It is also the manner the psychological and physiological systems readjusts when demands are more than the available resources. Jahromi, Minaei, Abdollahifard and Maddahfar (2016) posit that stress is a psychological state or process, by incidence of which a person is subject to events that are perceived as threatening to their physical and psychological well-being. From these views, it is obvious that stress is one of the occurrences in the human body that can threaten or endanger ones' health and wellbeing.

When one cannot cope with demands and pressures the body prepares for “fight or flight” a concept developed by the father of stress Hans Seyle in 1951. The concept of “fight or “Flight entail that stress can be harmful or useful to the human body. It can help one to readjust, take actions and prepare to manage stressors. However, stress can have adverse effects on the human body and can cause illnesses. Jadoun, Kushwah, Barodiya and Holani (2017) aver that stress accounts for 80 percent of all illnesses either directly or indirectly. Consequently, stress can affect the level of librarians' occupational performance. Khan and Khurshid (2017) affirm that stress is causing poor performance, reduced employee morale, lack of autonomy, job insecurity and to greater extent the employee's wellbeing. Abdelrazek, Ghabbour, Fahmy and El Sayed (2017) note that stress might affect the librarians' concentration, initiative ability, causing depression, negative thinking and lack of attention in the job and wrong or delayed decision making. In essence, stress prone or stressed librarians will perform lowly or poorly in their duties and responsibilities. Stress can beset job passion, effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, productivity, attitudes and interest.

Librarians on daily basis are faced with much workloads, inadequate technological tools and resources needed to do library house-keeping jobs, unfriendly attitudes from colleagues and the users and poor management styles. Librarians are vulnerable to stress experiences on daily basis. Librarianship has to do with dealing human beings and resources (mostly technological resources) that are contributing to stress vulnerability. Therefore, there is need to employ techniques, strategies, approaches and practices that will help in coping with, dealing with and eliminating stress and its harmful effects. In order to ensure that librarians' occupational performance is not negatively influenced by stress, there is need for stress management strategies

which will help librarians to readjust, take action and develop the ability to overcome stress and its harmful effects.

Concept of Stress Management Strategies

Managing stress entails employing techniques that will help in dealing with stress. Stress management strategies are activities, practices, readjustments, methods and techniques that are employed in dealing, coping, reducing and eradicating the harmful effects of stress. Jadoun, Kushwah, Barodiya and Holani (2017) note that managing stress is all about taking charge: taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment and the way you deal with problems. Stress management strategies according to Landy and Conte (2010) are programmes that help employees deal with work stressors that are difficult to remove or change. It entails setting up roadblocks so that the progression to the illness or disease level does not occur (Okafor and Okafor, 1998). Readjustment is one of the key approaches to effective management of stress. More so, to effectively manage stress, librarians need to consider readjusting their personalities, views, perceptions, attitudes and pursuits.

Employing stress management strategies will rejuvenate stressed librarians. Stress management strategies are needful in maintaining psychological and physiological stability and balance to handle daily social and work activities. They create the enablement for improved physical body ability to effectively handle stressors with ease. According to Holman, Johnson and O'Connor (2018) stress management strategies is a class of activities that are used to improve one's well-being and reduce stress, principally by either addressing the causes of stress or by reducing the impact of stress on an individual. In essence, stress management strategies positively redirect and improve one's attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, emotions and physical body conditions.

Every individual librarian is responsible for taking good care of themselves, maintaining healthy living and living a happy life. More so, dealing and managing stress can be a personal affair in terms of social and work induced stress and organisational affair in terms of work-related stress. Both the librarians and the library managements have different roles to play in the effective management of stress. Hence, stress management strategies are categorised into individual stress management strategies and organisational stress management strategies. Khan

and Khurshid (2017) believe that working towards ensuring stress is not affecting employee wellbeing both in short and long term is a collective responsibility both the individuals and organizational management. In respect to this, Bahtijarević-Šiber (1999) grouped stress management strategies into two which are individual stress management strategies that are focused on individual problems, helping individuals to easily overcome stress and organizational stress management strategies which are directed to the organization and change the environment that creates stress, reducing stress conditions and eliminating work and organizational internal and external. Employing these two categories of stress management strategies is helpful and beneficial to the librarians health, wellbeing and better living condition and the library in achieving her set goals and objectives.

Individual stress management strategies

Individual stress management strategies are those stress management techniques that librarians can practice on daily basis through personal readjustments or activities in the home, offices, outdoors etc. Individual stress management strategies that has to do with readjustments include:

Meditation: Taking time to think issues and challenges deeply and calmly is better than worrying or thinking too much. Meditation will help librarians find solutions to challenges and strategies for handling issues, make strategic plans and take reasonable decisions.

Time management: Creating appropriate schedule for daily, weekly and monthly activities is very important to avoid doing many things at the same time or procrastination. Time management helps one to know the right thing to do at the right time, hence, will not be overburdened with undone activities and waste time doing irrelevant things.

Doing Away with Some Habits: Some bad habits such as being temperamental, negative mindset, evil acts and deliberate errs should be gradually erased and avoided. By doing so the mind and soul will be free and can concentrate to deal with important issues.

Forgiving Others: Forgiving errors and wrongs is pertinent to having a free mind, thoughts, views and perceptions. It helps reduce the level of concern one places on people's errs and wrongs.

Resisting Unhealthy Competitions: Before competing for anything, one has to consider his/her ability and capability. Therefore, it is imperative resist unhealthy competitions that adds no value

and meaning to life. Competition can increase emotions and endanger cognitive ability. Librarians should pursue that which is not beyond their capability and ability.

Setting Priorities: There is need to set priorities on what one wishes to achieve with the most important and exigent ones placed first. Trying to achieve all things at the same time could be endangering and harmful to the body, soul and mind.

Doing One Thing at a Time: Similar to setting priorities, librarians need to finish one task or activity before diving into another. It is good to do and finish tasks one by one at a reasonable pace and within the confines of ones' ability.

Delegating Duties and Responsibilities: There is need to find capable helping hands to assign duties and roles to. This could involve to incentivize them to appreciate their gestures and efforts than just saying thank you. In such manner, one can overcome excess workload, being overburden and fatigue.

Knowing and Accepting Personal Limits: It is very important to know the limit one can go in carrying out duties based on knowledge, skills and training. Too much aspiration, desires and achievement targets can be unhealthy, hence, need to be avoided.

Avoiding Annoying Discussions and Persons: Anger provoking discussions especially arguments or persons who enjoy picking on others must be avoided at all cost. Being exposed to such experiences could beset ones' emotion, behaviour and psychology.

Doing Charity: Finding time to give arms, help the needy and give helping hands or assistance to others especially the users can give librarians joy, make them happy and fill fulfilled. Charity helps one feel self-satisfied and impressed with their actions and deeds.

Believing in Ones Self: Librarians need to feel relaxed and comfortable with what they can do and achieve amid the situations or conditions. Believing in yourself helps in handling difficult tasks with ease and yet achieve desired goal.

Personal Admiration: Even when faced with heavy criticisms, librarians need to learn to admire and appreciate whom they are, what they are and how they are made. The feeling of being okay and well to do should necessary. Hence, they should not let others talk them down.

Some of the individual stress management strategies that have to do with engaging physical activities include:

Regular and Daily Exercise: Daily and regular exercise both indoor and outdoor will help prepare the physiological and psychological body systems against stress and its effects. Exercise could be at least 15 minutes daily.

Healthy and Regular Eating: Daily meals should meet balanced diet standards with the necessary ingredients and nutrition. More so, eating very well and at the appropriate time, especially the breakfast before going to work is necessary. Also eating in a hurry, too much and in between meals should be avoided.

Regular and Enough Sleep and Rest: Sleeping at the right time especially night sleep and siesta is needed to cool of pressures and boredom. Librarians need to observe at least 8 hours sleep a day in order to maintain healthy balanced life. They must avoid working or doing other things that interfere with their sleeping hours.

Vacation: Librarians need to make out time for vacations and tours to various interesting and tourism places. Through such activities they can be able to see things that will make them happy.

Taking a Walk: Taking a mindful work around ones quiet vicinity alone or with family and friends will helps to ease off stress. Taking a walk should not be to distant places and must be in a place that has interesting events and attractive features that are appealing.

Stretching: Stretching at intervals especially during work is very important. Stretching can be done in the office to help deal with boredom emanating from workload. Stretching helps strengthen the weakened veins and blood vessels.

Talking with Trusted Friends, Family and Colleagues: Librarians should take time off their busy schedule to interact with close associates. Such interactions should be filled with jokes, funny and interesting events. It is not the time to discuss serious life issues and challenges.

Spending Time with Nature: Nature such as water bodies, flowers, animals, trees, open field, and mountains can be inspiring and rejuvenating. Most times, living in industrial and business areas can be boring to view, hence, librarians need to find time to visit places were they can interact with and view nature in its fullness.

Praying: A prayerful life style is required to help deal with issues that burdens life. Librarians need to pray always to commit their challenges and difficulties to their maker.

Listening to Soft and Cool Music: Listening and playing good music especially gospel songs are required to help restore the body, soul and mind. It will help take librarians' mind away from

negative thoughts, worries, challenges and issues. Cool and soft music appeals to the soul and mind.

Reading Comic and Interesting Information Resources: Comic story and inspirational books or information resources can help one to readjust their thoughts and focus on the interesting things which they have read. It is a tool for practicing mindfulness and mediation.

Regular Medical Checkup: Going to regular medical check up is very important in maintaining a healthy stress free life. One cannot assume that they are healthy or okay until it has been confirmed by health experts. Thus, the need for regular medical checks.

Consulting the Psychologists or Other Health Professionals: On regular basis, experts in handling stress should be visited for advice.

Practicing Yoga:

Some stress managements strategies are unhealthy even though people employ them in order to handle and deal with stress. Such techniques rather that alleviate the stress may degenerate it and cause more damages. They include: smoking cigar-ate or hemp, taking hard or unprescribed drugs or sleeping pills, drinking much caffeine, taking much sugar or sugary foods, avoiding or isolating from people, muttering, procrastination, eating too much and drinking too much alcohol.

Organisational Stress Management Strategies

Organisational stress management strategies are employed by managements to help the employees handle, cope and deal with stress. It is more of readjustments techniques or strategies which are helpful in adding vitality to the daily work activities and experiences. They include:

Proper Definition of Roles: Librarians may feel discomfit if they are often instructed to do things which are not in line with their job specifications. They may struggle to handle such roles and duties. Role conflicts can be boring, annoying and frustrating, therefore, there is need to properly define and assign roles in obvious details.

Assigning Duties Based on Qualification and Skills: Duties, tasks and roles should be assigned based on individual capabilities, skills, competencies, knowledge and training. Fixing a librarian in a duty that he/she lacks any of these qualities will be like putting a round peg in a square hole.

Addressing Internal Conflicts: Conflicts and disputes among colleagues are likely to occur. Library managements should not hesitate to justly and competently address conflicts arising in

the libraries. There is need to let both the wronged and offending parties know the essence of making peace, maintaining peaceful relationship and co-existence.

Creating Incentive Packages: Providing incentives for the librarians will help encourage and boost their energy, passion and job satisfaction level.

Providing Healthy Welfare Packages: Welfare packages for librarians need to be adequately considered in management meetings and plans. In fact, the welfare of librarians need to be one of the major priorities of the library managements.

Encouraging and Motivating Good Efforts: Librarians' attitude and behaviour to do more work will be positively influenced and increased if the library management find time and create avenue to encourage and motivate them for their good efforts and professional inputs. Encouragement should not end with verbal praises but include monetary or material rewards.

Ensuring Adequate Staffing: Having adequate staff will reduce the workload and increase specialisation and mastering. With adequate staffing, proper role definition is achievable.

Providing Adequate Resources and tools: Adequate resources and tools will increase job efficiency and competency level. Job can be frustrating when there is no adequate resources that are needed to carry out the job. Even though improvisation is encouraged, such condition can weigh ones efforts and target down. Hence, there is need to ensure that resources are adequately provided.

Increasing Salary and Paying Allowances When Due: When there is salary shortfall, delay in salary increment and payment or no salary payment, librarians will feel cheated, frustrated and annoyed to carry out their duties and responsibilities. Such situations could lead to depression and stress, therefore, should be addressed on time.

Providing Amenities in the Library: The presence of amenities such as proper ventilation (natural and artificial), good lightening, good furniture etc in the library will make the library complex conducive, comfortable and convenient to work in.

Improving the Working Environment: Making changes and renovations in the library complex and offices is very important. Offices need to be well decorated and designed to appeal to taste.

Approving Leave, Off and Vacation When Due: There is need to create opportunities for and approve leave, off and vacation entitlements. Furthermore, these entitlements should be approved when due, so that librarians can go and relax, cool off from stress and have enough fun time with their family and friends.

Encouraging and Promoting Open Communication: There is need for open and free flow of communication and information in the library. Such will enhance understanding, clarity and openness among librarians especially in sharing ideas and knowledge that will contribute to effective library and information service delivery.

Transformational and Democratic Leadership: Transformational leaders have various ways of making work easy, enjoying and interesting to the subordinate in the workplace. Employees feel comfortable, happy and relaxed working with managers with transformational and democratic leadership styles. This is because they are convinced that there is room for improvement, proper direction, managerial support and recognition.

Sponsoring and Encouraging Training Programmes: With emerging technologies and tools in the librarianship profession, librarians could be frustrated and may find it difficult coping without proper training. Hence, library managements should create modalities for sponsoring and encouraging librarians in training programmes. In that way, they will properly fit into global trends in the profession.

Encouraging Continuous Development Programmes: The library managements need ensure that librarians continually grow in the profession by acquiring higher degrees, attending conferences and workshops, acquiring skills and competencies on new technological tools such as library software, carrying out research and publishing in journals and books.

Approving Promotions When Due: Promotions should be approved with accompanying entitlements and benefits whenever they are due for each librarian. Such management decisions will increase their efforts in the effective conducting of their duties.

Create Free or Subsidised Health Care Packages: Regular health check up is important in managing stress. Therefore, managements need to support and encourage librarians to go for regular check ups.

Provide Staff Support System

Importance of Stress Management Strategies

Stress management strategies is very important to librarians as individuals and the university library. The importance include:

- i. improving and contributing to the librarians wellbeing.
- ii. helping librarians in maintaining healthy living, sound health and happy life.

- iii. improving librarians' mental alertness and cognitive ability to handle daily workloads, events and endeavours.
- iv. helping librarians to be properly fit into their the daily job responsibilities and tasks.
- v. helping librarians in dealing with, handling and coping with stressors they encounter on daily basis.
- vi. helping librarians to appreciate their job and achieve high level job satisfaction.
- vii. helping librarians in maintaining healthy relationship with colleagues and the users.
- viii. increases the level of confidence and comfort librarians have in providing library and information services to the users.
- ix. helping librarians in remaining focused on the job, being creative and innovative in handling duties and library house-keeping functions.

Conclusion

A discourse on the need for stress management strategies for improved occupational performance of librarians is worthwhile. Stress free librarians are likely to be productive, focused, dedicated and passionate with their job responsibilities. Managing stress is the onus of both the librarians and the library managements. Stress management strategies are employed at both individual level and organisational level. Librarians are responsible for their good health and wellbeing, hence, should employ stress management strategies on daily basis in order to eliminate the harmful effects of stress, cope with and deal with stress effectively. More so, in order to improve the performance of librarians, the library managements need to employ stress management strategies as part of their responsibilities to the librarians. The level of librarians' occupational performance can greatly improve when librarians are stress free. Consequently, stress management strategies will improve their health and wellbeing standards.

Recommendations

Based on the established facts in the discourse these recommendation are made:

1. The library managements should create awareness programmes to sensitise librarians on the need for daily stress management practices.
2. The library managements should initiate stress management programmes for librarians in the library.

3. Body fitness and training centres should be established in the library complex.
4. Librarians should frequently consult psychologists and physiotherapists for professional advice and care when stressed.
5. Librarians need to regularly visit health institutions for proper medical check ups and health care.
6. Librarians should find time to discuss their stress experiences with trusted management personnel, family, friends and colleagues.

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