

Employees Perception of Job Stress according to Leadership Styles in Engineering Firms: A Qualitative Research Approach

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Abstract

The research reported workers perception of job stress in relation to various styles of leadership among engineering firms in Nigeria. Stress has turned out to be a major worry not just to the individual workers, but also to the organizations. Managers can either arouse or avert stress by their behaviors towards employees. The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach using the phenomenological research design using a sample of 15 engineering firm staff in selected firms in Nigeria. Semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data. The collected data were analysed using thematic data analysis. Findings showed that most of the workers interviewed reported that transformational leadership style, most often than not, encouraged better working conditions and wellbeing generally. Again, it was found that most workers interviewed reported that transactional leadership style oftentimes set off job-related stress among employees.

Keywords: Engineering Firms, Job Stress, Leadership Style, Qualitative Research

I. Introduction

Stress has turned out to be a major worry not just to the individual workers, but also to the organizations.^{1,2} Precisely, job stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.³ Over half a million people are affected by job-related stress with costs in the range of £9.6 billion each year.⁴ Leadership behaviors in organizations have been linked to employee stress.⁵ In other words, managers can either arouse or avert stress by their behaviors towards employees.^{6,7} Also, the disposition of managers can influence the presence and/or

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absence of psychosocial issues in the workplace.⁸ Thus, managers via their attitude play a major role in employee job-related stress.

Literatures abound on two main types of leadership styles, namely, transactional and transformational leadership styles and they are very relevant in today's organizations.⁹⁻¹⁹ While transformational leaders teach, coach, inspire, support and push employees to attain organizational goals, transactional leaders compensate employees for tasks completed and penalize them for poor performance. Studies have been carried out on the association between these leadership styles and employee job stress.²⁰⁻²² However, most of these studies were carried out in western countries, availing the need to replicate it in the Nigerian context knowing that culture plays an essential role in leadership behaviors.²³ Thus, the main interest of the present study is to investigate workers' perception of job stress in relation to various styles of leadership in engineering firms in Nigeria.

II. Method

Ethical measures were ensured by obtaining clearance to conduct the study from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institutions. The researchers ensured that consent forms were given to the participants to sign before the commencement of the interview. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of their participation in the study. After seeking and obtaining relevant ethical committee approval, we adopted a qualitative research approach using the phenomenological research design to carry out this research. The phenomenological research design enables researchers to examine the individual's experiences in a given situation which for this study was the perception of engineering firm staff on the relationship between leadership styles of manager and job stress. The participants for this study were 15 engineering firm staff in selected firms in Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the research participants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who experience job-related stress in their various engineering firms.

Semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data needed for the study. The interview guide was properly validated, and trial tested. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected, the researchers conducted member checking on the responses of the participants. The individual interviews were conducted by visiting the participants at their various engineering firms' locations in Nigeria. Permission was sought from each of the participants for the researchers to tape record their responses and as well notes were recorded. The period for the interview of a particular participant was between 20-30 minutes.

Data collected from individual interviews were thematically analyzed using the principles of thematic analysis. Prior to that, the raw data were organized, prepared, read thoroughly to make meaning out of the responses of the participants.

III. Results

The results were presented based on the two major themes that emerged from the data analysis namely: relationship between transformational leadership style and job stress and relationship between transactional leadership style and job stress.

Theme 1: Relationship between transformational leadership style and job stress

Majority of the participants interviewed at the course of this study indicated that transformational leadership style does not always result to their job stress. They believed that through the exhibition of transformational leadership style by their managers, they are a bit comfortable and are bound to learn how to manage their job-related stress from their managers. Participants A, B, C & D had this to say in their respective firms

“Being around my manager makes me feel good; I strongly believe in my manager; My manager tells me in simple words what I could and should not do; Associating with my manager makes me proud”

Participants E, F & L among others have this to say

“My manager showcases appealing images of what I can; helps me make my work meaningful; enables me to think about old problems in new ways; provides new ways of looking difficult situations; gets me to rethink new ideas”.

Participants G, H, I, K, M, N & O have this to say

“My manager helps me in my own personal development; lets me know how he thinks I am doing; gives personal attention to me when I feel rejected”

Theme 2: Relationship between transactional leadership style and job stress

With respect to the relationship between transactional leadership style and their job stress, the participants perceived through their responses that the exhibition of transactional leadership style by their managers poses a lot of stress to their job. They responded that transactional leadership style oftentimes set off job-related stress among employees. Participants A, G, H, I, J, K, L, M have this to say:

“My manager does not tell me what to do if I want to be rewarded for the work; does not provide rewards when I reach my goals; does not call attention to what I can get for what I accomplish”

Participants B, C, D, E, N, O have this to say:

“My manager can never be satisfied with my work inputs; does not try to change anything for the good of my work output; does not tell the standards that I need to know to carry out my work”

IV. Discussion

The research reported workers perception of job stress in relation to various styles of leadership among engineering firms in Nigeria. Findings showed that most of the workers interviewed reported that transformational leadership style, most often than not, encouraged better working conditions and wellbeing generally. Such leadership style arouses confidence in subordinates, encourages a united sense of mission, is supportive, prone to new ideas and perspectives when resolving problems, as well as exhibits confidence that targets will be accomplished, and will potentially result in a reduction in job stress of employees.^{5,20,22,24} Transformational leaders do not demoralize employees, they do not perceive employees as incompetent of

undertaking difficult situations, instead such leaders motivate followers to view challenges as occasions to prove themselves by enthusiastically overcoming them.^{9,25}

Again, it was found that most workers interviewed reported that transactional leadership style oftentimes set off job-related stress among employees. Suffice it to mean that an increase in managers' transactional leadership tendencies will yield a corresponding increase in job stress among employees in engineering firms. Hence, transactional leadership behaviors have the propensity towards concentrating more on job outcomes hinged around rewards without much interest on the personal non-financial needs of the employees. This sort of leadership style which grants assistance to followers in return for their efforts makes it obvious what rewards await whenever goals are attained. The efficacy of such an approach is subject to the leaders' aptitude in responding to feedbacks as well as meeting diverse expectations of the followers.²⁶ It can then be assumed that the relationship reported between transactional leadership and stress in this study could be attributable to how much employers in engineering firms in Nigeria are able to meet expectations commensurate enough to their employees' commitment to work, thereby resulting in job stress among employees in the industry.

V. Conclusion

Leadership styles influences employees' stress level. Transactional and transformational styles can have varying effects on employees' job stress levels. Future studies should consider the effects of personality traits on the relationship between leadership styles of managers and employees' job stress levels.

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