

Supervision and Productivity in Academic Libraries: Focus on the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of supervision of non-professional library staff in the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS) on their job performance and productivity. The research design for this study was the survey method, using both questionnaire and interview as instruments for data collection. As a result of the smallness of the population, the entire 109 library staff comprising 22 professionals and 87 para-professionals were sampled. Simple percentage was used for data analysis. A time-use study was also conducted during which the activities and services of the staff were repeatedly observed. Respondents showed a clear personal interest in supervision and productivity, and readily provided relevant information. A direct relationship was observed between supportive supervision and productivity. Effective and supportive supervision could help maximize staff output in the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS).

Keywords: *Supervision, performance, productivity, University of Ghana Library System.*

INTRODUCTION

The ability of library supervisors to lead and implement the library's policies effectively through effective and supportive supervision is critical to the productivity and the overall success of the library's mission. Supervisors also have the power of influencing how the library staff feelings about the library as a whole. Through supervisors, the concerns, attitudes and complaints of the library staff could be heard by library management board. Effective supervision can help the organization strengthen its overall results, improve the quality of its services and, most importantly, meet the needs of its clients. Supervision is the interactive process in which the organization's goals and values are communicated and interpreted to workers and they, in turn, are guided and supported to help reach these goals (Pierce, 2006). By helping library staff understand their responsibilities, improve their performance and organizing resources to assist them, supportive supervision helps staff to become more effective and productive.

Based on performance and productivity, employees are promoted to the rank of supervisors because of their technical expertise and academic qualifications. However, an effective supervisory relationship requires that the supervisor should not only be a content expert, but also accepts the enormous responsibility of mentorship. Unfortunately, poor supervision has enormous impact on the quality and cost for both the individual staff, as well as the organisational productivity as a whole (Pierce, 2006). On management theory, it is warned that it can be dangerous to borrow concepts or ideas that worked in one

company and apply them to another because of differences in the way companies are organized and operated. In fact, even the designations "top management", "middle management" and "supervisory management" signify different concepts in different companies and libraries (Carl, 1973). Bailey (2011) points out that supervision in a library as the face-to-face interaction of a library professional that has administrative responsibilities, with another employee, usually subordinate. Supervisory management positions in libraries require complex mixture of subject expertise, supervisory responsibilities and professional activities. The role of the library supervisor is an interesting and challenging one. It includes such activities as mentoring (especially new staff, seeing that the relevant books and reading materials are acquired, processed and made easily accessible to users, coordinating in-house training programs, and monitoring the quality of service delivery. The library supervisor must be able to work effectively within evolving academic library structures and be able to report changes in management and policy back to library staff. An effective supervisor in the library must be able to strike a balance between monitoring and evaluating library services as well as providing support and encouragement to staff. Within the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS), library supervisors (Professional Librarians) refer to those library personnel in positions that require Masters of Library Studies or its equivalent, and play supervisory, managerial and technical roles in the library.

A wide range of monographs and serials dealing with library supervision and productivity theories was examined. Only the most significant are noted in this case. Salaman (1995) argues that supervisors should be concerned about both learning and performance of worker. The critically managerial aspect of supervisor's works is their duty to monitor and improve the work of other workers. Their managerial efficiency is determined through their capability to improve other subordinate works. In the process, satisfaction and commitment to the library and its mission are built. If supervisors are unable to offer this contribution to an organization then they will not be performing their duty, and thus they will not be adding any value to the organisation. The only definitive justification of supervisor's existence in an organization is the enhancement of their subordinate work. If supervisors fail in this direction, they fail as supervisors. In examining the link between management and productivity, Dorgan, Dowdy and Rippin (2006) observe that, if companies perform well, they must have good managers at all levels of the organisation. Mediocre management goes hand in hand with mediocre corporate results. Whatever an organisation's objective is, managers influence a company's future by defining standards and by managing people, assets, and capabilities. The topic of supervision is a particularly sensitive one for those in the library and information field (Bailey, 2011).

The supervisor may feel that he or she is an example of the Peter Principles, viz; that people rise in an organization to their maximum level of incompetence. Studies indicate that librarians have poor leadership qualities, exhibit little interest in administration, and are poor managers (Morrison, 1969). Binder (1973) in studying the supervisory behaviour of librarians in academic libraries found that there was little difference between professional and non-professional employee's abilities for and attitudes toward supervision. In a study of middle managers in medium-size public libraries, Gamaladdin (1978) found that

professionals were unwilling to make decision even when they were given the opportunity to do so. The main significance of this work is that it highlights the need for library supervisors to improve on their supervision in their respective units and the library in general. Academic library managers and supervisors are paid to manage and supervise the services of the library. They are therefore ultimately responsible for improving productivity in the library. Unfortunately, sometimes both managers, supervisors and staff in the library have misconceptions about improving productivity in the library. The problem of staff failure to deliver quality services and low productivity in the library starts with the library's inability on the part of its managers and supervisors to properly diagnose the cause of staff low productivity. The diagnosis of staff failure to deliver can be likened to the onion-skin. If we let the onion represent staff performance problems, each layer then represents a probable cause. The layers on the outside represent the common and simple cause with the easiest solutions. The layers at the core of the onion represent the more complex and less common causes. These deeper problems are not easy to solve by most library managers and supervisors. In order to discover the cause of a problem library managers and supervisors need to peel away one layer at a time. Hence, the study aimed assessing whether effective supervision of non-professional library staff in the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS) improves their job performance and productivity.

METHOD

The research design for this study was the survey method. The instruments for data collection were both questionnaire and interview techniques. In accordance with survey research as described by Adomi and Nwalo (2003), the researcher administered the questionnaire and conducted the interview to collect information on variables of interest. A time-use study was also conducted during which the activities and services of the staff were repeatedly observed. A census approach was used to survey all the 109 staff of the University of Ghana Library System (UGLS). In other words, all the professional librarian (22) and the para-professional (87), were surveyed due to the small size of the sample frame. Data obtained for the study were subjected to analysis using simple percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Training in Supervision: Like all other skills, supervision can be taught. However, unlike many simple or basic skills, supervision is best understood as a "process" requiring both knowledge and experience (Pierce, 2006). In order for an individual to develop the knowledge and skills to become an effective supervisor of others, he/she must first go through the process of effective supervision, particularly in terms of being supervised and mentored in the role of supervisors. The study however, observed that some library supervisors had no training in the art of supervision. Promotions to supervisor in the library are done on the basis of seniority and/or academic qualification. Also, that the library does not perform an analysis of the requisite knowledge and skills required by supervisors to assist their staff.

Agreed Supervision Policy and Clear Expectations: The study revealed that, there exists no agreed supervision policy in the library, which identifies the purpose of the supervision arrangements, the responsibilities of the supervisor and supervisee, the frequency of supervision and recording arrangements. More frequently, the expectations of subordinates were not made clear or they did not have the skills and knowledge to help them deliver, and know that they were delivering, good quality services. According to Binder (1973), a library manger or supervisor's goal is to help subordinates he/she supervises achieve an optimal level of performance, nothing else. One of the most important things that should be done is to set expectations. If the supervisor expects medium performance from a staff, that is the best he will get it, but he/she is sending a message to the staff that he/she believes in them as individual and believes they are capable of performing at high levels (Hohengaten, 1983).

Effective Orientation and Productivity: Once employees are selected and offered appointment, they must be prepared to do their jobs effectively and efficiently, and this is where orientation and training come in. Training programmes are used to ensure that the new employee has the basic knowledge required to perform the job satisfactorily. Orientation and training programmes are important components in the process of developing a committed and flexible high-potential workforce and socializing new employees. Orientation programmes not only improve the rate at which employees are able to perform their jobs but also help them satisfy their personal desires to feel they are part of the organisation's social fabric. Unfortunately, the study revealed that the library currently does not have a well structured orientation and training programme for both new and old staff. Sixty-five per cent (65%) of the respondents said they were not given any systematic formal orientation when they were first employed into the library. They were just lead and shown the various units and sections within the library by someone they later got to know as a messenger/cleaner who himself knew next to nothing about the job of a library assistant.

Building Staff Commitment: The more employees have a sense of ownership in the library, the more they will be committed to doing what they can to ensure its productivity and success. Within the library, supervisors are responsible for gaining the active involvement of staff. They are to take the vision of the library and work with staff to make that vision a reality (Fozzi, 1994). Majority, (75%) of the para-professional library staff interviewed didn't know or were not too clear what the vision, mission and the objectives of the library are. This implies that adequate information have not been communicated to the staff of the library.

Performance Appraisal and Productivity: Performance appraisal is the periodic evaluation of an employee's performance measured against the job's stated or presumed requirements (Terry and Franklin, 2003). It is a structured formal interaction between a subordinate and supervisor, that usually takes the form of a periodic interview (annual or semi-annual), in which the work performance of the subordinate is examined and discussed,

with a view to identifying weaknesses and strengths as well as opportunities for improvement and skills development (Akata, 2003). An effective performance appraisal can lead an organization to take strides towards success and growth by leaps and bounds. Conversely, an ineffective performance appraisal system can seal the fate of an organisation by creating chaos and confusion from top to bottom in the administrative hierarchy (Khan, 2007). As 71.3% of the respondents criticised some aspect of the current appraisal system with reference to unclear standards used in appraising them, different appraisers (supervisors) derive different meanings and interpretations from phrases and concepts such as, "good performance," "quality of work", "creativity", "integrity" and many others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Supervisory work permeates across all levels of the organisation - from top management down to the heart of operations. The supervisor's post is one of the most demanding, requiring high quality performance, which directly impacts on the quality, and cost of output (productivity) as well as on the motivation, and morale levels of workers in the supervisor's section or unit. It is more efficient and often more correct to avoid jumping to conclusions by borrowing right to the core. If a library manager or supervisor is in the habit of looking deep into the "onion" core as soon as he detects a performance problem, he is presuming the problem is deep-seated, for example, a psychological problem of motivation or attitude (Hohengarten, 1983).

In looking for a cause, the library managers and supervisors have to be clear in their minds what the performance problem is. Is the library staff insubordinate? Clowning around? Showing up late for work? Doing poor work and not measuring up to performance expectations and standard? The library manger has to be specific as possible about the nature of the poor performance. What is the staff doing that the manger or supervisor does not like? In addition, the library manager or supervisor has to be clear about what he wants the staff to do. Most library managers and supervisors presume that staff understand what the various tasks and duties of the library job are. Though this is a common assumption, yet a number of library staff, both new and old, do not know what their job duties are. To avoid making this assumption, the library manager or supervisor needs to put the new library staff through a systematic orientation programme. The content of such an orientation should include explanation of library job duties; guidelines as to authority that goes with the job; a rundown of library policies, benefits and anything else that will help to clarify what the job is and what the library manager and supervisor expects in the way of the staff performance. The library should prepare staff handbook that will allow staff the opportunity to study the expectations and rules of the library and take it home as a resource document. The library policies around absenteeism, loitering, tardiness can also be explained to ensure that there are no misunderstanding when the staff starts to work.

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