

Jerry Addison Anyan

Assistant Registrar, Registrar's Office, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

The Impact of Staff Meetings on Supervision at the University of Education, Winneba

Abstract

Forty-eight junior and senior staff from faculties, departments and sections of the University of Education, Winneba were sampled to find out whether staff meetings were being held with them in their respective offices and whether it impacted on their work performance. The main instrument used was interview. The results showed that staff meetings were not being held with senior and junior staff in most offices and its absence affected the discharge of their work. A number of recommendations have been made to address the situation.

Introduction

Workplace supervision is very essential to every organization's effectiveness. A tool for ensuring workplace supervision in any organization is the conduct of regular staff meetings. Staff meetings could be of different types, but most significantly, staff meetings enable staff of a Faculty, Department, Section or Unit to set targets together, deliberate on their daily work output and performance, emerging challenges and find solutions to immediate problems, develop new strategies in order to improve their daily performance as well as the contribution of the Department, Section, Faculty or Unit to the entire organisation.

Supervision in the workplace according to Certo (2000) entails ensuring that employees at a given Department (Faculty, Section and Unit) are performing their jobs such as will allow the Department (Faculty, Section, and Unit) to make its contribution to the organisation's goals. This function is performed by the supervisor who is a manager at the first level of management in an organisation which implies that the employees who report to the supervisor or who are being supervised are not managers. Writing on the philosophy of supervision, Broadwell (1986) notes that people at different levels of the management hierarchy of an organisation have different functions which distinguish them into "middle" management, "top" management and "higher" management. This according to him can be easily divided into "lower" management, "middle" management and "top" management with regards to their duties and responsibilities.

Broadwell (1986) notes further, that there are specific defined areas for each of these levels to enable the organisation to run smoothly and that things go much better when people are performing their functions at the right level with no overlapping. The higher the level of management, the more time is spent on long range planning, giving direction to the organisation and working on problems relating to the structure of the organisation. Down the ladder of the levels of management, people concern themselves with short – range problems such as directing people and checking on how well the work is done. Bittel (1985) also reiterates that the supervisor's responsibility is to get out the work done. He or she plans at the level of the Department, (Faculty, Section and Unit) in order to transform master plans into day to day activities and to avoid waste of time, materials, machines, space and personnel.

According to a study conducted by the American Management Association, cited in Bittel (1985) supervisors spend 38% of their time thinking on problems that come up the same day, 40% on those one week ahead, 15% on those one month ahead, 5% on those 3 to 6 months ahead and 2% on those one year ahead. The supervisor is thus expected to spend 78% of his/her time on daily and weekly delivery of work by employees in his/her Department, Section, Faculty, or Unit, attending to

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emerging issues and problems associated with work delivery and conduct of those under him/her. It is only when the supervisor is doing this; getting the job done through other people is the job being done correctly. This makes the supervisor's job unique from all others in the organisation.

In the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), the Registrar's Department provides support services to aid smooth academic work. The various Divisions, Sections and Units of the Department have mandates in this direction with Deputy Registrars, Senior Assistant Registrars and Assistant Registrars at the helm of affairs. These are charged with ensuring that work of their respective Divisions, Sections, Faculty and Department Secretariats, Hall of Residences and Units are effectively carried out through their subordinate staff.

Deputy Registrars constitute middle level management with Senior Assistant Registrars and Assistant Registrars constituting lower level managers who have the onerous responsibility to effectively supervise subordinate staff and report to Deputy Registrars who in turn report to the Registrar who belongs to top management.

Besides the Registrars Department, other Departments, Sections and Units exist in UEW for the provision of other support services for the smooth operation of the University. These include the Finance Section, Internal Audit, Works and Physical Development Office and Library. Supervision of subordinate staff in these Sections by staff in positions analogous to that of Assistant and Senior Assistant Registrars is equally important.

The supervisor's work of overseeing the progress and productivity of direct reports (subordinates) is accomplished by:

- a) Mutually setting goals with direct reports
 - b) Supporting conditions for their motivation
 - c) Observing performance and giving feedback and other forms of guidance
 - d) Conducting regular performance appraisals/reviews
 - e) Addressing performance problemsf) Ensuring sufficient rewards
- (http://managementhelp.org/fp_progs/sup_mod/staff.htm)

Staff meetings offer one of the means by which the supervisor can effectively perform the above identified roles and to ensure that work of subordinate staff is being performed. An effective meeting according to Taylor (1994) is an efficient communication tool which enables information and ideas to be shared, suggestions and proposals made and decisions taken. Meetings constitute an important setting for oral communication which is used for a variety of purposes such as:

- To provide information to a group of people
- To report on some activity/ experience
- To co-ordinate and arrange activities
- To obtain assistance
- To put forward ideas or grievances for discussion and
- To create involvement and interest

Additionally, meetings enable face-to-face contact of a number of people at the same time and provide a useful opportunity for obtaining instant feedback. Members at a meeting are free to give their views, make suggestions while active participation is encouraged. Meetings may take one of several forms including statutory meetings, Annual General Meetings, Extraordinary meetings, Board of Directors' meetings, Meeting of Managers/Section Heads, Meeting of Managers (Supervisors) with subordinates, Departmental meetings, Committee meetings and Working Party/Project Task meetings. On the importance of regular staff meetings, the Rozee Team noted that regular staff meetings:

- Improve collective performance, encourages greater productivity and boosts profits

- Strengthens a sense of togetherness, brand-awareness and corporate identity
- Develops good communication skills within internal teams – a valuable skill which will be translated into customer or client interaction
- Motivates staff to help each other succeed, reinforces their commitment to working towards a common goal
- Teaches managers and senior staff the crucial arts of communication, delegation and leadership
- Discusses matters concerning changes in office routine
- Announces weekly office statistics
- Opens discussion on ideas for generating referrals
- Contributes to a sense of oneness among co-workers
- Discourages feelings of isolation that can develop when staff members are given routine work assignments that allow only minimal interpersonal communication during the day
- Stimulates useful ideas about how to deal with problems and how to improve the handling of routine situations
- Reduces friction by giving staff members an appropriate forum to air their differences and seek resolution
- Ensures regular and effective communication

<http://blog.rozee.pk/2010/01/27/staff-meetings-important-attended/>

Udall and Udall (1982) also note that the various types of meetings are held for various reasons/purposes ranging from an informal exchange of views and ideas to the highly formal structured events that follow strict procedure such as Meetings of Parliament, Company Boards and Annual General Meetings among others. However, every meeting is called for the purpose of communication by giving out information, collecting, or answering questions, or clarifying issues. In all these, a meeting provides a means of co-ordinating collective knowledge and expertise whose outcome is a collective responsibility.

Blundell (2004) adds that instant feedback and intensive flow of verbal and non verbal communication which potentially offer rapid exchange of ideas and group synergies are derived from meetings. In other words, combined efforts of a group generates better solutions than individuals working alone or communicating through other less intensive channels such as letters, memos, and emails among others.

According to Certo (2000) the supervisor needs to have both knowledge and power to carry out his/her job. For the supervisor to acquire power on assumption to the job of supervisor, a formal announcement of the promotion or appointment should be done by his/her boss. This could be at a meeting with employees at which the supervisor could take the opportunity to state his/her expectations, desires to work as a team and his/her interest to hear about work-related problems.

For instance, where an Assistant Registrar is appointed, promoted and posted or transferred to a Faculty, Section, Department or Unit, the immediate boss is expected to formally announce this at a meeting with the office staff to enable the supervisor have the opportunity to express his/her expectations from the staff as well as his/her desire to work as a team among others and follow up at subsequent regular meetings to discuss progress of work. The system of casual mentioning of the appointment, promotion or transfer by a letter or mere mention in passing by the immediate boss is not helpful enough. The situation is compounded where regular meetings with subordinate staff in faculties, departments, sections and units are rare in an institution.

Contextual Framework

In spite of the importance of workers in the running of every organisation, employers need to put in place measures to ensure that they derive the maximum use of workers. As part of performance management practices, organisations and immediate managers of workers institute review meetings and staff appraisal schemes to assess staff performance. Some organisations conduct staff appraisal annually to assess staff work performance but it has been noted that such once a year review under the formal appraisal has been one of the main criticisms of typical appraisal schemes. Accordingly, it is advocated by contrast in performance management that review and the provision of feedback should happen more frequently (Williams, 2002). There is thus, the need for regular staff interactions and review meetings with staff and their immediate managers.

The University of Education, Winneba operates an annual staff appraisal scheme at which the Heads of members of staff complete the appraisal form to assess the performance of the members of staff. There is therefore the need to establish whether there is any form of regular interaction with staff by their immediate heads to review their work in the course of the year before annual appraisal and whether it impacts on their work.

Statement of Problem

Recent complaints from management and the Administration Committee of the University of Education, Winneba about the non performance of work by some subordinate staff and by extension members of the Registrar's Department raised questions over whether supervisors at UEW organised staff meetings with subordinate staff in Faculties, Departments, Sections and Units at which daily work related issues were discussed and remedial actions taken.

A survey conducted on meetings held at the University of Education, Winneba showed that the management and administration of the University thrived on meetings at different levels of the University hierarchy. At the apex are meetings of the University Council at which major policy issues are taken. The University management meets weekly to deliberate on the daily administration of the University.

Committees of the University Council also hold scheduled meetings which include meetings of the Academic Board, the Appointments and Promotions Board, the Development Committee, the Finance Committee and the Entity Tender Committee. These Committees deliberate on pertinent respective issues which are integral to the administration of the University. Through these Committee meetings, various officials in the University are held accountable for work performance. Members of management, Principals of Colleges, Deans of Faculties and selected Heads of Department constitute the membership of these Council Committees.

The Academic Board has a number of Sub Committees which also hold scheduled meetings. These include Academic Planning Committee, Executive Committee, Appointments and Promotions Committee, Housing Committee, Health and Sanitation Committee, and Student Staff Consultative Committee among others. Their memberships are mainly Principal Officers, Deans, Heads of Department/Sections, selected senior members and Union representatives. Additionally, a number of Ad Hoc Committees are constituted with membership ranging from Deans of Faculty to Heads of Department and selected senior members and Union representatives where relevant.

Another level of scheduled meetings is Faculty and Department meetings. These constitute meetings of the teaching staff at the various Faculties and Departments. At Faculty Board meetings, the Faculty Officers serve as Secretaries while Senior Administrative Assistants serve as Secretaries at Department meetings. The Secretaries are only recorders who do not contribute to discussions at such meetings.

Convocation which is made up of senior members in the University meets at least once in a semester to deliberate on the general state of affairs in the University. Recently, workers forum has been

introduced to enable staff interact with management once a while. Bi-weekly meetings of senior members in the Registrar's Department are held to deliberate on issues pertinent to the Department and the overall administration of the University. Reports are also received from the respective Divisions, Faculties, Institute, Sections, Halls, and Units. The expectation is that heads of these Divisions, Faculties, Institute, Sections, Halls, and Units also meet their staff on regular basis. The severalty of Committees and frequency of meetings underscores the importance and use of staff meetings in the administration of the University.

The University, however, has three levels of staff categories namely senior members, senior and junior staff but membership of the above Committees and meetings are of headship and senior positions with representatives of selected unions in some cases.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Find out whether staff meetings with subordinate staff were being held at the faculty, departmental, sectional and unit levels at UEW
- Find out whether the meetings impacted on the work performance of subordinate staff

Methodology

Population

The study covered the senior and junior staff in the Registrar's Department, Faculties/ Institute, Departments, Sections and Units of the Winneba Campus of the University of Education, Winneba.

Sample and Sampling

In all, a total of 48 senior and junior staff from 16 offices in the Registrar's Department, 25 offices in the Faculties and Departments and 7 other administrative Offices including Library, Finance, Internal Audit and Development Office on the Winneba Campus of UEW were sampled. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from the offices.

Data Collection Procedure

The main instrument used was interview using an interview guide and observation to obtain the primary data. The 'yes' and 'no' responses of the staff were collated by tallying and percentages calculated. The other open responses and comments were taken down and discussed. The responses were qualitatively analysed under the following questions:

- Are there staff meetings held in the respective offices with subordinate staff?
- Are subordinate staff aware of other regular meetings held in the University without subordinate them?
- Do staff meetings have any effect on work performance of subordinate staff?

Findings and Discussions

A question addressed in the analysis was whether staff meetings are held with subordinate staff in the 16 offices in the Registrar's Department, 25 offices in the Faculties and Departments and 7 other administrative Offices on the Winneba Campus of UEW.

It came to light that there were very few offices where meetings were held with junior and senior staff. This is represented in table 1 below:

Table 1a:
Holding of staff meetings with subordinate staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	9	18.7
No	39	81.2
Totals	48	100

From Table 1a, out of 48 senior and junior staff interviewed, 9 of them representing 18.7% said their supervisors held staff meetings with them. 39 of them representing 81.2% said their supervisor's did not hold staff meetings with them. This is not encouraging since 81.2% of staff interviewed did not have the opportunity of enjoying the benefits of staff meetings as identified by the Rozee Team and Blundell (2004). The situation is unfortunate since several other meetings were held with senior members of the University and heads as shown by the survey at which key decisions regarding the conduct of work in the University was taken. This indicates a gap between management, heads and senior members on one hand and senior and junior staff who tend to be active in carrying out daily administrative, clerical, menial work and other support services and who constitute greater majority of the workforce which require more supervision.

Table 1b:
Offices holding meetings with subordinate staff

Responses	Registrar's Department	Other Administrative Offices	Faculties/ Institute Secretariats	Academic Departments
Yes	5	4	-	-
No	11	3	5	20
Total	16	7	5	20

Table 1b above shows the breakdown of the responses in Table 1a above into the Registrar's Department, offices in the Faculties and Departments and other administrative Offices on the Winneba Campus of UEW. Out of the 9 offices where staff meetings were held with subordinate staff, 5 were in the Registrar's Department and 4 from the other administrative offices. There were no meetings with subordinate staff in the 5 Faculty secretariats and 20 academic Departments which clearly indicated that subordinate senior and junior members of staff in the faculties and departments were almost ignored with regards to sharing of views and ideas in running of the departments and faculties. This confirms the Rozee Team's assertion that feelings of isolation develops when staff members are given routine work assignments that allow only minimal interpersonal communication during the day.

Some senior and junior staff noted that the only time they met was at end of year gatherings where they were made to express their views concerning the department. Others indicated that the only meetings they participated were those of union meetings organised by the Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU) and the Federation of University Senior Staff Association of Ghana (FUSSAG). Staff of a Faculty and a Department admitted that they were once met by the Dean and Head of department when they took office but did not meet again.

Table 2:
Knowledge of other regular meetings held without subordinate staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	41	85.4
No	-	-
Not sure	7	14.6
Totals	48	100

Table 2 shows the responses of staff on whether they knew of other staff meetings which were held in the University but which did not involve them. 41 of them, representing 85.4% knew that other meetings were being held in the University which involved other members of staff but not junior and senior staff. 7 out of them representing 14.6% were not sure of any such meetings. The situation confirms the survey which showed several meetings being held by Council and its Committees, management, faculty and departmental levels which did not involve senior and junior staff. At the faculty and departmental level meetings, the supporting staff were not included and the Secretaries were only recorders who do not contribute to discussions at such meetings. This confirmed senior and junior staff members' claim of feeling alienated from the system during the interview.

Table 3:
Necessity of regular staff meetings with subordinates

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	38	79.2
No	6	12.5
Not sure	4	8.3
Totals	48	100

Table 3 depicts how senior and junior staff viewed regular meetings. 38 of them representing 79.2% considered that regular staff meetings by their supervisors with them were necessary. 6 of them representing 12.5% did not consider regular staff meetings with their supervisors as necessary while 4 of them representing 8.3% were not sure whether it was necessary.

Table 4:
Improved discharge of duties due to regular staff meetings with subordinate staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	7	78
No	2	22
Totals	9	100

As Table 4 above shows, 7 out of the 9 staff whose offices held staff meetings representing 78% said staff meetings had improved the discharge of their duties. They attested to the fact that the meetings helped the office to set targets, assess work for the past month and solve emerging problems. However, 2 of them representing 22% said staff meetings had not improved the discharge of their work.

Table 5
Absence of regular staff meetings with subordinates affected discharge of duties

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	31	79.4
No	8	20.5
Totals	39	100

On the effect of the absence of staff meetings, Table 5 shows that 31 (79%) of the respondents in offices where staff meetings were not being held said it had affected the discharge of their duties while 8 (20.5%) said it had not affected their work performance. This showed that the lack of meetings with

senior and junior staff to review their work to a greater extent affected general work performance with the exception of a few who thought they knew their work and thus performed them as such.

Conclusion

Generally, most of the senior and junior staff interviewed attested to the fact that staff meetings were not being held with them even though they regarded it as relevant to their work and its absence was affecting the discharge of their work. Further, knowing that regular meetings were held at Council, Council Committees, Management, Faculty and Departmental levels in the University involving senior members to their exclusion made them harbour a feeling of alienation which needed to be addressed.

Recommendations

In view of the findings made, the following recommendations are made for the consideration of University management, administrators and supervisors.

1. There is the need to institute compulsory regular monthly or quarterly staff meetings for support staff including senior /junior staff in the Faculties, Departments, Divisions, Sections and Units in the University as a means of collective target setting and assessing performance of work at regular intervals. This will greatly minimise complaints of staff non performance while senior and junior staff will feel part of the system and be motivated to perform better.
2. As heads of support staff in the faculties, Faculty Officers should be empowered to hold regular monthly or quarterly meetings with all support staff in the Faculty secretariat and those in the Departments to discuss and assess work delivery, administrative issues and challenges, resolve problems and set common targets for the Faculty and its Departments. Faculty Officers should in turn hold regular interactions with Heads of Departments on emerging issues.
3. The quarterly reports presented by Divisions, Faculties, Sections, Halls to the meeting of senior members Registrar's Department should indicate staff meetings held, emerging issues and action taken.
4. The summarised reports on meetings held at Faculty, and Departments with subordinate support staff indicating decisions and action taken should be forwarded to the Registrar every quarter. Alternatively copies of minutes of such meetings should be given to the Registrar. An Assistant Registrar in the Office of the Registrar should be tasked to summarise emerging issues from staff meetings of Faculties, Departments, Sections and Units for the purpose of monitoring their implementation. This will enable the Registrar and management to be abreast of issues relating to staff in the performance of work in Faculties, Departments, Divisions, Sections and Units. It will also aid preparation of Vice Chancellor's State of Affairs report to convocation.
5. The University should develop a guide to supervision and or a policy on staff supervision to help supervisors in effective supervision. This document could be used for staff orientation and training.
6. It is recommended that further studies should be conducted into how supervisors at the University of Education, Winneba utilise their time.

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