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# CROUCH, TOUCH, PAUSE, ENGAGE: THE ENGAGING OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT DURING RESTRUCTURING

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**Abstract:** *This article reports on stress during restructuring in a tertiary institution in New Zealand and compares it with South African legislation. The aim of this research is the engaging of HR to minimise the impact of stress on staff effectiveness and performance.*

*Data was collected using a quantitative instrument distributing the survey electronically to 291 staff from "Faculty A" at a Tertiary Education Organisation in Auckland; the response rate was 20.3%.*

*The findings of the study demonstrate high positive results to factors that cause stress within organisations during organisational restructuring. Stress can enhance a person's performance; excessive stress can have a reverse impact on a person's health resulting in lower productivity. Stress was not managed up to staff expectations during the restructuring and the impact was more severe than was expected.*

**Keywords:** *Human resources management engagement, stress, impact, performance*

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## Introduction

The Rugby World Cup 2011 was held in September and October 2011 in New Zealand. Construction companies, hospitality organisations, training organisations and numerous other businesses stressed to get everything ready and in order for the event. There is the other side of the coin as well, the financial side. It is a well known fact that there was a downturn in the global economy experienced by all organisations, large or small. This downturn in the economy was one of the reasons for restructuring causing stress within organisations and it was at an all time high. Budget cuts, limited resources and

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layoffs have led to a tremendous increase in stress among people within the workforce due to the uncertainty that prevailed in the environment (Du Plessis et al., 2013; Belmonte, 2008). The Department of Labour (New Zealand) confirmed that the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 was promulgated to include all employers and work places. The Act was amended in 2002 to specify “work-related stress” (Rudman, 2016). It puts the emphasis on the need to address stress management within the work place as the amended Act allows an employee to sue their employer for causing undue stress. Therefore, to reduce risk and ensure the best performance by staff it is important for an organisation’s Human Resource (HR) department to engage on all levels to minimise stress within their organisations.

Restructuring has three main dimensions. The first comprises of the transformation in the way teaching and learning occurs within educational organisations. The second dimension comprises of the transformation in the occupational situation of staff including conditions of school structures, conditions of lecturers’ work in organisations and the decision making processes. The third dimension comprises of transformation in the distribution of power between schools and its clients or in the governance and incentive structures under which academic institutions function (Dimmock, 1999). Marriott, Du Plessis, Pu (2011) state further that educational organisational restructuring is becoming necessary due to globalisation and internationalisation of education. With increasing students travelling overseas to acquire a qualification, there is a constant requirement for educational organisations to change their business practices by reshaping their basic ways including the design, management style and delivery of their academic practices. This view is also supported by Du Plessis and Frederick (2008; 2012) and Du Plessis, Frederick and Maritz (2013).

If referred to the word “staff” in this article, it includes management, administration and lecturers in a Faculty (it will be referred to as “Faculty A”). Staff members are unsure about their job security at the chosen Tertiary Education Organisation (TEO) due to restructuring taking place. Job security is one of the stress factors identified by **Clausen and Petruka (2009)**. During this period of changes and uncertainty it is important to manage stress. These stress factors have to be identified and addressed by the HR department. By managing stress while providing a better work environment and support, “Faculty A” staff would be able to perform more effectively in their respective roles (Kardam, 2005). This in turn could help the organisation in performing to its utmost potential as a tertiary institution.

This research discusses HR’s engagement in stress management issues among staff during organisational restructuring to enhance human resource efficiency and how neglecting stress within an organisation can have a significant impact on staff performance. These issues need to be addressed so as to provide guidelines to management for a better working environment.

When an organisation undergoes restructuring, redundancy is considered as one of the main stress factors that staff experience during such a process. In South Africa the Basic Conditions of Employment Act is clear about compensating staff as a result of redundancy. This, however, was not defined in any New Zealand statute until the Employment Relations Act (ERA) was amended in 2004 (Rudman, 2016). The ERA

now requires all collective employment agreements to encompass an employee protection provision to defend any staff/employee that is made redundant. Staff that is made redundant due to the restructuring should be financially compensated as part of the redundancy entitlements if stated in their employment contracts. This would help support staff for part of a period that they will be jobless (Du Plessis, 2015).

When making staff redundant as a result of restructuring, it is also vital for an organisation to justify the dismissal for redundancy by illustrating valid grounds for terminating a particular position. Poor performance should not be considered a factor for making staff redundant as redundancy cannot be adopted by an organisation as an excuse to dismiss staff when the actual problem could be lack of performance or misconduct (Du Plessis, 2015; Rudman, 2016). Hence, management should keep this in mind when carrying out such tasks. After a staff member was made redundant an organisation should also not replace that position or employ someone else to do similar work as it could result in unjustifiable termination leading to court proceedings, according to Rudman (2016).

Data was collected from all eight departments of the TEO's "Faculty A" staff. The reason for selecting and examining the three categories of staff was to ensure an adequate sample size for the research and to fairly represent "Faculty A" in different discipline areas which forms the basis of this research. All proposed plans, implementation processes and outcomes have been assessed, documented, tabled and graphed.

## **Problem statement**

The problem is: what stress factors could be managed to enhance staff performance in an organisation during restructuring and what is the impact of stress on staff. This research also identifies how stress and performance relate to each other and also identifies the relationship between stress and job performance. New Zealand is a huge rugby supporting nation hence the analogy used similar to the terminology referees used during the World Cup in 2011 of Crouch, Touch, Pause and Engage. The role of the HR department in addressing (crouch) identifying (touch) and discussing (pause) and then engaging to minimise the impact of stress is also highlighted in this article.

## **Rationale and aims of the study**

According to Scott (2008) stress within an organisation is inevitable and hard to escape. However adopting certain stress management strategies can help lower stress within an organisation which forms the rationale for this study.

The aim of this study is to highlight HR's role to recognise and classify issues and factors having an impact on staff during restructuring. There are five main areas in this research, but due to limitation of the length of this article only the last three (c, d, e) are reported on in this article:

- a) To theoretically study organisational stress management.

- b) To identify the factors that cause stress within an organisation by carrying out a survey.
- c) To determine the impact of restructuring on staff.
- d) To get information from Faculty staff by carrying out a survey about how stress relates with staff performance.
- e) To determine methods and guidelines by which stress can be managed among staff to improve staff performance and in-turn an organisation's efficiency.

Three hypotheses were derived from these areas but only H3 is discussed in this article:

H1- Restructuring has raised stress during the restructuring of "Faculty A" and had an impact on staff.

H01- Restructuring has not raised stress during the restructuring of "Faculty A" and had an impact on staff.

H2- Stress correlates with staff performance in an organisation during restructuring.

H02- Stress does not correlate with staff performance in an organisation during restructuring

H3- Stress can be managed among staff during organisation restructuring.

H03- Stress cannot be managed among staff during organisation restructuring.

## Literature review

Poor stress management can lead to loss of job interest and responsibility among staff, poor competency and reduced staff performance. Organisational stress has also been related with significant work related outcomes comprising of organisational commitment, job satisfaction including staff withdrawal behaviour (Du Plessis, 2014; Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Managers within an organisation can either prevent or then create stress among staff they manage as a result of their management style. Thus, managers must have a good understanding of the kind of behaviour they must demonstrate so as to manage staff in the least stressful manner. Hence, HR managers and managers play an important role in identifying and dealing with organisational stress.

According to a study carried out at the Otago Polytechnic (New Zealand), organisational restructuring has a significant impact on employee commitment. Brauch as cited in Theissen, (2004) mentions that in the current age of restructuring and downsizing work commitment is viewed differently. Many staff within organisations supports the change process simply to secure their jobs rather than having any attachment to it. Work commitment plays an important role impacting staff performance and their efficiency from a manager's point of view. Organisations can effectively manage and maintain staff commitment during restructuring by communicating periodically with staff, planning in advance, respecting staff seniority

and ensuring that the organisation's values and objectives are clearly aligned and communicated (Du Plessis, Toh, Chen, 2013; Theissen, 2004).

Restructuring if not undertaken appropriately can cause distress among staff within an organisation. Stuart as cited in Raukko, (2009) mentions that organisational restructuring and change can cause trauma, catastrophe and abuse among staff. The same author further indicates that organisational restructuring can have a negative impact on staff as it can lower their morale, increase stress levels, lead to loss of control and direction, create uncertainty and anxiety as well as reduce staff loyalty within an organisation. It can also have an impact on management functions comprising of training, recruitment, planning, staff compensation and organisational development (Du Plessis et al, 2013; Du Plessis 2009; Belohlav & LaVan, 1989).

Badenhorst (2016) as well as Appelbaum, Henson and Knee, (1999) state that organisation downsizing if not planned properly can result in psycho social problems among staff not affected by downsizing collectively known as "survivor syndrome". Such survivors tend to become narrow minded, risk averse and self absorbed which results in lowered self-esteem and loyalty in-turn affecting the organisational functioning. They continue to state that many organisations fail downsizing due to poor management and the existence of unmanaged resistance.

During organisational restructuring, social change in an organisation can also arise when there is disparity between the organisational environment and systems. Social change refers to an action such as restructuring that affects and influences a group of people with shared values and characteristics. The change is likely to have a negative impact on staff and systems when disparity between the organisation environments is increased and a positive impact when it is reduced (Badenhorst, 2016).

Certain amount of stress is essential for an individual's development, growth, change, performance at work and in their personal lives. Brief, as cited in Larson, (2004) states that stress to an extent can help enhance our effectiveness and performance. An example would be a promotion which can be quite an exciting yet a challenging experience. Stress if not managed properly can lead to individual stressors which are harmful to both staff as well as their organisations. Hence the more stressors that prevail within the work environment even as a result of restructuring, the more stressed out staff will feel which in turn can result in lowered performance according to Badenhorst (2016).

Therefore, excess stress of any kind can result in physical, psychological and behavioural problems leading to poor work performance and frustration. This is because excess stress enables us to perform well only to a certain extent after which a person's performance tends to decline (Badenhorst, 2016).

When stress is high within an organisation for example during organisational restructuring, it is important for managers to think and act in a positive manner. This helps reduce stress among subordinates and other staff members as staff tend to act in accordance to how management reacts during such times. The methods and guidelines stated below are of double the importance for managers as compared to other staff comprising of lecturers and administration staff (Badenhorst, 2016; Du Plessis, 2014; Nadia, 2009).

### **Enhance communication**

- Staff roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined.
- Staff must be made aware of their job prospects during restructuring to minimise ambiguity.
- Communication should be carried out regularly and efficiently among staff in a pleasant manner.

### **Conduct staff discussions**

- Staff should feel that they are valued by discussing scheduling of work activities and rules within the organisation.
- Encourage staff participation in decision making.
- Assign appropriate workload among staff that matches their skills and abilities.

### **Provide staff incentives**

- Reward staff for their achievements.
- Offer career development prospects for staff.
- Congratulate staff verbally and by offering certificates of merit based on their performance.
- Create a friendly work environment.

### **Develop a social environment**

- Social gatherings among staff should be carried out from time to time.
- Harassment at work should not be accepted (Marriott, Du Plessis, Nielsen, Sukumaran, 2013; Belmonte, 2008).

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample Selection***

Based on the topic of this research it was anticipated to carry out the study among staff members within an organisation where restructuring has currently been undertaken to determine their stress levels and its impact on staff. Hence, “Faculty A” staff was selected for carrying out this research as some departments of the organisation have already undergone restructuring while other departments are still in the process. Thus staff members from eight departments (in total 291 staff) in the same Faculty were considered the appropriate sample for this research as they had all been influenced by the restructure to a certain extent. According to CRS, (2009) “the larger the sample size, the more certain you can be that their answers will truly reflect the population”.

### ***Questionnaire Development***

The questionnaire was developed and categorized in six parts. The first part comprised of demographic data pertaining to participant's age, category, level and duration of service. The second part comprised of eight common factors that cause stress during organisational restructuring which included work overload, job security, longer work hours, role knowledge, inter role conflicts, lack of training, lack of management support and organisational commitment. The participants had to answer questions pertaining to each of the eight factors.

The questionnaire contains 32 questions subdivided into the eight most commonly occurring organisational stress factors. Each question within the questionnaire is assigned 5 marks. Hence the total marks for the 8 stress factors would be 32 (i.e. no. of questions) x 5 (i.e. no. of marks) = 160 marks overall. Part of this questionnaire was developed on a study carried out by Theissen (2004), which was based on the impact of organisational restructuring on employee commitment at the Otago Polytechnic in New Zealand.

The remaining four parts of the survey included the factors that cause stress within an organisation, the impact of restructuring on staff, identifying how stress relates with staff performance and determining how stress can be managed. These last four parts of the survey were not given any rankings.

### ***Questionnaire Data Collection***

Data pertaining to this study was collected electronically via e-mail that was sent by the researchers to all "Faculty A" staff members of the TEO. The staff members comprised of lecturers, administration staff and management. The e-mail included a link to an online survey that was sent out to 291 participants out of which 59 staff members completed the survey thus a response rate of 20.3% was achieved.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data pertaining to the surveys were exported to Microsoft Office Excel for analysis. All data was imported from an online tool called Survey Monkey which was used to carry out the surveys electronically via e-mail. Many tables and charts were developed using Excel to portray the results of the survey. Some of the data was also quantitatively analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme. The SPSS programme was selected due to the numerous advantages that it provides for analysing quantitative data. The degree of errors was reduced as data was directly collected online and not entered manually as in the case of physical (hard copy) surveys. The data from the survey was analysed by means of descriptive statistics comprising of percentages.

## **Analysis of the results**

The focus of this research is to highlight HR's role to recognise and classify issues and factors having an impact on staff during restructuring by obtaining staff's perspectives and the engagement of HRM to minimise and to manage stress. The analysis indicated that staff members are dissatisfied in general. It is alarming that 62% of the respondents responded that management did not plan and did not support the changes carefully in



the organisation while only 22% rarely feel that management has been as honest with bad news as good news about changes to the organisation during restructuring.

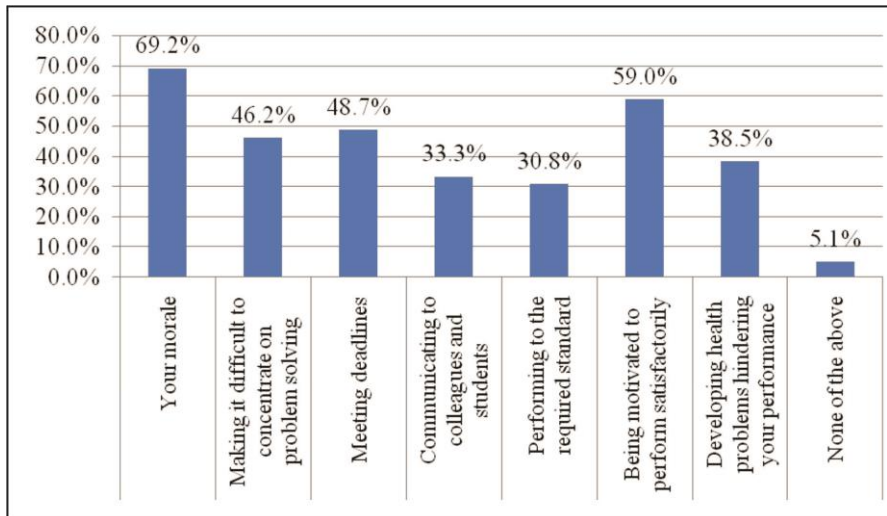
This research has identified that the majority (55%) of the respondents distrust management decisions regarding the future of the organisation and trust therefore is only 24%, while 21% feel this way from time to time. It can therefore be deduced that the staff do not trust senior management in making sensible decisions for the organisation's future. It should be of great concern for management that 80% of the respondents disagree with some of the organisation policies relating to its staff and only 23% of respondents are always loyal, while more than half (55%) is unsure and only feel loyal from time to time

### *The impact of restructuring on staff*

The respondents were asked: "According to you, has stress affected your job performance in your morale, problem solving, meeting deadlines, communicating to colleagues and students, performance, motivation, developing health problems or none of them"?

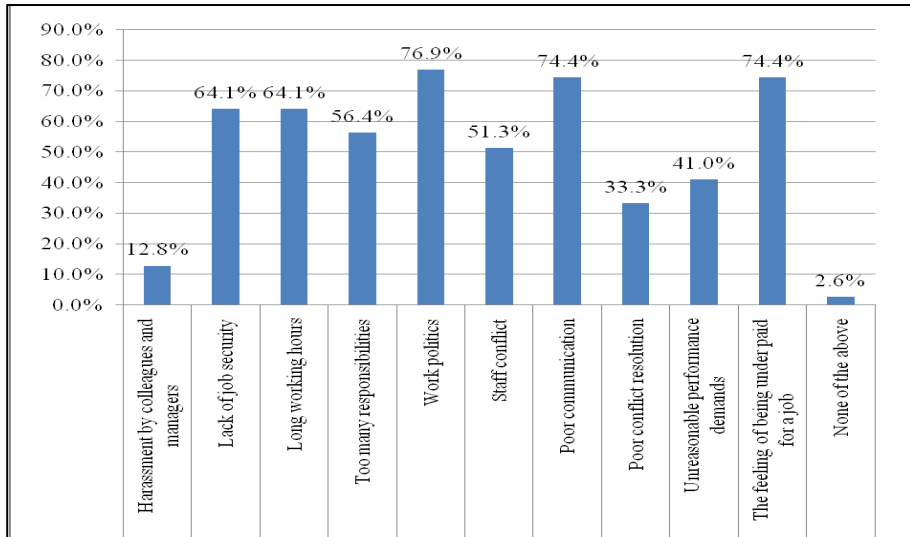
It was found that the impact of restructuring was severe on morale relating to job performance which was given a rating of 69.2%. It can be deduced that morale is linked to the percentage of respondents (78%) who indicated that they consider to leave the organisation, in other words to loyalty. A lower consensus showed being motivated to perform satisfactorily at 59% and meeting deadlines at 48.7% along with difficulty to concentrate on problem solving at 46.2% were other job performance affected areas as a result of the restructure.

*Figure 1: Job performance affected areas*



To further determine the impact of stress on the staff the question was put to them: “Which of the following stress factors have you experienced during the restructuring process”? This question required respondents to mark as many of the stress factors that applied to them. Three main areas of concern for management that they should address are: work politics at 76.9% followed by poor communication at 74.4% and the feeling of being underpaid for a job at an equal rating of 74.4%. These were considered as the top three stress factors by staff as a result of restructuring. A lower consensus, but still a factor for concern for management, showed lack of job security at 64.1% and longer working hours with an equal rating of 64.1% as other stress factors as a result of the restructure. Management will have to address longer working hours as soon as possible because of the consequences it might have with the OSH Act. On the other hand harassment by colleagues and managers was given the lowest stress factor priority at 12.8% by the respondents.

**Figure 2:** *Stress factors during restructuring: impact on staff*



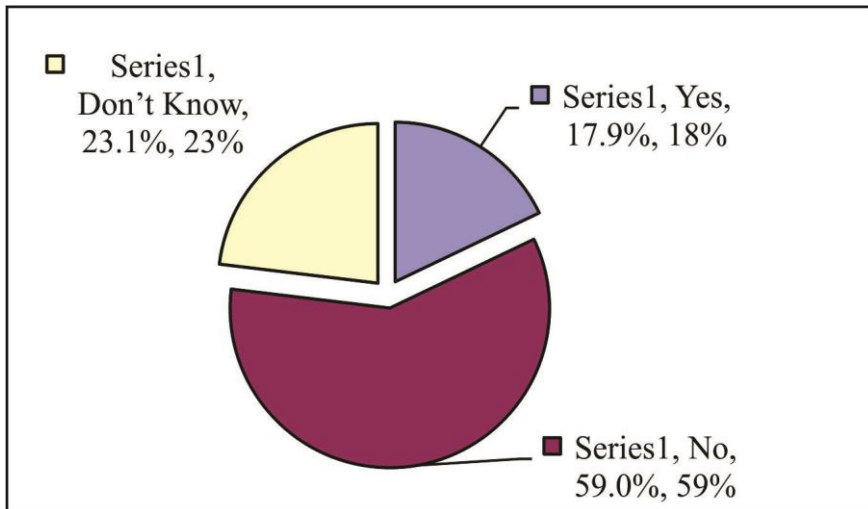
***How stress relates with staff performance***

Performing to the required standard was given the lowest priority of 30.8% by the respondents and is something that management must take seriously into account. It can be deduced that the respondents lost some of their interest in standards due to the continuous re-structuring at the TEO. It is another serious area for management to address and it is definitely linked to the problem with morale and loyalty (see Figure 1 above).

### ***How stress can be managed among staff to improve staff performance and in-turn an organisation's efficiency***

The survey participants were asked the question “In your opinion, do you believe that stress was managed properly during the restructure”? This question required participants to answer by agreeing to the statement as in “Yes” or then disagreeing to the statement as in “No”. The result shows that the majority of the respondents (59%) disagreed to the fact that stress was managed properly during the restructure. Only 17.9% of respondents on the other hand disagreed with the statement and believed that stress was managed properly during the restructure while 23.1% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. See Figure 3 below.

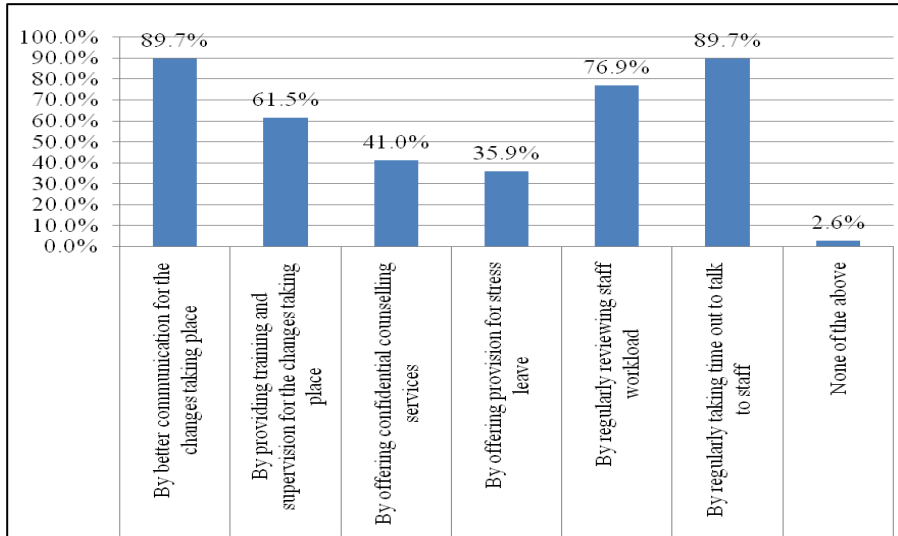
**Figure 3:** *Stress management during restructuring*



Another question was: “In your opinion, how can stress be managed and minimised in an organisation during restructuring”?

The results (Figure 4 below) illustrate that communication for the changes taking place along with regularly taking time out to talk to staff were given the highest and equal rating of 89.7% by respondents in order to minimise and manage stress more effectively during restructuring. A slightly lower percentage showed that regularly reviewing staff's workload at 76.9% and providing training and supervision for the changes taking place at 61.5% along with offering confidential counselling services at 41% were other stress management techniques. Offering provision for stress leave was given the lowest priority of 35.9% by respondent's which is still at a high and is something that management must take into consideration.

**Figure 4:** How to manage stress during restructuring



**H3- Stress can be managed among staff during organisation restructuring.**

When asked how stress can be managed and minimised in an organisation during restructuring, besides the stated areas in Figure 4 above, staff commented on the following issues shown in the summary below (Table 1):

**Table 1:** Staff comments on managing stress and minimising thereof

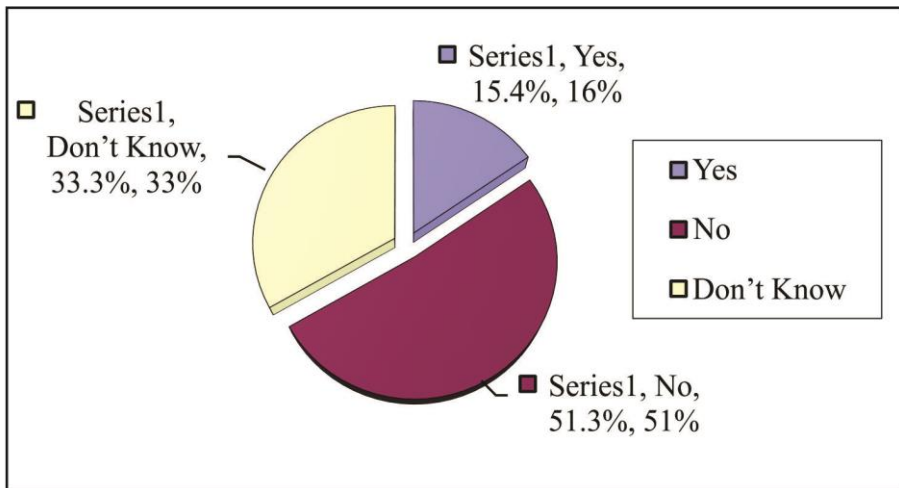
Other:-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By speeding the process as far as practicable.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By understanding the organisation BEFORE restructuring takes place.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By ensuring equal workloads as some particularly admin staff are doing much higher workloads than others, only because they are more capable which is unfair.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By managers ensuring support and encouragement that is given to administration staff.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making senior management aware of people's stress.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rationale for changes is no longer clear. There are no clear institutional goals. ACT on staff feedback. Some staff members know much more than their managers. We know the consequences if it goes wrong - qualifications are compromised and students migrate for e.g. latest Bach of Acc and Fin experience.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any change is stressful, no matter how many communications there are. But certainly lots of communication will help alleviate the stress to an extent.</li> </ul>

***The role of the HR department in addressing (crouch) identifying (touch) discussing (pause) and then engaging to minimise the impact of stress***

The respondents were asked the question “In your view, has staff received adequate training to keep up with the changes within the organisation”?

The result shows that more than half of the respondents (51.3%) disagreed to the fact that they received adequate training to keep up with the changes within the organisation. An insignificant 15.4% of respondents on the other hand agreed with the statement that they received adequate training, while surprisingly a third (33.3%) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. It can be deduced that the high percentage of respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement is because the restructure is still in process and many staff members at present still don't know the outcome of the change and how it is likely to affect them and their current role according to the feedback obtained from the questionnaire. This is no excuse for the HR department not to do training of the staff to minimise stress. In addressing changes during training sessions, the stress it caused staff could be identified by HR. Discussion and or communication during training sessions will also be a stress reliever for some staff. If the HR department is actively engaged in the restructuring process, stress could be minimised and staff would have trust and confidence in them to openly talk to them as they would to counsellors.

**Figure 5: Staff training**



## Recommendations for the leadership team of the TEO

Although offering of stress leave was given the lowest priority of 35.9% by the respondents it is something that management must take into consideration to offer to employees.

McPherson, (2008) and Du Plessis (2014) state that educational institution's morale is usually low among staff members as they complain about salaries not matching inflation and due to extreme work pressure during restructuring. Therefore, management can ensure staff morale is attained by following a number of basic procedures such as:

- regularly checking the flow of communication;
- monitoring leave to ensure that staff get a break from the daily work routine;
- listening to any issues that staff have;
- regularly determining levels of control; and most importantly
- asking staff themselves as to what motivates them.

To boost staff morale the leadership team should implement a schedule of morale boosters:

- conduct annual parties;
- publicise staff achievements and contributions;
- encourage staff to pursue further education;
- give staff authority to perform their tasks independently where and when possible;
- empower staff;
- greet staff at the start and end of the day;
- offer special anniversary gifts to acknowledge staff that have been within an organisation for "X" amount of years;
- have a honour day to honour staff contributions;
- conduct meetings at different venues and display employee of the month either monthly or then quarterly on the organisation top achievers board and
- reward high achievers.

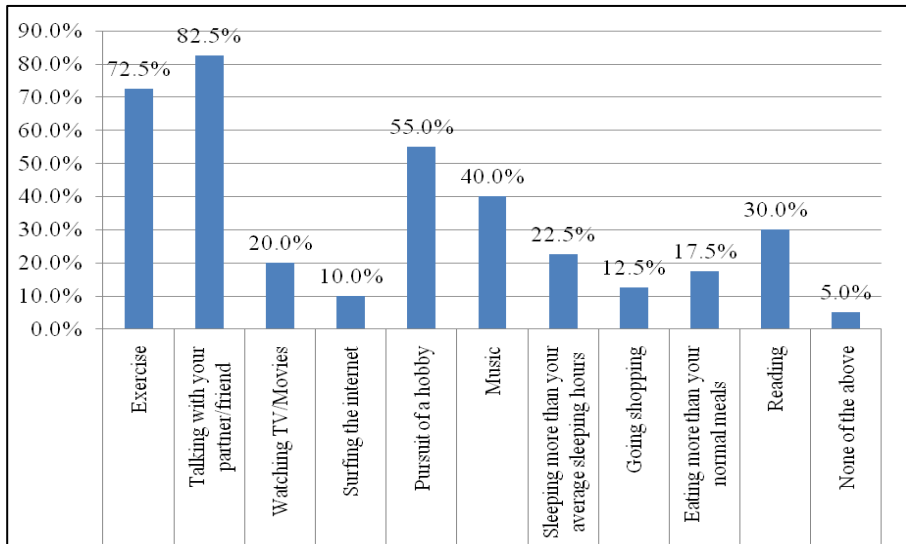
The HR department should give guidelines and encourage staff members, during training sessions, to overcome stress and they could advice staff members to follow any of the methods in Figure 6 below.

The respondents made some recommendations to management in answering the question: "If you experienced stress during the restructuring time, which of the following do you think assisted you in overcoming your stress"?

The results (in Figure 6 below) illustrate that talking with a partner/friend (82.5%), exercising (72.5%), pursuit of a hobby (55%) and listening to music (40%) are some of the ways of reducing and overcoming stress within an organisation during restructuring.

The final recommendation is that stress could and should be managed firstly by HR which engagement was pointed out and discussed above and then by the leadership team. Figure 4, above, depicts the areas and how this should be done by HRM and the leadership according to the respondents.

*Figure 6: Overcoming stress methods*



## Conclusion

The TEO's leadership team and HR department should use the results of this survey to identify the impact that restructuring has on such staff and their performance. The leadership team of the TEO could also be informed how the stress experienced by staff during the re-structuring including the influence/affects it had or still has on them can best be managed. It was also expected that a greater response rate would be achieved if the research had the backing and support of such an organisation's body. Organisation support when carrying out surveys helps to develop trust and confidence among the respondents while encouraging staff to see the need of such an exercise.

H3 is that stress can be managed among staff during organisation restructuring of "Faculty A". This hypothesis is found to be positive and the null hypothesis is rejected. The three main research areas (of the five) as well as H3 to determine the impact of restructuring on staff; to get information from "Faculty A" staff by carrying out a survey about how stress relates with staff performance; to determine methods and guidelines by which stress can be managed among staff to improve staff performance and in-turn an organisation's efficiency during restructuring are all answered. In

summary, some of the key issues that respondents raised with regards to the restructure were as follows:

- 60% of respondents did not feel secure of their jobs at the TEO during the restructure.
- 78% of respondents feel that after the restructure their new role interferes with their personal life and interests (e.g. social, religious and family) which are neglected due to lack of time causing stress.
- 81% of respondents feel that the scope of promotion is limited within staff roles due to restructuring, increasing their stress levels.
- 55% of the respondents distrust management decisions regarding the future of the organisation.
- 80% of respondents find it difficult to agree with some of the organisation's policies on important matters relating to its employees and only 23% of respondents are always loyal, while more than half (55%) is unsure and only feel loyal from time to time or often.

The respondents also raised some further issues with regards to the restructure which are as follows:

- Unfavourable work politics during the restructuring process.
- The feeling of being threatened by the restructure.
- A conventional, autocratic and authoritarian approach/style in carrying out the change at the TEO.
- How the stress caused, due to the restructure, has affected staff performance by lowering their morale.
- A total of 89.7% of the respondents responded that stress can be managed and minimised during restructuring through better communication. Regularly reviewing staff workload was also regarded important by 76.9% of respondents to manage stress.
- Management should reduce the fear of failure at all times as it leads to many people not performing up to expectations and standards

Stress factors are very closely related to a person's perception of their work environment. Stress management should be the responsibility firstly of the HR department and then the leadership team to ensure that their entire staff can perform to their utmost potential by monitoring and managing all stressors within the work environment. There must be clear and two way communication with feedback to overcome some of the stressors. If a solution to a problem is not found, it can lead to lower efficiency, poor staff morale and a considerable impact on the physical and psychological health of staff. Some recommendations were given in the previous section.



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