

## **Managing Stress in Times of Change for Teachers' Wellbeing and Commitment to Change in Tanzanian Education Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This review attempts to explain the strategic importance of managing stress in times of change for teachers' wellbeing and commitment to change in education sector in Tanzania. Building on Lewin's change management theory, stress management strategies based on ethical leadership values (care, respect, integrity, and justice) were suggested to escalate teachers' wellbeing, and commitment to changes in secondary schools. The findings revealed that teachers' stress can be originated from unclear vision of educational managers, fear of the unknown, job insecurity and uncertainties on the job in times of change in secondary schools. Also, the findings suggest that leadership roles of clearly communicating the vision, supporting teachers, being fair, considerate, and respectful during times of change in secondary schools are central to managing stress in times of change. This review calls for empirical test of the relationship between stress management and teachers' commitment to change initiatives in secondary schools.*

**Keywords: Change Management, Stress Management Strategies, Ethical Leadership**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Organisations should embrace changes for their survival and competitiveness. However, not always change initiatives get the desired outcomes; they fail (Burns, 2000; Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009). The change failures have been linked to ineffective change management (Ngirwa, 2013), employees' resistance (Hiatt, & Creasey, 2003, Yukl, 2010) and attitudes to change (Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005). This is due to the fact that processes of change bring unease (e.g., uncertainties, anxiety and stress) on employees (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia & Irmer, 2007; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan, 2004; Dahl, 2011). Change management studies have focused on examining the sources of employee unease such as uncertainties and stresses in times of change initiatives (see Allen et al., 2007, Bordia et al., 2004). It has been posited that leadership behaviours based on excessive control and force influence change resistance (Yukl, 2010) while ineffective communication seems escalating uncertainties which stress employees during change (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Previous studies have suggested that communication (from management) and involvement in decision making related to change can mitigate employees' uncertainties to change initiatives (Allen et al., 2007, Bordia et al., 2004).

Thus, employees' evaluation of the management of change processes would determine the change success (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). The change management processes based on transformational leadership, ethical leadership and participative leadership escalate employees' acceptance of changes (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell & Liu, 2008; Jones et al., 2005; Ngirwa, 2013). On the contrary, employees' resistance to change has been associated with directive leadership behaviours (Ngirwa, 2013). Stress management during change initiatives specifically, in education organisations lacks clear explanations in organisational studies. In the current review, we discuss based on Lewin model of organisational change management; the strategic importance of managing stress in times of change especially in schools. In this respect, we explain the gaps (i.e. ineffective communication, uncaring, unfairness, unsupportive) that might have been created by lack of appropriate change management strategies. We held major assumption that teachers' health is important and that inappropriate change management promotes teachers' stress that affects their wellbeing, commitment to change and their work performance in schools. This review asks:

- i. What are the causes of teachers stress during changes in schools?
- ii. What can be the effect of stress on teachers' wellbeing and commitment to change?
- iii. What are the important stress management strategies in mitigating teachers' stress in times of change in education sector?

## Literature Review

### *Stress in Times of Change*

The term stress can be defined as mental or emotional strain(s) resulted from adverse environment. It is considered as employee stimuli and response to uneasy circumstance (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Work stress has been associated with employees' "low motivation and morale, decrease in performance, high turnover and sick-leave, accidents, low job satisfaction, low quality products and services, poor internal communication and conflicts" (McHugh, 1993; Murphy, 1995; Schabracq & Cooper, 2000 in Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005, p.161). Stress has been negatively correlated with employees' change acceptance (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Workplace stress during times of change is inevitable. This is due to the uneasy situations (e.g., uncertainty) brought by change processes on the employees (Bordia et al., 2004; Nelson, Cooper, & Jackson, 1995). Changes in organisations cause uncertainties, anxiety, job insecurity and stress on employees (De Keyser, Vlerick & D'hoore, 2004).

However, too much stress affect employees' wellbeing, their attendance at work, work performance, and satisfaction (see Bashir & Ramay, 2010; Segal, Smith, Robinson & Segal, 2018; Trivellas, Reklitis & Platis, 2013) and the change initiatives (Dahl, 2011; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Likewise, organisation's productivity can be affected by stressed employees. This is due to the fact that stressed employees reveal low organisational commitment (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Therefore, managing stress is critically important for elevating employees' wellbeing, work motivation and performance; and organisational productivity in general. Leaders need strategies to reduce stress levels and thus escalate employees' performance. For the purpose of this review, we held an assumption that changes aim for organisational effectiveness and that they tend to cause unease on employees which affect the changes and organisation performance. Thus, stress management strategies in times of change are important for the changes to yield fruitful results.

### **Lewin's Model of Organisational Change Management**

Since changes affect employees in all times of change (i.e., before, during and after) (Smollan, 2015), the current study insists on the significance of managing teachers' stress in all times of change. Kurt Lewin (1947) posited stages of organisational change management namely: unfreezing, going and refreezing.

- In the unfreezing stage: the model emphasizes the importance of discouraging forces that maintain people in the status quo and encouraging forces that support change. The change agents (managers) should explain extensively about why the old ways of operating are no longer working while giving examples of organisational inefficiency. For instance, while inducing changes in education sector, examples on the consistent students' mass failure in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) results 2012-2017 (ref. CSEE results in the National Examination Council of Tanzania [NECTA] 2012-2017) can be presented. This may challenge teachers' beliefs, behaviours and attitudes and thus become motivated to accept the change at hand.
- The second stage by Lewin is change/transition where employees change their beliefs and uncertainties, and support the change. The change agents continue explaining about the benefits of the change, solve the underlying problems and involve people in the process of implementing change.
- In the refreezing stage, the change agents ensure change become part and parcel of the operations of the organisation. The change is sustained through established organisational structures, and systems.

In this study, we believe that in all stages (unfreezing, change & refreezing) of change process, teachers would face stress and thus change agents (i.e., education leaders) should demonstrate ethical behaviours based on care and fairness in handling teachers' concerns (Ciulla, 2004). They should act supportive (De Keyser et al., 2004) and participative (Ngirwa, 2013) in all processes of managing change. For example, at unfreezing stage, teachers' beliefs and attitudes are challenged, something which would lead to stress, resistance and thus requiring leaders behaviours based on participation/involvement (Jones et al., 2005; Ngirwa, 2013), communication (of the vision) (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993) and moving the teachers from the unknown to the future state. Leaders' support is crucial for the

teachers' wellbeing, change's success and school performance in general. Hence, effective management of stress is important to both employees and the organisation.

### **Teachers Commitment to Change Initiatives**

Employees' commitment to organisation tasks is crucial for tasks to reveal their expected results and organisation success in general. Likewise, for the change initiatives to reveal their expected results, leaders should ensure employees acceptance of change (e.g. through communication) (Armenakis et al., 1993; Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, & Walker, 2007; Jones et al., 2005) and commitment to change (see Fridén & Holmgren, 2015; Ngirwa, 2013). Transformational leadership (e.g., idealized influence) and participative leadership (e.g., involvement) have been empirically proven to influence employees' change acceptance and commitment (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Herold et al., 2008; Ngirwa, 2013). Besides, leaders' success in implementing change is determined by their capability to communicate and motivate employees (Gilley, Dixon & Gilley, 2008; Mullins, 2005). On the contrary, directive managerial approaches (e.g., force, control) necessitate resistance to change initiatives (Yukl, 2010).

### **Discussion**

#### *Managing Consequences of Teachers' Stress in Times of Change*

Organisational change causes stress to employees (Ahmad, 2013) the same way as stressed employees lead to undesired change outcomes (Dahl, 2011; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Hence, stress in times of change should be managed for employees' wellbeing, change success and organisational performance in general. Employees' wellbeing, and change success however, depend on leader's capability to manage the employee concerns on change (see Hiatt, & Creasey, 2003; Ngirwa, 2013 for detailed overview). Teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools have experienced changes such as the introduction of Competence Based Curriculum (see Komba & Mwandaji, 2015), Big Results Now, and the recent change of transferring teachers from secondary schools to primary schools. The changes might have caused stress on the side of teachers. However, stress in work organisations affect employees' wellbeing and performance (Bashir & Ramay, 2010; Trivellas et al., 2013), and may lead to undesirable employees' behaviours such as absenteeism (see Manning & Osland, 1989). Nevertheless, previous studies (e.g., Ngirwa, 2018) have revealed teachers' complaints and dissatisfaction with the management procedures and

processes in fulfilling their needs. A teacher claimed that:

*Motivating and encouraging teachers is the main tool for making them effective in performing their duties. This is contrary to force and disgrace we are experiencing..... Working environment should be improved as currently most of teachers work under very poor working environment...living in poor environment, poor working facilities, poor offices...let's allow teachers' voice and listen to them when they present their opinions or recommendations concerning their job rather than planning for them or taking them by force.....Ngirwa, 2018:298.*

The quote indicates dissatisfaction, use of force and poor communication in the management endeavours especially in secondary schools. Studies (e.g., Ngirwa, 2013) have associated directive leadership based on force to employees' cynicism and dissatisfaction especially in times of change initiatives (see Yukl, 2010). Likewise, the denial of employees' needs lead to change resistance (Ford, Ford & D'amelio, 2008). However, needs fulfillment has been linked to employees' motivation to change initiatives (Ngirwa, 2013). Leadership based on ethical attributes (e.g. fair care, considerate) and human relations (e.g. communication) have been significantly related to employees change acceptance (Jones et al., 2005; Ngirwa, 2013). In this paper, we commend ethical leadership behaviours, participative leadership behaviours and human relations strategies as crucial in negating unease conditions facing teachers during times of change in education sector (Figure 1). This is due to the consequences of employee stress on change initiatives (Dahl, 2011; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Therefore, managing stress in times of change is a great deal towards employees' wellbeing, commitment to change and school performance in general especially in education sector. Studies (e.g., De Keyser et al., 2004, p.6) have revealed that:

*.... if organisational changes adversely impact employee health and well-being, they may indirectly decrease performance, and ultimately lead to reduced customer satisfaction with services and products (De Keyser et al. 2004, p.6).*

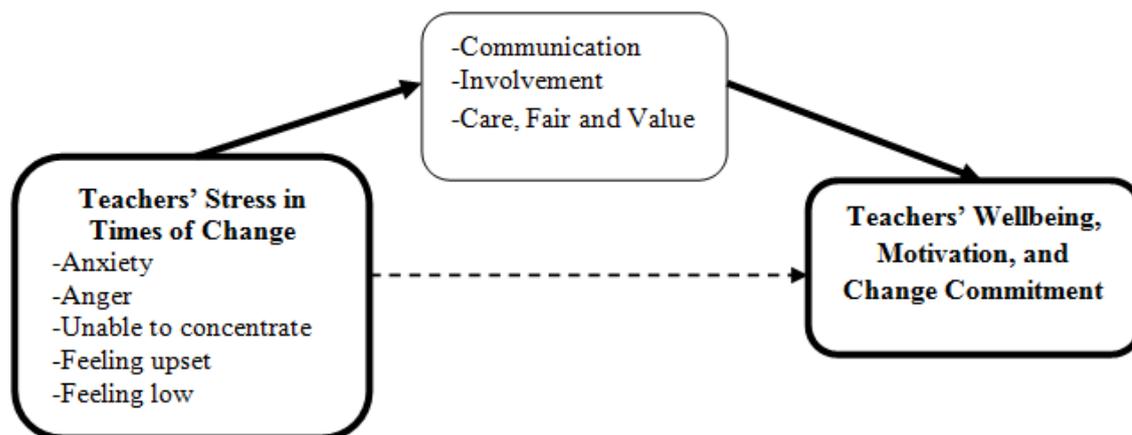


Figure 1: Managing stress in times of change for teachers' wellbeing, and commitment to change Building upon the cascade analysed above, this review presents the following hypothetical model (Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1: The negative relationship between teachers' stress and teachers' commitment to change is mediated by communication, involvement, leaders' support, care, fair and value.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' stress in times of changes is negatively related to teachers' wellbeing, motivation and commitment to change in schools.

### **Managerial Implications**

This present review alerts educational managers on the stress management strategies on employee stress in times of change. It further leads to the understanding of the possible causes of work stress among teachers in schools and possible stress coping strategies that would escalate employees' wellbeing important for their work motivation, and performance of schools. Managers should act supportive when teachers are discouraged especially in times of change (Ngirwa, 2013).

### **Limitations**

This review paper encounters some limitations. For instance, it does not give out field data with a specified sample but data from literature on employee stress during times of change and organisational performance. Thus we cannot provide general representation of the stress of the population (i.e., teachers) in times of change (e.g., transferring teachers from secondary schools to primary schools in Tanzania). However, the paper sheds light on the important role of

educational leaders in managing teachers' uneasy conditions in times of change for teachers' wellbeing, change success and school performance. Hence, this paper is important. Moreover, this paper can be a great starting point for education managers to consider the posited important factors (i.e. care, fair, considerate, communicative and participative) that would deprecate stress and engender teachers' wellbeing, motivation and commitment to change initiatives.

### Conclusions

Teachers being central resources in education sector, their working conditions especially in times of change should be a major concern of educational leaders. This is through being communicative, participative and caring, fair as well as valuing teachers' contribution in education sector (see Ngirwa, 2018).

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