Sources of Employee Grievances: Procedures and Employee Job Satisfaction among Seventh-day Adventist Institutions in Malawi

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Abstract

In the workplace, complaints and concerns arise from time to time. Organizations must have an effective grievance-handling mechanism to address such issues. This study aimed to assess the sources of employee grievances, the current procedures for handling grievances, and their relationship with employee job satisfaction in selected Seventh-day advisory institutions in Malawi. Two hundred thirty-one employees participated in the study. Based on the reported findings, sources of employee grievances are communication, workload, working conditions, organizational culture, and supervision. However, the regression analysis showed that among the procedures in handling grievances, only 'able to resolve grievances' was a significant predictor of job satisfaction. Hence, organizations, particularly SDA institutions that recognize their employees as the most critical organizational assets, must ensure adequate supervision and grievance-handling procedures for the organization's benefit in such a way that dialogue is commonly used in handling grievances.

Keywords: Grievance, procedures for handling grievances, job satisfaction, Malawi

Introduction

Grievances occur in every workplace, and proper handling is paramount for maintaining a conducive and productive work environment (Bohlander, 1999). Most employees are committed to their employing organizations and would, under normal circumstances, give their best to the organization. However, grievances surface when employees' needs in an organization are not satisfied or their expectations are not met. Employee grievances can take various forms. Kartoon (2014) stated that grievances could grow out of bad relationships at the workplace between an employee and the employer or supervisor, especially when they feel they are not being treated fairly. According to Meyer (2002), the establishment of procedures for handling grievances is in line with the principle of due process, which guarantees the application of procedural justice.

Ndung'u (2016) stated that constructive grievance handling largely depends on the managers' and supervisors' recognition, diagnosis and correction of the causes of potential employee dissatisfaction before they become formal grievances. He further explained that if employees lack job satisfaction, it will affect optimum performance and may eventually lead to turnover. Al-zu'bi (2010) contended that a determinant of job satisfaction is organizational justice which describes the individual's perception of the fairness of treatment received from an organization and their behavioral reactions for such perceptions. The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church institutions in Malawi have well-qualified employees committed to the Church's mission. Despite these well-qualified employees, employee grievances at these institutions remain challenging. Some employees are aggrieved and threatened to terminate their employment contract with the church, while others are simply distressed and dissatisfied. Such negative feelings affect employee job satisfaction and, ultimately, employee performance in the entire organization.

This research sought to investigate the common sources of employee grievances, the current procedures for handling grievances and their relationship with employee job satisfaction

in selected Seventh-day Adventist institutions in Malawi.

Review of Literature

Constructive grievance handling largely depends on the ability of managers and supervisors to recognize, diagnose, and correct the cause of potential employee dissatisfaction before they become grievances. Ndung'u (2011) underscored the importance of an open and sincere relationship between the management and employees. He further stated that well-managed and motivated human resources could help solve many problems experienced by an organization. Formal grievance handling procedures are essential to improve employee relations and run a fair, successful, and productive workplace. The sources of employee grievances can be grouped into non-work- and work-related categories.

Work-related Factors

Supervision: Supervisors are responsible for improving employee job satisfaction by equipping employees with knowledge, interpersonal, and technical skills. Supervisors must learn to handle grievances productively, as this can result in increased satisfaction. Furthermore, supervisors who manage grievances effectively can increase the potential for employee growth (Nellis et al., 2011).

Work environment: This involves **everything that forms part of employees' involvement with the work itself,** such as the relationship with co-workers and supervisors, organizational culture, and room for personal development. Malhotra (2014) explained that the workplace environment in most industries is unsafe and unhealthy, and includes poorly designed workstations, unsuitable furniture, lack of ventilation, inappropriate lighting, excessive noise, insufficient safety measures in fire emergencies, and lack of personal protective equipment. The organization is responsible for providing a friendly working environment that influences employees to work comfortably and perform their job well.

Organizational Change: Change is an inevitable part of a business. However, organizational change may generate negative consequences when it is mismanaged. When employees resist the change process, it has adverse effects on the company (Belcher, 2016). These effects can be widespread and may affect the workforce's morale if not addressed on time.

Culture and grievances: Organizations have different cultures that motivate employees to focus on reaching their goals (Sullivan, 2016). According to Armstrong (2009), organizational culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms in an organization. It influences employee behavior and performance. The quality of an employee's performance depends on how they perceive their work culture. Culture provides a framework for understanding organizational processes such as human resource decisions. Sullivan (2016) maintained that the key reasons for grievances when it comes to corporate culture are the trends, norms, values, and attitudes.

Non-work-Related Factors

Personality: An individual's personality traits can be a potential source of grievances at work. Employees come from different backgrounds and experiences, which play a role in shaping their personalities. Some employees cross with their co-workers over minor issues, causing grievances to arise. Isa and Noor (2011) maintained that personality traits are one of the reasons for grievances and differences in personality among employees, including supervisors. When employees fail to understand or accept differences in their personalities, problems arise in the workplace (Kharel, 2016). The authors further stated that some employees might possess a personality type that results in speaking whatever is on their minds, even if the timing is inappropriate. These employees may offend a coworker who does not possess the same personality type (Melchades, 2013). Awareness of personality differences is essential for valuing and leveraging them.

Gender: Although both men and women have interpersonal problems in the workplace, they differ in how they discuss conflicts (Bernotaite, 2013). Women in managerial positions felt significantly less confident about negotiating than their male counterparts did, and women were particularly uncomfortable when negotiating with another woman. Mayhew (2016) explained that most of the time when it comes to performance, women are underrated or unappreciated compared to men. Furthermore, the processes used to

resolve disputes are less effective for women than for men, such that women are more often transferred laterally instead of resolving disputes (Boulder, 2012).

Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction

Work Environment: A good working environment within the organization ensures that employees can work in a relaxed and free environment without feeling the burden or pressure that would cause their performance to decline. Working environment has a positive impact on employees' job satisfaction. According to Raziqa and Maulabakhsha (2014), the working environment consists of safety for employees, job security, good relations with co-workers, recognition of good performance, motivation for performing well, and participation in the decision-making process of the firm. In short, employees who work in a job where they feel disrespected, undervalued, and underappreciated are likely to feel dissatisfied with their work.

Job Security: Mayhew (2017) defined job security as one's expectation of continuity in a job situation. It has to do with employees' feelings about the loss of a job or the loss of some desirable job features, such as promotion opportunities, current working conditions, and long-term career opportunities. Employees with job security can envision their future in the organization, making them feel valued and satisfied with their current position. Meyer (2002) stated that job security is significantly related to job satisfaction, which reduces turnover intention and absenteeism.

Compensation/Pay: Jamilu et al. (2015) described compensation as including both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards include monetary and nonmonetary rewards. Non-monetary rewards include things other than basic pay, such as benefits. Mayhew (2017) stated that pay is imperative for job satisfaction. However, other related factors such as promotion, recognition, job involvement, and commitment are also considered. Employees want to be compensated for their worth, and are likely to look for work elsewhere if they are not compensated accordingly (Apenteng, 2012). Therefore, compensation is one of the driving forces that motivate workers. Apenteng (2012) further explained that if workers are compensated well, they will be encouraged and assured. They have positive feelings towards their jobs, resulting in job satisfaction.

Promotion: Mayhew (2017) stated that reasons for job dissatisfaction vary. Some employees are bored in their current positions or believe that the company does not utilize their talent. According to Kosteas (1996), promotions have a longer-lasting impact on job satisfaction than income, which affects job and life satisfaction only temporarily. He stated that job satisfaction and quit estimates indicate that promotions can be essential for employers to keep their workers happy and reduce turnover.

Supervision: Apenteng (2012) defined supervision as frequent personal contact between managers and their subordinates to observe their work, communicate policies, assist with subordinates' work, and solve work-related employee problems. When supervisors provide emotional support to workers when they feel overwhelmed and stressed by their work, they feel satisfied with their jobs.

Related Studies on Employee Grievances

Ndung'u (2011 conducted a study in Kenya on the influence of grievance handling on employee job satisfaction and found that employee job satisfaction is improved when the employee's concerns are addressed. Kartoon's (2014) study on grievance handling procedures and their effects on employee productivity in Kenya revealed that it is a significant predictor of employee satisfaction, which further affects employee productivity. Another study by Sundaram and Ramya (2014) on grievance handling procedures in India concluded that although employees were not fully satisfied with the salary and promotions provided by the organization, they were satisfied with how their supervisors handled their grievances. Sardeshmukh (2016) studied the awareness of grievance-handling procedures among Kenyan staff. The study revealed that employees were aware of the committee that addresses grievances, the levels of grievance-handling procedures, and whom to speak to and present their grievances.

Methodology

This section describes the research design, setting, population, sampling procedure used to

select the respondents, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study used a quantitative causal research design. It was found to be appropriate for testing the impact of sources of employee grievances and handling procedures on job satisfaction.

Sampling Procedures /Population

The target population for the study was regular and contract employees working in selected SDA institutions in Malawi. The target population was 285. As this population was small, all the employees of the selected institutions were included in the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Upon approval of the research proposal and authorization from the participating institutions, the purpose of the research was explained to the respondents to obtain signed informed consent. Finally, questionnaires were administered to the participants.

Data Analysis

This study used both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to address the research questions raised. Specifically, frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations, and Pearson correlations were used for the descriptive analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected for the following questions: Is there any significant effect of existing grievance-handling procedures on employee job satisfaction? Is there any significant effect of the sources of employee grievances on job satisfaction?

Ethical Considerations

Before administering the questionnaire, the participants were made aware of the purpose and importance of the study to ensure that they understood why the research was being conducted. Participants were allowed to ask questions or seek further clarification concerning the survey. Moreover, to ensure that respondents were more confident with the principles of privacy and confidentiality, the data collection tool was designed so that no respondent filled in their identifying details, such as name, email address, and birthdate.

Results and Discussion

The number of employees in the institutions under study was expected to be 285. Of the 285 questionnaires administered, 231, representing 81% of the overall questionnaires distributed, were returned fully completed, which formed the basis for the analysis, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for the study.

Table 1 shows the participants' responses concerning the sources of employee grievances in the selected Seventh-day Adventist Church institutions in Malawi.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Sources of Employee Grievances (n=231)

Sources of Grievance	Mean	Standard Dev.	Interpretation
Communication	3.03	.84	Sometimes
Workload	3.32	.75	Sometimes
Working conditions	3.04	.66	Sometimes
Organizational culture	3.11	.97	Sometimes
Supervision	3.20	.82	Sometimes

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for sources of grievances ranged between (M=3.03; SD = .84) and (M=3.32; SD = .75), which indicates that employees are sometimes aggrieved because of the stated sources of grievances in their institutions. The findings showed that communication and working conditions had the lowest causes of employee grievances (mean score of 3.03 and 3.04; SD = .84 and .66, respectively). Occasionally, the absence of communication may lead to employees misunderstanding the leader's words or actions, which can spark employee grievances. Poor communication can create a feeling that everything is urgent, causing employees to hurry, feel tense, overwork, and have little or no sense of humor. Working conditions also influence workers' attitudes towards negative or positive outcomes. These factors influence employee 'satisfaction and motivation (Al-Zu'bi, 2010). Employees' workloads had the highest mean (M=3.32, SD = .75). Workload is defined as the amount of work required by an employee within a given period. Wadhwani (2014) highlighted that excess workload leads to stress, grievance, and turnover.

Further, Stuhmcke (2001) highlighted that defective tools and equipment, poor physical conditions of the workplace, material quality, and a lack of recognition may cause employee grievances. Organizational culture (M=3.11; SD = .97) and supervision (M=3.20, SD = .82) can also be sources of grievances. Although cultures are powerful, they are often unconscious and influence grievances. When there is an open communication culture, employees are encouraged to provide their opinions. Employers can obtain valuable critical comments and suggestions to improve company procedures, processes, and policies. A lack of supervisory support sometimes leads to employee grievances (Mohanasundaram & Saranya, 2013).

The work focused on the effectiveness of existing grievance-handling procedures, as perceived by employees. The findings revealed that the grievance-handling procedures existing in the institutions were generally effective, with mean scores ranging from 3.77 3.49. The items with the highest mean were about the organization's ability to resolve grievances in an orderly manner (M=3.77; SD = 1.26), awareness of the grievance-handling procedures (M=3.68; SD = 1.21), and the step ladder policy (M=3.65; SD = 1.84) which employees have to follow to get their grievances redressed. This implies that these entities have a formal structure that addresses grievance issues. The items with the lowest mean concerns the opportunity given to employees to solve their grievances (M=3.49; SD = 1.37), the perceptions of fairness and equity in the organization (M=3.56; SD = 1.32), the encouragement and enforcement to follow up the procedures that are established in the entities (M=3.58; SD = 1.24). The implications of these findings show that, in actual practice, implementing procedures in place to address grievances may need improvement.

This study sought to determine if there were any significant effects of the sources of employee grievances on employee job satisfaction. Table 2 shows the correlation between the independent and dependent variables, which in this study were sources of employee grievances and job satisfaction. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for this purpose. The results revealed that job satisfaction positively correlated with culture (r=. 22; p< .01), supervision (r= .53; p< .01), and workload (r = .21; p-value <0.05). In contrast, working conditions and communication had no significant relationship with job satisfaction.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations between Grievance Procedure and Employee Job Satisfaction

		Job Satisfaction
Job Satisfaction	Pearson correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Work Conditions	Pearson correlation	.078
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.240
Organizational Culture	Pearson correlation	.224**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Supervision	Pearson correlation	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Communication	Pearson correlation	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.346
Workload	Pearson correlation	.212**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant effect of the sources of employee grievances on employee job satisfaction, to determine the predictive effect, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Sources of Employee Grievances on Job Satisfaction

Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sd. Error of the Estimate
1	.539ᵃ	.291	.275	.68955

a. Predictors: (Constant), workload, work conditions, organization culture, supervision, communication

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	43.820	5	8.764	18.43	.000b
	Residual	106.983	225	.475		
	Total	150.803	230			

a. Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction
b. Predictors: workload, work conditions, organizational culture, supervision, communication

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.610	.358		4.493	.000
Working Conditions	.042	.075	.034	.562	.575
Organizational Culture	.061	.050	.074	1.225	.222
Supervision	.487	.060	.494	8.065	.000
Communication	.080	.065	-.082	-1.231	.220
Workload	.093	.071	.087	1.312	.191

a. Dependent variable: employee job satisfaction

The findings showed an adjusted R^2 of 0.27, meaning that sources of grievances could explain approximately 27% of the total variation in job satisfaction. Furthermore, the variables that entered the multiple regression were significant, $F (5, 225) = 18.432$, $p < .01$, implying that the combination of the predictors significantly impact job satisfaction.

Table 3 shows the coefficients of the individual predictors. The results show that among the five sources of employee grievances, only supervision was a significant predictor of job satisfaction in the model ($\beta = .494$, $p < .01$). Thus, sources of employee grievances such as working conditions, organizational culture, communication, and workload did not contribute to the multiple regression model. Therefore, based on the above results, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant effect of sources of grievances (predictors) on job satisfaction in terms of supervision is rejected. On the other hand, we accept the null hypothesis that claims that sources of grievances, such as communication, work conditions, workload, and organizational culture, have no significant effect on job satisfaction. These results clearly demonstrate the importance of effective supervision. The results seem to agree with those of Nellis et al. (2011), who stated that supervision implies giving the needed support by ensuring the well-being and

work performance of subordinates. Hence, an effective supervisor offers frontline leadership, resolves conflicts, and treats employee issues in a fair manner. Yaseen (2013) suggested that a lack of supervisory support leads to an increase in employee grievances and decreases their satisfaction. Therefore, supervisors need to learn to handle grievances productively as this can result in increased satisfaction.

This study also assessed the effect of existing grievance-handling procedures on employee job satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive effect of grievance-handling procedures on employee job satisfaction. The results are shown below, starting with correlation analysis, followed by regression analysis.

The results in Table 4 reveal that job satisfaction had a significant positive but weak correlation with procedure awareness ($r = .28$; $p < .001$), following procedures ($r = .27$; $p < .001$), appeal decisions ($r = .24$; $p < .001$), ability to resolve grievances ($r = .35$; $p < .001$), complete, sufficient information ($r = .29$; $p < .001$), improved perceptions ($r = .39$; $p < .001$), and employee avenues ($r = .34$; $p < .001$).

Table 4

Pearson Correlations between Grievance Procedure and Employee Job Satisfaction

		Job satisfaction
Procedure awareness	Pearson correlation	.282**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Step ladder policy	Pearson correlation	.306**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Following Procedures	Pearson correlation	.269**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Appeal the decision	Pearson correlation	242*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Able to resolve grievances	Pearson correlation	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Complete, sufficient information	Pearson correlation	.290**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Improved perceptions	Pearson correlation	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Employee avenue	Pearson correlation	.335**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive effect of grievance-handling procedures on employee job satisfaction. The null hypothesis in this section stated that there is no significant effect of the existing grievance handling procedures on employee job satisfaction. Table 5 presents the findings.

Tables 5

Multiple Regression Analysis Effect of Grievance Procedures on Employee Job Satisfaction

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sd. Error of the Estimate
1	.457ᵃ	.209	.180	.73309

a. Predictors: (constant), employee avenue, appeal the decision, procedure awareness, following procedures, able to solve grievances, step ladder policy. complete, sufficient information, improved perceptions.

ANOVAa

Model	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
1 Regression	31.497	8	3.937	7.326	.000b
Residual	119.306	22	.537		
Total	150.803	230			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee job satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Avenue, appeal the decision, procedure awareness, following procedures, able to solve grievances, step ladder policy. Complete, sufficient information, improved perceptions.

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.136	.204		10.492	.000
Procedure awareness	.054	.049	.081	1.099	.273
Step ladder policy	.055	.056	.080	.974	.331
Following procedures	.022	.051	.034	.438	.662
Appeal the decision	.006	.047	.010	.127	.899
Able to resolve	.102	.050	.158	2.037	.043
Complete, sufficient information	-.020	.053	-0,34	-.384	.702
Improved perceptions	.097	.057	.158	1.710	.089
Employee avenue	.076	.047	.129	1.612	.108

a. Dependent variable: employee job satisfaction

All variables presented in Table 5 entered the multiple regression analysis with an adjusted R^2 of the regression model of 0.18, meaning that the predictor variables could explain approximately 18% of the total variation in employee job satisfaction. This also means that 82% of the variation is explained by factors other than grievance procedures. The variables that entered the regression were significant, F $(8, 222) = 7.326$, p< .01. This implies that the combination of predictors significantly affects the dependent variable (job satisfaction). The individual predictors were examined further, and the results showed that among the procedures in handling grievances, only 'able to resolve grievances' was a significant predictor of job satisfaction in the model ($\beta = .158$, p < .01). This implies that employees are satisfied only

when the grievance mechanism enables them to resolve grievances effectively. Therefore, based on the results, the null hypothesis which stated that grievance handling procedures (predictors) has no significant effect on job satisfaction in terms of its ability to resolve grievances, is rejected. On the other hand, we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of other grievance handling procedures such as procedure awareness, step ladder policy, following procedures, appeal to the decision, complete information, improved perceptions, and employee avenue on job satisfaction. This finding confirms Mohanasundaram and Saranya (2013), who found that supervisors are responsible for responding appropriately to grievances and managing the process according to the organization's guidelines, policies, directives, procedures, and industrial agreements.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, the Seventh-day institutions in Malawi seem to be doing well with regard to grievance handling. This practice should be encouraged in future studies. However, based on these findings, a few recommendations have been suggested. The first recommendation is that the sources of employee grievances, such as communication, workload, working conditions, organizational culture and supervision, mistreatment in the workplace, favoritism, unfairness, intimidation, discrimination, and sexual harassment should be addressed as quickly as they arise to avoid grievances. The second recommendation is that supervisors ensure that all employees are aware of the grievance-handling procedures and steps to be followed on how to address grievances. Finally, supervisors need to ensure that there is sufficient transparency so that employees can perceive fairness and equity in matters of grievances.

Conclusion

Employee grievances are likely to occur in the workplace. However, it is vital to identify and address the sources of these grievances. Based on the findings, the study concludes that, although there are several sources of employee grievances, supervision is a crucial source of grievances in an organization. Moreover, although it is essential to have grievance-handling procedures in place, it is important to ensure that the system effectively addresses employee grievances.

The findings show that the main predictors of employee job satisfaction are the quality of supervision and ability of grievance-handling procedures to resolve issues. Hence, organizations, particularly SDA institutions that seek to recognize their employees as the most critical organizational assets, must ensure effective supervision and grievance handling procedures for the organization's benefit.

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