

EXPLORING THE REPORTING TIME AND ATTENDANCE PATTERNS OF FEMALE JUNIOR STAFF IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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Abstract

This paper examines challenges associated with reporting time and attendance patterns of female junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba and how it could be improved. The main argument is that the failure to effectively involve administrators in implementing internal controls over reporting time and attendance patterns can affect productivity. Purposive sampling technique was used to select female junior staff for the study and the instruments used were interview, observation and document scrutiny. The paper concludes that faculty officers and other administrators should be empowered to supervise the reporting time and attendance of female junior staff while ensuring that such powers are not abused. The paper recommends that administrators should be encouraged to monitor attendances, lateness, abuse of work hours, abuse of break time and frequency of excuse duties and casual leave per female junior staff and produce reports for decision making.

Introduction

Reporting time and attendance patterns are critical to organizational productivity. In developed societies like Europe, reporting time and attendance systems are evolving toward increasingly automated mechanism of recording staff work attendance. It seems institutions in Ghana are not at this level but it is necessary that organizations implement and maintain well defined internal control activities that provide management with confidence that the system is working as planned. For an organization like the University to be effectively managed and to control its operations, there must be an internal control system that ensures that employees comply with applicable time and attendance policy.

Internal control mechanisms exist in the University of Education, Winneba, but there seem to be challenges associated with implementation related to female junior staff. Females form majority of the junior staff who support administrative processes in the University of Education, Winneba. At the time of writing this paper, the number of the female junior staff in the University was 197, representing 88.7% of the total number of 222 junior staff who worked at the offices. The assumption is that if they are in the majority and their reporting time and attendance are compromised, it will have negative consequences on productivity. Hence, the proposition in this paper is to find ways of improving internal/administrative control of reporting time and attendance patterns of female junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba. Preliminary studies in the University and concerns expressed by colleague administrators and some academic Heads suggest that female junior staff in University do not maximize productive hours.

This paper examines the implementation of internal/administrative control over staff reporting time and attendance relative to female junior staff, and how best the institution could humanely streamline compliance. The study also, seeks to explore how officials who

are responsible for administrative control over female junior staff implement existing policies on reporting time and attendance in the University of Education, Winneba.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Whose responsibility is internal/administrative control over reporting time and attendance of female junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba?
- What are the reporting time and attendance characteristics of female junior staff employee in the University of Education, Winneba?
- How can the reporting time and attendance of female junior staff in University of Education, Winneba be managed to promote productivity?

Literature in Context

Internal/Administrative Control

Although the concept of internal/administrative control often means different things to different people in different contexts, Delarue, Gryp and Van-Hootehem (2003) contend that internal control generally could be defined as a process designed to provide enough assurance regarding the achievement of the trine objectives of efficiency of operations, reliability of reporting and compliance policies. They also suggest that effective internal control helps an organization to achieve efficiency in its operations and compliance with policy guidelines and laws. Effective internal control is built-in part of the administrative process (i.e. plan, organize, direct, control). Internal control keeps an organization on course towards its objectives and the achievements of its mission.

It therefore follows that in promoting effectiveness and efficiency of operations, internal control reduces the risk of assets loss. Effective internal/administrative control helps an organization to achieve its objective. Available publicised events shows that a key element of internal control is to ensure that employee comply with time and attendance policies. Rogers and Stephen (1993) opine that absenteeism is a major concern of all managers and administrators in any organization, both private and public, because it affects productivity. As a result, internal control over reporting time and attendance systems are guided by organizational time policies and control activities to provide reasonable assurance that reporting time and attendance information is properly and promptly recorded. The implication of this for the present study is to maximize productive hours to help the University to achieve institutional mandate.

Responsibility of Internal /Administrative Control over Staff Reporting Time and Attendance

Every successful institution adopts methods to periodically assess risk, develop and implement internal controls. Officials in charge of internal/administrative control over staff ensure that methods used are not only observed but are also tailored to the achievement of the objectives of the institution. Delarue et al. (2003) contend that institutional head or authorized designee is ultimately responsible for identifying risks and establishing, maintaining, and reviewing internal control in the institution's system. The Human Resources Management Manual (1997), for example, explains that any employee is responsible for obtaining advance approval from the supervisor before proceeding on leave. Similarly, the United States General Accounting Office (2003) note that it is standard practice for immediate supervisors to be in charge of internal/administrative control before it is cross-checked by an overall supervisor. It therefore, follows that both senior administrators and heads of department, unit/section responsible for ensuring that reporting time and attendance systems are established, properly documented and maintained.

Reporting Time and Attendance

National Labour policy in Ghana contains provisions on employee reporting time and attendance which worth exploring. Employees are expected to comply with the six hundred and fifty-first Act of Parliament of the Republic of Ghana (Labour Act , 2003) which underscores the importance of maximum hours of work. It also states that the every worker shall work for a maximum of eight (8) hours a day or forty hours a week except in cases expressly provided for in the Act. This provision is emphasized in the Unified Conditions of Service for Unionized Staff of the public Universities of Ghana (2006). The document also indicates that an employee is required to attend duty for not more than the statutory number of hours per each working week and that the actual working hours for a staff shall be laid down by the University from time to time. It is also expected that staff would be committed to working time and working days during which they must work to support the institution's development.

However, there is evidence of major challenges of time attendance and the balance of duties posed by female junior staff to internal/administrative control systems in the University under study. The stipulated working hours for government employees, according to the labour law, for reporting and closing times for government workers of which the university is no exception is 8.00am to 5.00pm whilst break time is between 12.30-1.30pm.

Leaves

Excuse duty/Sick leave

It is indicated in the Unified Conditions of Service that Medical Officers and Heads of Department are obliged to ensure that no employee is made to be on duty when his or her state of health renders it desirable for him or her to be granted sick leave. Different excuses are normally given by female junior staff for absenting themselves from work. The most notable excuse is ill health notification. This kind of excuse duty is difficult to turn down because of its implications. Rogers and Hertin (1993) opine that sick leave may be given to employees who are genuinely too ill to work, but some sick leaves may be referred to as 'elective sick leave'. This kind of excuse duty involves choice on the part of the employee. For Rogers and Hertin, elective sick leave include sick leaves with slight headaches, minor menstrual discomfort, minor backaches, elective medical appointments, sick children at home and other situations where the employee could conceivably work but would choose not to do so. They add that 'elective sick leave' also includes sick leave used for personal business or recreational purposes, where no discernible illness is involved.

Casual Leave

An employee may apply in writing for casual leave to enable him or her to attend to urgent personal affairs. At the University of Education, Winneba, a Head of Department may, at his/her discretion, grant junior staff up to ten working days casual leave in a year and notify the Registrar accordingly. Casual leave may be granted within the maximum permitted time in one or more spells (Labour Act, 2003).

Annual Leave

U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2011) policies require that an employee may use annual leave for vacations, rest and relaxation, and personal business or emergencies. An employee has a right to take annual leave, subject to the right of the supervisor to schedule the time at which annual leave may be taken. This policy is in consonance with annual leave policies in the University of Education, Winneba. It is evidently clear from existing literature that for unforeseen reasons, faculties and departments of institutions do not adhere to the leave plan already submitted to the Division of Human Resource. The Division of Human

Resource in institutions or organisations work on leaves for employers at a request. In the universities, the Division of Human Resource requests for leave schedule of departments and faculties to enable them develop contingency plans for relieving duties. Leave for the ensuing year is planned with support of all staff.

The guidelines of the University of Education, Winneba require that review and initial approval of any form of leave for a junior staff must be done by the immediate supervisor who is most knowledgeable about activities of every employee under his or her supervision. The immediate supervisor, after approving or not approving a leave for a subordinate, returns the form to the Division of Human Resource about the decision for further action.

Measures To Streamline Staff Reporting Time and Attendance

It is effective when reporting time and attendance policies are clearly outlined and approved (Delarue et al, 2003). This makes it easier for officials responsible for controlling employee reporting time and attendance. Technological advances and changes in work place habits have increasingly affected the operating environment for recording of reporting time and attendance in recent times. For example, trends in the Ghana government labour law to streamline operations through automation and encourage more flexible work schedules have provided a major impetus for changes in reporting time and attendance.

Whilst University of Education, Winneba waits to adopt this system, it is important that Heads of Department coordinate well with administrators to help staff to maximize work hours. Jobson (2000) contends that insistence on daily signing in an Attendance Register as a mechanism to record time and attendance information of staff should be monitored by immediate supervisors. He further asserts that supervisors should be accountable for reporting time and attendance of staff and also keep information and maintain related records to support the individual employee or supervisor or combination of the two. An important deficiency in the current system of internal/administrative control in University of Education, Winneba seems to be that senior administrators in faculties, departments, units and divisions do not feel empowered to enforce internal control measures.

University of California's reference Guide for Managing University Business Practices (2011) suggests ongoing monitoring of reporting time and attendance as the basic streamlining activity. They think that monitoring activities include activities that evaluate and improve the design, execution, and effectiveness of internal control. They also hold it that monitoring as the assessment of internal control performance over time is accomplished by ongoing monitoring activities and by separate evaluations of internal control such as self-assessments, peer reviews, and internal audits. For them, the purpose of monitoring is to determine whether internal control is adequately designed, properly executed, and effective.

Another issue highlighted by this authority is that the establishment of an effective control environment is the one where competent people understand their responsibilities, the limits to their authority, and are knowledgeable, mindful, and committed to doing what is right and doing it the right way. Thus the control environment encompasses technical competence and ethical commitment to include commitment to following an organization's policies and procedures and its ethical and behavioural standards.

Methodology

The data for the study was collected using semi-structured interviews with administrators and female junior staff, observations and document scrutiny. Semi-structured interview was used because it enabled the researcher to get the information needed and at the same time give the interviewees some flexibility to go outside the box to express their opinions. This type of interview schedule also ensured effective use of the time for the study. The purposive

sampling technique was used to select 10 administrators and 20 female junior staff for the study. The focus group interview was used for both participants.

The administrators were put into 2 focus groups of 5, whilst the female junior staff were put into 2 focus groups of 10. This approach was used because it is an ideal exploratory technique which ensures freedom, stimulation and spontaneity inherent in such interviews. The approach allowed interviewees to spark off one another. The documents scrutinised were the attendance register, documents on National Labour Policy and Conditions of Service for Unionised Staff of Universities and the University Statute.

Discussion and Findings

The discussion and findings from the data collected are based on the three research questions.

Research Question One:

Whose Responsibility is Internal/Administrative Control over Reporting Time and Attendance of Female Junior Staff in the University of Education, Winneba?

Interviews with personnel in the Division of Human Resource and analysis of the University's statute (2007) indicate that administrators are directly responsible for the control of the reporting time and attendance of junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba. It was, however, added that administrators are expected to report seemingly uncontrollable deviations to Heads of Department/Unit/Section for further action. Interviews with female junior staff indicate that they think this responsibility should be the preserve of the Division of Human Resource and Heads of department or section.

Hence one female junior staff stated:

"It is the Division of Human Resource that employed me and it is my Head of Department who is my boss in the office so I think they should be responsible for my reporting time and attendance".

An administrator confirmed the statement above by saying:

"Female junior staff directly deal with the said authorities when it comes to administrative control over reporting time and request for permission and as such, administrators do not feel empowered to enforce administrative/internal control mechanisms"

This situation seems to create a gap in the enforcement of internal/administrative control measures in the University.

Research Question Two:

What are the Reporting Time & Attendance Characteristics of Female Junior Staff Employee in University of Education Winneba?

Interviews with administrators indicated that employees of the University are expected to comply with the Labour Act (2003) that states that employees should work for maximum of eight hours a day. However, the study found out that it was a dilemma for female junior staff in the University.

One administrator noted:

"..... apart from the labour act, the Unified Conditions of Service for Unionized Staff of the Public Universities of Ghana (2006)" also emphasizes that an employee is expected to report to work at 8.00 am, and close at 5.00pm yet female junior staff find it difficult to comply with that ".

The interviews indicated that female junior staff were aware of the required reporting time but observations and evidence gathered from the Attendance Register revealed that 155 (78.1%) out of 197 female junior staff usually reported to work late and left office earlier. The common reason both administrators offending female junior staff gave when they were asked why female junior staff sometimes flouted reporting and closing time for work were related to the issues of health and family problems. The most frequently given reasons were headache, stomach ache, picking kids from school or going to the market. The messengers /cleaners were expected to be at post and get the offices tidied up before work began at 8.00 in the morning. Observation of the junior staff and interview with administrators revealed that some offices were opened in the morning by senior administrators or Heads of Department before the messenger /cleaner arrives to get the offices cleaned.

The statement below attests to this:

“Some female junior staff are habitual late comers and they do not even find it necessary to apologise for their lateness”.

When female junior staff were asked why they were not able to report to and close from work at the stipulated time, the summary of their reactions was captured as:

“I don't get transport to work on time, I send my kids to school, I am a nursing mother, I stay far away from my work place.....”

The information obtained from most of the Attendance Registers examined indicated non-compliance with time and attendance policies. Observation in offices also indicated that many female junior staff are irregular in attendance. It was also observed that where there was more than one female junior staff in an office, colleagues provide cover to condone non-compliance to time and attendance policies. For example, if one of them is late to work, the other would fake a signature. Administrators in their responses added that,

“they would fake an excuse to explain that the absentee female junior staff had gone out to buy breakfast or to a sister department for an information”.

One of the female junior staff on this issue confirmed the position of the administrators by explaining in the following words:

“We have to cover one another because one can never tell when one may also be late to work”

It was also observed that these excuses were well rehearsed among the offending side, prior to, any query by a senior administrator. Interactions with administrators have shown that this practice is endemic and urgent effort is needed to address it.

Use of Break Time

Observations and interviews with both female junior staff female junior staff and administrators revealed that 170 (86.3%) of female junior staff in the University, sometimes leave for break before the stipulated time and also report back to the office late. It was observed that female junior staff, particularly those in the faculties and departments, abuse time allotted for break period. They sometimes outwit their immediate superiors and also cunningly manipulate their Heads of Department to enable them to flout rules governing lunch break. Even if they are able to return from break on time, most of them prefer sitting under trees or in some other offices for a chat. Since Deans/Directors/Heads of Departments/Unit/Sectional Heads are not always in the office, female junior staff do this with impunity. It was also observed that even when Heads are in the offices they are less

likely to recognize it because their offices are usually separated from the general offices. The comments below sums up what goes on in many offices:

“ work load also keeps Heads of Department indoors most of the time and they hardly come out to notice what is happening in the other offices. The administrators are unable to exercise any form of control over the use of break time because the female junior staff have become used to the situation that the powers of control reside with the Heads who, in most cases, exercise control without any consultation with the administrator”.

Eventually this irregular reporting and attendance patterns of behaviour do not auger well for productivity within the University. However, it was observed that the library assistants and security personnel were punctual to work. It was also observed that these people returned to post on time after break but it was not so with the other category of female junior staff. The study also revealed that female security personnel and porters were not late attendants because the nature of their schedules demanded they hand over or take over from colleagues. As a result, they do not frequently report late as those in academic departments. They were most often punctual to work and virtually had no break period except responding to nature's call. An interview with a female security staff revealed that they were punctual because all security staff were required to be at post at least thirty minutes earlier as part of their professional ethics.

The tendency of female junior staff to report to work late was observed particularly among the secretarial staff. Evidence from the attendance register in the faculties and departments indicated that 150 (76.17%) out of 197 female junior staff in UEW did not strictly adhere to the stipulated time for work. However, it was observed that 55 (96.5%) of the messenger / cleaners were often at post by close of work. This was attributed to the fact that they were responsible for the closing of offices and also because some heads of department insisted that their offices were cleaned up before the next working day.

Work Hours and Work- life Implications

It was observed that for many of the clerks/typists and messenger/cleaners, finding time to socialize outside the office was rather important to them than to find work to do in the office. Interactions with immediate supervisors of female junior staff in the University indicated that issues of reporting time and attendance seemed to reverberate more with the female secretarial and messenger/cleaners staff in their first and second year of work. One interviewee indicated:

“it seems as the female junior staff become familiar with the job, there is a drastic negative change towards respect for working hours. Many of spend time talking with colleagues outside their offices even when there is work to be done and this affects the processing of documents for effective administrative decision. This attitude is encouraged because many seem to find ‘god fathers’ within the system”.

While it is not wrong to have ‘god fathers’ (in this paper ‘god father’ is a generic term referred to senior members who seemingly has interest in the professional development of their junior colleague but they both at one time or another abuse this good intention) at work places, it should not be the source of loss of management hours and reduced productivity but a source of mentorship for promoting administrative efficiency. Interview results indicated that some female junior staff abuse the ‘god father’ factor to flout reporting time and attendance regulations.

Another interviewee added:

“The ‘god father’ role of some senior officers is abused by female junior staff as they tend to use it to defy compliance with time and attendance policies”.

The indication was that immediate supervisors (Faculty officers and other administrators) probably do not feel encouraged to take disciplinary action against female junior staff who flouts reporting time and attendance regulations.

Excuse Duties

The study revealed that 140 (71.1%) female junior staff either did not know that weekends were counted as part of the number of days given to them by a medical practitioner as part of their excuse duty days or they deliberately overlooked that. Administrators’ indicated that some of the junior staff abuse excuse duties by either often going for it or overstaying for a number of days that would be given for an excuse duty. This presents some difficulties, as it is indicated in the summary of complains below:

“Excuse duty is difficult to turn down because of its implications meanwhile people used them for their private business”.

“Sometimes female junior staff do not report back to work after they had been treated and discharged by a medical practitioner”

One administrator registered her discomfort on this issue by adding that

“Instead of a junior staff calling or writing to ask for permission to absent himself/herself from work s/he would prefer informing the academic head in the office which is totally out of place”

Interview with the female junior staff, on the other hand, confirmed the allegations levelled against them by the administrators but one of them explained that the reason as workload related.

As the interviewee noted:

“The work at the university is tiring and when you ask for leave, the chances of getting it is very slim and you would be asked to defer it”

Casual Leave

Observations and interviews have revealed that these leaves were granted too frequently and arbitrarily. This have resulted in a situation where many female junior staff have taken administrative procedures and processes for granted because sectional Heads/Deans/Directors grant such leave without any reference to the concerns of senior administrators. Interviews with administrators revealed that this affected work plan.

An administrator stated:

“This affects work plan and processing of documents and documentation”.

Annual Leave

The study revealed that the Division of Human Resources in the University of Education, Winneba, requests for leave schedule for departments and faculties to enable staff / work planning every year. Interviews with administrators revealed that female junior staff would always want to bypass administrators/immediate supervisors deal directly with the Heads of Department/Unit/Section for the initial approval of their leave. It follows therefore, that sometimes female junior staff proceed on leave without the knowledge of their immediate supervisors who under normal circumstances should be the first point of contact. Interviews with an administrator from the Division of Human Resource sums up the annual leave challenges in the following words:

“Female Junior Staff in University of Education, Winneba do not comply with annual leave conditions. It was noted that most staff who resume duty after leave do not comply with the directive of reporting to the Division of Human Resource as indicated on the leave advice form. This makes monitoring difficult and accountability more perplexing.”

Notable concerns commonly expressed by the administrators are summarized as:

“Sometimes senior administrators only notice that a FJS is absent only to be told that the individual involved is on casual leave. Over 60% of such leaves were granted without the consent of the administrators. This affects planning and processing of documents and documentation”.

Research Question 3

How can the Reporting Time and Attendance of Female Junior Staff be Managed to Promote Productivity?

Observation and interviews revealed that senior administrators are supposed to work as immediate supervisors while academic heads take oversight responsibility of reporting time and attendance of female junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba. The interviews indicated that there are challenges with coordination and enforcement of internal/administrative control measures at the faculty level. An interviewee explained that:

“it is important that Heads coordinate well with Faculty Officers and other administrators to help female junior staff to maximize productive hours”.

Another interviewee suggested:

“There must be insistence on daily signing in the Attendance Register to serve as a mechanism for recording time and attendance information of junior staff”

The interviews also suggested that administrators do not keep records on daily reporting time and attendance. As an interviewee noted,

“one way by which administrators can monitor reporting time and attendance is by ensuring that information on reporting time and attendance were recorded daily and to inform the Heads when deviations from an individual’s work schedule occur”.

One administrator suggested that:

“Regardless of time of recording reporting time and attendance information, it could be ensured that the record is kept in such a way to provide reasonable assurance that the recorded information reflects time female junior staff work and the time lost due to numerous permissions taken to absent themselves from work”.

The data indicated that one problem with female junior staff reporting time and attendance has to do with record keeping. It is unclear whether the female junior staff are flouting the rules because the rules are not being enforced by faculty officers and other administrators or the supervisors feel less empowered to do so.

Conclusion

The results for the study suggest that there are internal control mechanisms to monitor reporting time and attendance which invariably applies to female junior staff in the University of Education, Winneba. However, it is faced with some challenges which compromise administrative effectiveness. The central problem is that administrators who are the immediate supervisors of junior staff are not adequately empowered and involved in the implementation of internal control mechanisms in general and reporting time and attendance

systems in particular. The result is loss of working hours, disregard for administrative processes and procedures and delays in the processing of documents.

The 'god father' role of some senior members should be rather directed to mentor female junior staff to promote proper compliance with reporting time and attendance and not to offer protection that tend to be abused. Since Deans/Directors/Heads of Department/Unit/Section are usually not always present in the offices, it is important to encourage faculty officers and other administrators to monitor reporting time and attendance patterns of female junior staff to ensure administrative effectiveness. From the discussion so far it may be concluded that reporting time and attendance of female junior staff, particularly those in faculties and departments are fraught with challenges. Female junior staffs seem to flout the institution's rules and regulations regarding work hours and leave matters. Immediate superiors seem to be helpless in implementing compliance order, because they do not feel empowered to do so.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Future university workshops/seminars should consider discussing the role of Faculty Officers and other administrators in monitoring the reporting time and attendance of female junior staff.
- University authorities should support faculty officers and other administrators to enforce administrative control mechanisms on reporting time and attendance to enhance productivity.
- There must be sustained retraining and re-orientation organized by the Division of Human Resource for female junior staff on the Unified Conditions of Service (2006), regarding work hours.
- Leave requests from female junior staff should be approved accordingly in consonant with the University's policy on leaves.

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