# *Work Attitudes Among Staff in A Ghanaian University*

AKUA TIWAA BUABENG-BOATENG

***Abstract***

*The study sought to identify the possible causes of poor time management practices (that is, weak worker time-on-task) among the staff of a Ghanaian public university. The case study research design was employed in executing the study, which began with an informal observation using a structured checklist to obtain information from management on staff attitude to work, guided by the Fishbone theory. Further information was collected from respondents using an interview guide. A fishbone diagrammatic analysis was generated from the data collected. From the analysis of the results, it was found that in order of extensiveness, weak worker time-on-task was caused by staff-related issues such as lack of knowledge and competency, laziness, poor self-esteem, and incompetence. Inefficiencies in management-related issues found included poor supervision of work, lack of disciplinary actions and lack of delegation. Policy and procedure-related issues that were also found included poor documentation, unclear or unbalanced workload and non-compliance with standards. Inadequate motivation relating to poor working conditions, inadequate incentives, and promotions, as well as the place where the work is located vis-a-vis transportation and distance from residence were also found. These factors were further analysed and broken down into sub-issues which guided the building of the diagram and also informed the appropriate recommendations.*

## Introduction

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the issue of tim management and employee performance. Alzalet and Sandybayev (201 define time management as a strategy or tool which helps individuals t manage their work time in a much productive manner that results in gettin more done in limited time. It is known as the method of organising an taking control over the activities that one performs throughout the day in given amount of time. It is used in reference to the control of time to enabl the worker to be more effective, efficient, and productive (Alzalet & Sandybayev, 2015). Time management is a concept that deals with th effective management of work schedules and tasks at the workplace. Th is also referred to as worker time-on-task. An individual worker needs t

organise all his/her tasks and duties in accordance with the timings to make him/her more productive, more efficient, and well organised. Thus, worker time-on-task refers to how employees manage their work schedules at the workplace and their active engagement on tasks during work hours.

Weak worker time-on-task challenge arises when individual workers in the organisation or institution feel that in their absence, their work task would be done by other members. The individuals may report to work and especially when there are other staff members to perform the same tasks with them, those individuals get the feeling to be hesitant to work. They may tend to relax and do very little, or even take French leave and move out of the office, leaving the work behind. It may also occur when the workload on the individuals happens to be less than expected. An individual may conjecture that the routine workload is minimal and unchallenging and hence adopt the attitude of coming to work only to lazy about doing virtually nothing and yet leave the office earlier. Such attitudes of some workers which tend to eventually increase the workload of the other staff members could thus lead to inefficient work done. When one person fails to do his/her work, it inevitably lays more work on other members. This, coupled with other workplace pressures, lead to inefficiency and ineffectiveness of work done in the Faculty. Low productivity and poor performance may consequently become the order of the day among the staff members in general.

Public universities in Ghana operate a somewhat decentralised system of administration in which all other sections in the institution, including academic colleges, faculties, and departments, align their vision to that of the mother university in order to ensure accountability and better work output. The expectation is that every member within every unit or section of the university will work diligently towards the realisation of the vision of the college, faculty, department or section, altogether culminating in the realisation of the overall vision of the university.

About a decade ago, a public university in Ghana created new colleges, faculties/schools, departments and other units, as part of its expansion and innovation process. One of the newly created faculties, which was transformed from an existing department, runs five undergraduate programmes, five Master of Arts/Master of Education (MA/MEd) programmes, and five Master of Philosophy/Doctor of Philosophy (MPhil/PhD) programmes. The courses run in this faculty, thus, have their undergraduate and graduate components. The faculty has 27 lecturers, 10

senior staff, 6 junior staff and a sizeable number of National Service Persons posted there annually, to altogether work towards the objectives and aspirations of the faculty.

## Statement of the Problem

A cursory experiential observation from 2019 to 2021 revealed that there was a decline in worker time-on-task among the junior/senior staff of this Faculty in the university. This resulted in low quality of work output, leading eventually to low productivity among the workers in the Faculty. There seemed to be a huge vacuum left in the day-to-day activities at the office. Karaaslan and Aslan (2019) see organisational commitment as the level at which an employee will be willing to maintain membership because of the interest and association with the organisation's goals and values. In other words, employees will become loyal and be willing to spend time and effort on their work when they find that their organisation provides an atmosphere of fun and satisfaction (El Badawy, Chinta, & Magdy, 2018).

A lot of work was left undone in the Faculty, as workers dissipated their energies in the pursuit of endeavours that were mostly unrelated to the official tasks given them. Services were not rendered to clients (including students and graduates of the Faculty) on time, and correspondence was equally not delivered on time. It was observed that the junior/senior staff were exhibiting behaviours that could best be described as counterproductive to the objectives and aspirations of the Faculty. Although staff signed in as present to work, they were not available to do assigned duties. As Eliyana, Emur, and Sridadi (2020) posit, when employees are committed to their organisation, they will assume that staying in the institution is a moral requirement. What could be the reason or reasons for such attitudes being displayed by the junior/senior staff of a Faculty which was created not too long ago? It was therefore considered worthwhile to conduct an indepth investigation to unravel the reasons behind such apathetic behaviour exhibited by the junior/senior staff of the Faculty and how it affected productivity.

## Purpose of Study

The study sought to identify factors that contribute to the weak worker time-on-task among the junior/senior staff of the Faculty. Specifically, the study intended to:

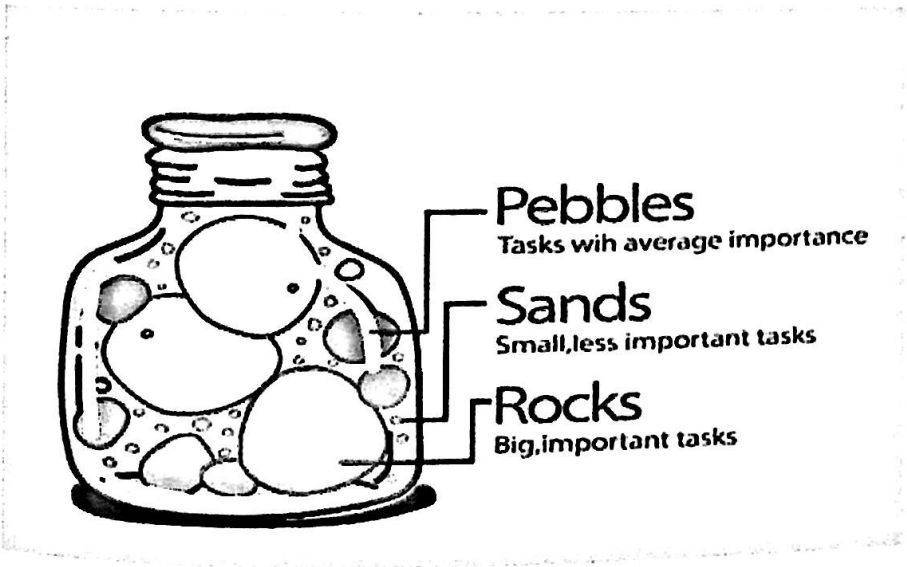
(a) assess why some workers would report to work and yet fail to work.
(b) examine the reasons why some workers do not wait till work time is over before leaving the workplace.
(c) find out whether supervisors were doing proper supervision of work.

## Theoretical Underpinning

### *Performance Theory: The Pickle Jar Theory of Time Management*

This work was built on the Pickle Jar theory to explain how time could be managed and maximised by employees to ensure high achievement of the organisational goals. The Pickle Jar theory is based on the idea that time, like a pickle jar, is limited. The jar represents human life with the limitedness of the volume or space in it indicating how limited life is.

**Figure 1:** The Pickle Jar Analogy




**Source:** Ansari, S. M. (2019)

According to Mudler (2017), the Pickle Jar theory uses the analogy of an empty pickle jar to illustrate how the fixed amount of time available is used each day. The theory is based on the idea that time, like a pickle jar, is limited. And here, one needs to consider big rocks, water, sand, and pebbles

to represent the things done in daily life, whether at home or at the work place.

The analogy consists of an imaginary individual who, having a huge pickle jar, fills it with rocks until it is full such that there is no more room in the jar to hold any more rock; yet, some gaps are seen in between the rocks. The person then drops some pebbles in the jar which are able to fill the gaps left in between the rocks in the jar until no more pebbles can go in. However, further observation shows that there are still some small gaps in between the rocks and pebbles. At this stage the person drops in sand which is able to fill the smaller spaces in the jar and follows up with water until the jar appears full.

The bigger objects represent the roles, goals, and commitments that are of importance to the person or institution and mean that, one needs to dedicate more time to such goals. The smaller objects like pebbles represent the less important things, which may be done or could be dispensed with. The sand is easy to pour into the jar, meaning it is easy to do and takes little time to complete, and thus represents the daily chores of life that get placed perfectly between goals and hobbies. The water represents whatever takes time but does not add any value, like spending hours online chatting or doing anything else that wastes time.

This theory not only shows how to manage time but also creates the awareness to ensure the avoidance of distractions that lead to misuse of time to allow for things to be done in the right way. The theory highlights the need for workers to put premium on the important tasks of the organisation and stresses on such virtues as punctuality among workers and creating greater chance for more effective performance on the job. It also denotes the simple lesson that if one fulfils the major tasks first, there will be room to complete other tasks as well and probably get time for leisure. This theoretical analogy is equally applicable to the staff of the said university Faculty.

## Method of Investigation

The study adopted the case study research design with a qualitative dimension, the purpose of which was to examine the factors that cause weak worker time-on-task among the junior staff of the Faculty. Creswell (2003) defines a case study as involving a study in which a "researcher explores in-depth of a programme, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals" (p. 15). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) further describe

case study to have a defined time frame. The case study can be either a single case or a case bounded by time and place (Creswell, 1998). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) provide several examples from different disciplines such as medical research studying a rare illness (event) or political science research on a presidential campaign (activity). The authors again state that case studies attempt to learn "more about a little known or poorly understood situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 149). Creswell (1998) suggests that the structure of a case study should be the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned. The data collection for a case study may be extensive and draws from multiple sources such as direct or participant observations, interviews, archival records or documents, physical artifacts, and audiovisual materials. The researcher must spend time on-site interacting with the people studied. The report would include lessons learned or patterns found that connect with theories.

The qualitative approach of the current study comprised the informal observation as well as formal interviewing of participants. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) describe the interview as a very important technique used in qualitative research. Its purpose is to "find out what is on their [interviewees'] mind — what they think or how they feel about something" (p. 509). The current study used a semi-structured interview guide in eliciting from the respondents the factors that cause weak worker time-on-task.

## The Fishbone Method

The fishbone method was used to analyse issues in this management challenge. The fishbone diagram gives a comprehensive list of possible causes to identify the root cause of the problem (Ilie & Ciocoiu, 2010). It identifies all contributing root causes likely to cause an identified problem or issue.

## Benefits of a Fishbone Diagram

The fishbone diagram has a number of benefits to users such as the following (Ilie & Ciocoiu, 2010):

- It is a visual tool that is very easy to understand and analyse.
- It involves an in-depth discussion of the problem to educate the entire team.
- It helps to identify the root cause of the problem.

- It helps to identify ways to improve the process.
- It prioritises further analysis and helps in taking corrective action.

## Limitations of a Fishbone Diagram

The following are a few limitations of a fishbone diagram (as outlined by Sandra, Wikarya, Zubaidah, Effendi, Atmazaki, & Darmansyah, 2019):

- A fishbone diagram does not single out the root cause of the problem.
- The fishbone diagram process involves a democratic way of selecting the causes and is therefore largely based on opinion rather than evidence.
- Sometimes, effort is wasted in identifying causes that have little effect on the problem.
- If the discussion is not appropriately controlled, it may deviate from its objective.

## Characteristics of the Fishbone Diagram

The fishbone diagram is a cause-and-effect diagram that helps managers to track down the reasons for imperfections, variations, defects, or failures. The diagram looks like the skeleton of a fish, with the problem at its head and the causes for the problem feeding into the spine. Once all the causes that underlie the problem have been identified, managers can start looking for a solution to ensure that the problem does not become a recurring one (Sandra *et al.*, 2019). The first advantage of this tool is that it provides better understanding of the problem, and helps eliminate the root cause of the problem in one shot rather than solving a part of the problem the first time, then again solving another part at another time. It is used to troubleshoot before there is trouble, and helps overcome all or most of the teething troubles when introducing something new (Worch, Dooley, Meullenet, & Punter, 2010).

According to Usman and Hutasoit (2019), the fishbone diagram uses a brainstorming technique to identify the causes and to come up with a kind of mind map which shows all identified causes graphically. This diagram gives the opportunity to think more thoroughly about the root cause of the problem, which leads to a healthy resolution (Usman & Hutasoit, 2019). The fishbone diagram allows for the consideration of all possible causes of a problem instead of focusing on only the most obvious one.

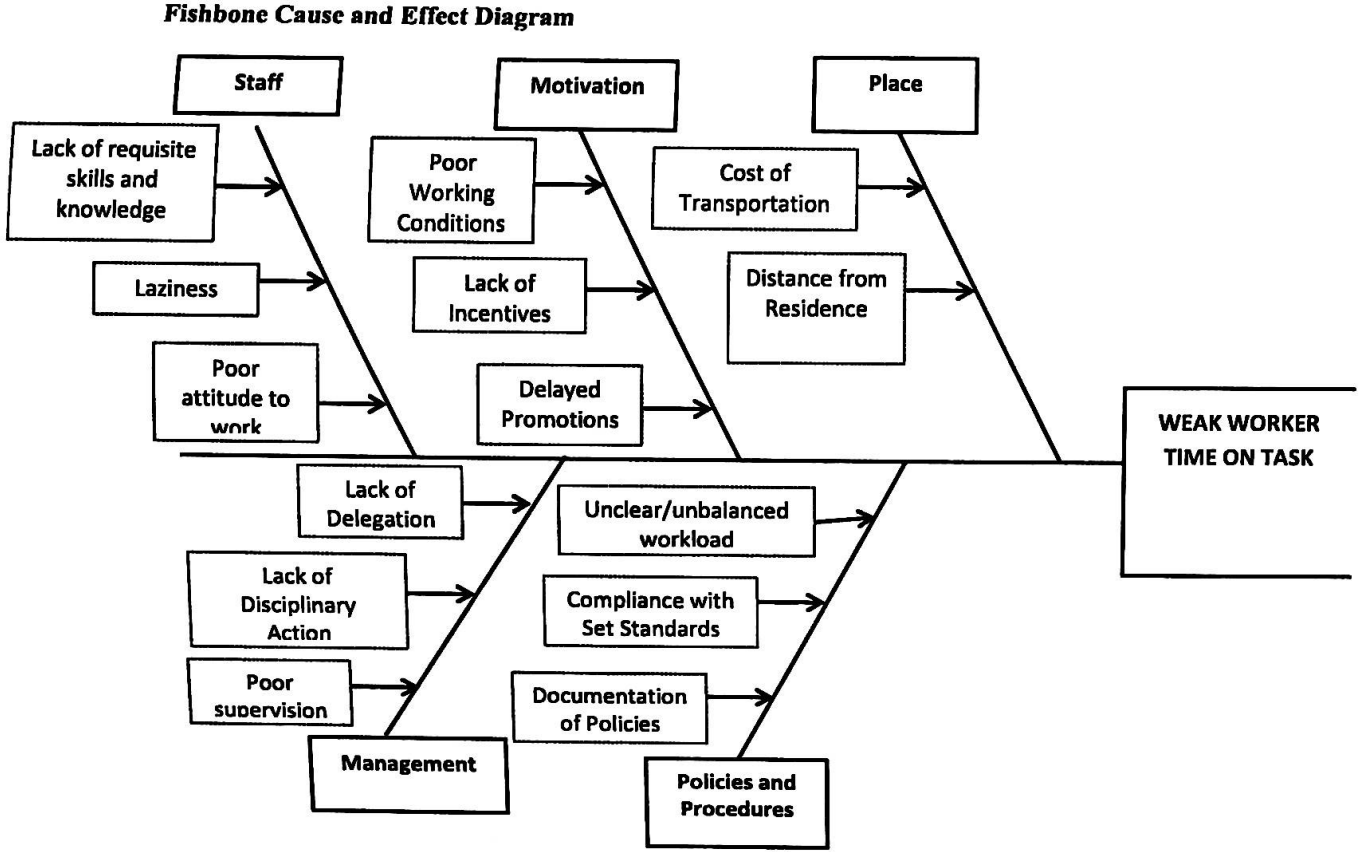



**Figure 3:** Fishbone cause and effect diagram on Faculty staff weak time-on-task

## Application of the Fishbone Scientific Method

Five members of staff who had personal knowledge of the processes and systems involved in the issue under investigation were included in the study. The fish was drawn on a flip chart making sure enough space was left between the major categories on the diagram so that the minor detailed causes could be added later.

The staff members were interviewed and allowed to brainstorm on the causes. The members wrote each cause on sticky notes. In each category of the primary causes in vertical form, brainstorming of the possible secondary causes of the problem was done. While brainstorming, questions like "Why does this happen?" were noted down over and over again till the researcher got the possible causes of the problem. These causes were horizontally added to the fishbone (factors) to which they belonged and labeled. Sub-branches were still added until the satisfactory result was arrived at. Much time was spent on this process because of its importance, with the collection of causes being very comprehensive.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented under five sub-headings, namely: staff, management, policies and procedures, motivation, and workplace. This is in line with what Walton (cited in Zin, 2004) gave as the factors of quality of work life which include fair and adequate compensation, a safe and healthy environment, development of employee capabilities, growth and security, social integration, constitutionalism, the overall organisational environment, and social relationship. The presentation comprises what was found from the investigation and a systematic analysis of the findings from the fishbone diagram of causes.

### 1. Staff

The upper part of the diagram has Staff as the main primary cause. The staff as used here entails every act or issue that affects the worker's efficiency and as such makes him/her spend less time on task than expected. The secondary causes under staff in the order of extensiveness and relevance, were identified to include: lack of knowledge and competency, laziness, poor self esteem, and poor interpersonal relations with other staff in the

organisation. Thus, from the analysis, an incompetent worker is more likely to stay out of work rather than the mere fact that he/she has a poor attitude towards work.

As a key contributor to weak worker time-on-task, insufficient skills and knowledge of the staff regarding the assigned task would cause a worker to stay out of work due to the fact that the worker finds it difficult to perform the task. Their inefficiencies would demotivate them from staying on the task as they struggle with their conscience. Ollukkaran and Gunaseelan (2012) proved in their study that training and development is helpful in increasing employees' performance. Workers who are also naturally lazy may want to stay out of task more frequently than their diligent counterparts. This is because lazy workers will find it more frustrating staying on task and therefore may resort to unwarranted breaks for leisure. Approachable, supportive and technically sound co-workers are imperative sources of job satisfaction for individuals and for productivity. Luthans (2011) described the role of co-workers in job satisfaction as the degree to which fellow workers are technically proficient and socially supportive. Some employees may also have poor perceptions and attitudes towards work. These workers, like their lazy colleagues, will find the tasks unattractive and spend more time on activities other than the tasks assigned to them.

2. **Management**

Inefficiencies in organisational management, to a larger extent, are believed to have the greatest impact on worker feeling of redundancy and inactivity in the organisation. The issues under management are further broken down into poor supervision of work, lack of disciplinary actions, and lack of delegation. These are arranged in the order of extensiveness to which the sub-cause contributes to the primary cause (management). Thus, poor supervision of work by management was found to have a superior relevance to lack of delegation. That is, a worker is more likely to be redundant if not well supervised rather than when work is not delegated to him/her.

The study revealed that if management does not ensure that workers do what they are supposed to do and on time, the

workers will take advantage of the inefficiency in management's supervisory role and consequently spend less time on assigned tasks. According to Luthans (2011) supervision is the ability of the supervisor to provide technical assistance and behavioral support. There are two types of supervisory styles that influence job satisfaction and productivity. One is employee-centredness, which is the supervisor taking personal interest in employees and the other dimensions influencing the employees to perform (Luthans, 2011). Like poor supervision, lack of disciplinary action by management was also found to be a major contributory factor to the decline in worker time-on-task. Management is supposed to ensure that workers act in a prescribed manner towards the achievement of the organisation's goals. To this end, when workers go contrary to set rules and obligations, management is to ensure that necessary punitive actions are meted out to the culprits in order to deter other workers from committing the same or similar offense. Thus, the inability of management to ensure these could be a contributory factor in breeding indiscipline among the workers and the resultant weak worker time-on-task.

Another key point identified was the lack of delegation of authority by management. In certain circumstances, management may be preoccupied with a lot of tasks to accomplish, and therefore performing all may become difficult. In such situations, management could delegate some of the tasks to junior/senior staff who may be free to allow the managers to concentrate on the more technical and urgent ones. The inability of some managers to delegate some duties will leave them with several tasks unattended to, and therefore certain indisciplinary acts of workers may be overlooked.

3. **Policies and Procedures**

The next major primary cause leading to the weak worker time on-task phenomenon happened to be policy related. Policies ensure that there is order in the organisation to facilitate quick flow of information for effective decision making (Huffman, King & Reichelt, 2017). Poor documentation, unclear or unbalanced workload, and non-compliance with standards within the

organisation were identified as the secondary causes. Policies follow after management on the lower part of the fishbone diagram since these policies are formulated and controlled by management.

Weak worker time-on-task is very common in organisations where there are weak policies and procedures. According to Yaya (2019), institutional policies are essential elements in management as they facilitate enabling work environment where employees derive a sense of accountability and feel motivated to achieve organisational goals along with their career development. Thus, inefficiencies in management's roles of formulating and keeping employee-related documents, and defining and striking a proper balance of workload schedules for employees, together contribute to the increasing decline in worker time on a task among junior staff. Thus, the workers might not be conversant with duty policies existing in the organisation. Also, when they lack a clear description of work, they may stay out of work.

4. **Motivation**

The study found that aside from the worker's intrinsic nature, external factors such as poor working conditions, inadequate incentives, and promotions are the next strong factors that may cause the worker to stay out of work. These factors classified under motivation will yield redundancy when not checked as they outline the relationship and arrangements between staff and management.

Motivation of any kind boosts workers' morale. According to Condly, Clark and Stolovitch (2003), incentives plan can significantly increase performance when they are carefully implemented. It makes staff feel accepted as they will think their efforts are being recognised. On the other hand, lack of motivation and other incentives brings the spirit of workers down. In such circumstances, poor and unhealthy attitudes towards work may set in, and when they do, the result is weak worker time-on-task. Thus, workers will not stay on task when conditions and incentive packages including promotions are absent or unattractive.

5. **Workplace**
Being the last of all the major causes, workplace, or conditions at work, was also found to play a role in determining the number of hours a worker may stay on at work. This is to say that the environment also impacts on employees' level of productivity. Ajala (2012) argued that a conducive working environment aids to improve the productivity of employees in the organisation. Although not as strong a major point as staff, the impact of transportation cost and distance from work cannot be overlooked. Thus, workers are more likely to spend more time on work if the distance between their residence and the workplace is relatively short and costs less expensive.

The distance and the cost incurred for an employee to get in and out of work, are also noteworthy. When the cost of transporting is too significant, it may influence the number of days the employee will report to work and be on task. Also, when the distance is too far, employees may close from work earlier than the official closing time in order to be able to get home before late. Thus, the place where the work is located also plays a major role regarding the number of hours a worker may stay on task.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, a number of recommendations are made for improving the situation of worker time-on-task among the junior/senior staff of the Faculty in the public university. These recommendations are made in the short term, medium term and long term perspectives.

### *Short-term*

To ensure that workers stay on task as required, management must duly supervise all tasks assigned to the junior/senior staff to ensure they stay on the work, and do what they are supposed to do at a particular time. Furthermore, management must put measures in place to ensure worker compliance with the demands of duty. This will ensure checks and balances among the staff.

In situations where workers flout rules, disciplinary actions should be

meted out to prevent repetition and also to deter others from doing the same thing. Finally, management, when overwhelmed with tasks should delegate some to workers to free them to be able to monitor key areas and also to keep workers busy on tasks.

***Medium-term***

A system needs to be put in place that will ensure all staff and duty-related issues are documented to enable workers know what they are supposed to do and at what time. Management must also apportion the workload of workers duly so that workers might not be too occupied with work at one time and virtually free at another time.

To ensure workers are effective and efficient on tasks, there should be an arrangement of training and development courses for staff to enable them possess the requisite skills and knowledge. Training will also boost their confidence level and in that regard, they may want to spend more time on the job to acquaint themselves with tasks.

Measures must be put in place to reduce or eliminate laziness and other unhealthy attitudes of workers towards work. This may include sanctions, denial of benefits and incentives, and dismissal when necessary, to deter other workers from cultivating such habits. Staff should endeavour to learn on the job and exhibit good work ethics

***Long-term***

As stated already, motivation of any kind makes workers feel accepted in the organisation and therefore boosts their morale towards work. Motivation should be sufficient and adequate in an organisation and should be given as appropriate. There should be incentive packages attractive and appealing to reward hard working staff and also to encourage others to work harder. Dealing with issues with place, workers must be provided with convenient transport service that will reduce their woes. If possible, an arrangement may be made with workers who stay farther to settle in the organisation's bungalows or nearby premises. The organisation can also acquire a vehicle to transport workers to and from office either at no or little fee rather than commercial ones. There should be proper documentation of policies and dissemination to staff which should be made available at the University website.

## Conclusion

The study sought to identify the possible causes of weak worker time-on-task among junior/senior staff of an academic faculty in a Ghanaian public university. The case study research design was employed. Informal observation was employed to obtain the initial information on the time-on-task situation. Thereafter, guided by the Fishbone theory, interviews were conducted to gather information from respondents based on which was generated the fishbone diagram on the causes and effects of weak worker time-on-task.

From the analysis of the results, it was found that weak worker time-on-task was caused by inefficiencies in management-related issues, weak policies and procedures, staff-related issues, inadequate motivation, and the place where the work is situated. These factors were further analysed and broken down into sub issues which guided the building of the diagram and also informed appropriate recommendations.

It was recommended that, in order to reduce weak worker time-on-task, management of the faculty need to improve supervision, apply disciplinary actions when necessary and also delegate work as and when appropriate. Management must orient staff on policies and issues regarding work and further ensure that workers are duly motivated to boost their morale for work. Staff should also be given training to ensure they possess the requisite skills for work. Finally, management may consider running shuttle services for workers who stay far from the work premises.

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