



# **Changes in Higher Education and Well-being of Academic Employees: Storylines from Higher Education Academic Employees in Ghana**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author DO design the study, wrote the protocol, transcribed the qualitative data and performed data analysis. Author JA managed the analyses of the study and the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past two decades, the higher education sector in Ghana has undergone many reforms ranging from deregulation and financial sustainability to massive investments in infrastructure. These reforms are aimed at addressing diversity in schools, promoting inclusive learning and increasing access to quality tertiary education. The reforms required changes in job skills, job conversions, modes of teaching and learning, self-consciousness and staff re-locations with probable consequent effect on the well-being of employees. However, these reforms failed to adequately account for employee well-being issues. Hence personal changes and support schemes to help employees keep pace with the changes have received little attention. We investigated these phenomena in public universities to understand the well-being shifts during the reforms from the storylines of higher education academic employees.

The study adopted a qualitative research design using laddering interview technique grounded in the personal change theory to solicit stories from 19 academic employees who have lived across the

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reforms. Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) of data analyses was used to analyse the experiences of academic employees. The study provides personal stories reflected in real-life experiences and hinged on the eudemonic theory within a developing country context. The study discovered that leadership, personal mindset shifts and political interference constitute a Change-Effect Model that shapes the well-being of academic employees during the period of organisational reforms. The findings provide a new dimension to organisational reforms and employee well-being and consider from a critical viewpoint how a change-effect model can be applied in change management process to support employee well-being in locally appropriate and effective ways.

*Keywords: Higher academic institutions; academic employees; education reforms; well-being.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

How can education reforms affect academic employees' well-being and performance of higher educational institutions? This interrogation and the drive to investigate employee well-being during organisation change process is motivated by a case in point: The higher education sector in Ghana has experienced several reforms initiated by various governments over the last two decades. These reforms include 'deregulation', 'cost-sharing' or 'fee-paying for students', investments in educational infrastructure, increase access to higher education especially for those from deprived areas among many others.

The reforms brought about radical structural transformations or changes in the higher educational institutions such as; an upsurge in enrolment; on-line teaching and learning, 'fast track' up-skilling of academics to the required academic levels etc. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions for Ghana, led to reforms in the labour front which aimed at controlling the public wage bill [1,2]. These reforms resulted in a freeze on public sector jobs including those in higher education institutions. The IMF condition compelled the government to place a cap on recruitment with ceilings to manage the payroll. This prevented higher education institutions from recruiting new academic staff. The reforms also had downsides for tertiary education management to meet government and societal demands despite limited capacity and constraint resources [3,4]. These initiatives required changes in job skills, job conversions, self-consciousness and re-locations. The consequent results led to absenteeism and presenteeism (working more hours) with associated probable effect on the well-being of employees [5,6,7].

Ironically, the records provide little information about efforts made by higher educational

institutions in Ghana to account for employee well-being during the reforms. The limited information available has been on welfare issues. Even though the various professional associations in higher education have established systems to look at conditions of services for their respective professional groups, these systems are inadequate to respond to employee well-being issues during major reforms. In order to understand personal changes and identify support schemes that can help employees keep pace with organisational changes during major reforms, it is important to constantly explore and analyse employee workplace well-being issues. Insufficient information in these areas has thus created space for debates within the constructs of employee workplace well-being - raising questions about the effect of education reforms on the well-being of employees and implications on wider organisational performance.

This study investigated these questions, aimed at higher academic employees from public universities in Ghana taking cognisance of similar challenges across other sectors of the economy where employee well-being remains a low priority. With over 650,000 employees estimated to be working in the various sectors of the economy of Ghana and the government spending about 10.6 million cedis (\$1.9 million) annually representing (48 percent) of national tax revenue in the form of wages and salaries [8] workplace well-being of these employees needs to be prioritised in Ghana. Yet workplace well-being of employees in Ghana has been relegated to individual efforts with little support from organisations.

The higher education sector in Ghana which is comprised of the universities, specialised colleges and the polytechnics [9] employs over 9,830 full-time academics and 2,789 adjunct or part-time lecturers [10] even though these institutions have seen several structural changes

in the past two decades, little empirical studies have been done on the well-being of their employees. Clearly, the importance of these institutions to the national economy should not be overestimated. While the polytechnics and specialised colleges train middle-level professionals for the various sectors of the economy, the universities prepare highly skilled personnel and researchers to support the economy [11]. Together, the 146 tertiary education institutions as accredited in 2013, had a total number of 389,897 students. The goal of the study is to provide a better understanding of the complexity of workplace well-being and how it is experienced during organisational change process in higher education institutions.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Definitions

To inform discussions around changes in higher education institutions and higher education reforms, we attempt to define the two terms (reform and change) and explain their application in this paper. First, we define reform from Berman's [12] point of view. Berman defines reform as; 'the process of improving the performance of existing systems and of assuring their efficient and equitable response to future changes' (Berman 1995:27). Examples of policy reforms in Ghana during the last two decades include; the introduction of National Health Insurance Scheme to replace the 'cash and carry' in the health sector and the 'Free Senior High School Policy in the education sector etc. Second, for the purpose of this paper, we consider, change from the perspective of Bennet and Hewlett [13]. According to Bennet and Hewlett, a policy change refers to gradual movements that take place within existing structures which may involve the implementation of a new or a ground breaking strategy. Fullan [14] on the other hand provides a clear distinction between policy reform and policy change. Fullan is of the view that reform is a deliberate intervention to solve a problem but this may not necessarily produce change.

In this paper, we assume that higher education reforms by governments in Ghana have brought about changes in higher education institutions. Therefore, we refer to higher education reforms as broader policies by governments to improve higher education while changes to higher education institutions refer to structural and administrative shifts that happen to tertiary educational institutions as a result of

organisational responses to policy reforms by governments.

### 2.2 The Higher Education Reforms

The higher education sector is constantly experiencing reforms across the globe. These reforms span from education restructuring, changes in tuition fees, financial sustainability, infrastructural investments, diversity and inclusive learning [15].

In the United Kingdom, for example, recent higher education reforms have centered on tuition fees and inclusivity. Reforms in tuition fees have led to increases in university fees for home students who are required to contract colossal student loans to pay tuition fees. The effect of this policy has raised concerns about the huge debt that awaits graduates after completion of their studies and the impact on them and their families [16,17]. In a survey to assess the impact of top-up tuition fees on students in England, Jones [18] found that students expect more from their university experience due to the increase in tuition fees. According to Jones, students see themselves as consumers and therefore expect a high value for money. Jones [18] suggests that maintaining a balance between students' requirements and needs while at the same time ensuring the best experiences for students' education require structural and administrative changes in higher educational establishments. However, achieving this without compromising the philosophy of higher education may pose a challenge on higher education institutions.

Aside, high tuition fees, there is also pressure on universities in the United Kingdom from various governments to increase participation and widen access to higher education in recent years [19]. Whereas progress has been made to ensure that higher education is easily accessible to students who have been regularly left out, widening participation is still one of the main challenges facing the higher education institutions [20]. Similarly, with an increase in technological development these days, a lot of attention has been given to online teaching and support which has again challenged lecturers' roles, competencies and motivation.

Varghese [21] provides findings of a UNESCO funded study on institutional restructuring in higher education institutions in East Asia, Hue City Vietnam. Varghese [21] found that the changes in the higher education institutions was as a result of sector-wide reforms that has

brought about: 'deregulation'; a higher rate of returns to invest in higher education; globalisation and reduced public funding by the government.

Varghese [22] and Altbach [23] also argued that these reforms have a global dimension with associated changes in many higher educational institutions in both developed and developing countries. Interestingly, there is pressure on public educational institutions in East Asia countries to change the way they do business due to more effective and efficient operations by the private sector educational institutions. The World Bank [24] found that this challenge has a global implication as most of the private higher educational institutions although small in size have introduced an element of innovation, competition and effective governance systems which are more efficient than what is happening in the public higher education institutions.

Ghana, prior to major higher education reforms in the 1990s, was experiencing a low intake of students into higher education. Ghana together with other English speaking West African English countries; Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and the Gambia then developed a standard examination to facilitate university entrance across their boundaries [25]. Although this initiative was deemed promising and was welcomed by neighbouring countries, only five percent of qualified secondary school-leavers in Ghana could get admission into the various specialised colleges, universities and the polytechnics at that time. In the late 1990s Ghana introduced 'deregulation' in the higher education sector—to allow individuals, religious institutions and the private sector to set up universities and colleges to support the public institutions [26,27]. The deregulation strategy resulted in an increase in the number of private and mission university colleges and coupled with the introduction of new courses, the number of graduates supplied to the labour market started growing to meet the demands from the various sectors of the economy [28,29].

Yet, the tertiary educational institutions suffered a major infrastructural setback with the increasing intake policy by successive governments. As a result, some higher educational institutions introduced the principle of 'grade cut-off point' to regulate the number of students that could gain admission into the institutions. The 'grade cut-off point' principle allows institutions to admit prospective students based on the institution's own preferred grades

for various courses. This principle, however, denied many candidates admission into their institutions of choice - otherwise could have qualified for admission based on the National Accreditation Board (NAB) requirement. Again, in order to address infrastructural deficits in higher educational institutions to cater for increasing enrolment figures and to improve the quality of teaching and learning, many tertiary institutions invested massively in infrastructure. This led to the building of new laboratories, expansion of libraries, hostels or halls of residence and lecture halls.

The massive infrastructural investments caused financial constraints in some of the higher education establishments because government fiscal position was not strong to adequately support the institutions. Therefore, balancing recurrent cost and investments became a major challenge to governments. Many questioned the financial sustainability of some of the educational institutions that relied so much on government funding. Consequently, in the 2000s some higher educational institutions introduced a "fee-paying system for students" – which was meant to provide opportunity to students who met the tertiary education entry requirements but were not offered admission to their chosen courses or specific programmes because of the 'grade cut of point principle' being implemented by the institutions. This strategy offered two benefits for both the institutions and the public; first, it improved the solvency of the institutions and; second, it ensured access to tertiary education to students who otherwise could not have gained access.

This paper argues that the broader education reforms resulted in structural and administrative changes in higher education establishments and the management of those changes influenced employee well-being and organisational performance.

### **2.3 Change Management**

Change management as a topic is an extensively researched area in business management and social science. It is a properly coordinated approach by organisations to reduce possible interruptions during organisational change process for the attainment of the objectives of the change. Over the years, the focus on change management has been on how to enable people in organisations change from their present behaviour to a new set of behaviours required for higher organisational performance.

Most of the studies in this area have provided evidence of a number of unsuccessful change management programmes. Kotter [30] in his book called 'leading change' recalled that in all change programs only 30 percent achieved positive results. McKinsey [31] in a global survey of 3,199 executives discovered that only one out of three transformation programmes are successful. As a result of the number of unsuccessful change management programmes, some academics, strategists and researchers have suggested various strategies to improve change management process with the aim of achieving higher results. These strategies extend from organisational health to changing employee behaviours. For example, Lawson and Price [32] in "The Psychology of Change Management," postulate four basic conditions essential for employees to change behaviours during any change process; a compelling story, role modelling, reinforcing mechanisms and capability building. According to Lawson and Price, these strategies are necessary because employees must see the point of change, appreciate managers as role models, motivated by structures and procedures and improved skills to deliver.

Gallie et al. [33] reaffirm some of the conditions postulated in "The Psychology of Change Management". A skill employment survey in the United Kingdom conducted by Gallie and others posit that proper consultation is a change management tool that can impact on employees' lives and well-being with its consequent effect on wider organisational performance. Likewise, Harney et al. [34] used structural equation modelling to test the hypothesis on consultations during a change process in Ireland. Harney et al. [34] in a survey of public employees in Ireland pointed out that consultation serves as a "buffer" to reducing the scale of negative experience faced by employees during a change process in an organisation. Rhodes and Langtiw [35] in a community-based approach to mental health study in Australia show that effective change can be made through the proper engagement of stakeholders. The results from these studies mean that when leaders engage their employees in a change process, the outcome is likely to be positive.

Within the context of Ghana, changes in political landscape and interference from political leaders constantly reinforce 'The Psychology of Change Management'. These changes have had different impacts on higher education [36]. Political interference is not only peculiar to the higher

education sector in Ghana but other sectors of the economy including the private sector. Akomea-Frimpong et al. [37] attest that decisions by politicians during policy reforms most often affect structural changes in organisations and these changes may have a detrimental effect on employees through job losses etc.

Improving organisational health has also been argued to facilitate change management programmes [38]. Five principles to improve organisational health during change management process by Keller and Price [38] include; identifying health goals to select organisational targets for improvement; shifting mindset to support behaviour change; influence levers to re-shape the work environment; creating energies to help employees act decisively; effective leadership to identify talents, prioritise roles and match roles to talent. On mindset and behaviour change, Basford and Schaninger [39] have proposed 'the influence model' with 'four building blocks of change' as the main activities that stimulate employee 'mindsets' and behaviour during organizational change process; role modelling, fostering understanding and conviction, developing talent and skills and reinforcing with formal mechanisms. Basford and Schaninger [39] indicate that the four blocks connect with each other to give a huge effect on the individual mindset. Abugre [40] shows another dimension to organisational health during a change process. A survey of university employees in Ghana found that effective communication reduces workplace anxieties and reinforces all other activities during a change process [40]. From 'irrational side of change,' effective communication is relevant in decision making [41]. The irrational side of change demonstrates how employees' interpretation of their work environment helps them to decide on how to act and this strongly influences organisational change [41].

Leadership has always been a vital part of change management. A change of leadership in any organisation has an impact on the employees. Whereas some changes bring positive outcomes for both the employees and the organisation, others come with negative consequences for only the employees. A study on "the impact of frequent leadership changes as perceived by employees" found that most employees are happy with repeated leadership changes made by their organisations [42]. The reason is that some of the changes support individual growth, encourage new ideas, increase profits levels and create happy working

environments for employees. On the other hand, those who encounter negative experiences through leadership changes complain of stress, job instability, uncertainty, and low productivity. The study concluded that leadership changes should be kept to a minimum to reduce stress at the workplace. Moreover, a study on teachers' motivation and commitment in Turkey argues that leadership styles can have an impact on employees' commitment and attitude to work, disruptions to work schedules and emotional stability [43]. Effect of leadership styles on motivation and commitment of employees has also been demonstrated in other areas [44].

We argue that the strategies employed during organisational change process by many organisations have all focused on results optimisation with less concentration on the well-being of employees. It is clear that change management involves analysing and defining all changes facing the organization and developing programs to reduce the risks and costs and to maximize the benefits of change. It really does require individuals throughout the organization to behave differently on a day-to-day basis. It often means changing traditional processes and procedures that have been in place for many years. These activities strongly have an effect on employee well-being and employees react to things that strongly affect their well-being [45]). We discuss the stories of higher academic employees from the perspective of three main domains of change management; the psychology of change management; organisational health and leadership.

## **2.4 The Concept of Workplace Well-being**

Generally, the notion of well-being studies and theories extents from the hedonic (life, work stratification and happiness) and eudaimonic (purpose and meaning in life) perspectives. These two viewpoints are somewhat different in their approach but can also overlap in their application [46,47,48]. However, from the perspective of positive psychology movement [49]), which draws inferences from Positive Organisational Psychology (POS) and Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB), some researchers argue that well-being theories should be expanded to fully capture the experiences of individual well-being at the workplace [50,51]. The literature considers individual well-being at the workplace to include physical and mental health issues of employees [52,53]. There is evidence to support that prioritising and improving the physical and

mental well-being of employees yields positive work outcome and performance for both the individual and the organisation [54].

Contemporary research in organisational psychology and behaviour has uncovered other dimensions to the well-being theories—components of well-being. According to Diener [55], components of well-being could be grouped into; subjective and objective. These different perspectives of well-being alongside the various domains have added a rather complex dimension to the understanding of well-being. For example, from the point of view of the health professional, well-being is seen in terms of the absence of disease, illnesses and the physical, mental and social state of the individual [56,57]. The health and safety practitioners and those working in factories also understand individual well-being as how a person's work is organised and managed at work [58,59]. Also, from the perspective of business and organisational management, well-being is seen in terms of productivity, individual performance, job satisfaction, effective workplace well-being and vigour at work [60,61,62]. To the layman, the term well-being can mean different things; happiness, satisfaction, high and low affect, good and poor health, and more.

In terms of the conceptualisation of well-being, we consider the two well-being theories; the hedonic (life, work stratification and happiness); and the eudaimonic (purpose and meaning in life). We argue that in the context of organisational and management changes, the eudaimonic well-being concept by Ryff [63,64] which incorporates the growth dimension of human needs as a component of well-being experience (forming positive relationships in the work environment) is the most appropriate theory for this study.

The reason is that the theory encompasses work changes and personal experience of purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth, and self-acceptance. Relatively, the theory provides a broader exploration of the growth dimension of well-being beyond stress, organisational changes and negative individual experiences [65,66]. Based on the growth perspective of individual well-being experience, we set out to explore further the impact of the changes in the higher education institutions in Ghana on academic employees' well-being, by specifically looking at the impact on their lived experiences from their stories. We argue that this area remains a gap in existing organisational development and management literature in a low-income country context.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design, Population and Sampling**

To capture the experience of the participants in their workplace, a qualitative research method was chosen. This study collected primary data from lecturers of three public Universities in Ghana. The three universities randomly selected together had a student population of over 47, 505 and academic staff of 1,500 who are both full and part-time across 6-7 faculties. We used a non-probability sampling technique (snowballing) also known as chain-referral sampling, to identify and select participants for the study based on participants understanding and experience of the phenomenon [67]. In all 30 participants, 10 each from the three universities were sampled to take part in the study.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Procedures**

In-depth interviews among the sampled higher education academic employees were conducted. The research was concerned with academic employees' experience of workplace well-being during the period of education reforms; what that means to them and how that has changed over time.

Given the focus of the investigation that involved experiences of academic employees at their workplace, the use of laddering interview technique was selected despite its limitation on larger and diverse organisational application. Laddering interview technique is used to discover subconscious mindsets. It is grounded in the personal change theory propounded by Dennis Hinkle in 1965 (cited in Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. [68]).

Among the different forms of labelling interview approach, the researchers' encouraged participants to tell their stories with linkages between their current and past experiences through semi-structured questions. By drawing inferences from current and past experiences, the participants were able to reflect on their experiences and that ultimately helped them to construct meanings to issues that affect their well-being. The interviews were audio-recorded and coded for analysis.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

##### **3.3.1 Interpretative phenomenology approach**

We used the Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) for the data analysis.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and science of the first-person viewpoint with an emphasis on the lived experience of individuals [69]. It encompasses an in-depth investigation of an individual's experience of a specific phenomenon, how they make sense of that experience and the meaning they attach to it.

##### **3.3.2 Method of analysis**

The recognised steps of data analysis, data interpretation for the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) framework proposed by Smith et al. [70] cover a phase-by-phase analysis of the empirical claims, understanding and concerns of Larkin et al. [71]. This approach involves the identification of commonalities, distinction and emergent themes and emphasising divergence and convergence from individual participants' transcripts across several transcripts [72]. IPA produces a circular interpretation instead of a linear and dynamic thinking style, leading to an inductive style that uses a method of 'moving from the specifics to the communal and to the interpretive [70]. IPA consists of six main steps; step 1: Reading, re-reading and transcription, Step 2: Initial noting of emerging themes, Step 3: Developing emergent themes, Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes, Step 5: Moving to the next case Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.

#### **3.4 Data Validity and Reliability**

One of the key considerations in carrying out a qualitative study was how to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. Polkinghorne (2007:479) stated that 'evidence of the participants' stories and issues collected is not to ascertain if some of the issues truly happen but is about the meaning experienced by the people'. The text of stories is evidence for personal meaning and not for the factual occurrences of the events reported in the stories. Subsequently, in this study, we did not intend to confirm the facts. Rather, we sought to question the meaning that academic employees give to their well-being experience at work. This position is supported by Riessman (2001:704-705), who indicated that 'verification of the 'fact' is less salient than understanding the changing meaning of events for the individual involved and how these, in turn, are located in culture and history'.

The past rebuilding of events is, therefore, not our main concern. Instead, the emphasis is placed on how the participants understand their

well-being in relation to the changes in their workplace. To create an effective, strong and powerful relationship with the participants, the suggestion by Lincoln and Guba [73] was considered. Aligning with the view of the extended meeting, the researchers spent some time with the participants (visiting their lecture halls and laboratories and going to the staff canteen to eat together) before the interviews. This was done to gain an understanding of their experience at work and again to build rapport and trust. This also contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The participants from the three study sites had worked at the various universities for five years or more with ranks ranging from lecturers to senior lecturers and heads of department. The participants' age range was between 35 to 50 years.

Table 1 shows that in all, 30 participants were sampled to participate in the study. However, 19 (63%) agreed to take part in the study. Site A produced the highest number of participants with a total number of 7, out of the 10 sampled. Most participants were happy and willing to contact their colleagues at the other two study sites to encourage them to take part in the study as they believed they share similar workplace experiences. This shows the importance of using the snowball approach, as one key participant can reach out to other participants with similar experiences and educational background to encourage them to take part in the study, thus reducing the time and effort spent by the researcher in the recruitment process.

### 4.2 Storylines

It is worth hearing from people with experiences because people who lived with a situation can tell their own stories. In this study, stories from individuals who lived across the various reforms are presented as quotes in three main thematic areas; (1) participants' past and present experiences of leadership changes and styles; (2) participants perspectives on political interferences in higher education following major reforms (3) participants' personal mindset shifts. Each story is independent of the other and false names are used to represent participants in the study.

### 4.2.1 Organisational leadership

**The participants' current experiences of leadership changes:** The important aspect of the participants' stories, was their worry about the constant leadership changes experienced in their faculties and institutions as a whole. Their present experience of change indicated a lack of control, work uncertainties and instability, work pressures and anxiety, which were all connected to the negative workplace well-being experiences they had encountered. Agnes presented her present and past stories in quotes 1-3 below:

#### Quote 1

Personally, one change of leadership that affected me badly to the extent that, I felt my sacrifice over the years was worthless. I had a very good working relationship with this person who had to leave suddenly. I found out that a lot of plans and discussion we had for my department which has been approved and things that seemed to have been agreed in past suddenly did not exist because someone else came and disagreed with everything. So, I found that transition very stressful. Said Agnes.

#### Quote 2

The current experience is very stressful. I easily get angry at the whole situation that my colleagues notice changes in my behaviour at work. Going to work and starting all over again has been my biggest concern. This has caused a lot of delays in certain areas of my work and performance in general, I just lost it at a point, hmm. Agnes continued.

#### Quote 3

**But in the past, Agnes felt different:** The leaders I came to meet were very helpful [smiles], I can stand anywhere and say it. They encourage us to work together to build the department. They made sure we the young lecturers were comfortable and was happy at work and it was a joy working with them. Agnes indicated.

It was observed in the stories by Agnes that her past experience of leadership changes gave her a positive experience at work. Her assertion resonates with the work of Abdul et al. [44]. Abdul and others are of the view that leadership styles have impact on employees' commitment and attitude to work. Whereas Agnes current



experience demonstrates an individual whose work schedules has been disrupted, causing her a lot of stress and emotional instability (negative workplace experiences). She found this upsetting and it made her rethink her future commitments to the university. Agnes's comment on her future commitment describes a person who has lost the motivation at work. Again, Agnes felt that the frequency of the leadership changes created a working environment full of uncertainties, fear and tensions.

Daniel - A lecturer, who has worked in the same institution for the past eleven years, described his current experience of leadership change and the impact that it has had on his work and life in quote 4 below:

#### Quote 4

One will not be happy with every change that takes place in an organisation, but for me my overall experience recently is negative. There are too many changes and a lack of communication among the senior managers and the lecturers. Leaders are changed without any notification to the staff. This disrupts activities at all levels in the university. I feel I am not valued as a staff because if there is going to be a change, I expect the management to inform us all. Said, Daniel.

Daniel attributed his negative experience of the recent changes to the lack of information flow between the management and the staff. He stated that the lack of information flow delayed the progress of work, increased uncertainties about job security and increased the lack of commitment, which tended to affect individuals' performances at work. Daniel's experience is similar to that of Agnes and consistent with a study conducted in higher education institutions [40].

Charles – a lecturer for seven years indicated his present and past experiences in quotes 5-7 below:

#### Quote 5

For me, my experience of change has been a mix. In the most recent years, it's been more of the negative experiences. Some of the leaders that came to the department recently behave as if they are here to write wrongs. They will change things without asking anyone's view or input. There is a

complete loss of communication and I get worried because that is not what I am used to. Charles retorted

#### Quote 6

**Charles demonstrated his current emotional state about leadership changes and styles and said:** I feel disappointed that our efforts and sacrifices have not been recognised by the new leadership. In recent years, I think more and more I feel this may not be a place for me for much longer. Charles said.

#### Quote 7

**Charles has however not informed anybody about his worries or concerns:** Hmm, well, I have not informed anybody. Maybe I should have, but I feel nothing will come out of it because there have been several complaints and nothing was said or done, so I feel the same thing will happen. Charles indicated.

#### Quote 8

**Charles, however, presented a different picture from past experiences:** The leaders I meet when I started were determined to get things done, haha [laugh]. Lecturers were also committed and we work as a team. Most of the leaders then understood the university system and this made things easier. Charles explained.

#### Quote 9

**And in the past, Charles experienced a very relaxing mood at work. He admitted:** Oh, very relaxed and fun to go about my work. The leaders understood what we were doing, and our students were much closer to us. I think the support we gave the students showed in their results too because we had a very good pass rate and we were all happy. Charles emphasised.

A sense of frustration is seen in Charles's present experiences as he used phrases such as "hmm", "I am disappointed" and "I am not sure anything will come out of it". While Charles seemed satisfied with the work done by his past leaders (i.e. their commitment and dedication) for the growth of the university and their students' success, his recent experiences with his new leaders showed frustration, uncertainty about the future and pain. Charles felt that his hard work in

the past had not been recognised by the current leadership due to their one-sided management style. Charles's experience is in line with the hidden part of job uncertainty concept [33].

Katrina, who started teaching as an assistant lecturer and had gone through the ranks to become a professor and head of the department for eight years, presented her present and past experience in quotes 10–12 below:

**Quote 10**

**Katrina shared some of her past experiences and the impact on her well-being:** There are several good instances but I will give you just a few. Some of the leaders I started with were very supportive and guided us to find our feet. It was one of our professors who took an interest in my work and recommended that the university support me to further my studies, so I can come back and help the department. I will not forget the day I got the news, haha. Our leaders were friendly and we got on well. Katrina indicated.

**Quote 11**

**Katrina showed how often their leaders were changes:** Well, not that much, most of the department and faculty heads stayed on much longer and they knew their work. They were concerned about our progress, I came back from further studies after 3-4 years abroad and my head of the department was still here. There was some sense of steadiness in the department and the staff and students liked that. Said Katrina.

**Quote 12**

**Katrina admitted that in the past they had a leadership style that made them more comfortable:** It gave me peace of mind knowing that I will come back to continue working without going through the trouble of explaining myself to a new leader. We had the freedom to work and worked with leaders who had a passion for the work. The sense of togetherness and the freedom to make decisions as a lecturer was great but now it's something else. Katrina retorted.

The stories of Charles, Katrina and Agnes show they were happy working with their past leaders, especially with the support they received. Charles's positive experience was in relation to working with a committed and dedicated team (lecturers and leaders), and support from past

leaders who were interested in his career growth and student progress. For Karina, it was about how the leaders understood academic work and the interest they had in her career progress, as in the case of Charles. Katrina's emphasis was also on the job stability and academic freedom that existed in the past. This, she said, gave her confidence and peace of mind to work, while Agnes attributed her positive experience to work autonomy and a happy working environment. Charles, Karina and Agnes all believed that their experience with their past leaders had affected their work and lives positively. Also, they were able to support their students better in the past, as compared to what they were experiencing now. The participants' past stories point to their positive workplace well-being experiences and are also linked to the concept of "flow" in their eudaimonic experience of well-being. The participants' present experience of their work environment supports the negative view of well-being [45]. With regards to the participants' past experience, phrases such as "it was a joy working in a team", "we understood each other" and "people were ready to work" were used to describe their experiences working with their leaders. One key observation made interviewing the participants' when they were asked to share their past experiences was the smiles on their faces and the excitement which accompanied their stories.

**4.2.2 Political interference on higher education employees**

Educators in the Ghanaian universities are faced with the pressure from politicians to increase university access, create opportunities for secondary school leavers from the deprived parts of the country to enter public universities to create a balance in society and justify all-inclusiveness. On the academic employees, there is also a concern on the cap on recruiting new academic employee due to IMF financial restrictions on the government. These have been the most pressing issues in recent years facing the higher education sector in Ghana, especially the public universities. However, it appears politicians follow up the policy reforms and interfere in the implementation of these reforms. Therefore, the education institutions are often faced with political interference such as appointing their friends, close associates and political party members to key positions in the public universities. On the impact of these interferences on academic employees' work, life and well-being, Jack, James and Peter shared their experiences:

**Table 1. Respondents' participation rate**

Means of recruitment	Total number sampled	Agreed to take part	Participation rate
Site A	10	7	70%
Site B	10	6	60%
Site C	10	6	60%
Total	30	19	63%

**Quote 13**

I get stressed with their constant calls and changes to do things their way. It affects me emotionally though I may not say anything to my colleagues, hmm. If I fail to work with them then it means my department will suffer. Any request made to the ministry from my department will delay in processing because I refuse to do what they want as politicians. This causes delays in running the programmes and, your staff members look at you as if you don't know your job, in fact, is a worry. Jack indicated.

**Quote 14**

With these politicians, you cannot win when dealing with them. You only have to dance to their tune to have your peace of mind. In fact, I get worried but what can I possibly do? I just try to do my job. James said.

**Quote 15**

It is very frustrating dealing with the politicians in this country. They have all the powers and you cannot win. Peter lamented.

A sense of helplessness was seen in Jack's story as he tried to describe his experience. Jack sighed (hmm) constantly before every statement, showing a sign of hesitation to speak. Jack's actions demonstrated his level of uneasiness due to the challenges he had to go through in the hands of politicians. Also, his hesitation to respond to questions underlined his frustration, which can be described as negative expressions.

James, was concerned about the lack of autonomy by the leaders of the university when dealing with politicians. He described the situation as helpless with the phrase "In fact, I am not happy but what can I possibly do? I try to just do my job." A sense of impossibility demonstrated in his story showed his frustration and the impact on his life and work as he simply summarised his experience of political

interference as "not pleasant at all", indicating a sense of worry and anxiety. Peter's story captured both his past and present experiences of political interference and said currently, there were too many interferences compared to when he started working as a young lecturer. This, he said, affected him emotionally and negatively impacted on his work. Peter described his negative experience dealing with politicians with phrases such as "is a long war", "it's frustrating" and the "politicians have all the powers". This, he said, caused workplace unrest.

Throughout James, Peter and Jacks' stories, it became clear that they were all not happy with the level of political interference they were experiencing in their institutions and somehow agreed that the actions of the politicians marginalised their role as academics. Consistent in the participants' stories was the use of the phrases "the politicians have all the powers", "they put pressure on you", "it's all political" and "they control everything". These phrases were used to either emphasise a point or describe their level of frustration due to political interference in their work. Also, there appears to be a "power play" between the politicians and the academics, as Janet explained in quotes 16-19 below:

**Quote 16**

Over here the politicians control everything. Even an 'assembly man' has power. When it comes to admissions, for instance, they will bring their own people who do not meet the admission criteria and ask you to help them, hmm, is not easy I tell you. Janet, who has been a lecturer for 6 years indicated.

**Quote 17**

**Janet talked about instances when she was not able to help the politicians and how that affected her emotional well-being:** Well, on the surface it may seem ok, but believe me, there is a lot of things that go on behind the scenes. Sometimes if you are

not lucky, it can even affect your promotion, especially if you are close to getting one of the senior positions in the university. Janet continued.

**Quote 18**

Is not a good one, there is constant pressure on you. You don't have the free hand to work and this can be stressful. For you to have your peace of mind, you have to try and provide what the politicians ask of you because they have their ways to get you, hmm. Janet lamented.

Janet's story demonstrates an individual who seems to be aware of the "power play" between the politicians and the academic staff, and the consequences when one is not able to meet the demands of the politicians. This situation restricted academic freedom especially in the decisions making process.

Peter, a lecturer for 15 years, also said:

**Quote 19:**

The politician controls everything in this country and anytime you try to challenge them then you become their target and believe me you are in for a 'long war' with them. (Peter).

Peter's description of the pressure from the politicians as "a long war" suggests a situation which can only be won by the politicians. On his experience of political interference and its associated pressures, he explained:

**Quote 20**

Oh is bad now because in those days the pressure usually came from close friends and family members. If I'm not able to help my friend's daughter to get admission into a programme this year for whatever reason, I can explain, and they will understand but with the politicians, no. (Peter).

Peter's stories described both his past and present experiences of political pressures and the impact on his work. Peter was not happy with the way the politicians tried to interfere with the work of academics' but he was unable to do much as he described the situation as a "long war" between the academics and the politicians. The stories show that the impact of political interference on the participants' work points to their negative workplace well-being experiences.

The evidence from this study supports similar findings in higher academic institutions in Ghana [37].

**4.2.3 Personal mindset shifts**

The participants' stories showed that organisational health could easily be affected by personal mindset shifts. It appears that high work demands such as workload, long working hours and pressure to meet deadlines which were caused by a restriction in the recruitment of new academic employee led to personal mindset shifts. Cynthia and Jane both heads of the department told their stories:

**Quote 21**

What worries me most in all these changes is workload, because we are few and the student numbers keep rising. Now, in my department, we need more staff but because of the embargo we cannot recruit." Cynthia indicated.

**Quote 22**

It's exhausting because I'm teaching courses I have no idea of, hmm. We have new courses, but no lecturers teach them. This embargo is close to 10 years now, but we don't know when this will end. Lecturers are doing their best but this is affecting the quality of teaching as they are stretched with work. Cynthia mourned.

**Quote 23**

Now the university cannot recruit, and we have all been told to help in whichever way we can. If you are asked to do something you can't really say no because there is nobody else to do it, so, there is a lot of pressure on us. Jane said.

**Quote 24**

I am really exhausted, and my colleagues also feel the same. The most difficult part is we do not know how long we will have to continue to be working like this with all these work pressures on us. In fact, we are really pressured to work and is as if we do not have our own lives anymore. (Jane).

Cynthia's story shows a leader who is concerned about her staff and students' progress in her department. She feels that her lecturers are

overloaded with work, which is affecting not only the contact time with students (students' university experience) but also the teaching quality and standards. She describes this as exhausting and emotionally draining:

**Quote 25**

We are struggling, hmm, maybe in your recommendation you can suggest to the government to lift the embargo (Cynthia).

Further, it became clear in Cynthia's story that she was worried about teaching new subjects she had little or no idea of, as she feared any mistake in front her students would embarrass her, affect her status as and lower their confidence in her.

Jane's account here demonstrated a person who was tired of the work pressures on her. Her use of the expression "there is a lot of pressure on us" and "is as if we do not have our own lives anymore" demonstrated a sign of frustration and an expression of negative sentiments due to work pressures. Jane again explained how the long working hours and pressures had affected her life and that of her family; as she puts it:

**Quote 26**

For those of us who have children, it is difficult to have a work-life balance. Our children are also feeling the pressure since we do not spend much time together (Jane).

It has been revealed in this study that some of the changes experienced by the participants led to an increase in student numbers. However, this varied across the three study sites. Six out of the 19 participants said that the increase in student numbers had affected their work negatively.

For example, Prince said:

**Quote 27**

Oh yea, student numbers are very high now and marking has become an issue. I teach about seven courses now, so you can imagine. (Prince)

**Quote 28**

Well, it's about the university admitting more for more money, ha-ha. The problem is that it affects the students themselves because they don't pay attention in class (Prince).

**Quote 29**

Well, it depends on the course as well. Some of the courses are not attractive to students more than others. Those of us in the health sciences are used to having high numbers all the time. Our work involves hospital placement supervision as well, so the pressure is massive. (Paul).

Prince, unlike Paul, did not sound worried about the increase in student numbers as he seemed to suggest that the students were the ones affected due to limited classroom space and overcrowding, which made some students not pay attention during lessons. Prince seemed to suggest that the increase in student numbers is an issue for the university management and not for the lecturers, with a phrase "it's about the university admitting more for more money". Thus, it is obliged to provide the needed resources to match the student numbers. Paul, however, was worried as he said his department attracted the most student numbers every year, making him and his colleagues work more than the other academic staff in the university. He said this situation put more pressure on him and affected his life negatively. Both Paul and Prince agreed that workload and pressures due to increasing student numbers were not a general concern across the whole school but were department and course-related. However, on the part of Prince, it was the duty of the university authorities to ensure there were enough resources to meet the demand for such attractive courses.

The participants' views and experiences on the cap on recruitment presented their negative workplace well-being experiences. They linked their negative experiences to work demands, such as long working hours and stress relating to work pressures. The participants' stories are similar to work pressure experiences across the higher education sector globally. A sense of worry, frustration and uncertainty emerged in their stories. However, this was related to institutional policies and governance and not entirely work-related regarding the increase in student numbers.

**4.3 Change-effect Model**

The participants' well-being is positioned in the eudaimonic concept, showing their desire to overcome work challenges with fewer complaints and more attention to their students' progress. Their stories captured both their past and present

experiences. The participants said they felt frustrated and stressed by the lack of communication between them and their leadership. This made them feel uncertain about the future of their jobs (negative well-being experience). Regarding their positive experiences, the participants praised their past leaders for their support, the opportunities their leaders created for their career development, the autonomy they gave them, and the teamwork that existed between them. The impact of these on participants' past and present experiences from the perspectives of organisational leadership changes; political interference; and personal mindset shifts are presented in the change-effect model (Fig. 1).

We designed the model (Fig. 1) based on our analysis and synthesis of the stories from the respondents. We conclude that the stories from the respondents indicate the effect that structural and administrative changes in higher academic institutions can have on the well-being of higher academic employees. We therefore present this relationship in what we call 'change-effect model' as in Fig. 1. From Fig. 1, it is quite clear that broader policy reforms can cause structural and administrative changes in organisations. For the higher education sector, these changes can lead to both positive and negative well-being of the employee from three perspectives: The first, factor that emerged from the responses is political and this constitutes external influence on

the organisation. However, within the organisational health literature, this factor appears to be insufficiently explored or discussed.

The evidence from the study shows that politicians who initiate policy reforms do influence the implementation of the reforms with some level of interference. These may lead to negative well-being of employees because the political interest is most often results-oriented with less focus on the well-being of the employee. The second, factor is the leadership changes which constitute internal influences and appears strongly in the organisational health literature [38]. Leadership change is a common phenomenon in change management and usually comes with inherent changes to leadership styles. The stories from our study show that this can lead to both negative and positive well-being of employees depending on who is the leader and what leadership styles they bring to bear at a particular time. The third is the mindset shift which constitutes personal changes and also situates strongly in the organisational health literature [38]. Our evidence suggests that individual mindset shifts constitute a predisposing factor for behaviour change. These changes are caused by work outputs, relocation of jobs, changing job schedules etc. The study has shown that mindset shifts during the change management process can lead to both positive and negative well-being.



**Fig. 1. A change-effect model**  
 Source; Designed by Authors based on analysis of findings

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, we provide a conceptual understanding to the phenomena of policy reforms and employee well-being with the argument that major policy reforms in education in Ghana have caused organisational changes and managing the processes can easily influence the well-being of employees. This can, in turn, affect organisational performance. We suggest that during any policy reform that requires structural and administrative changes to organisations, priority should be given to the well-being of employees to enable employees to position themselves physically, psychologically, socially and economically well. This will ensure higher organisational performance and that can lead to results optimisation that organisations need. We recommend the organisational management model that prioritises staff well-being with a focus on political influence, mindset shifts and effective organisational leadership as they impact both negatively and positively on employee well-being.

Again, we argue that the growth dimension of workplace well-being is not only likely to influence how individuals can maintain their well-being but also how people understand what well-being is, and what the components of their experiences are. We argue that; organisational leadership, political interference and mindset shifts are common conditions that can impact on employee well-being and like the 'butterfly effect' the initial small changes from experiences can lead to major differences in the well-being of employees in later stages. The organisational performance equation is incomplete without a focus on employee well-being. We recommend the establishment of well-being centres in higher education institutions for the management of employee well-being since 'change' is a constant denominator factor that continuously happens in higher education institutions. We also recommend that this initiative be extended to employees of other sectors of the economy such as the health sector.

### CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

Issue of ethics in conducting this research was highly adhered to. Researchers adhered to high moral and ethical values, thus ensuring the protection and promotion of rights of all individuals. The aspect of confidentiality was also given optimum attention. In this case, identities of respondents were not disclosed to other people

alongside guaranteeing them security for any complications which may erupt thereafter.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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