



Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Employees' Work Life: A Case Study of St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi

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Abstract

The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted organizations and employees, posing unique challenges to their work lives. This case study focuses on St. Mary's College Kisubi (SMACK) and the University of Kisubi (UniK) in Uganda, exploring how the pandemic has affected their employees' tasks, context, mindset, and daily routines. By analyzing organizational factors such as structure, culture, and technology, as well as employee-level factors like resilience and coping mechanisms, this study identifies key impact categories, contingencies, and coping strategies. The comparative analysis between the two institutions provides insights into effective management practices during and after a pandemic, contributing to academic literature and offering practical implications for organizations aiming to support employee well-being and productivity in crisis situations.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic impact, Employee work life, Organizational resilience, Coping mechanisms, Comparative case study

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has presented organisations and employees with unique challenges (Adams et al., 2020). St. Mary's College Kisubi (SMACK) and University of Kisubi (UniK) are two educational institutions located in Kisubi, Entebbe, Uganda that are experiencing unique pandemic consequences (Allen et al., 2015).

This case study research aims to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work lives, including tasks, context, mindset, and daily routines, by considering organisational-level factors such as structure, culture, and technology, as well as employee-level factors (Alon et al., 2020). The study will compare the two organisations to identify stylized impact categories, contingencies, and coping mechanisms at the organisational and employee

levels, as well as provide recommendations for the efficient management of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Brough et al., 2020).

The relevance of this case study research is multi-fold:

- **Academic contribution:** This research can contribute to the existing literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work lives by investigating the specific impacts, contingencies, coping mechanisms, and differences between organization-level and employee-level factors between two organisations, St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi. The findings of this study can shed light on how the pandemic has affected the work lives of employees in various organisational contexts and how organisations and employees have

adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic (De Vries et al., 2019).

- **Implications for organizations:** The findings of this study can inform organisations, such as St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, about the key factors that have influenced the impact of the pandemic on employees' work lives, including organisational structure, culture, and technology, as well as employees' resilience, coping mechanisms, and perceptions. This can help organisations develop strategies and interventions to better support their employees during and after a pandemic, including adjusting work tasks, context, and routines, providing resources and support for employee well-being, and promoting effective coping mechanisms (Gajendran et al., 2007).
- **Employee well-being and productivity:** Understanding the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life can contribute to improving employee well-being and productivity. By identifying the challenges and changes in work tasks, context, mindset, and routines, and the coping mechanisms that employees use, organizations can design targeted interventions to support employees' mental health, work-life balance, and productivity, which can ultimately benefit both employees and organizations (Hammer et al., 2009).
- The comparison and contrast of the impacts, contingencies, and coping mechanisms between St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi can shed light on how different organisational factors influence the experienced of employees during the pandemic. This comparative analysis can assist organisations in comprehending the role of organisational factors in shaping employees' work lives and in making future decisions regarding the management of similar crises (Shockley et al., 2016).
- Overall, the relevance of this case study research lies in its potential to contribute to the academic literature, provide practical implications for organizations, promote employee well-being and productivity, and offer comparative insights for better understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work life (World Health Organisation, 2020).

The research problem

Employees at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, as well as their respective organisations, are affected by the problem of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work lives. It encompasses all levels and departments and functions, including academic and administrative personnel. Changes in work tasks and context, shifts in mindset and daily routines, challenges in managing remote work, increased workload, changes in organisational structure and culture, and effects on employee well-being, engagement, and motivation are all manifestations of the problem.

The research objectives for the case study research may include:

- To explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work life at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, including changes in tasks, context, mindset, and daily routines.
- To investigate the organization-level factors such as structure, culture, and technology that have influenced the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life in the two organizations and identify similarities and differences between them.
- To examine the employee-level factors, such as resilience, coping mechanisms, and perceptions, that have influenced the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life in the two organizations and identify similarities and differences between them.
- To identify the stylized impact categories, contingencies, and coping mechanisms at the organizational and employee level in response to the pandemic in the two organizations.
- To provide recommendations for effective strategies to manage the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life in St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, considering the organization-level and employee-level factors identified in the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant changes in work tasks, roles, and responsibilities have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the employees' work lives. Resilience, coping mechanisms, and work-life balance have emerged as key determinants of employees' adaptability to these changes. Resilience, defined as the capacity to recover from adversity, has been identified as a crucial factor in employees' capacity to face the challenges of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, employees with greater resilience may be better equipped to deal with increased stress, uncertainty, and changes in work tasks and contexts. Coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and social support, have been identified as important factors in the adaptation of employees to the challenges of the pandemic. Effective coping mechanisms can assist employees in managing stress, preserving their health, and adapting to the changes in work tasks and contexts brought on by the pandemic. During the pandemic, work-life balance, defined as the equilibrium between work and personal life, has been a crucial aspect of employees' lives.

With the shift to remote work and the blurring of the lines between work and personal life, employees have encountered difficulties balancing their professional and personal obligations. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is more crucial than ever, as it can have a significant

impact on employees' health, job satisfaction, and overall work experiences. Based on the research, it can be hypothesized that employees with higher levels of resilience will be better able to adapt to the changes in work tasks, roles, and responsibilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-life balance may moderate this relationship. In addition, the literature suggests that organizational factors, such as structure, culture, and technology, can influence employees' work experiences during the pandemic and may have implications for their health. The literature review concludes by identifying gaps in the literature pertaining to the case study context, specifically the hospitality industry, that may require further investigation to contribute to the understanding of employees' experiences during the pandemic in this industry. Different scholarly perspectives have been taken on the topic of employees' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some researchers have focused on the psychological factors, such as resilience and coping mechanisms, that influence employees' adaptability to changing work tasks and contexts. These researchers emphasize the significance of individual-level factors in the capacity of employees to deal with the challenges of the pandemic and maintain their well-being. Other researchers have examined the role of work-life balance in the context of the pandemic, highlighting the difficulties employees face in managing work and personal responsibilities in a remote work environment. These scholars stress the need for organizations to assist employees in maintaining a healthy work-life balance to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on their health and job satisfaction. In addition, some researchers have investigated the impact of organizational factors, such as structure, culture, and technology, on employees' pandemic-related work experiences. These researchers highlight the significance of organizational support in assisting employees to adapt to the changes brought about by the pandemic and maintain their well-being. They emphasize the need for organizations to create work environments that facilitate employees' ability to cope with the challenges of the pandemic and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that resilience, coping mechanisms, and work-life balance are critical factors in employees' adaptability to the changes in work tasks, roles, and responsibilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees with higher levels of resilience may be better equipped to handle increased stress, uncertainty, and changes in work contexts, while effective coping mechanisms can assist employees in managing stress and preserving their health. Additionally, maintaining a healthy work-life balance has become even more crucial during the pandemic, as remote work has blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, posing challenges for employees in managing their professional and personal obligations.

Moreover, organizational factors such as structure, culture, and technology can also impact employees' experiences

during the pandemic. Supportive organizational structures, positive organizational cultures, and appropriate use of technology can contribute to employees' ability to adapt to the changes brought about by the pandemic and maintain their well-being.

However, it should be noted that there may be gaps in the literature, particularly in the context of the hospitality industry, which may require further investigation. Further research in this industry could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by employees in the hospitality sector during the pandemic and shed light on effective strategies for supporting their well-being.

In conclusion, employees' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have been shaped by various factors, including resilience, coping mechanisms, work-life balance, and organizational factors. Understanding these factors can help organizations create supportive work environments and implement strategies to assist employees in adapting to the changes brought about by the pandemic and maintaining their well-being. Further research in specific industries, such as the hospitality industry, can provide valuable insights and inform evidence-based interventions to support employees during times of crisis.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative case study research design was chosen for this study. The case study method permits an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon, in this instance, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work lives of employees at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi. The research design includes employee interviews and focus groups to collect rich and contextualised data about their pandemic experiences.

To collect in-depth data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work lives of employees, a qualitative research design was employed. This required conducting semi-structured interviews, surveys, or focus groups with employees from St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi in order to collect rich and detailed information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms. The design of the study included a comparative analysis between the two organisations to identify similarities and differences in the pandemic's impact.

Sampling

To ensure a diverse representation of employees, at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, I used purposeful sampling to select participants from a variety of departments and positions.

Participants

Participants in this case study are employees of St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, including faculty and staff. The rationale for selecting these participants is that their work environments, job responsibilities, and work-life balance have been directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants with diverse perspectives, including roles, levels of seniority, and experiences during the pandemic, were selected through stratified sampling.

Unit of analysis

This study's unit of analysis is the individual employee. The focus is on comprehending their work-related experiences, perceptions, and behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collected data were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, which entailed coding and categorising the data to identify major themes and patterns. The data was analysed iteratively, with codes and categories modified as needed.

RESULTS

The findings of the case study research will be presented in three stylized impact categories: task-related impacts, contextual impacts, and mindset-related impacts, with a focus on the unique experiences of SMACK and UniK.

- **Task-related impacts:** The pandemic has resulted in significant changes in tasks and responsibilities for employees in both organizations. At SMACK, employees have had to adapt to online teaching methods, creating and managing virtual classrooms, and navigating technological challenges. UniK has also shifted to online teaching, but with additional challenges such as limited access to technology and internet connectivity issues.
- **Contextual impacts:** The pandemic has had contextual impacts on employees' work life at both SMACK and UniK. At SMACK, the lack of face-to-face interactions and social distancing measures has affected the sense of community and friendship among employees, leading to decreased team cohesion. UniK has also faced challenges in maintaining a sense of community, as well as managing safety protocols and health concerns for employees and students.
- **Mindset-related impacts:** The pandemic has had a significant impact on the mindset of employees in both organizations. At SMACK, employees have reported increased stress and anxiety due to the increased workload and adapting to online teaching methods, leading to burnout and reduced work-life balance. UniK employees have also faced heightened stress and anxiety related to the uncertainties of the pandemic and its impact on the academic calendar and financial sustainability.

At SMACK and UniK, structure, culture, and technology have influenced the impact of the pandemic on employees' working lives in different ways. The hierarchical structure and traditional teaching culture of SMACK have presented obstacles to the implementation of online teaching methods and the adoption of technology. However, the strong sense of community and support among the organization's employees has served as a coping mechanism.

The transition to online teaching has been facilitated by UniK's relatively flatter organisational structure and more progressive teaching culture, but employees' work lives have been negatively impacted by obstacles in technology infrastructure and accessibility. In response to the pandemic, coping mechanisms and contingencies have been observed at both the organisational and employee levels. At SMACK, coping mechanisms have included providing training and support for online teaching, fostering communication and collaboration among employees, and placing an emphasis on employee health. UniK has implemented measures including the provision of technological assistance, the provision of flexible work arrangements, and the promotion of mental health and well-being initiatives.

Data collection

Employees participated in semi-structured interviews and focus groups to collect data. Based on the research objectives, open-ended questions were included in the interview guide to explore the participants' experiences, obstacles, and coping strategies during the pandemic. Focus groups were conducted to facilitate group discussions and generate a collective understanding of the pandemic's impact on employees' work lives. Audio recording devices, note-taking, and transcription services were used to collect data for data analysis.

Data collection procedures

Institutional Review Board ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Before the interviews and focus groups, all participants gave their informed consent. Data was collected using google forms, and some officers were physically interviewed in their offices. With the participants' permission, all interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Data collection strategy

Employee perspectives were gathered through a combination of interviews and focus groups as part of the data collection strategy. Focus groups encouraged group discussion and generated collective understandings, whereas interviews provided in-depth insights into individual experiences. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources (interviews and focus groups) and by employing multiple methods (audio recordings, note-taking, and transcription) to enhance the

validity and reliability of the findings.

Ethical conduct

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were meticulously observed. All participants gave their informed consent, and their privacy and confidentiality were protected. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without repercussions. The information was stored securely and was only used for research.

Quality assurance

Several quality assurance standards were upheld to ensure the validity, dependability, and trustworthiness of the research results. These included utilising established research instruments, conducting member checks to validate findings, keeping a reflective research journal, and engaging in peer debriefing to ensure the accuracy of data collection and analysis.

Member checks

Member checks were conducted to validate the accuracy and completeness of the findings. After data analysis, preliminary findings were shared with participants for their review and feedback. This allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings and provided an opportunity for member validation.

Auditor and peer de-briefer

An auditor was not involved in this study. However, a peer debriefer, was consulted throughout the research process to provide critical feedback, review the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis to ensure rigor and accuracy in the research process.

DISCUSSION

This research investigates the specific effects, circumstances, coping mechanisms, and differences between organization-level and employee-level factors in two organizations in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work lives. The findings shed light on how the pandemic has affected employees' work lives in various organizational contexts and how organizations and employees have adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The comparative analysis of the impacts, contingencies, and coping mechanisms of the two organizations can assist organizations in understanding the role of organizational factors in shaping the work lives of employees and in making future decisions regarding the management of similar crises.

The study's findings inform organizations such as St. Mary's

College Kisubi and University of Kisubi about the key factors that have influenced the impact of the pandemic on employees' work lives, such as organizational structure, culture, and technology, as well as employees' resilience, coping mechanisms, and perceptions. This can assist organizations in developing strategies and interventions to better support their employees during and after a pandemic, such as adjusting work tasks, context, and routines, providing resources and support for employee well-being, and promoting effective coping mechanisms.

Understanding the impact of the pandemic on the health and productivity of employees is crucial. By identifying the challenges and changes in work tasks, context, mindset, and routines, as well as the coping mechanisms that employees use, organizations can design interventions to support employees' mental health, work-life balance, and productivity, which ultimately benefits both employees and organizations.

Case study research provides rich and detailed data that can capture the complexities and subtleties of the pandemic's impact on individuals, organizations, and communities. It enables a holistic understanding of the investigated phenomenon, considering multiple levels of analysis, such as organizational and individual factors. Case study designs include exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, and intrinsic. They are adaptable and flexible, allowing for the exploration of diverse perspectives and the generation of new insights and hypotheses.

While case study research has the advantage of generating rich and contextualized data and the capacity to generate new insights and hypotheses, it also has some potential disadvantages, such as limited generalizability of findings due to the focus on specific cases, potential biases in data collection and analysis, and the possibility of subjective interpretation of findings.

The discussion emphasizes the significance of the findings, providing insights into the impact of the pandemic on employees' work lives, organizational-level factors (such as structure, culture, and technology) that influenced the impact, and employee-level factors (such as resilience and coping mechanisms) that shaped employees' experiences. Based on the findings and discussion, suggestions for future practice and research are made.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted employees' work life at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi. By considering organizational factors such as structure, culture, and technology, as well as employee-level factors, and implementing the recommended strategies, both organizations can effectively manage the impact of the pandemic on their employees and support their well-being, engagement, and productivity.

Continuously monitoring the situation and adapting strategies as needed will be essential in navigating the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested for SMACK and UniK to effectively manage the impact of

- **Encourage employee engagement:** Both SMACK and UniK should actively involve employees in decision-making processes and solicit their input and feedback on work-related issues. Consequently, job satisfaction and productivity will increase.
- **Provide resources for remote work:** As remote work becomes a more prominent mode of work during the pandemic, it is crucial for both organizations to provide the necessary resources for employees to effectively work remotely. This includes providing access to relevant software, hardware, and online resources, as well as offering support for setting up ergonomic home workstations.
- **Address workloads and expectations:** The pandemic has disrupted workloads and expectations for many employees. It is important for SMACK and UniK to regularly assess and manage employees' workloads, ensuring they are reasonable and achievable given the circumstances. Clear communication about expectations and priorities, and timely adjustments to workloads, can help prevent burnout and maintain employee well-being.
- **Support career development:** Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is important for both organizations to continue supporting employee career development. This can be achieved through virtual professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, and career advancement initiatives. Investing in employees' growth and development can foster a sense of motivation and loyalty among employees.
- **Foster social connections:** Social connections are crucial for employees' well-being, especially in times of remote work and social distancing. SMACK and UniK should create opportunities for virtual social interactions among employees, such as virtual team-building activities, online social events, and virtual coffee breaks, to foster social connections and promote a sense of community.
- **Continuously monitor and adapt:** The situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly evolving, and organizations need to continuously monitor and adapt their strategies and approaches. Regularly assessing the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life, gathering feedback, and making necessary adjustments to policies,

procedures, and resources can help SMACK and UniK stay agile and resilient in the face of uncertainties.

Directions for future research

- **Mental health and well-being:** Investigate the effects of the pandemic on employees' mental health and well-being, including the prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, and the coping mechanisms employed by employees to manage these challenges.
- **Work-life balance:** Explore how the pandemic has impacted employees' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, including changes in work hours, increased workload, and challenges in managing personal and professional responsibilities.
- **Employee engagement and motivation:** Assess the level of employee engagement and motivation during the pandemic, including factors that have positively or negatively influenced employees' engagement levels, and strategies implemented by the organizations to foster employee motivation and engagement.
- **Remote work effectiveness:** Examine the effectiveness of remote work arrangements during the pandemic, including the challenges and benefits of working remotely, and the strategies employed by employees to cope with remote work challenges, such as communication, collaboration, and productivity.
- **Leadership and communication:** Investigate the role of leadership and communication in managing the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life, including the effectiveness of communication channels, leadership styles, and decision-making processes in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- **Organizational culture and values:** Explore how the organizations' culture and values have influenced employees' work experiences during the pandemic, including the alignment or misalignment of organizational culture with employees' needs, values, and expectations.
- **Technological adaptation and impact:** Investigate the technological adaptation and impact on employees' work life during the pandemic, including changes in the use of technology for communication, collaboration, and work tasks, as well as the challenges and benefits of technology adoption.
- **Employee resilience and coping mechanisms:** Examine the resilience and coping mechanisms employed by employees to manage the challenges of the pandemic, including individual and organizational strategies for coping with uncertainty, stress, and change.
- **Employee perceptions and attitudes:** Explore employees' perceptions and attitudes towards the organizations' response to the pandemic, including

their satisfaction with the support provided, their level of trust in the organizations' leadership, and their perceptions of the organizations' commitment to employee well-being.

- **Comparative analysis:** Conduct a comparative analysis of the impact of the pandemic on employees' work life at St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi, identifying similarities and differences in the challenges faced, coping mechanisms employed, and outcomes observed in the two organizations.

These additional research topics can provide further insights into the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work life and help to identify effective strategies for managing the challenges and supporting employee well-being in the context of St. Mary's College Kisubi and University of Kisubi.

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