

# A Review of the Challenges and Survival Strategies of University Workers during the Economic Crisis: A Case Study of the Midlands State University (MSU) Workers in Zimbabwe

Chipo Hungwe

Department of Human Resource Management

Midlands State University

P. Bag 9055, Senga Road Gweru, Zimbabwe

E-mail: hungwec@msu.ac.zw

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## Abstract

This study explored challenges faced by the Midlands State University (MSU) workers and analysed the survival strategies used to deal with the identified challenges during the height of the economic crisis in 2007. Participants comprised 40 teaching and 21 non-teaching workers, of whom 35 were male and 26 female. Data were collected using a questionnaire and participant observation. Data analysis was through the SPSS programme and qualitative thematic analysis. The results revealed that, the six major challenges faced by MSU workers were lack of adequate remuneration, consumables, transport, electricity, office space and economic hardships. The most popular survival strategies to deal with such challenges were fiddling and escaping. The study revealed that most of the coping strategies employed by participants were not means of resisting the university but means of overcoming constraints caused by the university and thus facilitating university business.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Stress, Survival strategies, University workers

## 1. Introduction

While the economic climate of Zimbabwe has improved due to the introduction of the United States dollar as the medium of exchange, most issues have however not changed. This study gives an insight of the challenges faced by teaching staff at the Midlands State University before the introduction of the united state dollar as the medium of exchange. From the year 2000-2009 the Zimbabwean economy suffered the highest levels of economic and political deterioration. This period is generally regarded as a period of crisis (Raftopolous 2009). Formal sector employment shrunk from 1.4 million in 1998 to 998,000 in 2004 and hyperinflation reached an official level of 230 million percent by the end of 2008 (Raftopoulos 2009: 220). The estimate of Zimbabweans living below the poverty datum line was 85% in 2006 (Raftopoulos, 2009: 220). Many employees left both the private and the public service and thronged the humanitarian non-governmental organisations that were paying employees in foreign currency. At the Midlands State University workers were still earning Zimbabwean dollars that were equivalent to less than thirty United States dollars (\$30).

The Midlands State University (MSU) is a fast growing organisation. By 2006, student enrolment had risen since its establishment in March 2000 from 400 to 10 499 in June 2006 (Mangoma, 2006). The number of lecturing staff was 329 by June 2006 and the number of support staff was 452. By June 2006 there were 30 undergraduate, 11 masters and 4 doctoral programmes (ibid). Up to now however, the MSU is still experiencing acute shortages of teaching and office space, library facilities, student accommodation, laboratories, dining halls, sporting facilities and ablution facilities. Though the university inherited some infrastructure from the former Gweru Teachers' College, this infrastructure is not adequate for university programmes. The university has since embarked on several projects of renovating existing buildings, leasing and buying buildings in the city and constructing new blocks on campus. However, most of these efforts have been hampered by the harsh economic environment.

In a wage labour economy the primary reason for working is to obtain money. The crucial test of why people work is that if the employer stops paying them a wage they will stop coming to work (Jackson & Carter 2000). Work is part of defining the self because it is a means towards attaining material possessions that define the desired self. Satisfaction with income received for work done is related to people's happiness and general job satisfaction. This

is especially true when work provides a sense of personal effectiveness so that the worker feels responsible for shaping his/her life and feels an ability to affect the world, (Levine and Rizvi 2005).

University work is expected to be challenging, flexible and liberating; however it is no longer so, mainly because of the alienating economic environment. At the height of the economic crisis in 2007 the socio-economic environment in Zimbabwe was characterised by uncertainty, high inflation, wage freezes, electricity power cuts, water cuts and generally dwindling economic resources. The situation was characterised by backhanded deals, and basically informal means of survival. Nothing was straight in Zimbabwe as the informal was celebrated and became the only way out (Jones 2010). However, such a situation alienated individual workers. Alienation comes in various ways, chief among them being the inability of workers to enjoy the economic benefits of their work, unable to use what they earn to get what they want on the market. Such a situation called for ingenuity and certain cunning ways being crafted by workers at MSU. These ways were not peculiar to them but to most workers faced with economic hardships where they had to make ends meet. Writing about Zimbabwean university workers, Gaidzanwa (2007) reported that the most common ways of coping for some lecturers were to reduce or abolish totally tutorials, confining assessment to the cheaper mode of one or two multiple choice tests that could be marked easily by junior staff because given this overburdened, unpleasant and degraded campus environment, it became preferable to visit the campus for the minimum possible time.

One factor that alienated university workers, particularly the lecturers, was the massive expansion enrolment of students without corresponding increase in resources (Gaidzanwa 2007). The massive enrolment is worsened by semesterisation that brought constant pressure on both the teaching and non-teaching staff members that have to deal with teaching and registration of students all year round. Gaidzanwa (2007) is critical of semesterisation and contends that the introduction of semesterisation paved the way for delivering fast education in much the same way that fast food systems deliver poor quality meals. Given this scenario, employees had to respond to management in certain ways for them to survive.

Management desires can always be resisted, circumvented, subverted, bent to the benefit of the employees. Expending energy to thwart the attempts at control by managers can itself be a source of amusement, satisfaction and positive self-image, (Harding & Jenkins 1989). Noon and Blyton (2002) identified five survival strategies employed by workers in order to deal with a potentially alienating work environment. These are making out, fiddling, joking, sabotaging and escaping. Making out is defined as beating the system or finding loopholes of a system. It does not challenge or undermine management prerogative to set the rules thus making out is a way of consenting to formal rules and structures imposed by management. The joking strategy is where employees create relationships among themselves and their superiors that allow for a combination of friendliness and antagonism. The behaviour is such that in any other social context it would express and arouse hostility but is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously (ibid). Such behaviour rarely undermines existing power.

Fiddling is theft from the workplace. It may involve adding to their total income through taking stationary for private use or artificially inflating expense claims. Noon and Blyton (2002) argue that for most people the monetary value of fiddling is likely to be small, hence the efforts required to prevent it are often not seen to be worthwhile. There are however, other situations where employees may be formally encouraged to do 'a bit on the side' because the employer participates in the profits. One such case is the university lecturers who engage in consultancy work using university facilities. The employing institution benefits from both the overhead payments and the status and symbolic credits that attach to consultancy work in the contemporary moral economy of higher education (Harding & Jenkins, 1989).

Sabotage as a strategy has two categories. It could be a temporary expression of frustration with the work process, rules, management etc. Another category of sabotage is an attempt to assert control over the work process thus presenting a direct challenge to authority and consequently far more serious for management, for example "working to rule". Escaping can either be physical or mental. Physical escape presents a problem in the form of absenteeism and labour turnover. However, mental escape does not necessarily present a problem for management for it offers no challenge thus it is the most passive of the informal behaviours (Noon & Blyton 2002).

Studies on stress reveal that stressful conditions have a negative impact on individual health. Some attribute stress to personality characteristics, such as type A or Type B (Evans, Palsane & Carrere 1987), while sociological arguments link stress to structural causes and role sets (Pearlin 1989). Sometimes stress tends to spillover from home to work and work to home. Generally economic hardships increase stress levels on workers. The coping strategies employed to deal with stress are actions that people take in their own behalf to avoid or lessen the impact of life problems (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Coping strategies may be direct or indirect. They can also be emotion focused or problem focused. Emotion focused strategies are meant to build an individual's resilience while

problem focused deal directly with the stressor in order to overcome it. Direct strategies tend to be more effective in dealing with the stressor (Lazarus 1993). Stress could also result from the legal and political constraints placed on individuals in their work setting, particularly in bureaucratic rigid organisations. However, a comparative study of stress among private and public sector employees in Australia revealed no evidence that public sector employees experience stress more than private sector employees (Macklin, Smith and Dollard 2006).

The purpose of the study was to explore challenges faced MSU workers and to analyse the survival strategies used to deal with the identified challenges. To this end, the following objectives were examined:

- a) To identify challenges faced by university workers that created the need for survival strategies
- b) To identify and account for the survival strategies employed to deal with each challenge identified.
- c) To discuss the effectiveness of the survival strategies in dealing with the challenges raised.
- d) To find out whether the survival strategies employed were forms of workplace consent or resistance or both.

## 2. Research Methods

This research is a qualitative descriptive case study.

### 2.1 Participants and Setting

This research was carried out between July and December 2007. The target population were all the teaching and non-teaching workers at the MSU.

Target persons /groups were as follows;

The deputy registrars and personnel staff

Faculty Deans

Teaching staff (lecturers and teaching assistants)

Secretaries and administrators

University guards, cooks, cleaners and gardeners.

### 2.2 Sampling Procedure, Instruments and Methods

There was use of quota sampling where employees were put in quotas determined by their job category. Two main categories were created, which were the teaching and non teaching staff. The research used questionnaires and participant observation. Out of the 100 questionnaires distributed 61 were returned. The sample size was 61 comprising 40 teaching staff and 21 non-teaching staff. The questionnaire required demographic information of participants such as age, sex, professional qualifications and job category. It also required information specific to the research objectives. The researchers used participant observation since they were also employed by the University. Data analysis was through the SPSS programme and qualitative thematic analysis.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Participants' Characteristics

Table 1 below reflects the demographic characteristics of the sample. About 78% of the participants fall within the 18-47 years age range. This means that in this age group, for some workers, working at MSU was their first job hence the need to buy property, marry and settle down was very real while others tended to have young families and children in school thus the burden of school fees was also real. In terms of gender 57.4% were male while 42.6% were females. This shows that the university was still male dominated. The majority of the women were non-teaching support staff such as secretaries and administrators.

Insert Table 1 here

The effect of the brain drain was felt at the MSU where most lecturers were young holders of masters' degrees (47.5%) while teaching assistants only held first degrees (34.4%). Only one person in the sample (1.6%) had a doctoral degree and was a faculty dean. This shows that MSU had either failed to attract experienced professors or had failed to retain them and thus had to rely on holders of masters' degrees for lecturers and its own graduate students for teaching assistants.

### 3.2 Challenges Faced by University Workers That Created the Need for Survival Strategies

The top six challenges rated number one by university workers were as follows in the order of severity; general economic hardships, unavailability of consumables (bond paper, ink and toner), lack of transport to work, electricity power cuts, lack of office space, poor remuneration (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 here

In Table 3, the most common challenges identified by participants were also tallied regardless of their ratings. Results show that the top seven common challenges that made it difficult to work among teaching and non-teaching staff were lack of consumables, lack of transport, remuneration, electricity, office space, hunger, and economic hardships. Thus, both Table 2 and Table 3 show that the top six challenges identified by participants and rated number one were among the most common seven challenges identified by participants.

Insert Table 3 here

Challenges of teaching and marking loads, lack of teaching equipment and venues and work pressure support the fact that the massive student enrolment has not been accompanied by investment in relevant infrastructure. This explains why workers had no adequate access to offices, books, computers, ablution facilities, complained of a noisy environment and suffered from fatigue. Effective communication was also a challenge in an institution where most of the time lecturers did not know when the university would close/open or have a semester break and thus had to rely on the grapevine, which included sometimes getting information from students.

### *3.3 Survival Strategies Employed to Deal with Challenges Identified*

More than fifty survival strategies were identified. Out of these, there were 15 individual categories of strategies which were mentioned more than ten times each. The following are the strategies in order of their popularity (see Appendix A). The greater number of these survival strategies used show that participants preferred methods that furthered their ability to do their work. From Appendix A, such strategies include working longer hours, walking to work, sharing offices and supplementing using their own resources. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that when the strategies are grouped into 15 ensuing generic categories, the top three with relative percentage frequencies above 10% also suggest that participants preferred to use strategies that further their ability to do their work. As indicated in Appendix A, the following are three most popular generic categories: Sharing available resources; Finding alternative means; and Rescheduling or postponing work.

However, at individual category of strategies level, some participants had resigned and given up (7.2%) while others improvised (5.0%) by using some specific and non-specific methods of coping. Non-specific methods of improvisation could mean engaging in informal activities or just making do with what was available. Relatively few participants preferred confrontation (3.3%) as a way of solving their problems. In Appendix A, the generic category of Exploit university resources (8.5%) is relatively high considering that this category is composed of generally negative strategies that include fiddling. However, of the frequency of 39 responses identified with this generic category, only 8 (1.7%) were involved fiddling. Despite the fact that relatively very few participants reported engaging in fiddling, it was analysed in more detail as it can affect an organisation negatively.

Various studies have linked fiddling to low wages and work situations where the employee has responsibility for an employer's cash receipts (Ditton, 1977, Mars 1982, South & Scratton 1981). Another school of thought links fiddling to non-economic activities related to dominant social mores, (Henry 1978). However, at MSU it can be argued that fiddling was mainly economically driven. That computers, the internet, telephones, cars and fuel were the most fiddled resources at the university points to the economic motive of the participants lending support to Harding and Jenkins' (1989) argument that fiddling depends upon whether or not there is a demand for the particular commodity or service and upon the degree of organisational space available for its provision. This fiddling also shows the degree of ease with which such resources fiddled can be accessed. This is in line with Mars' (1982:154-9) argument that there are four contributory factors to fiddle proneness;

- a) The existence or effectiveness of control systems,
- b) The ambiguities which are attached to certain kinds of goods with respect to values,
- c) The ease with which goods can be converted to private use and
- d) The anonymity that is a feature of large-scale organisations.

### *3.4 Sources of Stress and Methods of Relieving Stress at Work*

Various sources of stress were identified. These were mainly related to the challenges raised. However, those who reported too much control, tighter supervision, work pressure and tight deadlines were mostly from the non-teaching departments while the teaching employees were the ones most likely to complain of lack of co-operation and negative attitudes from members of other departments.

Table 4 presents the frequencies of ways participants relieved stress and used their free time. The three most reported common ways of relieving stress were: chatting, joking with friends, gossiping; using the internet and reading books, novels, newspapers, or the bible. It would be interesting to note that 5.3% of the participants argued

that they had no time to relieve stress because of work pressure.

Insert Table 4 here

About 70% of the participants reported that their stress relieving methods were effective as they ended up feeling better. It is not surprising that such a number view their strategies as useful because these were both emotion focused and problem focused strategies. However, more emotion focused than problem focused strategies were used. There were also unhealthy ways of removing stress that were identified by some participants. These included the consumption of alcohol, smoking and disappearance or moving away from the stressful environment. This is escaping the stressor and is usually short lived.

### *3.5 Likes and Dislikes of University Workers at Work*

Over 50% of participants liked dealing with students either in the lecture room situation or in their various offices. Research, attending seminars and conferences and dealing with the public, were also some of the interesting aspects identified in various jobs at the university. The most boring aspects of the jobs were identified as follows; marking assignments, routine work, multiple reporting structures, feeling of powerlessness, attending examination invigilation, interference from other departments, supervising students on work related learning and teaching. Some responses were specific to the teaching staff, for example marking assignments and teaching, while other responses like having many bosses were confined to the non-teaching staff. However a response such as that on invigilation was non-specific to job category since both the teaching and non-teaching staff were engaged in invigilation. The desperation of university workers was reflected through those who said they loved attending workshops and seminars because such situations offered free food.

### *3.6 Effectiveness of the Survival Strategies in Dealing with the Identified Challenges*

Effectiveness was measured through such aspects as the relative amount of stress a worker reported to have had after engaging in the survival strategies and the ability to change the unpleasant situation that the worker faces. Only 26% were confident that their coping strategies were effective while 33% argued that sometimes their strategies worked and another 41% felt that their coping strategies were ineffective. They however continued to employ these strategies because they had no better options. Table 5 shows that almost 59.6% of participants had no better alternative coping strategy than what they were using.

Insert Table 5 here

### *3.7 Are the Survival Strategies Forms of Workplace Consent or Resistance or Both?*

In determining whether the survival strategies employed are forms of workplace consent or resistance or both participants were asked to give reasons for selecting particular coping strategies. Researchers then also regrouped responses into categories of those who are consenting to the university situation, resisting and those whose actions are both a form of resistance and consent. Results show that the coping strategies employed by participants were not means of resisting the university but means of overcoming constraints caused by the university and thus facilitating university business.

The research also revealed that the reason for choosing any strategy was for lack of better options and not because of any sinister motive though 58% felt that by so doing they were overcoming the demands of the university environment. However, the remainder in the sample did not feel that their coping strategies were ways of overcoming the harsh working environment. The majority of workers felt that their survival strategies were beneficial both to the university and to themselves. About 72.9% argued that their coping strategies were ways of facilitating university business, which is why they used them while a further 76.1% argued that these strategies facilitated the way they did their jobs. Table 6 illustrates these points clearly.

Insert Table 6 here

Table 7 supports the views expressed by the participants that their survival strategies were mainly facilitating university business and therefore were more of forms of workplace consent than resistance. Most workers' responses (76%) can be categorized as perpetuating the goals of the university rather than sabotaging the workplace. However, some of the survival strategies affected the quality of work negatively. For example, sharing offices among lecturers could mean reducing or even foregoing student consultation hours. Rescheduling/postponing work and asking students to research on their own also jeopardized the quality of teaching.

Avoiding using the computer was a form of resistance which negatively affects one's work because what it meant for the teaching staff was that they also avoided uploading teaching material on e-learning thus refusing students' access to the same material. Staying home, engaging in consultancy/ private teaching outside the university, informal/ cross border trading were forms of physical escape from the university and fiddling with university time

because all these were done during work hours and days. The workers did not formally take leave from university but were almost always away from the university on personal business.

Some behaviours could be classified as being both forms of resisting and consenting to the university work environment. These included working for the stipulated time and avoiding extra duties, just improvising, combining classes, asking students to research on their own, delegation and resting frequently to relieve stress. The argument is that if any of these is taken to excess it becomes harmful to the organisation. Delegation is correct up to a certain point and so are the frequent breaks/ rest periods. Combining classes increase the lecturer-student ratio and affects the quality of the lecturer's attention to individual students' needs. It can also mean that those older working students engaged under the parallel degree programme (whose teaching must ideally start after 4pm) lose out when lecturers combine classes and teach in the mornings or afternoons. Improvising as a strategy is unclear, hence in Table 7 this strategy was placed under "Both resistance and consent" category.

Insert Table7 here

### *3.8 Analysing Resources Most Abused and Why They are so Abused*

As a survival strategy 68% of the participants used university resources for personal business while 29% did not use these resources. The remainder did not give an answer on this aspect. The resources they mostly used for personal business were as follows; the Internet, university cars, telephones, bond paper and fuel. About 30% participants did not identify resources they could use for personal business. The majority of participants agreed that computers and the Internet, university vehicles and telephones, bond paper and ink were resources that were mostly abused by members of staff because they were not available in their homes, but were easily available at work and could be used to find other jobs. About 88% of the participants agreed that they would use the Internet to look for other jobs because of the following reasons; they were not paid enough therefore workers deserved some kind of benefits, it is fast, it is free of charge and easily available and is their only easily attainable benefit. About 10% had no answer for this particular aspect. The average time spent on the Internet was 2 hours and every free opportunity was most likely to be used surfing the Internet.

About 77% agreed that given an opportunity they would use university resources while only 23% said they would not use university resources for their personal business. The resources they said they would use for personal business were the same ones that they are currently using. Again the majority argued that given an opportunity they would use the Internet for personal business, university vehicles, telephones, bond paper, ink and printer. However, there were those workers who still insisted that they would never use any university resource for personal business. These individuals constituted about 23% of the sample.

To show that fiddling of university resources was a result of the easy availability of such resources is the fact that about 38% of participants agreed that if stricter measures were applied abuse of these resources would stop while about 9% suggested that individuals should be made to pay for their use of university resources. However, about 19% participants felt that fiddling of university resources must not be stopped because they were not paid enough to sustain themselves. The rest suggested that the university must connect the Internet to individual workers' homes and allocate departmental vehicles.

Table 8 shows the amount of time spent on the Internet by participants either for personal or university business or both. About 5% of the participants used every free time surfing the Internet on both university and personal business, over 40% spent about 2 hours on the Internet doing both university and personal business. The majority of participants spent between 30 minutes and 4 hours on the Internet doing both university and personal business. Only 4 participants reported that they used the Internet for personal business only, while the same number argued that they used the Internet for university business only. The majority preferred to say that they used the Internet for both university and personal business.

In terms of actual time, 53 (87%) of the participants reported a total of 108 hours of internet use per day which translates to 2.04 hours person per day. However, this does not take into account the three participants who reported that they use the internet every free time and the other three who said they do not use the internet. Only a total of 4½ hours per day were reported to be dedicated to university business only while a total of 8 hours were dedicated to personal business only. Among the 8 participants involved, this translates to 68 minutes per day and 120 minutes per day respectively. Thus although the time spent on personal business only was almost double that spent on university business only, the number of people who reported to be involved makes the time spent on either personal business or university business only insignificant. Participants reported using a total of 103 hours which is equal to about 112 minutes per person per day for the 55 participants who dedicated time to both university business and personal business. Thus most of the participants dedicated internet time for both personal and university business.

Insert Table 8 here

### 3.9 Recommendations from Participants

Recommendations given by participants cluster around what Herzberg (1968) identified as hygiene factors and satisfiers. These include the general working environment, job design, workload, and development facilities remuneration and general conditions of service. The most popular suggestions were as follows:

- a) Creation of a more conducive working environment (30.5%) by specifically providing the necessary equipment needed for one to work (9.5%), office space (8.4%), fuel and transport (4.2%), consumables (4.2%), and resources (4.2%).
- b) Increase in salaries and better conditions of service. Views gathered reveal that 13.7% of participants would like their salaries increased, while 7.4% complained of conditions of service that include provision of contact leave particularly for the teaching staff.
- c) About 6.3% of employees required access to further education thus employee development was an important issue for the young workforce at MSU.
- d) The massive recruitment of students had increased the workload of MSU workers. That is why 6.3% of participants recommended the recruitment of more staff to reduce workload while a further 5.3% recommended reduction of student intake.
- e) Some workers, particularly the non-teaching recommended job enrichment (2.1%) redesigning of routine jobs, increased employee participation (3.2%) and better treatment and recognition of employees (4.2%).
- f) The overcrowding at MSU also meant that water and ablution facilities were inadequate. That is why 2.1% argued for the improvement of toilet facilities and 2.1% recommended provision of better food and water. Table 9 summarises the frequencies of responses given.

Insert Table 9 here

It is clear that the MSU faces challenges of addressing absenteeism and revising recruitment and retention policies. Factors such as the unclear job descriptions, unavailability of resources to carry out one's job and poor remuneration are all demotivators and may lead to resignations, thus high labour turnover. Such factors do not motivate an individual per se but their absence causes an individual to want to leave the organisation. Issues of employee participation, job enrichment, better treatment and recognition are satisfiers whose absence causes dissatisfaction with one's job. While it is true that young workers are more mobile than older ones, it is also true that the human resource managers at MSU have a role to play in determining who leaves the organisation and when they leave. The human resource function's role is not that of stopping those who leave but delaying their leaving until such a time as when the organisation could afford to lose the same workers. This delaying could be done through improving working conditions. The following section examines the Implications/consequences of the study; distinctiveness of how MSU workers were coping and resisting; and general analytical insights.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Consequences of the Study/ Implications

- i. Coping strategies tended to be individually based and not collectively based which leads their ineffectiveness. Effectiveness is measured by their likelihood of bringing about personal well being without violating the law or ethical principles. While the coping strategies classified as consenting may be within the law, they mostly do not bring about positive personal well-being. Sharing offices and borrowing money from relatives, for example, are only temporary measures that do not remove the challenge.
- ii. The results of the study suggest that MSU workers mostly suffered silently. There was a reluctance to officially engage authorities. One possible reason could be the realisation by workers that university authorities were powerless in solving workers' problems. However, there was still need for official recognition of the plight of workers without covering up the situation and indirectly forcing workers to supplement organisational resources with personal ones.
- iii. There was informalisation of university work and a decrease in professionalism that resulted in the flouting of university regulations and left individuals open to bribes/corruption. This was a consequence of the growth of improvisation (ad hoc or non specific coping strategies). It also had the following consequences:
  - a) Lowering of teaching and learning standards, weakening the quality of education at the university.
  - b) Increase in absenteeism and faking of illnesses, taking unnecessary leave and just disappearing from the workplace.

c) Mental and physical absence of lecturers and administrators as they mainly pursued issues related to their daily survival.

d) The underutilisation of the e-learning as a facility due to the unavailability of computers or sheer reluctance to use the same resources by university workers.

e) Growth of ignorant lecturers and students because of inadequate computers, books and other learning resources.

f) Decreased lecturer-student contact because lecturers had no office space and computers.

iv. Research identified a need for the university to avail news on internet and visible notice boards in-order to avoid toner and printing problems. However, MSU should first consider increasing the number of computers and laboratories for easy access by staff. To deal with overcrowding and transport problems faced by workers, the university needs to have multiple campuses. However, for the multiple campuses to work there is need to either provide transport to college or consider renting/buying buildings in town that could be turned into lecture rooms/halls in order to avoid going to the main campus which is already overcrowded. Multiple campuses require a viable transport system that shuttles between campuses transporting staff members. The staff bus must be reliable and not be provided only during examinations.

v. MSU should seriously consider accommodating more staff members than were currently accommodated. There must be proper use of resources such as houses and vehicles. Proper utilisation is also required for the university farm produce to be provided to workers at cheaper prices. This could reduce the level of discontent and ease the burdens of staff members.

vi. The MSU human resource managers must consider working towards a work -life balance by considering the provision of a nursery /crèches for workers' children rather than having female workers working with children strapped to their backs as it sometimes happened with those who did not have maids and had nobody to leave the kids with.

#### *4.2 Something Distinctive about How Workers are Coping and Resisting*

Despite the harsh economic environment workers were still bent on going to work. That is why the majority of participants preferred working longer hours to meet organisational goals. They were coping by either supplementing university resources using own resources or external resources. They were inventing ways of ensuring survival that did not disturb the running of the university. However, going on as if the situation was normal is refusal to accept the abnormality of the socio economic environment. Carrying on or just continuing as usual is not an effective strategy because it is not sustainable. Avoiding extra work is both consenting and resisting because one is actually doing the work while it is resistance because it is work to rule. However, such coping mechanisms do not change the status quo.

MSU workers' coping strategies did not seem to address the authorities or the organisation as a problem employer. They did not boldly confront the system but created ways of making the system work better. There was no outright condemnation of the system, for example, workers would rather be uncomfortable all day or leave the university as soon as possible rather than confront the system about inadequate ablution facilities. This was distinctive for MSU because the workers, particularly lecturers were mainly junior workers who have no reputation for themselves and most did not have tenure. The fear of being summarily dismissed without six months' notice as happens with those with tenure compelled one to suffer quietly than boldly confront the employer.

While this inexperience and youth among workers might work as a disadvantage because they have not yet made names for themselves, it could also be an advantage where workers have no emotions tied to the organisations and are thus quick to resign and leave the organisations for better remuneration. Again because some of them were still young, they did not have children and spouses that tied them down to discourage job hopping.

#### *4.3 General Analytical Insights*

The coping strategies of MSU workers can best be understood using Merton's strain theory which was formulated in the 1930s in response to the great depression period of enormous unemployment and social upheavals in the United States of America. Merton (1968) argued that crime was one possible outcome of a society that attempted to impose upon people values that were incompatible with the economic reality. He also argued that there was a tremendous cultural stress on being successful (the goal) yet it was virtually impossible for the majority of the population to achieve success in a socially acceptable manner (means). The desire to achieve socially stressed goals actively promoted deviant behaviour.

This research also stresses the same point of view maintaining that some coping strategies promote deviant behaviour among workers. Depending on personal characteristics, individuals respond to economic pressure and



societal strain differently. The five categories of responses created by Merton (1968:194) are presented in table 10.

Insert Table 10 here

Conformists are those that still followed set university means of providing high quality education through active teaching, research and university service. Such individuals responded to challenges through such ways as working longer hours, sharing offices, approaching bosses, using a generator, engaging in collaborative research, borrowing money from relatives and friends, hitch hiking etc. Innovators rejected the set ways of achieving high quality education though they still believed in the mission of the university. Such workers asked students to research on their own, avoided tutorials, combined classes, adjusted the timetable, just improvised, used university resources, practised informal trading to get extra money and engaged in private lessons/ consultancy. Ritualists still agreed to the university ways of achieving desired means but had stopped working towards the university goals. Such individuals would cope by avoiding extra work, resting frequently, avoiding the computer and just continuing. Workers who rebelled had lost interest in the set ways of achieving the desired goals of the university because they no longer believed in the same goals. They went on to select new goals and new means of achieving them. These workers resigned, absented themselves frequently, took unnecessary leave, post-poned work and mostly stayed at home.

From the study at MSU no workers could be categorised as having retreated since retreatism generally refers to those who no longer worked towards anything and would have just given up on life. The reactions of MSU workers are worrying because they were mostly innovative though there is a sizeable percentage of conformists. Innovators, ritualists and rebels create problems because they are tempted not to work towards organisational goals. Innovators also a drain on organisational resources because they could end up not giving adequate time to work issues and are thus generally psychologically absent from their jobs. Ritualists do not work towards organisational goals because they have stopped believing in them. They go to work as a ritual but refuse to go the extra mile or to make use of new technology such as the e-learning. The psychological contract that binds them to the organisation is no longer there but because they have no better alternative they continue working for MSU until they become rebels and they then resign.

The environment was highly alienating because of the many challenges that workers faced in their daily lives both at home and at work. However, workers' responses to challenges tended to be individualistic rather than collective. In all the responses presented no workers preferred dealing with their issues through the workers' union. This could be an indicator of the ineffectiveness of the workers' union. Even strikes took long to take off because of the vulnerable and differentiated nature of workers.

## 5. Conclusion

Most challenges identified by participants negatively affect the quality of teaching and the way work is done. These challenges are demotivators that propel individuals to ultimately leave the work environment. Survival strategies used at MSU are more of workplace consent than resistance. The fact that employees did not approach their superiors about the challenges they faced also explains why those that decided to leave the organisation did so without informing administration. The university resources such as computers, cars, telephones and bond paper were largely abused because they were easily available, there were no strict measures to govern their use and because these were not available anywhere else. The survival strategies of MSU workers were not a result of any selfish motive for sabotage but ways of facilitating survival in a harsh constraining environment.

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Table 1. Frequencies and percentages by demographic variables

<b>Demographic variables</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Sex	Male	35	57.4
	Female	26	42.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Job category	Teaching staff	40	65.6
	Non teaching staff	21	34.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age range	18-27	17	27.9
	28-37	20	32.8
	38-47	11	18.0
	48-57	9	14.8
	58-67	4	6.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.1</b>
Educational qualifications	Grade 7	1	1.6
	Ordinary level	5	8.2
	Advanced level	4	6.6
	First degree	21	34.4
	Masters degree	29	47.5
	PhD	1	1.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>99.9</b>

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of the challenge rated number 1

<b>Challenge rated number 1</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Economic hardships	9	14.8
Unavailability of consumables	7	11.5
Transport to work	7	11.5
Electricity power cuts	7	11.5
Office space	6	9.8
Poor Remuneration	6	9.8
Lack of access to computer	3	4.9
Shortage of books and reading material	3	4.9
Hunger	2	3.3
No access to further education	2	3.3
Big Marking and Teaching Loads	2	3.3
Other (Six challenges were each rated number1 by one participant only)	6	9.8
Nothing/ no answer	1	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of identified challenges by their commonness

<b>Identified Challenges</b>	<b>Total Frequencies</b>	<b>Total Percentages</b>
Consumables	29	11.7
Transport	26	10.5
Remuneration	17	6.9
Electricity	17	6.9
Office space	16	6.5
Economic hardships	13	5.3
Hunger	13	5.3
Teaching load	10	4.0
Teaching venues	9	3.6
Lack of co-operation	8	3.2
Work Pressure	7	2.8
Access to computer	7	2.8
Teaching equipment	6	2.4
Non recognition	6	2.4
Accommodation	6	2.4
Water cuts	5	2.0
Communication	5	2.0
Nothing/ no answer	5	2.0
Shortage of books	3	1.2
Unpleasant toilets	3	1.2
Working conditions	3	1.2
Internet connectivity	3	1.2
Doing extra duties	3	1.2
Lack of team spirit	3	1.2
Research funds	3	1.2
Reporting structures	2	0.8
Inexperienced Personnel	2	0.8
Dependent students	2	0.8
Further education	2	0.8
Control by superiors	2	0.8
Other (Eleven challenges were each identified by one participant only)	11	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>99.6</b>

Table 4. Ways of relieving stress at work

Ways	Frequency	Percent
Chatting, Joking with friends, Gossip	26	27.7
Using internet	14	14.9
Reading books, novels, newspapers, bible	10	10.6
Bask in Sun + Walk around campus	7	7.4
Radio/ TV /playing musical instruments	5	5.3
No time to relieve stress	5	5.3
Consulting others/ sharing your problems	5	5.3
Sports	5	5.3
Alcohol /sleeping	5	5.3
Set realistic targets	4	4.3
Cup of coffee /smoking	2	2.1
Training your team mates	2	2.1
Non appearance or leaving early	1	1.1
Confronting the stressor if it is a person	1	1.1
Praying	1	1.1
Playing computer games	1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5. Stated reason for using the coping mechanisms

Reason	Frequency	Percent
No other alternative	34	59.6
Facilitate University business	7	12.3
To achieve personal objectives	7	12.3
No answer	6	10.5
Situation beyond my control	2	3.5
To reduce worries	1	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6. Ratings of how coping strategies facilitate the participants' work

Ratings	University business		Way you do your job	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	72.9	35	76.1
Sometimes	2	4.2	1	2.2
No	7	14.6	8	17.4
No answer	4	8.3	2	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 7. Strategies as forms of resistance or consent (Total frequency=194)

<b>Consent</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Resistance</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Both resistance and consent</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Work longer hours	17	8.8	Mostly stay home	4	2.1	Just improvise	10	5.2
Ignore/do nothing	15	7.3	Consultancy/private lesson	4	2.1	Use university resources	7	3.6
Sharing offices	13	6.7	Informal trade	3	1.5	Avoid extra work	4	2.1
Walk to work	12	6.2	Postponing work	2	1.0	Combining classes	4	2.1
Supplement with own resource	11	5.7	Avoid computer	2	1.0	Adjust timetable	2	1.0
Living within means	8	4.1	Take unnecessary leave	1	0.5	Ask students to research	2	1.0
Use Hellenic Hall/AVU centre	8	4.1				Rest frequently	1	0.5
Bring food/water from home	6	3.1				Delegate	1	0.5
Just continue	6	3.1						
Borrow money from family	5	2.6						
Borrow resources from departments	5	2.6						
Approach boss	3	1.5						
Self motivation	3	1.5						
Look for venue with students	3	1.5						
Wake up early	2	1.0						
Pleading with bursary	2	1.0						
Recycling paper/toner	2	1.0						
Discussing problems	2	1.0						
Staying with relatives/friends	2	1.0						
Hitch hiking	2	1.0						
Use collaborative research	2	1.0						
Other (Eighteen consent strategies were each mentioned by one participant only)	18	9.3						
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>75.1</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>8.2</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>No answer 32</b>								

Table 8. Time spent on internet

<b>Estimated time of internet use</b>	<b>Total time spent on internet</b>		<b>For personal business only</b>		<b>University business only</b>		<b>Both personal and University business</b>	
	<b>f</b>	<b>Total time</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Total time</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>Total time</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>Total time</b>
<b>Every free time</b>	3	-	0	0	0	0	3	-
<b>6 hours</b>	1	6	0	0	0	0	1	6
<b>5 hours</b>	2	10	1	5	0	0	1	5
<b>4 hours</b>	3	12	0	0	0	0	3	12
<b>3 hours</b>	5	15	0	0	0	0	5	15
<b>2 hours</b>	25	50	0	0	1	2	24	52
<b>1.50 hours</b>	1	1.5	1	1.5	0	0	1	1.5
<b>1hour</b>	11	11	1	1	2	2	9	9
<b>0.5 hours</b>	5	2.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	5	2.5
<b>0.00 hours</b>	3	0.0	0	0	0	0	3	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>103</b>

Table 9. How job can be improved

<b>Suggested ways of improving job</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Increase salary	13	13.7
Provide teaching equipment	9	9.5
Office space	8	8.4
Improve conditions of service	7	7.4
Recruit more staff for department	6	6.3
Access to further education and improvement	6	6.3
Reduce student intake/ teach	5	5.3
Provide Fuel and Transport	4	4.2
Provide consumables	4	4.2
Provide resources	4	4.2
Better treatment and recognition	4	4.2
Co-operation from other departments	3	3.2
More employee participation	3	3.2
Increasing number of computers	2	2.1
Job Enrichment	2	2.1
Improve Toilet facilities	2	2.1
Other (Thirteen ways of improving job each suggested by one participant only)	13	13.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100.1</b>

Table 10. Merton's categories of responses to economic pressure and societal strain

<b>Responses to the situation</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>Goals</b>
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	-	+
Ritualism	+	-
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	+	+
	-	-

Source: Merton, (1968:194).

## Appendix A: Categories of Survival Strategies

Category f (%)	Category f (%)
<b>1. Sharing available resources</b> <b>74 (16.1%)</b> Delegate 27 Ask colleagues for information 20 Sharing offices/ squatting/ resources with department member 13 Discussing the problems that we have and giving each other feedback 8 Team spirit at work 2 Sharing food 2 Involving everyone in the duties assigned 1 Use collaborate research 1	<b>2. Finding alternative means</b> <b>67 (14.6%)</b> Hitch-hiking 24 Use gas 15 Walking to work 12 Use Hellenic Hall / AVU centre 8 Join voluntary associations outside university 4 Bring food from home/ or water from home 2 Generator 1 Using other libraries e.g. UZ 1
<b>3. Rescheduling or postponing work</b> <b>59 (12.9%)</b> Adjust the timetable 50 Rescheduling or postponing work 4 Wake up early 2 Do research on vacations 2 Read whenever there is opportunity 1	<b>4. Exploit university resources</b> <b>39 (8.5%)</b> Eat meals sometimes provided by the university 31 Use university resources - vehicles, computers, phones, and internet 8
<b>5. Withdrawal/ avoidance</b> <b>33 (7.2%)</b> Stay home most of the time take unplanned / unnecessary leave 17 Ignore / do nothing/ have given up 16	<b>6. Supplementing university resources</b> <b>29 (6.3%)</b> Supplement using own resources 15 Look for donors 14
<b>7. Self motivation/persevere</b> <b>24 (5.2%)</b> Work longer hours/ weekends and evenings 18 Self motivation 4 Living within means/ strict budget 2	<b>8. Improvise</b> <b>23 (5.0%)</b> Just improvise 11 Combining classes 5 Avoid using the computer (do paperwork) 2 Using already used paper/ toner 2 Move around with students looking for a venue and refuse to move out if you get it 2 Ask students to research on their own 1
<b>9. Take time off task</b> <b>21 (4.6%)</b> Sports 12 Rest frequently to relieve stress 9	<b>10. Enlisting assistance from others/ social support</b> <b>20 (4.4%)</b> Borrow resources from other departments 8 Staying with relatives/ friends 6 Borrow money from friends/ family /spouse 5 Leave children with neighbours 1



Continued (Appendix A)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>11. Confrontation</b> <b>15 (3.3%)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Approach/ confront bosses who are too controlling 13</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pleading with bursary or lobby department for reasonable allocations 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Keep venue and timetable 1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>12. Maintain the status quo</b> <b>10 (2.2%)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Just continue 6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Work for the stipulated time- avoid going the extra mile 4</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>13. Wear warm clothes</b> <b>9 (2.0%)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Wear warm clothes 9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>14. Income generating projects to supplement salaries</b> <b>7 (1.5%)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Engage in consultancy or private lessons / extra jobs moonlit 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Informal trading / cross border 3</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>15. No answer</b> <b>29 (6.3%)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">No answer/Nothing 29</p>	