Unravelling the Emotional Experience Among Staff: Negative Work Events in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study delves into the complex interplay between negative work events and employees' emotional encounters within the higher education sector. Employing a qualitative research design, the study investigates how negative work events impact the non-academic staff's emotional experiences. Using a Kansei Engineering approach, specifically the KJ method, the study engages non-academic staff spanning various grades in Malaysian public universities (N = 28). The data analysis utilises affinity diagrams and ATLAS.ti software version 23 for comprehensive content analysis, amalgamating qualitative data analysis with advanced analytical techniques. This combined approach aims to provide insights into prevalent negative work events and their associated emotional responses among non-academic staff. Distinct categories of negative work events are identified, including interpersonal, task-related, infrastructure, organisational policies, and career development events. Interpersonal events emerge as the most frequent, followed by task-related, infrastructure, organisational policy, and career development events. This study also unveils a spectrum of distinct negative emotions triggered by these negative work events, encompassing anger, sadness, frustration, fatigue, shame, jealousy, fear, guilt, and distress. These emotions together create a comprehensive emotional framework for understanding the impact of the identified negative work events. Practical implications highlight the importance of fostering positive workplace relationships, transparent policies, optimising workloads, clarifying roles, providing sound infrastructure, and promoting career development. The study concludes by outlining future research prospects, including individual differences, intervention effectiveness, longitudinal perspectives, and cross-cultural variations. Ultimately, this study enriches the understanding of employees' emotional experiences and offers valuable insights to foster a positive work environment within the higher education sector. It is imperative for higher education management to prioritise fostering positive workplace relationships, transparent policies, optimised workloads, clear roles, sound infrastructure, and career development opportunities to enhance employees' emotional experiences and promote a positive work environment.

Keywords: Higher Education, Kansei Engineering, Negative Emotions, Staff, Work Events

1.   Introduction

Non-academic workers play a critical role in ensuring the smooth operation of academic environments since they are embedded in the complicated fabric of higher education institutions. These dedicated individuals work tirelessly behind the scenes to navigate the complex administrative framework that underpins the pursuit of knowledge (Graham, 2012). Nevertheless, the execution of administrative tasks is not devoid of difficulties. According to Manaf et al. (2021), there have been reports of depressive symptoms among non-academic staff members in higher education. The aforementioned symptoms manifest as emotional responses that arise from the stress associated with their occupational duties. In light of this, a thorough inquiry into the emotional triggers that result in negative experiences for non-academic staff members has been sparked.

Negative work events, which include a variety of challenges such as organisational restructuring, interpersonal disputes, and increased job demands, have the potential to have a major influence on the emotional well-being and job satisfaction of these vital employees (Ibrahim et al., 2023a). Recognising the unique emotional components intimately entwined with these occurrences is critical not just for the overall well-being and efficacy of non-academic employees but also for the vitality and efficiency of educational institutions.

While scholarly discourse on the emotional aspects of work events has gained popularity in a variety of fields (e.g., Basch & Fisher, 1998; Matta et al., 2014; Casper et al., 2019; Woznyj et al., 2021), the experiences of non-academic employees in higher education remain a relatively unexplored territory. This research aims to overcome that gap by exploring the complex relationship between negative work events and the emotional landscape of administrative roles. By detecting and grasping emotional undercurrents, the framework is laid for enriching academic discourse and providing higher education institutions with essential insights for cultivating supportive working environments. Additionally, this investigation aims to provide institutions with the knowledge needed to build an environment conducive to the emotional well-being of non-academic employees.

In its quest for understanding, this study employs an innovative technique by utilising Kansei Engineering, namely the Kawakita Jiro method. Kansei Engineering provides a unique perspective for examining the emotional responses (Lokman et al., 2019) elicited by negative work events among non-academic staff. This method seeks a more profound understanding of the subtle emotions that underpin their experiences, shedding light on how these events resonate within their work environment. Using the Kansei Engineering approach, a holistic picture of the emotions generated by negative work events is revealed, leading the way for increased resilience, increased job contentment, and triumphant performance in higher education administrative echelons.

2.   Literature Review

The realm of workplace emotions has captivated considerable scholarly attention, particularly in its exploration of how negative work events can act as catalysts for an array of emotional responses, ultimately influencing employee well-being (Ibrahim et al., 2023b). This literature review delves into the intricate interplay between negative work events and the emotions they incite, shedding light on the wider implications across diverse work contexts. Guiding this exploration is the Affective Events Theory (AET), which provides a lens to dissect the dynamic relationship between workplace incidents and emotional reactions. AET posits that specific events within the work environment can trigger emotions that extend beyond the immediate instance, influencing employee attitudes and conduct over time (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). It stands as an anchoring framework that harmonises seamlessly with the quest to unravel how negative work events and emotions coalesce to shape the broader landscape of organisational dynamics.

2.1   Negative Work Events

Work events, as outlined by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), encompass occurrences unfolding within a specific timeframe in the workplace. These events possess the potent capacity to impact an individual's experiences and elicit emotional responses profoundly. They operate as catalysts, invoking emotions through cognitive appraisal theories that distinctly differentiate event conceptualisation from

subsequent emotional reactions (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Such events distinctly emerge as discrete and distinctive incidents, diverging from the regular and commonplace aspects of the work environment (Morgeson et al., 2015). According to Matta et al. (2014), affective work events can be regarded as critical work events that substantially invoke employees' affective states rather than trivial or regular work events. This unique distinction is further accentuated by Reindl et al. (2021), who elaborated that work events span a spectrum of experiences that employees encounter in the course of their work, regardless of their magnitude, encompassing both major and minor events. The intricate interplay between these events and the emotional responses they evoke weaves into the very fabric of workplace experiences, shaping perceptions and influencing behavioural responses (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

The sophisticated connection between negative work events and their impact on employee well-being resonates significantly in the realm of organisational psychology. These events are inextricably linked to negative affect and a subsequent reduction in work engagement, findings well supported by research (Bledow et al., 2011). This negative affective reaction to adverse circumstances within the work environment poses a challenge to employee motivation and dedication, potentially undermining overall productivity and job satisfaction.

Delving deeper into the theoretical underpinnings, a convergence of perspectives underscores the role of goal obstruction as a driver of adverse effect stemming from negative work events. The obstruction of pathways to goal attainment, a notion consistent across various theoretical frameworks, notably contributes to the emergence of negative affect. This phenomenon prompts individuals to seek alternative avenues for achieving their objectives, a natural response to circumvent perceived barriers. This inclination to explore alternative avenues reflects an inherent human drive for goal fulfilment, even in the face of challenging circumstances (Dalal et al., 2020). Specific negative affective work events, as elucidated by Ohly and Schmitt (2015), exert a pronounced influence on emotional states experienced by individuals. These events trigger heightened levels of distinct negative emotions, including anger, worry, and exhaustion. These emotional reactions stand in stark contrast to situations devoid of such specific negative affective work events. Such insights highlight the emotional turbulence that can arise due to the occurrence of adverse workplace incidents, subsequently impacting the psychological well-being of employees.

Expanding upon the bedrock of influential literature, it becomes undeniably evident that negative work events possess the capacity to evoke affective responses in employees. This emotional resonance extends further, potentially moulding employees' convictions, perspectives, and conduct within the workplace (Matta et al., 2014; Jahanzeb et al., 2020; Andel et al., 2022). Additionally, negative events such as interpersonal, task-related (Ohly & Venz, 2021), physical work environment (e.g., infrastructure) (Matta et al., 2014; Lokman et al., 2018; Scheibe, 2021), and organisational policies (Matta et al., 2014; Koopmann et al., 2016) can lead to decreased job satisfaction, demotivation, and negative emotional states. Negative emotional experiences resulting from negative work events harm team performance, particularly when frequent (Baur et al., 2022).

Interpersonal events at work, which frequently involve supervisors, coworkers, subordinates, and customers, may elicit various emotional reactions (Matta et al., 2014). In light of this, previous studies demonstrated a significant relationship between interpersonal events and employees' negative emotions (e.g., Fatima et al., 2019; Wang & Xiao, 2021; Baur et al., 2022). On the other hand, Demerouti and Cropanzano (2017) revealed that several task-related events, such as uncompleted tasks, ambiguous project planning, and incorrect calculation of materials, are the most frequent negative events experienced by employees. They also found that negative events reduced both positive affect and work engagement. In addition to interpersonal and task-related events, issues relating to infrastructure and facilities could also trigger emotional experiences at work. It refers to the physical facilities that help employees carry out tasks. Employees require information technology infrastructure, well-equipped workstations, a comfortable work area with a functioning air conditioning system, parking space, and other well-maintained basic facilities in order to fulfil their duties. If these components of the facilities are insufficient, employees will most likely be unhappy, influencing their overall performance. Thus, good infrastructure is one of the important predictors of happiness at work (Lokman et al., 2018). Furthermore, employees tend to have a higher negative affect when they face difficulties accessing the internet (Scheibe, 2021). Likewise, Woznyj et al. (2021) discovered technological issues (negative events) as a source of workplace anger. It is commonly held that organisational policies and practices are pervasive emotional occurrences in the workplace (Basch &

Fisher, 1998; Grandey et al., 2002; Matta et al., 2014). It is linked to analysing the results of the company's policies and practices (Basch & Fisher, 1998; Grandey et al., 2002). Policy outcomes that are unfair, undesired, or unexpected are common sources of anger (Grandey et al., 2002). The previous findings underscore the pivotal significance of discerning between critical negative work events that substantially evoke employees' affective states and those that fall within the sphere of trivial or routine occurrences (Matta et al., 2014). The ability to distinguish between the emotional weight of various negative work events is imperative for crafting targeted interventions that address employees' emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and overall effectiveness within the organisational context.

In the realm of higher education management, negative work events such as interpersonal conflicts, unclear task assignments, inadequate infrastructure, or unfair policies can evoke adverse emotional responses among staff (Ilies et al., 2011; Matta et al., 2014; Lokman et al., 2018). These situations not only impact the individual's well-being and job satisfaction (Grandey et al., 2002), but also the overall productivity and effectiveness of the educational institution (Lokman et al., 2018). Recognising and addressing these issues is crucial. For instance, promoting clear communication, providing necessary resources, and ensuring fair and transparent policies can mitigate the negative effects of these work events (Basch & Fisher, 1998; Matta et al., 2014). Ultimately, a focus on improving the work environment in higher education can lead to increased job satisfaction, better team performance, and a more positive learning environment for students.

2.2   Discrete Negative Emotions

Within the domain of emotions, negative emotions act as indicators of general distress, as highlighted by King (2013). These emotions are usually associated with unpleasant experiences, encompassing a wide range of frequently cited reactions such as annoyance, frustration, anger, boredom, discouragement, fatigue, fear, intimidation, misery, and fury (Diefendorff et al., 2008, Noor et al., 2008). Matta et al. (2014) further elaborate that emotional states like anger, nervousness, and distress can be categorised as emotional responses. Building upon this idea, Bauer (2011) and Bauer and Spector (2015) suggest that negative emotional states can be understood as combinations of distinct negative emotions, including anger, sadness, envy, shame, anxiety, boredom, and jealousy. The PANAS-X scales, developed by Watson and Clark (1994), encompass emotions such as afraid, scared, nervous, jittery, irritable, hostile, guilty, ashamed, upset, and distressed. These scales have been widely utilised to assess emotional experiences in work contexts (e.g., Matta et al., 2014; Ružojčić et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023). According to Williams (2020), negative emotions display significant correlations with adverse behaviours, such as Counterproductive Work Behaviours (CWBs). For example, frustration strongly correlates with all types of CWBs at the inter-individual level, while fear exhibits a weaker positive connection (except for CWBs targeting individuals). Conversely, guilt is linked with negative outcomes. In addition to CWBs, negative emotions also exhibit substantial associations across all three levels of job performance (inter-individual, intra-individual, and team). Specific negative emotions like anger and anxiety are negatively linked at the inter-individual level. However, fear displays a smaller association with task performance. Interestingly, guilt and worry even reveal positive associations with task performance. Regarding Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs), certain negative emotions align with the negative valence category (e.g., anxiety, envy, frustration). Notably, anger/hostility magnifies the impact of negative emotions, while sadness shows a more modest link. Importantly, guilt is significantly positively associated.

3.   Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing focus group discussions, specifically the KJ method, to capture work events and the corresponding elicited emotions. The utilisation of qualitatively rich theories or methodological approaches is essential for comprehending work conditions and identifying the events that trigger emotions (Sabir, 2014). The KJ method, a facet of Kansei Engineering approaches, is well-suited for gathering qualitative data through fieldwork to unveil human affective experiences. The integrated application of the KJ method and Kansei Engineering is acknowledged as a methodology that synergises emotions and intellect to shape the meanings within the world and translate those structured meanings into explicit specifications (Shigemoto, 2022).

3.1   Participants

The participants encompass non-academic staff (i.e., professionals and supportive roles, ranging from grade 1 to 54) employed in public universities in Malaysia (N = 28). The sample size was determined to ensure data saturation (Hennink et al., 2019). These participants represented diverse job schemes and held full-time positions. The study comprised three sessions, each involving six focus group discussions. Every focus group consisted of four to five employees (see Lokman et al., 2019; Shuhidan, 2023).

3.2   Procedures

To compile a repository of negative work events significantly influencing employees' adverse emotional responses, the researchers developed a KJ method (focus group) protocol based on the guidelines provided by Lokman et al. (2019). A Kansei expert validated this protocol, which consisted of two sessions: the first aimed to identify negative work events, while the second focused on revealing the corresponding negative emotions. During the initial session, participants received pink cards and were assigned the task of contemplating work-related incidents that had notably impacted their emotions adversely over the preceding six months. These incidents encompassed various aspects, including interpersonal interactions, task-related challenges, organisational policies, infrastructure issues, and related factors. Participants documented these events on pink cards, using a silent brainwriting approach. Subsequently, participants affixed their cards to a board, collectively reviewed them within groups, and rectified instances where words did not align with negative work events. In cases of duplicates, participants were required to retain only one instance. Participants then strived to uncover commonalities among the events and categorised them accordingly. If commonalities were absent, participants introduced new categories, repeating the process until all cards were grouped on the board with clusters for negative events. Finally, participants attached green cards as labels to signify the most appropriate event within each category. In the second session, the negative work events identified in the first session served as reference points for recognising the negative emotions elicited. Uncovering participants' emotions frequently involves deploying emotional keywords. Researchers typically select these keywords from domain-specific sources such as technical publications, pertinent literature, input from domain experts, experienced users, and technical documents (Lokman, 2013; Hussin, 2011). For this study, a set of 10 negative emotions formulated by Watson and Clark (1994), accompanied by supplementary discrete emotions (anger, shame, envy, jealousy, sadness, boredom, frustration, fear, fatigue) sourced from relevant literature, was utilised as a framework. These emotions guided participants in expressing the emotions they experienced in response to the identified negative work events.

3.3   Data Analysis

The KJ method, often referred to as affinity diagrams, serves as a tool for meticulously examining focus group data to encapsulate group consensus. This brainstorming technique organises extensive and unstructured data by discerning inherent relationships (Lokman et al., 2018). The outcome manifests as a visual map, spotlighting the interconnections between diverse data points, grounded in their meanings, associations, and frequency of occurrence. Consequently, this approach facilitated the extraction of work events, their categorisations, and their frequencies. Subsequently, the data were further analysed using ATLAS.ti software version 23, enabling a robust and efficient content analysis process. The coding procedure unfolded across various stages. Initially, researchers immersed themselves in the narratives, comprehending the content through thorough reading and rereading. Subsequently, discrete units of text, or "codes," were assigned to delineate individual work events embedded within the narratives. This inductive coding strategy embraced the emergence of fresh codes directly from participants' descriptions, capturing their diverse and distinctive experiences. Concurrently, a deductive coding process unfolded, orchestrating the categorisation of codes into predefined classes rooted in existing literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This approach facilitated the organisation and clustering of work events and emotions, furnishing a comprehensive analytical

framework. The proposed categorisations, collaboratively forged by participants and researchers, then endured scrutiny and suggestions from a panel of four subject matter experts. This panel featured two specialists in organisational behaviour, one in Kansei Engineering, and two practising psychologists, aligning with the methodological tenets delineated by Singh and Aggarwal (2018).

4. Findings

Through an iterative process of coding and analysis, the identified work events underwent categorisation into distinct categories and sub-categories. Each category and sub-category encapsulates a specific facet or dimension of work events, reflecting the intricate depth and complexity of participants' experiences in the workplace. To render the results visually comprehensible, the ATLAS.ti coding visualisation showcased the arrangement of work event categories and their corresponding sub-categories (refer to Fig. 1). Additionally, the Sankey diagram (Fig. 2) provides an illustration of the frequency of identified work events within each category, contingent on the respective focus group. Table 1 highlights the distribution of work events across sub-categories, offering an overview of the prevalence of each facet. It categorised work events into five; Interpersonal, Task-related, Infrastructure, Organisational Policy, Career Development. Table 2 presents detailed insights into sample events categorised based on their categories and sub-categories. For instance, from Focus Group 2, participants event was "…my friend blames me for technical problems that are not my fault," and from Focus Group 4, "Blamed for mistakes made by the respective officer." These events among others are categorised under Interpersonal.
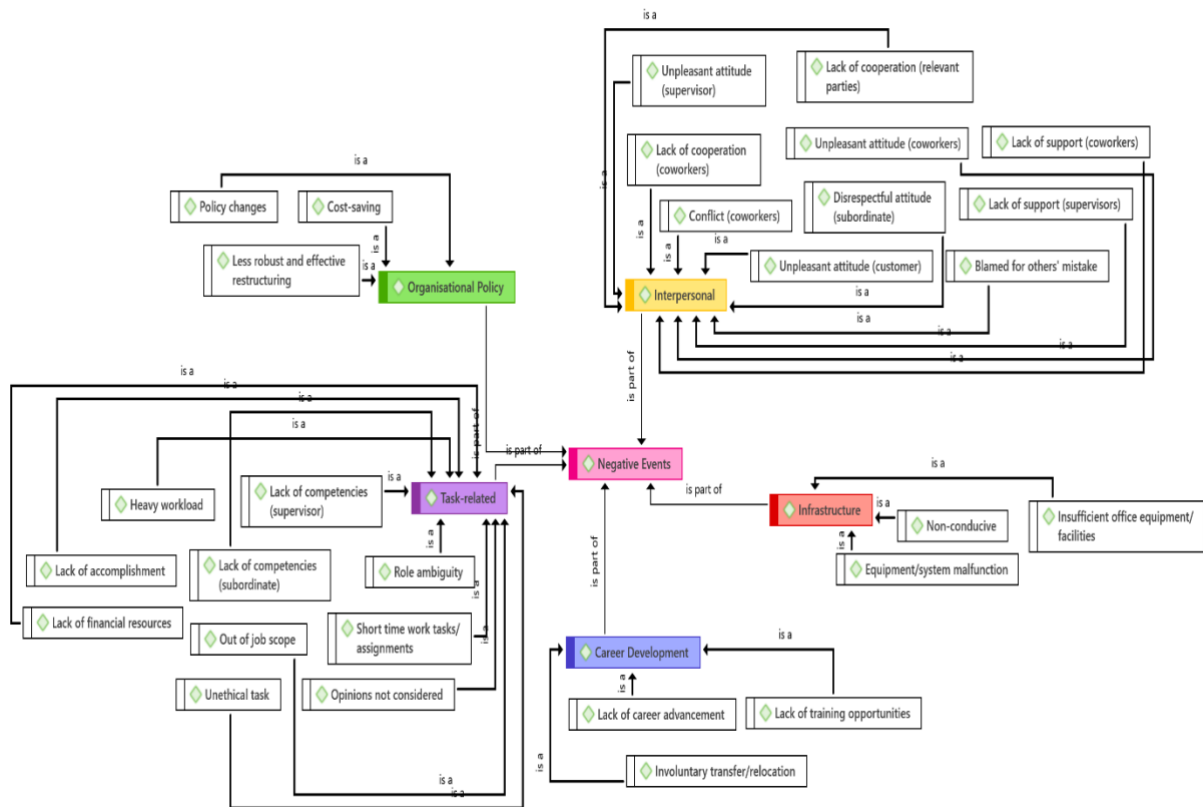

Fig. 1 Network visualisation of negative work event categories and sub-categories
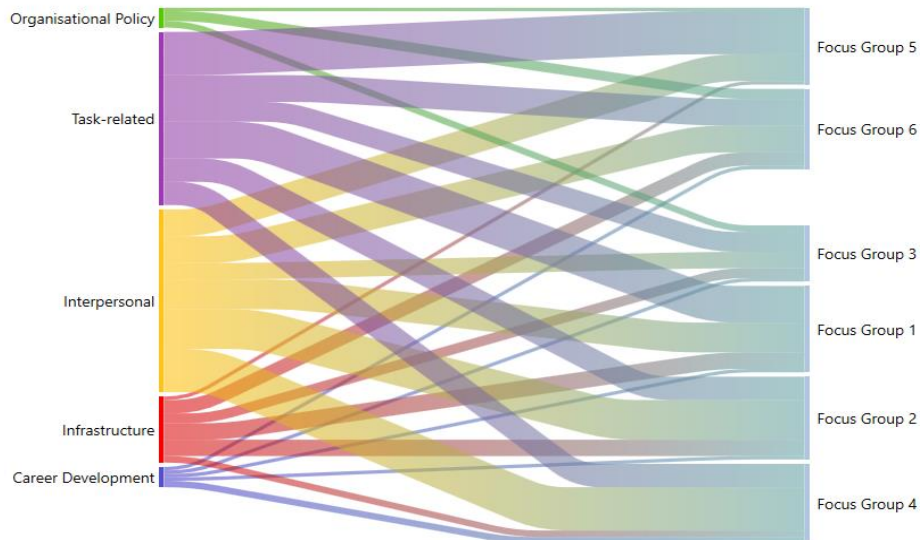
Fig. 2 Frequency of negative work events within each category

Table 1. Distribution of negative work events across sub-categories

Categories	Sub-categories	Total
Interpersonal	○ Blamed for others' mistake	6
	○ Conflict (coworkers)	5
	○ Disrespectful attitude (subordinate)	4
	○ Lack of cooperation (coworkers)	8
	○ Lack of cooperation (relevant parties)	3
	○ Unpleasant attitude (coworkers)	10
	○ Unpleasant attitude (customers)	8
	○ Unpleasant attitude (supervisor)	4
	○ Lack of support (coworkers)	2
	○ Lack of support (supervisors)	5
Task-related	○ Heavy workload	15
	○ Short-time work tasks/assignments	10
	○ Lack of financial resources	2
	○ Out of job scope	6
	○ Role ambiguity	5
	○ Unethical task	2
	○ Opinions not considered	3
	○ Lack of accomplishment	2
	○ Lack of competencies (subordinate)	5
	○ Lack of competencies (supervisor)	2
Infrastructure	○ Non-conducive	7
	○ Insufficient office equipment/facilities	4
	○ Equipment/system malfunction	9
Organisational Policy	○ Cost-saving	2
	○ Policy changes	2
	○ Less robust and effective restructuring	2
Career Development	○ Involuntary transfer/relocation	2
	○ Lack of career advancement	2
	○ Lack of training opportunities	2
		139

Table 2. Categories, sub-categories, and samples of negative work events

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample events
Interpersonal	Blamed for others' mistake	"…my friend blames me for technical problems that are not my fault" *FG*2
		"Blamed for mistakes made by the respective officer" *FG*4
	Conflict (coworkers)	"Inharmonious relationships among colleagues" *FG*4
		"…some individuals try to dominate the situation, leading to staff forming cliques" *FG*5
	Disrespectful attitude (subordinate)	"Job instructions that are not followed by subordinates" *FG*2
		"Staff who resist or show disrespectful behaviour" *FG*5
	Lack of cooperation (coworkers)	"A colleague quietly avoids taking responsibility for minute-taking during the meeting" *FG*1
		"Colleagues not cooperating during task execution" *FG*4
	Lack of cooperation (relevant parties)	"Difficult handover/coordination from the previous section" *FG*3
		"Contractor fails to inform early about air conditioning issues, despite a major event the next day" *FG*5
	Unpleasant attitude (coworkers)	"A colleague discriminates based on ranks" *FG*1
		"Colleagues prefer to associate based on favouritism" *FG*2
	Unpleasant attitude (customers)	"Students push me/workers (testing)" *FG*1
		"Handling negative customer attitudes" *FG*3
Categories	Sub-categories	Sample events
	Unpleasant attitude (supervisor)	"Threatened to quit or work "in or out" by superiors" *FG*2
		"Supervisor's negative emotions hindering the desired tasks" *FG*4
	Lack of support (coworkers)	"…colleagues not helping when busy completing urgent tasks" *FG*4
		"Colleagues, especially males, question the function of AKRAB (staff welfare club)…" *FG*5
	Lack of support (supervisors)	"Lack of support and encouragement from superiors" *FG*1
		"Lack of welfare from supervisor" *FG*6
Task-related	Heavy workload	"…all the tasks are assigned to me…" *FG*1
		"Workload is too heavy at one time" *FG*2
	Short-time work tasks/assignments	"Given important tasks in a short time" *FG*1
		"Some tasks need to be prepared urgently…" *FG*3
	Lack of financial resources	"Lack/shortage of funds to help patients" *FG*1
		"Budget constraints in task implementation" *FG*3
	Out of job scope	"Doing work not within the scope of actual duties…" *FG*1
		"Additional non-core tasks that are burdensome…" *FG*5
	Role ambiguity	"Doubts or lack of understanding towards the supervisor…" *FG*2
		"Tasks are given with incomplete or unclear information" *FG*4
	Unethical task	"Involved in activities/projects conflicting with work ethics and humanity" *FG*3
		"…forced to amend decisions…" *FG*6
	Opinions not considered	"Suggestions or proposals rejected without discussion" *FG*2
		"Not given opportunities to voice opinions or provide input on work-related matters" *FG*6
	Lack of accomplishment	"Received a reprimand for filing audit" *FG*1
		"Projects not completed as promised" *FG*5
	Lack of competencies (subordinate)	"Subordinate's prolonged illness…" *FG*4
		"Incompetent subordinates…" *FG*5

Categories	Sub-categories	Sample events
	Lack of competencies (supervisor)	"Supervisor lacks administration and leadership knowledge…" *FG*3
		"Unit head in the gift section fails to filter contribution materials according to established policies…" *FG*5
Infrastructure	Non-conducive	"Limited space/facilities for storing collection materials…" *FG*1
		"Isolation from other staff (isolated location from colleagues)" *FG*4
	Insufficient office equipment/facilities	"Inadequate or insufficient task equipment" *FG*2
		"Insufficient office equipment" *FG*3
	Equipment/system malfunction	"Office equipment is old. It's constantly breaking down and needs repair" *FG*1
		"Office equipment malfunctions that disrupt work" *FG*2
Organisational Policy	Cost-saving	"…a circular that no longer allows overtime claims as before, but workload remains unchanged" *FG*5
		"Important matters that need prioritisation as per cost-saving guidelines are overlooked…" *FG*6
	Policy changes	"Sudden policy changes disrupting existing work plans" *FG*3
		"Abrupt policy changes requiring the need to have contingency plans" *FG*6
	Less robust and effective restructuring	"Unstable department restructuring - causing constraints for staff" *FG*3
		"Assessment and analysis not aligned with actual restructuring needs" *FG*6
Career Development	Involuntary transfer/relocation	"Feeling sad about being moved to a new office/department that doesn't align with my interests" *FG*2
		"Finding out about the transfer to another department" *FG*4
	Lack of career advancement	"Lack/shortage of positions for promotion/career advancement" *FG*1
		"Employer showing favouritism. Promoting staff who are favoured" *FG*3
	Lack of training opportunities	"Head not approving applications for courses outside…" *FG*4
		"Only specific staff selected for overseas training" *FG*6

FG: Focus Group

Regarding the elicited emotions, Table 3 presents the distribution of emotions across main categories and focus groups, providing an overview of the prevalence of each aspect. Angry emotions are most expressed among others, followed by fatigue, distressed, sad, and frustrated almost equally mentioned. In parallel, Fig. 3 illustrates the components of negative emotions derived from the qualitative inquiry (KJ method study), content analysis, and expert validation. These reveal the makeup of specific negative emotions, serving as emotional descriptors tailored to the higher education context.

Table 3. Distribution of emotions across main categories

Emotions	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6	Frequency
Angry	9	11	7	8	6	7	48
Sad	3	4	3	2	2	4	18
Frustrated	1	4	3	2	2	5	17
Fatigue	5	4	5	0	2	4	20
Shame	0	2	0	1	2	1	6
Jealous	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Fear	0	1	2	3	4	0	10
Guilty	0	1	1	4	1	0	7

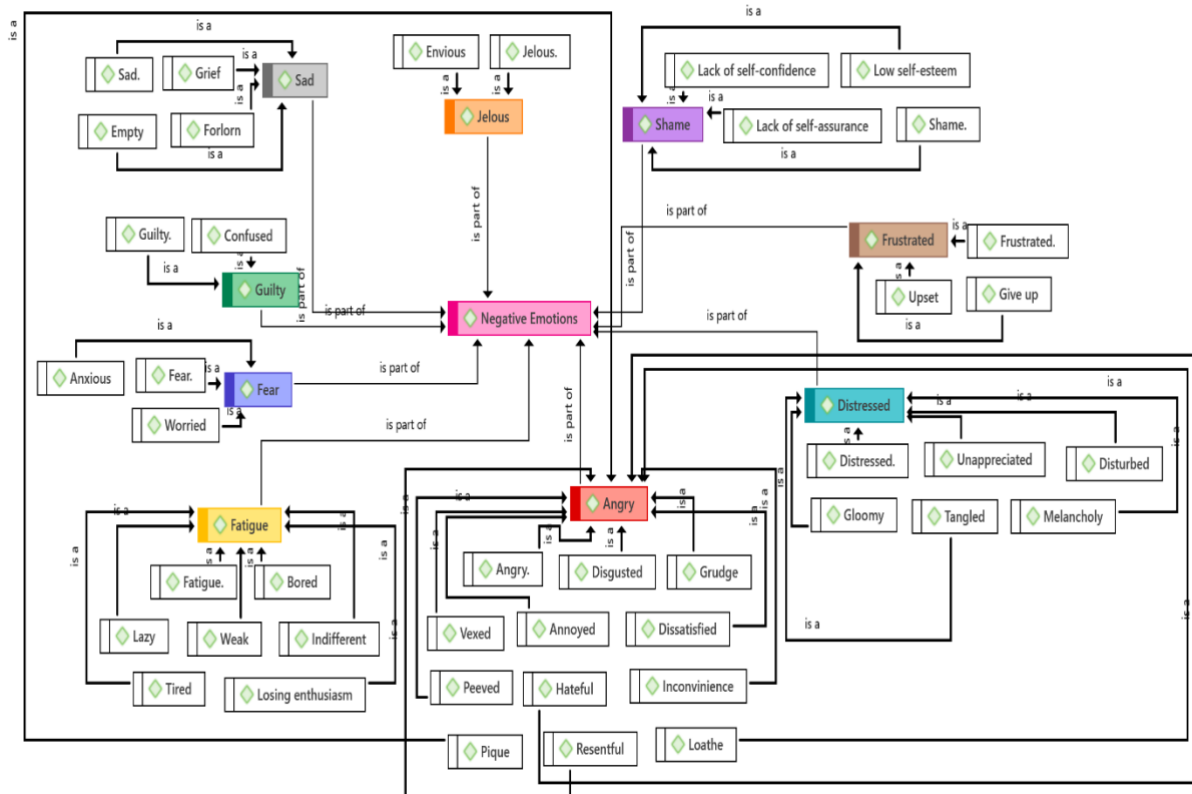| Emotions	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6	Frequency
Distressed	2	1	1	3	7	5	19
Total	20	29	22	24	26	26	147

FG Focus Group

Fig. 3 Network visualisation of negative emotions components

5.   Discussion

The discussion section delves into the intricate interplay of negative work events and discrete negative emotions, shedding light on their combined impact on employees' emotional experiences within the workplace. This exploration offers a deeper understanding of how these aspects collectively shape the emotional landscape and provides insights into potential avenues for fostering a more positive and supportive work environment.

5.1   Deciphering Patterns of Negative Work Events

The alignment between the negative work event categories unveiled in this study and prior research by esteemed scholars like Grandey et al. (2002), Matta et al. (2014), Demerouti and Cropanzano (2017), Casper et al. (2019), Scheibe (2021), and Lokman et al. (2018) lends robustness to our findings. The recurring presence of the interpersonal, task-related, organisational policies, and infrastructure categories across numerous studies underscores their pervasive role in shaping employees' emotional realms. A compelling revelation from the qualitative inquiry is the emergence of a hitherto unexplored category of career development. This brings a fresh layer to our comprehension of employees' emotional experiences. This category encapsulates occurrences such as involuntary "transfer/relocation," "lack of career advancement," and "lack of training opportunities." These occurrences underscore the significance of career-related elements in shaping employees' emotional reactions. In a time when professional journeys interweave with emotional well-being, this newfound category spotlights an aspect that organisations should address to cultivate a positive work atmosphere.

The prevalence of the identified categories underscores the paramount importance of interpersonal interactions. The recurring instances of events like "unpleasant attitude (coworkers)," "unpleasant attitude (customers)," and "lack of cooperation (coworkers)" emphasise the significant influence of human relationships on employees' emotional responses. This significance is further fortified by the alignment of our findings with prior research. Interpersonal events at work, which encompass interactions with supervisors, coworkers, subordinates, and customers, have consistently been recognised as potential triggers for various emotional reactions (Matta et al., 2014). The research conducted by Fatima et al. (2019), Wang and Xiao (2021), and Baur et al. (2022) emphasises the substantial impact of such events in eliciting negative emotional responses. These findings highlight the necessity of nurturing a culture of respect, support, and collaboration within the workplace, as these interpersonal dynamics significantly shape employees' emotional well-being.

Within the realm of task-related events, such as "heavy workload," "short-time work tasks/assignments," and "out of job scope," the significance of workload management and role clarity in influencing employees' emotional states becomes evident. The prominence of these events underscores the importance of effective task allocation, role definition, and adept time management strategies to mitigate potential adverse emotional consequences. This perspective is reinforced by previous research, with studies like Koon and Pun (2018), Thompson and Bruk-Lee (2020), and Eissa and Lester (2017) indicating the connection between job demands, emotional well-being, and organisational outcomes, shedding light on the intricate relationship between task-related events, job demands, and employees' emotional experiences.

The emphasis on infrastructure brings to light the substantial impact of events like "equipment/system malfunction," "non-conducive infrastructure," and "insufficient office equipment/facilities" on employees' emotional well-being. These events underscore the intrinsic connection between physical work conditions and emotions. The significance of a functional work environment should not be underestimated by organisations, as it directly influences employees' job satisfaction and emotional responses. This perspective aligns with research findings that highlight the importance of well-equipped facilities in shaping employees' emotional experiences. As underscored by Lokman et al. (2018), inadequate facilities, including insufficient information technology infrastructure and poorly maintained workstations, can lead to employee dissatisfaction and hinder their overall performance. Moreover, difficulties in accessing the internet and technological issues, as noted by Scheibe (2021) and Woznyj et al. (2021), contribute to negative emotional reactions among employees. This underscores the tangible impact of infrastructure-related events on employees' emotional well-being within the workplace environment.

Furthermore, the organisational policies category sheds light on the emotional implications of decisions like "cost-saving," "policy changes," and "less robust and effective restructuring." This aspect gains further insight from research highlighting that organisational policies and practices are pervasive emotional occurrences within the workplace (Basch & Fisher, 1998; Grandey et al., 2002; Matta et al., 2014). The analysis of company policies and practices is intrinsically linked to employee emotional experiences (Basch & Fisher, 1998; Grandey et al., 2002). Instances of policy outcomes that are perceived as unfair, undesired, or unexpected commonly act as sources of anger among employees (Grandey et al., 2002). These findings underscore the complex relationship between organisational policies and employee emotions, emphasising the need for organisations to consider not only the practical implications of policies but also their potential emotional impact. It is imperative for organisations to thoughtfully evaluate the emotional dimensions of policy decisions, striving to align policies with the well-being of their employees.

Concurrently, the prevalence of the most recurrent events within the career development category, namely "involuntary transfer/relocation," "lack of career advancement," and "lack of training opportunities," sheds light on the intricate emotional landscape linked to career progression. These insights gain resonance from diverse research perspectives. While task-based and interaction-based events dominate discussions, other pivotal events like promotions also hold significance in employees' emotional experiences (Woznyj, 2017). Notably, the denial of promotion is associated with heightened fatigue, anger, and anxiety while concurrently diminishing pleasure, comfort, and work engagement (Woznyj, 2017). In a similar vein, sentiments related to transfers or relocations were expressed by dissatisfied employees, some of whom referred to undesired or unjustified transfers (Singh & Aggarwal, 2017). These findings collectively underscore the profound role of career-related facets in shaping the

emotional landscape of employees. By proactively addressing concerns such as career advancement, training opportunities, and unjustified transfers, organisations can foster a positive emotional climate within the workplace.

5.2   Unveiling the Spectrum of Discrete Negative Emotions

The frequencies of distinct negative emotions illuminate the intricate emotional landscape experienced by employees within the workplace. Among the identified emotions, anger emerges as the most prevalent. This prominence underscores the frequent occurrence of situations that provoke anger, demanding focused attention to comprehend employees' emotional reactions. Following closely are sadness and frustration, highlighting their prevalence in the work context. Notably, the reported occurrence of fatigue accentuates the significant role of tiredness and exhaustion in shaping employees' emotional well-being. Emotions like shame, jealousy, fear, guilt, and distress are reported with less frequency. Despite their lower occurrence, their presence remains noteworthy due to the unique impact each can have on employees' overall emotional experiences and subsequent behaviours.

Contextualising these findings with established literature adds depth. King's (2013) perspective on negative emotions as indicators of general distress resonates with the prevalence of emotions like sadness, frustration, and distress in our study. The diverse array of emotions, as elucidated by Diefendorff et al. (2008), underscores the intricate emotional terrain navigated by employees in the workplace. Drawing from Bauer's (2011) and Bauer and Spector's (2015) insights on the interplay of various negative emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, envy, shame, anxiety, boredom, and jealousy) enriches our comprehension of how these discrete emotions might interact and influence overarching emotional experiences. Examining the influence of these negative emotions on work-related conduct and outcomes, the correlations delineated by Williams (2020) between specific emotions and CWBs, OCBs, and job performance offer practical insights. The strong connection between frustration and CWBs, as well as the negative links of anger and anxiety with task performance, along with anger/hostility, anxiety, and sadness with OCBs, highlight the complex interaction between emotions and behaviours in the workplace. Additionally, this study elucidates the makeup of specific negative emotions, serving as emotional descriptors (see Fig. 3) tailored to the higher education context.

6.   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of negative work events and their implications for employees' emotional experiences within the workplace. The analysis of various categories of negative work events, including interpersonal interactions, task-related challenges, infrastructure issues, organisational policies, and career development, has illuminated the intricate dynamics that shape employees' emotional well-being. The identification of distinct negative emotions, such as anger, fatigue, sadness, frustration, and more, further deepens the understanding of the complex interplay between work events and emotional responses. By aligning the findings with previous research, the significance of these negative work event categories and their impact on employees' emotional landscapes has been validated. The prevalence of particular categories, such as interpersonal events (including instances of coworkers and customers displaying unpleasant attitudes, as well as challenges related to coworkers' cooperation) and task-related experiences (such as managing heavy workloads and adhering to tight time constraints for work tasks and assignments), distinctly underscores the utmost significance of nurturing positive relationships and upholding respectful interactions. These factors hold a pivotal role in establishing an environment conducive to productive work dynamics.

This study's findings have several implications for higher education management. Notably, the study's findings bring into focus the criticality of implementing peer support programmes, as exemplified in studies such as Pedersen et al. (2019), which empower employees to provide valuable support to their peers, encompassing various dimensions such as informational, emotional, motivational, and practical support. Furthermore, nurturing a supportive atmosphere among colleagues and supervisors can significantly enhance employees' overall well-being (Zhou et al., 2018). Additionally, prudent workload management, and effective time allocation further enhance the well-being and productivity of employees. Notably, the development of competencies and expertise through on-the-job training has evolved into a prerequisite for all organisations seeking to enhance skills and

knowledge (Abdullah et al., 2022; Khatimah & Ismail, 2022), thereby assisting in the effective management of workload and time.

Despite that, the emphasis on infrastructure brings to light the substantial impact of events like equipment/system malfunction, non-conducive infrastructure, and insufficient office equipment or facilities on employees' emotional well-being. This underscores the need to prioritise future organisational budgets to equip employees with adequate and well-maintained infrastructure and facilities (Lokman et al., 2018). Furthermore, the organisational policies category sheds light on the emotional implications of decisions like cost-saving, policy changes, and restructuring implementation. To alleviate these potential adverse effects, organisations should methodically plan and implement restructuring policies, giving due consideration to the emotional well-being of their employees. Finally, the prevalence of the most recurrent events within the career development category, namely involuntary transfer or relocation, lack of career advancement, and lack of training opportunities, sheds light on the intricate emotional landscape linked to career progression. Thus, organisations should provide a clear, transparent, and systematic path for career progression (Tahir et al., 2023) and establish clear communication channels to guide employees through the transfer or relocation process, including expectations and available support (Shuhidan et al., 2023). Notwithstanding the multitude of valuable insights derived from this study, it exclusively concentrates on work events that evoke negative emotions, lacking an accompanying mechanism to elucidate the relationship. The research methodology employed a cross-sectional design, with an emphasis on frequency rather than intensity, and specifically targeted the administrative staff of Malaysian public universities.

7.   Suggestions for Future Research

While this study has provided valuable insights, several avenues for future research could enhance the understanding of the relationship between negative work events and employees' emotional well-being. Exploring the moderating effects of individual differences, such as personality traits and coping strategies, on the emotional outcomes of negative work events, could unveil nuanced patterns. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of interventions targeted at mitigating the emotional impact of specific negative work events could provide actionable strategies for organisations to improve employee well-being. Furthermore, adopting a longitudinal approach that tracks the evolution of negative work events and emotional responses over time could offer a more dynamic perspective on how these factors influence each other. Since this study measures the frequency, future research should analyse the significance of negative work events or measure how strongly participants feel about them. Lastly, delving into cross-cultural differences in the perception and experience of negative work events and their emotional consequences could provide insights into the universality and cultural specificity of these dynamics.

8.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 played a vital role in shaping the research problem, establishing the theoretical foundation, collecting and interpreting data, and crafting the manuscript. Author 2 made significant contributions to defining the research problem, analysing and interpreting data, and critically revising the manuscript. Author 3 played a crucial role in critically revising the manuscript and contributing to the literature review. Author 4's contributions encompassed defining methodological procedures, critically revising the manuscript, and conducting analysis and interpretation of data.

9.   Acknowledgements

10.   References

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