

Work Flexibility and Employment Stability in Selected Cleaning Services Companies in Lagos State, Nigeria

¹Uwem, Imoh Emmanuel,
²Kabuoh, Margret. N.,
³Egbuta, Olive U. &
⁴Akintaro, Abel A.
^{1,2,3&4}Department of Business Administration and Marketing Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo Ogun State

Abstract

Changes in business practices such as outsourcing and organizational restructuring, and globalization have brought about changes in the nature of work resulting in cost-cutting flexible work arrangements which is characterized with inconsistent schedules and work hours. Consequently, workers are faced with uncertainty and employment instability due to lack of social benefits such as health care, legal assistance and insurance plans. This study adopts quantitative approach and used a well-structured questionnaire to elicit information from Opel cleaning services Ltd, GC cleaning services Ltd and Mahut cleaning services Ltd, all located in Lagos State. The total population consist of 1535 personnel. Rao soft sample size calculator was used to determine the sample size-400 of which 365 was returned. Findings revealed there is no significant effect of work flexibility on employment stability since the coefficient is 0.293 and the p-value is 0.65. Aside that, the propensity of some employers to ignore cleaners in decision making, inadequate infrastructure in Nigeria mitigates work flexibility which influences employment stability. The study therefore recommends that employers should take cognizance of the human factor by engaging cleaners in decision making and government should ensure provision of enabling environment for employment stability to strive.

Keywords: *Work flexibility, Employment stability, Cleaning services, Nonstandard work arrangement and Infrastructure.*

Corresponding Author Kabuoh, Margret. N.

Background to the study

Alexander and Haley-Lock (2013) opined that nonstandard work arrangements, such as contingent and temporary positions, have become more common; nonstandard hours and inconsistent schedules or shifts have increased. The traditional industrial relations system based on the concept of full-time employees working within an enterprise is increasingly being challenged by the use of nonstandard work arrangements by employers. More so, this changing nature of work has taken a new dimension with the adoption of flexible work arrangements by many firms globally (Fapohunda, 2012), inclusive of cleaning services companies in Lagos State. In furtherance to this, Jawando (2013) posited that flexibility has brought about destabilizing and exploitative labour practices which are characterized by temporary or casual work.

Work flexibility is the entrenched work arrangement in the cleaning services industry as employees are apparently engaged through triangular employment which may have created uncertainty and job instability. Work flexibility also seems prevalent and desirable for both the employers and employees as cleaning services are 24 hours around the clock, every day of the week and all year round inclusive of public holidays. More so, cleaners and their supervisors are placed on shifts depending on the work arrangement between the client and the service provider/cleaning services company which is largely due to the informal and unstructured nature of the job.

Akinbode and Uwem (2013) opined that cleaning services companies operate in every aspect of the Nigerian economy such as churches, hospitals, eateries, banks, to mention just a few. The authors are of the view that employment is short term, unstable and relatively secured. That is, the continued engagement of a cleaner is relatively tied to the continued engagement of the client company. They suggested that a variety of services is offered in the cleaning services industry such as janitorial service, fumigation, laundry, industrial cleaning, maid service and pre and post construction cleaning. Janitorial service was observed as the most rendered service with hundreds of personnel. More so, they observed that Human Resource Management practices are unstructured, unstable and inconsistent with global Human Resource practices. Notably, work is characterized with high flexibility, high labour turnover and employment instability.

Furthermore, cleaners' remuneration is inadequate and lacking benefits such as paternity leave, health scheme against infections and diseases, and proper training on equipment handling. Consequently, as asserted by Jawando (2013), workers are on daily basis subjected to job instability, lower wages and more dangerous working conditions as they are denied rights and benefits of regular workers. To buttress this, studies have found that employers are now engaging more of flexible workers as alternatives to standard or permanent workers which contravene the fundamental principles and rights at work (Capelli & Neumark, 2004; Okafor, 2007; Okafor, 2012). In the light of the above issues, this study intends to investigate the effect of work flexibility on employment stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

During the last two decades of the 20th century, international competition, domestic competitive pressures, technological changes and major financial events made organizations to seek “ greater flexibility and productivity as well as new strategies focused on speed, responsiveness to changing market conditions and innovation....have induced organizations to eliminate jobs not just in the factory floor as often as in the past but also among those who have traditionally been offered a long-term career within the organisation” (Hiltrop,1995, cited by Sarantinos, 2007, p. 2).

The traditional employment relationship is viewed as having been permanently undermined by mass dismissals and high unemployment; globalization and technological change are seen as causing an unstoppable rise in precarious employment (Auer & Cazes, 2004).Furthermore, globalization has facilitated a shift from “Fordist” to a “Post-Fordist” regime. Fordism, describes a situation focusing on mass production and distribution of products in a stable market with standard terms in the employment relationship. On the other hand, Post Fordism describes a situation where organisations have to cope with constant change. At this level, firms are losing their stability in the marketplace as technological advancement sweeps away the old rules of competition along with the introduction of globalization and uncertainty (Thompson & McHugh, 2002).

Fapohunda (2012) explained that “in nearly every economic sector, good jobs are falling prey to corporate cost-cutting moves at the expense of working families. Too many jobs are being outsourced, contracted out, or reclassified under a barrage of legal definitions designed to keep pay down, benefits low, and unions out” (p.258).The massive restructuring forced organisations and employees to renegotiate their relationship as new variables such as uncertain environment, increased risk and individualism arose (Sarantinos, 2007). While some workers in higher wage categories have benefited by the flexibility brought on by these changes, workers at the lower end of the wage and skill spectrum are struggling in insecure employment to make a decent wage (Law Commission of Ontario, 2009). Evidence suggests that the vast majority of employers would be happy to consider an application for flexible working. However, in many cases employers will have concerns over the business impact of flexible working patterns, especially as it relates to employment instability (Alexander, 2011).

Employment flexibility, as posited by Sarantinos (2007), presents a tendency to cause feelings of uncertainty and insecurity to employees. Naturally there are differences among countries and social contexts (e.g. EU & the U.S.A) but the voice that there are no more 'jobs for life' is increasing. Undoubtedly, this is bound to have adverse effects on employees and trigger negative reactions. The latter is further accentuated as trade union power decline and other forms of collective representation become marginalized. One of the most prominent feature employees bring into the employment relations is the sense of commitment to the organization which is not possible to remain unaffected in the general environment of instability.

Bobkov and Veredyuk (2013) opined that employment instability for the employee is usually accompanied by a loss of wages and social guarantees; decrease of social security (mainly against dismissal), mandatory social insurance and welfare payments by the employer, to

mention just a few. Thus, employment instability includes the elements of informal and unprotected employment. In addition, the authors opined that employment instability breaks down social cohesion and has a negative impact on the development sustainability of the whole society, which can be seen in, reduced consumer demand for products that require long-term financial resources (purchase of apartments, houses, villas, cars, etc.); underinvestment in human capital (education, health); reduced opportunities to accumulate experience and improve professional competence; limited availability of credit (including mortgage) just to mention a few. Thus, employment instability creates not just a crisis of employment quality, but also a crisis of social relations reproduction.

Akinbode and Uwem (2013) argued that there are various factors responsible for employment instability in the cleaning services industry such as high cost of training with low retention chances, high turnover rate, unrealistic salary structure, delay in salary payment and inability to maintain stable workforce over a period of time. Often times, the resultant effect is the death of these businesses after a few years of inception (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). Thus, employment instability reveals the highest degree of insecurity, involuntary economic and social instability and determines the deterioration in living standards of employees, households and the whole society (Bobkov & Veredyuk, 2013).

However, it should be stated that work flexibility in the cleaning services industry has both positive and negative aspects. That is, it is appealing to cleaners/supervisors who intend to pursue careers in academics because it allows them to work at night and study during the day. There are cleaners/supervisors who also engage in multiple job holding in order to augment pay. On the other hand, many employers prefer to engage on temporary basis since it is a cost cutting measure which reduces cost of operation and social benefits such as long term care insurance plans, legal assistance plans and health care plans. To buttress this, Sarantinos (2007), suggested that organisations, all the more select fixed-term and temporary employees as opposed to direct employment. This is part of an effort to decrease costs associated with wages and social benefits thus minimizing the overall cost of labour.

Furthermore, work flexibility could lead to uncoordinated team work especially when cleaners are not properly supervised. Although, various studies (Auer & Cazes, 2004; Bobkov & Veredyuk, 2013; Sarantinos, 2007) have identified low wages and lack of social benefits in work flexibility arrangement as impeding employment stability, this study specifically seeks to explore the human factor, as in how engagement of cleaners in decision making and multi skilling could facilitate employment stability. Could it be that work flexibility influence employment stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State?

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine the influence of work flexibility on employment stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Question

In what ways does work flexibility influence employment stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: Work flexibility has no significant influence on employment stability in the cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

This section focuses on the review of salient constructs in this study. They include work flexibility and employment stability. It seeks to determine the influence of work stability on employment stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. This section also consists of the conceptual review, theoretical and empirical review.

Conceptual Framework

Work Flexibility

According to ILO (2001), with the introduction of economic and social reforms in 1990, earlier strong job stability and employment security were undermined by large-scale structural changes and consequent flows of labour between jobs and from employment to unemployment or inactivity (opposite flows were much smaller, especially in the first period of economic transition). Labour legislation was amended to allow more labour flexibility and mobility. While competitive workers of prime age, highly skilled, in good health and flexible, without direct family obligations, could benefit from emerging and attractive job opportunities, other workers were suddenly confronted with much looser employment security. Many were forced to leave their jobs. Some found new jobs immediately, but most were faced with shorter or longer (often repeated) unemployment spells and the necessity to change their occupation, undergo re-skilling, or accept commuting for work (rather than a change of residence) before being re-employed.

Flexibility in the workplace is about an employee and an employer making adjustment as to when, where and how employee will work to better meet individual and business needs. Individual and business needs are met through making changes to the time (when), location (where) and manner (how) in which an employee works. Flexibility should be mutually beneficial to both the employer and employee and result in positive organisational performance. Flexible working opportunities can benefit everyone: employers, employees and their families. Most employers now recognize that it makes good business sense to provide flexible working opportunities for their staff ("what is workplace flexibility", 2014).

Furthermore, flexibility allows employers and employees to make arrangements about working conditions that suit them. This helps employees maintain a work life balance and help employers improve the productivity and efficiency of their business. However, Kokemuller (2016) argues that when an employer arbitrarily approves or disapproves flexible scheduling, this can create internal conflict among employees. If some employees find it unfair that co-workers are able to work flexible hours that they feel are more preferable, this can cause bitterness and lower morale among the ranks, leading to employment instability.

By flexibility of course numerous concepts can be included even in the confines of employment flexibility. For instance, organisations might wish to promote flexibility in their workforce through the enhancement of the quality and competencies of their employees.

Equally, one could recognize employment flexibility when management makes use of the external labour market to face internal shortages or deficiencies in the necessary amount of workforce (Sarantinos, 2007).

Four main types of flexibility as suggested by Atkinson (1984) as cited in (Sarantinos, 2007) include

Functional Flexibility

It allows employees to combine skills and competencies in order to increase their mobility across the various channels of production. Functional flexibility relies on extensive training and thus it is likely to be pursued when there is no longer a stable relationship between employees and the organisation.

Numerical Flexibility

It refers to the possibility of the organisation to adapt the number of its labour on a short-notice, increasing or decreasing it as it sees fit. Varying employee numbers can be achieved by hiring temporary agency workers and employing people on fixed-term contracts. Numerical flexibility is often related with limited employment security rights.

Temporal flexibility: It refers to shifting working hours so as to meet production demands. This can include things such as working overtime and spreading the working hours unevenly over a period of time depending on fluctuations in production. Part-time employment also might be used by the organisation to face even tougher peaks in demand.

Financial Flexibility

It is linked with efforts on behalf of the organisation to reduce labour costs in order to protect profitability. To be applied, it requires partial use of temporal flexibility along with of cost savings that come from using through the adjustment of wage levels to reflect performance on individual, group or organisational levels.

In today's workplace many organisations are looking towards utilising a more flexible workforce to carry them through ever increasing demands more effectively. The savings can be considerable: lower fixed employment costs, a reduction in overtime, and less absenteeism caused by stress claims and burnout; all important considerations when people are being called upon to achieve more with less. A flexible workplace might involve a percentage of casual or temporary staff employed to assist with a certain project. It might also include flexible start and end times or the option of working from home or other remote locations. The point is that flexibility would provide options that would suit both the worker and the workplace ("the benefits of flexible workforce", 2015).

Workplace flexibility is no longer just an innovative policy option for managing employees. It is also a critical requirement for companies to thrive in today's competitive and dynamic global business environment. The multinational nature of work calls for an ever-increasing use of flexibility in schedules, hours, and locations. Despite barriers related to monitoring, manager skepticism, and the potential for adverse effects on productivity, the gains from expanding workplace flexibility are far too compelling to disregard (Bhate, 2013).

A flexible workforce can have both economic and social benefits. Many workers who choose to remain casual find they have more time to balance work with family; which is important when many couples are forced to earn two incomes. This flexibility often has a direct impact on engagement, turnover, and stress claims for the organisation, while providing a better fit between work and personal life for the employees. It also better supports the differing needs of the three prominent generations currently in the workforce (“the benefits of flexible workforce”, 2015).

Employment Stability

Employment stability is desirable for both workers, who rank it among the most important factors for job satisfaction (European Commission, 2001), and for firms, who dislike high turnover and prefer stable employment relationship in order to retain human capital investment and reduce both workforce screening and selection costs (Origo & Pagani, 2010). However, the intensification of competitive pressures has required in the last decades more flexibility both on firms and on workers side.

Employment instability is an increasingly important social problem in workplace environment especially in the Nigerian informal economy. Uwem, Akpa, Magaji, Ukaegbu & Kabuoh, (2016) asserted that it has been accentuated by precarious employment which encourages work flexibility, low wages, part time work, nonstandard hours, work unpredictability and may have health consequences for workers. In addition, the monumental shift from regular work to temporary work may be adduced to the global economic recession and globalization which increased competition among making employers, leaving them with no choice but to device every means in and out of the book to reduce cost of production through cost cutting moves. It threatens the well-being of families and poses considerable challenges to society.

Hill and Ybarra (2014) explained that beginning in the 1980s, structural changes to the economy—including decline in manufacturing and the influence of labour unions and increases in health care costs—combined to increase the instability of employment for less-educated workers. Cleaning services companies' personnel in Lagos State is mostly dominated by primary and secondary school leavers. However, the unemployment situation in the country has made graduates to seek employment as cleaners. Most of these graduates working in the cleaning services companies only work on temporary basis while seeking employment elsewhere. The consequence is high labour turnover and job instability, making difficult it for employers to maintain and retain the same set of workers over a period of time.

Relationship between Work Flexibility and Employment Stability in selected Cleaning Services companies in Lagos State

Auer and Cazes (2004) states the labour market of the future was described as a market of free agents, where everyone bargained for their own terms of employment and where the longer-term commitment of firms to workers or of workers to firms was replaced by a short-term contractual relationship which left both partners free to change partners “at will”. In terms of employment stability, this scenario would of course lead to much more job-hopping and employment termination. Workers would choose to leave, and employers would dismiss workers much more frequently and adjust workforce levels to the volatility of the (macro- and

micro) economic cycles. As a consequence, numerical flexibility would increase and employment tenure would decrease dramatically jobs leading to employment instability and possibly business failure.

Theoretical Framework

Psychological Contract

Armstrong (2006) asserted that psychological contract is the employment relationship which consists of a unique combination of beliefs held by an individual and the employer about what they expect of one another. These unwritten understanding refers to employees inputs which should equate employer expectations like performance, loyalty, commitment, innovation, sacrifice, tolerance and ideas while employer rewards examples and employee's expectations include training and development, promotion, work flexibility, social benefits, growth and responsibility.

In the cleaning relationship as cleaners bargain individually on terms and conditions of employment, services industry, employers continue to have a wide edge over cleaners in the employer-employee Work flexibility is largely at the discretion of the employer because the cleaning services industry has a nonstandard work arrangement. Notably, employers demand from cleaners' increases by the day in terms of work flexibility making it difficult for employees to fulfill employers' expectations such loyalty, sacrifice and commitment. To underpin this, Sarantinos (2007) suggested that a negative change in the employment relationship is likely to cause feelings of insecurity, stress and skepticism among the lines of employees which may produce negative reactions and have adverse effects on the levels of commitment towards employers.

The adoption of paternalism leadership style in the cleaning services industry has done well to emasculate the formation of unions as employers solely determine who gets what, how and when. It is positive for cleaners/supervisors if the work arrangement is in favour of their work life balance and academic pursuits which in a long run enhances business sustainability but if the reverse is the case and cleaners/supervisors are uncomfortable with work schedules and hours; this leads to high labour turnover which results in employment instability. Some cleaners in paternalistic organisations are resentful, disillusioned and demotivated, manifesting in expression of grievance and workplace counterproductive behaviours which generates workplace conflict, with its resultant negative effect on business sustainability. Perhaps, this explains the short life span of most cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Empirical Findings

A study, "flexible working provision and uptake" (2012) by Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), found that 72% of the employers surveyed believed that implementing flexible working practices had a positive impact on staff engagement. Other findings revealed that, the main barrier to improving flexible working appears to be operational pressures, which was mentioned by 52% of employers. Other barriers that feature highly are maintaining customer/service requirements (40% of employers) and line managers' ability to effectively manage flexible workers (35%). From the perspective of employees, the biggest obstacle to flexible working is the nature of the work they do, with

34% citing this as an issue. Another study, “flexible working and work-life balance” (2015) by ACAS revealed that 73% of employees felt that flexible working had a positive impact on employee motivation.

A report, “the Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements” (2012), prepared by Future of Work Institute, revealed that flexibility enables employees to operate in an environment that best suit their personal working styles and allows companies to respond to fluctuations in workload. Though some companies are cautious that a loss of direct control over employee work patterns could result in a lapse in commitment or discipline, with most reporting that flexibility produced more energised, more motivated, and more productive employees. Yet success does not arise naturally. Balance is critical, and employers have to work hard to ensure flexibility functions effectively. There are cases where employees are permanently home-based and with little connection to the business, there is a danger that engagement and productivity could diminish if the informal networks and team interaction gained in an office environment are not maintained.

Methodology

This study seeks to add to the existing empirical literature and conducted an empirical examination on the influence of Work Flexibility on Employment Stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos state, Nigeria. The total population of this study consisted of 1535 cleaners, supervisors and top management working in three selected cleaning services-offering janitorial services. The sample size was drawn from the target population which consist of one major cleaning services company offering janitorial services in each of the three senatorial zone (Lagos-east, GC cleaning services Ltd: 495, Lagos-west, Mahutcleaning services Ltd:515 and Lagos central Opel cleaning services Ltd:525) in Lagos State A sample size of 400 personnel consisting of 400 cleaners, supervisors, operation executives and top management, was arrived at using a Rao soft sample size calculator.

According to Akinbode and Uwem (2013), the capital base, size, the staff strength of cleaning services offering janitorial services varies to a large extent and ranges from 5 to 600 personnel. Based on the 1535 personnel of the target population, an alpha level of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, the sample size for this study from the strata is 308 samples. In addition, to take care of non-response from the respondents, 30% of the sample was added to increase the sample (Isreal, 2009).

Therefore, 30% OF 308 = 92.4

The appropriate sample size is

$308 + 92.4 = 400.$

The research instrument for this study is a well-structured questionnaire with a Likert scale format of Strongly agree, Agree, Partially Agree, Partially disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, used to elicit response from the respondents. Descriptive statistics such as tables and percentages was used, while inferential statistics was carried out using simple linear regression, so as to determine the influence of Work Flexibility on Employment Stability in selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis one: Work flexibility has no significant influence on employment stability in the cleaning services companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using Simple Linear Regression Analysis: the result of the analysis is presented in

Table 1.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.233 ^a	.054	-.182	.31406

a. Predictors: (Constant), work flexibility

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.023	1	.023	.229	.657 ^b
	Residual	.395	4	.099		
	Total	.417	5			

a. Dependent Variable: employee stability

b. Predictors: (Constant), work flexibility

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.324	2.573		1.292	.266
	work flexibility	.293	.613	.233	.479	.657

a. Dependent Variable: employee stability

Interpretation

The results significantly disclosed that the value of coefficient of work flexibility (0.293) is positive, hence it can be concluded that work flexibility is positively associated to employment stability. So any increase on work flexibility would cause an increase in employment stability.

Also from the ongoing, since *p*-value of 0.657 is greater than 0.05, it shows that work flexibility has an insignificant influence on employment stability.

Probability of F-statistics (0.657) also shows that model is overall insignificant at 0.05. The value of R^2 denotes that about 5.4% of the variations in employment stability are explained by the variations in work flexibility. Hence the null hypothesis that says Work flexibility has no significant influence on employment stability in the cleaning services industry in Lagos State, Nigeria is accepted.

The regression equation that shows the effect of work flexibility on employment stability is presented below:

Model 2 for (H_{01}) is stated as

$$y_i = f(x_i) \text{ and } y_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 x_i + \mu$$

$$y_i = 3.324 + 0.293x_i$$

where y_i = work flexibility of employees

x_i = employment stability

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made based on the findings.

1. There is no significant influence of work flexibility on employment stability in the selected cleaning services companies in Lagos State.
2. Scholars have observed that in advanced countries, flexibility can help widen talent pool, increase commitment and loyalty, maintain work life balance and can help retain staff

which translates to improved productivity (“Flexible Working: working for families, working for business”, 2011).

However, work flexibility in the cleaning services industry in Lagos State has challenges such as, inability to retain a stable workforce, lack of proper training, arbitrary hiring and sacking of staff, low chances of retaining a particular client for a long period of time, incessant traffic on highways due to bad roads, perennial power failure, high labour turnover, issue of burnout from working long hours which can slow down productivity in the work place to mention just a few. Perhaps, this account for that low value of coefficient of work flexibility (0.293) in the cleaning services industry, meaning that although the coefficient is positive, it is statically insignificant.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are therefore made:

1. Cleaner's skills and knowledge should be improved via multi skilling. That is, training them on different aspects of the work. Some are recruited today and assigned jobs they have not done before which may lead to disenchantment of the part of the client. This no doubt will encourage the cleaners to stay in the cleaning services company trying to acquire the basic rudiment of the job.
2. Despite the inadequate remuneration, cleaners should be keyed into the decision making process to give them a sense of belonging due to the fact that it is not only money that motivates.
3. To avoid internal conflict, cleaners consent should be sort when designing a flexible working policy in order to carry them along.

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