

## Precarious Work, Workplace Conflict and Organisational Performance in Lagos State Organisations

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### Abstract

*This research study examines the relationship between precarious work, workplace conflict and organizational performance in Lagos State organizations. Research questions were tested based on the standpoint of preceding studies and literature which concludes that work environment and nature of work affects the behaviour and enthusiasm of workers. Also, conflict if not managed properly contributes to a decreased in organizational performance but if managed properly conflict induces greater creativity, more worker enthusiasm for better decisions. In furtherance to this, findings also suggests training, effective communication and a conducive workplace environment as panacea for quality service delivery and higher organizational performance. Organizations should create a workplace that encourages workers participation, empowerment and flexibility that allows for self actualization.*

*Keywords: Precarious Work, Workplace Conflict, Organizational performance, Flexibility, Employers and Government Agencies*

### Background to the Study

In recent years, there have been fundamental changes in the way people are employed all over the world. The standard employment arrangement in which workers are employed on permanent basis with benefits – paid holidays, pension and free health care is fast eroding. Non standard employment in form of temporary work, contingent work, agency work and contract work is taking over as employers are constantly devising ways to reduce cost of operation and maximize profit. Mbwaalala (2013), in Odeku (2015) also indicated that stiff competitions amongst all sectors of the economy are the reasons for devising cost effective strategies to hire casual workers for a certain purpose in the

organisation and emphasized that “the ever increasing regional and global trade competition has manifested itself in a growing number of non-standard forms of employment including the increasing use of “temporary employment services” or “labour brokers”.

This kind of work arrangement which is known as precarious employment is speedily gaining ground largely due to global economic downturn and high rate of unemployment, with workers having no other alternative but to face the reality and embrace it. The economic crisis that plunged the global economy into one of the most serious recessions in history in 2008 may well have exacerbated this problem, as employers continued to pursue strategies that have made employment flexible and undermine the very concept of job security (Evans and Gibb, 2009). Management's attempts to achieve flexibility led to various types of corporate restructuring, which in turn led to a growth in precarious work and transformations in the nature of the employment relationship (Osterman, 1999). The increasing use of precarious work practices in the workplace has raised the issue of the need for a concerted campaign to develop a policy and legislative framework that provides protection for workers employed under these arrangements (Wilson, 2013). This has, and continues to have, sweeping effects on the society.

In the formal and informal economy of Lagos State, Nigeria, a lot of workers suffer from insecure, uncertain, and unfavourable working conditions. In the oil and gas, banking, insurance, construction, maritime, educational, agricultural, telecommunication and manufacturing industries, the story is the same –workers have no choice but to accept contract work, contingent work, temporary work and fixed term work. Ordinarily, unions that are suppose to protect workers have largely gone out of extinction as years of sustained labour attrition by both government and employers expose vulnerable workers to all kind of exploitation. This work arrangement was predominant in the construction industry and agricultural sector and it was mainly for the unskilled in Nigeria. However, today both the skilled and the unskilled are engaged as casual workers in the informal sector, the organised private and public sectors of the economy (Danesi, 2011). A glorified nomenclature- contract staff; usually in triangular relationships and a source of cheap labour, is use to describe some workers in the formal economy.

Precarious work is characterized with uncertain duration jobs, termination of worker's service at will, low wages and benefits, no social protection and a loss of rights. Experts have portrayed precarious work as a major challenge bedeviling decent work in the Nigerian work environment. Fajana (2005) notes that it is difficult to give accurate statistics about the number of casual and contract workers in Nigeria because there are no official statistics showing the extent and trends of casualisation. Some organisations have been reported to have up to 60-90 percent of their workers as casual/contract employees (Animashaun, 2007). Outsourcing or labour broking companies are sprouting the landscape on daily basis, acting as intermediary for most organisations that prefer to hire temporary workers. In 2011, the call centre agents of Airtel Nigeria who are mostly

workers engaged in precarious work embarked on an industrial action to protest deplorable working conditions which include among others, the dissolution of their National Health Insurance Scheme, increase in working hours and days, unpredictable depletion in salary and bias policy against pregnant women.

Given these deliberations a strong case can be argued for a heightened likelihood of workplace conflict in both formal and informal economy in Lagos State organisations on ground of the influence of amongst others; nature of work (standard or nonstandard work), unfulfilled expectations, increasing uncertainty, complexity in the operating environment, competition for supremacy, competition for scarce resources and organisational change. It has been observed that although profit margin may increase temporarily through cost saving strategies, the life span of most of these organisations especially small medium enterprises in Lagos State hardly exceeds 10 years. Inability to recognize employees as “leading assets,” ineffective employee's retention policies, and deplorable working conditions result in high labour turnover, making it difficult to achieve higher organisational performance which requires stability of a competent workforce and consistency in service delivery over a period of time.

However, it is pertinent to state that precarious employment is often embraced by people who consider it as providing a temporary work arrangement that helps to provide short-term gains that nurtures body and soul for survival sake. To this set of people, no knowledge gained in the course of this type of work arrangement is a waste but add to future career progression experience that maybe useful at a later period.

#### Statement of the Problem

The global rise in precarious work in the world of work today is quite disturbing as unstable, flexible and temporary work arrangement is now the in-thing with its minimum benefits and uncertain job duration. Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2005), in Odeku (2015) suggested that the recent global economic crisis has been considered by many, as a major factor in the increased use of temporary or casual labour in order for organisations to be more flexible in their employment strategies. The massive shift away from regular employment into temporary work or jobs through agencies and labour brokers is having a deep impact on all workers, their families, and on the society (Eroko,2013), leading to both conflict at home and the workplace.

Most organisations in Lagos State, Nigeria including multinationals have in the process of saving cost, outsource some of its traditional work functions like Human Resource, Marketing, cleaning and security services to outsourcing companies or labour brokers who in turn employ workers as contract staff without benefits as enjoyed by permanent staff. This results in having workers with the same academic qualification, knowledge and skills, working in the same workplace with disparity in remuneration even when a contract staff's job performance is better than a permanent worker. However, some employers in Lagos State argue that the use of outsourcing in some cases may not necessarily be to cut costs but to help them concentrate on their core services while contracting out the ancillary services to labour and service contractors who specialize in

these areas (Danesi, 2011). Workers in precarious employment, are with no rights to severance pay, collective bargaining and can be dismissed from work at the whims and caprices of the employer, due to imbalance of power in the employer-worker relationship and by virtue of their employment status.

It is argued that workers in precarious work who are disenchanting due to low income, wage disparity, unfavourable working conditions and uncertainty of job duration, may nurse ill feelings of being unappreciated which manifest in organisational aggression leading to conflict in the workplace. In January 2015, about 450 workers were arbitrarily sacked from Radisson Blu Anchorage Hotel in Lagos, for agitating to belong to unions. This led to a workplace conflict that resulted in the organisation being shut down for months, and this consequently affected overall organisational performance and its goodwill. In September 2015, scores of workers at Lacasera Company Plc in Lagos State embarked on a protest because 700 workers received their sack letters unexpectedly.

Fapohunda, (2012) also observed the controversy surrounding the sacking of 3,000 workers by a Telecommunication Company, Airtel Nigeria Limited which became a matter of national concern, given the major issues that the alleged sacking raised in Nigeria's Industrial Relations Practice. The arbitrary sacking of worker sat will by employers in Lagos State isa regular phenomenon that has defile possible solution due to lack of government political will to deal decisively with these organisations that mitigate Labour laws through unethical practices.

However, precarious work is a two edged sword that has positivity and negativity. It has been observed that while some workers who have searched for jobs for years, are contented with the terms and conditions of precarious work due to pay and job experience to be acquired, various bodies and governments are still agitating for precarious work to be discarded or at best modified to create a conducive workplace environment for personal development, free flow for information and fair remuneration. There are workers who prefer precarious work because of the flexibility it offers them to hold multiple jobs and pursue other goals like university education or vocational training , while some married women are comfortable with it because it allows them time to look after family thereby creating an appropriate work life balance.

This paper therefore seeks to find out the following: the extent to which precarious work affects organisational performance, the impact of workplace conflict on organisational performance in selected companies in Lagos State, Nigeria.

#### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to determine the relationship between precarious work and workplace conflict and organisational performance in selected organisations in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives seeks to determine

- I. The relationship between precarious work and organizational performance
- II. The impact of workplace conflict on organisational performance.

## Research Questions

- I. To what extent does precarious work affect organisational performance?
- II. What is the relationship between workplace conflict and organisational performance?

## Literature Review

The focus here is on the review and determinant of the relationship between the variables in the title of this study which are precarious work, workplace conflict and organisational performance in selected organisations in Lagos State.

## Conceptual Review

### Precarious Work

Vermuyten (2014), states that the original meaning of the word "precarious" is "revocable", "uncertain" or "shaky". International Labour Organisation ILO (2011) asserts that precarious work is a term used to describe non-standard employment which is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and cannot support a household. Albeit, the term precarious work is usually used at the international level, its meaning remains imprecise and multidimensional and is also commonly used to chronicle the proliferation of unstable, unpredictable and vulnerable working conditions. Other terms that are used to describe precarious work include contingent, atypical or non-standard work. The bottom line is, employers with the objective of enhancing profitability are using different tactics to exploit workers who have substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining a trade union and bargaining collectively.

Precarious work arrangement in Lagos State is not dependable due to its uncertain duration, low job security and low income especially when it involves sole proprietorship/partnership enterprises that fire and hire workers at will. ILO (2011), asserts that precarious work is a means for employers to shift risks and responsibilities on to workers. It is work performed in both the formal and informal economy and is characterized by uncertainty and insecurity. The standard employment relationship generally refers to a situation where an employee has one employer; works in a permanent, year-round full-time position; enjoys extensive statutory benefits and entitlements; and expects to be employed indefinitely (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003). Any work arrangement that is at variance with the one expressed above is known as "non-standard" or "atypical employment".

It has been observed that some workers in the informal economy who are engaged in precarious work derive job satisfaction from it due to internal locus of control and work flexibility it offers, as it creates time for them to indulge in other aspirations. More so, they hardly pay tax because the informal sector which is not well regulated by the Lagos State government. Workers in the formal sector like the banking industry acknowledge that pay is better but complain of extra working hours with virtually no time to spend their salaries.

### Workplace Conflict

Conflict is a process of social interaction and a social situation, where interests and activities of participants (individuals or groups) actually or apparently, confront, block and disable the realization of one party's objectives (Jambrek and Peni , 2008),in (Spaho,2013).Conflict is endemic in any workplace or environment due to the divergent personalities with different views, culture and social cultural background. Owens (2001) contends that two things are essential to any conflict: (i) divergent (or apparently divergent) views and (ii) incompatibility of those views. *Work place conflict* refers to any kind of *conflict* that occurs within a *workplace* or among workers and/or management. If workers grievances and even suggestions are ignored and not addressed when expressed, the tendency is that there will be a display of counterproductive work behaviour that can torment workplaces including workers and clients. This means conflict occurs when there are divergent orientations and inadequate resource levels within a given organization (Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil, 2011).

Furthermore, Wagner and Hollenbeck (2002), in (Eshun,Bediako and Paintsil, 2011) maintain that conflict is a process of opposition and confrontation that can occur in organisations between either individuals or groups. That is, it occurs when parties exercise power in the pursuit of valued goals or objectives and obstruct the progress of other parties. In essence, conflict reflects disagreements, disparities, controversial ideas or clash expectations held on by two or more individuals or groups within an organisation (Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil,2011)..

Nature of work (standard or non standard), communication mode, motivation and organisational climate determines the type and level of workplace conflict. Sources of conflict in Lagos State organisations include amongst others diversity of culture, values, beliefs, competition, lack of recognition, organisational change, and introduction of new technology and mode of communication within and outside the organisation. A rancorous organisational climate generates organisational silence which impedes innovations, suggestions and vital information that would otherwise enhance higher organisational performance. According to Rivers (2005), the hidden costs of unresolved conflict in organisations are enormous and finding effective ways to manage and resolve organisational conflicts can have a significant impact on productivity and therefore, may enhance performance. Healthy differences of opinion are however vital in an organization in order for it not to stagnate, but when individuals are not able to work through their differences constructively and agree on a way forward, the conflict becomes destructive and damaging to individual, teams and ultimately to the organisation (Rivers, 2005).

### Organisational Performance

Organisational performance refers to the ability of management to utilize human, technological and material resources in an efficient and effective manner to accomplish set organisational objectives and goals. This is in line with Richardo and Wade (2010), who defined organisational performance as the ability of the organisation to achieve its goals and objectives. It is the outcome of various decisions and actions utilized in the

process of achieving organisational goals. These decisions and activities which may make or mar higher organizational performance which includes communication process, human resource retention policies, organisational culture, customer orientation, innovativeness, leadership style, technology adopted, organisational change process and organisational climate. Organisational performance can be measured in four ways which are relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and financial viability, and can be affected by organizational motivational incentives, organisational capacity and the environment of the business.

According to Richard et al. (2009), in Mukolwe, Korir, Eliza, Milka and Joseph (2015), organisational performance should be related to factors such as profitability, improved service delivery, customer satisfaction, market share growth, and improved productivity and sales.

Most workers in Lagos State, are only interested in salaries and not the job itself, preferring to engage in what Frederick Taylor described as *soldiering*. However, employee performance which is predicated on recognition, job satisfaction and adequate pay, increases with flexible scheduling which is most suitable for some employees who prefer multiple job holding or have other engagements like academic pursuit.

#### Theoretical Review

##### Marxist Theory

The unfolding scenario in Lagos State work environment in which capitalism reigns and by extension employers are practically “Lords of the Manor” in the industrial relations system is aptly captured by Karl Marx's postulation about the history of class struggle. Political power is decided by power over capital (production). Woods (2013), noted that capitalism contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction; that is, it is an anarchic and chaotic system characterized by periodic crises that throw people out of work and cause social and political instability.

High unemployment rate in Lagos State and employers incessant enthusiasm for profit at the detriment of workers have lead to an imbalance employer-worker relationship as workers face deplorable working conditions, resulting in workplace conflict. This is in line with Marx's prediction, in Woods (2013), of how the inherent conflict between capital and labour would manifest itself. As Karl Marx wrote in his book *Das Kapital*, companies' pursuit of profits and productivity would naturally lead them to need fewer and fewer workers, creating an 'industrial reserve army' of the poor and unemployed: 'Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery'.

##### Equity Theory

Equity Theory as propounded by John Adams in 1963, proposes that a person's motivation is based on what he or she considers to be fair when compared to others (Redmond, 2010), in (Housell, 2015). The idea of employing some workers as permanent staff while engaging others a temporary staff under precarious work arrangement is

arguably unfair, and creates inequality as temporary workers feel they are not fairly treated as their co-workers who are permanent staff. Workers' expectations such as self esteem, sense of belonging and praise from supervisor is often dashed resulting in reduction of inputs like skills, experience and training. This creates a workplace climate that impedes creativity, enthusiasm, loyalty, hard work, innovativeness, and demotivates some workers which manifest in inoperative behaviours that retards organisational performance. More so, promotion or pay-rise of a worker can affect other workers negatively who will feel they are not being recognized.

### Psychological Contract

Majorly in the work of organisational and behavioural theorists Chris Argyris and Edgar Schein in the 1960s, Psychological Contract is a concept that explains the relationship between an employer and employee especially as it relates to informal expectations, unwritten understanding and obligations. Armstrong (2006), asserts that psychological contract is the employment relationship which consists of a unique combination of beliefs held by an individual and his 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, benefits, growth and responsibility.

This is largely a mirage in the Lagos State work environment as employers continue to have a wide edge over employees in collective bargaining process coupled with the sustained labour attrition have emasculated unions that otherwise would have been a mouth piece of workers. The adoption of the mantra "paternalism" leadership style by Lagos State multinational and major companies in recent years have done well to send unions into near extinction as employers solely determine who gets what, how and when. Employers demand from workers increases by the day making it difficult for employees to fulfill employers' expectations such loyalty, sacrifice and commitment. Some workers 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 organisational performance. Perhaps, this explains the short life span of most enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria, especially sole proprietorship and partnership.

### Path Goal Theory

Path-goal theory, as propounded by Robert House in 1971 assumes that leaders are flexible and can change their style, as situation requires in guiding their subordinates to achieve organisational goals and objectives. Path goal theory refers to how leader's behaviour can motivate and increase job satisfaction of workers. The leader is expected to aid the workers in identifying their goals, mentoring so as to clear impediments that may arise in the course of achieving organisational performance and offer rewards when appropriate.



For higher performance to be achieved in a precarious work environment, participative leadership style may be used by managers to give workers a sense of belonging, recognition and create an organisational climate that elicit innovation, creativity and integrative thinking.

#### Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory as postulated by George Homans in 1958, proposes that the relationships we choose to create and maintain are the ones that maximize our rewards and minimize our costs (Long-Crowell, 2014). In the Employer-Worker relationship, employers are more egocentric and definitely not concerned with equality. Workers are likely to keep and value relationships for a long term that give them the most benefits for the least amount of effort which means they will prefer to stay in a work arrangement that they perceive could help them to their goals and objectives. Creating a synergy by aligning the interests of both employers and employees will minimize workplace conflict and help achieve higher organisational performance.

Workplace conflict can also be minimize if risks like industrial accidents, illnesses as a result of deplorable working conditions and job insecurity involved in precarious work, are relatively equated with benefits like adequate pay, recognition, provision of window for multiple job holding and freedom of workers to participate in decision making process. Workers in precarious work arrangement who are stressed and under pressure to provide family needs, may likely move to another job due to unfavourable imbalance between risks and benefits at the workplace, leading to labour turnover. Positive relationships are those in which the benefits outweigh the costs, while negative relationships occur when the costs are greater than the benefits (Cherry, 2014).

#### Relationship between Precarious work and Organisational Performance

wage inequality which is not tenable on the premise of a worker's performance, job instability vis a vis retention policy, and uncertainty about future income in precarious work creates anxiety for the worker leading to exhibition of organisational aggression at the workplace. The spillover effect is conflict in which affects the overall organizational performance. It is argued that organisational performance is premised on employee's disposition towards work activities. Abbas and Yaqoob (2009), in Khan, Khan and Khan (2011) asserted that employee performance is the important factor and the building block which increase the overall performance of an organization. Humans as "leading assets" in the workplace are essential to accomplishing higher organisational performance. Therefore, employers in their pursuit for profitability must take cognisance of the well being of their workers as performance is associated with consistency in service delivery which is achieve when there is a stable workforce that can only be sustained through motivation, cooperation and free flow of information .

Empirical studies like the Hawthorne experiment have shown that work environment and nature of work affects the behavior and enthusiasm of employees and this determine the level of job satisfaction, happiness and drive to enhance organisational performance. This is also in line with a study, -Can better working conditions improve the performance of SMEs? conducted by Croucher, Stumbitz, Quinlan and Vickers in 2013 for

International Labour Organisation. The research using descriptive survey approach ascertained that there is suggestive evidence of working conditions, safety and health, and skills development increasing positive outcomes which are creative innovations of employees, customer satisfaction and improved productivity. These deliberations confirms Research question I which seek to find out the extent to which precarious work affect organisational performance.

#### Relationship between Workplace Conflict and Organizational Performance

Soeharso (2003), contends that conflict is functional when it initiates the search for new and better ways of things and undermines complacency within the organisation. Furthermore, Pony (1990), in Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil (2011), claims that conflict induces greater creativity, more worker enthusiasm for better decisions. However, according to (Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil, 2011), conflict if poorly managed can rip an organization apart by creating walls between co-workers leading to poor performance and even resignations. It can have disastrous consequences and situations which may give rise to inefficiency, ineffectiveness among others for individuals and organizations.

Conflict strives in the most profitable organizations and so it is not a different scenario in organisations that engage in precarious work, due to the divergent interests of the parties in the industrial relation system. However, conflict can be minimize in organisations that allows for free flow of information which aid management to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of the workers . Organisation performance cannot be achieved in an environment that does not allow for synergy of activities in the workplace.

Van Tonder, Havenga and Visagie, in their study in 2008 on the Causes of Conflict in Public and Private Sector Organizations in South Africa, utilized a single, experimental 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire on 386 employees and with the aid of ANOVAs procedures established that conflict has recognizable effect on interpersonal relations of employees, contributes to a decreased in performance and generates counterproductive behaviour that affects emotional and physical wellbeing of the employee.

A cross-sectional study on Organisational Conflict and its Effects on Organisational Performance was conducted by Ongori Henry in 2009 using survey research design. Questionnaire was administered on One hundred and thirty managers and findings suggest that organisational conflicts do exist in organisations, conflicts have both positive and negative effects on the organisation and conflicts if not nipped in the bud may affect the organisation negatively in terms of creativity from employees, avoidable mistakes leading to workplace accidents, wasting of resources and labour turnover.

Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil in 2011, conducted a study on Assessment of Conflict among Supervisors and operational employees in Ghanaian Mines. Data was collected from 139 people mostly comprising of supervisors and operational employees using developed Likert structured questionnaire and interview as research instruments. Results received

with the help of descriptive statistics for the analysis of the data collected, reveal that conflicts creates a climate of mistrust, decrease communication, increases tension, hostilities, suspicion and lower productivity. These deliberation supports research question II that state there is a relationship between workplace and organisational performance.

#### Relationship Between Precarious Work, Workplace Conflict and Organisation Performance

In a study on the Impact of Conflict Management on Employees' Performance in A Public Sector Organisation in Nigeria;a case of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), conducted by Ojo and Abolade in 2014 using survey design, stratified sampling technique, questionnaire and descriptive statistics, findings revealed that effective conflict management increase employee performance in the workplace. It also suggested training, effective communication and a conducive workplace environment as panacea for higher organisational performance. This aligns with the general objective of this study which seeks to determine the relationship that exists between precarious work, workplace conflict and organisation performance.

It has been observed that the aftermath of precarious work on some workers include perception of being undervalued, job dissatisfaction and psychological disarray which manifest in hostility in the workplace. The spill out is stress, communication breakdown, lack of synchronization of activities and poor enforcement of directives, leading to far-ranging negative work attitude that causes workplace conflict Furthermore, negative work attitude can crowd out integrative thinking and accentuate labour turnover, absenteeism, health issues, abuse against others, bullying, incivility and go-slow in work activities.

However, conflict can serve as a useful function by stimulating creative solutions to problems (Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil, 2011). That is, conflict can be positive and capable of generating solutions to organisational issues that would have otherwise result in organisational silence which stagnate innovation, free flow of information and creativity. Danso-Mensah (2003), in Eshun, Bediako and Paintsil (2011) alludes that conflict improves organisational effectiveness by stimulating change and improving the decision making process. Thus, it is an agent for evolution and for internal and external change (Mullins, 2006).

#### Conclusion/Discussion

There is no doubt precarious work has come to stay for now pending when economic prosperity returns and the imbalance employer- worker relationship, as predicted by Karl Marx 130 years ago, is resolved. Until then, employers must strive to minimize workplace conflict through concerted effort of involving workers in decision making and creating an enabling work environment since it is not only money that motivates. The idea of having different set of workers in the same workplace is indeed disheartening and only serves to create conflict, as lackadaisical attitude and ill feelings towards management policies by workers will do an organisation no good. Stability of the

workforce is a sine quo non for higher organisational performance and this can be achieved when effective conflict resolution strategies are in place to counter any iota of conflict through collective bargaining.

An organisation should be proactive in monitoring industrial wide wages so as not to pay below what other organisations are paying, discover workers needs so as to apply the right motivational incentives and create a workplace that allows for employees recognition, empowerment, work flexibility, free flow of information and safety.

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