

Decent Work and Employee Performance in Nigeria: Adopting an Integrated Programmatic Approach

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Abstract

The importance of decent work in the organization cannot be overstressed. Decent work advocates enhancing the quality of the employee. One way of doing this is through skills development and training of the workforce. It is imperative for all countries to take heed of the requirements of decent work so that better and conducive working environments are created for the labor force. The study examines the concept of decent work and organizational performance in Nigeria. Data is obtained primarily from secondary sources and examined through content analysis. Extant literature reviewed revealed that several factors are responsible for low productivity, mainly worker's discrimination and low pay. The study identifies the framework of the integrated programmatic approach as suitable for improving the performance of public organizations in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Decent work, Employee, Performance, Integrated pragmatic approach*

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Background to the Study

Decent work is a term originally coined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a report published in June 1999, when it described the goal of decent work as 'not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quality'. The publication stated very clearly that “the level of employment (quantity) cannot be divorced from its quality”. The ILO report recognized that all societies had a notion of decent work, but that the quality of employment could mean many things. It could relate to different forms of work, and also to different conditions of work, as well as to feelings of value and satisfaction.

In strengthening the framework of effective work performance, the ILO saw the need to devise social and economic systems that would ensure basic security and employment while remaining capable of adaptation to rapidly changing circumstances in a highly competitive global market. For the ILO, decent work lies at the 'heart of social progress and thus has become one of its major strategic policy concepts.

The concept and practice of decent work in the organizations is a universal objective and has been included in major human rights declarations, UN Resolutions and outcome documents from major conferences including Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), World Summit Outcome Document (2005), the high level segment of ECOSOC (2006), the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017), Conference on Sustainable Development (2011) and in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). The Nigerian government, in its bid to achieve effectiveness in public service performance, cannot be left out in achieving decent work principle in its service organizations and department (General Comment 18, 2006; ILO (2009 & 2010); Ndongo, 2017).

The aim of this study is to assess the concept of decent work and organizational performance in Nigeria. The study identifies the framework of the integrated programmatic approach and adopts it as a strategic framework for improving the performance of public organizations in Nigeria.

Statement of the research problem

There are cases of unfair treatments in the work organizations and this affects the level of employee productivity. There are various forms of unfair treatment in the organization. These include, spreading rumours about an employee, overlooking someone for a promotion for no good reason, making offensive comments, emails, or social media posts to or about someone, making someone's life difficult with unfair criticism and menial tasks, demotion, transfer, or dismissal without a fair disciplinary procedure, unfair treatment at work due to illness and so on. All this leads to the act of discrimination, which can lead to the feeling of upset, shamed, and even scared. When this happens, it affects the morale and productivity level of workers.

While fair treatment in employment encompasses fair treatment in employment, stability, safety and security at work as well as combining work and family life, it has been noted that traditionally men and women are treated differently around the world's labor markets. Unfair

treatment affects the achievement of the objectives of decent work in Nigeria, especially in the public and private sector.

In addition, wages and salaries play an important role in determining productivity growth in the Nigerian civil service. However, emerging studies have shown that there are other factors such as motivational incentives and modern technological facilities made available to their employees. Like most developing economies, the Nigerian public sector has low productivity as measured by its output in relation to its capital and labor inputs (Obasaolufemi, 2014). This problem is caused by government non-sustainability action towards labor and its insensitivity towards the unprecedented poor wages and incentives given to public workers (Obasaolufemi, 2014). Assessing this challenge and enhancing the achievement of an integrated pragmatic approach of decent work in Nigeria, is the focus of this paper. Data are obtained from secondary sources and assessed through the use of content analysis.

Conceptual literature

Decent Work

Decent work is defined as work that is freely chosen with guarantees of adequate earnings, workers' rights, social protection and dialogue and devoid of discrimination. The indices outlined above are seen as the bedrock of a decent job. This work, therefore, attempts to establish a relationship between the presence or absence of these indices and performance of civil servants.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work involves opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (ILO, 2011).

Decent work includes six dimensions which are the opportunity to work, productive work, equity at work, freedom at work, security at work and dignity at work. The basic objectives of decent work are relevant to all economies irrespective of their level of development (ILO 2012). The decent work approach maintains that all job seekers, irrespective of their nationalities desire to obtain employment. It states that all workers whether in state enterprises, the formal or informal economy or self-employment desire levels of remuneration in cash or kind that provide at least a minimum standard of living for their families (Panmela, Stephen, Patricia and Fanddt, 2004).

In addition, all workers wish to work in safe and healthy conditions and to have secure livelihoods. Workers in all categories of employment seek the right to form their own organizations to defend and promote their interests and to participate in decisions that affect them as workers.

Employee Performance

Anam (2012) maintained that performance can be defined as “the ability of an employee to accomplish his or mission based on the expectations of an organization”. According to Panmela, Stephen, Patricia, and Fanddt (2004), employee performance has been described as the degree of achievement of set goals or missions of the workplace or organization. It refers to the range of measurement of transactional efficiency and input and output efficiency. Various organizations, however, have varied yardsticks for measuring performance depending on the products and or services rendered by the organization. The civil service is a service-oriented organization and performance is measured by the quality of the service especially in terms of timeliness of service delivery. The civil servants will be seen as performing optimally when they attend to work on time when they do not absent themselves from work when files are treated promptly and given the attention that is required.

The challenges of decent work: the Nigerian experience

To achieve the objectives of decent work in the organization, a lot is required. Among several scholars, the concept of decent work poses challenges and controversies. In Africa, for example, informal employment is the norm, while well-paying jobs that offer social-protection benefits are the exception (Nwizu, 2008). He explained further that the Decent Work Agenda requires national and international actors to commit to the objective of creating quality jobs globally and to pursue cooperative solutions to this challenge. However, governments struggle to convince their publics that development and job creation abroad is imperative to prosperity and employment at home. Some governments also face the temptation to close markets and lower labor standards to remain competitive in a world economy that is blamed for depressing wages and working conditions.

Obasaolufemi (2014) carried out a critical study of Nigeria's public sector. He showed that the cost of running these bureaucratic institutions is so alarming that they became a drain pipe of hard earned resources. This heinous development raises some fundamental questions on their existence and importance as government ministries, departments, and parastatals whose major reason for their establishment is to sustain economic and social development of Nigerian state (Obasaolufemi, 2014). It is important to add that there is a general belief that the politicians and past military juntas were responsible for the state and height of poverty, corruption, low productivity and non-performance of public servants. Scholars believed that the performance of the public sector in Nigeria has been replete with varying contradictions (Adeyemo and Salami, 2008) and has even become an epitome of all that is corrupt, mediocre and fraudulent (Imhonopi and Urim, 2013).

Obasaolufemi (2014) reiterated that from the military autocratic leaders to the quasi-democratic governments; all have collaborated with public officers to swindle the public fund for their personal use. The argument that the government has no financial capacity to review the income of public servants may not be tenable considering the degree of financial embezzlement committed by the public officers in the political environment and civil institutions. He added that the public sector's inefficiency is not limited to low income as it were. The following factors are also attributed to low productivity such as:

- (1) Colonial, outdated administrative machinery
- (2) The poor capacity of the majority of civil servants, sometimes to the point of illiteracy
- (3) Certificate forgery to gain entry and get promotions
- (4) Age falsification to remain in service beyond the stipulated period/ age
- (5) Corruption
- (6) Policy reversals
- (7) Primordial considerations like ethnicity at the expense of merit, etc.

The Nigerian public sector ever since the country's independence from Britain in 1960 has been grappling with weak governance structure, red-tapism, weak accountability, low professional standards, waste and corruption, poor productivity, and lack of control, redundancy and over-bloated staff structure (Ogunrotifa, 2012).

From the above arguments, it will be right to state that the problem of the public sector arose from the problem of securing appropriate income for public servants and this has continued after many years, despite several reform measures. This contradicts the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, which “sums up people's aspirations for a full and productive employment that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men” (ILO, 2010).

The low performance of the Nigerian public sector is also shown in the pattern of the income distribution. Recent experiences have increased the concern of most Nigerians over the overall effect of performance of the economy on the generality of the population. The concerns of low income paid to workers have really generated a strong argument and counter-argument on the part of government, labor, and workers. Unless this is significantly addressed, the challenges of low employee performance in Nigeria will not be properly addressed.

Integrated programmatic approach for civil service performance in Nigeria

The ILO Decent Work Agenda is the balanced and integrated programmatic approach to pursue the objectives of full and productive employment and decent work for all at global, regional, national, sectoral and local levels. It has four pillars:

- a. Standards and rights at work,
- b. Employment creation and enterprise development,
- c. Social protection:
- d. Social dialogue.

There must be clear standards and rights at work for workers to perform maximally in the organization. This must be complemented with enterprise development as a basis for workers motivation and productivity. It is important to emphasize the pillars of social protection and social dialogue. The objective of social protection can be achieved in two ways: by pushing for the rapid implementation of national social protection floors of basic social security

guarantees that ensure universal access to essential health care and income security while also improving existing social protection schemes to provide higher levels of benefits, progressively, to as many people as possible.

Social dialogue is described as any form of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information among representatives of government, employers and workers on issues of common interest. It provides a vehicle for the participants especially workers to defend their interests, articulate their concerns and priorities and engage the stronger partners on matters of social and economic interest. It remains the only avenue through which workers rights can be defended against policies that are detrimental to their wellbeing. The relationship between social dialogue and employee performance cannot be overemphasized. This is because it is inherent that every human being wants to be involved in making decisions concerning his/her life and targets set by an individual for himself/herself remain a greater motivational force than targets set for him/her by other people.

The importance attached to social dialogue by the ILO is demonstrated by the provisions of two core conventions: Conventions No. 87 (1948) on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organise and Convention No. 98 (1949) on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining. These conventions provide the bedrock for the protection of fundamental human rights at the workplace.

Njoku (2013) opined that social dialogue plays a prominent role in enhancing performance. Because it removes from the employees the thought of their rights being trampled upon and this, in turn, encourages innovation and initiative and improves performance. Available data shows that during periods of labor engagement with government, workers usually come to work early and avoid absenteeism which is an indication of improved performance in the civil service. Given these strategic considerations, the Nigerian public service will enhance the productive capacity of workers.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The paper examined the concept of decent work and organizational performance in Nigeria. Extant literature reviewed revealed that several factors are responsible for low productivity, mainly workers discrimination and low pay. The study identifies the framework of the integrated programmatic approach as suitable for improving the performance of public organizations in Nigeria. This is in line with the agenda created by the ILO to include job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective.

The paper therefore recommends the need for the Nigerian government to create opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

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