

The Influence of the Psychological Contract on Employee Commitment and Organisational Performance in Nigeria: Evidence from First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, Cross River State

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Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijedesr.v9.i1.25

Keywords:

Psychological contract, Employee commitment, Organisational performance, Nigeria, Educational sector

This study examines the influence of the psychological contract on employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigeria, with empirical reference to First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, Cross River State. The psychological contract represents the unwritten set of expectations between employees and employers that shapes attitudes, commitment, and performance outcomes. The study adopts a qualitative content analysis design drawing from secondary data, institutional reports, and contemporary literature on human resource management, organisational behaviour, and educational administration. The objectives are to examine the relationship between psychological contract fulfilment and employee commitment, assess the effect of psychological contract breach on organisational performance, and analyse how employee commitment mediates organisational effectiveness. Findings from literature and institutional evidence suggest that psychological contract fulfilment significantly enhances employee commitment, job satisfaction, and organisational performance, while contract breach leads to reduced motivation, absenteeism, and poor service delivery. Evidence from First Assured Premier College indicates that employee performance is strongly linked to perceived fairness, management support, and fulfilment of implicit obligations. The study concludes that psychological contract management is a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions. It recommends improved leadership practices, transparent communication, and strengthened human resource policies.

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Background to the Study

The psychological contract has become a central and highly influential concept in organisational behaviour, human resource management, and contemporary workplace studies. Unlike formal employment contracts, which specify written and legally binding obligations between employers and employees, the psychological contract refers to the unwritten, implicit, and subjective expectations that both parties hold regarding their employment relationship. These expectations often include fairness in treatment, job security, timely remuneration, opportunities for career development, recognition of effort, supportive leadership, and a conducive work environment. The concept has gained increasing scholarly attention because it provides deeper insight into employee attitudes and workplace behaviour beyond what formal contracts can explain. Rousseau (1995) conceptualised the psychological contract as an individual's belief in mutual obligations between themselves and the organisation. These beliefs significantly influence employee commitment, trust, motivation, and overall performance. When employees perceive that the organisation has fulfilled its obligations, they are more likely to demonstrate positive work attitudes such as loyalty, engagement, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Conversely, when these perceived obligations are violated, employees may respond with dissatisfaction, withdrawal behaviour, reduced productivity, and increased turnover intention. In contemporary organisational settings, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria, the psychological contract has become increasingly relevant due to persistent challenges in human resource management, including inconsistent reward systems, limited career progression opportunities, and weak institutional trust structures.

These challenges are especially pronounced in the educational sector, where service delivery depends heavily on employee commitment, motivation, and professional competence. Anam (2024) emphasises that employee commitment in both public and private institutions is strongly shaped by perceived organisational support, leadership behaviour, fairness in administrative processes, and the degree to which implicit expectations between employers and employees are fulfilled. According to this perspective, organisations that demonstrate consistency, transparency, and responsiveness to employee needs are more likely to experience higher levels of workforce stability, improved productivity, and enhanced institutional performance. This aligns with broader human resource management literature, which highlights that psychological contract fulfilment is a key predictor of organisational effectiveness in both developed and developing contexts. Within the Nigerian educational system, these dynamics are particularly significant. Schools and colleges rely not only on formal administrative structures but also on the discretionary effort and commitment of academic and non-academic staff. Where employees perceive fairness and organisational support, they are more likely to go beyond their formal job descriptions, thereby enhancing teaching quality, student satisfaction, and institutional reputation. First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, Cross River State, provides a relevant institutional context for this study.

The institution is experiencing gradual expansion in terms of student enrolment, staffing needs, and administrative complexity. As with many private educational institutions in Nigeria, it operates within a competitive environment where quality service delivery, staff retention, and organisational performance are critical for sustainability and growth. However, despite this expansion, there are emerging concerns regarding employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall organisational performance. Informal observations suggest that issues such as perceived inequities in reward systems, limited opportunities for professional development, communication gaps between management and staff, and inconsistent motivational structures may be affecting the psychological contract between employees and the institution. These concerns are important because they potentially undermine employee commitment, which in turn affects organisational performance and service delivery outcomes. Empirical studies in organisational behaviour have consistently shown that breaches of the psychological contract can lead to reduced trust in management, lower employee engagement, increased absenteeism, and diminished productivity. This study investigates the influence of the psychological contract on employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigeria, with specific reference to First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo. The study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on human resource management and organisational behaviour by providing context-specific insights into how psychological contract dynamics shape workplace outcomes in Nigerian educational institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Organisations in Nigeria continue to experience declining employee commitment and inconsistent performance despite formal employment contracts and organisational policies. A major contributing factor is the violation or neglect of psychological contracts. Employees often perceive a mismatch between expected and actual organisational support, particularly in areas such as salary structure, career progression, recognition, and working conditions. This perception leads to reduced commitment, low morale, and poor performance. At First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, informal observations and institutional reports suggest issues such as:

- i. Irregular motivation structures
- ii. Limited professional development opportunities
- iii. Perceived inequity in reward systems
- iv. Communication gaps between management and staff

These challenges negatively affect employee commitment and organisational effectiveness. Empirical studies in Nigeria confirm that psychological contract breach reduces organisational commitment and performance (Joel et al., 2022; Inegbedion, 2024). However, limited attention has been given to private educational institutions in Cross River State, creating a contextual gap this study addresses.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the influence of the psychological contract on employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigeria.

Specifically, it seeks to:

- i. Examine the relationship between psychological contract fulfilment and employee commitment in First Assured Premier College.
- ii. Assess the effect of psychological contract breach on organisational performance.
- iii. Analyse the mediating role of employee commitment on organisational performance.
- iv. Identify institutional factors shaping psychological contract perceptions.

Research questions

- i. How does psychological contract fulfilment influence employee commitment in First Assured Premier College?
- ii. What is the effect of psychological contract breach on organisational performance?
- iii. How does employee commitment influence organisational performance?
- iv. What factors shape psychological contract perceptions among employees?

Conceptual Literature

The Psychological Contract

The psychological contract refers to the unwritten, implicit set of expectations that exist between employees and their organisation regarding mutual obligations, responsibilities, and reciprocal exchange. Unlike formal employment contracts that are legally binding and explicitly stated, the psychological contract is subjective and based on perceptions of fairness, trust, and mutual respect. Rousseau (1995) conceptualises the psychological contract as an individual's belief system regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the employee and the organisation. These beliefs are shaped by organisational practices, managerial behaviour, communication patterns, and workplace experiences. In organisational settings, the psychological contract typically includes expectations such as job security, fair remuneration, career advancement opportunities, recognition of effort, supportive supervision, and conducive working conditions. When these expectations are met, employees perceive contract fulfilment; when they are violated, psychological contract breach occurs. Anam (2024) argues that psychological contract dynamics in Nigerian institutions are strongly influenced by leadership behaviour, organisational justice, and perceived support systems. He further notes that informal expectations often play a greater role than formal policies in shaping employee attitudes in developing economies.

Employee Commitment

Employee commitment refers to the psychological attachment and loyalty an employee has toward their organisation. It reflects the degree to which employees identify with organisational goals and are willing to exert effort to achieve them. Commitment is widely recognised as a key determinant of employee performance and organisational effectiveness.

Meyer and Allen (1997) classify employee commitment into three dimensions:

- i. Affective commitment: emotional attachment to the organisation
- ii. Continuance commitment: perceived cost of leaving the organisation
- iii. Normative commitment: sense of obligation to remain in the organisation

In the Nigerian context, employee commitment is often shaped by job satisfaction, leadership quality, remuneration structure, and organisational culture. According to Inegbedion (2024), affective commitment is particularly influenced by perceived organisational justice and job satisfaction, which are themselves linked to psychological contract fulfilment. Anam (2024) further emphasises that employee commitment in public and private organisations is largely determined by how well management meets employees' implicit expectations regarding fairness, recognition, and professional growth.

Organisational Performance

Organisational performance refers to the ability of an organisation to achieve its goals efficiently and effectively using available resources. It is a multidimensional construct that includes productivity, service quality, efficiency, innovation, and overall institutional effectiveness. Armstrong (2021) describes organisational performance as the outcome of coordinated efforts of employees, systems, and management practices aimed at achieving strategic objectives. In educational institutions, performance is measured through indicators such as teaching effectiveness, student satisfaction, administrative efficiency, staff productivity, and institutional reputation. In Nigeria, organisational performance is often influenced by human resource practices, leadership quality, funding levels, and employee motivation. Poor alignment between employee expectations and organisational practices often results in low productivity and weak institutional outcomes. Anam (2024) argues that organisational performance in Nigerian institutions is deeply connected to human resource management effectiveness, particularly employee motivation, commitment, and leadership support systems.

Psychological Contract Fulfilment and Breach

Psychological contract fulfilment occurs when employees perceive that the organisation has met its obligations, whether formal or informal. This leads to increased trust, motivation, and commitment. Psychological contract breach, on the other hand, occurs when employees perceive that the organisation has failed to meet its obligations. This perception often results in dissatisfaction, reduced performance, withdrawal behaviour, and turnover intention (Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

In Nigerian organisations, psychological contract breach is commonly associated with delayed promotions, poor remuneration, lack of recognition, and inadequate working conditions. These issues significantly affect employee morale and organisational stability. The relationship between psychological contract, employee commitment, and organisational performance is interdependent. Psychological contract serves as the foundation for employee attitudes and perceptions. When fulfilled, it enhances employee

commitment, which in turn improves organisational performance. Conversely, when breached, it weakens commitment and reduces performance outcomes. This conceptual relationship aligns with Anam (2024), who argues that organisational effectiveness is a function of the interaction between human resource practices, leadership behaviour, and employee psychological perceptions in Nigerian institutions.

In this study, the psychological contract is treated as the independent variable, employee commitment as the mediating variable, and organisational performance as the dependent variable. The framework suggests that:

Psychological Contract → Employee Commitment → Organisational Performance

This conceptual pathway provides the analytical foundation for understanding how implicit employee-employer expectations influence institutional outcomes in First Assured Premier College and similar educational institutions in Nigeria.

Psychological Contract and Employee Commitment

Empirical literature consistently demonstrates that psychological contract fulfilment is a strong predictor of employee commitment across organisational settings. When employees perceive that their organisation has met its implicit obligations, such as fairness in treatment, timely recognition of effort, job security, and opportunities for development, they are more likely to develop strong emotional attachment and loyalty to the organisation. This emotional attachment is often reflected in increased willingness to exert discretionary effort, improved attendance, and stronger alignment with organisational goals (Joel et al., 2022). In the Nigerian context, the influence of the psychological contract on commitment is particularly pronounced due to persistent concerns about fairness, remuneration, and institutional trust. Studies indicate that affective commitment among employees is largely shaped by job satisfaction, perceived organisational justice, and leadership responsiveness (Inegbedion, 2024). Where employees perceive management decisions as transparent and equitable, their commitment levels tend to increase significantly. Conversely, perceived injustice or unmet expectations often leads to disengagement and reduced organisational loyalty. Anam (2024) further reinforces this position by arguing that employee commitment in Nigerian institutions is strongly dependent on perceived organisational support and the consistency of leadership behaviour in fulfilling both formal and informal obligations. This suggests that psychological contract fulfilment is not merely a motivational factor but a structural determinant of workforce stability and productivity.

Psychological Contract and Organisational Performance

The psychological contract also has significant implications for organisational performance. When the psychological contract is breached, through unmet expectations regarding rewards, promotion, working conditions, or recognition, employees often respond with reduced motivation, declining job satisfaction, and increased turnover intentions. These behavioural outcomes collectively undermine organisational effectiveness and service delivery (Lee et al., 2023). Psychological contract breach can also

lead to reduced trust in management, withdrawal behaviours, and lower levels of organisational citizenship behaviour, all of which negatively affect productivity. In educational institutions, this may manifest as reduced teaching effectiveness, poor administrative coordination, and declining service quality. On the other hand, organisations that fulfil psychological contracts tend to experience improved innovation, higher levels of employee engagement, and stronger organisational citizenship behaviour. Employees in such environments are more likely to exceed formal job requirements, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and contribute to institutional development beyond assigned responsibilities.

Employee Commitment and Organisational Performance

Employee commitment plays a mediating role between psychological contract and organisational performance. Empirical studies in Nigerian sectors such as banking, education, and manufacturing show that committed employees significantly contribute to improved organisational outcomes (Barbara, 2024). High levels of commitment are associated with increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, improved service delivery, and enhanced organisational stability. Committed employees are also more likely to identify with organisational goals and participate actively in achieving institutional objectives. This is particularly important in service-oriented organisations such as educational institutions, where performance is closely tied to human interaction, instructional quality, and administrative efficiency. Anam (2024) emphasizes that organisational performance in Nigerian institutions is not solely dependent on structural factors but also on the psychological disposition of employees, particularly their level of commitment and perceived organisational support.

Institutional Context: First Assured Premier College

At First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, Cross River State, evidence from institutional practices and observed workforce dynamics suggests that employee performance is shaped by both formal management structures and informal psychological contract expectations. Key factors influencing psychological contract perceptions in the institution include:

- i. Management communication style: The extent to which management communicates decisions transparently and engages staff in decision-making processes influences trust and perceived fairness.
- ii. Reward systems: Perceived fairness and consistency in salary payment, allowances, and recognition strongly affect employee satisfaction and commitment levels.
- iii. Work environment: The physical and psychological working conditions, including workload distribution and institutional support, shape employee motivation and performance.
- iv. Professional development opportunities: Access to training, workshops, and career advancement opportunities enhances employees' perception of organisational support and long-term commitment.

These factors collectively shape the psychological contract between employees and the institution. Where employees perceive that these expectations are being met, they demonstrate higher commitment, improved job performance, and stronger organisational identification. However, where gaps exist between expectations and reality, there is a tendency toward reduced motivation and weakened organisational performance. Anam (2024) argues that such dynamics are typical in Nigerian educational institutions where informal expectations often play a significant role in shaping employee behaviour beyond formal job descriptions.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

This study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). The theory posits that relationships between individuals and organisations are based on reciprocal exchanges. When employees perceive that the organisation fulfils its obligations, they respond with higher commitment and improved performance. In contrast, psychological contract breach reduces trust and weakens employee commitment, leading to reduced organisational effectiveness. Anam (2024) supports this view by noting that organisational performance in Nigerian institutions is strongly influenced by perceived fairness, leadership behaviour, and reciprocal employee-employer relationships.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative content analysis research design. This approach is considered appropriate because it enables a systematic and interpretative examination of existing documentary materials in order to understand patterns, meanings, and relationships within the phenomenon of psychological contract, employee commitment, and organisational performance. The design is particularly suitable for studying organisational behaviour issues where perceptions, expectations, and institutional practices are best understood through textual and documentary evidence rather than numerical measurement. Data for the study were obtained from multiple secondary sources to ensure depth and credibility of analysis. These include academic journals on organisational behaviour and human resource management, institutional records from First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, government education reports, relevant human resource management (HRM) literature, and recent Nigerian empirical studies published between 2021 and 2026. These sources provided a broad and contextually relevant foundation for understanding psychological contract dynamics in Nigerian educational institutions. Content analysis was used as the primary method of data analysis. This involved systematically identifying and interpreting recurring themes such as psychological contract fulfilment, employee commitment, organisational performance, and leadership and human resource management practices. The study further employed thematic interpretation to examine relationships among these variables, particularly how psychological contract perceptions influence employee attitudes and organisational outcomes within the selected institutional context.

Table 1: Empirical Discussion of Findings

Finding	Empirical Observation	Explanation / Interpretation	Theoretical Link & Literature Support
Finding 1: Psychological Contract Enhances Commitment	Employees who perceive fulfilment of psychological contract obligations show stronger emotional attachment, loyalty, and willingness to remain in the institution.	When employees feel that management has met implicit expectations such as fairness, recognition, job security, and support, they develop trust in the organisation. This trust strengthens emotional attachment and encourages discretionary effort, leading to higher commitment levels.	Supported by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which emphasizes reciprocity in relationships. Aligns with Anam (2024), who argues that perceived organisational support significantly enhances employee commitment in Nigerian institutions.
Finding 2: Contract Breach Reduces Performance	Perceived unfairness, unmet expectations, and poor treatment lead to reduced motivation, low productivity, and withdrawal behaviours among employees.	Psychological contract breach creates feelings of betrayal and dissatisfaction. Employees respond by reducing effort, disengaging from responsibilities, and sometimes withdrawing psychologically or physically from work. This negatively affects organisational output and service delivery.	Consistent with Robinson & Morrison (2000) and Lee et al. (2023), who found that psychological contract breach reduces performance and increases turnover intention. Also supported by Anam (2024) on the impact of poor HR practices in Nigerian organisations.
Finding 3: Commitment Drives Organisational Performance	Employee commitment acts as a mediating factor that translates psychological contract perceptions into organisational performance outcomes.	Employees who are committed are more likely to be productive, reliable, and proactive in achieving organisational goals. Commitment enhances cooperation, reduces absenteeism, and improves service delivery, especially in educational institutions.	Supported by Meyer & Allen's (1997) three-component model of commitment. Aligns with Armstrong (2021), who links employee commitment to organisational productivity and efficiency. Anam (2024) also highlights commitment as a core driver of institutional effectiveness.
Finding 4: Institutional Factors Matter	Leadership style, communication patterns, reward systems, and workplace environment significantly shape psychological contract perceptions at First Assured Premier College.	The way management communicates decisions, rewards performance, and engages employees determines whether employees perceive fairness and support. Positive leadership practices strengthen trust, while poor communication weakens the psychological contract.	Supported by organisational behaviour literature (Armstrong, 2021). Anam (2024) emphasizes that leadership behaviour and HR practices are central to shaping employee attitudes and organisational outcomes in Nigerian institutions.

The findings from literature and content review demonstrate a strong interrelationship between psychological contract fulfilment, employee commitment, and organisational performance. The evidence suggests that when employees perceive fairness and

organisational support, commitment increases and performance improves. Conversely, breach of psychological contract leads to disengagement and reduced organisational effectiveness. These findings strongly align with Anam (2024), who posits that human resource management practices and leadership behaviour are decisive factors in determining organisational success in Nigerian institutions, particularly within the educational sector.

Challenges of Psychological Contract on Employee Commitment and Organisational Performance

The study identifies several interrelated challenges that hinder the effective management of the psychological contract and, by extension, employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigerian educational institutions, with specific reference to First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo.

- i. **Weak Human Resource (HR) Policies:** Many private educational institutions operate without fully developed or consistently implemented HR policies. This weak institutional framework limits the ability of management to clearly define expectations, enforce standards, and ensure fairness in employee relations. As a result, psychological contract expectations often remain ambiguous, leading to misunderstanding between staff and management.
- ii. **Poor Communication Systems:** Ineffective communication between management and employees significantly weakens trust and contributes to psychological contract breach. When decisions regarding workload, remuneration, promotion, and institutional changes are not transparently communicated, employees may perceive unfair treatment or neglect, which negatively affects commitment.
- iii. **Inconsistent Reward Structures:** Irregular salary payments, unclear promotion criteria, and lack of performance-based incentives create dissatisfaction among employees. Inconsistent reward systems reduce employees' belief in organisational fairness and weaken their psychological attachment to the institution.
- iv. **Limited Training Opportunities:** Continuous professional development is a key expectation within the psychological contract. However, many private educational institutions provide limited opportunities for staff training, workshops, and academic development. This reduces employee motivation and limits capacity building, thereby affecting overall organisational performance.
- v. **Perceived Inequity in Management Practices:** Employees often compare their treatment with that of colleagues, and perceived inequality in task allocation, recognition, or promotion can damage trust in management. Such perceptions contribute to emotional disengagement and reduced commitment.
- vi. **Financial Constraints in Private Educational Institutions:** Many private schools operate under financial pressure due to fluctuating student enrolment and limited external funding. These constraints affect salary structures, infrastructure development, and staff welfare, thereby weakening the organisation's ability to meet employee expectations.

- vii. **Expectation–Reality Mismatch Between Staff and Management:** A major psychological contract challenge arises when employee expectations regarding job security, career progression, workload, and rewards differ significantly from what management is able or willing to provide. This mismatch often results in dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and lower organisational commitment.

These challenges demonstrate that psychological contract management is deeply influenced by both structural and relational factors within the institution. Without addressing these issues, sustaining high levels of employee commitment and organisational performance remains difficult.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the psychological contract plays a critical and decisive role in shaping employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigeria, particularly within educational institutions. The evidence from both literature and the case of First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, demonstrates that employees' perceptions of fairness, organisational support, and fulfilment of implicit expectations significantly influence their attitudes and work behaviour. Where psychological contract expectations are fulfilled, through fair treatment, transparent communication, recognition of effort, and adequate support, employees tend to exhibit higher levels of trust, motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. These positive behavioural outcomes translate into improved organisational performance, better service delivery, and enhanced institutional reputation.

Conversely, when psychological contract obligations are perceived to be violated, employees respond with reduced commitment, low morale, withdrawal behaviours, and declining productivity. Such outcomes negatively affect institutional efficiency and undermine the achievement of organisational goals. At First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo, employee commitment is particularly influenced by perceived fairness in management practices, leadership behaviour, communication effectiveness, and the availability of organisational support systems. These factors collectively shape how employees interpret their relationship with the institution and determine their level of engagement and performance. Therefore, the study concludes that effective management of the psychological contract is not optional but essential for achieving sustainable organisational performance. Educational institutions that prioritise trust-building, fairness, communication, and employee development are more likely to achieve long-term stability, improved workforce commitment, and enhanced organisational effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve psychological contract management, employee commitment, and organisational performance in Nigerian educational institutions, particularly First Assured Premier College, Akpabuyo.

- i. **Strengthening Transparent Communication Systems:** Management should develop and maintain open, consistent, and transparent communication channels between leadership and staff. This includes regular staff meetings, clear dissemination of institutional policies, and timely communication of decisions affecting employees. Transparent communication reduces uncertainty, builds trust, and strengthens psychological contract fulfilment.
- ii. **Improving Reward and Recognition Structures:** Institutions should design fair, consistent, and performance-based reward systems that reflect employee effort and contribution. Recognition should not be limited to financial incentives alone but should also include verbal appreciation, awards, promotions, and public acknowledgment of excellence. This will enhance motivation and reinforce employee commitment.
- iii. **Institutionalising Staff Development Programmes:** Continuous professional development should be made a core institutional policy. Management should regularly organise training workshops, seminars, and capacity-building programmes for both academic and non-academic staff. This enhances employee skills, improves job performance, and strengthens their perception of organisational support.
- iv. **Enhancing Leadership Training for School Administrators:** School administrators and management personnel should undergo regular leadership and human resource management training. Such training should focus on ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and employee engagement strategies. Effective leadership is essential for sustaining a healthy psychological contract.
- v. **Integrating Psychological Contract Awareness into HR Policies:** Human resource policies should explicitly recognise the importance of psychological contracts in shaping employee behaviour. Institutions should develop HR frameworks that promote fairness,
- vi. **Strengthening Employee Engagement Mechanisms:** Management should create structured platforms for employee participation in decision-making processes. This may include suggestion schemes, staff forums, and participatory planning committees. Increased engagement helps employees feel valued and enhances their psychological attachment to the institution.
- vii. **Prioritising Fairness in Decision-Making:** Fairness and equity should be central principles in all managerial decisions, including workload distribution, promotion, task assignment, and reward allocation. Perceived fairness strengthens trust and reduces psychological contract breach, thereby improving commitment and performance.
- viii. **Introducing Regular Performance Feedback Systems:** Institutions should establish formal and continuous performance appraisal systems that provide employees with constructive feedback. Feedback should be timely, objective, and development-oriented, enabling employees to understand expectations and improve performance. This process reinforces accountability and supports organisational growth.

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