



Remote Work and Employee Engagement in Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria

Sunday Owzorji (Ph.D)

Department of Management, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Jaja Inye Sunday (Ph.D)

Department of Industry Relations / Human Resources Management,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the conceptual relationship between remote work and employee engagement. The goal of this article is to determine how much remote work telecommuting improves employee engagement, vigor, and absorption. The theoretical framework for the paper focuses on technological determinism theory, which reveals work patterns and the value they offer the organization as essential, unique, and useful in advancing the organization's competitiveness and survival, and thus achieving the organization's goals and objectives. Improving productivity and more inclusive working environments through the use of technology, as well as protecting employees' individual choices (to select when and how to engage), etc. Thus, the article advises that related practices of telecommuting mobile work should build on existing company strategies and match with organizational goals and values, which will boost employee engagement, vigor, and absorption.*

Keyword: *Employee engagement, Remote Work Telecommuting.*

INTRODUCTION

In view of the current challenges facing businesses across the globe including the covid-19, organizations are transiting to remote working, and with remote work have come the concern for employee engagement. Scholars has examined remote work while others have examined employee engagement such as: The effect of remote work on collaboration among information workers (Longqi Yang *et al.*, 2021), Remote working on employee productivity (Kurdyet *al.*, 2023. Effective employee engagement in the work place (Schrita Osborne & Mohamed S. Hammond, 2017). But however not much effort seems to have been devoted to the relationship between remote work and employee engagement.

This paper therefore seeks to examine how remote work enhances employee engagement. Remote work is a working practice where a worker works outside of the designated work space. Whereas, employee engagement is the personal connection an employee has towards his work, making sure the organization do well in terms of profitability, revenue, customer relationship, turnover and more.

The future of remote work continues to grow, and the technology to support remote workers is only getting better. Whether working from a home office, on a laptop in a van, or from a smartphone, WiFi gives employees access to cloud-based platforms. These applications help them do everything they would do in an office. Now, virtual employees' work all hours of the day and can stay in touch with their coworkers from all over the world.

This paper seeks to examine how the various remote work will help in improving employees engagement, hence other strategies include making efforts to make employees feel valued and respected, and feeling that their ideas are being heard and understood. Engaged employees believe that their work is meaningful, believe that they are appreciated and backed by their supervisors and that they have been entrusted with the success of their company. The main problem of this paper is to examine the extent to which employee engagement is improved towards its organization through remote working.

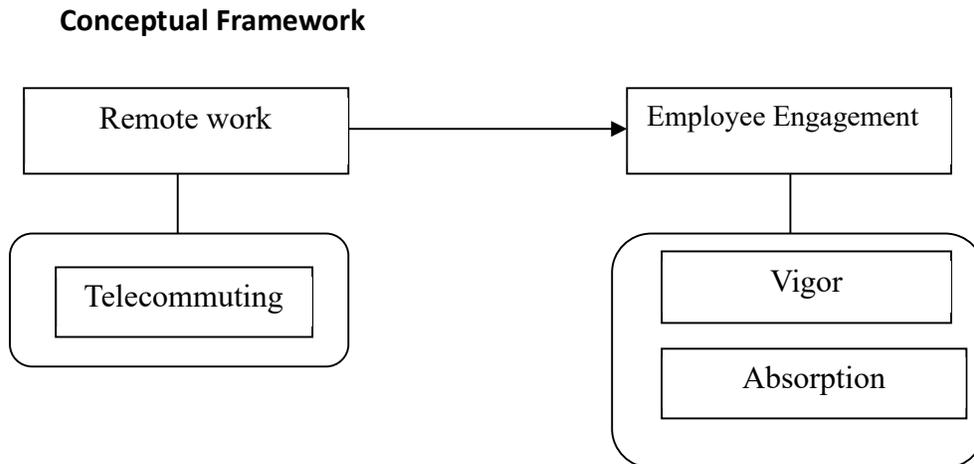


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of Remote work and Employee Engagement

Source: Researcher (2023). Dimensions of Remote Work (telecommuting). Measures of Employee Engagement (vigor and absorption).

The purpose of the paper is to examine how the various dimensions of remote work help in improving employee engagements.

1. Ascertain the relationship between Remote WorkTelecommuting and Employee Engagement Vigor in telecommunication firms in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the relationship between Remote WorkTelecommuting and Employee Engagement Absorption in telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

The following research questions are stated in such a way that it givesanswers to the objectives and serves as a guide in assessing the relationship between the variable in the study.

1. To what extent does Remote work Telecommuting affect Employee EngagementVigor in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does Remote Work Telecommuting affect Employee Engagement Absorption in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria?

The following research hypothesis were formulated and stated in the null form.

Ho₁: There is no relationship between Remote Work Telecommuting and Vigor in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no relationship between Remote Work Telecommuting and Absorption in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Veblen Technological Determinism Theory

It is a theory that attributes the advancement of society to technology, asserting that technology serves as the primary driver of societal development. Karl Marx and other theorists view technology as the defining characteristic of modern societies within this framework. Technological determinism posits that a society is shaped and characterized by its technological advancements. This concept was introduced by Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), a Norwegian-American sociologist and economist who explored the interconnected dynamics of society, culture, and the economy. The core focus of technological determinism is on the relationship between society and culture.

While Marshall McLuhan (1962) supports what he terms "technological determinism," a question persists: does this determinism negate the human capacity to assert a distinct identity capable of overcoming the impacts of technological determinism? This dilemma arises when individuals overlook their surroundings, allowing significant technological innovations to profoundly influence societies. According to McQuail (2010), the theory predicts that social changes will result from technological innovations, particularly in the media, impacting how people behave, think, and live. Similarly, Griffin (2000) associates technology with behavior in the context of this theory. The acceptance of remote work stems from advancements in communication technology and society's need for flexible work styles and pace, which is why technical determination is crucial to this subject.

The Concept of Remote work

Nilles (1975) introduced the concept of remote work, a notion that has evolved alongside advancements in information and communication technology. Remote work entails employees carrying out their duties away from the traditional workplace, employing various communication and information technology methods (Viktorovich et al., 2020). Several businesses have embraced remote work in specific sectors to foster a more flexible approach to work, resulting in savings in time, cost, and effort. Although the shift is generally perceived positively in terms of employee morale, it may not necessarily lead to increased productivity (Manley, 2002).

Remote work offers several benefits, including enhanced flexibility in time management, the attainment of a better work-life balance, increased accessibility to alternative career opportunities, avoidance of commuting challenges, and improved convenience in task delivery. In the realm of remote work, employees remain connected to the work environment even when physically absent, underscoring the importance of maintaining professional ties. The work environment, comprising both physical and behavioral dimensions, plays a crucial role in influencing employee motivation, productivity, and performance (Sharma, Dhar, & Tyagi, 2016).

Telecommuting: The term "telecommuting" was coined by Jack Nilles, a U.S. Air Force rocket scientist, in 1973, to describe the practice of working outside a traditional office setting and relying on telecommunication devices for communication (Olorunfemi, 2013). Telecommuting, also known as teleworking, involves completing work tasks from a location outside the office, utilizing internet and phone connections (Entrepreneurship, 2022). Many companies, both large and small, are adopting telecommuting to reduce the costs associated with renting office space, with some fully embracing remote work for all staff members. Commuters often experience discomfort and restlessness due to poor air quality resulting from vehicle emissions during their travels.

Despite the cost and environmental benefits of telecommuting, recent international research, such as that by Kim (2017), suggests that the optimistic view of the travel impact of telecommuting in past years may be overstated. Commuting stress leaves workers disengaged, unfocused, or frustrated. In light of these considerations, the following definition of telecommuting aims to provide important clarifications and distinctions within the extensive body of research on this topic: "Telecommuting is a work practice where members of an organization substitute a portion of their regular work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace, typically primarily from home. This involves using technology to interact with others as needed to perform work tasks. This definition draws heavily from various established conceptualizations (e.g., Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden & Veiga, 2005; Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006; Konradt, Schmook, & Malecke, 2000; Mokhtarian, 1992; Pinsonneault & Boisvert, 2001), including the original one provided by Jack Nilles (1994), and incorporates key points and distinctions.

In the context of telecommuting, individuals who engage in this practice: (a) Substitute the time they would typically spend in a central office with time spent working away from other employees, rather than working additional overtime hours that might be carried out after a full day in the office. (b) Engage in telecommuting for a portion of their regular work time, ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time. The hours spent telecommuting tend to follow a set pattern for individual telecommuters but may vary among telecommuters within the same organization. Additionally, telecommuting practices may involve some degree of scheduling flexibility. Tasks completed at home may vary in schedule from day to day or be partially carried out during nonstandard work hours in the telecommuter's work organization. However, as noted in point (a), telecommuting does not include time spent working at home after a full day in the central office."

Advantages of telecommuting include reduced office space requirements, elimination of travel and relocation expenses, higher retention of valued employees, time and cost savings related to commuting, increased work flexibility, improved work-life balance, and a reduced risk of the spread of communicable diseases among workers. Employee engagement, a concept in human resources, reflects the level of enthusiasm and dedication a worker feels toward their job. Engaged employees are invested in their work and the company's performance, considering their efforts integral to the company's success. Vigor, a component of employee engagement, refers to physical and mental energy, enthusiasm, and perseverance at work. It is associated with high levels of work motivation and engagement, contributing to employee well-being.

The impact of vigor on employee engagement is substantial, influencing factors such as physical strength, emotional energy, cognitive activity, and resilience. The measurement of vigor utilizes the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which assesses high energy levels, mental resilience, willingness to invest effort, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Studies suggest that vigor has a positive influence on employee productivity, performance, and overall well-being. Absorption, another facet of employee engagement, entails complete concentration and satisfaction in work activities. Engaged employees with elevated absorption levels are deeply engrossed in their work, finding it challenging to disengage from tasks. The UWES is employed to measure absorption, examining correlations with full concentration, happiness, and a perception of time passing quickly. High absorption contributes to enhanced performance, reflecting a focused and dedicated attitude toward work that encourages thoroughness and quality. Research indicates a moderately significant positive relationship between absorption and performance, encompassing both contextual and task-related aspects.

Empirical Review

According to Brie Weiler Reynolds (2022), remote work refers to a job performed outside a traditional office setting. Employee engagement, as noted by Bowles and Cooper (2009), is achieved when employees exhibit high morale, a result of their heightened enthusiasm.

A recent development is the issuance of ministerial decision no. 157/2017 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), led by Minister Dr. Ali bin Masoud Al-Sunaidy. This decision introduces the "Remote Work through the 'Invest Easy' portal" program, aiming to enhance the productivity of Ministry staff. The decision was prompted by successful remote work experiences demonstrated by numerous employees in shopping malls across the governorates (Oman Daily Observer, 2018). The program, functioning as a one-stop shop, seeks to offer commercial register services online, transforming traditional services into accessible, location-independent ones. This marks the first introduction of the Remote Working concept, empowering the MoCI to facilitate remote work for individuals unable to operate in conventional office settings due to health, medical conditions, or emergency reasons. It's emphasized that not all administrative staff are eligible, and specific provisions are outlined to ensure compliance with established guidelines.

METHODOLOGY

This research was described as a quasi-experimental study. In addition to philosophical perspectives, the study's approach and investigative method were shaped by its goals, whether to: depict a phenomenon, situation, or issue (descriptive); investigate or establish a relationship between two or more variables (correlational); clarify specific events (explanatory); or delve into a new subject (exploratory) (Kumar, 2011). Following Kumar's framework, this study will employ a survey research design.

Population

The sample for this paper was drawn from four Telecommunication companies located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. These companies include MTN, Global-com, Airtel, and 9mobile. The population comprises a total of 360 employees, with 101 from MTN, 85 from 9mobile, 85 from Airtel, and 89 from Global-com.

DATA ANALYSIS

Bivariate Analysis

In our effort to ascertain the presence and direction of this correlation, we created a scatter diagram illustrated in the figure below. The predictor variable, Remote Work, is depicted on the Y-axis, while the criterion variable, Employee Engagement, is represented on the X-axis.

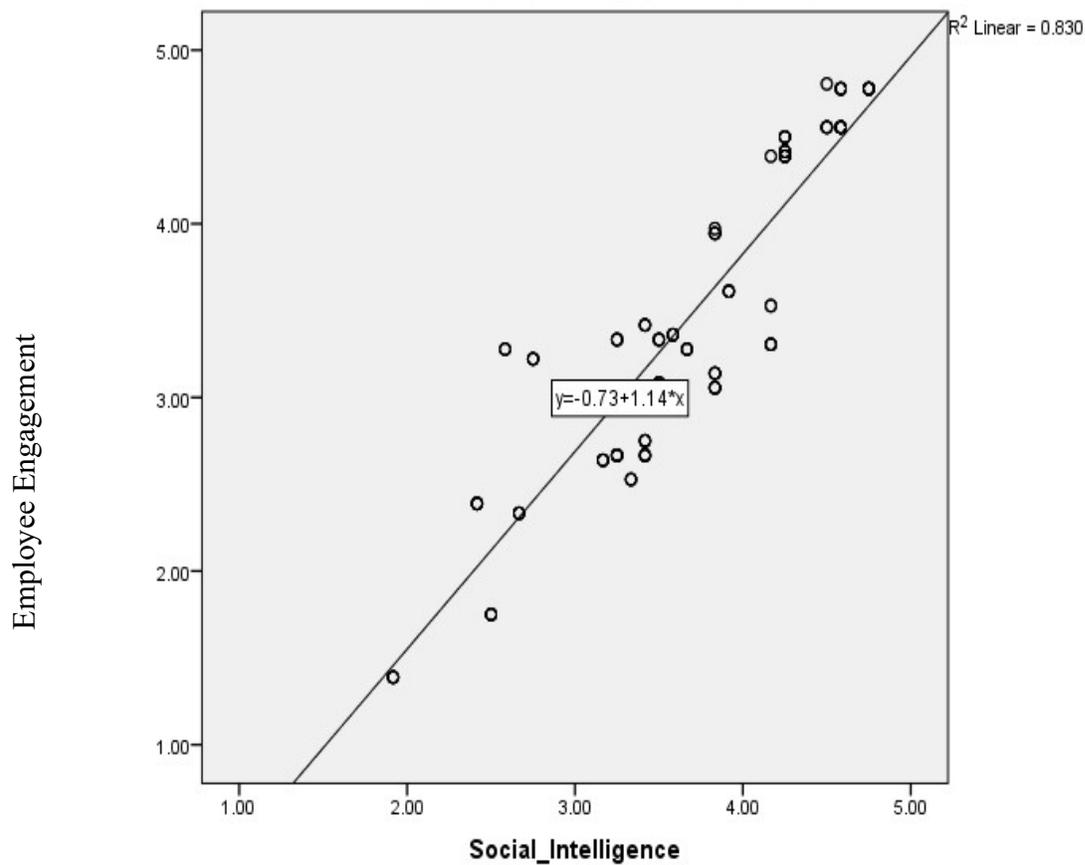


Figure 2: Relationship between Remote Work and Employee Engagement.

The obvious pattern of the instances in the scatter plot sloping upwards from left to right indicates the existence of a linear and significant positive association between Remote work and Employee Engagement. The linear R2 of 0.830 confirms this, demonstrating that they have a linear connection.

Relationship between Telecommuting and Vigor

		Telecommuting	Vigor
Telecommuting	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.877**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	119	119
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.877**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	119	119

** . Correlation issignificant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2023

The table above depicted the association between telecommuting and the vigor of Nigerian telecommunication firms. The correlation significant between Telecommuting and Vigor was (r = 0.877), which was higher than the average correlation coefficient of (r = 0.5). The correlation probability wassignificant at (= 0.010.05). This demonstrated that there is a considerable and highly beneficial association between telecommuting and the viability of Nigerian telecommunications firms. Based on this result, the null hypothesis, **Ho₁**: There is no relationship between Telecommuting and Vigor in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Relationship between Telecommuting and Absorption

		Telecommuting	Absorption
Telecommuting	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.933**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	119	119
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.933**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	119	119

** . Correlation issignificant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2023

The table above depicted the association between Remote Work Telecommuting and Employee Engagement Absorption in Nigerian Telecommunication Firms. The correlation significant between Telecommuting and Absorption was (r = 0.933), which was higher than the average correlation coefficient of (r = 0.5). The correlation probability wassignificant at (= 0.010.05). This

revealed that there is a strong and highly beneficial association between telecommuting and absorption in Nigerian telecommunications firms. Based on this result, the null hypothesis **Ho₂**: There is no relationship between Telecommuting and Absorption in Telecommunication firms in Nigeria was rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

Telecommuting and Employee Engagement

The findings from the analysis of Telecommuting and Employee Engagement indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship. The correlation significance between Telecommuting and Dedication was ($r = 0.858$), surpassing the average correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.5$). The probability of correlation was significant at ($p = 0.01 < 0.05$), indicating a substantial and strong positive relationship between Telecommuting and the Dedication of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria.

Similarly, the correlation significance between Telecommuting and Vigor resulted in a coefficient of ($r = 0.832$), exceeding the average correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.5$). The probability of correlation was significant at ($p = 0.01 < 0.05$), revealing a noteworthy and high positive relationship between Telecommuting and the Vigor of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria. Additionally, the correlation significance between Telecommuting and Vigor yielded a coefficient of ($r = 0.802$), surpassing the average correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.5$). The probability of correlation was significant at ($p = 0.01 < 0.05$), indicating a substantial and high positive relationship between Telecommuting and Vigor among Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria.

However, it is crucial to note that recent international research, such as Kim (2017), has cautioned policymakers that the perceived travel impact of telecommuting in previous years might have been overly optimistic. In other words, the stress associated with commuting can potentially leave workers disengaged, unfocused, or frustrated. Despite these challenges, the advantages of telecommuting, including reduced office space, elimination of travel and relocation costs, enhanced retention of valued employees, time and cost savings related to commuting, improved work flexibility, work-life balance, and reduced spread of communicable diseases among workers, remain notable. Based on the result, the null hypotheses were rejected and the research hypotheses accept that:

Ho₁: There is a significant and strong positive relationship between Telecommuting and Vigor of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is significant and positive relationship between Telecommunication and Absorption of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria.

Summary

Remote work, also known as telecommuting, is a flexible working style that enables professionals to operate outside the confines of a traditional office setting. In this arrangement, employees are not required to be physically present in a specific work environment to fulfill their contractual responsibilities. Organizations permit their staff to establish remote workstations, allowing them

to work from various locations as long as they successfully complete projects and meet or exceed organizational objectives. Popularly referred to as "work from home," remote work provides employees with the flexibility to manage their time, leading to a harmonious work-life balance, increased access to diverse career opportunities, protection from commuting hazards, and enhanced ease in task delivery (Gartner, 2020).

In the realm of remote work, employees remain connected to the work environment even when they are not physically present at the office, exemplifying the concept of "dialing in" or "staying connected" to the work nexus.

Employee engagement in this context is delineated into two distinct factors: Employee Satisfaction, representing the level of contentment or happiness an individual attributes to aspects such as their job, organization, and overall employment experience; and Employee Commitment, signifying the sentiments individuals harbor toward their organization. This commitment encompasses intentions to stay with the organization, a desire to perform at high levels, a positive inclination to recommend the organization to others, and a dedication to enhancing the organization's outcomes.

The research investigated the correlation between remote work and employee engagement within Telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The study employed a series of questions and formulated hypotheses, which were then analyzed and tested using various statistical tools, including tables, frequencies, mean, standard deviation, and the Spearman rank order coefficient. Eight hypotheses were developed based on existing literature to provide initial answers and guide the research process. Data were collected directly through the distribution and retrieval of structured questionnaires, and the analysis encompassed both univariate and bivariate approaches using appropriate tools endorsed for the study.

The findings from the analysis indicated a notably positive relationship between remote work, specifically work from home, and various measures of employee engagement, such as Vigor and Absorption. The dimension of telecommuting, as a subset of remote work, exhibited positive associations with employee engagement, highlighting the measures of Vigor and Absorption within Telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Beyond establishing these relationships, the study also uncovered that, given the evolving nature of global business operations, a judicious implementation of remote work could lead to increased employee alignment with the firm's policies. This alignment, in turn, could enhance organizational values, uphold the unique cultures of the respective firms, and prompt proactive measures to address workflow challenges.

Conclusion

There are various ways individuals can engage in remote work, showcasing the versatility of this working arrangement. This flexibility empowers people to select a mode of remote work that aligns with organizational objectives while accommodating their dual responsibilities of work and

family. Some opt for co-working spaces as their remote work venues, providing environments conducive to productivity, community, and technological resources. These spaces offer excellent network connectivity and opportunities to connect with professionals from diverse industries. Co-working spaces cater to individuals with full-time positions, freelancers, and entrepreneurs seeking office space for themselves or their small teams. In essence, co-working spaces serve as a midpoint between a conventional office and a non-traditional workspace, blending the comfort of working from home with the professional amenities and networking opportunities found in a corporate environment. As managers contemplate remote work options, it becomes imperative to consider the nature of the staff and their job assignments, aiming to minimize stressors and enhance motivational factors to foster employee engagement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings made in the course of this study, the following recommendations are hereby suggested

1. Most organizations however, in special cases where some level of remote work is allowed, it is most convenient for employees with low immune system, health challenges. Hence the risk of spreading illnesses is minimized.
2. For employees working in a non-plant areas of the company depending on their mode of operation.
3. Remote workers have greater freedom – the freedom to avoid a troublesome co-worker, to leave an unproductive conversation, to choose when and how to engage.
4. They're in control of their own environments, and they report feeling less stressed as a result which could lead to a higher level of employee engagement.

Therefore there is no doubt that the aforementioned recommendations are useful.

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