

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH: AN ANALYSIS OF SUPPORTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Employee wellbeing and mental health have emerged as critical components of organizational success in the 21st century. In Nigeria, where economic pressures, high unemployment rates, and socio-political instability contribute to elevated stress levels among workers, the role of supportive organizational practices in promoting mental health and wellbeing cannot be overstated. This paper examines the intersection of employee wellbeing and mental health with supportive organizational practices in Nigeria, exploring how these practices contribute to overall organizational effectiveness. By analyzing empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this study provides insights into the implementation of mental health initiatives in the workplace and the associated outcomes for employees and organizations. The findings suggest that organizations that invest in supportive practices, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), mental health awareness training, and flexible work arrangements, see improved employee engagement, reduced absenteeism, and higher productivity. The paper concludes with recommendations for Nigerian organizations to adopt and enhance these practices to foster a healthier and more productive workforce.*

Keywords: *Employee wellbeing, Mental health, Supportive organizational practice.*

Introduction

Employee wellbeing and mental health have become increasingly important in the modern workplace, driven by the recognition that a healthy workforce is essential for organizational success. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a condition of wellbeing in which people are aware of their own potential, are able to manage life's typical pressures, are able to work effectively, and are able to give back to their communities (WHO, 2004). Employee wellness in the context of enterprises encompasses more than just physical

health; it also includes general quality of life, work satisfaction, and mental and emotional health. Studies have shown that mental health issues may result in lower output, more absenteeism, and higher rates of employee turnover, all of which can have detrimental effects on the functioning of organizations (Cooper & Cartwright, 2004; Kahn et al., 2020). The socioeconomic climate in Nigeria makes the problems with employee mental health and wellness worse. The workforce experiences higher levels of stress due to a number of factors, including political unpredictability, high unemployment rates, economic instability, and limited access to mental health care (Adeosun, 2016). Notwithstanding these obstacles, Nigerian businesses are beginning to understand the need of addressing employee mental health and wellness as part of their larger CSR and HRM plans. In order to address these concerns, supportive organizational practices are being implemented more often. These practices include stress management programs, flexible work schedules, mental health awareness training, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) (Onyeizugbo, 2019). Nonetheless, there are notable differences in the use and efficacy of these techniques across Nigeria's many sectors and organizations. While some businesses have made great progress in supporting employee wellness and mental health, others have lagged behind, sometimes as a result of a lack of funding, knowledge, or leadership commitment. With an emphasis on the function of supportive organizational practices in cultivating a well-being and productive workforce, this study seeks to assess the present status of employee wellbeing and mental health in Nigeria. This study will examine the advantages of such approaches via a review of previous research and empirical investigations. It will also provide suggestions for Nigerian firms looking to enhance employee wellbeing and mental health results. This paper is organized as follows: The research on employee wellness, mental health, and supportive organizational behaviors is reviewed in the following part, and then the theoretical frameworks supporting these ideas are discussed. The next section of the article offers a conceptual perspective on employee wellness and mental health in the Nigerian setting, highlighting important potential and difficulties with the use of empirical data. Recommendations for improving supportive workplace practices for businesses and policymakers are included in the paper's conclusion.

Literature Review

Employee Wellbeing

The notion of employee wellness is multifaceted, including the mental, emotional, physical, and social aspects of an individual's work life. Because it affects work satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational performance, wellbeing is important for both people and businesses (Danna & Griffin, 1999). High levels of wellbeing are linked to increased employee engagement, improved performance, and a lower risk of burnout, according to research (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). Because of the difficult work environment in Nigeria, which is marked by sociopolitical problems, high unemployment rates, and economic volatility, employee wellness is a topic of increasing concern. These elements lead to higher levels of stress and anxiety in workers, which may have a negative impact on their mental health (Akanji, 2015). As a result, businesses in Nigeria are

realizing how crucial it is to create a welcoming workplace that supports workers' well-being in order to boost productivity and lower attrition (Eneanya, 2018).

Mental Health in the Workplace

When we talk about an employee's mental health in the workplace, we're talking about their psychological well-being and their capacity to handle stress, keep up positive connections, and function efficiently. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2005) states that having good mental health is crucial for good overall health and for leading a happy and meaningful life. A number of problems, including as lower productivity, more absenteeism, and higher turnover rates, may be brought on by poor mental health (Cooper & Cartwright, 2004). In Nigeria, the mental health of employees is still stigmatized and often disregarded. Underutilization of mental health services is a result of cultural attitudes and ignorance, with many workers hesitating to seek treatment out of fear of being discriminated against (Gureje & Lasebikan, 2006). Notwithstanding these obstacles, companies in Nigeria are beginning to understand the importance of addressing mental health in the workplace through supportive organizational practices like stress management interventions, mental health awareness training, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) (Onyeizugbo, 2019).

Supportive Organizational Practices

Organizations that adopt strategies and programs aimed at promoting employee wellness and mental health are said to be engaging in supportive organizational practices. Flexible work schedules, wellness initiatives, mental health support services, and employee assistance programs (EAPs) are a few examples of these approaches (Gifford, Zammuto, & Goodman, 2002). These procedures are intended to support staff members in stress management, work-life balance, and obtaining the resources they need for their physical and emotional well-being. Supportive organizational practices are becoming more and more important in the Nigerian environment for fostering employee welfare and mental health. To assist workers manage job-related stress and create a better work-life balance, some firms, for instance, have developed flexible work schedules (Oruh, Mordi, & Dibia, 2021). Other businesses have implemented wellness initiatives that include access to counseling services, courses on mental health awareness, and physical fitness activities (Ajayi, 2020). It has been shown that these programs have a good effect on worker wellbeing, which raises productivity, decreases absenteeism, and increases job satisfaction.

Challenges in Implementing Supportive Practices in Nigeria

Although supportive organizational approaches have been shown to provide advantages, there are a number of obstacles preventing their widespread adoption in Nigeria. Lack of funding is a major issue, especially for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), who may not have the means to fund all-encompassing wellness initiatives (Akanji, 2015). Furthermore, cultural variables and the stigma associated with mental health problems persist in providing obstacles to the efficient delivery of mental health support services (Gureje et al., 2015).

Organizational leaders' lack of knowledge and comprehension of the significance of employee welfare is another issue. The long-term advantages of investing in employee health and wellness are often overlooked by Nigerian companies, who prioritize financial success and productivity above employee welfare (Eneanya, 2018). In many businesses, the adoption of supportive practices has been sluggish due in part to this mentality.

Theoretical Review

Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model

A theoretical framework that describes the connection between job demands, job resources, and employee welfare is called the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001). The JD-R model defines work demands as those organizational, social, psychological, or physical characteristics of a job that need consistent effort and have related psychological and physiological costs. On the other hand, job resources are those features of the workplace—physical, psychological, social, or organizational—that support the accomplishment of work objectives, lessen job demands, and foster individual development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to the JD-R paradigm, supporting organizational practices may be seen as job resources that assist workers in meeting job demands in the context of employee wellness and mental health. To improve employee wellbeing, factors including wellness programs, flexible work schedules, and access to mental health services help lessen the negative effects of high job demands, such stress and burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The JD-R model emphasizes the need of developing supportive measures to balance these demands and enhance mental health in Nigerian firms, where workers often confront high job demands owing to economic constraints and stressful work conditions (Oruh et al., 2021). Organizations may lessen the negative consequences of workplace expectations and foster a happier, more productive workforce by giving workers the tools they need.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Hobfoll (1989) established the idea known as the Conservation of Resources (COR), which holds that people make an effort to acquire, hold onto, and safeguard their resources—which include things, qualities, circumstances, and energy. As to the COR theory, stress arises due to the possibility of resource loss, actual resource loss, or insufficient resource gain after a substantial investment (Hobfoll, 2001).

In the workplace, supportive organizational practices can be seen as resources that employees use to protect their mental health and wellbeing. For example, access to counseling services or EAPs can help employees manage stress and prevent burnout by conserving their psychological and emotional resources (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). The COR theory suggests that organizations that invest in such practices can help employees maintain their resources, leading to better mental health and higher levels of wellbeing.

In the Nigerian context, where employees may face significant stressors both inside and outside of work, the COR theory underscores the importance of supportive organizational practices in

helping employees conserve their resources and maintain their mental health (Gureje & Lasebikan, 2006). Organizations that fail to provide these resources risk higher rates of employee burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, ultimately affecting organizational performance.

Social Exchange Theory

Blau (1964) created Social Exchange Theory (SET), a theoretical framework that describes how people behave in social situations as an exchange process in which they get into mutually beneficial partnerships. According to SET, when employers adopt supportive policies that foster employee wellbeing, workers are more likely to respond favorably with greater productivity, organizational loyalty, and job dedication (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Using these behaviors might encourage a feeling of reciprocity among workers in Nigeria, where supportive organizational practices are not yet common. Employees are more likely to positively contribute to the firm and enhance performance and lower turnover when they believe that their employer values and supports their well-being (Ajayi, 2020). SET offers an insightful viewpoint on how companies may improve mental health and well-being of their workforce by fostering a constructive working connection.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Another theoretical framework that is pertinent to comprehending employee welfare and mental health in the workplace is the Conservation of Resources (COR) hypothesis, which was put out by Hobfoll in 1989. According to the COR hypothesis, people have an incentive to preserve and safeguard their pecuniary, psychological, social, and physical resources. This idea states that stress arises when people feel as if they are about to lose resources, lose resources really, or don't get the resources they have invested in. Resources in the workplace might include access to mental health treatments, job stability, opportunity for professional advancement, and support from coworkers and bosses. Employees are better able to handle work demands and preserve their wellness when they have access to these tools. On the other hand, stress, burnout, and poor mental health outcomes might result from a lack of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). One important tool for assisting staff members in preserving their energy and lowering their stress levels is the supportive organizational practices. For instance, mental health awareness training may reduce resource loss and promote wellness by giving staff members the information and abilities they need to manage stress and get assistance when they need it (Martin et al., 2005). In a similar vein, flexible work schedules lower the risk of resource depletion and improve general mental health by assisting workers in striking a balance between their personal and professional life (Byron, 2005).

Application to Nigerian Organizations

Insights into how supportive organizational practices might improve employee wellbeing and mental health in Nigerian businesses can be gained from the JD-R model and COR theory. Organizations may lessen stress, avoid burnout, and foster a better work environment by giving

workers the tools they need to handle the demands of their jobs. This is especially crucial in Nigeria, since workers encounter many difficulties because of the country's political unpredictability, unstable economy, and stigma associated with mental health concerns (Adeosun, 2016). Furthermore, these ideas emphasize how crucial organizational dedication is to worker well-being. In order for supportive practices to be successful, leadership support and integration into the organization's culture are required. Additionally, organizations need to guarantee that staff members feel free to use these services without worrying about shame or retaliation. Organizations in Nigeria may enhance employee wellbeing and mental health by using a theoretical approach based on the JD-R model and COR theory. This would eventually lead to better organizational performance and success.

Conceptual Review

Employee Wellbeing: Definitions and Dimensions

Mental Health in the Workplace

According to Dannan and Griffin (1999), employee wellbeing is the whole quality of a worker's experience at work, including all facets of their physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. Over time, the idea has changed, going from a limited emphasis on safety and physical health to a more comprehensive definition that takes mental and emotional aspects into account (Diener, 2009). Work-life balance, mental health, and job satisfaction are some of the aspects that are often used to quantify employee wellbeing (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO, 2004). Mental health is an essential component of overall wellbeing. Stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and other psychological illnesses are examples of mental health problems that may arise at work and have a big influence on worker productivity and organizational results (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Organizational Supportive Practices Initiatives and policies known as supportive organizational practices are put in place by companies to support the mental and physical health of their workforce (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to Masi and Jacobson (2003), these strategies include stress management training, mental health awareness initiatives, flexible work schedules, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and the encouragement of a healthy work-life balance. Ensuring the emotional wellness of workers and promoting a healthy work environment require the adoption of these strategies.

The Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, the discourse around employee wellbeing and mental health is relatively nascent, with cultural, social, and economic factors influencing how these issues are addressed in the workplace (Gureje et al., 2010). Traditional attitudes toward mental health often stigmatize those suffering from mental health conditions, which can deter individuals from seeking help and organizations from implementing supportive practices (Onyeizugbo, 2019). However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of employee wellbeing in driving organizational success, particularly in the face of the economic and social challenges prevalent in the Nigerian context (Adewale, 2020).

Empirical Review

Global Perspectives on Employee Wellbeing and Mental Health

Numerous studies conducted worldwide have shown the connection between excellent results for employee wellness and supportive organizational strategies. For example, a 2003 research by Harter et al. discovered that companies reporting superior business results, such as decreased absenteeism, greater productivity, and increased profitability, had higher employee engagement levels, which were driven by supportive workplace policies. In a similar vein, stress management strategies have been shown in a meta-analysis by Richardson and Rothstein (2008) to considerably improve employee mental health, which in turn improves work performance and lowers turnover.

Employee Wellbeing and Organizational Success

Empirical evidence suggests that companies that make investments in mental health and employee well-being likely to achieve better results than those that do not. Bakker and Demerouti (2007), for instance, discovered that job resources—like supportive organizational practices—improve work engagement directly and indirectly by lessening the effect of job demands. This research was done utilizing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm. Furthermore, Dewa et al. (2014) emphasized that by lowering absenteeism and increasing productivity, treating mental health in the workplace may result in significant cost savings.

The Nigerian Perspective

There are fewer but increasing empirical research on the mental health and well-being of Nigerian workers. Adeosun (2016) investigated the use of mental health services in Nigeria, emphasizing the difficulties brought on by a lack of funding and social stigma. The research underlined how important it is for organizations to become more involved in raising mental health awareness and facilitating access to treatments. While some organizations have implemented Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and mental health awareness training, Adewale's (2020) study also looked at the adoption of supportive organizational practices in Nigerian companies. It found that the effectiveness and reach of these initiatives are frequently limited by socio-economic constraints.

High job expectations and employee mental health were shown to be significantly negatively correlated in a research by Ehimare and Ogaga (2020), which also looked at the link between workplace stresses and employee wellbeing in Nigerian firms. The research suggested that strengthening mental health programs and cultivating a positive workplace culture are essential tactics for enhancing employee well-being in Nigeria.

Challenges and Opportunities

Even while supportive organizational policies have a good effect on employee wellness, there are still issues in the Nigerian environment. Significant obstacles to the broad adoption of these

practices include the stigma associated with mental health in culture, the lack of access to mental health treatments, and financial limitations (Gureje et al., 2010). Nonetheless, Nigerian firms have the chance to improve their employee wellness strategies due to the increased recognition of the significance of mental health and the ability of technology to close gaps in service delivery (Onyeizugbo, 2019).

Recommendations

1. **Establish Comprehensive Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Nigerian businesses should make investments in the creation and execution of EAPs that offer workers private counseling, mental health resources, and assistance with personal and professional issues. In addition to encouraging staff members to seek assistance when necessary, this may help lessen the stigma attached to mental health (Arthur, 2000).
2. **Encourage Mental Health Awareness and Education:** Companies should regularly run mental health awareness programs and teach staff members and management on how to spot mental health disorders' telltale signs and symptoms. This will enable the development of a more encouraging work environment where mental health is valued and freely addressed (Martin et al., 2005).
3. **Adopt Flexible Working Arrangements:** Nigerian companies should investigate adopting flexible working arrangements, such as job-sharing, remote work, and flexible hours, given the benefits of work-life balance on employee welfare. In light of Nigeria's special socioeconomic issues, these approaches may aid in lowering stress and enhancing work satisfaction (Kossek & Thompson, 2016).
4. **Use Technology to Support Mental Health:** Given the dearth of mental health services in Nigeria, companies should use technology to provide staff members access to teletherapy, online support groups, and mental health resources. This strategy can guarantee that workers have access to the assistance they need and help close the gap in service delivery (Adewale, 2020).
5. **Promote a Supportive Organizational Culture:** Establishing a supportive culture that places a high priority on employee welfare and mental health should be a top priority for organizational leadership. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) state that promoting open communication, lowering stigma, and making sure mental health programs are included into the organization's broader plan are some examples of what this entails.
6. **Collaborate with Mental Health employers:** To provide staff members access to specialist resources, training, and support, employers should think about forming partnerships with regional and global mental health organizations. These kinds of partnerships may guarantee that workers get the most treatment available and increase the efficacy of mental health programs (Adeosun, 2016).

Conclusion

Success of a business depends critically on the emotional and physical well-being of its workforce, especially in Nigeria's difficult socioeconomic climate. It has been shown that supportive organizational practices greatly enhance employee wellness and mental health results. Examples

of these practices include stress management programs, flexible work schedules, mental health awareness training, and employee assistance programs. However, there are a number of obstacles to these approaches' adoption in Nigeria, such as economic limitations, resource scarcity, and cultural shame. Despite these obstacles, there are plenty of chances for Nigerian businesses to improve their approaches to employee wellness via the use of technology, raising awareness of mental health issues, and cultivating a positive workplace culture. Organizations may boost overall performance and success as well as individual employee outcomes by placing a high priority on the mental health and well-being of their workforce. Organizations must move proactively to solve these problems and create happier, more supportive work environments as the conversation around mental health in Nigeria develops.

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