

Flexible Work Practices and Employee Performance in Information Communication Technological Industry

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Abstract: *This study investigated the Flexible Work Practices and Employee Performance in Information Communication Technological industry in Nigeria. Job sharing and telecommuting were conceptualized as the dimensions of the independent variable while employee performance was used as the dependent. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary source of data was generated through self-administered questionnaire. The target population of the study comprised employees, management staff and unit heads of the National totaling 67. The sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) North-East Zonal Office Gombe State determining minimum returned sample size for a given population. For our population, the Krejcie and Morgan table placed our sample size at fifty four (54). The research instrument was validated by my supervisors vetting and approval while the reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between flexible work practices and employee performance. The study recommends that management of the organisations should encourage job sharing where majority of the employees are part timers. This will help in reducing cost and ensuring that work that could take longer being done by one person is handled faster by people working on part time basis at reduced cost.*

Keywords: *Employee Performance, Flexible Work Practices, Job sharing and Telecommuting*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations must consider the diversity of working relationships, work life values, cultural influences in the regions where they operate, and employee needs in order to achieve competitive advantage. Additionally, this will guarantee that employees are drawn to, kept, and fully engaged in the business. It is crucial that managers use a variety of human resource practices to achieve organizational goals as many organizations struggle to find ways to attract and keep the best talent while also addressing the new problem of work-life conflicts (Davidescu, Apostu, Paul & Casuneanu, 2020). In addition to the demands of the workplace, many employees' lives today are

becoming more dominated by a variety of family and other personal responsibilities and interests (Guy & Arthur, 2020). As a result, there is a perceived disparity between the demands of modern life and people's capacities to manage them, which may result in feelings of stress (Spinelli, Lionetti, Setti & Fasolo, 2021). Flexible work arrangements have emerged as a major problem in the workplace in a society where obligations and responsibilities conflict. Global competition, renewed interest in personal lives, family values, and an aging workforce are the three main factors that influence interest in and importance of seriously considering flexible work arrangements. Concerns about the policy and discussions surrounding flexible work arrangements have always been voiced from the perspectives of the quality of working life when compared to the larger family issues. The difficulty has been in getting employees to adopt good flexible work practices and getting organizations to adopt policies to deal with conflicts that arise when family or social pressures collide with work stress.

The 20th century saw rapid economic growth all over the world, giving rise to new business opportunities for organizations. The world has become a global village, and as a result, organizations like the ICT industry are under pressure to work hard to establish and maintain a competitive advantage. The ICT industry's focus on customer satisfaction and customer service has prompted changes, which have led to changes in workplace structures (Gupta & Agrawal, 2021). Employees find it challenging to maintain a balance between work, family, and other personal matters, for instance, because ICT workers in Nigeria work longer hours and more than 48 hours per week (Rahman, Kistyanto & Surjanti, 2020). (Adnan Bataineh, 2019). This has led to conflicts between work and personal life, which have been linked to mental health problems like stress and depression (Priya, Garg, & Tigga, 2020), which over time affect an organization's performance.

According to the 2010 Global Report on Flexible Work Arrangements by International Labor Organizations, Nigeria has one of the highest prevalences of long working hours (more than 48 hours per week) (Wesamba, Mamuli & Eshiteti, 2021). Furthermore, according to a list of 24 industries, the ICT sector in Nigeria is said to be the one most impacted by work-life imbalances, ranking third overall (Muriithi, 2020), which has key stakeholders in the nation worried about work-life conflict and life-work conflicts. Work-life balance has been linked in studies to lowered stress levels, fewer physical complaints, higher job satisfaction, lower labor turnover, and improved organizational performance (Anisha & Melvin, 2020). Flexible work arrangements as a means of enhancing performance among Nigeria's commercial banks have received little research (Mathenge, 2019). Hence this has prompted the investigation of the relationship between flexible work arrangement and performance of the ICT industry in Nigeria.

The study provided answers to the following research questions

- i. What is the relationship between job sharing and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between telecommuting and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria?

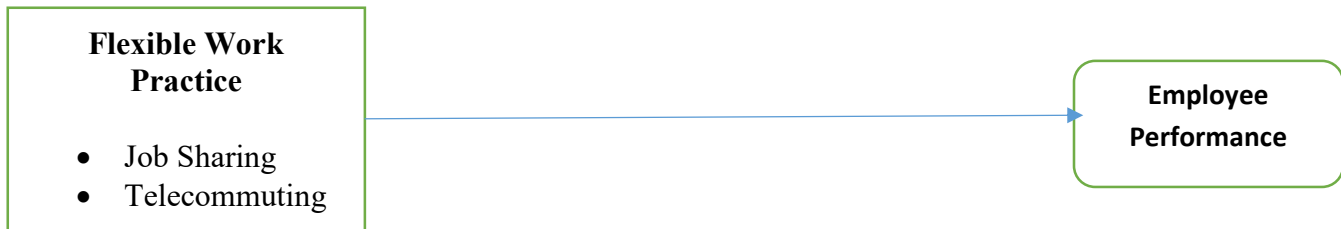


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework showing the Relationship between Variables

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Contract Theory

Contract theory has been used to investigate relationships in practical ways (Salanie, 2015). This theory has been applied in the formation of organizational teams as a measure of control (Barua, Lee & Whinston, 2016). This model incorporates the principal-agent model principle, where the principal or managers assign tasks to agents and anticipate the greatest possible effort and the least amount of conflict possible. Contracts are used by the principals to manage the relationship between them and the agents. Holmstrom and Milgrom (2016) contend that contracts are agreements in which the principals manage their relationships with one another using incentives, control, and other factors.

According to this theory, which is credited to Vroom from 1964, employees have expectations that must be met in their daily lives. Flexible work arrangements are an innovative way to achieve high employee performance in an organization, claim the theory's proponents. The relationship between human resources management practices and performance is based on three key fundamentals identified by the theory. The idea of valence explains how employee productivity can be increased through rewards and innovations that result in lower turnover. The second idea is expectancy, which includes things like employee training, higher job satisfaction, and customer satisfaction, all of which contribute to high employee performance and productivity. According to Marks and MacDermid's (1996) research, people with more balanced role systems experienced less stress, more role-ease, greater well-being, and more positive role-specific experiences. Role balance, which is defined as a general orientation across roles, is both a cognitive affective pattern of organizing one's inner life and a behavioral pattern of acting across roles in a certain way. The Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial 4.0 International License governs the use of this work.

Flexible Working Arrangement

Flexible work schedules are a growing problem in the human resource management industry. The balance between personal and professional obligations should not be overlooked by employees in any organization because the world is increasingly becoming a global village if employee performance goals are to be met. Work-related tasks that are expected of employees are referred to as employee performance, along with how well those tasks were completed. To help improve a particular business segment, performance can be measured on a monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie, 2020). It is a

factor in both employee motivation and skills, according to Paais and Pattiruhu (2020). The author discusses how the performance of the organization as a whole can be improved through careful placement and training programs with the appropriate incentive, both monetary and non-monetary.

A company's working arrangements in terms of working hours, working locations, and working patterns are referred to as flexible working (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development). In order to help employees balance their personal and professional lives, flexible working arrangements like job sharing and telecommuting are frequently used (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019) during "core hours," which are typically fixed or the time between the latest and earliest permissible starting time. Working from home or another central location that is convenient for clients is known as telecommuting (Tamunomiebi, Adim & Adubasim, 2018). To communicate with their managers and other coworkers, the employees use their phones, email, and fax machines. Various academics have given different definitions of job sharing. It is described by Sarich (2020) as the division of a full-time job's responsibilities into two parts so that two part-time employees are engaged and paid in accordance with the work completed.

Concept of Employee Performance

Employee performance has always been the most important issue for any organization, profit or non-profit (Adubasim, Adim & Ibekwe, 2018). However, defining, conceptualizing, and measuring performance has not been a simple conversation (Wentzel, 2022). According to Taouab and Issor (2019), performance is defined as a set of financial and non-financial indicators that provide information on the degree of achievement of objectives and results. Employee performance includes three types of firm outcomes: (1) financial performance (profits, return on assets, and return on investment); (2) market performance (sales, market share); and (3) shareholder return. Employee performance entails recurring activities such as establishing organizational goals, tracking progress toward those goals, and making adjustments to achieve those goals more effectively and efficiently (Adubasim, Unaam, and Ejo-Orusa (2018).

Employee performance describes the behaviours and actions that are displayed by the employees which contribute to an organization's goal. Consequently, Hendri, (2019) postulates that job performance exists as a result of the perception of workers who consider their job as fundamental to the attainment of organizational goals. Hartnell, Karam, Kinicki and Dimotakis (2020) corroborates that employee performance is extremely influenced by training and development and hence it is imperative that employees and management focus more on personnel training in order to increase the level of skilled workers, and in return these workers can give their best to the organization. Aziz-Ur-Rehman and Siddiqui (2019) believes that employee performance is instrumental to organizational growth and profitability and management's ability to comprehend staff's satisfaction and its connection to schedules and daily responsibility will impact greatly on staff performance. According to Hu, Yan, Casey and Wu (2021), workers should strive to achieve the performance standard put in place by the organization to ensure quality of work on their part. However, employees need a conducive environment that enables them to work, an environment void of problems that may deter them from performing or achieving to their full potential if they are to meet organizational goals.

Relationship between Flexible Work Practices and Employee Performance

There have been several studies done on the relationship between work-life balance and employee performance. In his 2018 study, Abdirahman looked into the effects of work-life policies on employees' performance and job satisfaction. The results of that study highlighted the fact that each work-life balance policy is a predictor of performance and job satisfaction on its own. Similar to this, Soomro, Breiteneker, and Shah's (2018) study looked into the impact of work-life balance on productivity. The purpose of that study was to investigate the relationship between work-life balance and organizational productivity as well as the possibility that promoting work-life balance may reduce absenteeism and employee turnover. The study's findings indicated a link between work-life balance practices and lower employee turnover. Additionally, a study by Dibua, Nosike, and Oburoh (2021) examined the effects of work-life balance practices on employee job performance. The study's findings concur with those of other researchers who looked into the impact of work-life balance on employee performance.

According to Tavares, Santos, Diogo, and Ratten (2020), flexible work practices are workplace policies that help people successfully juggle work-related obligations and domestic responsibilities. The issues with work-life balance are made more difficult by the time spent getting to and from work and engaging in work-related activities, which is neither considered work nor leisure time but must be taken into account. Studies like those by Gagnano, Simbula, and Miglioretti (2020) have shown the value of work-life balance and employees' overall wellbeing. Conflicts in their personal lives can limit an employee's productivity at work if they are fortunate enough to have a work-life balance.

According to the Apuko, 2021 study, the established Embu County had flexible work arrangements in place that had a significant impact on employee performance. The current study, which will focus on Ken-Gen, an independent organization from the main government, will contrast this study's focus on a government ministry. Another study conducted by Chung (2020) findings showed that flexible working schedules positively increased employee productivity to a very great extent. The study recommended that organisations that seek to enhanced employee productivity should adopt flexible working schedules. A similar study was conducted by Davidescu, Apostu, Paul and Casuneanu (2020) findings showed that time flexibility significantly affected the productivity and performance of employees. Karia and Saleh, (2021) results showed that female entrepreneurs had a positive attitude about job sharing. The study further established that job sharing was a feasible mechanism of achieving work life balance.

The foregoing argument gave rise to the following hypotheses:

- HO1: There is no significant relationship between job sharing and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria

- HO2: There is no significant relationship between telecommuting and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey method in the generation of data. The target population of the study comprised employees, management staff and unit heads of the National totaling 67. The sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) North-East Zonal Office Gombe State determining minimum returned sample size for a given population. For our population, the table placed our sample size at fifty four (54). The sample size therefore of 54 was used for the study. The sampling procedure to be used in this study is the simple random sampling technique which give each respondents equal opportunity to be selected. Descriptive statistics and Spearman’s rank correlation were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing with the aid of the SPSS Package version 23.

Table 1. Reliability statistics for the instruments

S/No	Dimensions/Measures of the study variable	Number of items	Number of cases	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Job Sharing	4	47	0.875
2	Telecommuting	4	47	0.783
3	Employee Performance	4	47	0.846

Source: Research Data, 2022

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Bivariate Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using the Spearman rank order correlation tool at a 95% confidence interval. Specifically, the tests cover hypotheses Ho₁ and Ho₂ which were bivariate and all stated in the null form. We have relied on the Spearman Rank (*rho*) statistic to undertake the analysis. The 0.05 significance level is adopted as criterion for the probability of either accepting the null hypotheses at (p>0.05) or rejecting the null hypotheses at (p<0.05).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix showing relationship between Flexible Work Practice and Employee Performance

			Employee Performance	Job Sharing	Telecommuting
Spearman's rho	Employee Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.763**	.832**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	47	47	47
	Job Sharing	Correlation Coefficient	.763**	1.000	.730**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000

	N	47	47	47
Telecommuting	Correlation Coefficient	.832**	.730**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
	N	47	47	47

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

Source: Research Data, 2022 (SPSS output, version 23.0)

The table above illustrates the test for the three previously postulated bivariate hypothetical statements.

HO1: There is no significant relationship between job sharing and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria

The correlation coefficient 0.763 shows that there is a strong and positive relationship between job sharing and employee performance. The p value $0.000 < 0.05$ indicates that the relationship is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between job sharing and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria.

HO2: There is no significant relationship between telecommuting and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria

The correlation coefficient 0.832 shows that there is a strong and positive relationship between telecommuting and employee performance. The p value $0.000 < 0.05$ indicates that the relationship is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between telecommuting and employee performance in ICT firms in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed a strong and positive significant relationship between flexible work practice and employee performance using the Spearman's rank order correlation tool and at a 95% confidence interval. The findings of this study confirmed that flexible work practice (job sharing and telecommuting) had a significant positive relationship with employee performance. This finding supports the views of Niati, Siregar and Prayoga (2021) who found that FWAs improve employee job performance. The study proposed the amendment of existing labour laws to include mandatory employee welfare programs facilitated by employers. Munyeka and Maharaj (2022) in Mumbai of 100 employees from both industries compared work life balance of women employees from education colleges and I.T industries. It was observed that the duration of

working hour is not always uniform in case of women IT professionals in Mumbai city and the working hours vary as per nature of project assigned to them. It was found that young married women employee of early thirties or late twenties having kid are more stressed while interfacing their work and non-work lives. Baby care and managing household chores were been observed as the most pressing demand for them at the family. Along with this they were having their spouse working in 9 to 6 schedule thereby mostly depending on house maids and some of them put their kids in crèches. It was found that women in education are far more satisfied than in IT sector because the major cause of life imbalance in IT sector was work pressure while in education it was family responsibility.

Nwagbara (2020) investigated work life balance practices and policies managers and employees experience in Nigeria ICT sector. The finding of the empirical study shows that there is need to enlighten employee about the various work life balance practices. Bellmann and Hübler (2020) investigated work life balance reflections on employee satisfaction. Findings of the empirical test show that high correlation exists between work task and employee satisfaction with a mediator variable. The study concluded from the data that the individuals work/life balance correlates significantly with his/her level of satisfaction. The study recommends that further research be done to determine and assess the employees' satisfaction over a period of time by considering the drawbacks. A study by Anyim, (2019) examined work life balance and employee performance in selected commercial banks in Lagos state. The study showed that work life balance is an important factor that brings about employee performance. The study recommended that managers of these commercial banks should prioritize creating different work life balance incentives that will improve employee performance.

Abdirahman (2018) investigated the influence of work life balance and job satisfaction on organization commitment of health care employees. The findings of the empirical test shows that employee in the health care sector have a moderate level of perceived work life balance, job satisfaction and commitment. There is a positive relationship between work life balance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Chung and Van der Lippe (2020) studied the impact of flexible work time and employee commitment. In their study, it was confirmed that 87% of the workforce preferred flexible work and usually given priority when considering new employment. Organizations now have more awareness on the best way to engage employees that are more creative than the other.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Employees now have higher expectations for work-life balance as a result of the changing nature of the workplace. On the other hand, organizations are adopting work practices that allow employees to achieve a balance or equilibrium between time spent working and time devoted to other life roles in order to maintain the sense of harmony. The results of the study demonstrated a significant relationship between flexible work practices and employee performance in Nigeria's ICT sector. According to the study's findings, flexible work practices are crucial in assisting employees in striking a balance between their professional and personal obligations. The study came to the conclusion that job sharing and telecommuting are two examples of productive workplace practices and activities that contemporary organizations are increasingly implementing to boost employee productivity. Healthy work-life balance is achieved through these behaviors.

The study thus recommends that:

- i. Management of the organisations should encourage job sharing where majority of the employees are part timers. This will helps in reducing cost and ensuring that work that could take longer being done by one person is handled faster by people working on part time basis at reduced cost.
- ii. All organisations that seek to achieve work life balance that improves employee performance must put in place relevant work place policies that will ensure that all employees their work life demands are protected.

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