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Bridging The Gap: Employer-Employee Relationship And Task Performance: A Study Of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (2018–2022).

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Abstract: *This paper examined the impact of employer–employee relationship on task performance in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University between 2018 and 2022. The study specifically investigated the influence of employer–employee relationships on employee commitment, productivity, and absenteeism. A qualitative research design using content analysis was adopted, relying on secondary data sources such as academic journals, institutional reports, and policy documents. Findings revealed that a positive employer–employee relationship significantly enhances employee commitment by fostering trust and loyalty, improves productivity through motivation and engagement, and reduces absenteeism by promoting job satisfaction and workplace inclusion. The study concludes that employer–employee relationship is a fundamental driver of task performance in higher institutions. It recommends improved communication systems, participatory leadership, and enhanced employee welfare policies to strengthen organizational effectiveness.*

Keywords: employer–employee relationship, task performance, employee commitment, productivity, absenteeism, higher education

Introduction

The relationship between employers and employees remains a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly in academic institutions where human capital serves as the primary driver of productivity and innovation. Universities are inherently knowledge-driven organizations whose effectiveness depends largely on the intellectual contributions, commitment, and performance of both academic and non-academic staff (Armstrong, 2020). As such, the quality of interaction between university management and employees significantly shapes institutional outcomes, including teaching quality, research productivity, administrative efficiency, and overall service delivery (Guest, 2017).

A harmonious employer–employee relationship is characterized by mutual trust, respect, open communication, and fairness in organizational practices. These elements foster a conducive work environment in which employees feel valued and motivated to contribute meaningfully to institutional goals. When such relationships are well managed, they promote cooperation, reduce workplace conflict, and enhance organizational efficiency. In contrast, strained relationships often result in dissatisfaction, low morale, and reduced employee engagement, all of which negatively affect task performance (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

In the context of Nigerian universities, employer–employee relationships have been shaped by a variety of structural and systemic challenges. Issues such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic bottlenecks, inconsistent policy implementation, and frequent industrial disputes have contributed to tensions between management and staff (Akanbi, 2016). Specifically, factors such as poor communication channels, delayed payment of salaries and allowances, limited opportunities for career advancement, and perceived inequities in treatment have been identified as major constraints to effective workplace relationships (Armstrong, 2020). These challenges are evident in institutions like Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, where staff experiences often reflect broader trends within the Nigerian higher education system.

The consequences of weak employer–employee relationships are far-reaching. Employees who perceive neglect or unfair treatment from management are more likely to exhibit negative work attitudes, including low commitment, reduced productivity, and increased absenteeism (Robbins & Judge, 2013). In extreme cases, such conditions may lead to industrial actions, such as strikes, which disrupt academic calendars and undermine the credibility of institutions. Akanbi (2016) noted that ineffective human resource management practices significantly affect employee performance and organizational outcomes, particularly in public sector institutions.

Conversely, positive employer–employee relationships can serve as a strategic tool for enhancing institutional performance. When employees are actively engaged, adequately motivated, and fairly treated, they are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment and efficiency (Meyer & Allen, 1997). This not only improves individual task performance but also contributes to the overall effectiveness and competitiveness of the institution. In this regard, employer–employee relationship goes beyond mere administrative interaction; it becomes a critical mechanism for achieving organizational sustainability and excellence (Guest, 2017).

Furthermore, the evolving nature of work in the 21st century, characterized by increased emphasis on collaboration, innovation, and adaptability, has made it imperative for universities to prioritize effective workplace relationships. The integration of modern management practices, such as participatory decision-making, transparent communication systems, and performance-based incentives, is essential for fostering a positive organizational climate (Armstrong, 2020).

Therefore, understanding the dynamics of employer–employee relationships is essential for improving institutional performance. This study is particularly significant as it seeks to provide empirical and theoretical insights into how such relationships influence key performance indicators—namely employee commitment, productivity, and absenteeism—within Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. By examining these dimensions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on enhancing human resource management practices in Nigerian universities and strengthening the overall effectiveness of higher education institutions.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the paper was to evaluate the impact of employer-employee relationship on task performance in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the paper sought to:

1. Ascertain the impact of employer-employee relationship on employee commitment to work in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria;
2. Determine the impact of employer-employee relationship on improving employee productivity in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria;
3. Examine the impact of employer-employee relationship on reduction of absenteeism among staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers the examination of the relationship between employer–employee interactions and task performance at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University over the period 2018–2022. The study focuses specifically on understanding how the quality of employer–employee relationships influences three key aspects of staff performance: employee commitment, productivity, and absenteeism. Both academic and non-academic staff are included in the study, recognizing that effective organizational performance depends on the contributions of all categories of employees.

Geographically, the research is confined to the main campuses of the university in Anambra State, Nigeria. Conceptually, the study emphasizes the social and organizational dynamics of the employer–employee relationship, drawing on Social Exchange Theory to explain the impact of perceived fairness, recognition, and support on employee behavior. Temporally, the study analyzes data and experiences spanning five years (2018–2022) to capture trends and patterns in workplace relationships and their influence on task performance within the institution.

The study does not extend to other universities in Nigeria or to sectors outside the academic environment. Similarly, it does not focus on factors such as external economic conditions or government policies beyond their indirect effect on employer–employee relations within the university context. The scope is thus deliberately focused to provide an in-depth understanding of how internal relational dynamics shape performance outcomes in a higher education institution.

Literature Review

Employer–Employee Relationship

Employer–employee relationship refers to the interactions, communication patterns, and mutual obligations that exist between management and staff within an organization. It represents the foundation upon which organizational activities are coordinated and executed. According to Armstrong (2020), the employer–employee relationship encompasses both formal and informal interactions that shape employee attitudes, behavior, and overall productivity. Formal relationships are defined by organizational structures, policies, employment contracts, and rules, while informal relationships emerge through social interactions, shared experiences, and workplace culture (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

The employer–employee relationship is inherently reciprocal in nature, involving a continuous exchange of expectations and obligations between both parties. Employers are expected to provide fair wages, conducive working conditions, job security, and opportunities for growth, while employees are expected to demonstrate commitment, loyalty, and competence in the discharge of their duties (Blau, 1964). This reciprocal exchange forms the basis of trust and cooperation, which are essential for organizational stability and effectiveness.

A positive employer–employee relationship is characterized by trust, fairness, respect, and effective communication. Trust serves as a critical element, as it enhances cooperation and reduces the likelihood of conflict. When employees trust management, they are more likely to align their personal goals with organizational objectives (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Fairness, particularly in areas such as promotion, compensation, and disciplinary actions, also plays a vital role in shaping employee perceptions and attitudes. Perceived injustice can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and counterproductive work behaviors (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Effective communication is another central component of employer–employee relationship. Open and transparent communication channels facilitate the flow of information, clarify roles and expectations, and enable employees to express their concerns and ideas. According to Guest (2017), organizations that encourage employee voice and participation tend to experience higher levels of

engagement and performance. Communication also plays a vital role in conflict resolution, thereby promoting a harmonious work environment.

Furthermore, leadership style significantly influences the nature of employer–employee relationships. Participatory and transformational leadership styles tend to foster positive relationships by encouraging inclusiveness, motivation, and empowerment. In contrast, autocratic leadership styles may create distance between management and employees, leading to resentment and reduced productivity (Armstrong, 2020). Leaders who demonstrate empathy, integrity, and support are more likely to build strong relationships with their subordinates (Guest, 2017).

In addition, organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping employer–employee relationships. A culture that promotes collaboration, recognition, and mutual respect strengthens interpersonal relationships and enhances teamwork. Conversely, a toxic organizational culture characterized by favoritism, discrimination, and poor management practices can damage relationships and hinder performance (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

In the context of higher institutions such as Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, employer–employee relationships are particularly important due to the complexity of academic work and the need for collaboration among staff. Academic staff require autonomy, recognition, and support to effectively carry out teaching and research responsibilities, while non-academic staff depend on clear communication and fair treatment to perform administrative functions efficiently (Armstrong, 2020).

Overall, the employer–employee relationship is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that goes beyond contractual obligations. It involves emotional, psychological, and social dimensions that significantly influence employee behavior and organizational outcomes. A well-managed relationship not only enhances job satisfaction and commitment but also serves as a strategic tool for improving productivity, reducing absenteeism, and achieving organizational goals (Guest, 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Task Performance

Task performance refers to the effectiveness with which employees carry out their assigned duties and responsibilities within an organization. It is a central component of overall job performance and reflects how well employees execute tasks that directly contribute to organizational goals. According to Campbell (1990), task performance encompasses behaviors that are formally recognized as part of an employee's job description and includes the quality, quantity, and timeliness of work output. These dimensions serve as key indicators for evaluating employee efficiency and effectiveness in achieving expected outcomes.

Task performance is often measured through several criteria, including accuracy, consistency, speed, and adherence to organizational standards. High-quality performance implies that tasks are completed with minimal errors and in accordance with established procedures, while quantity refers to the volume of work produced within a given period. Timeliness, on the other hand, emphasizes the ability of employees to meet deadlines and deliver results promptly (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Together, these indicators provide a comprehensive framework for assessing employee contributions to organizational success.

In academic institutions, task performance assumes a more complex and multifaceted dimension due to the diverse roles performed by staff. For academic staff, task performance includes effective teaching delivery, curriculum development, research productivity, publication output, and supervision of students. Teaching effectiveness involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also the ability to engage students, stimulate critical thinking, and facilitate learning outcomes. Research output, measured through publications in reputable journals and participation in scholarly activities, is another critical indicator of performance in universities (Armstrong, 2020).

For non-academic staff, task performance is reflected in administrative efficiency, record management, service delivery, and support functions that ensure the smooth operation of the institution. These roles, though often less visible, are essential for maintaining institutional effectiveness and supporting the academic mission. As such, both academic and non-academic staff contribute significantly to the overall performance of the university.

Furthermore, task performance is influenced by several organizational and individual factors, including motivation, leadership style, work environment, and availability of resources. Employees who are adequately motivated and supported by management tend to exhibit higher levels of performance (Guest, 2017). Similarly, a conducive work environment characterized by adequate facilities, clear job roles, and supportive supervision enhances employees' ability to perform their tasks effectively (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Another important dimension of task performance is its relationship with employee competence and skill development. Continuous training and professional development are essential for improving employees' knowledge and capabilities, thereby enhancing their performance levels. In the context of higher education, staff development programs such as workshops, seminars, and conferences play a crucial role in equipping employees with the skills needed to meet evolving academic and administrative demands (Armstrong, 2020).

In institutions such as Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, task performance is particularly important due to the institution's mandate of teaching, research, and community service. The ability of staff to effectively carry out these responsibilities determines the institution's reputation, ranking, and overall contribution to national development. Poor task performance can lead to declining academic standards, inefficiency, and loss of public trust, while high performance enhances institutional credibility and competitiveness.

Moreover, task performance is closely linked to other work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee retention. Employees who perform well are more likely to experience a sense of accomplishment and recognition,

which in turn reinforces positive work attitudes (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Conversely, poor performance may result in disciplinary actions, reduced morale, and job insecurity.

Task performance is a critical construct that captures the extent to which employees fulfill their job responsibilities effectively. It is influenced by a combination of individual capabilities and organizational factors, and it plays a vital role in determining the success of institutions. In the context of higher education, enhancing task performance requires strategic efforts aimed at improving employee motivation, strengthening employer–employee relationships, and providing adequate resources and support systems (Guest, 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory (SET), propounded by Peter Blau (1964). The theory posits that relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges in which individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In organizational settings, the employer–employee relationship is viewed as an exchange process where employers provide rewards such as salary, support, and recognition, while employees reciprocate through commitment, loyalty, and improved performance (Blau, 1964).

Social Exchange Theory is built on key assumptions that explain workplace behavior. First, the principle of reciprocity suggests that employees respond positively to favorable treatment from employers by demonstrating commitment and improved performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Second, the theory assumes that employees engage in cost–benefit evaluation, assessing whether the rewards they receive justify their efforts and contributions (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Third, repeated exchanges between employers and employees foster trust and mutual obligation, which are essential for sustaining long-term relationships. Finally, the theory emphasizes fairness, as employees are more motivated when they perceive equity in treatment, while perceived injustice can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced performance (Adams, 1965).

The application of Social Exchange Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how employer–employee relationships influence key outcomes in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. When employees perceive fairness, support, and recognition from management, they are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of commitment, expressed through loyalty and dedication to their duties (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Similarly, such positive exchanges enhance productivity, as employees are motivated to exert greater effort and improve their efficiency (Guest, 2017). In addition, strong employer–employee relationships reduce absenteeism, as employees develop a sense of attachment and responsibility toward the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Overall, Social Exchange Theory provides a clear and relevant framework for understanding how positive employer–employee relationships translate into enhanced task performance. Through the principles of reciprocity, trust, and fairness, the theory explains how mutual exchanges between employers and employees contribute to improved commitment, increased productivity, and reduced absenteeism within the organization.

Empirical Review

Previous studies have established a strong link between employer–employee relationships and performance outcomes. For instance, Guest (2017) found that effective communication and employee involvement significantly enhance productivity. Similarly, Ogbonna and Harris (2000) emphasized that leadership style influences organizational climate and employee output. In the Nigerian context, Adeyemi (2019) reported that poor industrial relations negatively affect staff morale in public universities.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design using content analysis. Secondary data were sourced from academic journals, institutional reports, and government publications covering the period 2018–2022. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to employer–employee relationships and task performance.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of employer–employee relationships in shaping staff behavior and performance at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. Each of the three key findings aligns with both the study objectives and the theoretical framework, providing insights into how relational dynamics affect organizational outcomes.

The study revealed that positive employer–employee relationships significantly enhance employee commitment. This finding aligns with the principles of Social Exchange Theory, which emphasize that employees are likely to reciprocate favorable treatment from their employers with loyalty and dedication (Blau, 1964). When staff perceive fairness, recognition, and support, they develop a sense of obligation toward the organization, resulting in higher engagement and willingness to perform beyond formal requirements (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Conversely, weak relationships characterized by poor communication, lack of recognition, or perceived inequity reduce commitment, reflecting prior research showing that employee disengagement is often rooted in poor managerial relationships (Guest, 2017). In the context of Nigerian universities, where bureaucratic challenges and delayed remuneration are common, strengthening employer–employee relationships is especially important to sustain motivation and institutional loyalty.

The finding that positive relationships improve employee productivity confirms that relational factors directly influence work output and efficiency. Supportive supervision, open communication, and timely feedback were shown to enhance the quality and quantity of work produced. This is consistent with studies indicating that employees who feel valued and supported demonstrate higher task performance (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Productivity in universities is not limited to academic work but also includes administrative efficiency and research output. When management invests in building strong relationships with staff, employees are more likely to take initiative, meet deadlines, and maintain high standards of work. Conversely, poor relationships often result in reduced effort, mistakes, and low morale, which can hinder institutional objectives.

The study also found that strong employer–employee relationships reduce absenteeism. This finding is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that employees reciprocate positive treatment with behaviors that benefit the organization (Blau, 1964). Staff members who feel supported, fairly treated, and recognized are more likely to be present, engaged, and committed to their duties. On the other hand, when employees perceive neglect, inequity, or lack of support, absenteeism increases as a form of withdrawal behavior, disrupting workflow and institutional efficiency. This reflects previous research that links absenteeism to job dissatisfaction and poor workplace relationships (Armstrong, 2020; Robbins & Judge, 2013)

Conclusion

The study concludes that a strong and positive employer–employee relationship is essential for enhancing task performance in higher institutions. In Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, improved communication, effective leadership, and employee motivation were found to significantly influence productivity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. University management should adopt participatory leadership styles to encourage employee involvement.
2. Effective communication systems should be established to ensure transparency.
3. Timely payment of salaries and incentives should be prioritized.

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