EMPLOYEE SKILLS MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between Employee Skills Management and Performance of Public Hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study adopts a cross-sectional study research design. The study population consist of three thousand four hundred and eighty-eight (3488) employees, obtained from the human resource departments of five (5) public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State; with a sample size of three hundred and forty-six (346) which was determined from the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. After data cleaning, three hundred and twenty-seven (327) respondents were finally used for data analysis. The analysis was carried out in primary, secondary and tertiary stages respectively. The primary stage of the analysis had to do with demographic analysis. At the secondary stage, the univariate analytical tool employed was used to describe the individual variables using mean scores and standard deviation, at the tertiary stage, the bivariate analysis was carried out to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the dimensions of the employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance with the use of Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient in other to test the stated hypotheses formulated for the study with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26. The empirical findings revealed that there is a strong and positive relationship between employee skills management and the measures of performance of public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State that were studied. Thus, the study concludes that, investments in employee skills management is positively related to organizational performance. The study recommends that public hospitals employ various skill identification methods, such as job analysis, competency mapping, self-assessment, and performance appraisal, as it helps organizations make informed decisions about improving their performance.

Keywords: Employee Skills Management, Skill Identification, Skill Assessment, Skill Development, Labour Productivity, Employee Retention.

INTRODUCTION

An organization's success heavily relies on its workforce's competence and dedication. They can either propel the organisation towards its objectives or impede its progress. One can deduct from this statement the extent to which the quality of individuals employed by an organization is, by large, a pertinent factor in framing an organization's performance outcomes. For some, this quality translates into the employee's knowledge and competencies, which are considered substantial factors for success (Ardhianiswari, 2014). Robbins and Decenzo (2001) have conclusively determined that one of the keys to achieving organizational success is recruiting employees with the required skills to effectively execute the tasks necessary to meet the company's strategic objectives.

More so, it can be asserted that employees are seen as the capital force that controls an organization's capital and, as such, are indispensable; thence, the management of these employees' skills to improve an organization's performance cannot be overemphasized. For instance, Deloitte (2019), in their global human capital trend report, highlights the indispensability of employees to an organization's success by emphasizing the need for employee development, empowerment and autonomy, and positive work culture. Likewise, they stress the importance of investing in employee development and learning opportunities as organizations that invariably prioritize their employees' growth and skill enhancement create a culture of continuous learning that inevitably leads to higher labour productivity, retention, and improved organizational performance. Also, with rapid changes in today's business environment, organizations need employees with the necessary skills to adapt to new challenges ushered by technological changes.

Nevertheless, failure resulting from an organization's inability to foresee and adequately install future reactive measures to mitigate the impact of the change, as mentioned earlier, can have far-reaching consequences for employees and the organization. It is deduced from an avalanche of literature that technological advancement can, without doubt, render specific skills obsolete or less relevant and create a pool of employees who are left at the risk of swiftly becoming digital illiterates or technologically incompetent in their job functions. Thus, the need to continuously up-skill and re-skill employees to leverage new technologies effectively. Affirming this deduction is the World Economic Forum (2020), which, in their study, highlights the increasing demand for re-skilling and up-skilling due to technological advancements and automation. They emphasize investing in workforce training and development to bridge the skills gap and ensure employees thrive in a digital era. Successively, the advent of the concept and practice of skills management has made it possible for organizations to effectively manage the skills of their employees in such circumstances. Numerous social scientists assert that implementing this approach can enhance organizational performance outcomes.

However, the level of achievement of the goals and objectives of an organization is known to determine how successful an organization is. Consequently, employee skills management has been shown through research to have a significant impact on organizational performance. As a result, the effective management of employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities through skills management practices are considered pertinent factors that are instrumental to an organization's success; and have been linked to increasing productivity, employee turnover, employee job satisfaction and engagement. For instance, a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that investing in worker training and education significantly positively affects productivity (Allen, Baum, Carre & Delgado, 2011). Relatively, Gallup (2016) indicated that employees, who feel a sense of development towards an organization or employer, are more engaged in their work and more likely to stay with that organization or employer.

Even with the wide range of benefits of ESM to an organization's success, organizations often need help with specific difficulties revolving around the implementation of ESM practices. One significant challenge is skill obsolescence; in today's rapidly changing business environment, employers are responsible for continuously updating their employees' skills to remain relevant. This can be daunting for most organizations when an effective process for identifying and addressing the skills gap created by the latter is not implemented. Thus, it becomes imperative for organizations to implement systems structured to effectively and efficiently implement employee skills management practices. As a result, organizations can take steps such as clarifying the goals and objectives for managing employee skills and competencies and ensuring ESM practices align with its broader talent management and human resource strategy. However, one must measure the impact of ESM on organizational performance to know the effectiveness of skills management practices and identify areas needing improvement. Therefore, this study aims to determine the relationship that exist between employee skills management and organizational performance of public hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Relationship between Employee Skills Management and Organizational Performance
Source: *Author's Research Work 2023****;*** *with measures of organizational performance sourced from the work of Akande & Osibanjo (2017);*

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions are categorically formulated to suit the respective objectives, thereby creating a coherent understanding of the study for both researcher and readers alike. Thus:

i. What is the relationship between employee skills management and labour productivity in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State?
ii. What is the relationship between employee skills management and employee retention in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical foundation

The human capital theory was used as a baseline theory to underpin the research model.

The Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory is a widely recognized economic theory that asserts that investing in employee education and training results in enhanced organizational productivity and profitability. It posits that people are not merely a cost to organizations but a valuable resource that can provide a competitive advantage. However, concerning employee turnover, it highlights organizations being capable of reducing turnover and retaining their valuable employees through investments made towards their development. Initially formulated by Theodore Schultz in 1961, it was argued that investments in the education and training of employees had significantly played a role in increasing their level of productivity, which led to increased economic output and growth.

Conversely, this theory acknowledges the risks and challenges of investing in human capital. Having the potential to become a sunk cost, this is known to be a barrier to individuals making rational decisions about their investments in human capital. For example, a study by Gourville and Soman (1998) found that individuals were more likely to invest additional resources in a project when they had already invested a significant amount, even if the project was not likely to succeed. This can also be associated with individuals who continuously invest in education with no feasible return on their investment but, notwithstanding, continue to make future investments.

In Nigeria, contemporary issues such as the rapid increase in brain drain and human capital flight are significant risks associated with investing in human capital. Many highly educated and skilled Nigerians choose to immigrate to foreign countries in search of better opportunities; this can limit the availability of skilled workers and reduce the returns on human capital investment. Finally, the human capital theory may oversimplify the complexities of employee behaviour and motivation. While education and training can improve productivity, factors such as job satisfaction, motivation, and workplace culture also play an essential role in shaping employee behaviour. Overall, the human capital theory can provide valuable insights for organizations looking to invest in their employees' skills and knowledge. However, knowing these investments' potential risks and challenges is vital to ensure they generate a positive return on investment and contribute to long-term organizational success.

Concept of Employee Skills Management

It can be stated through an overview of management theories that one of the earliest references to skills management can be traced back to the early 20th century when Taylor (1911) proposed the scientific management approach, which emphasized the importance of matching workers' skills to job requirements to enhance productivity. According to Rigby (2012), this was achieved through training and development programs to meet the organization's immediate needs. More so, the emergence of competency-based management in the 1980s led to a shift from training and developing employees to identifying and assessing specific competencies or skills considered critical to job performance (Noe Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2017). This process was seen as dynamic as it not only focused on aligning employee skills with the needs of the organization but also, emphasized the importance of continuous training and development.

According to Bach and Sisson (2013), employee skills management refers to identifying the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities for a specific job or role and then creating strategies to ensure that employees have those skills, whether through recruitment or training and development. Employee skills management, as it is known today, has become a more dynamic and strategic approach incorporating new technologies and processes like e-learning, gamification and artificial intelligence. As an example, Blaschke (2012) in his study argued that e-learning can provide a cost-effective and efficient way of delivering training and development programs to employees.

Consequently, an organization's ability to manage and develop employee skills has become critical in determining its capacity to innovate and compete in an increasingly globalized and dynamic market environment. However, this can be challenging for organizations due to various factors, including technological advancements, changing customer needs, and continuous learning. As a result, Bocken, Short and Rana (2019) posited that technological advancements require employees to learn new skills to remain competitive in the labour market. Additionally, the changing nature of customer needs requires employees to possess diverse skills and knowledge to provide high-quality services (Kelleher & Tierney, 2018).

Concept of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is an essential element within management that is widely studied in academic literature. Rothwell and Kazanas (2003) define it as the extent to which a company achieves its objectives and goals, measurable through financial and non-financial metrics such as productivity, customer satisfaction and employee engagement. Contrary, Richard, Barnette, Dwyer and Chadwick (2009), on the other hand, believe that organizational performance is impacted by a variety of internal and external elements, including leadership, culture, strategy and environmental factors.

Organizational performance is also linked to an organization's culture; those with solid and flexible cultures tend to outperform those with weak or rigid cultures while emphasizing continuous improvement and innovation are vital for prolonged success (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). More so, the use of Performance Measurement Systems (PMS) is necessary for optimal results; it is suggested that the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) and balanced scorecards can help organizations align their strategies with their performance goals and objectives (Samson & Terziovski, 2011). Nevertheless, both KPIs and scorecards are essential tools for monitoring and managing organizational performance. They enable organizations to align their activities and resources towards achieving strategic goals, improve decision-making, and drive continuous improvement (Neely, Adams, & Kennerley, 2002).

Measures of Organizational Performance

Employee Retention

McKeon (2020) as cited in Kaur (2017) defines employee retention as " a systematic effort by employers to establish and foster a work environment that motivates current employees to remain employed through implementing policies and practices that address their diverse needs." It can be described as an organization's goal or attempt to keep talented employees and reduce turnover by promoting a positive work environment. Additionally, Fitz-enz (1990) recognized that employee retention is not influenced by a single factor but rather by several factors such as skill recognition, compensation, rewards, job security, training and development, supervisor support culture, work environment and organization justice.

Labour Productivity

Labour productivity quantifies the effectiveness of a company's labour force in generating goods or services. Krugman and Obstfeld (2009) define labour productivity as the amount of output produced per unit of labour input; that measures the efficiency and effectiveness with which labour is employed in producing goods and services. It is calculated by dividing output by the number of hours worked. Labour productivity is an indispensable KPI in many organizations and is intrinsically linked to profitability and competition (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Enhancing labour productivity may lead to decreased costs, augmented production, and upgraded competitiveness (Chilunda, 2016).

More so, a high labour productivity score indicates that a business is making efficient use of resources and producing more with fewer resources. Assessing and surveilling labour productivity can aid companies in analyzing areas for improvement and creating tactics to boost efficiency and productivity. It also serves as a helpful comparison tool with industry standards and competitors (Garengo & Biazzo, 2015).

Empirical Review

Bassi et McMurrer (2004) investigated the relationship between investments in employee skills and organizational performance using a cross-sectional design. The sample consisted of 4,340 US private-sector firms from various industries. The authors used regression analysis to assess the relationship between firm investment in employee skills (as measured by training expenditure per employee) and two outcome measures: labour productivity and return on investment (ROI). The findings indicated that firms that invested more in employee skills had higher labour productivity and ROI levels than firms that invested less. Specifically, firms in the top 25% of training expenditure per employee had a 24% higher labour productivity and a 218% higher ROI than firms in the bottom 25%. The authors concluded that investment in employee skills positively relates to firm performance and recommended that firms invest in employee skills to improve their bottom line.

Chunming (2019) studied the relationship between training and firm performance through a systematic literature review methodology. The study used literature reviews to analyze existing research on the relationship between employee training and firm performance; it did not have a specific population nor statistical analysis as it was a review of existing literature. The study found consistent evidence of a positive relationship between employee training and firm performance, with training positively impacting a variety of performance measures such as productivity, sales, and profitability. The study also found that the relationship between training and firm performance was moderated by factors such as training intensity and the quality of the training program.

Ulrich, Brockbank, and Yeung (2015), through a synthesis of literature reviews of previous works on the relationship connecting talent management practices and organizational performance, examined the relationship between talent management practices, including skills identification, development, and organizational performance. A population comprising different industries and sectors were used in this study. The findings of this study showed that organizations are more likely to outperform their competitors and achieve long-term success when they effectively identify and develop the skills of their employees and take a strategic approach towards talent management. They also accentuated that organizations that invest in talent management practices are more likely to innovate and adapt to changing market conditions. As due, they recommended that practices involving skills identification and development and talent management practices be prioritized to improve organizational performance. Also suggested is taking a strategic approach to talent management and aligning talent management practices with organizational goals and objectives, as well as investing in training and development programs that ensure employees have the skills and necessary knowledge to meet the present and future needs of the organization.

By exploring a descriptive self-administered survey questionnaire that collected data from 100 employees across five companies in Ogun state Nigeria, Mabogunje and Akanbi (2018); examined the impact of employee training and development on productivity. Analysis of this data through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis revealed that training and development programs were well-suited and relevant for employees to execute their job functions. Conclusions suggest that organizations regularly invest in employee training and development to improve productivity, increase employee motivation and commitment, and retain talented employees. Thus, we hypothesized that;

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between employee skills management and employee retention in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between employee skills management and labour productivity in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a cross-sectional study research design. This was used in the investigation of the variables in the study. Primary data was also generated through a survey questionnaire. The population covered three thousand four hundred and eighty-eight (3488) workers from the twenty (5) public hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria; a sample of 346 was determined using the table from Krejcie and Morgan (1970). After data screening, 327 copies of the questionnaire were used for data analysis. Spearman’s rank order correlation was adopted in the test for 6 hypotheses formulated for the study with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26.0.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alphas of Study Variable

S/N	Variables	No. of items	Alpha (α)
1	Employee Skills Management	9	0.885
2	Organizational Performance	6	0.891

Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

Bivariate Analysis (Test of Research Hypotheses)

The bivariate level of analysis for this study is concerned with the presentation of the results for the tests of the hypothetical statements of null significant association between employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance, the associations in this section are tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 95% confidence interval. The study adopts a criterion and significance value of 0.05, based on its level of confidence (95%). **Decision rule:** The decision rule which applies to all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject the hypothesis based on evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept the hypothesis based on insignificant relationship between the variables.

Relationship between Employee Skills Management and the Measures of Organizational Performance

Table 2: Correlations for Employee Skills Management and the Measures of Organizational Performance

			Employee Skills Management	Employee Retention	Labour Productivity
Spearman's rho	Employee Skills Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.883**	.902**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	327	327	327
	Employee Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.883**	1.000	.898**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	327	327	327
	Labour Productivity	Correlation Coefficient	.902**	.898**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	327	327	327

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: SPSS Output, 2023

H_{O1-3}: There is no significant relationship between employee skills management and organizational performance in public hospitals in Bayelsa, State Nigeria.

The correlation coefficient (rho) result in Table 2 shows a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.883, and 0.902 on the relationship between employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance (employee retention and labour productivity) in public hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. These values imply that a strong relationship exists between the variables. Also, the direction of the relationship of both variables indicates a positive relationship; thus, implying that investments in skills management practices can undoubtedly improve organizational performance. Therefore, there is a strong positive correlation between employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance (employee retention and labour productivity) in public hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Similarly displayed in Table 2 is the statistical test of significance (p - p-value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained from Table 2, the tests of significance show that the relationship between employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance in public hospitals in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the relationship between employee skills management and organizational performance in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between dimensions of employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance in public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Using Spearman's rank order correlation tool and at a 95% confidence interval, the findings of this study confirmed that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of employee skills management and the measures of organizational performance. The evidence on the scatter plot showed that approximately 92.5% of the changes and manifestations of organizational performance can be linked to actions that reflect employee skills management in the public hospitals in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

The finding supports the study by Bassi et al., (2004) that investigated the relationship between investments in employee skills and organizational performance. The findings indicated that firms that invested more in employee skills had higher levels of labour productivity and ROI than firms that invested less. Specifically, firms in the top 25% of training expenditure per employee had a 24% higher labour productivity and a 218% higher ROI than firms in the bottom 25%. The authors concluded that investment in employee skills is positively related to firm performance and recommended that firms invest in employee skills to improve their bottom line.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A clear and immediate correlation exists between using employee skills management in improving organizational performance. As a result, the effective management of employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities through skills management practices are factors that are instrumental to an organization's success; and have been linked to increasing productivity and employee retention. More so, it was revealed from the outcomes of the study that employee skills management plays a significant role in the organizational performance of public hospitals in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the subsequent recommendations are made:

i. Given that employee skill identification positively relates to organizational performance, the study recommends that public hospitals should employ various skill identification methods such as job analysis, competency mapping, self-assessment, and performance appraisal, amongst others, as it helps organizations make informed decisions about continuing improving the performance of the organization.

ii. Public hospitals should pay attention to employee skill assessment which should be optimized to improve the performance of the employees and the organization. Information regarding an individual's weaknesses and strengths, which can help make informed decisions involving training, development, and performance management, is brought to light through employee skill assessment.

iii. Skill development is an ongoing procedure that allows individuals to gain and refine the skills needed for effective execution in the workplace; therefore, investing in employee skills development is vital for any organization that desires to stay competitive in the market.

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