Understanding the Effect of HRM Practices on Employees’ Task Performance: An Empirical Evidence from Civil Service in Nigeria

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For years the performance of public sector employees has been questioned especially in developing countries like Nigeria where employees are expected to exert more efforts in discharging their assigned responsibilities. On the premises of Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study examined the effect of HRM practices on public sector employees’ task performance using a sample of 265 Civil Servants drawn from 27 local government employees in Jigawa State of Nigeria. Using the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) the findings revealed that HRM practices including training, compensation, autonomy, communication and career planning had a significant positive relationship with employees’ task performance. The results suggested that application of effective HRM practices in organization will promote high performance of employees not only in the private sector alone as indicated by many studies, but also within the public sector organizations.

Key words: HRM Practices, Task Performance, Civil Service, Public Sector Employees

INTRODUCTION

Extent literature on performance revealed that the performance of employees in organizations has a strong influence on the success or failure in attaining organizational objectives. This can be attributed to the reason why most organizations nowadays unlike before considered their employees as a strategic assert rather than a cost to the organization. Thus, effective management of human resource practices like training, participation, compensation, empowerment etc enables organization to gain competitive advantage over others (Pfeffer, 1995; Tessema, Craft, Subhani, & Tewold, 2015). The main reason for this was that, organizations whether private or public most operate and cooperate with people in order to successfully attain their objectives (Tessema et al., 2015).

The Public sector organizations especially the mainstream civil service of the developing countries like Nigeria are considered to be a labour-intensive organizations considering the number and the huge budgetary allocation spent every year on their recurrent expenditure. For
instance, for years the money spent on recurrent expenditures were always greater than the one spent on capital expenditures. However, despite these huge expenditure spent on the public servants, yet the performance of Nigerian civil servants over the years is characterized by inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Esu & Inyang, 2009), poor service delivery (Inyang & Akaegbu, 2014), low service quality (Dogarawa, 2011) among others. These performance related problems of the Nigerian civil service in particular and the public service in general led to several reform efforts in order to restore the lost glory of the service. While empirical evidence have documented that effective management of HRM practices promote higher employees’ task performance, the poor performance of Nigerian civil service can be attributed to lack of effective HRM practices. For example, Onah (2012) reported that training practice (both on-the-job and off-the-job) in Nigerian civil service were not properly designed inline with the training needs but only based on individual personal ties. Similarly, compensation (remuneration and other fringe benefits) in the civil service is very low when compared with private sectors. This over the years have been leading to a number of strike actions within the civil service (Enoghase, 2014). Again the practice of communication (free flow of information) was for years been distorted due to the bureaucratic nature of Nigerian civil service (Afinotan, 2009). Relatedly, appointment and transfer of officer from private sectors to the mainstream civil service especially at federal level obstruct the career progression of many civil servants and distort their career planning (Magbadelo, 2016). To address these issues, this study was conducted with aim of understanding the influence of HRM practices (specifically, training, compensation, job autonomy, communication and career planning) on employees’ task performance within the context of Nigerian civil service.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Employee Task Performance

Task performance as conceptualized by Campbell (1990) is the proficiency or competency with which one (an employee) performs his/her assigned job tasks. It is also seen as the employees’ behaviours that mainly concern with core task assigned to them in organization. Literature revealed that several other labels were used interchangeable with task performance such as task behavior (Murphy, 1989), in-role performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), job specific task proficiency (Campbell et al., 1990), technical proficiency (Lance, Teachout, & Donnelly, 1992). However, whatever label used task performance is concerned with the quantity of work done, the quality of work and above all the job knowledge (Campbell, 1990; Koopmans et al., 2011).

2.2 HRM Practices and Employee Task Performance
Studies on different HRM practices were linked with different form performance i.e organizational performance, unit performance, departmental performance and individual performance (Knies & Leisink, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). As earlier mentioned, this study focuses only on five HRM practices (training, compensation, job autonomy, communication and career planning) and employees’ task performance. Literature on HRM practices and performance suggested that specific HRM practices adopted by organizations do influences the attitude and behavior of employees (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2009; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007). However, majority of these studies are on organizational performance as only few studies considered the influence of HRM practices on employees task (individual) performance (Alfes et al., 2013).

HRM practices are group of interconnected and carefully designed organizational practices typically conceived to improve performance at different levels (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005). Thus, implementing them is based on the assumption that the organization intends to promote higher performance by investing on employees.

Training & development of employee in organization is considered to be one of the most important ways through which organization used to socialized and motivate their employees and also equip them with necessary knowledge, skills and abilities that are required in accomplishing the organizational goal (Cappelli, Singh, Singh, & Useem, 2010). Effective training and development of employee contribute to the development of positive changes in employees attitude and behaviours. Previous studies revealed that there is a positive relationship between training and task performance (Cho & Yoon, 2009; Tessema & Soeters, 2006).

Compensation practice refers to all forms of financial returns and tangible benefits which employee receives as part of an employment contract (Milkovich & Newman, 1999). Similarly, John, (2003) considered compensation to encompasses all type of rewards that employees receive in an exchange for what they have performed towards achieving organizational objectives. Previous findings (Akhter, Siddique, & Alam, 2013; Nadarasa, 2013) indicated positive relationship between compensation practice and task performance.

With regard to job autonomy, Hackman and Oldham (1975), conceptualized job autonomy as the degree or level to which the work of an employee allows him substantial discretion and freedom in scheduling the job and determine the ways and procedure that will be use in conducting the work. Empirical work of Langfred and Moye (2004) and Gellatly and Irving (2001) proved that job autonomy had a positive influence on task performance arguing that allowing employee the freedom to discharge assigned responsibilities encouraged them to exerted more efforts in performing their jobs.
Communication as HRM practice refers to the exchange of organizational information (policies, procedures, and practices) between organization and employees about their job (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Previous studies had shown that when employees that enjoyed open upward and down ward communication with their management (organization) they are more likely to build an effective and good work relationships that will enhance their performance and above all contribute to the overall organizational productivity (Gray & Laidlaw, 2004; Tsai, Chuang, & Hsieh, 2009).

Career planning being an important HRM practice that identify employees’ career preferences and setting up a development objective by establishing an action plans that enable employees match their capabilities and interests with organizational available opportunities (Ismail, Adnan, & Bakar, 2014). Scholars like (Gardner, Wright, & Moynihan, 2011), suggested that employees) mostly prefer to join the organization that provides enough opportunities to attain career goals. Effective career planning practice in organizations provide opportunities for employees to develop and improve their skills, administrative knowledge and new technologies that increase the employees’ abilities and performance (Pynes, 2009).

Drawing upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) which argued that relationships in organizational set up (between employees and organizations/management) are governed based on social and economic exchanges (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) has been used extensively to explained the relationships between several HRM Practices and performance at different levels. Also, Public Administration scholars (Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005) employed the theory to explained performance outcomes in the context of public organizations. Social Exchange Theory suggests that when organizations invest on its employees through effective HRM practices then employees are assumed to consider such investment in them as an expression of organization’s been supportive and intention to engage them on long term relationships (Sun et al., 2007). Therefore, in return the employees reciprocate with behaviors that benefit the organization towards efficient attainment of goals. For instance, traing and development of employees signal that the organization valued the employees and prepared them for future career prospect within the organization. allowing the employees to plan their work through job autonomy signalled that the organization trust them. Also Career planning practice of organization is an indication that the organization appreciates and recognizes the employees long term value. Therefore, in combination HRM Practices signals to the employees that their organization is desirous to form a long term social exchange (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Based on the above empirical and theorical support, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Training will be positively and significantly related with employee task performance
H2: Compensation will be positively and significantly related with employee task performance
H3: Job autonomy will be positively and significantly related with employee task performance
H4: Communication will be positively and significantly related with employee task performance
H5: Career planning will be positively and significantly related with employee task performance

3.0 Method

Data for this study was collected from all the 27 local government areas of Jigawa state. 265 civil servants in Jigawa state, Nigeria participated. Self administered questionnaire was adopted using a cross sectional method. The researcher explained to all the respondents the purpose of the study and assured them on that they will remain anonymous. Out of the 265 participants, 244 representing 92% were male, while the remaining 21 that represent 8% were female. Majority of the participants 46% had Degree/ HND, while 38% had Diploma as their highest educational qualifications. With regard to year of service, majority of the participants representing 63% spent more than seven years with the state civil service.

3.1 Measures

In measuring all the six latent constructs previously reliable and validated measures were used and they were all found to be reliable and valid. The participants were asked to rate their degree of agreement or otherwise based on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Training: Training was measured using six (6) items of perceived training & development from Lam, Chen, and Takeuchi (2009). Compensation: compensation was measured using six items developed by Amin, Ismail, Abdul Rasid, and Selemani (2014). Job autonomy: Job autonomy was measured by nine items developed by Breauhg (1999). Communication: Communication practice was measured by six items developed Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, and Croon (2013). Career planning: Career planning practice was measured by six items from the work of and lastly, Task Performance was measured with six items of Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997).

4.0 Analysis and Results

The main instrument of analysis in this study was Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM). The PLS SEM was considered appropriate for the study because it enable researchers to estimates both the relationships between constructs popularly called the structural model and the relationships between items (indicators) and their corresponding constructs (the
measurement model) at the a time (Lohmöller, 2013). Again, the study aim to predict employees task performance which is the endogenous latent variable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

Assessment of measurement model

In assessing the measurement model, the items reliability and validity were all ascertained. As suggested by scholars (Hair et al., 2011; Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014), the reliability of individual items was ascertained by looking at the outer loadings of constructs using a rule of thumb of .50. Based the rule items with low loading were deleted.

Table 1: loadings and reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>TRN02</td>
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<td>.821</td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRN03</td>
<td>.715</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRN04</td>
<td>.773</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRN05</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
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<td>.850</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>CMP04</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CMP05</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CMP06</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Autonomy</td>
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<td>.829</td>
<td>.549</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AUT02</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AUT03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AUT06</td>
<td>.704</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>COM02</td>
<td>.787</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM06</td>
<td>.785</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Planning</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>CPL07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task Performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>TSK02</td>
<td>.710</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>TSK04</td>
<td>.719</td>
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</table>
Composite reliability was used in ascertaining the internal consistency of all the six major latent constructs. In this regard, Hair Jr et al. (2014) suggested .70 be the minimum value for composite reliability coefficient. Based on this rule of thumb, all the six constructs had recorded a good composite reliability coefficient above the minimum yardstick (see Table 1). In addition, discriminant validity was tested by comparing the correlation among the construct and the values of variance average extracted (AVE) as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Results as shown in Table 2 suggested that the squared roots of all the latent constructs are greater that the correlations among the variables, thus indicating adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Discriminant validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Training</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Compensation</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job Autonomy</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>.775</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Career Planning</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment of Structural model

As suggested by scholars (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012), bootstrapping procedure was followed in assessing the structural model. In this regard, 5000 bootstrap samples and 265 cases were used. Figure 1 and Table 3 provides detail results of the structural model.
The results above, indicated that training had a significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .197, p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. Similarly, compensation was found to have a significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .174, p < .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is also supported. Relatedly, job autonomy was found to have a significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .130, p < .01$). Likewise, communication practice had a significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .173, p < .01$). Finally, career planning also had a strong significant positive relationship with task performance ($\beta = .268, p < .01$). These also suggested that hypotheses 3, 4 and 5 were all supported.

5.0 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the influence of HRM practices (specifically training, compensation, job autonomy, communication and career planning) on employees’ task performance.
performance within the context of public service. In line with hypothesis 1, the finding revealed that training had a significant positive influence on task performance. This result concurred with previous findings (Cho & Yoon, 2009; Tessema & Soeters, 2006). This suggested that adequate training of public servants enable them to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and experience. Thus, in return the employees will perform their assigned task efficiently and effectively. Consistent with hypothesis 2, the result revealed that provision of appropriate and regular compensation that match employees skills, abilities and contributions will make them to feel been fairly rewarded and in return be more willing to perform different task that enable the organization to achieve goals. This result was inline with previous findings (Akhter et al., 2013; Nadarasa, 2013). With regard to hypothesis 3, result of the PLS SEM suggested that job autonomy had a significant positive influence on task performance. This also concurred the previous study of Cho and Yoon (2009). This further proved that allowing public servants the freedom to use their discretions in discharging assigned responsibilities give them the feeling of been trusted and in return exhibited higher performance. Hypothesis 4 suggested communication practice will be positively related with task performance. As expected, the findings revealed significant positive relationship between communication and task performance. Similar result was also reported by Neves and Eisenberger (2012). This suggested that open communication practice will enable the employee in the public service to have effective relationship and understating with management and accordingly increases organizational identification and performance. Lastly, with respect to hypothesis 5, the results also indicated a significant positive relationship between career planning practice and task performance. This result also concurred the findings of Akhter et al. (2013) and (Nadarasa, 2013). This implied that when civil servants enjoyed effective career planning practice in organizations it will inspires them to excel in performing their assigned tasks.

Implication for theory and practice

This finding has several implications for both theory and practice within the field of public administration, human resource management and beyond. First, the findings provides additional theoretical implication by giving additional empirical evidence on the relationship between HRM practices and employees’ task performance especially within the context of public service that received less attention. The study also validated social exchange theory within the African context. Thus, extending the understanding and influence of the social exchange theory beyond western and Asian continents.

Secondly, in relation to practical implications the results of the study suggested that effective human resource management practice especially within the public/civil service is an important ways of improving the task performance of civil servants. As improving the task performance will ultimately enhances the overall organizational performance. Therefore, government and
other related agencies can promote the performance of their employees by effective utilization of these important practices.

However, despite the above important implications, this study has some limitations that create room for future studies. The use of data from only employee’s perception and cross sectional method may led to social desirability and common method bias. As participant may have tendency to exaggerate their performance responses. Thus, future study using multisource and longitudinal approaches will minimized these tendencies.

References


