

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE DIMENSIONS AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The study of organisational justice remains an important issue of debate among employees and organisations at large, thereby having serious implications for varying organisational outcomes. Therefore, understanding the extent to which justice perception influences work outcomes requires further investigations. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the impact of organisational justice dimensions on work engagement among employees in the Nigerian public sector. Employing a cross-sectional survey research design and convenience sampling technique, a total of 120 respondents participated in the study, while a structured questionnaire was employed to elicit information on the study variables from respondents. The study relied on a simple linear regression to test the three hypotheses. Procedural justice was found to have significant impact on work engagement out of the three-justice perception examined. The study, concludes that among the three-justice perception of distributive, interactional, procedural justice, only procedural justice had significant impact on employee work engagement. Based on this, it is recommended that government should endeavour to enact policies that will encourage fairness in the work environs in line with equity as the key driver for employee work engagement. There is also a need for strict compliance with rules that will encourage employee work engagement; while employees are expected to put in their best, be immersed and dedicated to their work.

Keywords: Work engagement, Distributive justice, Interactional justice, Procedural justice.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of work engagement has become a topical issue of concern for organisations and nations today. The global nature of the work environment has added to the importance of this concept because having engaged workers gives an organisation an edge over competitors and also aids national development. According to Bakker and Albrecht (2018), the

need to have an engaged work force is paramount and essential for any organisation in the quest to achieving its desired goals.

According to Shuck, Osam, Zigmami, and Nimon, (2017) engagement is viewed and defined differently by scholars, it is important that scholars understand the nature and type of engagement to avoid construct muddling. For example, the literature on engagement has employee engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010), personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), work engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002), organizational engagement (Saks, 2006), among others. All these various forms of engagement have been employed for studies interchangeably without really understanding which of the engagements actually suits each of these studies. This study aligns with Schaufeli, *et al*, (2002), where work engagement is seen as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption.” (p.74). Nonetheless, employees’ level of work engagement may be impeded by various factors, one of which may be the perception of the justice level by the employees.

The justice literature has alluded that employees view justice from different perspectives and are likely to react based on this perception. Organisational justice has become a salient but important contextual factor that may impede on organisational outcomes if adequate attention is not paid to it. According to Colquit (2016) organisational justice stem from the days of earlier researchers who sought to understand why and how do employees react negatively to inequity by organisations. Answering this pertinent question, the literature findings began to make scholars and even managers understand that certain underlining issues contribute to why employees are not engaged in their work, one of which is organisational justice.

Organisational justice is the way an employee views the process of distributing organisational resources, and how fairly these resources are distributed and how they react to it (Virtanen & Elovaino 2018). Furthermore, organisational justice is viewed from three perspectives in the literature: Distributive justice which emphasizes on resource allocation, procedural justice which emphasizes on fairness and interactional justice which emphasizes on the relationship between supervisor and subordinate (Colquit, 2016). This, therefore, denotes that having an engaged workforce goes beyond the dispositional factors alone, though the dispositional factors are important, contextual factors become even stronger and more important for employees especially when organisations do not pay close attention to it (John, 2006).

It should be noted that the debate on whether contextual factors override dispositional factors has been a long-standing debate in organisational studies (Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015; John, 2006; Oluwafemi, & Okon, 2017). This study, however, opines that contextual factors may become the bedrock for the level of engagement among employees among developing nation such as Nigeria. Therefore, the justice perception becomes important and scholars have viewed these three-justice dimensions as an "integrative wave", implying a unidimensional construct. This study, however, seeks to examine how each dimension relates to work engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Regardless of the developing nature of Nigeria, the public sector remains the largest employer of labour, ranging from the federal level trickling down to the local government level. Therefore, the level of work engagement among employees in the public sector becomes an important issue of discourse for the individual, the organisation, for economic and national development. However, till date, the level of work engagement among public sector employees remains a source of concern. There are reasons to suggest that employees are not engaged in their job. With the current debate on the minimum wage, which according to experts is long overdue, employees may feel cheated and not well taken care of, and this may affect their perception of justice. With incessant warning strike and strike by some public sector workers, it is pertinent to note that all these are likely to affect their level of engagement. However, some experts are of the view that owing to the recent economic recession experienced by the country, employees and their union needs to understand the position of the government on the issue. However, does this denote fairness? Based on the foregoing this study sets out to investigate if organisational justice dimensions have any influence on employee work engagement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dating back to the days of Adams (1965) in his equity theory, he defined and explained that equity refers to fairness in the work environment; Fairness among employees, fairness from employer to employees and from employees to employers. However, if any form of inequity is observed by any of this group it becomes a source of concern, and has a significant impact on the wellbeing of both the individual and the organisation. According to the theory when employees feel unjustly treated, they may withdraw their services and do not give their best to the organisation. This leads to a low level of engagement or not being engaged at all, which have negative consequences. This, therefore, implies that equity theory is not only important from the organisation's perspective but also the individual perspective.

Guan and Frenkel (2018) in a study of manufacturing firms in China, work engagement was found to be an important variable that affects human resources management and performance of employees. Establishing that for good performance, employees must be engaged in the job if the organisation is to achieve the desired goal.

Monica and Krishnaveni (2018) in the study of IT firms in India, found that factors such as competence development, emotional engagement, communication, job characteristics, and cognitive engagement were all enablers of employee engagement. The study concluded that various factors can help enhance the engagement of employees and it is imperative that organisation understand this and pay adequate attention to these enablers in their organisation.

In a comparative study of engagement level among private and public sector employees in the educational institution, Ugwu and Ojeaga (2016), found organisational justice dimensions had a significant impact on employee work engagement of both employees in the public and private sector. And employees in both sectors did not differ in their perception of organisational justice. Though this study was limited to the educational sector and the study did not show the extent to which organisational justice impacted on employee work engagement.

Zhu, Liu, Guo, Zhao, and Lou (2015) conducted a study among nurses in the Chinese health sector and found organisational justice influence work engagement. Also, correlation

between work engagement and emotional intelligence was mediated by organisational justice. The study observed that paying adequate attention to organisational justice can help improve other important organisational outcomes. The study of Agarwal (2014) employing social exchange theory, found that justice (procedural) significantly influence the level of work engagement, with innovation and flexibility playing vital roles in the organisation. With trust further mediating this relationship among employee in the pharmaceutical and manufacturing sector in Western India.

In a study conducted by Malinen, Wright, and Cammock (2013), spanning over 12 months, the findings showed that procedural justice had a significant influence on engagement level of employees over the spanned period though the study was based on organisational engagement which is conceptualized and defined differently from work engagement.

Studies have alluded to the importance of justice perception on the engagement levels of employees and how important it is to organisations (Malinen, *et al*, 2013). Interactional justice emerged in the justice literature after the dominance of procedural and distributive justice. Though interactional justice is further broken down into two distinct justice dimensions, this study views interactional justice as a unidimensional construct (Virtanen & Elovaino 2018). Therefore:

H₁- Distributive justice does not significantly impact on work engagement.

H₂- Procedural justice does not significantly impact on work engagement.

H₃- Interactional justice has no impact on work engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed cross-sectional research design, which involves distribution of copies of a questionnaire once to respondents at a particular period. The study population consists of employees in the public sector in Lagos Nigeria. A total of 180 respondents were sampled employing a convenience sampling technique, while information was elicited from respondents. However, after collection and screening of the questionnaires only 120 copies were deemed usable for the study. The study adapted an existing questionnaire for each of the study variables from the literature.

UWES “engagement scale”, was employed to measure the level of employee work engagement, assessed on a seven-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always) . Some questionnaire items include "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" "I am enthusiastic about my job" "I feel happy when I am working intensely" the scale has a reliability value of .87. Distributive justice was measured with Price and Muller (1986) with five items asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they believe they are fairly rewarded. Moorman (1991) scale was employed to assess procedural justice with seven items and also interactional justice with six items. All dimensions of justice were assessed on six point Likert scale, strongly agree (6) to strongly disagree (1), with reliability values above .70 for all three sub-dimensions. Simple regression was employed since the study objective was to establish the relationship as well as the contribution of each dimension of organisational justice on employee work engagement in the study setting.

The researchers tested for common error of bias since it is common with cross-sectional studies.

Harman’s single factor test was employed and is the most popular in the literature (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The result showed that for this study, 33.72% of variance, which indicates that, common method bias is not a challenge. Furthermore, the need to re-standardize the study instrument was imperative, to know how reliably the instrument is, the result showed all the variables of the study were above the recommended threshold of .70.

The regression model for the hypotheses is stated as $Y = a + Z0X + \epsilon 1$.

Note: $Y =$ Predictor; $X =$ Criterion; $Z0 =$ Constants and $\epsilon 1 =$ Error term.

Results

Hypothesis One

Distributive justice does not significantly impact on work engagement.

$WE = F (DJ)$

i.e $WE = Z0 + Z1 DJ + \epsilon 1$,

Note: $WE =$ Work engagement; $DJ =$ Distributive justice, and $\epsilon 1 =$ Error term.

Table 1: Regression results on Distributive justice and work engagement

Variables	Coefficient	t-value
Distributive justice	.119	1.620
(Constant)	3.510	13.345
R = .147	$R^2 = 0.022$	
F = 2.623		
Prob (F-statistic) = 0.108		

Source: Field survey, (2018).

$WE = 3.510 + (.119) DJ + \epsilon 1$

Std. Error = (.263) (.073)

The findings show that $t = 1.620$ for DJ and not significant. The R^2 value of .022 indicates that 2.2% variation in work engagement emanates from distributive justice, while 97.8% remaining is not captured by the study. Furthermore, the findings indicates that WE and DJ are not significant statistically ($r = .108$; $p > .05$). In conclusion, the model showed no statistically significant ($F = 2.623$, $p > .05$). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Two

Procedural justice does not significantly impact on work engagement.

$WE = F (PJ)$

Implying that: $WE = Z0 + Z1PJ + \epsilon 1$,

Note: $WE =$ Work engagement; $PJ =$ Procedural justice, and $\epsilon 1 =$ error term.

Regression Table 2: Procedural justice and work engagement

Variables	Coefficient	t-value
Procedural justice	.200	2.226*
(Constant)	3.285	11.142
R = 0.201	R ² = 0.040	
F = 4.956		
Prob (F-statistic) = 0.028		

Source: Field survey, (2018).

$$WE = 3.285 + (.200) PJ + \epsilon_1$$

$$\text{Std. Error} = (.295) (.090)$$

The findings show that $t = 2.226$ for PJ and significant. The R^2 value of .040 indicating that 4% of the variation in work engagement emanates from procedural justice, while the remaining 96% is not captured by this study. Furthermore, the findings indicates WE and PJ are statistically significant ($r = .201, p < .05$). In conclusion, the model is statistically significant ($F = 4.956, p < .05$). Therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Three

Interactional justice has no impact on work engagement.

$$WE = f(IJ)$$

Implying that: $WE = Z_0 + Z_1 IJ + \epsilon_1$,

Note: WE = Work engagement; IJ= Interactional justice, and ϵ_1 = Error term.

Regression Table 3: Interactional justice and work engagement

Variable	Coefficient	t-value
Interactional justice	.137	1.450
Constant	3.397	9.301
R = 0.132	R ² = 0.018	
F = 2.102		
Prob (F-statistic) = 0.150		

Source: Field survey, (2018).

$$WE = 3.397 + (.137) IJ + \epsilon_1$$

$$\text{Std. Error} = (.263) (.073)$$

The findings show that $t = 1.450$ for IJ and not significant. The R^2 value of .018 indicates that 1.8% of the variation in work engagement emanates from interactional justice, while 98.2% remaining is not captured by this study. Furthermore, the findings indicate that WE and IJ are not statistically significant ($r = .132, p > .05$). In conclusion, the model shows no statistical significance ($F = 2.102, p > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how the three dimensions of organizational justice relate to work engagement. The result of the first hypothesis did confirm the first hypothesis, which states that distributive justice does not significantly impact on work engagement. The findings,

however, is not in line with the findings of prior studies (Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2016). Procedural justice, on the other hand, has a significant impact on work engagement, this finding corroborates the findings of Malinen, *et al.*, (2013), where they found that procedures employed by organisations have an impact on the employees and subsequently adequate attention needs to be paid to it. The level of procedural justice in any organisation has a significant impact on the employees regardless of the outcomes. Furthermore, interactional justice did not have any relationship with work engagement. This finding does not corroborate the findings of previous studies (Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2016; Zhu, *et al.*, 2015). This may be as the result of the study setting and may impede on the study variables. Though according to Ugwu and Ojeaga (2016) the level of interaction within the organisation may impact positively or negatively, since the justice literature does not only allude to the importance of this dimension of justice, nevertheless it is important for any organisation to pay adequate attention to this dimension.

Limitation and Future studies

Just like other studies, this study is not without its own limitation and should be interpreted with caution. The data was collected at a particular point in time, though common error of biases was not a problem. Also, the use of cross-section design is a limitation, future studies can employ a longitudinal research design. Future studies can use a different study setting to confirm the result, also further studies can look at other forms of engagement and how the justice dimensions may influence them.

CONCLUSION

This concludes that only procedural justice had a significant impact on the engagement level of employees. This result is interesting because previous findings have shown the importance of justice dimensions on organisational outcomes generally. Emanating from the 1960s these three dimensions of organisational justice have generally been found to impact on work settings regardless of the sector (Virtanen & Elovaino 2018). The literature has also supported the notion that certain constructs are enablers of work engagement one of which may be the justice perception of employees. Nonetheless, the level of engagement of employees is not just important but a tenet through which organisations are able to achieve their objectives, which in the long run may affect national development. Further extending the equity theory, fairness is imperative in any organisational setting as employees are willing to react in line with their perception of justice and act accordingly either positively or negatively.

This study contributes to existing literature noting the possibility of variation in responses. The non-conformity of the results of this study to previous studies with respect to distributive justice and interactional justice goes to show that perception differs across people, firms and sectors. It thus becomes imperative that organisations take into cognisance the likely effect of perception of justice by employees and the likely effect on work engagement.

Recommendations

The study recommended that government should endeavour to enact policies that will encourage fairness in the work environ in line with equity as the key driver for employee work engagement. Also, the need for strict compliance with rules to encourage employee work engagement. While employees are expected to put in their best, be immersed and dedicated to their work.

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