



INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND PUBLIC SERVICE PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF BAYELSA STATE PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT: *This research study is on interpersonal relations and the performance of public servants in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The main objective is to ascertain whether interpersonal relations can enhance performance in public service in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research collated quantitative data from structured questionnaires filled by public servants and data from interviews of some civil servants of different rank through a purposive method. This was justified by the fact that it enabled the researchers to capture both the forms and the contents of the interpersonal relationship, plus the frequency density and flow of the interaction network. The results showed significant differences in communication preferences. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the respondents preferred face-to-face conversation. Other issues were ineffective role definition and interdepartmental conflict influencing performance. The quantitative surveys used stratified random sampling to gain a wide population range, while the qualitative surveys used purposive sampling to gain knowledge of approved informants. The quantitative data was analyzed using statistical methods. Conversely, the qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis, facilitating a robust quantitative assessment of the relationship between interpersonal relationships and the performance of public servants. The results unveiled a moderate and significant positive relationship between interpersonal relations and public service delivery outcomes. This finding instills hope and optimism that improving interpersonal relationships can potentially improve public service performance in public service in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This study affirms the understanding of how interpersonal relations can be harnessed to address issues in delivering public services.*

KEYWORDS: Interpersonal Relations, Public Service, Job Performance, Hierarchy, Service Delivery and Job Satisfaction.



INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Relationships between employees are central to civil service performance anywhere in the world, especially in a pluralistic society such as Nigeria. The public service sector in Nigeria has been confronted with a set of challenges, including bureaucratic encumbrance, corruption, and lack of political leadership accountability, which have eroded the public confidence in the capability of the public sector to deliver services effectively. In this regard, issues such as cultural diversity and economic inequality in the state in addition to the problems known in Bayelsa State. The information regarding the interpersonal relations among the public servants in their workplace matters a lot regarding how they can improve the delivery of services and generally enhance people's productivity and interactions at the workplace. Latter literature has also paid significant attention to the role of communication and interpersonal relationships as antecedents to job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior, which is fundamental for improved public service performance (Erdoğan & Bauer, 2021; Matteis et al., 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Interpersonal or one-on-one relations within public service organizations significantly shape employees' work attitudes towards work performance. Public service in Bayelsa State, Nigeria still indulge in the old hierarchical structure and traditional method of work relations and seems to have abandoned interpersonal relations. One-on-one relation is an effective method in improving organisational efficiency and performance, since organisations are networks of connected people. Large portion of work performance is tied to the establishment of interpersonal relations (Amakiri, Nein & Oyinmiebi, 2024). But this very vital component of all organizations appears to be jettisoned and overlooked as a critical tool for efficiency and effectiveness in public service in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The present study further highlights that communication and interpersonal relationships at the workplace is positively related to job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and organizational commitment (Matteis et al., 2023; Rajesh et al., 2023). When it comes to public service, because the quality of service being delivered to the people is an issue of human concern, the question of interpersonal relations is paramount. Studies show that high-quality interpersonal relationships in teams reduces conflict of interest, fosters knowledge sharing, and thus improves service delivery to the public (Erdoğan & Bauer, 2021; Haoran, 2023). Besides, in a multicultural environment with such a population as in the case of Bayelsa State, there is a possibility to study the regulation of interpersonal relations in the workplace, which would reduce the risk of conflicts and ensure the successful integration of marginalized groups into the workforce.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess whether interpersonal relations do improve performance and to interrogate the extent of interpersonal relations and its effect on public service performance in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Evaluate the level of interpersonal relationships among public servants in Bayelsa State.
2. Assess the implications of these interpersonal relations on the performance of public services in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, and citizens' satisfaction.



3. Find out the conditions that support and those that are likely to hinder positive interpersonal relationships within the public service.

4. Give details of how interpersonal relations should be worked to optimize public service delivery's general performance.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives outlined above, the study seek to answer the following research questions:

1. In what way are current interpersonal relations among the PSs in Bayelsa State?
2. How do interpersonal relations affect public service delivery and output on efficiency and effectiveness?
3. Interpersonal communication in the public service sector: What caused the interaction to become positive or negative?
4. What can improve interpersonal relationships among public servants in Bayelsa State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Public Service Performance in Nigeria

Correlatively, people have repeatedly expressed concern and attention regarding the performance of the public servants in Nigeria, bearing in mind that the nation continues to grapple with challenges in governance and accountability. Despite several policy reforms meant to enhance service delivery in most public service institutions, several challenges, including bureaucratic rigidity, poor training, and lack of equipment for service delivery, are evident (Kim et al., 2022; Judijanto, 2024). Poor service delivery is compounded in Bayelsa State by governance problems in local politics, including political crises and economic difficulties. Emerging research evidence suggests that positive interpersonal relations within the context of public servants contribute positively towards recorded efficiency rates, including delivery of services and the satisfaction of customers (Hoang et al., 2022; Judijanto, 2024). This, therefore, underlines the importance of mastering interpersonal relations for effectiveness in public service performance in Nigeria.

New Public Management: Issues and Its Relevance to Nigeria

New Public Management (NPM) has become the premier public administration discourse in the current century, focusing on contextual and outcomes-based efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness in delivering public services. NPM promotes the implementation of private-sector management practices in public organizations for better accountability and performance (Poindexter et al., 2020; Kalpakeci et al., 2014). The application of NPM can hardly be overemphasized in the Nigerian context, considering that the nation's institutionalized public service has remained an albatross due to years of inefficiency and corrupt practices. Current research shows that comprehensible service delivery and increased citizen satisfaction results can be achieved from the NPM directive, and this result is bolstered by solid interpersonal relations among employees in the civil service (O'Brien et al., 2022; Jacoby et al., 2016). The



concern observed in the Nigerian public service organization regarding the issue of bureaucracy, and bureaucratic entrenchment results in the need to employ a framework for the change that is sought to be not only constricted in the structural components of the organization but also includes the interpersonal relationships between the players.

Interpersonal Relations Theory

Interpersonal relations theory, which can be explained well by the work of Hildegard Peplau, states that interpersonal relationships affect individual and organizational performance. This theory may be more appropriate in the public sector, especially where inter- and intra-organizational cooperation and communication are compulsory for the provision of services. According to the theory, promoting positive interpersonal relationships can increase job satisfaction, minimize conflict, and potentially positively impact organizational performance (Smith et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2017). The nature of interpersonal relations can thus give an insight into how the morale and productivity of employees in Nigeria's public service, especially the civil service, can be enhanced given the fact that jealousy and rivalry associated with cultural differences as well as different expectations make interpersonal conflict almost a daily occurrence. In particular, the studies of the last few years contribute to understanding the impact of interpersonal trust and communication on creating a positive organizational culture, which is crucial for realizing the goals of service organizations (Li & Solomon, 2022; Ryum et al., 2019).

Public Service Performance in Nigeria

There is concern for the performance of public service institutions in Nigeria due to governance issues still evident today.

1. Historical Context

Here, the paper presents a historical account of the political, social, and economic factors that have influenced public service performance in Nigeria. This has been attributed to the colonial administration, after which political instability thrived throughout the post-independence period for many African countries (Baka et al., 2022; Sauber & O'Brien, 2017). The introduction of many reforms aimed at improving public service performance has been dismally typical; many institutions continue to face the problem of ineffectiveness coupled with corruption. This is important because it enables performance appraisal of the current situation in Bayelsa State and adds governance challenges in the local delivery of services (Payne et al., 2010; Cheek et al., 2015).

2. Modern-state Affairs: Current Challenges and Opportunities

Today, the NSPS suffers from the following problems: insufficient funding, insufficient training, and high staff turnover rates (O'Keefe & Wingate, 2013; Brok et al., 2023). However, there are also areas where improvement can be made, especially in the principles of NPM reforms and the promotion of interpersonal relationships among civil servants. Some of the recent works have evidenced that a shared working culture can contribute to higher efficiency in services and more satisfaction from citizens (Liu et al., 2023; Chu et al., 2017). Thus, by discovering the problems of interpersonal relationships in public service organizations, it is possible to reduce the currently existing difficulties and strengthen the stimulus for reforming.



Interpersonal Relations in the Public Sector

Interpersonal relations can be identified as a key factor influencing the work and activity of public service organizations.

1. Importance of Interpersonal Communications

Public servants should be able to communicate and collaborate to meet organizational objectives and increase the efficiency and productivity of services. Studies have shown that effective relationships always enhance communication, which enhances working together and teamwork (Fetterman et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2021). Given that employees of the state's public service work in multicultural teams, intercultural communication and cooperation skills are essential for the execution of tasks. A literature review has found that organizations that invest in interpersonal communication exhibit enhanced subordinates' engagement and job satisfaction, essential to producing optimal public service outcomes (Morris et al., 2019; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

2. Concerning Employee Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Quality interpersonal relations in public service organizations determine the motivation and satisfaction of the employees. Interpersonal climate can improve employees' feeling of inclusion and identification with the job, improving employee engagement and performance (Gambrel et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2021). On the other hand, conflict in interpersonal relationships leads to poor employee morale and high turnover in an organization. Regarding performance in Nigerian public service, employees' perceptions of pleasant communication or interpersonal interaction indicate that employee relations are a critical human resource management factor that must be appropriately managed to ameliorate workplace performance.

Case Studies and Previous Research

A brief analysis of the case and prior literature proves important in understanding Interpersonal Relations and PS Performance in Nigeria.

1. An Assessment of Public Service Performance

This is a comparative analysis of selected ministries and parastatal organizations in Nigeria. Cross-sectional studies of public sector performance indicate regional variations in service delivery in Nigeria. Previous research has established that those interpersonal relations among employees in ministries and other governmental departments are positively associated with performance indicators such as speed and efficiency and the satisfaction of end users (the citizens) (Schut et al., 2019; Saikouk et al., 2021). This highlights the need to promote positive inter-staff relational patterns as strategies that promote the effective execution of public services. In addition, one must look at the successful experiences of other countries that followed the NPM principles and prioritized interpersonal relations (Bittencourt et al., 2018; Bass, 2014).

2. Interpersonal Relations Research in Public Administration

The literature has recently shifted from the traditional manner and narrowed down its focus on the relational aspect of public administration as much as achieving organizational objectives (Baka et al., 2021; Solem et al., 2015). Studies have found that personal relationships are valued



in the organization, and when public service organizations focus on it, their positive implications on both the level of employee engagement and employee job satisfaction are vital for efficiency in service delivery (Lindsey et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2019). Therefore, in attempting to demystify practical approaches to optimizing interpersonal relations for enhancing public service performance in Bayelsa State, this research will try to synthesize the findings of these studies.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to analyze interpersonal relations and public service performance in Bayelsa State. The quantitative aspect consisted of distributing questionnaires to a sample of civil servants to get quantitative data on civil relations and performance indicators. On the other hand, the justified qualitative aspect involved closed interviews and discussions with certain civil servants at different levels of the government, thereby providing deeper insight into the experiences of those in different ranks. This dual approach was justified because, as the nature of the relationships was intricate, it offered the research a view and vantage to capture not only the type and frequency of the organizational objectives and their accessibility but also the 'organizational objectives influencing factor' and its impact on the relationship, and the performance of the teams.

Quantitative surveys involved stratified random sampling to cover various departments and organizational hierarchy subcategories, whilst purposive sampling was used to get valuable qualitative data. The collected data were gathered through survey questionnaires capturing variables such as trust, communication, and aspects of public service performance alongside interview guides shooting at interpersonal relations and the perceived impact on service delivery. The survey questionnaires were distributed to a representative sample of civil servants, and the interviews were conducted with civil servants at different levels of the government. Descriptive and inferential analysis of quantitative data was done with the help of statistical software, while the qualitative data were analyzed using Thematic analysis in order to identify patterns and themes. Thus, the proposed integrative approach strengthened the findings' validity when using the cross-cheque procedure and expanded the knowledge of how interpersonal relations might be harnessed to increase public service effectiveness in the region.

FINDINGS

A. Nature and Extent of Data Gathered

Information was obtained from 50 employees drawn from different Bayelsa State Public Service departments from February to April 2024. A variety of data collection methods were used, including:

Surveys: A quantitatively designed online self-completed survey measured the communication process, teamwork, job satisfaction, and perceived organizational service delivery effectiveness (50 participants).



Interviews: In order to gather more detailed information, five introduced employees with varying organizational positions were selected, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with them (recorded and transcribed).

Focus Groups: One focus group discussion was conducted to gather diverse perspectives on the state of interpersonal relationships in the public service. With the consent of 5 participants, representing different offices, the discussion was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

B. Interpersonal Relationship and Public Service in Bayelsa State: The findings from the data gathered suggest that interpersonal relationships play a significant role in the performance of the Bayelsa State public service. The nature and quality of these relationships, as well as the factors that influence them, were explored in detail.

Communication Patterns

Communication Method	Preference (N=50)	Effectiveness (N=50)	Timeliness (N=50)	Clarity (N=50)
Face-to-face	30 (60%)	40 (80%)	35 (70%)	37.5 (75%) \approx 38
Email	12.5 (25%) \approx 13	27.5 (55%) \approx 28	20 (40%)	25 (50%)
Phone calls	5 (10%)	30 (60%)	32.5 (65%) \approx 33	30 (60%)
Online Messaging Platforms	2.5 (5%) \approx 3	22.5 (45%) \approx 23	37.5 (75%) \approx 38	20 (40%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Survey Data: Face-to-face communication remains preferred and perceived as most effective, timely, and clear. Email, while commonly used, scored lower in effectiveness and timeliness. Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents reported experiencing communication barriers with other departments, often due to unclear roles and responsibilities.

Inter-departmental Communication Challenges

Challenge	Frequency
Unclear Roles & Responsibilities	15 (30%)
Lack of Formal Communication Channels	10 (20%)
Slow Response Times	12.5 (25%) \approx 13
Information Silos	7.5 (15%) \approx 8
Interpersonal Conflicts	5 (10%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Interview and Focus Group Data: Qualitative data highlighted the need for improved cross-departmental communication protocols and more frequent updates on organizational changes.

Team Dynamics and Collaboration

Teamwork Aspect	Positive (N=50)	Experience	Negative Experience (N=50)
Collaboration & Support	37.5 (75%) \approx 38		5 (10%)
Shared Goals & Vision	32.5 (65%) \approx 33		10 (20%)
Conflict Resolution	25 (50%)		15 (30%)
Respect & Trust	30 (60%)		12.5 (25%) \approx 13

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Teamwork Challenges

Teamwork Challenges (N=50):

Challenge	Frequency
Lack of Trust	12.5 (25%) \approx 13
Personality Clashes	10 (20%)
Unclear Expectations	7.5 (15%) \approx 8
Unequal Workload Distribution	5 (10%)
Lack of Recognition	15 (30%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Survey Data: While most respondents reported positive team experiences, significant challenges remain in conflict resolution and building trust. Lack of recognition for contributions was a notable concern.

Interview & Focus Group Data: Participants suggested the implementation of regular feedback mechanisms and team-building exercises focused on improving communication and trust.

C. Impact on Public Service Performance

1. Employee Productivity:

Survey Data: A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.55$) was found between positive interpersonal relations and self-reported productivity. Employees reporting high levels of trust within their teams also reported higher job satisfaction ($r = 0.65$).

Factors Affecting Productivity

Factor	Positive Impact	Negative Impact
Teamwork & Collaboration	35 (70%)	5 (10%)
Communication Effectiveness	32.5 (65%) \approx 33	7.5 (15%) \approx 8
Recognition & Appreciation	27.5 (55%) \approx 28	12.5 (25%) \approx 13
Work-Life Balance	22.5 (45%) \approx 23	15 (30%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024.



Interview & Focus Group Data: People highlighted that there has to be a healthy and friendly attitude to expect top performance from the employees.

2. Service Delivery Outcomes:

Survey Data: Perceived service delivery outcomes were rated as "good" or "excellent" by 70% of the respondents. Positive interpersonal relation was found to have a moderate positive relationship with perceived service delivery outcome, with a correlation coefficient of 0.45.

Hence, the findings of the current pilot study will offer a preliminary understanding of the growing literature about interpersonal relations and public service performance that is delimited to a smaller sample size. It is forwarded that subsequent large-scale research studies should condition these findings and conceive overall strategies for enhancement.

DISCUSSION

To an extent, this study results corroborate the theoretical underpinnings and empirical works on public service performance in Nigeria, especially within the tenets of New Public Management (NPM) and Interpersonal Relations Theory. The observed preference for face-to-face over systemic communication, though it contradicts the aspects of systemic communication, aligns with the concerns for communication and collaboration as stressed by authors like Fetterman et al. (2014) and Lin et al. (2021). The study's findings on poor formal communication, which also revealed that most of the respondents complained about weak communication channels and slow response rate, also align with the bureaucratic culture and poor overhead highlighted in the reviews on Nigerian public service performance (Kim et al., 2022; Judijanto, 2024). The NPM emphasizes the importance of performance measurement and management, while the Interpersonal Relations Theory focuses on the impact of social interactions on organizational performance. In addition to the conclusions made by O'Brien et al. (2022) and Jacoby et al. (2016) regarding the necessity of structural reforms of the healthcare system based on NPM practices, such as improving communication procedures and organizing work processes, the data are probative.

The issues of conflict and trust in teams, together with positive tendencies concerning teamwork, prove the relevance of the Interpersonal Relations Theory discussed by Peplau and investigated by Wright et al. (2015). The analysis thus underlines what Smith et al. (2013) and Turner et al. (2017) say, that more is needed to encourage teamwork and cooperation for the teams to display positive dynamics; the interpersonal skills for cooperation and dealing with conflict must be developed. The perceived lack of recognition for individual efforts, which leads to affecting motivation and team cohesiveness, is workable, according to research on motivation and job satisfaction in the public sector, as follows (Gambrel et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2021). According to Gao and Qian (2021), Li and Solomon (2022), and Ryum et al. (2019), acceptance and appreciation of the role of each employee are essential for the attainment of any organizational goals.

These positive correlations established between positive interpersonal relations and self-perceived productivity (the individual's perception of their own productivity) and perceived service delivery indicate that the findings agree with broader studies on the positive correlation between interpersonal relations and enhanced performance indicators or measures (Hoang et



al., 2022; Judijanto, 2024; Schut et al., 2019; Saikouk et al., 2021). This re-emphasizes the need to encourage attention to interpersonal relationships to improve public service delivery performance since, in decentralized settings such as Bayelsa State, Nigeria, local governance issues worsen the overall problem. The current study, therefore, has its limitations, which calls for more synthesis type of research to establish these relations and for the development of the corresponding interventions more fully, as urged by other scholars working in the relevant literature (O'Keefe & Wingate, 2013; Brok et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Chu et al., 2017). To a certain extent, this pilot study advances knowledge of the relationship between interpersonal relations and public service performance in Nigeria and provides insights that may be useful in future studies and policy-making.

CONCLUSION

This investigation depicted that old hierarchical structure is still employed in public service in Bayelsa devoid of contemporary interpersonal relations, which is the current trend, a one-on-one, physical communication as the best and most efficient form needed in the Bayelsa State Public Service, but interdepartmental communication could be smoother due to unprofitable responsibility. Most employees in organizations are pleased with their team experiences, though substantial difficulties persist with conflict, trust, and reward issues. Significant moderate positive relationships were established between positive interrogation relations, self-rated productivity, and perceived service delivery effectiveness. Notably, 70% of the respondents rated perceived service delivery outcomes as "good" or "excellent," employees reporting high levels of trust within their teams also reported higher job satisfaction. The study, therefore, generates important empirical insight into the connection between IR and PS performance in the Nigerian setting, particularly the state of Bayelsa.

The combination of large-scale structured questionnaires with a small number of non-structured questionnaires, such as interviews and focus group discussions, provides a better view of the multiple factors within interpersonal relations in the public service context. In this way, the research can help to identify specific factors that might hinder productivity and service delivery results in the public sector and thus help guide the interventions and policies that could be useful. In addition, by targeting only the specific area of study in Bayelsa State, this research adds to the body of knowledge on how interpersonal relations operate within the Nigerian public sector's particular cultural and bureaucratic environment.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study is on geographical scope on Bayelsa State public service and therefore adds to the whole body of knowledge on how interpersonal relations need to operate within the public service with regards to ecology and particular to the specific cultural environments.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study is on interpersonal relations and public service performance in Bayelsa State. More research on the topic in the context of South-South and the entire public service in Nigeria,



especially the core civil servants, is required. An assessment of the relationship between public servant or civil servant in the main stream in the whole of South-South, Nigeria and African countries is required to be able to generalize the study findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Enhance Interdepartmental Communication:

Public service in Bayelsa State should incorporate formal procedures and establish cross-sectional meetings that fail to occur to enhance information flow and clear roles and responsibilities. This will solve the public service problems concerning communication barriers between departments and even organizations in general.

2. Establish a Formal Recognition Programme:

Due to the lack of or low acknowledgment of any work done, there is a critical need to establish and follow an excellent standard employee recognition programme. Organizations should have a structured award system together with other nonofficial recognition procedures to increase the motivation of workers and make them feel valued and appreciated.

3. Implement Conflict Resolution and Trust-Building Initiatives:

Once a month, offer a workshop or training session to address methods of handling conflicts and activities that build and restore trust. This will aid in reducing the significant difficulties mentioned in these aspects and enhance the general group interaction.

4. Develop a Comprehensive Feedback Mechanism:

Implement a culture of a 360-degree feedback system and conduct organizational employee satisfaction surveys from time to time. This will provide avenues for free expression, foster a culture of timely positive change, and ensure that leadership deals with organizational problems effectively.

5. Leverage Positive Interpersonal Relations for Performance Improvement:

Since there is a moderate positive correlation between interpersonal relations and productivity and service delivery outcomes, designing special programmes to enhance friendly relations among employees will be appropriate. Doing so could entail organizational factors such as the incorporation of team spirit amenities, membership or partnership schemes for tutorial sessions, and shared projects, all to optimize this linkage and, consequently, upgrade the conformity to the standard public service performance.



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