



**ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF FLEXIBLE-WORK-OPTION AS A
PRECURSOR OF WORK LIFE BALANCE ON EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY OF
LOGISTICS COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper assesses the influence of flexible work option as an indicator of work-life balance on employee productivity of logistics companies in Rivers state, Nigeria. We adopted a survey research design, with a population of 1300 staff of logistics companies in Rivers state, and a sample size of 285 while Bowley's proportional allocation method was used to survey the participating companies. Data generated from the survey were subjected to statistical analysis using frequencies, mean scores, standard deviations, spear rank order correlation coefficient with the aid of statistical package for social sciences. The findings revealed that there is a positive association between flexible work options on employee productivity of logistics companies. Therefore, we conclude that a statistically significant and positive association exist between flexible work option and employee productivity of logistics companies in Rivers state. Hence, we recommend that: logistics companies should consciously design and fashion out a flexible working option that will create a change of environment and positively enhance employees' well-being in order to achieve a high-spirited workforce. And that, Management of logistics companies should effectively adopt alternative work arrangement so as to create a family-friendly atmosphere that will appeal to and attract competent employees for better productivity.*

KEYWORDS: Flexible-Work-Option, Work Life Balance, Accomplishments, Timeliness, Task, Productivity, Logistics, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The world of work has been re-defined due to the economic conditions and rising social demands. At first, work was taken up for purposes of survival and necessity, however the role of work has evolved and its composition has significantly changed. On the other hand, modern society conceives work as a necessity for sustaining life's demands, hence constituting a source of personal satisfaction to the worker. One of the approaches to support the achievement of personal satisfaction and professional goals for workers is the entrenchment of work-life initiatives and policies by employers of labour (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). More so, the value of employees in ensuring successful implementation of organizations goals and objectives have informed the quest amongst human resource management practitioners, as to how best to create a balance between work and personal life in employees so as to enhance their productivity (Wright and Boswell 2002).



Providing quality of life for an employee at the same time retaining the productivity levels of an employee in the work place is the main focus for work life balance. Greenhaus et al., (2003) pointed out that, balance work life provides an organization with a productive and innovative employee, whereas disparity in the work life balance tends to develop depressed, dissatisfied and unproductive employees. In the current work place, employees are faced greater workload, increasing time pressure and growing obstacles in satisfying both job and personal demands (Sabatini, Fraone, Hartmann & McNally, 2008). At work the demand for productivity leads to more tasks, which have to be fulfilled in a shorter period of time. Satisfying the often-conflicting demands of work and family life is one of the biggest challenges for modern employees as this impinges on their ability to accomplish a given task within the stipulated time frame (Lingard, Francis & Turner, 2012). In response to the above challenges, most employers are committed to helping their employee achieve some level of work-life balance as they believe that it will raise employee morale and productivity (Convergence International, 2008). Again, organisations seeking to achieve productivity of their employees have turned to policies such as flexible working option, on-site childcare, eliciting support for co-workers (Simard, 2011); flexibility in working conditions, family-friendly policies, support for gender equality and expanded labour rights. Furthermore, work-life balance has been found to have a number of positive outcomes. There is evidence that work-life balance is related to higher levels of organizational commitment (Baral and Bhargava, 2010). An empirical study of 3,000 Australians conducted by (Convergence International, 2008) showed that work-life balance is the number one factor of job attraction and satisfaction which results in increase productivity. Also, Hamming and Bauer (2009) in a study of employee productivity discovered that when work-life imbalance issues developed in males as well as females' employees, they tend to develop further issues such as negative emotions, depression, low energy, pessimism, fatigue and sleep disorders. While several studies (Williams et al., 2000; Clarke et al., 2004; McDonald et al., 2009; Nganga, 2010; Morrison, 2005; Garg and Rastogi, 2006) have been carried out focusing on different aspects of employee performance and further increase in the crisis in every organization in terms of productive capacity of their employee, all empirical evidences are in short of the actual factors of work-life balance that influences the employee productivity. From the foregoing all studies done on work life balance and employee performance and productivity is done outside the shores of our country with few done within the country in the banking and oil/gas sectors. Hence, this paper assesses the influence of flexible work option as a precursor of work life balance on employee productivity of logistics firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE

Flexible -Work-Options

The need for flexibility increased during the latter part of the 20th century as women entered the workforce and continued working after having children. The need for employees to care for parents increased as people lived longer, and this prompted requests for flexible schedules. Older workers continued to work beyond the traditional retirement age, though many seniors prefer part-time employment, seasonal work or flexible daily scheduling. The importance of continuing education also impacts employee work schedules. Telecommuting lends itself to planning work hours around other life responsibilities (Baer, 2011). One reason why many have advocated their use is because of the belief that they help employees manage



better the conflict between work and family (Cohen, & Single, 2003). This conflict has received much attention in both popular press and the academic literature particularly over the last decade. One result of this is that organizations have sought to become more "family-friendly". Because flexible works arrangements are a common component of many family-responsive human resource policies, their popularity has increased (Glass & Finley, 2002).

More so, flexibility at work now takes various forms and includes job sharing, variable working time and telecommuting alongside conventional part time schedules. These arrangements vary across different countries and reflect the amount of control over working time that employer or employee enjoys in relation to when the work is done and the number of hours worked during a specific period (Cole, 2006). Flexible Work option provide organizations and their employees the ability to make choices about when (flexitime, compressed workweeks), where (telecommuting), and for how long (part-time, reduced hours) work-related activities are accomplished. These types of work arrangements have seen a rise in popularity due to a change in workforce demographics and employee demands for greater work-life balance (Wendt, 2010).

Furthermore, it makes good business sense to provide flexible-working opportunities and appropriate policies for employees. It helps companies to retain skilled employees, raise employee morale and minimize absenteeism (Baldoni, 2013). Organizations that help employees work in a way that best supports them in balancing their work and home environments are more likely to have engaged employees. Engaged employees stay longer and contribute in a more meaningful way (Allen, Bruck, and Sutton, 2000). Stamps and Piedmonte (2010) noted that employees prefer flexible working option which are not dangerous and unpleasant. They like flexible working option which are similar to the conditions that they have in their homes. Because employees spend so much time in their work environment each week, it's important for tertiary institutions to create flexible working options that will maximize their productivity on the job. Such things as providing virtual offices rather than centralized ones, and other gestures that contributes to comfortable and favourable work conditions. Providing productivity tools such as upgraded information technology to help employees accomplish tasks more efficiently contributes to job productivity.

Al Sumaiti (2010) observed that the conditions under which a job is performed can be different -from those completely comfortable to those very difficult and dangerous to employees' life and health. Again, difficult working conditions can be influenced by: external factors that include climate -meteorological conditions, temperature, humidity, drafts, lighting in the workplace, noise and interference, gases, radiation, dust, smoke and other harmful factors; subjective factors that include gender and age of the worker, fatigue, monotony, unfavourable posture during work, etc.; factors related to the organization of production such as duration of the work shift, work schedule, working time, work pace, excessive strain have to the agitation in modern institutions for flexible work options (Gayathri & Ramakrishnan, 2013).

Over recent years, there has been progressive interest in the field of HRM due to the crucial role it plays in strategy implementation as a source of competitive advantage among competing organizations. In recent times, tertiary institutions are literally hawking their services in all manner of places and this is in response to the high level of competition amongst them. Again, productivity is often confused with efficiency. Efficiency is generally



seen as the ratio of the time needed to perform a task to some predetermined standard time. However, doing unnecessary work efficiently is not exactly being productive. It would be more correct to interpret productivity as a measure of effectiveness (doing the right thing efficiently), which is outcome-oriented rather than output-oriented.

According to Anderson and Ulrich as quoted by Armstrong (2006), HRM is the bedrock of strategic planning and its importance is on a path of continuous growth. Employee productivity has traditionally been viewed simply as relationship between input and output and hence a measure of efficiency. Armstrong (2010) proposes a contemporary view of productivity that incorporates historically unaccounted-for factors such as employee turnover, absenteeism, and lowered employee cooperation among others.

Timeliness

Managing time appropriately leads to achieving results easily with limited resources. Consequently, any productive system, whatever its structure, human, technology or financial support requires efficient and effective time management procedure. Consequently, Mullins (1999) refers time as one of the most valuable, but limited resources and it is important that administrators utilize time to the maximum advantage. For not realizing time as a scarce resource most administrators run out of time before expected result is achieved.

Maduagwu and Nwogu (2006) notes that, every activity is allocated some frames within which the activities are to be accomplished in educational institutions. Time is utilized to maintain facilities, delegate functions or even spend fiscal cash. Time management is also important for effective inspection and supervision in the academic workplace in bringing the much-needed quality. Effective time process ensures unambiguous objectives, proactive planning, well defined priorities and actions; participatory and successful delegation of activities. Nevertheless, time is continuum and all activities or roles performance depend on it whether voluntary or involuntary in avoiding conflicts. According to Hisrich and Peters (2002), time is a unique quantity an entrepreneur (manager) cannot store it, rent it, and buy it. Everything requires it and it passes at the same rate for everyone. Time management involves investing time to determine what one wants out of his activities. Effective time management is the investment of time in such a way that optimal result is gotten from activities consuming a specific time quantity. Time management hinges on the principle that it is more important to do the right things than to do things right. The ability to choose between the important and the unimportant and be persistent on the correctly chosen sequence is the key determinant of effectiveness in time management.

Task Accomplishment

Task accomplishment is a measure of an employee's productivity and involves their contribution to overall organizational productivity and effectiveness; it refers to actions that are part of the formal reward system and addresses the prescription as indicated in the descriptions of the role (Williams and Karau, 1991). It shows the level or the extent an employee achieves a given target. In general, task accomplishment comprises of activities that translates the organizations policies, missions and resources into tangible and intangible goods produced by the organization and to enable efficient operation of the organization (Motowidlo et al., 1997). Thus, task accomplishment covers the fulfilment of the requirements that are part of the agreement between the employee and the organisation.



Borman and Motowidlo (1993) pointed out that task accomplishment is the effectiveness and efficiency with which job incumbents perform activities that contribute to the organization's technical core and assist in moulding the psychological state of the organization (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). They further suggested that in accomplishing a given task there are two aspects to it, which are interpersonal facilitation and job dedication. Interpersonal facilitation includes cooperative and helpful acts that help the effectiveness of co-employee. While job dedication includes self-disciplined and motivation to support organizational objectives and goals (Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996).

Flexible-Work-Option and Employee Productivity

Hill et al., (2001) stated that flexible work option is a situation in which employer provided benefits that permit employees some level of control over when and where they work outside of the standard workday. More so, by creating a flexible working option, organisations can keep good employees and not force them to sacrifice family life. Flexible work option will help them benefit personally and professionally and the result will be people who are more productive, loyal and committed (Smith, 2002). Some forms of flexible work schedules, such as part-time work, compressed workweeks, annualized hours and flexi-time, have a long history of implementation. For example, the meta-analysis by Baltes et al. (1999) concluded that both flexi-time and compressed workweeks had, on balance, positive effects on productivity, worker self-rated performance, and worker satisfaction with work schedules, but absenteeism was reduced only by flexi-time. Flexible work options traditionally have been introduced largely to meet employer needs for flexibility or to keep costs down, although they may also have met employee needs and demands (Krausz et al., 2000). Most importantly, there is virtually no research finding that employees working on flexi-time have lower productivity than those on traditional fixed work schedules (Yang and Zheng, 2011). Similarly, prior comprehensive reviews of the literature on occupational health and safety, which affect worker and organizational productivity in a more indirect way, include the role of both duration of hours and worker discretion or choice regarding how much and when to work (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Sparks et al., 1997; Spurgeon et al., 1997).

Some employees who had become accustomed to working flexibly expressed unwillingness to move back to a more traditional pattern, linking their flexible arrangement to reduced pressure and stress. There was abundant evidence of individuals adapting their working arrangement over time to meet both changing job demands and evolving demands from the home, and great value was placed on the personal control to meet needs from both domains which was afforded by their flexible working pattern.

Flexible working could be seen as a positive measure which helped reduce workplace stress through reducing hours, cutting down on commuting time and minimizing work overload. However, it could also be a source of stress, if a reduction in hours meant that employees struggled to achieve objectives which had not been appropriately reduced to match such a change. This reinforces the message that flexible working option needs to be well designed to succeed, particularly in the case of reduced hour's work where the required tasks of the role should reflect the hours available. Where flexible working option is more successfully ingrained in the culture there is an emphasis on outcomes rather than being visible and available in 'office hours'. Embedding a flexible working culture results in an increased number of people working flexibly outside the traditional groups. Technology is a key



enabler, with ease of communication valued above physical location, helping to undercut presentism.

Embedding a flexible working culture within an organization is difficult, and can, to some extent, be aided or hindered by the sector in which the company operates and the type of work it does. However, the similarities between organisations will outweigh the differences especially in large organisations. Many roles and teams will have functions which are broadly equal. In addition, other factors that drive employees to seek flexibility, such as the desire for work-life balance or caring responsibilities, remain constant.

Furthermore, examining the barriers to cultural change in some organisations, and the successful embedding of a flexible culture in others shows some general points which may be of benefit. Identifying pockets of resistance is useful, and devising strategies to combat them may be helpful, such as the provision of support to managers of staff with flexible working patterns. Organisations also need to embrace and invest in technology and training to allow them to maximize the benefits of remote working, and this includes the provision of appropriate support. Again, it was well understood that one of the main aims of flexible working policies was to assist with the recruitment and the retention of key staff with varied skills. Flexible working, allowing employees to attend to other concerns outside the workplace, was highly valued by employees.

Material Method

This study, which generated data from a population of 1,300 organizational members of the 25 logistics companies operating in Rivers State, was conducted in a non-contrived setting as cross-sectional survey. Adopting the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample size determination, the corresponding sample size for the study was 285. Furthermore, the sample size of 285 was distributed to the 25 logistics companies using proportionate sampling technique relative to the number of employees in each company; this is because the population is vastly different as it is made up of different subgroups. With a 94.34% response rate attained, 250 copies of the questionnaire were returned and used for analysis in this study that was built around the purpose of hypotheses testing. The data generated from the survey were analysed using frequencies, mean scores and Pearson's product moment correlation in assessing the relationship between the variables with the help of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Also, data was generated on elements of individual differences in order to investigate possible patterns and their influences on the outcome of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis was done both at the primary and secondary levels, at the primary level frequencies and descriptive statistics were used in the primary analysis, which concentrates on the demographics and univariate analysis in turns, and at the secondary level of analysis inferential statistics were used. At the primary level, 85 persons representing (34.0%) of the respondents were male while 165 persons (66.0%) were female, while majority of the respondents which is 120 (48.0%) were within the age bracket of 21 to 30 years, 60 (24.0%) were 20 years of age. 50 (20.0%) were within the age of 31 to 40 years while 20 (8.0%) were within an unspecified age. This means that the majority of the respondents are in their youthful years having the ability to practice the knowledge earned in formal learning.



The results of univariate analysis are revealed that the mean scores (\bar{x}) obtained for the study variables are: flexible work option (4.30), employee commitment (4.55) Furthermore at the secondary level of analysis, inferential statistics such as spearman's rank order correlation coefficients and Regression coefficients including the p-values, were calculated for purposes of testing the stated hypotheses.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between co-worker support and timeliness of employees in logistics companies in Rivers state.

Table 1: Correlation between Flexible Work Option and Timeliness

		Correlations ^b	
		Flexible Work Option	Timeliness
Flexible Work Option	Pearson Correlation	1	.521**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Timeliness	Pearson Correlation	.521**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

b. List wise N=302

From the results shown in Table 1, flexible work option has $r = 0.521^{**}$ correlation with the timeliness of employees, thus there is a moderate negative correlation between the two variables.

The correlation coefficient $r = -0.521$ is categorized as the moderate relationship which is ranged from ± 0.40 to ± 0.59 in As shown in Table 1, the p-value of flexible work option is 0.000 which is less than the alpha value 0.05. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted and concluded that there is a negative and moderate significant relationship between flexible work option and timeliness

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between flexible work option and task accomplishment of employees in logistics companies in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Correlation between Flexible Work Option and Task Accomplishment

		Correlations ^b	
		Flexible Work Option	Task Accomplishment
Flexible Work Option	Pearson Correlation	1	.921**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Task Accomplishment	Pearson Correlation	.921**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

b. Listwise N=302



From the results shown in Table 2, flexible work option has $r = 0.921^{**}$ correlation with the task accomplishment of employees, thus there is a very strong positive correlation between the two variables.

The correlation coefficient $r = 0.921$ is categorized as very strong relationship which is ranged from ± 0.80 to ± 0.99 in Table 4.11. As shown in Table 2, the p-value of flexible work option is 0.000 which is less than the alpha value 0.05. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted and stated that there is a significant very strong positive relationship between flexible work option and task accomplishment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results revealed that there is a negative and moderate significant relationship between flexible work option and timeliness ($r = -0.521$) while flexible work option and task accomplishment has a very strong and positive relationship from the analysis ($r = 0.921$).

The result corroborates with the findings of Baltes et al. (1999) who concluded that both flexi-time and compressed workweeks had positive effects on productivity, worker self-rated performance, and worker satisfaction with work schedules, but absenteeism was reduced only by flexi work option.

Milliken and Luis, (2007) pointed out that flexible work schedule gives employees more options and is especially appropriate in jobs where specific work hours really do not matter. Hence, allows employees to determine or be involved in determining the start and end times of their working day. This allow them to meet family or personal commitments/emergencies (enable employees to respond to both predictable and unpredictable circumstances), during the day or to reduce their commuting time by starting and ending work before or after the rush hour (Dalton and Debra, 2004).

Our findings also show that employees who have this flexibility boost productivity and have less work family spill over and they are less likely to miss work due to family related issues. Also, our findings supported Smith and Johnson (2004) assertion that the benefits of flexible work arrangement are: improved morale and reduced stress by giving employees more options to balance work and family demands; increased employee productivity and better planning for employee absences. Typical flexible work option includes compressed workweeks, telecommuting, job sharing and part-time work.

Also, Flexible work option is particularly useful for employees who wish to reduce the number of days per week spent at work, but who cannot financially afford to decrease their working hours. They are often initiated by the employee, but sometimes the employer may initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production (reduced daily start-up costs) or to establish longer business hours which can enhance task accomplishment (Dreher, 2003).

Again, in a Gallup study in Kenya by Helen and Frances in 2007 found a significant correlation between flexibility in working hours and productivity of employees. The researchers concluded that employees who enjoyed flexible working hour boost productivity and have less work-family spill over and they are less likely to miss work due to family



related issues. They also added that flexibility in working hours itself is a motivator to employees, it assures the employee of management's interests at heart and gives them satisfaction in their jobs. This in turn influences employees to deliver beyond the company expectations.

Also, the study of Koh and Hu (2011) on the relationship between flexi-time working arrangement and productivity of manufacturing firms in Taiwan. It was revealed that flexibility in working hours enabled the employee to focus more on their job while at work without divided attention with little worries on their personal commitments thereby enhances productivity. Varatharaj and Vasantha (2012) in a similar study on alternative working arrangement and its relationship with organizational productivity in Helsinki, Finland revealed a positive association between compressed work weeks arrangement and organizational productivity. Employer can initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production and to establish longer business hours which can enhance timeliness and task accomplishment. Flexible working options allow employees to adjust their working hours to their specific needs, which should have a positive effect on productivity. Pointing out further that flexibility also eliminates the clear end to a working day. That is, fixed working hours have clear beginnings and endings, whereas daily changing working times can lead to extended hours. With a heavy workload, flexible working option and overtime that is neither paid nor accounted for could push employees to work nearly round the clock.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Noncompliance by managers of Logistics Company to work-life balance practices is a major challenge impinging on employees' productivity. Management are yet to recognize that unbalanced work-family life caused by increased work demands leads to higher levels of stress and stress caused by higher demands from work results in family-work conflicts which impacts negatively not only on the wellbeing of employees but also on other life and social demand.

Moreover, the responses given by the employees indicate that the challenges encountered in combining their profession and family life hinder advancement in their vocation as well as affect their ability to accomplish a given task as when required. Even though work-life balance policies/practices exist in their establishments, a more relaxed atmosphere would be a relief since the aim of obtaining the best of or ensuring higher productivity from career parents cannot be achieved if there is a poor balance between their family life and profession. Therefore, we recommend that: logistics companies should consciously design and fashion out a flexible working option that will create a change of environment and positively enhance employees' well-being in order to achieve a high-spirited workforce. And that, Management of logistics companies should effectively adopt alternative work arrangement so as to create a family-friendly atmosphere that will appeal to and attract competent employees for better productivity.



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