

Strategies for Building High Performance Work Teams in Public Sector Organisations in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study focuses on Strategies for building High Performance Work Teams in public sector organizations. The objectives of the study are; to identify the strategies for building high performance work teams in public sector organizations, to ascertain the extent to which public sector organizations make use of team work in achieving their goals and to identify the relationship between team work and organisational performance in public sector organisations. The methodology adopted for this study was the survey research design. Primary and secondary sources of data were used. Findings reveal that the major strategies for building high performance work teams in public sector organizations are to save costs and increase commitment of the work force, work teams have always been used in public sector organizations and their exist a positive relationship between teamwork and organisational performance in public sector organisations in Nigeria. Based on the findings, the work recommends that; Human Resource managers in public sector organizations should be encouraged to undergo constant training and development programs to help them acquire innovative skills. Furthermore, team work should be encouraged in public sector organizations; this will help them to achieve their goals, because decision-making and problem-solving is better handled by teams. Also, public sector organizations are advised to create a receptive organizational environment for work groups and teams to function effectively. Hence it is widely held that organizations that adopt High Performance Work Team practices out-perform others that do not.

Keywords: Work teams, Public Sector Organizations, High Performance Work System

1. Introduction

The pace of technological change appears to have quickened in the 1990's. New forms of work organization, popularly labeled "High Performance Work System" in the academia and business literature, underscore flexible job designs and work arrangements, team or group work, greater information sharing and employee involvement in decision making, and cooperative labour-management relations to foster a participatory enterprise culture (Kumar, 2010:2). High performance work system is a set of human resource management policy and practice that promote organizational effectiveness (Dessler, 2011:120). The characteristic of the 21st century is technology, globalization, speed, change, competition, complexity and paradox. And this 21st century work is synonymous to High Performance Working.

Thus, by making better use of employee skills and knowledge, the new approach is intended to help organizations to become lean, cost efficient, and flexible, and more responsive to changing markets and technologies. At the same time, new system of work and rewards promises workers challenging, satisfying and more secure jobs, higher wages, and opportunities for greater control, autonomy, and participation (Kumar, 2010:4). In response to increased international pressures, Human Resource Managers have turned to High-Performance Work Team Processes as the key to maintaining global competitiveness. Specifically, a lot has been done, and still being done in the area of structural reformations such as rightsizing, monetization, due process, privatization and commercialization, professionalism of the public sector organization (Onodugo, 2008:155). However, there is still so much to be done in the area of inculcating the needed value reorientation for enhanced productivity.

According to Imaga (2003:107), the Second National Development plan observed that actual performance of many Nigerian public sector organizations was unsatisfactory; many of them were not responsive to the changing requirement of a growing and dynamic economy. Some do not possess the tools of translating into reality the hope of successful commercial operations. The level and quality of personnel are sometimes mediocre and reflect the worst traditions and ingredients of the civil service. The result of this poor attitude to work in the public service is the reason for constant dwindling productivity in the public sector. The notion of managers of public sector organizations that what worked in private sector cannot work in the public sector in terms of method of profit generation has considerably changed in recent years, (Kodjo, 2004:295). The prevailing view now is that the public sector can be made more efficient and result-oriented.

In recent years, Government and their agencies, especially those in Nigeria and other developing countries have come under increasing criticism for not being cost conscious and innovative enough to adapt to the new changes. The major problem facing most Nigerian public sector organizations is basically managerial, such as operational inefficiency, resulting in poor and unsatisfactory services and financial inefficiency, shown by huge annual losses, corruption, fraud and other acts of financial mismanagement. The reason is because the public sector organizations are bureaucratic in nature, hierarchical and staffed mainly by permanent career officials. Most of the decisions of the public sector organizations are influenced by political considerations and societal pressures. It is

in recognition of the above stated challenges that this study became necessary.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to identify the strategies for building high performance work teams in public sector organisations in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study include:

- to identify the strategies for building high performance work teams in public sector organizations.
- to ascertain the extent to which public sector organizations make use of work teams in achieving their goals.
- to identify the relationship between team work and organisational performance in public sector organisations

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 High Performance Work Practices (HPWP) Defined

A high performance work system is a set of human resources management policies and practices that together produce superior employee performance (Dessler, 2011:45). As Osterman (1999) has noted in his recent book, *Securing Prosperity*, there is no unambiguous way of defining a high-performance work system and knowing whether or not the establishment is following the part. He went further by adding that, the term “High Performance” is used to describe new forms of work organization, a new human resource management approach, or a set of practices that have the potential to achieve substantially enhanced economic performance. In his own view, Pfeffer (1998) defines High Performance Work Practices, as the menu of human resources policies and practices - sometimes described as “Innovative” – that contributes to higher productivity, greater flexibility, and stronger financial performance of organizations, is also large, diverse, ambiguous and unsettled.

High Performance working, refers to flatter, non-hierarchical structure, moving away from reliance on management control, team- working, autonomous working, based on high levels of trust, communication and involvement. Workers are seen as being more highly skilled and having the intellectual resources to engage in lifelong learning and master new skills and behaviors. Stewart (2001) defines high performance as a function of four leadership factors: competence, commitment, trust and opportunities. In a more elaborate way, a high performance work organizations incorporates some or all of the following ‘strategic, structural and behavioral features’ (Kumar, 2010:10).

- More job complexity, multi- tasking and multi-skilled.
- Increased employee qualifications.
- Ongoing skill formation through enterprise training.
- A minimum of hierarchy.
- Greater horizontal communication and distribution of responsibility (often through teams).
- Compensation incentives for performance and skill acquisition.
- Increased focus on ‘core activities’ and
- More horizontal inter-firm links for subcontracting and outsourcing.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that there can be no precise definition of HPW, however, most organization are likely to be moving towards, rather than considering that they have achieved HPWP.

3.2. Managing Work Teams in Public Sector Organizations

For us to be able to appreciate work teams, we will first define group. According to Nelson and Quick (2005:178), a group is two or more people having common interest, objective and continuing interaction. Also Ezigbo (2011: 464) sees a group as two or more individual who come into personal and meaningful contact on a continuing basis. She went further by telling us, that there are two types of groups within an organizations, informal groups and work teams. Therefore a work team consists of a small number of identifiable, interdependent employees, who are held accountable for performing tasks that contribute to achieving an organization’s goals. Members of a work team have a shared goal and they must interact with one another to achieve it. In a simpler note, Calkins and Stulz (2008:31) believe a work team is a group of individuals who work together to achieve defined goals. Team work is increasingly important to expand multinationally, adopt new technologies and look for ways to decrease costs, and improve profits. In collaboration to the afore mentioned, a work team is a group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common mission, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993:111-120). Groups emphasize individual leadership, individual accountability and individual work product, while work teams emphasize shared leadership, mutual accountability, and collective work products.

Work teams are task-oriented groups, teams are very useful in performing work that is complicated, complex, interrelated, and/or more voluminous than one person can handle, that is why Harold Geneen, chairman

of ITT, said, “If I had enough arms and legs and time, I’d do it all myself”. Obviously, people working in organizations cannot do everything because of the limitations of arms, legs, time, expertise, knowledge, and other resources. Several kinds of work teams exist, although each type of team may have a useful role in the organization, the individual expert should not be overlooked (Drucker, 1992).

Moving organizational structures away from traditional hierarchies and towards self managed teams and cells is one aspect of high performance working. Successful organizations today know that teams make a big difference in achieving strategic goals, (Harkins, 2004). Teams that are strong, flexible, and productive can be the competitive edge needed to produce better results, achieve higher quality, lower costs for the organization and the customers. Well-integrated, High Performing Teams - those that “click” – never lose sight of their goals and are largely self-sustaining. In fact, they seem to take on a life of their own to borrow from Harkins (2008), and it is all down to leadership. Hence a High Performance Work Team are groups of 3-30 worker drawn from different areas of a corporation who get together to solve the problems that workers deal with daily (Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert, 2007).

3.3. Strategies for building High Performance Work Teams in Public Sector Organisations.

Over the past two decades, workplace in the United States and Canada has experienced a wide variety of formal and informal changes in the organization of work, this is same in Nigeria. As the world of work changes in response to many factors – rapidly changing markets and services, different employee expectations and the opportunities presented by information technology, organizations are adapting, by moving from traditional systems and methods of organizing to new ways of communicating and managing. Against this backdrop, Kashefi (2011) identifies some major strategies for building high performance work team, they include:

- Smart working: This is an approach to organizing work that aims to drive greater efficiency in achieving job outcomes through a combination of flexibility, autonomy and collaboration, in parallel with optimizing tools and working environment for employees.
- Shaping the future: This aims to advance both thinking and practice through generating new insight, provoking debate and providing practical guidance and tools that can be applied in a work context. It offers practical insights into achieving sustainable long term business prosperity.
- Distributed leadership: Senior leaders set a clear strategy, but also empower and motivate managers to innovate to deliver it.
- Alignment: All components parts of the organization are focused on the same vision and values, objectives and end goal.
- Shared purpose: Core purpose is firmly set from the top, with leaders and managers at all levels contributing to ensuring employees have a strong, emotional connection to that purpose.
- Locus of engagement: Employees can be engaged on multiple levels with the overall purpose of the organization, the loyalty and bond they feel towards their managers, or team, or to the customer. For engagement to support sustainable performance organizations need to ensure individual team and organizational objectives are aligned.
- Balancing the short and long-term: Successful organizations are flexible enough to respond to short-term demands, but maintain sight of long - term horizon. The decisions employees make, need to reflect this balance.
- Sharing information: The information flow should be facilitated through the team leaders across the organization.
- Rewarding performance: Reward in the form of wage increases are collectively negotiated for the team and not individually.
- Assessment and Evaluation: It’s not just about measuring the right things, it’s also about taking the business context into account and how data is fed back into organization. Data can be used not just to prove past performance, but to improve for the future.

3.4. The Need for Building High Performance Work Teams in Public Sector Organizations

The technological revolution which is characterized by an increasing rate of technological change, and diffusion, greater knowledge intensity and the importance of knowledge to competitive advantage has affected Public Sector Organizations. Globalization, also characterized by the liberation of developing economies and emerging markets, new economies alliances and rules and the growing interdependences of national economies, along with worldwide economic development also require Public Sector organizations to ensure that they are productive. Including, competitive landscape of the new millennium, which is characterized by substantial and discontinuous change, are forcing public sector organization to ensure that they are efficient. Baker (1999) is of the opinion that, the wide spread interest in, and heightened awareness of the need for workplace change in the world can be attributed to four interrelated developments, they are:

- Unprecedented and interconnected changes in the economic, labour-market, public policy, and technological environments which have exerted tremendous pressures on public sector organizations to become more efficient, flexible and innovative, in order to respond effectively to changing markets and new technology.
- Poor relative productivity performance since the mid-1970s, which has affected international competitiveness and living standards.
- The growing realization that the current system of work organization based on Tayloristic norms of hierarchy, control and power, with a rigid separation of conception, planning and execution of tasks, is a source of inefficiencies, rigidities, and unnecessary conflicts that have adverse effects on productivity and quality performance, and
- The superior economic performance of Japanese organizations and their transplants, in terms of productivity and product quality, based on lean production practices and employee-centered work organization.

The cumulative effect of these four interrelated factors has been a new focus on human resources management emphasizing “The optimum use of human resources as the key” to international competitiveness. The new approach envisions a system of work organization that:

- Reject the traditional dichotomy between thinking and doing with a redistribution of decision making authority from management to teams of workers.
- Redesigns jobs to include a greater variety of skills and tasks with expanded opportunities for training in exercising discretion, solving problems, and using communications and team skill.
- Flattens out the management structure by reducing management layers and replacing supervisors with a team leader to enable workers to be self-managed and responsible for their own performance.
- Promotes worker involvement in decision making at all levels through information-sharing and advance notice and consultation on change, and
- Seeks an equitable distribution of the gains, by transforming the organization of work with a “promise” of higher incomes and greater employment security.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Theories of Effective team work and Organisational Performance.

Hackman and Oldham team effectiveness: To Hackman and Oldham (1980) team effectiveness comprises all of the following; the teams’ ability to produce an output that meets or exceeds an organization’s performance standards or expectations, the team experience serving more to satisfy than frustrate the personal needs of team members, and the team’s ability to work together on future assignments as a result of the social process engaged in to carry out current tasks.

McGregor Characteristics of effective Team: McGregor and his colleagues developed lists of characteristics for effective and ineffective teams. McGregor (1960) his list focuses on management of teams. Other scholars that conducted research similar to his includes, Argyris (1965) who focuses on organizational effectiveness that impact inter- personal competence of team members. He also looks at how the organization supports positive norms, such as openness, experimentation, individuality, thoughtfulness, concern, internal commitment, candidness, encouraging candidness, assisting with experimentation, and encouraging openness.

Many studies have also been conducted on performance management. Some have equally sought to establish the manner in which performance management can impact on the employee attitude, behavior and general performance (Ezezue, 2010:126-127). One of the most fundamental purposes of performance management is to align individual and organizational objectives. This means that everything people do at work leads to outcomes that further the achievement of organizational goals. Bevan, Barber and Robinson (1997:260) opine that the overall aim of performance management is to establish a high performance culture in which individuals and teams take responsibility for the continuous improvement of business process and for their own skills and contribute within a framework provided by effective leadership.

Mintzberg (1981:103) declares that performance management is a planned process of which the primary elements are agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement, and dialogue. It is concerned with measuring outputs in the shape of delivered performance compared with expectations expressed as objectives. To Mayo (2001:87), he opines that the organizational values are being upheld through performance management-living the value. This is an aspect of behavior but it focuses on what people do to realize core values such as concern for quality, concern for people, concern for equal opportunity and operating ethically. In a concluding note, Armstrong (2006:492) asserts that performance management is a continuous and flexible process, which involves managers and those whom they manage acting as partners within a framework that sets out how they can best work together to achieve the required result. It is based on the principle of management by contract and agreement rather than management by command. It relies on consensus and co-operation rather than control

correction.

4.2. Leadership Techniques for Building High Performing Teams

Harkins (2008) identified Top Ten Leadership Techniques for building High Performing Teams, they are:

- Defining a very clear picture of the future - a vision for the team. Keeping teams informed on where they are headed and how best to get there, means leaders should be prepared to acknowledge and adapt to changes.
- Being genuine, even if it means lowering your guards. Leaders will even reveal their own vulnerabilities at the right time, to gain the respect of those around them.
- Asking good questions. They use enquiry and advocacy in such a way as to keep them abreast of what is really going on.
- Talking about things, even the hard things. The leaders must find ways to have the difficult conversation, in the knowledge that burying problems doesn't make them go away.
- Following through on commitments. Leaders of high-performing teams find ways to build trust and maintain it, especially by making teams hold to their commitments and keeping the teams' view of it goals clear.
- Letting others speak first. In high performing teams, members see themselves as equal in terms of communication. Leaders should therefore encourage this, by putting the other person's need to express their agenda ahead of their own.
- Listening. The leaders know that achieving higher levels of innovation requires team members to be unafraid to express unusual ideas and advocate experimental processes.
- Facing up to non-performing players. Leaders should not tolerate players who pull the team apart. They are capable of getting the work done and not afraid to remove people who are failing to help them do so.
- Having fun, but never at others' expense. If high impact leaders do make fun of someone, it is usually themselves. They have learnt the lesson that reckless humor can be misinterpreted and backfire.
- Being confident and dependable. Leaders who get teams "click", project confidence. They are known as straight shooters- people who play hard, "fight fair" and never never give up.

4.3. Benefits Derived From Work Teams and High Performance Work Systems in Nigeria

Work teams are two or more people who interact and influence one another towards a common purpose (Stoner et al, 2007). A productive team environment contains an atmosphere of trust and its members are completely accountable for the groups' bottom line results. Nelson and Quick (2005:191) assert that, "There are two social benefits available to work teams, One of them is **Psychological intimacy** (which is the feelings of affection and warmth, unconditional positive regard, opportunity for emotional expression, openness, security and emotional support, and giving and receiving nurturance). The second one is **Integrated involvement** (which is closeness achieved through tasks and activities, social identity and self definition, being valued for one's skills and abilities, opportunity for power and influence, conditional positive regard and support for one's beliefs and values)". Specifically, the benefits derived from work teams are that:

- Work teams helps in the need to quickly respond to change and to respond with agility and flexibility.
- They help in increased need to produce products/ services at the highest quality, lowest cost, and using the most efficient method possible.
- Helps in demands for continuous improvement for leadership.
- Work teams provide a sense of belonging to members.
- Decision – making and problem- solving is better handled by teams that are working together.
- Skilled team members need to be constantly improving and growing in order to stay competitive and serve the organization.
- Teamwork allows resources to be used more effectively.
- Work teams helps to increase ownership, commitment, and motivation.
- It improves quality, reduces costs and improves efficiency.

High performance work practices generally aspire to help workers to manage themselves, the point of recruiting, screening, training and other humans resources practices is to foster a trained, empowered, self-motivated and flexible workforce (Robert and Keith 2001:294). Better management tends to promote productivity and quality, and the effectiveness of public sector organizations. Lumijarvi (2007) identified three current management methods that Public Sector Organizations have tried to adopt, they are; Total Quality Management(TQM), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Balanced Scorecard (BSC), but another approach recently used when reforming Public Sector Organization, is the High Performance Work Practices(HPWP). Tentabaum, (1998:8), advocates the shift from traditional world of Newton to Chaos. This chaos according to him is a complex, unpredictable and orderly disorder in which patterns of behavior unfold in irregular

but similar forms. Performance management systems, consists of the processes used to identify, encourage, measure, evaluate, improve, and reward employee performance, (Mathis and Jackson, 2004:273). Performance management links organizational strategy to results.

Furthermore, there are some major benefits derived from building high performance work teams in public sector organization, Osterman (1999) provided the following advantages of building high performance work teams in organizations, they are:

- a) High performance work organizations do a better job of tapping into the ideas and creativity of workforce.
- b) The participation that high performance organizations generate tends to increase the commitment of the workforce.
- c) The adoption of group work and redistribution of decision making, save costs, as organizations are able to eliminate supervisors and other redundant employees.
- d) People tend to work harder because of the increased peer pressure that emerges from being a member of the team.

4.4. Overcoming Barriers to High Performance Work Practices in Public Sector Organisations in Nigeria

Kashefi (2011) asserts that, Private Sector organization that introduces high performance work practices can expect to achieve a 20% increase in productivity and profitability, and he concludes that Public Sector organizations could enjoy a similar boost to performance. However his study highlights difficulties facing public sector and other organizations that want to introduce high performance work practices - which presents a serious leadership and management challenges to the organizations. He discovered that organizations wishing to introduce high performance work practices successfully must win the trust of their employees, be prepared to let them be more directly involved in decision-making, and provide extensive training for managers and employees. Sophisticated recruitment and selection procedures must also be put in place, to ensure that future managers and employees can support a culture of high performance work system.

Furthermore, the chances of high performance work practices can hinge on a strong and active commitment from senior management, commitment from employees to the organization's objectives. The opportunity for managers and employees to apply their own discretion in their work and the pursuit of continuous learning throughout the organization. Clear vision, strong leadership, great managers and engaged employees are all important. But all these come together to deliver sustainable performance, only when shared purpose exists, and is supported by co-ordinated, empowered and innovative management at all levels.

5. Research Design

The research design used for this study is the survey research design. The survey approach appeared best suited for this work since it is not feasible to interview the entire population. Furthermore in surveys, there are fixed sets of questions, and responses are systematically classified, so that quantitative comparison can be made. Primary data for the study were sourced from the management staff of the organizations randomly selected for this study through the use of questionnaires and structured oral interview held with them. A total of 250 questionnaires were administered and 235 were collected in usable form, representing 94% of return. Secondary data were gathered from earlier research works that have been done.

5.1 Method of Data Analysis

Table 1: Strategies for building High Performance Work Teams in Public Sector
(n =235)

Strategy	Yes (%)	No (%)	Z-value	p-value
Distributed leadership	175 (74.5)	60 (25.5)	7.131	0.000
Information sharing	162 (68.9)	73 (31.1)	6.713	0.000
Rewarding performance	190 (80.6)	45 (19.4)	7.587	0.000
Assessment and evaluation	215 (91.5)	20 (8.5)	8.193	0.000

Table 1 reveals that majority of the respondents (over 50%) identified that assessment and evaluation, rewarding performance, distributed leadership and information sharing as the strategies for building high performance works teams in public sector organizations. These strategies are having significant influence on building high performance based on their Z-values > 1.96 (5% significance level) and $p < 0.05$.

Table 2: Extent Public Sector Organisations use Work Teams in achieving goals

Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)	Z-value	p-value
Great Extent	135	57.4	5.281	0.000
Moderate Extent	45	19.1		
Little Extent	31	13.2		
No Extent	24	10.2		

Table 2 reveals that the respondents decidedly are of the opinion that public sector organizations use work teams in achieving goals. The extent to which these organizations use work team is great and it is significant as $Z\text{-value} = 5.281 > 1.96$ (5% significance level) and $p < 0.05$. This reveals that public sector organizations make use of work teams to a significantly great extent in achieving their goals.

Table 3: Relationship between team work and organizational performance

		Organisational Performance			Total	Pearson Correlation	p-value
		High	Moderate	Low			
Team Work	Great Extent	135	0	0	135	0.882	0.021
	Moderate Extent	13	27	5	45		
	Little Extent	1	25	5	31		
	No Extent	0	3	21	24		
Total		149	55	31	235		

As presented in Table 3, there is a high relationship team work and organizational performance. This relationship is positive; indicating that with increased used of work teams, organisatioanl performance increases. This is captured in the data that shows that all the public sector organizations that used work team to a great extent experienced high organizational performance. The Pearson Correlation coefficient of 0.882 and $p\text{-value} < 0.021$, confirms this.

6. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Findings

Findings reveal that the major strategies for building high performance work teams in public sector organizations are to save costs and increase commitment of the work force, work teams have always been used in public sector organizations and their exist a positive relationship between teamwork and organisational performance in public sector organisations in Nigeria.

6.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it may be concluded that Team Work is increasingly important to expand multinationally, adopt new technologies and look for ways to decrease costs, and improve profits. More also, successful organizations today know that teams make a big difference in achieving strategic goals. Teams that are strong, flexible, and productive can be the competitive edge needed to produce better results, achieve higher quality, lower costs for the organization and the customer. Hence it is widely held that organizations that adopt High Performance Work Team practices out-perform others that do not.

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that; Human Resource managers in Public Sector Organizations should be encouraged to undergo constant training and development programs to help them acquire innovative skills. Team Work should be encouraged in Public Sector Organization; this will help them to achieve their goals, because decision-making and problem-solving is better handled by teams. Public Sector organizations are advised to create a receptive organizational environment for work groups and teams to function effectively.

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