

Workplace Democracy and Performance of Employees in Public Institutions in Nigeria: How Far, So Far?

Okafor, Lawrence Chima*

Department of Business Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Okorie, Ebere Florence

Department of Business Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Lifu, Frank Lifu

Department of Business Administration, Ogoja Campus, Cross River University of Technology

Abstract

In most work organizations in Nigeria, it was conventionally alluded that management had the prerogative and exclusive preserve in relation to decision making; therefore, little or no concrete efforts were made to institutionalize Workplace Democracy (WPD). This is in contrast to what obtained in other countries especially in developed societies where WPD has long been espoused as part of the needed tonic for operational efficiency and organizational performance. Against the backdrop of recent claims and counter claims as to the place of WPD practices in organizations in Nigeria, this paper sought to investigate WPD variables (Collective Bargaining, Committee membership, workers' representation on boards and use of quality circles) vis-a-vis employee performance variables of job satisfaction, commitment, punctuality, timely completion of work. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the collection and analyses of data, which were supplemented by views of "informed people", the paper reinforces relationships between workplace democracy and employee performance variables. However, observable evidences supported by descriptive analyses of data are suggestive that the future of workplace democracy in Nigerian public institutions is bleak.

Keywords: Workplace democracy, Employee performance, Universities, Local governments.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Universities and local governments are service oriented organizations. Like most service organizations, they emphasize on timely completion of work, quality of work, punctuality, commitment to work, and citizenship behaviour, with a view to improving overall performance. A glossary of the history of public universities in Nigeria show that they were established to ameliorate the problems associated with inadequate access to tertiary education. Summarized, the visions of these institutions seem to capture the need to be amongst the best of universities worldwide, through the advancement of knowledge by providing educational experiences for students, encouraging and fostering entrepreneurship, and engaging in research for the betterment of humankind. These visions supposedly are anchored on the tenets of excellence, open dialogue and inquiry, and a deep appreciation for the entire spectrum of human experience. As a means of realizing their visions, most of these institutions through the mission seek to provide enabling environment for intellectual growth, a strong commitment to academic excellence, integrity, entrepreneurship, and by creating new knowledge and solving practical problems that benefit humanity; amongst others.

Local governments in Nigeria on the other hand, through the instrumentality of the 1979 constitution, became a 3rd tier of government. For instance, the 1979 constitution in section seven (7) stipulates that there shall be democratically elected local government system put in place to attend to the needs of the local populace. In recognition of the status of local government and in furtherance of enhancing the division of powers principle, the fourth schedule detailed the functions of a local government council to include making inputs to the state regarding economic development, establishing and maintaining cemeteries, rural roads and registering of births, deaths, and marriages amongst others.

For these functions of local governments to be attainable, and for the visions and missions of these universities to be realizable demands all employees must not only be involved but must show commitment as no one person or group have monopoly of knowledge. The realization of these visions and mission statement is dependent on the participation and involvement of all stakeholders. Put differently, for these missions to be realizable and for local governments to function efficiently and effectively, employees will need to be part of the decision and management processes i.e. there, should be demonstration of democratic ideals or workplace democracy. Ahiazu (1999:114), restating the position of Harrison (1991:51), defined Workplace Democracy (WPD) as the level of involvement of subordinates in making decisions that directly affects them in their work domains. Donnachie (2000:13), while submitting that WPD has a tradition in Germany dating back to the

Weimer Republic, refers to WPD as a construct that allows workers in organizations to exercise control over their routine activities and contribute freely towards the success of the organization.

Deetz (1992:16), Donnachie (2000:19), Ahiazu (1999:27), also attempted to chronicle the historical developments and antecedents of WPD. A synthesis of their submissions is that the idea of workplace democracy is incomplete without reference to the contributions of Saint Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. Today, however, the practice of WPD has spread to countries and institutions and possibly the public universities and local governments in Nigeria. WPD has the potential to transform people within organizations by making them more democratic politically aware and active social, public spirited, co-operative, and concerned for the general good (Butcher and Clark, 2002:39), and that WPD has the capacity to reduce organizational dysfunction (Adekiya, 2015:108).

On the contrary however, in some of these public universities and local governments, some workers rarely show commitment to duties as a response to their non-involvement in appraisal cum promotion exercise, procurement of facilities and equipment they use and in the overall policy formulation, decision-making and implementation. This is not in tandem with the views of Okafor (2010:34), who opined that where the influence and control of work activities within an organization are seamlessly done to allow employees participate in the running of the enterprise, a feeling of belongingness, trust and delegation evolves with a capacity to developing worker satisfaction, employee commitment, quality services and enhanced citizenship behaviour.

Mayers' (2001:234) argument is that in contemporary workplaces, workers have increased skills and competences that encourages self-monitoring, self directed activities with the possibility of embracement of knowledge and responsibility. Not minding these competences and the associated values and benefits, he opines that "workers are still subjected to managers they did not elect, and to rules in which they have little or no say Accordingly, they become spied, drug-tested, subjected to searches, and e-monitored". These management actions according to him diminishes WPD in organizations.

It is common knowledge that universities are largely run using committees. Through the committee system, some employees are co-opted to make contributions on matters affecting workers and on the general management of the institutions. However, there is the claim that the contributions of these co-opted members/employees are not factored into the final decisions, or that the aftermath of committees reports are kept in view or partially implemented, and that the dimension and level of participation through committees are not determined. It is further claimed that these practices, have influences on quality of work, intellectual output of lecturers, punctuality to and timely completion of work, as well as employee commitment. Similarly, there is the idea that among the preponderant pathologies of local governments in Nigeria, is the high prevalence of tall structured local government system of administration which creates a gap between labour and management therefore, limiting mutual co-operation and workplace democracy. However, either on the basis of speculation or on grounds of observable evidence, it is suggested that in these universities and local governments, the ideals of WPD are far from being vigorously pursued and enhanced. Against these claims and hypothesis, this study seeks to explore workplace democracy and employee performance in public institutions in Nigeria with the universities and local government in focus.

1.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Like many other constructs in the social and management sciences, workplace democracy (WPD) has been defined and interpreted variously by authors. Also known as Industrial democracy or sometimes referred to as workers participation in management (WPM), WPD is defined by Donnachie (2000:14), as that which allows workers in organization to exercise control over routine activities. For Nkinebari (2014:442), Industrial Democracy is simply the involvement of workers in decision-making process. Imaga (2004:10), posited that industrial democracy is a reflection of the extent of direct democracy (government of the people, by the people and for the people) therefore, the nearer a worker's participation is to management of an enterprise, the closer we adjudge the system to be democratized. Anugwom (2007:227), thinks that WPD should include the various ways which workers influence decisions of the organization for which they work; a means through which employees have a real share in the decision affecting the company to which they are part of and therefore, a share in the responsibility for making it a success. Tanic (1969:13), is of the view that industrial democracy is a work plan designed to reassign to workers the status they had lost due to the capitalistic pattern of labour – management relationship. To him, industrialization led to the proletarianization of workers, led to disparity between the democratic citizenship rights of workers and employers, thus, industrial democracy or high powered participation constitute means and mechanisms for reducing the wide field of discrepancies between labour force and economic power.

Today, the increasing wave of "democracy" sweeping across the globe is making industrial democracy an imperative. Whether construed as a restoration of rights lost or viewed in contemplation of the innate abilities of all men to make contributions, this paper in addition to conceptualizing WPD as the right of employees to participate in the management decisions and processes of the organization they are employed, submits following

Anugwom (2007:227), that WPD be seen as all personal and institutional processes by which employees seek to exert countervailing pressure on management control within the organization. The idea of industrial democracy then, is a challenge to the traditional prerogative of management thinking/thought. WPD is an idea that knowledge, wisdom, ingenuity, and innovativeness can be found in all segments/units of an organization; it is a proposition that organizations would be run on less autocratic principles with probable positive implications for product quality, service delivery, increasing output and decreasing absenteeism and turnover. Whereas the possible correlates of WPD have been articulated, it is yet to be narrowed in terms of specifics to public universities and local governments in Nigeria visa-visa performance of employees, hence, this study.

Though the analytical frames and the accompanying definitions may differ, most writers agree that collective bargaining, two way communications between employers and employees, Scanlon and Rucker plans which share productivity gains with workers, joint health and safety committees, workers council/strategic management are reflective of and do help to deepen industrial democracy. Fajana (2006:236), had submitted that in addition to scattered instances of institutionalized co-operation between unions and management, organizations have established quality circles, and put in place programmes for improving the quality of working life, all in a bid for developing worker participation for the purpose of improving productivity and product quality. Meanwhile, the work of Fasoyin (2005:09), draws our attention to the fact that the degree of WPD or employees' involvement vary from one organization to another, and in the same organization over time. These variations accordingly are reflective of the pattern of management relations, subject(s) under discussion, as well as the socio-political and cultural environments. Generally, the forms of employee involvement following his typology are summarized as:

- **Joint consultation model:** With management consulting with workers before taking decisions and the views of workers presented through Joint Consultative Committees' as in the UK, Poland, and Sweden.
- **Joint Decision model:** Commonly found in the USA, entails that both workers and management jointly decide and execute decisions.
- **Self or Auto-Management scheme:** where workers exert dominant influence and control especially in large state owned industrial units as experienced in the now defunct Yugoslavia, and
- **Workers Representation on Boards:** This type is applicatory to Nigerian universities and would mean that workers elect their representatives and send them to board (E.g. Governing council) to participate in decision-making.

Meanwhile, Tokunboh (1990:124), sees employee performance as the outcome that result due to organizational input and other subsequent transformation that occurs when individuals, materials and organization interacts. For Esu and Inyang (2009:56), employee performance is a state of competitiveness achieved through a high level of efficiency and productivity by workers having the goal of assuring durable position on the market. Whereas these definitions capture performance in relation to market and to competition, we join Ayesha (2014:26), to capture performance as the success, achievement, effort and actions of employees in relation to their job requirements with the hope of optimizing the present and protecting the future. Bartol and Martin (1994:156), not only sought to dichotomize performance measurement levels, but-submitted that at the individual level; performance is concerned with issues such as punctuality to work, quality service, citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, employee commitment, job responsibilities, and the like. They contend further that at the organizational level, performance measures focus on productivity, profitability, absenteeism, turnover, market share, and adaptability. For the purpose of this work, we adopted the individual level parameters of employee performance in addition to absenteeism and turnover that will be adapted for the organization level of employee performance.

The objective of this study therefore, is to explore WPD and Employee Performance using the universities and local governments in Nigeria. Specially, we sought to establish whether the ideals of WPD correlate to the Employee Performance indices, and to estimate to what extent these WPD ideals are practicalized in Nigerian universities/local governments.

Meanwhile, the eclectic mode is adopted as the theoretical frame for analysis. First is the moral right theory, drawn from management ethics which is based on the assumption that workers are autonomous and that being treated equally is a demonstration of distributive justice. The autonomy claim means that the freedom to make decision in workplaces is a continuation of the right to autonomy that all individual possess. The justice claim presupposes that equals should be treated equally. The moral right theory as interpreted by the works of Archer (1995:24) and Mayer (2001:244), is an extension of a social contract which conveys right, responsibilities and relationships between workers and employers in terms of management and control of processes in organizations. The moral rights model in seeking to protect the fundamental rights and privileges of all affected; is an expression of the right to self government through democratic processes, therefore, is assumed to be inalienable.

The goal setting theory of Locke (1996:119) is the second theoretical plank for the study. On the assumption that people have conscious goals that challenge and energize them, and direct their thoughts and behaviour towards an end, and that individuals who set specific but difficult goals performed better, and that goal

setting is likened to task performance, with an implication that involving employees in decision making, and management processes will shore-up performance, in terms of timely completion of work, improve quality of work and service delivery, this theory is adopted for this work.

2.1 Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for the purpose of this study. The survey aims to determine the extent of relationship between the independent variables of WPD (Workplace Democracy) and the dependent variables of employee performance (Y) as shown below:

Independent Variables of WPD (X)	Dependent Variables of Performance (Y)
X1 Use of collective Bargain (CB)	Y1 – Job satisfaction
X2 Use of Quality Circles	Y2 – Punctuality
X3 Use of Committees	Y3 – Timely completion of work
X4 Workers Rep. on Board	Y4 – Decreasing absenteeism

Both WPD and performance variables were treated as multi-dimensional constructs and their degree of association measured using the Log-Linear Regression model. A sample size of approximately 400 respondents was used. This number was determined from population of 1105, using the Taro Yameni statistical formulae. Furthermore, extant rules of inclusiveness and exclusiveness were applied to ensure that the sampled respondents were appropriate for the study.

The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire, designed in a way to reflect the variables studied and to ensure validity. The test-retest approach was used to ensure reliability. Comments and expert opinions from some informed persons were also used to supplement data obtained through the responses to questionnaire items. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistic. Test of hypotheses was based on 95% confidence level.

3.1 Findings and Discussion

Data collected were analyzed using SPSS 23 to test the hypotheses. The summarized model using Log-Linear (Linear-by-Linear Association) revealed as follows:

There is significant positive relationship between:

- i. Collective Bargaining and Job satisfaction
- ii. Use of quality circles and punctuality
- iii. Use of committee and timely completion of work
- iv. Workers representative on Board and Decreasing Absenteeism

Whereas, the results show positive relationships between the variables studied, the accompanying descriptive statistics in relation to the responses of respondents to the extent to which these ideals are practicalized, reveal otherwise. Majority of the respondents (74.3%), while believing that collective bargaining offers a good theoretical plank for shoring job satisfaction, has remained largely a mirage, as most issues that would have been thrashed collectively are rather decided through the instrumentality of deputation. Following Yesufu (1984), Deputation is used in work organizations where the employer or employee or both are unenlightened, inarticulate and the method reaching decisions is by dictation, so that majority of people have no shared responsibility in the decision reached and would probably leave with a feeling that he has decided. As many as 96.4% of responses from employees of local governments subscribe to the foregoing, position regarding collective bargaining, deputation and job satisfaction.

Again, it is estimated that the presence of tall structures in the local government system, the fear of loss of jobs, political intimidation and the increasing alienating tendencies of the management of local governments and the apparatus or apparatuses of state, are all acting in concert to making mockery of the ideals of use of quality circles, use of committees, and workers representative on boards, as tonics for improving punctuality, timely completion of work, and reducing absenteeism.

For the universities, it is the view of 71.4% of those who responded that election of workers representative into boards are manipulated as ethnic cards are openly played, so that those “elected” may not actually go to represent the interest of workers. Similarly, appointments into committees are neither reflective of the desired outcome (timely completion, increasing output) nor of experiences of employees, so that in the final analyses, either the reports of these committees are not utilized or that these committees in the first instances were set up to serve pecuniary not university interests.

4.1 Conclusion

Whereas, collective bargaining, use of quality circles, committees and the election of employees into boards of their organization are theoretically believed to contribute to performance of employees and organizations, their deployment and use remains a far cry in most of Nigeria’s local governments and universities. Collective

bargaining though espoused as an official policy of the Nigerian state remains a myth; quality circles are seldom used just as mediocres may be “elected” into boards of these organizations, with possible negative consequences on job and performance outcomes. Given this scenario, Imaga’s prediction that the future of WPD in Nigeria is bleak, though made more than a decade ago, remains apt.

Authors’ contributions

All authors participated in the design and development of the study. Okafor drafted the manuscript, Okorie edited for submission and all authors made inputs to the final manuscript.

Acknowledgments

This study was one of the outcomes of the academic and promotional aspirations of the authors hence special recognition goes to the Management of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki and Cross Rivers State University of Technology, Ogoja Campus for creating the enabling environment for growth.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Adekiya, A. A. (2015), Perceived Job Insecurity: Its Individual, Organizational and Societal effects. *European Scientific Journal, Special edition*. 1(1) 104-111.
- Ahiazu, A. I. (1999), *The African Industrious Man*. Port-Harcourt: CIMRAT Publications.
- Anugwom, G. A. (2007), *Industrial Relations System in Nigeria*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Archer, R. (1995), *Economic democracy: The Politics of feasible socialism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ayesha, J. (2014), Impact of motivation on employee performance. *European Journal of Business and Management* 6(23) 23-34.
- Bartol, K. M. and Martin, D.C (1994), *Management* (2nd edition) USA: McGraw Hill Inc.
- Butcher, D. and Clarke, M. (2002), The Cornerstone for organizational democracy. *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(1), Pp. 35-46.
- Deetz, S. A. (1992), *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Donnachie, I. (2000), *Robert Owen: Owen of Lanark and New Harmony*. Scotland: Tuckwell Press.
- Esu, B. B. and Inyang, B. J. (2009), A case for performance management in the public sector. *International Journal of Business and Management* 4(4) 54-58.
- Fajana, S. (2006), *Industrial Relations in Nigeria: Theory and Features* (3rd edition) Lagos: Labofin and Company.
- Fasoyin, T. (2005), *Industrial Relations in Nigeria*. Second Edition. Lagos: Long Man Nigeria PLC.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (1999), *The constitution of the Federal Republic*. Lagos: Ministry of Information.
- Harrison, B. (1991), The failure of worker participation. *Technology Review*, 94(1) 74-78.
- Imaga, E. U. L. (2004), *Industrial Democracy in the Third World. A Focus on globalization and the best practice model in Industries* (2nd Edition), Enugu: Rhyce Kerex publishers.
- Locke, E. A. (1996). Motivation through conscious goal setting. *Applied and preventative psychology*, 5, 117 – 124.
- Nkinebari, N. P. (2014), Workplace Democracy and Industrial Harmony in Nigeria: *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 3(1) 441-444.
- Mayer, R. (2001), The Robert Dahl and the right to workplace Democracy, *Review of Politics* 63(3), 221 – 247.
- Okafor, L. C. (2010), *Lecture Notes on Industrial Relation*, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.
- Tanic, Z. (1969), *Workers participation in management – ideal and reality in India*. New Delhi” Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations.
- Tokunboh, M. A. (1990), *Public Enterprise: the Nigerian experience*, Lagos: Lantern Books.
- Yesufu, T. M. (1984), *The dynamics of industrial Relations: the Nigerian experience*, Ibadan: University Press Limited.