

Flexibility of Work in Employment Relations and Labour Deployment in the Nigeria Labour Market

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Abstract

The paradigm shift in the world of work has created a new dimension in the labour market vis a vis employment relation; a point of reference is the flexibility of work and labour deployment in the Nigeria labour market. The study examines flexibility of work in employment relations and deployment of labour in the Nigeria labour market within the purview of relationship and the benefits to the employers and employees. Hence, the study takes an exploratory approach by reviewing extant literatures to understand the dynamics of work flexibility in employment relations and its influence on different patterns of labour deployment. The findings from the review of extant literatures revealed that there are various dimensions to flexibility of work in employment relations(workplace flexibility, workforce flexibility, low flexibility and mutual flexibility) and labor deployment(temporary worker, part time workers triangular employees etc.) in the Nigeria labour market and it often benefit the employer more because of the objective of maximizing return on investment by creating financial rigidity on the employee through cutting or reduction in the personnel cost or overhead cost. This study therefore recommends that a win-win flexible work dimension for deploying of workers for flexible work arrangement should be adopted to achieve a healthy employment relations practice in the Nigeria labour market

Keywords: *Workplace flexibility; workforce flexibility; Nigeria*

A. INTRODUCTION

Flexible work patterns issues have now expanded beyond the exploratory analysis of 'who' the flexible workers are, 'what' they earn, 'where' they work, and 'which' industries have the largest percent of workers in flexible work arrangements (Bal & De Lange, 2014; Clark & Holdsworth, 2017). Emerging research is focusing on long-term implications of these jobs on the workers, their families, workplaces, unions, and the society at-large (Isik & Waheeda, 2005). Flexibility in the workplace is a key theme in almost every organisation and it is often pursued by endeavours to introduce resilience in employment and the expectation of relevant benefits (Vlasios, 2007)).

However, it is important to note that since the early 1990s, the concept of "workplace flexibility" has occupied an increasingly central place in managerial thinking and workplace management, on how to manage diversity in an organisational workforce, talent development, employee engagement, enforcement of organisational policy among others which is away from traditionally bureaucratic patterns (Dyer, 2006; Chandrasekar, 2011). There seems little consensus on the reasons that underlie this putative shift, with theorists variously stressing the rise of global competition, depression of global economy, changing patterns of consumer tastes, the demands of new information technologies and the entry into labour force of millennial children (PWS, 2011).

However, the belief that modern capitalism is undergoing re-conceptualisation of markets, technologies, and industrial hierarchies leading toward the displacement of mass production as the dominant technological paradigm of the late twentieth century (Steven, 1999) and this informed a major change in the workplace and in the relationship between organisations and employees (Vlasios, 2007).

On the other hand, work patterns were designed and distributed by superiors and the role of employees was restricted in the narrow tasks assigned to them. Also, during the last two decades of the 20th century, international competition, domestic competitive pressures, technological changes and major financial events made organisations to seek greater flexibility and productivity as well as new strategies focused on speed, responsiveness to changing market conditions and innovation, as a result, these have induced organisations to eliminate jobs not just in the factory floor as often as in the past but also among those who have traditionally been offered a long-term career within the organisation (Hiltrop, 1995).

Another conceptualisation of the latter framework is the shift from 'Fordist' which involves mass production and distribution of products in a stable market with standard terms in the employment relationship to a 'Post-Fordist' regime, a situation where organisations have to cope with constant change leading firms to lose their stability in the marketplace because technological advancement sweeps away the old rules of competition along with the introduction of globalization and uncertainty bringing forth the need for labor market flexibility for organisations and employees alike (Vlasios, 2007).

Thus, managers should ensure workplace flexibility in managing workforce, enforcing rules and maintaining effective strategic partners is sacrosanct for today's organisation employment relations. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to conceptually review the flexibility of work in employment relations and labour deployment in Nigeria labour market. The specific objectives are to:

- examine the literatures on flexible work and labour deployment
- examine the relationship between workplace flexibility and employment relations in the Nigeria labour market
- examine the benefit of flexible work to both employer and employee within the purview of their employment relations in Nigeria

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Flexibility of work and labour deployment

Labour deployment is the involvement of workers in different categories of work arrangement patterns which include; temporary worker, contract staff, home based worker, part-time worker and full time worker among others, this is as a result of a paradigm shift into a knowledge economy which is driven by capitalism, characterized with deploying workers into different employment patterns so as to maximize profit at the lowest possible cost. It is within this purview that Steven (1999) review of

the empirical literature suggests that, despite scattered support for the post-fordist approach, important anomalies exist (such as the growing authority of "mental" over manual labor) that post-fordism seems powerless to explain. In spite of its ample contributions, post-fordist theory provides a seriously distorted guide to the nature of workplace.

This has also been exemplifying in the study by Ifedapo (2010), that there are different levels of diffusion of employment flexibility across the banks, with different patterns as well in the types of jobs with atypical employment contracts. These variations have a significant difference in the organizations' level of safety obligations to casual and permanent workers and this is an indication of selective and preferential treatments among the workers due to difference in their job nomenclature and despite working within the same job environment (Okoye & Aderibigbe, 2014). This also account for work family conflict, that the direction of work-family conflict (work interference with family vs. family interference with work) and the specific form of flexibility (flexitime vs. flexplace; use vs. availability) make a difference in the effects found. Overall, the significant effects were small in magnitude (Tammy, Ryan, Kaitlin & Kristen, 2013). Similarly, Haruko (2009) study show that: (1) female workers who have not come back to work within one year after the first childbirth face a high risk of never being reinstated into the labor market; (2) a decrease in child care costs due to the presence of informal care and an increase in opportunity costs such as profession/skilled or clerical work with high annual income would motivate a female worker to be reinstated into the labour market within a short time period after the first childbirth; and (3) adjusting for the opportunity costs, the accessibility of work-life balance measures still remains a significant positive impact on the probability of a stable female employee to come back to work and thus shortens the length of being on leave. Almudena (2011) support the existence of different combinations of demanded and offered flexibility. They also provide evidence that flexible work arrangements have differing impacts on work intensity and employee wellbeing.

This is the reason for Vlasios and Co (2007) argued that the role of HR departments is important in gauging employee attitude by assisting the organizations in avoiding breach in the contract or at least minimizing the unfavourable outcomes which could adversely affect employee commitment, that is, through a positive environment of openness and co-operation, employment flexibility and commitment can co-exist. However, Catherine and Kate (2007) argue that although students seek to maximise the benefits associated with their employment, employers ultimately gain more in the short and long-term from a significant pool of low-cost, low-investment and highly flexible labour. In the same vein, Gerry (2007), argued that the notion of flexibility and its impact is often oversimplified and the evidence does not provide much support for the view that greater flexibility results in higher employment. Isik and Waheeda (2005) state that overall, the research presented here shows that with the accumulated experience in flexible work patterns and dynamics, new issues for discussion are emerging to strike a balance between employers' and workers' needs and interests in flexibility.

2. Flexibility of work and employment relations

Over the past two decades, work and employment relations has been undergoing a dramatic transformation from various industrial policy to policy, reforms, diversity, competitive business environment (Dyer, 2006; Chandrasekar 2011). This was further influenced by global economy challenges which brought about dynamics in workforce management as public parastatal embraces privatisation, coupled with rises in multinational companies (Chen & Chan, 2004).

This development makes manpower planning and management of workforce on the future of employment relations fraught with unpredictable and difficulties. As policy makers and managers face more unforeseen events such as the current financial crisis and recession, which requires them to be more strategic thinking and proactive than ever before (ACAS, 2011).

This makes Chandrasekar (2011) to posit that there is no doubt that the environment in which employees, employers and trade unions find themselves have changed dramatically in the recent time and will continue to change (Chandrasekar, 2011). Although, ACAS (2011) emphasises that the significant changes in the workplaces and the shift in the balance from collective to individual models of employment relations, coupled with traditional frameworks and assumptions surrounding employment relations need constant renewal (ACAS, 2011).

This reasoning has opened up the need to manage high performance employee toward productivity and provides him/her a reward that are in line with his aspiration which will enable him/her to develop a new skill, both technical and social that will be necessary for both the individual and organisation growth and survival. The ability of managers to manage employment relations on a day-to-day basis and to get the best from their staff has implications for innovation, productivity and organisation growth and survival (Chandrasekar, 2011, ACAS, 2011).

In fact, the increasing globalization requires more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds than ever before. People no longer live and work in an insular marketplace; they are now part of a worldwide economy with competition coming from nearly every side. For this reason, organizations need to manage workforce diversity in order to become more creative and open to change. Maximizing and capitalizing on this issue have become an important issue for management today (Green, López, Wysocki, & Kepner, 2012). Although different from one organisation to another, no wonder Chandrasekar (2011) maintains that a motivating work environment must be the one in which employees are treated fairly. No matter what level of input a particular worker has in relation to the business processes as a whole, it is essential for a manager to give each employee a sense of playing a dynamic, integral role in something much larger.

The model below shows the need for workplace flexibility on employment relations

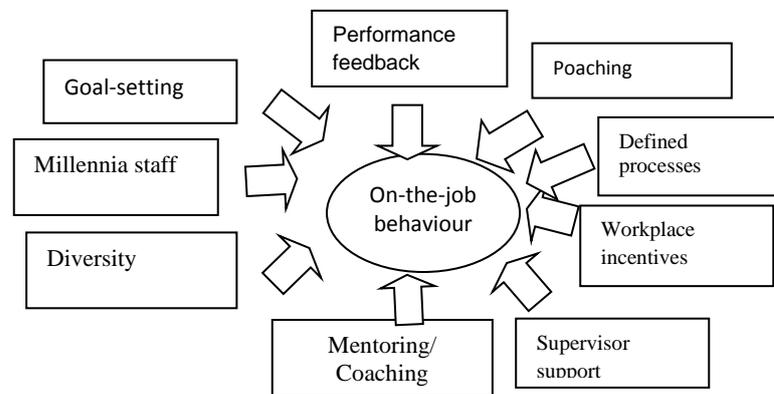


Figure 1 Workplace flexibility on employment relations

Source: Chandrasekar K. (2011) Workplace environment and its impact on Organisational performance in public sector Organisations, *International Journal of Enterprise Computing and Business Systems*,1 (1)

The factors in the box from the diagram above were modified in order to suit the purpose of the study. However, each of these can impacted negatively on organisational performance if it is not properly handled (Chandrasekar, 2011). Although, it is no longer news in today emerging trends for many organisations to refer to their employees as their main source of competitive advantage (Collis & Montgomery 2008; Fried & Fottler, 2011). Hence, the need for flexibility in employment relations policies that can ensure people commitment, loyalty, retention, pay, and reward policies that can help organisation succeed in achieving desired organisational outcomes (Fried & Fottler, 2011).

From the diagram above, Chandrasekar (2011) maintains that employees are to be involved in setting performance and goal, either through their immediate supervisor or as part of an organisation formal performance management process. This become necessary as every relationship between a principal and an agent is characterized by information asymmetry, and since the employer is not able to monitor the effort of the employees permanently, certain measures to motivate staff have to be offered to the workforce (Asmus, Karl, Mohnen & Reinhart, 2015), while goals setting present the best way to achieve this (Locke, Shaw, Saari & Latham ,1981)

From the diagram, with the millennia generation entering into employment in vast number, present a challenge of how to retain them, their career aspirations, attitude to work and with their uncomfotability with rigid corporate structures (PwS, 2011). Thus, poaching also creates the need for organisation to be flexible in managing their talent, so as not to lose them cheaply to rival organisations that are not ready to invest in training and at the same time, need already made talent

that will make them succeed, and help replacing their retiring boomer generation (Cooke, 2000; PwS, 2011; Nappinnai & Premavathy, 2013).

It appears the essence of workplace flexibility on employment relations is to ensure that organisation has the right people with the right mix of skills, displaying the right attitudes and behaviours, with high rate of retention. Bond, Hayes, & Barnes-Holmes (2006) maintain that workplace flexibility does not only help organisation to be sensitive but increases their sensitivity to performance-related contingencies of reinforcement in their work environment. Whenever an organisations' manager is mindful of flexibility in maintaining organizational policy and managing workforce in today labour market, this will not only contribute to his/her success on the job, but growth and survival of that organisation. In the perspective of Bond, Flaxman Veldhoven, Biron (2010) maintain that managers who are more flexible are not expending their limited resources trying to change, control, but they are better able to notice and respond effectively to those performance-related contingencies that exist in their current environment.

3. Flexibility of work dimensions

a. Firm Oriented Flexibility (FOF) / Workplace flexibility

As noted by Almudena (2011), FOF is a situation where measures are exercised at the discretion of employers, mostly benefiting the organisation at the expense of the workforce and that employers expect high levels of flexibility from their employees, such as overtime, weekend availability or rotation capacity. However, they do not offer flexibility options, such as flexitime. These little choice individuals have over their work day in the organisation make them less powerful actor in the employment relationship.

b. Employee oriented Flexibility (Workforce flexibility)

This is an arrangement whereby the company does not demand its employees to be flexible but offers them flexibility programs. Essentially, this means that employees have a choice over the way in which they do their jobs (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008) but are not required to constantly adapt to changing organisational demands. Although this unbalance may seem illogical from the perspective of the organisation, this kind of arrangement appears to exist in big organisations where workload variation is little or foreseeable, such as public administration (Kerkhofs, Chung & Ester, 2008). It may also exist in companies that essentially require semi-skilled or highly skilled workers, with rather tight labour markets. Indeed, high levels of firm dependency on employee knowledge and cooperation may result in workers acquiring a flexibility arrangement that benefits them (Donnelly, 2008).

4. Mutual flexibility and low flexibility

a. Mutual Flexibility (MF)

Mutual flexibility arrangements exist when organisations both demand and offer high flexibility to its employees. This kind of arrangements can be labelled as open-ended since no specific written contract is signed as to where balanced flexibility is (Tsui, Pearce, Porter & Tripoli, 1997). It implies a long-term commitment, and broad, unspecified obligations by both parts, exchange on the basis of a social agreement where trust is essential (Blau, 1964) cited in (Almudena, 2011). Large organisations with high degree of variation in workload as well as adapting to a changing environment might be able to offer flexibility programs to attract and retain talents.

Low Flexibility (LF), according to Almudena (2011), this arrangement implies that the organisation does not demand or expect flexibility from its employees neither provides them with flexibility offers. For instance, an agreement would exist that work starts at nine o'clock in the morning and finishes at six in the evening, Monday to Friday and employees will not be expected to work beyond this schedule and employer won't offer them either the chance to adapt this timing to their personal needs. According to the macro-European study undertaken by Kerkhofs, Chung, and Ester (2008), this type of arrangement predominates in small companies with less than 20 employees operating in industries where little and sudden variation of workload occurs and the workforce is mature with low levels of skills and training.

b. Benefits of Flexible Work Practices to Employers and Employees

The benefits of flexible work practices to both employers and employees is a mutually beneficial arrangement between employees and employers in which both parties agree on when, where and how work gets done, hence, this is germane to today's organisation growth and survival (Dyer, 2006; ACAS, 2015). Therefore, the benefits of introducing flexible work practices to both employers and employees manifest in various ways, these are; increased employee productivity, motivation, commitment and retention. The study of Clark & Holdsworth (2017, p.1) reveal that when employees are allowed to work flexibly, they tend to demonstrate greater commitment and a willingness to give back to the organisation.

This implies that flexible working acts as a motivator for employees, as such employees would be willing to work overtime, in order to execute a task. Although, the benefit of flexible work practices has not been well utilised in developing country like Nigeria as most managers still believe in stereotyped of official hours 8 am -4 pm. This approach lack flexibility and this is sequel to the fear that subordinates may abuse it, despite having autonomy to grant employment flexibility arrangements, contrary to institutionalist account (Adeleye, 2011).

Cost savings, an increased operating hour without increased wage costs is another way it serves as a benefit to employers. This is in line with Clark & Holdsworth (2017) who assert that flexible workers tend to increase their effectiveness through the implementation of a number of strategies, such as being well-organised; for example, they are more likely to set deadlines for themselves and others. Adeleye (2011) was also of the view that cost-cutting or financial flexibility was a key factor in the decision to adopt flexible employment practices. Forth & Bryson, (2011) buttress that programmes of flexible hour can actually have a positive impact on the productivity of employees. Meanwhile, on how flexible work practices can enhance morale and a decrease in workplace stress. ACAS (2013), posits that employees who work flexibly often have a greater sense of responsibility, ownership and control of their working life. Parris, Vickers, and Wilkes (2008) assert that flexibility at workplace can reduce stress and also improve the performance. This would help employees to strike a balance with their official and personal life, at the same time; it helps to cope up with the stress related problems (Lott, 2017). In developing countries most managers are interested in seeing subordinates all the time and available even when they are not productive or having something to do base on institutional rigid time.

This aforementioned syndrome affects employee's breathing space, and caused stress, most especially once employees realized there is no support from the managers, co-workers and lack of control over work (Almer & Kaplan, 2002). Employees are likely to experience conflict when working in a stressful job with high job pressure (Schiemann, 2006). Sometimes, in most public organisations in Nigeria, job pressure has nothing to do with employees being in a state of productivity or rendering essential service that is adding value to organisation fortunes. This might be as a result of overbearing of the managers, managers with autocratic behaviours couple with a belief in rigid time.

This agree with Peretz, Fried, and Levi (2017) who argue that in high power distance societies, individuals are more comfortable with an autocratic leadership style, whereas in low power distance societies, individuals value autonomy and equality in opportunity and control (Peters & DenDulk, 2003). HR managers under this environment would be inflexible and focused on rules, policies, and procedures (Church & Waclawski 2001) cited by (Abid & Barech, 2017). Employees under this type of managers would make themselves available pretending to be working when actually not working, that is, a form of presenteeism (Peretz, Levi, & Fried, 2015). This lack of flexible managerial skills from the managers and employees presenteeism response would have negative effect on organisation's performance (Peretz, Levi, & Fried, 2015; Lott, 2017).

This situation goes contrary to productive high job pressure that has to do with high volume of work which increased steadily over the years (Kelly & Moen 2007; Ortega 2009; Schiemann 2006; Lott, 2017; John, 2017). Organisations benefit more when managers and employees have better understanding of flexible time, ability to create, manage and cross boundaries (Clark, 2000). Successful organisation at the global level have shown that it is not the number of hours that employees are available that matter but productive hours. This act makes them to be lean organizations', downsizing and cutting out layers of management and supervision (Golden, 2003; Armstrong, 2011).

This also help them to reducing permanent staff to a core of essential workers, increasing the use of peripheral workers (subcontractors, temporary staff) and outsourcing work to external service providers (Armstrong, 2011; Olorunsola, & Ibegbulam, 2003; Tang, Ya, & Wadsworth, 2008). John (2017) asserts that flexible working hours have impact on the organisational productivity and thus has great implications for all managers and HR managers in specific, Pruchno, Litchfield and Fried (1997), workplace flexibility, serves as a win situation for both employer and employee. Therefore, looking at the public service today in Nigeria flexible working hours would not only reduce stress, improve the performance but would help to strike a balance with employee's official and personal life.

The competitive nature of managing organisations coupled with the work employment relations issues that continue to revolve globally have made HR and administrative experts to devise means of managing time and ensuring time efficiency on the side of labour (Golden, 2003; Armstrong, 2011). Considering the argument that wages for labour impact negatively on organisations' rate of profit, hence, today's managers in most private sector embrace new direction of flexible work practices by not engaging employee when their services are not required. The strategy of flexible work practices enable organisations to make gains by not paying for non-productive hours and preventing the traditional lifetime employment practice and accumulated pension liability. The aforementioned therefore, enlarge the activities of HR managers towards various financial participation schemes which include profit sharing employee, stock ownership, stock option, and team incentive (or gain sharing) plans amongst others (Bryson, Freeman, Lucifora, Michele & Perotin, 2012).

The inability of public sector in Nigeria to shift towards this medium led to wages and salaries payment challenges as a lot of employees are still involved in manual operating tasks instead of being expected to become more customer, business oriented and adding values. Chen (2015) citing Matos and Galinsky, (2012), claimed that the majority of employers now globally embracing flexible work arrangements in order to allow employees to better manage their working hours and locations. In the perspective of Golden (2003), flexible employers increasingly seek internal organisational and changes in the work process that allow them to quickly adapt labour input, including the length and timing of work and operating hours, to improve either efficiency, capital utilization or sales revenues.

The foregoing argument agreed with HR scholars and experts that flexible organisations workforce can adjust their approach to new information and challenges with greater speed, accuracy and effectiveness than individuals caught in the web of larger organisational conventions (Golden, 2003; Armstrong, 2011, Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009; Abid & Barech, 2017). Synthesizing this views together shows that the failure of high power distance societies and autocratic leadership style lead to dysfunctional system with inflexible work practices. Resultant effect of which always manifest in strained and over-formalized system, too much discussion that gets nowhere, with employee do not feel free to express their opinions on how to increase awareness about flexible working hours.

C. METHOD

The methodology for this paper is a qualitative method based on literature review from secondary sources. The materials were drawn from secondary data from publications and texts written by various authors that are related to the subject matter of investigation. The study adopts an explorative approach to interpret and synthesis existing literatures on flexibility of work in employment relations and the deployment of labour in the Nigeria labour market.

D. FINDING & DISCUSSION

1. Findings

The result of the extant literatures reviewed shows that there are various dimensions to flexibility in the workplace which include workplace flexibility, workforce flexibility, mutual flexibility and low flexibility) and labour deployment in terms of part time, full time, triangular employment/precarious employment. Also, the outcome of the extant literature review shows a significant relationship between flexibility in the workplace and employment relations as employees

are drivers of every employment relations variables as specified in the adapted model of Chandrasekar's model of workplace environment and impact on organizational performance.

Furthermore, the result reveal that the flexibility in the deployment of labour in employment relations practice benefit the employer more when it is firm oriented flexibility and its benefit the employee more if it is employee-oriented flexibility but it is more of workplace flexibility than workforce flexibility.

2. Discussion

The study shows that flexible work plays a significant role in shaping the practice of employment relations in the deployment of labour in the Nigeria labour market. However, there are no universal trend in the flexibility of work, that is, organisations experiences different levels of work flexibility and labour deployment and this the reason Almudena (2011) support the existence of different combinations of demanded and offered flexibility which might lead to the use of peripheral workers (subcontractors, temporary staff) and outsourcing work to external service providers (Armstrong, 2011; Olorunsola, & Ibegbulam, 2003; Tang, Ya, & Wadsworth, 2008).

Also, it was deduced that the practice of flexibility of work in deploying workers in Nigeria has lead to precarious employment especially in circumstances where organization practice high power distance in its employment relations and autocratic leadership style which usually leads to dysfunctional system with inflexible work practices.

Similarly, what is universally noticed in the literature reviewed is the fact that there is a movement from physical man-manual economy to a knowledge based economy which increases the dynamism in employment relations and that Nigeria practice of flexibility is more of firm oriented flexibility rather than mutual oriented flexibility making it difficult to properly adapt flexibility and deployment of labour in terms of attracting, managing and retaining best talents for competitive advantage because new issues are emerging to strike a balance between employers' and workers' needs and interests in flexibility (Isik & Waheeda, 2005).

E. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Emerging trend in flexible work and labour deployment is a feature of emerging trend in the world knowledge economy which often affects employment relationship between the employer and employee in the Nigeria labour market. However, this flexible work in Nigeria does not give a favourable pattern of labour deployment because Nigeria is faced with different challenges. For instance, the challenge of unemployment which often make labour to compromise their bargaining power in their employment relationship and employer trying to reduce their overhead cost paving way for precarious and triangular employment. This study therefore recommends that a win-win flexible work dimension for deploying of workers for flexible work arrangement should be adopted to achieve a healthy employment relations practice in the Nigeria labour market

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