

Interactional Justice and Employee Engagement of Insurance Firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study addressed the relationship between interactional justice and employee engagement of insurance firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. The population for the study comprised of an accessible population of 154 staff of selected insurance establishments within Rivers State, Nigeria. The sample size of 111 was determined using calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between interactional justice and employee engagement of insurance firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Therefore, the study concludes that the practice of interactional justice by insurance firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State positively enhances employee engagement. Hence, the study recommends that relationships within the workplace should be structured to allow for reciprocal respect and mutual understanding of roles and positions. As such relationships should be transformative and based on mutual respect and value for significant others within the organization.*

Keywords: *Interactional Justice, Employee Engagement, Dedication, Absorption, Vigour*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is currently drawing a lot of interest among various professionals, practitioners and consultants in the business world (Saks, 2006). It has evolved to become one of the most popular concepts in the field of organizational behaviour and management; forming a fundamental factor and feature of employee survey instruments utilized in the generation of social or management related data (Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2017). Its interest grows as a result of its key contributions to and implications for workplace relationships and the organization as a whole. This is as the past decade has seen a surge in academic research on the concept of engagement which has been lauded as the key to an organization's effectiveness,

competitiveness and a driver for an organization's bottom-line performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks & Gruman, 2014).

In one of the first empirical investigations on the possible predictors as well as consequences of employee engagement within organizations, Saks (2006) observed that employee engagement significantly impacts on workers satisfaction, employee commitment, lower turnover and also organizational citizenship behaviour. Employee engagement is essential to employee productivity and involvement. Employees who are high on their engagement scales tend to contribute to more and in substantial degrees to their organizations. Their levels of task performance and organizational citizenship behaviour will increase in line with their engagement which further results in competitive advantages for organizations (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Similarly, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) affirmed that from their meta-analysis study which was carried out in 36 organizations that employee engagement is related to meaningful organizational results comprising of internal and external customer satisfaction, service quality, profit, employee retention and trust. Employee engagement can therefore be considered a factor for the overall success of the organization as it results in improved business outcomes and higher levels of employee productivity (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Alvi & Abbasi, 2012)

The conceptualization and meaning of the employee engagement construct has been varied among different scholars and schools of thought and to date there is no generally accepted or consensus on what engagement actually implies (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks & Gruman, 2014). This is as different constructs of employee engagement can be considered as distinct from one another and have been advanced to capture or illustrate the fundamental features or aspects employee engagement (Shuck, Adelson & Reio, 2016). Following the early works of Kahn (1990) on the concept of engagement as it relates to the work role, several researchers have developed several varieties of engagement constructs which cover mainly: work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, intellectual or social engagement and, the subject of this study, employee engagement sometimes as distinct and separate constructs or as components of one or the other (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck *et al.*, 2016).

Kaplan and Norton (2004) noted that the transition of business activities and functions from the industrial age to informational age has made organizations across the world increasingly dependent upon the human capital which in turn best flourish when dealt with fair and just way. Consistently high engagement by the employees in this competitive environment is a key to achieving the coveted success for the business. As such Employers and managers today are, therefore, more concerned with the attitude employees hold about their organizations. In this sense, organizational justice has been considered of great interest from different quarters such as from industrial psychology, behavioural management and human resource management as a means of endearing organizations to their employees and ultimately making the organizations more effective in terms of employee productivity (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997).

In this regard, organizational justice contributes and serves as a medium to infuse amongst the employees a sense of belongingness, oneness and loyalty to ensure whether every member of an organization is satisfied with and accepts the pattern of distribution of reward (distributive justice), process of distribution (procedural justice) and with the top-down interpersonal communication (interactional justice). Organizational justice has thus been addressed as a significant factor in understanding and influencing workers behaviour within the context of an organization (Hartman, *et al.*, 1999). Understanding the different dimensions of employee

engagement and the ways these are expressed such that they enhance the productivity of the organization is imperative for the survival and success of the organization (Ngodo, 2008). In this context, organizational justice has been regarded as one of the prime factors influencing the engagement of employees.

Though in the western and other developed parts of the world, there exists large number of studies have been produced which have focused on the effect of interactional justice on employee engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Alvi & Abbasi, 2012), however, very little empirical studies have been conducted within the context of Nigeria. This is as there exist significant dissimilarities and contextual factors which contribute to the distinct features of each context.

Based on the foregoing, this study departs from previous studies as it extends the research on the variables by testing hypotheses on workers within Insurance firms in Port Harcourt. This is as, over the last two decades, labour and workplace related issues in Nigeria has gained increasing importance in the world economic scene, due to its steady rise as well as opening up of its markets, following liberalization and reforms of several sectors initiated in the early 2000s (Budhwar & Varma, 2011). As one might expect, the liberalization of the Nigerian economy and the resultant growth in competition among service firms has led to significant changes in managerial policies and procedures, especially those related to human resource functions (Budhwar & Sparrow, 1998; Sparrow & Budhwar, 1997). These development and features necessitate the need for a study of this nature and form as a means of understanding and the role or significance of the relationship between the variables of the study within such a context. Hence, the purpose of this paper therefore was to examine the relationship between interactional justice and employee engagement in insurance firms in Port Harcourt. The specific objectives of the study included to:

- i. Examine the relationship between interactional justice and dedication in insurance firms in Port Harcourt?
- ii. Examine the relationship between interactional justice and vigour in insurance firms in Port Harcourt?
- iii. Determine the relationship between interactional justice and absorption in insurance firms in Port Harcourt?

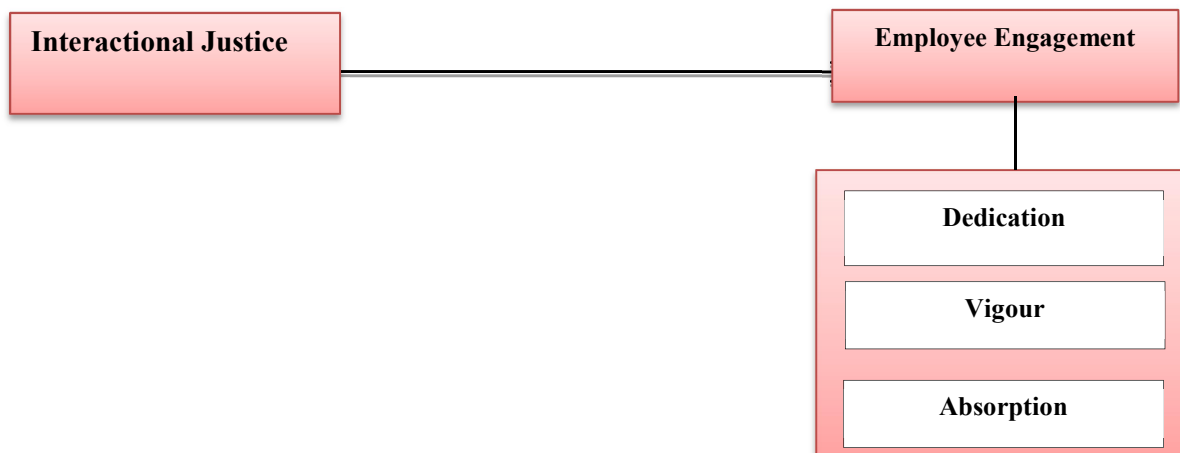


Figure 1: conceptual model for the relationship between interactional justice and employee engagement

Source: Desk Research (2022)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Equity Theory

Equity theory suggests that overpaid workers avoid any inequity reduction techniques that result in (a) negative consequences to self-esteem or physical wellbeing or (b) devaluation of a good job outcome such as job satisfaction or monetary compensation. The preferred method is a psychological justification involving a higher valuation of one's job inputs as indicated by the results of the study (Perry, 1993). When employees are not satisfied with their job they react negatively. This is consistent with what Adams has predicted in which workers who feel inequitably underpaid may respond by raising their outcomes.

In a study of a manufacturing plant setting, some employees were temporary underpaid by receiving a pay cut without any explanation. While employees experienced a 15% reduction in pay, they reported feelings of underpayment and stole over twice as much compared to when they felt equitably paid. It is possible that the pay cut produced anger and frustration for employees, which motivated the act of theft. It is also possible that the act of theft was used as a mean to restore equity. On the other side, when employees were provided with direct and honest explanation, the feeling of underpayment inequity was reduced in comparison to the group who did not receive any explanation (Greenberg, 1990). Berkowitz (1987) studied pay perceptions and satisfaction among a random sample of employed men. They found that the more the employees strongly believed their pay was fair; the more satisfied they were with their earnings. In fact, pay equity was a strong predictor of pay satisfaction (Berkowitz, 1987). The idea that the perceived fairness of one's pay is a better predictor of pay satisfaction, then the absolute amount of pay received is in keeping with the evidence showing that the concept of pay fairness and pay satisfaction are strongly related (Scarpello, 1988).

According to equity theory people can readdress states of inequity cognitively, for instance, altering their beliefs about the outcomes they received from their jobs. Equity theory asserts that workers who are underpaid financially may be able to re-establish overall level of equity by convincing themselves that they are well compensated with respect to other outcomes. A study on 114 salaried clerical workers, whose pay was reduced, felt that they were inequitably underpaid (Greenberg, 1989). Their pay cut created an underpayment inequity. In this case the employees followed two approaches. First, enhanced the perceived importance of other outcomes (work environment). Second, exaggerate the perceived level of these outcomes needed to establish equity.

The equity theory further tells us that cognitive revaluation of a situation will minimize the distressing effect of inequity (Greenberg, 1989). Heneman's (1985) review showed that pay satisfaction effects on overall levels of employee engagement and also has a big effect on behaviours such as turnover, absenteeism, and the effort exerted on the job. However, overpayment does not produce these results, usually underpayment does that consistently (Mowday, 1987).

Interactional Justice

The focus of research on justice gradually moved away from legal procedures towards organisational procedures. One of the reasons for this was that in organisations a variety of situations lend themselves to the use of procedures. Variations in these procedures and outcomes occur with organisational decisions, for example, regarding selection and salaries (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005). The application of justice theory to organisations has made evident certain issues in terms of procedures and outcomes. For example, in the same company the same supposedly fair procedure could create very different employee reactions, depending on the way in which different managers implement and enforce the procedure. Bies and Moag (1986) initially referred to this aspect of justice as interactional justice

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a relatively new concept in the academic community but has been heavily promoted by consulting companies (Wefald & Downey 2009). Scholars and practitioners in the HRM field tend to agree that the fundamental concept of engagement may help explain behaviour at work, but they present different definitions of it. Thus, while the concept of employee engagement seems on the surface to be compelling, the concept lacks clarity in its definition. Using Kahn's (1990) seminal work as the point of departure, the concept of engagement was first introduced by him to explain how people are personally engaged and disengaged at work. He defined 'job engagement' as 'the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles where people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn 1990, p. 694). This definition clarified the concept of engagement as the manifestation of being 'present at work'. Being 'present at work' requires a particular mental state.

In order to be engaged, an individual has to think, feel and act on their job. In other words, this mental state constitutes a driving force which requires physical, cognitive and emotional resources. These resources can be enhanced in certain psychological conditions: meaningfulness (feeling that one is receiving a return on the investment of the self in the work role performance), safety (a sense of being able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to one's self-image or status at work) and availability (a sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources needed for investing oneself in the work role). These psychological conditions serve as the mechanism by which individuals connect to their role performance. In contrast, disengagement refers to withdrawal from the work role. The dominant contribution by Kahn (1990) is the identification of the conditions in which engagement would be likely to exist.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) reintroduced the concept of engagement as an energetic state of involvement that is posited to be the opposite of burnout. Engaged employees who are seen as energetic and take their work as a challenge appear as the opposite to burnt-out employees who are stressed and see their work as demanding (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris 2008). Maslach and Leiter (1997) added to their argument by asserting that, if an employee is not engaged, he or she will be more likely to move to the other end of the continuum and experience burnout.

The state of engagement is characterised as having high energy (as opposed to exhaustion), high involvement (as opposed to cynicism) and efficacy (as opposed to lack of efficacy). Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker and Lloret (2006) supported this view and further characterised it by

activation, identification and absorption. Activation refers to having a sense of energy, identification is a positive relationship towards work, and absorption is being fully immersed in one's job.

Dedication

The first element of employee engagement is dedication. This refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Being dedicated to one's job includes motivated acts such as working hard and giving the best that one can at work. Work not only seems to be important but also requires self-disciplined behaviour, as demonstrated by following rules, taking the initiative to solve a problem at work and exceeding one's personal job requirements (Van Scotter & Motowidlo 1996). A person who is dedicated to work is veritably engaged to his or her job.

Vigour

The first element of employee engagement, vigour, is a positive affective response to an employee's interactions with the elements of the job as well as the environment. The concept of vigour is drawn from the view that individuals share a basic motivation to obtain, retain and protect the things that they value, such as resources (in this case, energetic resources) (Hobfoll 1989). Energetic resources refer to physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness. According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), vigour is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in the work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Vigour relates to psychological capacities for exercising will power and developing alternative ways to achievement, optimism in expecting future success, and resilience to persist in the pursuit of goals. A person who is vigorous at work distinctly represents an engaged employee.

Absorption

The third element of employee engagement is absorption. This describes the feeling of contentment while performing work. Absorption represents a state of being fully concentrated on and happily engrossed in work, a state in which time passes quickly and one has difficulty in detaching oneself from work. This domain of employee engagement concerns the hedonic aspect of work. For a person to be engaged, he or she should enjoy the work and find pleasure in performing it. Thus, a happy and focused employee embodies an engaged employee. A study using 30 in-depth interviews confirmed that absorption is a relevant aspect of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker 2001). The study argued that this facet of engagement relates to individual efficacy through having the confidence to be absorbed and the resilience to be persistently absorbed in a task.

Interactional Justice and Employee Engagement

Employees seek justice when communicating with their managers. Interactional justice, based on peer-to-peer relationships, is the perception of justice among employees that is concerned with informing employees of the subjects of organizational decisions, as well as about attitudes and behaviours to which employees are exposed to during the application of organizational decisions (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001). In other words, it expresses the quality of attitude and

behaviours to which employees are exposed during the practice of (distributive and procedural) operations by managers (Greenberg, 1993).

It is stated that interactional justice is composed of two sub-dimensions, interpersonal justice and informational justice (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Interpersonal justice points at the importance of kindness, respect and esteem in interpersonal relations, particularly in the relationships between employees and managers. Informational justice, on the other hand, is about informing employees properly and correctly in matters of organizational decision making.

According to Cojuharenco and Patient (2013), employees focus on job results when they consider justice in the workplace, and they are likely to focus on the methods of communication and reciprocal relationships within the organization when they consider injustice. If the interactions of managers or manager representatives with employees occur in a just way, employees will respond with higher job performance (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Interactional justice can lead to strong interpersonal interactions and communication over time (Cropanzano et al., 2007). According to social exchange theory, the positive or negative effect of employee-administration relationships on job performance stems from interactional justice (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001).

According to this theory, if employees are satisfied with their relationships with the administration, apart from their formalized roles, they will volunteer to acquire additional roles, which will increase their contextual performance. Some scholars, who argue that it is expensive and time-consuming to motivate employees with financial incentives alone, highlight interactional justice as another way to increase employee productivity (Cropanzano et al., 2002; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002; Cropanzano et al., 2007). According to Lind and Tyler (1988), employees have concerns about their relationships with management on the basis of interactional justice.

From the foregoing discourse, the study hypothesized thus:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between interactional justice and dedication in insurance firms in Port Harcourt
- H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between interactional justice and vigour in insurance firms in Port Harcourt
- H₀₃:** There is no significant relationship between interactional justice and absorption in insurance firms in Port Harcourt?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. The population for the study comprised of an accessible population of 154 staff of selected insurance establishments within Rivers State, Nigeria. The sample size of 111 was determined using calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation Matrix for Interactional Justice and Employee Engagement

| | | Interaction | Dedication | Vigour | Absorption |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------|--------|------------|
| Spearman's rho | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .431** | .545** | .540** |
| | Interaction | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| | Correlation Coefficient | .431** | 1.000 | .477** | .607** |
| | Dedication | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| | Correlation Coefficient | .545** | .477** | 1.000 | .488** |
| | Vigour | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | . | .000 |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |
| | Correlation Coefficient | .540** | .607** | .488** | 1.000 |
| | Absorption | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | . |
| | N | 92 | 92 | 92 | 92 |

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

Source: Research survey, 2022

The result for this hypothetical statement indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The evidence shows that at a $\rho = .431$ and a $P < 0.05$, interactional justice enhances dedication. Consequently, the hypothesis is considered as false and therefore rejected based on the lack of statistical evidence to prove otherwise. Also, the result for this hypothetical statement indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The evidence shows that at a $\rho = .545$ and a $P < 0.05$, interactional justice plays a significant role in driving vigour. Consequently, the hypothesis is considered as false and therefore rejected based on the lack of statistical evidence to prove otherwise. Finally, the result for this hypothetical statement indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The evidence shows that at a $\rho = .540$ and a $P < 0.05$, interactional justice impacts significantly on absorption. Consequently, the hypothesis is considered as false and therefore rejected based on the lack of statistical evidence to prove otherwise.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result from the analysis indicates contrary to the hypothesis of no significant relationship. The result of the analysis indicates that there is a significant level of moderation by organizational culture on the relationship between organizational justice and employee engagement in the insurance firms in Port Harcourt. The evidence suggests that organizational culture enhances and significantly influences the extent to which expressions of justice impact on the engagement levels of the staff of the insurance firms. The evidence corroborates the findings of Romualdas and Vida (2006) who argued that organizational culture contributes substantially with regards to the interpretations of systems and organizational features or attributes. In this sense organizational culture is a unifying platform that harmonizes the organizations position with that of its individual members.

Furthermore, Yafang (2011) affirmed in his study that organizational culture provides the necessary framework and mental path in which work relationships are designed and in which actions or expressions such as organizational justice. The implications of this finding are that

organizational culture determines and the adoption and sustainability of the justice system of the organization, the way they are expressed and of course the way they are also interpreted. Culture also presents the organization with a well-established format that guides the design of its justice systems based on its values, belief systems and behaviour or actions that are considered as norms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Therefore, the study concludes that the practice of interactional justice by insurance firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State positively enhances employee engagement.

Hence, the study recommends that relationships within the workplace should be structured to allow for reciprocal respect and mutual understanding of roles and positions. As such relationships should be transformative and based on mutual respect and value for significant others within the organization.

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