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NIGERIA**

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WORK FLEXIBILITY AND TEACHERS INNOVATIVENESS IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between work flexibility and teachers innovativeness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a cross sectional design that solicited responses from teachers drawn from 10 selected Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. Primary data was collated using structured questionnaire. The population of the study was 253. The sample size was 133 determined using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The reliability of the instrument was achieved using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman rank Order Correlation with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 23.0. The study's findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between work flexibility and teachers innovativeness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that work flexibility bears a significantly influences teachers innovativeness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. The study recommended that Private Secondary Schools should incorporate flexible job schedules into human resource management strategies, policies and plans to enhance innovativeness.

Keywords: *Work Flexibility, Employee Innovativeness, Creative Thinking, Proactiveness*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations have increasingly become interested in creativity and innovation, in part as a response to the pressures associated with globalization, competition, economic factors, and technology changes. Many organizational leaders recognize creativity as an opportunity for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage. To remain competitive in the global market, organizations must continuously develop innovative and high quality products and services, and renew their way of operating. In the heart of all innovation lies creative ideas and it is individual employees, who alone or in groups, generate, promote, discuss, modify and realize these ideas (Scott & Bruce 1994). It is therefore not surprising that innovative employees are the chief currency for contemporary organizations. Arising from this, question how to promote and support employees' innovativeness presents a key issue that faces academics and organizational managers. Teachers' innovativeness requires that the individual is able and willing to be innovative. With respect to abilities, such employee should possess above average general intellect, certain cognitive capabilities, general skills and task and context-specific knowledge. These are facilitators of innovativeness (Taggar, 2002). Beyond knowledge and skills, innovativeness requires intrinsic motivation and a certain level of internal force that pushes the individual to persevere in the face of challenges inherent in the creative work (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Moreover, the internal force keeps the employee going even when the challenges are successfully overcome.

Mukama and Omondi (2010) notes that with excessive pressures, the job demands cannot be met, relaxation turns to exhaustion and a sense of satisfaction replaces with the feelings of stress, motivation sheds away and the workers start losing interest in the work and hence performance chart shows a negative trend. The performance of individuals also decreased when stress is caused by

inability of individual to maintain a reasonable balance between family life and work life as he/she has to spend a lot of time in his/her working (Abdi, 2001), hence the need for work flexibility.

In the current global work environment, there is intense competition for talented employees and market share based on higher product quality and lower prices in order to realize strategic advantage. Competition requires organizations to take into account diversity of employee needs, work life values, cultural influences in the areas where the companies operate as well as the diversity of working relationships in order to attract, retain and fully engage the employee. As many organizations come to terms with the challenges of attracting and retaining the best talent and retaining the best talent coupled with the emerging issues of work life conflicts, it is important that managers employ a variety of human resource practices to attain organizational goals (Mclean & Collins, 2011).

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, flexible work arrangement has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Flexible working arrangements are actually emerging issues in the human resource management field. The world is becoming a global village, hence employees in organizations seek the balance between personal life and work responsibilities if the employee performance is to be achieved. Three major factors contribute to the interest in flexible work arrangement: global competition, renewed interest in personal lives, family values and an aging workforce. Concerns have always been raised regarding policy and debates on flexible work arrangement from perspectives of the quality of working life when weighed against the broader family matters. However the challenge has been how employees would adopt good flexible work arrangement practices and the organizations to adopt policies to tackle conflicts that ensue from the interface of family or social pressures and work stress (Mclean & Collins, 2011).

Flexible work relates to an organization's working arrangement in terms of working time, working location and pattern of working (Chartered Institute of Personnel And Development, 2013). Flexible working arrangements like flexible part time, shift work, compressed work hours and job sharing are often used to help employees in balancing their family and work life (Okemwa, 2016) during 'core hours' which is usually fixed or a period between the latest permissible starting time and earliest permissible finishing time. In Africa, the concept of work life balance initiatives uptake and development compared to other continents has received lower attention. In Nigeria, Mordi and Ojo (2011) observed that most employees suffer work life conflict due to among others an overwhelming working environment. Thus the utilization of work-life initiatives is not given much consideration in Nigeria as compared to other countries of the West and Europe as evidenced above. Patel, Govender, Paruk and Ramgoon (2006) revealed that in South Africa that despite the availability of work-life balance initiatives and strong legislation to support the uptake of work-life balance initiatives, there is a growing conflict between work and family. It was further observed that women are the most affected as demand for home, life and responsibilities clashed with their commitment to work compared to their male counterparts (Brink & De la Rey, 2001).

According to Golden (2008) flexible practice is not a new concept and has been used by some organizations. This has been made possible because of technological advancements. Some flexible work practices used in organizations today include: flexitime: this arrangements enables employees to chose when they report or leave work; Flexi place: gives employees freedom as to work from home or

office; compressed hours: enables employees to work for extra hours in order to get an off; Part time: this is working for less time in a week; Job sharing: this enable two people to share a full time job, thus they alternate either two days in a week depending on the arrangement.

According to Lonnie (2011) so much emphasis has been put about teleworking. Most organizations are moving towards "24-hours operations". This has been made possible because of advancement in technology. Thus most organizations are moving away from the standard working hours to non-standard work schedules. There has been a change over the last 300 years regarding the standard work week. Previously employees would work for 96 hours, that is, 16 hours per day (Bird, 2010). Since 1900s Labour Unions have continued to hire employees' grievances until the 40 hours week was established by Labour Standards Act. According to Avery and Zabel (2001) one manufacturing company changed its work schedule from working six hours per day to eight hours. This alteration brought increase in production because accidents reduced as well as increasing employees' morale. The program was accepted nationally by stakeholders from government and business organizations.

The purpose of this study therefore was to examine the relationship work flexibility and teachers innovativeness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. This study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the relationship between work flexibility and creative thinking of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt?
- What is the relationship between work flexibility and proactiveness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt?

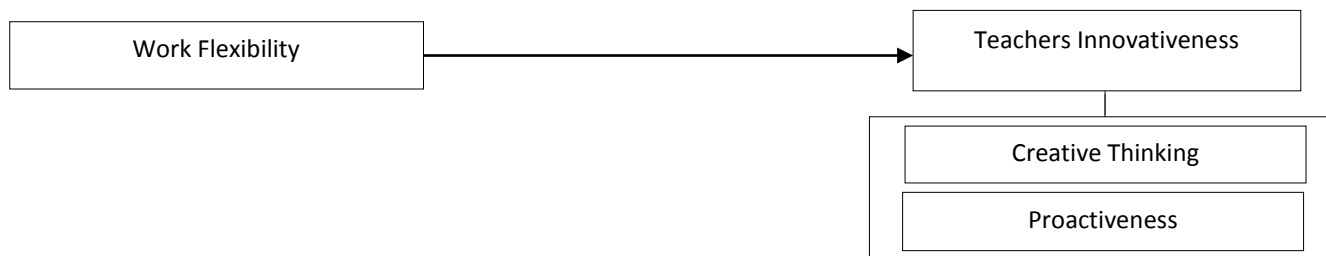


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the relationship work flexibility and teachers innovativeness

Source: Author's Desk Research, 2019

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress

Although the experience may produce discomfort for the individual, arousal and stress are vital to the operation of complex brains, and the Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS). Donald and Siu (2001) suggests that repeated experiences with a stimulus allows individuals to adapt and regulate themselves. The purpose of arousal is to compel the individual to remove the source of the stress “alarm” and the alarm itself, similar to how it has been argued that the function of affect is to direct action (Lazarus 1991). Or, if not removed, the individual then is able to sustain the activation necessary to handle the stressor. Consequently, the stress experience is part of an adaptive and beneficial system that has survived the test of evolution. CATS argues that because the stress alarm occurs when there is a discrepancy between what is desired and what is reality, individuals will associate a probability with the likelihood of abolishing the alarm and its source. This expectancy will have a strong influence on the level of arousal. At its simplest, if the person has control and expects a desired outcome, then the alarm will not be activated (i.e., stressors will not be felt, psychologically or physiologically). However, if the future is unpredictable and/or an individual does not have the necessary resources to handle the demands, then the alarm is activated. Further, there are instances (e.g., avoidant coping, learned helplessness) when individuals do not possess the necessary resources to handle the situation and remove

themselves from it, thus engaging a passive response that provokes a positive outcome expectation, reducing stress activation.

As discussed by Donald and Siu (2001), CATS proposes four components to the stress process. The first part is the stress stimuli (i.e. Stressors) or load. It is argued that it is not the physical characteristics of a stimulus that elicit the stress response (Scullen & Goff, 2000) but a person’s appraisal (i.e., the second stage in the process) based on (previous) experience and (future) expectations that translates a situation into a stressful experience. Certainly, some stressors would be regarded as negative across persons, time, and situation. However, individual and situational differences (e.g., prior learning, personality, contextual setting) are likely to influence evaluations of most stressors. Second in the stress process is the stress experience (i.e. appraised and felt stress). The stressors most often reported in the literature are those that stem from the stress experience itself. These are the physical, physiological, psychological, and emotional loads or demands felt by the individual that are reported as stress to the extent that they are deemed a loss or a threat. It is this feeling of stress that some could argue is the most relevant to occupational stress and, as noted by Cooper & Williams (1990), it is what is reported on job stress questionnaires when individuals are asked whether something is a source of stress. The respondent is reporting the expectancies developed for this situation or source of stress.

Similarly, Sauter and Murphy (1995) suggested that survey measures using the word stress are likely to assess respondents' post appraisal evaluations of the stressor, not merely the presence of the stressor. The third part is the individual's general response ("alarm") to the stress experience. Similarly, Sauter and Murphy (1995) argued that an alarm reaction occurs prior to adaptation. In this phase, as argued by Ursin and Eriksen (2004), the individual has an increase in arousal, and there is a specific response to handle the cause of the alarm. Like above, individual and situational differences play a role in the alarm reaction (e.g, strength and duration of alarm) elicited in the individual during this stage. Because arousal affects many physiological systems, this is the most reliable and consistent part of the process to analyze (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004).As argued by Ursin and Eriksen (2004), examining stress alarm behaviors, such as coping behaviors, coping strategies, or "ways of coping" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), is problematic, because these behaviors can occur under different degrees of arousal and future expectancy.

Work Flexibility

Flexible working methods are a good source of stress management to employee. According to Urieto (2010) flexible work schedule enriches employees' job by giving the employee decision making responsibility over the context in which they work. With a flexible work schedule, workers according to Newman can decide when to work and can arrange work around non-work commitments or interests. Flexible work schedule (flextime) enriches employee job by enriching their context and allowing workers to fit their obligations at work around their obligations or needs outside the work setting. Cooks (2008) sees flextime as a core of hours during the day or week in which employees must work and a range of times, or "flex-band" in which employees can choose to work. According to him, flexible work schedule can cover more than just this arrangement. Flexible working according to Cooks (2008) also includes

unconventional work hours, part time work, job sharing, leave of absence and working at home etc. Flexible time schedules can, from the company's view allow employees to have more pliable hours, foster a sense of empowerment among workers, and a sense that the companies trust them. Flexible working enables dual career parents to integrate work and family concerns more effectively.

According to Cooks, employees with such flexible working arrangements are fiercely loyal, and they strive to prove themselves worthy of the company's trust. flexible working method allow managers to manage better, delegate real responsibility to their subordinates, plan ahead and set priorities rather than treating marginal issues like crisis. A study carried out by Anderson (2008) shows that the majority of flexible workers, co-workers of flexible worker and managers of flexible workers reported that there was either a positive impact or no impact on individual performance. This according to Anderson was true for both the quantity of work produced and the quality of work produced. Rather the finding showed that flexible working was seen as a positive factor in achieving a better work-life balance.

Teachers Innovativeness

Innovativeness of employees is measured by the propensity by which they innovate in their work (Miller and Friesen 1982); their willingness to try new ways which are different from the existing; the enthusiasm to adopt new ideas or new methods to their work operation; and the eagerness to implement the innovation strategy in their work (Khandwalla 1987). Innovativeness reflects a employee's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation and creative processes (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996) that may result in new products, services, or technological processes and which may take the organization to a new paradigm of success (Swieczek & Ha, 2003). It also implies seeking creative, extraordinary or strange solutions to problems and needs. Schumpeter (1934)

considered employees to be essentially a creative activity and entrepreneur as an innovator who carries out new combinations in the field of men, money, material, machine and management. According to him, an entrepreneur is an economic man who tries to maximize his profits by making innovations in any one of the following fields: (1) new products; (2) new production methods; (3) new markets; or (4) new forms of organization.

Employee innovativeness refers to employee's propensity to innovate can be conceived as complex behaviour consisting of idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization with Employee innovativeness refers to employees' propensity to innovate can be conceived as complex behaviour consisting of idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization with the aim of meeting organizational goals in novel ways. Individuals, alone or in groups, undertake innovative activities from the intention to derive anticipated benefits from innovative change. Creativity is central to innovativeness, but the concepts are not synonymous. Innovation can be seen as a successful and intentional implementation of creativity, which is more subjective and context specific by its nature (Miron, Erez & Naveh, 2004). Creativity as such may be limited to idea generation alone but by definition innovation produces benefits for the people involved in the innovative process (Anderson, Qin, Sohn, Stenger, & Carter, 2003). Therefore, employee innovativeness requires creativity, but creativity does not always lead to an innovation.

Employee innovativeness requires that the individual is both able and willing to be innovative. With respect to abilities, above average general intellect, certain cognitive capabilities, general skills and task and context-specific knowledge, for example, facilitate innovativeness (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Taggar, 2002). Beyond knowledge and skills, innovativeness requires intrinsic motivation and a certain level of internal force that pushes the individual to persevere

in the face of challenges inherent in the creative work (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Moreover, the internal force keeps the employee going even when the challenges are successfully overcome: it is about a positive tension and desire to excel. Consequently, employees' initiative, flexibility, perseverance and willingness to go beyond their actual goal accomplishment in order to come up with novel and organizationally beneficial ideas characterize innovativeness (Georgsdottir & Getz, 2004). Often it is impossible to set goals for innovativeness, as it is so context and problem –specific. Innovativeness is therefore largely about discretionary extra role behaviours that go beyond the formal job requirements in complex and ambiguous conditions, and organizations are increasingly dependent on their employees' willingness to go the extra mile (Ramamoorthy, Flood, Slattery, & Sardesai, 2005).

Measures of Teachers Innovativeness

Creative Thinking

Creativity is defined as an effort to make an objective change in social or economic power of organization. Creativity refers to making use of mental capacity for creation of a new notion or idea. Creativity in management is defined as constructing or fostering a new idea and in management; it refers to producing a new production. Creativity means to travel a new road or to make a new journey through a familiar road. According to Woodman (1995) organizational creativity is the creation of a valuable, useful new product service, idea, procedure or process by individuals working within a complex social organization. Various factors contribute to the generation of creative products both at the individual and organizational levels (Mumford & Gustafson, 1998). In organizations including businesses creativity is the process through which new ideas that make innovation possible are developed (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). Additionally, at least for business organizations, creative ideas must have utility. They must constitute an appropriate response to fill a gap

in the production, marketing or administrative processes of the organization. Thus organizational creativity is concerned with both the generation of ideas and the implementation of these ideas.

Creativity is the process through which new ideas that make innovation possible are developed. Current views on organizational creativity appear to focus largely on outcomes or creative products. A creative product has been defined as one that is both novel and original and potentially useful or appropriate to the organization (Mumford & Gustafson, 1998). Additionally, at least for companies, creative ideas must have utility. They must constitute an appropriate response to fill a gap in the production, marketing, or the administrative processes of the organization. Organizational creativity is the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or a process by individuals working together in a complex social system. Therefore, creativity could be seen as an important organizational capability (Amabile 1998), a possible source of organizational effectiveness (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993), and a source of competitive advantage (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998).

Proactiveness

Proactive behavior refers to anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments. Existing research provides extensive evidence of the different ways in which employees express proactive behavior, including seeking feedback (Ashford, Blatt & Vande Walle, 2003), taking initiative in pursuing personal and organizational goals (Frese & Fay, 2001), actively adapting to new environments (Kim, Cable & Kim, 2005). Proactiveness means acting in advance to deal with things that might cause problems in the future, but also to identify future opportunities and to act upon this. To be one step ahead. For the entrepreneurial dimension it means that one is active in creating new opportunities and anticipating possible threats. Many scholars since Schumpeter have pointed out the

importance of initiative in the entrepreneurial process. In some literature, proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness are used interchangeably. This can be explained by the pervasiveness of Covin and Slevin's theory (1991); competitive aggressiveness was later introduced to the orientation dimensions by Lumpkin and Dess (1996). It is indeed closely related to competitive aggressiveness; the distinction is that proactiveness pertains to how an organization relates to new market opportunities. By showing initiative and acting with opportune influence on trends, demand can be created. Competitive aggressiveness pertains to how organizations relate to competitors and how they respond to trends and demand that are already on the market.

The Relationship between Work Flexibility and Teachers Innovativeness

De Bruin and Dupuis (2004) suggest that the significance of managing an employee's quality of work has spanned over 20 years and that there have been measurable changes that directly impact on this issue. Firstly, the kind of jobs available today have become very complex and the employee is subjected to untold pressure to meet quality standards in the shortest time possible with fewer resources (Hosie, Forster & Servatos, 2004). This has resulted in the adjustment of the normal working hours. Secondly, the demographic nature of the workforce has been significantly altered from what was traditionally a man's world. Today we find an influx of women into the once acclaimed male dominated work zone. There is a wide spread representation across the various cultures of the world owing to globalization. Nowadays, it is no longer news that there are dual career couples. Anderson (2008) which showed that the majority of flexible workers, co-workers of flexible worker and managers of flexible workers reported that there was either a positive impact or no impact on individual performance. This according to Anderson was true for both the quantity of work produced and

the quality of work produced. Rather the finding showed that flexible working was seen as a positive factor in achieving a better work-life balance. According to Anderson (2008) majority of employees also reported that flexible working also had a positive effect in managing and reducing stress level. Flexible work schedule (flextime) enriches employee job by enriching their context and allowing workers to fit their obligations at work around their obligations or needs outside the work setting. Cook (2009) sees flextime as a core of hours during the day or week in which employees must work and a range of times, or "flex-band" in which employees can choose to work. According to him, flexible work schedule can cover more than just this arrangement. Flexible working according to Cook (2009) also includes unconventional work hours, part time work, job sharing, leave of absence and working at home etc. Flexible time schedules can, from the company's view allow employees to have more pliable hours, foster a sense of empowerment among workers, and a sense that the companies trust them. Flexible working enables dual career parents to integrate work and family concerns more effectively.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation matrix for the relationship between Workplace Flexibility and the measures of teachers innovativeness

			Workplace Flexibility	Creative Thinking	Proactiveness
Spearman's rho	Workplace Flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.796**	.691**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Creative Thinking	Correlation Coefficient	.796**	1.000	.896**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	110	110	110
	Proactiveness	Correlation Coefficient	.691**	.896**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	110	110	110

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

Source: Research Data 2019, (SPSS output version 23.0)

From the foregoing arguments, the following hypotheses were stated:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between work flexibility and creative thinking of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between work flexibility and proactiveness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional design that solicited responses from teachers drawn from 10 selected Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt. Primary data was collated using structured questionnaire. The population of the study was 253. The sample size was 133 determined using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The reliability of the instrument was achieved using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman rank Order Correlation with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS version 23.0.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between workplace flexibility and creative thinking of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt.

From the result in the table above, the correlation coefficient shows that there is a significant relationship between workplace flexibility and creative thinking. The *correlation coefficient* 0.796 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at $p < 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between workplace flexibility and creative thinking of private secondary schools in Port Harcourt.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between workplace flexibility and proactiveness of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt.

From the result in the table above, the correlation coefficient shows that there is a positive relationship between workplace flexibility and creative thinking. The *correlation coefficient* 0.691 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at $p < 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a strong correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between of workplace flexibility and creative thinking of Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The test of hypotheses shows that there is a significant relationship between workplace flexibility and teachers innovativeness of Private Secondary Schools. This study finding concurs with a study carried out by Anderson (2008) which showed that the majority of flexible workers, co-workers of flexible

worker and managers of flexible workers reported that there was either a positive impact or no impact on individual performance. This according to Anderson was true for both the quantity of work produced and the quality of work produced. Rather the finding showed that flexible working was seen as a positive factor in achieving a better work-life balance. According to Anderson (2008) majority of employees also reported that flexible working also had a positive effect in managing and reducing stress level. Flexible work schedule (flextime) enriches employee job by enriching their context and allowing workers to fit their obligations at work around their obligations or needs outside the work setting. Cook (2009) sees flextime as a core of hours during the day or week in which employees must work and a range of times, or “flex-band” in which employees can choose to work. According to him, flexible work schedule can cover more than just this arrangement. Flexible working according to Cook (2009) also includes unconventional work hours, part time work, job sharing, leave of absence and working at home etc. Flexible time schedules can, from the company’s view allow employees to have more pliable hours, foster a sense of empowerment among workers, and a sense that the companies trust them. Flexible working enables dual career parents to integrate work and family concerns more effectively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, this study concludes that work stress management is a significant predictor of teachers’ innovativeness in Private Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt in Port Harcourt. Based on the discussion and conclusion the study recommends that the management of Private Secondary Schools should incorporate flexible job schedules into human resource management strategies, policies and plans to enhance innovativeness.

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