



THE THEORY OF WORK ADJUSTMENT: THE NIGERIAN WORK SETTING IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper examined the theory of work adjustment: the Nigerian work setting in perspective. Availability of employment opportunities for individuals plus a well-adjusted working population is a factor for societal development. The import of the theory was discussed for a clear understanding of it. Current occupational phenomena in Nigeria in relation to the theory of work adjustment were also highlighted.

Keywords: Theory, work, adjustment, setting, perspective.

Introduction

Work is employment: something done to earn wages. It is a means of livelihood. Work is also seen as an interaction between an employee, their assignments or responsibilities, and the work environment. Similarly, work is viewed as a means of realizing an individual's personal goals and values. According to Norman (2013), work is believed to be a means of self-expression and self-actualization. This implies that a person's work can speak volumes about them. Work can also be a means of identity sometimes. However, Green and Messer (2016) observed that working is more than for mere survival as believed by some. They noted that although money is important, there are other things people want from their jobs. Having interesting or challenging work and working in a good environment are more important than pay. In their bid to give explanations to such occupational phenomena, psychologists have formulated diverse theories, amongst which is the theory of work adjustment (TWA). This paper, therefore, attempts to discuss the theory of work adjustment and its applicability in the Nigerian work situation.

The theory of work adjustment

The theory of work adjustment (TWA) also referred to as the person-environment correspondence theory was originally propounded by Davis et al (1964). In occupational psychology, this theory describes the relationship of an individual with their work environment. It is all about working a job successfully after an individual has chosen and engaged in an occupation. According to the theorists, knowing how to meet one's physical, social, and psychological needs

in a job is just as important as the act of choosing a career. They described work adjustment as a "continuous and dynamic process by which a worker seeks to achieve and maintain correspondence with a work environment". In simple terms, it is a worker's satisfaction (being satisfied with one's work) and the employer's satisfaction with individual's performance. For a work environment to be successful, the environment and the individual must meet each other's requirements (Dahling and Librizzi, 2015).

TWA implies that the more closely a person's abilities (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours, etc) correspond with the requirements of the role or the organization, the more likely it is that they will perform the job well and be perceived as satisfactory by the employer. Moreover, the more closely the reinforcements (rewards) of the role or organization correspond to the values that a person seeks to satisfy through their work, the more likely it is that the person will perceive the job as satisfying. Satisfaction is therefore the outcome from the match between the individual's vocational interests, motivational needs, and values, and the extent to which the organization is able to provide appropriate rewards and reinforcement of the personality characteristics.

The theorists claim that everyone has different values they are seeking to satisfy through their work, so there has to be a correspondence between the organization's and the worker's personal attributes for there to be satisfaction for both parties. Davis et al (1964) further listed six key values that individuals seek to satisfy through their work, which are (Swanson and Schneider, 2013):

- Achievement: Conditions that encourage accomplishment and progress.
- Comfort: Conditions that encourage lack of stress.
- Status: Conditions that provide recognition and prestige.
- Altruism: Conditions that foster harmony and service to others.
- Safety: Conditions that establish predictability and stability.
- Autonomy: Conditions that increase personal control initiative.

The degrees of satisfaction and satisfactoriness are seen as predictors of the likelihood that someone will stay in a job, be successful at it and receive advancement.

In effect, the theory acknowledges that the correspondence between person and environment may not be perfect – perhaps because the person chose the wrong career or the employer chose the wrong candidate. Even good correspondence may change over time. The person's skills might develop so that they may outgrow their role or their priorities may change because of non-work commitments. The nature of the job or the nature of the rewards an employer is able to offer may also change. The flexibility of a person or an environment will determine the extent to which they can tolerate any lack of correspondence between abilities and requirements and/or values and reinforcements. Flexibility will vary from individual to individual and from environment to the environment. Internal factors, such as personality or organizational culture, will influence the level of flexibility, as will external factors, such as the availability of alternative options. When the lack of correspondence is so great that flexibility is no longer viable, some form of adjustment often takes place. There are two major forms of adjustment (Geiger, 2020) namely,

- Active adjustment by the individual involves them trying to change their working environment. They may seek to change the content of the job, and therefore its behaviour requirements to better reflect their abilities. Alternatively, they may try to alter the reinforcements of the job by seeking to gain different rewards, like better working conditions or greater variety or responsibility. Active adjustment by the environment may involve trying to change the person's abilities through training or trying to change their values or expectations in some way.
- Reactive adjustment may involve the individual trying to change their behaviours to better suit the environment or by changing their personal priorities or work values. Similarly, the environment may change the responsibilities of a role to better suit the natural strengths of the individual or change the rewards to attempt to increase job satisfaction.

Furthermore, Davis et al (1964) defined persistence as the extent to which individuals or environments will keep trying to adjust before giving up. When no further adjustment is possible, something more dramatic happens--- the person leaves the job or they are fired (Eggert and Flynn, 2012).

The following statements briefly summarize the main points of the theory of work adjustment (Norman, 2013):

- Work is conceptualized as an interaction between an individual and a work environment.
- The work environment requires that certain tasks be performed and the individual brings skills to perform the tasks.
- In exchange, the individual requires compensation for work performance and certain preferred conditions such as a safe and comfortable place of work.
- The environment and the individual must continue to meet each other's requirements for the interaction to be maintained. The degree to which the requirements of both are met may be called correspondence. Work adjustment is the process of achieving and maintaining correspondence.
- Work adjustment is indicated by the satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and by the satisfaction of the work environment with the individual, by the individual's satisfactoriness.
- Satisfaction and satisfactoriness result in tenure, the principal indicator of work adjustment. Tenure can be predicted from the correspondence of an individual's work personality with the work environment.
- Work personalities and work environments can be described in terms of structure and style variables that are measured on the same dimensions.

Applicability of TWA in the Nigerian work setting

In Nigeria today, the applicability of the theory of work adjustment is remotely effective. It has been observed that people or employees' disposal to their jobs no longer produce optimum results as it used to be in the past. Odeyemi and Idowu (2015) explained that work in the 1960s and 1970s was seen as a tool for survival and fulfillment. However, in recent times it has turned in the opposite direction as a result of affluence which has brought about poor adjustment at work. According to them, work adjustment has been found to be a major hitch to productivity in most offices and workplaces in Nigeria. The work value of every prospective employee has always been higher expectancy, but as soon as the job is begun, the expected value becomes farfetched which in turn makes employees to have negative disposition toward their works. This does not have to do with the employees alone; it also involves the negligence and inability of employers to meet up their responsibilities and obligations towards their employees.

Several people are engaged in different jobs, but they are really not happy doing the work they are being paid for as a result of improper employment conditions. Workers' conditions and the environment of work have been described as poor, and the discrepancies between personal work values and work environments are so obvious (Odeyemi & Idowu, 2015). A number of factors contribute to the poor work adjustment of Nigerian workers. Some of such factors are:

1. Poor remuneration: The Nigerian worker is grossly underpaid, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the present economic situation in the country, whereby the inflation rate is at an all-time high. Workers' salaries are inadequate to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, good shelter, medical care, and daily transportation to and from work. In addition to the gross inadequacy of salaries, workers' salaries are owed for long periods, sometimes up to a year or beyond.
2. Bad working conditions: Conditions of service, as well as work environments, do not properly support or guarantee workers' welfare. This situation is found in both private and public sectors. Workers' welfare schemes are relegated to the background in some government workplaces and virtually non-existent in most private sector organizations. There are no insurance covers for workers in government employment, while only a few private organizations offer minimal insurance schemes for their staff, especially the multinational companies. Most times, workers in the manufacturing or construction sectors bear the medical expenses for injuries they sustain at work. In like manner, some workers lose their lives through dangerous or hazardous working conditions whereas others who sustain serious injuries get fired when they return to work after regaining their health.
3. Poor employer-employee relations: The Nigerian worker's first priority is their economic sustenance. They need something to keep body and soul together. For this reason, work is basically undertaken as a means of livelihood. Employers, on the other hand, place premium on their returns on investment over workers' welfare (their values, interests, personal principles, desires, etc). It is this 'employer-is-supreme' philosophy that reflects in all relationships between the Nigerian employer and their staff. A great majority of Nigerian employers are unmindful of their employees' concerns. Meanwhile, the massive rate of unemployment in the country serves as motivation for such inhuman attitudes of employers to persist. Some employers often tell their workers to leave the job if they are not satisfied with the working conditions because they believe that the workers do not have any choice than to stay.
4. Bad management policies: Poor management skills resulting in bad policies is also a problem in Nigeria. Both in private and public workplaces, there is high level of corruption and nepotism. Staff promotions are considered on the bases of tribe, religion, and other flimsy factors, leading to depletion of morale among workers. There is equally little or no reward/motivation for jobs done excellently well. Organizations do not have well-planned pension schemes to cater for retirees. This accounts for why most Nigerian workers find it

uneasy to receive their gratuities when they exit active service. Others die while waiting for long periods, sometimes having to stay in the sun/rain for several hours or days before they could receive their entitlements.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, one may conclude that there is no correspondence between the Nigerian worker and their work environment. As a matter of fact, neither the worker nor the work environment seeks to meet the requirements of each other. The worker merely does their job to meet their pecuniary needs and ignore every other personal concern like values, interests, prestige, etc. On the part of the employer, whatever happens to the employee does not concern them, so long as they are getting their desired returns on investment. A worker may simply leave if they do not get satisfaction from their work, or they get fired if their employer does not get satisfaction from their work performance. In this sense, therefore, the theory of work adjustment does not seem to find adequate application in the Nigerian work setting.

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