MANAGING EMERGING WORKPLACE STRUCTURATION IN A PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract

COVID-19, a new coronavirus, has made problems that were already widespread in the international business world even worse, which is a worry. The pandemic is not only a biological health problem; it has far-reaching repercussions in many other areas as well, including the economy, society, technology, and even human behavior. As companies of the modern era realize they must adjust to the new normal by implementing creative responsive systems, they are rethinking what it means to "work." Numerous businesses are already taking advantage of modernized technology to encourage innovation in the workplace. Notwithstanding the many different adaptations companies have made In response to the current hardship, the requirement for managers to have meaningful comprehension and interpretation of behavioral presentations seems to have swiftly risen in the face of rising workplace issues. Using an exploratory study design, this work intends to help managers understand employee behavior in the workplace by analyzing the major factors influencing such behavior and offering solutions that put managers in a stronger position to succeed despite challenges.

Keywords: *Behavior, COVID-19, Management, Nigeria, Technology.*

INTRODUCTION

The world was abruptly awakened by the new coronavirus's contribution to the biomedical health problem. Some individuals lost their lives, while others lost their means of support. In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the disease outbreak of COVID-19 (also known as 2019-nCoV)(WHO, 2020a) which was designated a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), and in March 2020, it was proclaimed a pandemic (WHO, 2020b). Declaring the disease, a pandemic confirmed that humanity and all of the human existence were under severe attack, and consequently, all the survival arsenals were released. Every innate survival skill and tactic was put to the test. Health systems and infrastructure were thrust into the forefront of the fight to save mankind as the whole economy, society, and polity ground to a standstill. The existing body of literature lends support to this (Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw, & Thurlow, 2020; Mohsin, Hongzhen, & Hossain, 2021).

In order to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases, legal frameworks have to be revised to include the mandated use of PPE and to serve as a guide for health interventionist authorities tasked with the creation and execution of long-term, comprehensive policies (NCDC, 2020). In addition to the unique educational and training programs and advertorials conducted by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), which educated quick response teams throughout the states in the Federation, and the African Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC), which taught specialists from Nigeria and other African nations on the diagnosis of COVID-19, a number of commercial and government-owned news organisations and people via the use of social media plausibly contributed to the spread of the illness. Participants in such trainings have to master the proper way to put on and remove protective gear, including face masks and shields. For reasons of survival and protection, personal cleanliness was elevated to a new level. Ajisegiri, Odusanya, and Joshi (2020) have proposed addressing a noticeable scarcity of competent health professionals to further lower the incidence of morbidity and death and to continue regular health services, particularly at the community level, owing to the pandemic. The extent to which public health education has influenced positive behavioral changes in disease prevention and control among Nigerians remains unclear. This is in line with the thinking of Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo, and Danjibo (2020) who observed that many individuals and religious groups have continued to disobey the directives on social distancing and public gatherings.

Workplaces in Nigeria were not immune to the global health crisis that has affected so many other countries. People were confined to their homes because of mandatory lockdowns and other health safety precautions, such as the recommendation of physical separation. De Lucas Ancillo, Del Val Nez, and Gavrila (2020) state concisely that the revolution started by COVID-19 has altered and will continue to transform the way businesses and their personnel go about their daily tasks. There was a need for distant work in both the informal and formal economies. In this new telework setting, technology served as the connecting medium and bridge that made it possible to get things done. It was found that the technical interface of sites like Zoom, Skype, and YouTube, to name a few, facilitated remote work, learning, and other contacts with relative ease. At the height of the epidemic, for instance, Zoom detected a tremendous increase in activity. In 2020, a report claimed that Zoom was one of the best-performing stocks in the United States thanks to a pandemic-induced sell-off that increased by more than 600% over the course of the year (Klebnikov, 2020). If the threat of contagion continues, businesses that focus on remote communications and interactions will see their business steadily increase. The social and cultural contexts of work have shifted as a result of the widespread adoption of such technology interventions, as have the very definitions of a workplace and the nature of work itself. As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, many long-held beliefs about labor have been called into question, and the concept of a "workplace" has expanded to include any setting in which productive activity takes place. This has also messed with the norms of conventional management practices and regulations. Managers are tasked with thinking of novel, forward-thinking approaches to improving workplace health and safety as we wait for the health crisis's impact to lessen. Despite the many obvious benefits of the practicality and workability of such innovative systems, the focus of this article is on what the new functional environment, both in-person and remotely, means to the individual employees and how work may be effectively done within the bounds of the conditions to alleviate the pains that may develop from the ongoing process. With the goal of regulating recognised behavioural determinants in a post-pandemic work context, this article focuses primarily on highlighting the predicted behavioural manifestations of employees in the current condition.

Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical foundation of this study was laid on the Human Ecology Theory (Bubolz & Sontag, 2009) and the Employee Engagement Theory (Kahn, 1990). The term "employee engagement" was used by Kahn (1990) to describe the emotional connection that develops between an individual and their job. On the other side, disengagement at work occurs when a person emotionally and mentally disconnects from their work and the company. Workers need to feel that their efforts matter, that they are protected from harm and that they have time to focus on their tasks if they are to be engaged. Engaged workers, as he saw it, show their whole range of emotions and thoughts throughout role presentations. Based

on his findings, Kahn (1990) developed the concept of "engagement," which holds that employees' actions in the workplace are driven by their emotions rather than by whether or not they are a good fit for the position or whether they will receive monetary compensation for their efforts. The theory proposed that workers would be more invested in their jobs and more willing to put in extra effort if they felt their efforts mattered to the success of the company if they had positive relationships with their managers and coworkers and if they had access to the tools they needed to do their jobs. It is in the context of relationships that individuals make decisions about bringing their whole selves to work, as emphasized by Kahn (1990), who argued that relationships only gain enormous relevance when workers are seen as persons, not merely employees. Kahn (1990) established three principal elements of employee engagement: physical, cognitive, and emotional. The work was founded on the concept that individuals' performances are dependent on the varied degrees of themselves (physically, intellectually, and emotionally) that they bring to the work and their experiences of the workplace. Human ecology theory (Bubolz &Sontag, 2009) examined the complex relationship between humans and their environments from both a biological and social perspective. This study of human-environment interactions is known as "human ecology," and it was developed out of a need to understand the effects of human activity on both the built and natural environments and the effects of these environments on human social systems.

EMERGING WORKPLACE STRUCTURATION MANAGEMENT

Companies are being faced with extraordinarily tumultuous times in the context of the current epidemic. For the sake of productivity and success, businesses need managers who can help their staff rise above the prevailing norms of behavior at work. This section covers the apparent behavioral symptoms of workers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic. Whether it was the COVID-19 epidemic or the introduction of new digital technologies, the customary Nigerian workplace was inevitably disrupted. In order to capitalize on the scenarios of opportunities described, it is imperative that forward-thinking, hands-on managers have a firm grasp of the elements that may influence the actions of their employees on the job.

Homework Imbalance

As a result of COVID-19, more companies are beginning to allow employees to work remotely, and this trend is expected to continue. Many workers are able to spend less time commuting, which is a welcome development that allows them to spend more time with loved ones. In today's dynamic workplace, both companies and employees value the option of telecommuting. A stay-at-home directive and a meteoric rise in the number of people working from home may have added a new layer to the problem of home and work friction, despite the fact that hybrid work processes and a scenario where it will be appropriate for workers to work sometimes in person and sometimes electronically may be the new normal.

Society's social and behavioral health depends on the effective management of the work-life balance of its employees (Ugwuzor, 2019). The possibility of working from home might be detrimental to employees who have troubled home lives and use their professions as an escape from those troubles. Several workers have lost their lives to the epidemic, and some who have recovered from their illnesses have also lost their employment. Domestic violence and abuse are on the rise because people are stressed out and angry about their financial situations and other problems in their lives. Financial strain and job stress, which may be mitigated by alcohol consumption, have been linked to the abuse of intimate partners, as noted by Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012). Although domestic violence, stalking, and intimate partner abuse can all be motivated by a desire for power and control, people who are already struggling to make ends meet may turn to abuse as a coping mechanism (Piquero, Riddell, Bishopp, Narvey, Reid, & Piquero, 2020). As of the year 2020 (Piquero, Riddell, Bishopp, Narvey, Reid, & Piquero).

It is important to remember that problems with balancing work and family life are not limited to the examples given. For instance, if there are young children in the home and no one to watch them, there may be tension between domestic and professional responsibilities. Working without a decent workplace may also be a difficulty, so it may be necessary to provide an alternate workspace for those who live in houses where family members or friends share common rooms and spaces.

Technical backup

The corporation provides the employee with the infrastructure, both physical and organizational, that is essential to the operation of the business. In the literature, you may find several examples of various organizational support measures. When workers feel their bosses truly value and respect them, they are more likely to go the extra mile for the company (Eisenberger, Shanock, & Wen, 2020). Organizational factors that have been demonstrated to improve performance include supportive management, equitable working conditions, ethical leadership, and opportunities for employees to weigh in on major decisions (Abou-Moghli, 2015; Chen, Hao, Ding, Feng, Li, & Liang, 2020). Huge organizational benefits may also accrue through firms' commitment to special support provisions in areas such as flexible work schedules, finance, safety, health, and wellbeing, as well as employee creativity and development (Ibrahim, Isa, & Shahbudin, 2016; Sinclair, Allen, Barber, Bergman, Britt, Ford, Ford, Hammer, Ford, Ford, Ford, Hammer,

Even if people still use the same methods of transportation they always have, technological advancements have altered the dynamics of the workplace.

People are using the internet more and more to talk to each other and meet new people. The contemporary workplace has become a haven of peace and creativity. Improvements in computing and communication technologies are opening up new avenues for teamwork and information sharing. Simply put, the extent to which employees have access to digitally equipped and empowered workstations outside of the traditional office is a measure of organisational support and will undoubtedly be a substantial driver of the individual's performance outcome. As a result of the pandemic, several businesses have looked at the options accessible to their remote workers. If employees are given adequate training on how to use the new technology at work, perhaps the hostile atmosphere might be reduced (Ugwuzor & Arikawei, 2021). In addition to an adequate power supply and internet facilities and connections, remote offices need other basic input-output infrastructure and work support amenities in order to function. Many established workplaces and online hubs provide at least some of these basic conveniences. Yet, this could not be the case for people who live or work in places where such conveniences are unavailable. It may be impossible to accomplish any kind of work without these fundamentals. Lacklustre performance in the workplace can be characterised by a variety of unacceptable lapses in conduct, as well as missed deadlines and shoddy output. Employees may feel their occupations are monotonous and boring if output-based performance assessments are allowed to continue unabated. Some employees may be tempted to resort to dishonest methods of handling stressful situations. This fits with the idea that dishonest behaviour among employees is a direct result of using flawed ways to evaluate their performance (Daumiller & Janke, 2019; Gill, Prowse, & Vlassopoulos, 2013).

Given the problems we've already talked about, it might be easier to provide work support facilities when team members are all in one area. This is because resolving the concerns of individuals working from various addresses presents substantial barriers. Remote work has its place, but employers can show they value their workers by investing in infrastructure like meeting rooms and collaborative office layouts.

Irregular duty schedule

Time spent at the office has traditionally been divided into eight-hour days, with employees expected to clock in and out between the hours of eight in the morning and five in the afternoon. Due to their demonstrated dedication and hard work, some employers provide higher ratings to employees who consistently arrive early and stay late at the office. The quality, quantity, and value-added components of work production are expected to be the yardstick for performance assessment in the post-pandemic workplace, where work timing structures appear to follow many unbounded work timing patterns. Employees are now expected to work longer and harder than ever before, around the clock, with mandatory meetings being scheduled at what may seem like ungodly hours and unreasonable expectations for production. There are consequences for workplace conduct for all of these factors such as poor work-life balance, increased fatigue, mistakes, lack of concentration, stress, and burnout.

If businesses are serious about maximizing their return on investment (ROI), they will need to give serious thought to

how all of these new requirements will impact their staff. Systems and processes that set limits on how much work can be accomplished in a given time frame should be altered expressly to reflect the current state of affairs. Zoom fatigue can be avoided by limiting one's time spent in front of a screen.

Workplace atmospheric condition

One's mood while at work as well as the prevailing mood of persons at work is what we term the "workplaceatmospheric condition." It depends on how the individual is feeling at the office. Individuals are more inclined to leave their jobs if they believe they have no one to talk to about problems at work. When workers look forward to going to work each day, they are more productive, and turnover rates decrease. The loneliness model proposed by Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010) equates this feeling of isolation with apprehension. If the workplace is pleasant, individuals can enjoy working alone without feeling lonely. The feeling of isolation is not shared by everyone who spends time outside alone. After the peak of the epidemic, new ideas have emerged about what work is and how it should be done. Both human lives and economic opportunities have been severely damaged by the epidemic. In addition to this cost, businesses must deal with the emotional, mental, and physical pain of their returning employees. The discomfort may also impair the employees' degree of involvement as well as a general sense of connectivity and cohesion inside the workspace. When workers give their whole attention and effort to their jobs, they experience more job satisfaction, better organizational citizenship behavior, and higher productivity (Shoaib & Kohli, 2017). When people are in communities, they flourish. The simple act of striking up a conversation with a co-worker in the break room or hallway before or after a meeting can go a long way towards satisfying the basic human need and desire for companionship. The design of the new workplace is still ongoing, with many potential prospects and challenges. Managers should consider how to meet the social requirements of animals that require interaction with others while the current scenario persists. However, in the current context, structures should be put in place to allow for in-person social connections and interactions in order to build team spirituality and increase employees' sense of interconnectedness.

Mental Health Standing

The people of Nigeria are well known for their adaptability and toughness. They are naturally endowed with the ability and unique talent to adjust to a wide variety of pressures. Pandemic stress, however, may destabilize even the strongest of brains since it is both physical and mental in nature. Loneliness has been equated with physical pain, hunger, and thirst; the agony of isolation and the desire to not feel alone drives people to cultivate and sustain the relationships that are essential to their well-being (Banerjee & Rai, 2020). Isolation from co-workers is a potential source of tension in the workplace. Managers may need insight into their employees' thought processes if they expect them to effectively work remotely. Organizational performance and competitive

advantage can be attributed in large part to employee enthusiasm for their work (Pham-Thai, Murray, Muenjohn, & Muchiri, 2018). The challenges of people doing their work without the impact of the physical presence of people around may be grave to their mental health. There is a need for employees to communicate and engage, with an emphasis on actively supporting and interacting with each other socially, whether there is no physical workplace at all owing to telecommuting migration or a modified form of a physical workplace. This is because of the social nature of humans who find comfort in the company of others.

Hawkley and Cacioppo's (2010) research shows that when people think about being alone or socially isolated, they become more aware of dangers and feel more vulnerable while also wanting to connect more. As part of the corporate landscape, there should be groups of employees who live close to each other and help each other out virtually. This can be done either digitally (using devices like phones and laptops) or physically (observing all applicable safety procedures). Employees of a single company that live within a certain radius of one another will benefit from establishing corporate neighborhood pods since it will allow them to work together as co-workers and experience some type of communal life. If they have to use the same router or wi-fi for official business, this might offer them a sense of camaraderie.

Organizational restructuring

When a company is well structured, its various components and operations work together as intended. Corporations will succeed or fail based on how well they adapt to the unprecedented transformations taking place in the modern workplace. Clearly, the conventional view of how work is done has changed, and it is becoming increasingly common for businesses to seek out and implement innovations in order to strike a fair balance between the interests of their staff and shareholders.

Taking environmental considerations into account, a skillful virtual corporate structure will be necessary to encompass all elements of human resource management, such as e-recruitment and e-interviews, with video interviews progressively becoming the standard with many workers seeking placement in distant roles and occupations. There is an obvious need to re-evaluate non-compliant operational templates to be constructed in line with the shifting conditions, what with the problems of not having a physical workspace and not having direct supervision. New methods of coordination and motivation, as well as new roles, responsibilities, and norms for individuals and teams, will require some introspection and planning. Cheating in the workplace is defined as dishonest behaviour that increases the actor's own gain at the expense of others (Mitchell, Baer, Ambrose, Folger, & Palmer, 2018). The problems of workplace dishonesty in all its manifestations should be factored into the structure's design.

Methodology

This work uses an exploratory research approach to the questions it raises, making it theoretical in nature.

Conclusion

The knowledge gained through the COVID-19 epidemic has caused disruptions in several areas of management theory and practice. Managers of productive work systems should think about the social ramifications and possibly behavioral manifestations of employees even if the biological contagion is eventually eradicated. With the issues it has examined, this article has set a benchmark for the management of staff behavior during times of crisis, encouraging readers to see these times of stress as opportunities to grow professionally. With the highlighted themes at risk, managers must make critical model considerations and work design decisions to maximize efficiency and effectiveness within the restrictions of the conditions.

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