

Post Covid-19 Human Resource Management Challenges in Nigeria Public Sector: A Study of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike
By

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Abstract

The dreaded coronavirus affected social life, politics, and even the economy of nations. It is evident that the fear of contracting the dreaded virus led to people staying indoors, businesses and organizations adjusting, and, in most cases, strategically adopting the use of technology to keep activities ongoing as the pandemic lasts. The human resource management challenges such as recruitment, training, retraining, motivation, remuneration, and even evaluation of management decisions during this pandemic period with communication and technology became possible, easier, time-saving, and cost-effective. After the pandemic, it seems organizations have gone back to the old ways before the pandemic and not harnessing the achievements. The study analyses these post-covid human resources management challenges in Nigeria's public sector with an emphasis on Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike and adopted both the quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The 5-point Likert scale was utilized to rate the responses of the respondents to the research questions presented. The study discovered that lack of technological know-how, job security challenge, and financial constraints have remained impediments to harnessing the opportunities presented during the pandemic. Therefore, if the opportunities presented

during the pandemic that emphasized ease of management activities, time-saving, and cost-effective activities must be harnessed and improved upon, measures should be put in place to address the concerns bothering on lack of technological know-how, job security challenge, and financial constraints.

Keywords: Human Resource, Public Sector, Covid-19, ICT, Nigeria

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic crippled human activities, organizational activities, and even economies. The attendant fear of death kept people indoors and at the same time constrained socioeconomic activities. Mans' resolve to make ends meet by adapting to societal changes took the central focus and necessitated measures to ensure that life gets on not considering the constraints presented by the pandemic (Ndubuisi, 2019; Otunko & Ndubuisi, 2020). Organizations both the public and private sectors at the beginning of the pandemic were handicapped on how best to engage in required activities that must determine organizational growth and still ensure the safety and health concerns of employees and even management. Thus, information, communication, and technology became instrumental in closing up the gap created by the pandemic. People can meet up, engage, and proffer for action on societal development issues on social media platforms like Whatsapp, Likee, Twitter, Zoom, etc (Ndubuisi & Ibeh, 2021). The solutions presented by technology ensured the realization of organizational objectives, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness and at the same time saving cost.

The human resource has been described as the most vital resource in any organization. As such considering the role of human resource in the determination of the direction of organizational productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness; efficient and effective management of the human resource is important for the continued existence of any organization. Both the public sector and the private sector organizations cannot neglect the instrumentality of human resource management in the actualization of set objectives (Ndubuisi & Otusile, 2016). Human resource management ensures optimum service delivery and productivity in the public sector. It enables the public sector organization to achieve its strategic goals by attracting, retaining, and developing employees, thus existing as a link

between the organization and the employees and assisting the organization in creating loyal employees who are committed to the realization of organizational objectives (Nmadu, 2013). In the public sector, such organizational activities hinged around human resource management like recruitment, training, retraining, motivation, remuneration and even evaluation of management decisions became possible through the instrumentality of information, communication, and technology. Location and geographical considerations were no longer impediments to human resource management concerns.

It was projected that after the pandemic, organizations, nations, and even economies should be able to harness properly the gains made not considering the constraining pandemic, and consolidate on these (Onuba & Ndubuisi, 2020). It is unfortunate that organizational activities after the pandemic have gone auto reverse to how it was before the pandemic and not maximizing lessons and gains gotten during the pandemic. The prospects of information, communication, and technology are downplayed and, in most cases, not even considered at all. The study analyses these post-covid human resources management challenges with emphasis on Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike and tries to find out why it has been challenging to maximize the gains and opportunities presented during the pandemic through information, communication, and technology.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study focused on the post-Covid-19 human resource management challenges in Nigeria's public sector, with emphasis on Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. However, the specific objectives are enumerated as the following:

1. To determine whether post Covid-19 non-utilization of information, communication, and technology has a significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations.
2. To determine the link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic
3. To determine the major post Covid-19 human resource management challenge faced by public sector organizations.

Research Questions

This study in an attempt to analyze post Covid-19 human resource management challenges in Nigeria public sector, with emphasis on Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike will examine the following research questions:

1. Does post Covid-19 non utilisation of information, communication and technology has significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations.
2. Is there a link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic
3. What is the major post Covid-19 human resource management challenge faced by public sector organizations.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of the study and research questions, the following research hypotheses were investigated.

1. Post Covid-19 non utilisation of information, communication, and technology has no significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations.
2. There is no link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic

The Human Resource Management in Nigeria Public Sector Organization

The human resource has been described as the ultimate resource among all resources available for the effective and efficient performance of the organization. No matter how adequate every other resource needed by the organization is, without the appropriate human resource every other resource will end up under-utilized or even over-utilized (Ndubuisi & Otusile, 2016; Onuba & Ndubuisi, 2020). The human resource is the most important asset needed by the organization and comprises available talents, skills, and professionals whose contributions are essential for the optimum realization of organizational objectives. Every other resource available to the organization for its day-to-day functioning is dependent on and controlled by human resource (Grant & Shields, 2002). Thus, considering the central role of human resource in the organization, human resource management remain an essential activity or chain of activities that in the long run ensures optimum performance of the employee and enhanced organizational

productivity. In the words of Beer et al (1984) in Armstrong (2009:4), human resource management is defined thus:

“... involves all management decisions and action that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and its employees- its human resources”.

Most explanations of human resource management have been able to capture the fact that human resource management is concerned with all aspects of how people with required skills and qualifications are employed, managed, and sustained; thus, ensuring the capacity of the organization to achieve its set goals by best use of these resources available. This captures the question of what is the human resource need of the organization. What are the best skills or professionals available to meet these needs? How do you get this resource engaged in the organization? What kind of employee behaviour is expected? How do you get such expected behaviour? What composition of human resource is needed? What level of competence and commitment? All these among others are essential organizational questions that the human resource management tends to answer. Summarily, human resource management can be best described as how organizations whether public or private sector ensure the effective and efficient management of their workforce in a bid to realize set organizational objectives (Armstrong, 2009; Abah, 2012).

Eboh (1999) explains that the public sector connotes comprehensively institutions, departments, organizations, and agencies which are owned substantially in part or in whole by any of the tiers of government or a combination and which exist to serve the interest of the public. In Nigeria, the public sector is expected to ensure the needed development of needed infrastructure for the economy, existing as an economic multiplier through employment generation, raising the standard of living, and increase in Gross National Product. Over four decades the Nigeria public sector is still struggling to meet up with expected roles and contribute optimally towards enabling the increase in the standard of living and Gross National Product. As such the effective and efficient functioning of a public sector organization will depend on its good organization which is centrally hinged around the human resource (Nmadu, 2013; Onuba & Ndubuisi, 2020). It is observable that across the globe, management is generally concerned with the

proper mobilization of resources such as men, materials, machines, and money for the overall achievement of the set objectives of the organization (Abah, 2012). The worker (employee) contributes labour while the employer contributes land, capital, and management.

Nigeria Public Universities are notable examples of public sector organization and as such these institutions can only remain relevant contributing to national development only if the human resource management is exceptional. This is so considering the fact that the importance of human resources in the success of organizations is increasingly growing. Onuba and Ndubuisi (2019) explain that the success or failure of these public universities in producing the needed manpower that should contribute to national development, to a large extent, depends on the people working in them as well as their skills, ideas, knowledge, satisfaction, commitment, zeal and determination. Managing the human resource in the public sector organization just like what is obtainable in the private sector will include human resource planning, recruitment, selection, placement, development, motivation, and remuneration (Emerole et al, 2012). The Nigeria public sector organization is that which entails the relevance of organizational activities such as planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, staffing and budgeting in the realization of its set goals optimally (Onuba and Ndubuisi, 2019).

Post-Covid 19 Challenges of Human Resource Management in Nigeria Public Sector

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Nigeria public sector was already going through a lot of challenges. With the evolving need for the public sector in Nigeria to take the lead while the private sector follows or even complements the efforts of the private sector in the area of increasing the Gross National Product and ensuring national development; the Nigeria public sector is expected to be focused on attaining best human resource management practices. The ability of the Nigeria public sector organization to effectively compete in the global business environment is hinged on the promotion of new ideas; effective and efficient service delivery and new levels of productivity. In the bid to attain the above, it has not been an Eldorado for the Nigeria public sector organization. According to Ndubuisi and Otusile (2018), there have been many constraining factors impeding

effective human resource management in the Nigeria public sector, and most of these are outlined as:

- (a) Shortages in people trained to work in the growth areas of the future in the Nigeria public sector organization.
- (b) A huge population of unskilled workers in the Nigeria public sector organization who need training and retraining to be able to meet up with the high demands of the competitive global environment.
- (c) The rising employee expectations and drastic changes in technology as well as lifestyle changes.
- (d) The composition of the workforce and the rapid dynamic changes in the Nigeria public sector organization requiring new skills have been a challenge.
- (e) The impact of new economic policy, the political ideology of government, and complex set of laws, policies, and regulations have remained a human resource challenge.
- (f) A shift in employee attitude toward work as leisure time has become a much higher priority as flex time and shorter work weeks and also a decreased sense of employee loyalty, resulting in increased employee turnover and increased cost of replacing lost workers have remained a challenge.

Considering all these issues and many more not fully captured above, it is obvious that human resource management has remained a struggle with many roadblocks on the way to its optimal attainment even before the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic came at a period the Nigeria public sector organization was really struggling to breathe. The pandemic had attendant devastating effects on human activities, organizations, and economies. The declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO) of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 30th January 2020 as a public health emergency of international concern calling for collaborative efforts or action of all countries to curtail the rapid spread of the virus reinforced fears and doubts, especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Ukpnahiusi & Imafidon, 2020). With the increasing number of deaths recorded within the period, the Covid-19 pandemic became real and not just a myth to the huge population living in countries like Nigeria. It was observed that the fear of death due to the

increasing spread of the virus kept people indoors and stopped most socioeconomic activities.

In Nigeria, most of these people indoors comprised employees in most public sector organization spread across cities in Nigeria. Organizations both the public and private sectors at the beginning of the pandemic were handicapped on how best to engage in required activities that must determine organizational growth and still ensure the safety and health concerns of employees and even management. Man's resolve to always find a way of survival even in the most demeaning and devastating life situations surfaced. Before this period most of the private sector organization in Nigeria have gradually upgraded their activities in compliance with the information, communication and technology roadmap of the times; and even the ones that have not still have plans to adjust in the near future but this was not the case in most public sector organizations, especially in the education sector (Ndubuisi, 2019; Otunko & Ndubuisi, 2020). Thus, information, communication, and technology became instrumental in closing up the gap that already exists and is being reinforced by the pandemic. People can meet up, engage, and proffer for action on societal development issues on social media platforms like Whatsapp, Likee, Twitter, Zoom, etc.

The solutions presented by technology ensured the realization of organizational objectives, ensuring efficiency and effectiveness and at the same time saving cost. Most lectures or classes were held via such platforms as google classroom, zoom, WhatsApp, and others. It provided means of in-depth engagement and cost saving in respect of the kind of services rendered by employees in Nigeria universities (Ndubuisi & Ibeh, 2021; Otunko & Ndubuisi, 2020). University meetings, seminars, conferences, and other related activities were hosted on most of the above-mentioned social media platforms or e-learning platforms. It removed the cost of transportation, maintenance of venues, provision of hardcopy materials, etc. All these were consuming huge cost before this period, and with these measures put in place, there was a lot of cost-benefit accomplishments, ease of engagement, and larger audience capturing among others.

The contingency theory of human resource management explains that human resource management in every organization is affected by the organization's

environment and circumstances prevalent at the time (Legge, 1998). The implication of this is that in such environment and circumstance where information, communication and technology can enhance human resource management and ensure organizational productivity, the organization should be able to make out gains from the possibilities presented and not rely on the old ways of doing things not considering the prevalent circumstances and changes in the environment. Since the employee offers labour and the employers provide other resources like capital, land, and also the management of all these resources, thus every management in an organization is highly interested in the sourcing of competent, effective, efficient and highly motivated, and committed work force whose priority would be the attainment of set organizational objectives even in the most discomfoting circumstances.

The question after the pandemic has remained whether most of these gains through information, communication, and technology have been consolidated. To an extent, the answer is negative because it is obvious that the Nigeria public sector automatically reversed back to the traditional ways of doing business or service delivery, and the changes attained during the pandemic were thrown out of the window. Engagements has moved on to be physical and not online; thus, implying that people have to travel from distances to come together. Most administrative activities have moved back to paper works and even the online platforms for the classes neglected (e-learning). In the words of Caldwell (2004) in Armstrong (2009:6):

...the policy goals for human resource management included managing people as assets that are fundamental to the competitive advantage of the organization, aligning human resource management policies with business policies and corporate strategy, and developing a close fit of HR policies, procedures and systems with one another”.

It is obvious that these gains made during the pandemic can help manage the employee better and position the public sector organizations to compete better. It is discouraging to note that there is no evidence of any kind of consolidation and

this leaves the question to be answered, what is really wrong with Nigeria public sector organization?

Brief History of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike was established as a specialized university by the Federal Government of Nigeria and is situated in an axis along the road from Umuahia in Abia State to Ikot- Ekpene in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and has common boundaries with the National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike. As such Umudike and its other host neighbors are agrarian communities; this explains the role of the university as one specializing in agriculture and related programmes. The institution commenced on the 3rd of May 1993 and remains a notable public sector organization within South East Nigeria. The University has staff strength comprising both academic and non-academic staff.

Methodology

The study focused on a sample size of 200 respondents who are staff of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. A number of 100 respondents were randomly selected each from both the academic and non-academic staff of the university summing up to a sample size of 200 staff (respondents). The study adopted the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis, adopting the use of percentages and a 5-point Likert scale to rate the responses of respondents to the research questions asked. Questionnaires were distributed to the selected sample size soliciting responses to questions asked. The study adopted a cut-off point mean score of 3.50 thus any attribute with a mean score of 3.50 and below is rejected.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: Does post Covid-19 non-utilization of information, communication, and technology have a significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations?

Table 1: Response to Research Question

Response	F	%	x	%
Strongly Agree (SA)	56	28	280	37.4
Agree (A)	90	45	360	48.1
Undecided (UD)	11	6	33	4.4
Disagree (D)	31	16	62	8.2
Strongly Disagree (SD)	12	6	12	1.6
Total	200	100	747	100

Source: Field Survey

To calculate the mean score for the attribute (Post Covid-19 non-utilization of information, communication, and technology has a significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations), we have:

$$\frac{\sum x}{\sum f} = \frac{747}{200} = 3.37$$

Therefore, we accept that Post Covid-19 non-utilization of information, communication, and technology has a significant effect on the performance of public sector organizations. Thus, if organizations like Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike are to put to use information, communication and technology in the various human resource management processes there are gains to be recorded. Also, in the other way, if these organizations fail to utilize such the level of performance in terms of productivity and service delivery made by those organizations which have put to use information, communication and technology cannot be compared to what they are achieving.

Research Question 2: Is there a link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic

Table 2: Response to Research Question

Response	F	%	x	%
Strongly Agree (SA)	50	25	250	33.7
Agree (A)	96	48	384	51.8
Undecided (UD)	11	6	33	4.4
Disagree (D)	31	16	62	8.3
Strongly Disagree (SD)	12	6	12	1.6
Total	200	100	741	100

Source: Field Survey

To calculate the mean score for the attribute (there is a link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic), we have:

$$\frac{\sum x}{\sum f} = \frac{741}{200} = 3.70$$

Therefore, we accept that there is a link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, if human resource management activities are efficient it also saves cost and ensures high level of productivity and service delivery. In this study, the link between efficient and cost-effective human resource management activities remains the instrumentality of information, communication and technology.

Research Question 3: What is the major post Covid-19 human resource management challenges faced by public sector organizations?

Table 3: Response to Research Question

Challenges	F	%
Poor utilization of information, communication, and technology	70	35
Inadequate training of the employee to enhance performance/ Lack of technical know-how to use technology	50	25
Poor remuneration of the employee	15	7.5
Poor implementation and evaluation of organizational policies	20	10
Inadequate infrastructures and environment to support performance	25	12.5
Fear of disengagement from services due to the use of technology	20	10
	200	100

Source: Field Survey

From the responses of the respondents above, it was observed that 70 respondents representing 35% of the sample size admitted that poor utilization of information, communication, and technology are the major post covid-19 human resource management challenge, 50 respondents representing 25% admitted inadequate training/lack of technical know-how, 25 respondents (12.5%) inadequate infrastructure and environment to support performance, 20 respondents (10%) poor implementation and evaluation of organizational policies, another 20 respondents (10%) fear of disengagement of services due to use of technology, while 15 respondents (7.5%) mentioned poor remuneration. Considering the ratings of the percentages we can agree that poor utilization of information, communication, and technology, and inadequate training of the employee to enhance performance/ lack of technical know-how to use technology are the major post covid-19 human resource management challenges.

Thus, its obvious that in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike just like most public sector organization in Nigeria there has been the challenge of adopting the gains obtained during the pandemic which was made possible through the instrumentality of information, communication and technology. Such platforms like Google form, Google class room, Zoom and others introduced to necessitate engagements and services have become a foregone alternative and live has moved on as if there was no pandemic and no difficulties faced and also no lessons learnt. It is a fact that good human resource management practices hinged

on technology which ensures effectiveness, efficiency and saves cost do have a direct impact on employee, especially in the areas of engagement, commitment, motivation and skill. If the employee are positively affected in these areas it is possible that the organizational performance in terms of productivity, quality and delivery will improve and keep improving, and this has implications on the financial or service delivery results of the organization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Human resource management has been observed to build capacity, confidence, and commitment to organizational goals on the part of the employee, while at the same time ensuring progressive growth on the part of the organization. A confident and committed employee is more likely to perform beyond the call of duty to meet customer needs and is highly motivated to work to the best of their ability. Human resource management across the years has been described to be more than hiring and firing personnel especially as it concerns the Nigeria public sector. It involves all activities designed to achieve organizational goals within the laws that affect human resource management (Armstrong, 2009). The human resource is expected to make a notable impact on the extent of service delivery of the Nigeria public sector organization.

Human resource management ensures the evaluation of human resource needs existing in the public sector organization, finding the adequate people to fill those needs and ensuring the best performance by providing motivating incentives and a conducive job environment. As such it has been observed that if the Nigeria public sector must enhance national development through its input, human resource management cannot just be neglected. It is observable that human resource management even before the pandemic had numerous challenges constraining its role as the headway towards ensuring organizational productivity through the attainment of set objectives. The human resource management challenges such as recruitment, training, retraining, motivation, remuneration, and even evaluation of management decisions during this pandemic period with information, communication, and technology became possible, easier, time-saving, and cost-effective.

After the pandemic businesses and organizations seem to have played down the use of technology and can be seen to have gone back to the rudimentary methods of human resources management even with its shortcomings and not complimenting the possibilities attained through information, communication, and technology during the pandemic. poor utilization of information, communication, and technology, and inadequate training of the employee to enhance performance/ lack of technical know-how to use technology are the major post covid-19 human resource management challenges, fear of disengagement and even inadequate infrastructure or amenities like power supply have remained an impediment towards consolidating the gains made during the pandemic by Nigeria public sector organizations. Therefore, the study recommends the following:

- a. Commitment by Nigeria government at all levels to address the issue of power supply since a greater part of opportunities inherent in information, communication, and technology is dependent on power.
- b. There should be a public-private partnership in the provision of technology infrastructures in such public sector organizations, especially the education sector.
- c. There should be skill upgrade training to ensure the best performance and the required technological know-how for maximum use of the technology avenues.
- d. There should be intense sensitization negating the fears of service disengagement if technology is used for most organizational activities.
- e. Better remuneration and provision of a conducive work environment should be taken as a priority to encourage the public sector employee to show commitment to organizational goals.

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