

Organizational Culture and Employee Wellbeing in Rivers State University

Josephine U. Mkpong; Prof. Emmanuel B. Okemini

Department of Sociology

Rivers State University

Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

josephine.mkpong@rsu.edu.ng; emmanuel.okemiini@ust.edu.ng

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Abstract

The cultural environment of a university substantially shapes by many factors, such as the leadership style, communication patterns; the physical, psychological, and social welfare of its staff. This study examined the impact of organizational culture on employee well-being at Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The population of the study comprised all academic and non-teaching staff of Rivers State University. A sample of 312 respondents were drawn from a total of 329 questionnaires distributed, yielding a return rate of 94.8%. Data were collected using an instrument titled the Questionnaire on Organisational Culture and Employee Well-Being at Rivers State University (OCEWARSUQ), which demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.89 for the organisational culture subscale, 0.87 for the leadership practices section, and 0.91 for the employee well-being subscale. Data were analysed using simple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that hierarchical administrative structure had a significant positive influence on employee well-being ($\beta = .571$, $R^2 = .326$, $F = 149.45$, $p < .001$), explaining 32.6% of the variance in employee well-being. Leadership-centred culture was the strongest predictor, significantly influencing employee well-being ($\beta = .672$, $R^2 = .452$, $F = 253.37$, $p < .001$) and accounting for 45.2% of its variance. Collectivism and collegiality among staff significantly influenced employee well-being ($\beta = .648$, $R^2 = .420$, $F = 222.63$, $p < .001$), explaining 42.0% of variance. Adaptation to resource constraints also significantly influenced employee well-being ($\beta = .604$, $R^2 = .365$, $F = 177.05$, $p < .001$), accounting for 36.5% of variance. The study recommended that the university management should commit to transparent and people-centred leadership practices through structured leadership development training that equips leaders at all levels to communicate openly, recognise staff contributions on merit, and demonstrate genuine concern for staff welfare.

Keywords: Employee, well-being, Organizational culture, hierarchical, administrative structure.

Introduction

The modern workplace has become increasingly more complex due to globalisation and the technology driving mechanisms that has helped in shaping organisations realising their goals effectively through an efficient process that helps in functioning and smooth running of

organisational activities/businesses. Employee well-being is a multi-faceted phenomenon that involves physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being within the work environment. Zheng, Zhu, Zhao and Zhang, (2015) define employee well-being as 'the comprehensive condition of mental, physical and social health of employees, which directly affects their ability to work at their best and stay committed to the organizational goals'. This conception goes beyond the lack of sickness and suffering to the presence of feelings of vitality, purpose, and fulfilment in one's work life. Employee well-being is operationally defined as the extent to which employees; academic/non-teaching staff of Rivers State University enjoy positive physical, psychological, and job satisfaction and meaningful social relationships in the work environment. It is to know, that certain factors influenced employees' well-being and as critical as they, researchers and practitioners, take special in them especially because of the pressures that workplace face due to technological advancements, economic concerns, and changing employee expectations, organizational culture has become a more important determinant of the various aspects that affect employees' experiences in the workplace. Organisational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms that define an organisation and influence the behaviours, feelings, and thoughts of its members with respect to themselves, other people, and their work. According to Li, Bhutto, Nasiri, Shaikh and Samo (2018), there are different levels of organisational culture, from the visible level, which is the level of artefacts, to the last level, which is deeply embedded in assumptions and operates unconsciously and yet powerfully influenced the life of the organisation. Asaah, Effah, and Sam (2015) also explain that organisational culture is the personality of an organisation, which makes it unique and establishes a different social and psychological environment for employees. For this study, operationalisation involves a set of values, communication practices, leadership styles, collegial relationships and institutional adaptation styles that prevail within the working environment of Rivers State University. The link between organisational culture and employees' well-being has gained increasing attention in the academic world, but the work has focused largely on the corporate and industrial context in Western countries. The elements of psychological safety and health within a group are more prevalent in organisations that have a culture that encourages transparency, interrelationships, supportive leadership, and adaptability. On the other hand, cultures that are less hierarchical, low on communication, and lack the recognition of employee contributions are linked to higher stress, burnout, and intention to quit (Warr and Nielsen, 2018). Without gainsaying, organisation culture does not exist in the background, and as such, it is an active component that influences the everyday life of the employees and their future results. The pathways by which cultural practices affect various dimensions of well-being, however, are poorly understood, especially in different institutional cultures where the nature of cultural values and workplace dynamics can also significantly differ from those found in Europe and North America. Organisational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that guide behavior within an organization. In the globalised industrial world, culture has become a critical determinant of how employees experience work. Employee wellbeing, on the other hand, encompasses physical, psychological, and social health outcomes experienced at work (WHO, 2022; Schein, 2010). Conceptual Linkage: Culture Wellbeing

According to Schein's (2010) three-level model, culture operates at the level of artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions. These levels directly influence job demands and job resources, which are central to the Job Demands-Resources 'JD-R model' (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017/2010). When culture emphasizes support, autonomy, and fairness, it functions as a job

resource that buffers demands and promotes wellbeing. Conversely, cultures that normalize overwork, competition, and silence amplify demands and erode wellbeing (Nielsen, Nielsen, Ogbonnaya, Käsälä, Saari, & Isaksson, 2017). The ideal university environment should be one in which the organisational culture is a positive and enabling one that actively helps to maintain the well-being of all staff. The hierarchical administrative system should be transparent and equitable in its working; allowing for communication, equitable sharing of tasks and responsibilities, and giving staff a voice in decisions that impact their work. New and experienced department heads, as well as senior administrators, should show a true care for staff well-being, ensure psychological safety, and provide an environment where all strata of staff feel valued, motivated, and professionally fulfilled. Peer relationships and collegial bonds should be consciously developed and institutionally supported to be a stable resource to buffer work-related stress and workload. Moreover, the university's cultural resilience to cope with shortages of resources must be a proactive institutional approach that keeps staff from being psychologically and physically compromised by systemic deficits. In such a seemingly ideal cultural setting, the physical, psychological, job satisfaction, and social dimensions of employees' well-being, the four pillars of employee well-being, would be robust. Specifically, the study sought to; examine the influence of hierarchical administrative structure on employee well-being at Rivers State University. The study raised the question; to what extent does hierarchical administrative structure influence employee well-being at Rivers State University?

Organisational Culture and Employee Well-being

In their study, Nierenberg, Alexakis, Preziosi and O'Neill (2017) conducted a study titled 'Workplace happiness: An empirical study on well-being and its relationship with organizational culture, leadership, and job satisfaction'. The central focus was to investigate the different types of organizational cultures that affect employee happiness and well-being in Spanish organizations and to examine whether happiness at work mediated the relationship between the organizational characteristics and psychological wellbeing. A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was used by the study, which was carried out in several organizations in Spain, with 416 employees from different industries such as manufacturing, services and technology sectors. The researchers adopted Stratified Random sampling technique for selecting respondents in various levels of the organization and departments of the organization.

Dimensions of Employee Well-Being: Physical, Psychological, and Social Aspects

Employee well-being is multi-faceted and consists of various components, of which physical, psychological and social are three aspects that can be considered basic and have been consistently addressed in different traditions of well-being research in various fields. These dimensions are analytically separate but operationally linked and conditions affecting one dimension may impact on others in several ways. By combining the various aspects of well-being, more holistic information can be gathered about the health of employees and more accurately determine where specific organizational factors such as culture are helping or hindering employee well-being. Physical well-being is the most obvious part of employee welfare: it is the health, vitality and physical functioning aspect of employee welfare, both in terms of the absence of illness and injury and of a state of energy and physical capacity.

Psychosocial Pathway, supportive cultures increase perceived control and reduce job strain ([Karasek & Theorell, 1990); behavioral pathway; cultures that shape health behaviors.

Organizations with wellness-oriented cultures report 28% lower smoking and 20% higher physical activity (Goetzel, Henke, Tabrizi, Pelletier, Loeppke, Ballard, & Metz, (2014); Relational pathway, cultures of respect and inclusion reduce workplace bullying. In a survey of 4,000 Nigerian public sector employees, inclusive culture reduced reported bullying by 34%. (Owoyemi, 2019); Leadership Modeling, leaders who model work-life balance reduce burnout contagion (Eisenbeiss & van Knippenberg, 2015); Policy Integration, In Nigeria, integrating wellbeing KPIs into culture statements has been shown to improve retention in banking and telecoms sectors (Aborisade & Aborisade, 2020).

Studies on Organizational Culture and Employee Well-Being in Nigerian Universities

Meta-analytic evidence shows that clan cultures characterized by collaboration, mentoring, and cohesion are significantly associated with higher job satisfaction $\beta=.42$ and lower burnout [Hartnell et al., 2011]. In a longitudinal study of 2,100 healthcare workers in the UK, Nielsen, Nielsen, Ogbonnaya, Käsälä, Saari, & Isaksson, (2017) found that perceived supportive culture predicted 23% of the variance in psychological wellbeing 12 months later, mediated by perceived organizational support. Furthermore, cultures that prioritize competition and strict control are linked to higher emotional exhaustion. A study of 1,450 employees across 6 Nigerian manufacturing firms found that hierarchical culture positively predicted work-related stress ' $r=.38$ ' and turnover intention ' $r=.29$ ' (Aborisade & Aborisade, 2020). Similarly, market cultures with aggressive performance targets increased presenteeism by 17% in a sample of European financial firms (Schulte & Vainio, 2010). Wellbeing is highest when employee values align with organizational values. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson, (2005) in a meta-analysis of 172 studies reported that person-organization fit correlated .44 with job satisfaction and -.35 with stress. Misalignment leads to value conflict, a known predictor of depression and absenteeism.

Although much has been studied on the relationship between organizational culture and employee wellbeing in the universities of the world, studies specifically in the Nigerian university contexts are yet to be extensively researched, but nonetheless important in the light of the unique challenges confronting employees in Nigerian Universities. Studies that are done in this context are important in giving evidence on how culture–wellbeing relationships are manifested under Nigerian institutional context. Ugwu et al., (2020) did a research on organizational trust, job satisfaction and employee well-being in South-Eastern Nigerian universities, where they explored the extent to which organizational culture characterized by trust, fairness and supportive relationships can be used to determine or predict employee well-being in Nigerian universities. The aim was to test whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee well-being, and to compare the effects on organizational culture and job satisfaction on employee well-being between federal and state universities. A quantitative cross-sectional comparative survey research designed was adopted with a sample of 556 academic and non-teaching staff of the universities in South-Eastern Nigeria comprising of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi. The selection of the respondents was done through multistage sampling with stratified selection method to ensure representation across the universities, staff categories and organizational levels.

Method

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design within a quantitative research framework. The causal-comparative research or ex-post facto design was found to be appropriate since the

researcher was not interested in manipulating any of the variables to determine the causal relationship between the variables or the dimensions of organizational culture and the well-being of employees. The population of the study is the whole staff of Rivers State University (Academic and Non-Academic). The estimated number of the university staff is 1,847, of which 892 were academic staff ranging from Graduate Assistant to Professor posted in various departments and units of the university and 955 were non-academic staff in different administrative, technical and support roles in various departments and units of the university as per the official website of the university. The two categories of academic and non-academic staff allowed for the representation of the institution's diverse staff group who are the ones who are experiencing the institution's culture. The determination of appropriate sample size in this study was done through Taro Yamane's formula sample size determination widely known for its applicability in social science research involving finite populations. The formula used for the determination of the sample size, $n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$ was used in Rivers State University with a ninety-five percent confidence level and a five per cent margin of error where n is the desired sample, N is the population size and e is the acceptable sampling error.

The data collection was done by direct administration of the questionnaires to chosen respondents in their workplaces within the University campuses. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the help of three trained research assistants who gave a short explanation about the aim of the study, how to complete the questionnaire and confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Analysis

Table 1: Return Rate of Questionnaire

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Distributed	329	100
Returned and Valid	312	94.8
Not Returned / Invalid	17	5.2

Presentation of Data Based on Research Objectives

Descriptive and inferential statistics are provided for each of the four objectives of the research. Simple linear regression analyses are used for each objective, focusing on the effects of the different dimensions of the organization's culture on well-being.

The impact of hierarchical administrative structure on employee well-being at Rivers State University.

Table 2: Model Summary for Hierarchical Administrative Structure and Employee Well-Being

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
1	.571	.326	.324	0.700

Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchical Administrative Structure

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3: ANOVA - Hierarchical Administrative Structure's Influence on Employee Well-Being

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	73.252	1	73.252	149.45	.000 ^b
Residual	151.448	310	0.489		
Total	224.700	311			

Dependent Variable: Employee Well-Being Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchical Administrative Structure

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4: Regression Coefficients - Involvement Culture Dimensions' Influence

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.312	.172	7.628		.000
Hierarchical Administrative Structure	.528	.043	.571	12.225	.000

Dependent Variable: Employee Well-Being

Table 5: Model Summary for Leadership-Centered Culture and Employee Well-Being

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.672	.452	.450	0.633

Predictors: (Constant), Leadership-Centered Culture

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Discussion

Hierarchical Administrative Structure's Influence on Well-Being of University Staff

The result of this study shows that the hierarchical administrative structure has a significant role in employee well-being of Rivers State University, the employees who are subjected to concentration of authority and limited participation in the governance of the University, reported low level of physical, psychological and social well-being.

The Primacy of Leadership-Centered Culture in Shaping Staff Well-Being

Leadership's role in creating a culture that is the best predictor of employee well-being out of all four dimensions studied in this paper is both strong and noteworthy. Employees who describe their working experiences as being influenced by transparent, fair and supportive leadership report significantly higher levels of well-being in each of the three dimensions, while employees who describe their working experiences as being influenced by opaque, inequitable or indifferent leadership report significantly lower levels of well-being outcomes for each of the three dimensions.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of organizational culture on employee well-being in Rivers State University (RSU), which included the following four dimensions that are natural to the context of RSU: hierarchical administrative structure, leadership-centred culture, collectivism and

collegiality among staff, and adaptation to resource constraints. The results clearly show that all the four cultural dimensions have a highly significant effect on the physical, psychological and social well-being of both academic and non-academic staff, and as such have resulted in the rejection of all four null hypotheses at the 0.001 level of significance. The leadership-centred culture proved to be the most influential dimension, accounting for 45.2% of variance in employee well-being; collectivism and collegiality accounted for 42.0% of the variance, adaptation to resource constraints accounted for 36.5% of the variance, and hierarchical administrative structure accounted for 32.6% of the variance. The strong sense of collegiality and supportive leadership are the key cultural supports that maintain staff well-being, but the lack of leadership and resources are the most immediate challenges to address in institutions. To enhance staff well-being at RSU, thus, it is not only necessary to develop transparent, people-centred leadership, but also to pursue structural changes regarding participation in decision-making and the provision of resources.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The university management needs to change the structure of governance by creating a meaningful mechanism of participation for both academic and non-academic staff to make contributions to decisions that impact their working lives.
2. Effective leadership at all levels of the University should be committed to transparency, fairness and people-focused leadership, through structured leadership, development training that equips staff with leadership skills that can be expressed through open communication, recognition of good work on merit and a genuine interest in the welfare of staff.
3. It is recommended that the university management should strive for urgent and continuous improvement in the physical infrastructure facilities, equipment and operational fund available to the staffs of all the Faculties and Administrative Units in collaboration with the Rivers State Government and relevant federal funding agencies.

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