
Collaboration Strategy and Employee Performance in Oil Producing Companies in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Silas Gift Echaobari, Adim, C. Victor & Ihunda, C. C.

Department of Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Rivers State University
Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: adimcvictor@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focused on the relationship between collaboration strategy and employee performance in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a cross sectional survey method. Primary data were collated using structured questionnaire administered to five (5) oil producing companies operational in Port Harcourt. The study population was 345 from a sample size of 181 was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. The internal reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the Crombach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70 bench mark set by Nunnally (1970). Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment correlation was used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. The study findings reveal that there is a positive significant relationship between collaboration and employee performance in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt. Therefore, it was concluded that since acrimony, disagreement and grievance is inevitable, management should adopt proven techniques of resolving them so that the corporate goal will be actualized by the collective contribution of every member of the organization. It was based on this empirical finding that the study recommended collaboration as one of the veritable tool in resolving disputes and enhancing teamwork and collectiveness amongst employees in the oil producing companies in Port Harcourt. Also, management should not be hesitant in noticing conflict at its early stage to ensure quick application of processes that will promote collaboration amongst employee.

Keywords: *Collaboration, Employee Performance, Improved Productivity and Excellent Service Delivery.*

Introduction

There has been a growing interest in conflict management in recent years. First, research has stimulated interest in strategies and approaches to handling conflict which in the past may have involved litigation through the courts, Second, there is increased legalization of the workplace, particularly in the areas of occupational health and safety, discrimination, and harassment, Third, there has been heightened interest in the need for organizations to move to high performance work systems (Awan & Anjum 2015). Conflict on the other hand is a phenomenon that can never be ruled out in any gathering of more than one person. As long as the number of persons in a group is greater than one, conflict must be anticipated. Conflict can be described as a situation of struggle or competition amongst various person(s) with their opponent(s) (Mughal & Khan, 2013). They further opined that organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other.

Conflict among employees in an organization is not simply inevitable; rather it is the nature of complex organizations (Putnam & Krone, 2006). If conflicts are managed properly by applying the best course of action, the organization can increase its performance in terms of utilizing the scarce resources and achieving the organizational objectives (Awan & Anjum 2015). Conversely, unmanaged conflict negatively impacts both employee satisfaction and performance. Timely management of conflict has the potential of improving employee satisfaction and job performance (Awan & Anjum 2015). Management should therefore resolve conflicts so that organizational performance can be increased (Song, 2000). Although some people perceive conflict as something devastating, detestable and abnormal yet it could be an instrument of positive change/development if it is properly managed Hammed & Ayantunji, (2002) & Owoseni, (2011). Conflict management implies the integration of all factors which can contribute to conflict resolution or its prevention. All conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved but learning how to manage them can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Mayer (2004), Ogunbamila (2006) and Salami (2009) suggested that conflict management has many strategies which include competition, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating and compromising. This study will focus on collaboration as a conflict management strategy.

Since the discovery of the oil in 1956 at Oloibiri, there has been little or no concern as to how workers should be maintained. The National Union of Petroleum and Gas workers (NUPENG) Port Harcourt zone had threatened to go on strike and issued a 14 day ultimatum to the Federal and State government, oil majors and other stake holders in the petroleum sector to wade into the alleged insensitive conduct of some employers in the oil and gas industry (Alike, 2015). As a matter of urgency, the Nigerian Agip oil company was given an order to respect the April and June 2014 letters from the National Petroleum Investment Management Service (NAPIMS) directing her to discuss the 'stop gap' of turbine and related equipment maintenance in Ebocha and Kwale with ARCO petroleum Nigeria.

In 2012, The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association, PENGASSAN, called its members out for a nationwide strike in sympathy with its colleagues in the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, NUPENG, sacked by Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC. It further accused Shell management of outsourcing its Fire and Safety Department to punish most of the NUPENG officials who were in the Caretaker Committee, adding that despite protests against the decision, Shell management went ahead to order the transfer of the affected officials to other departments, prior to terminating their appointments (Udo, 2012). The survivors of layoffs have perceived their managements and superiors as perpetuating organizational injustice. The more the employees perceived organizational injustice and unfairness as arising from their management's use of uncooperative and negative conflict management in the work place, the more they reciprocated by exhibiting more negative attitudes to work and the organization such as reduced organizational commitment, trust, loyalty and sabotage and reduced employee performance. All these have subsequently led to further conflicts between the management and the workers (Adebayo, 2006). This indicates a very high interest from firms, workers and likewise the government in the oil industry. With this level of interest people who work in these organizations come from different background and exhibit differences in values, goals and preferences. This situation no doubt suggest that collaboration which is described as a process of solving problems within a system mutually (Sternberg and Dobson, 1987) is a requisite tool for managerial practices in an industry like the oil production industry in Nigeria. This is so because at the workplace disagreement could lead to work stoppages and this is tantamount to efficiency or effectiveness both on the part of the employee and the organization.

Also, organizations sometimes ferment this disagreement because of issues like neglecting the value and importance of their employees, not considering their welfare and giving inadequate compensation which are part of their bargain, for these workers agitate, demand and ask for their right while management do not freely satisfy employee rights and demands, which brought about conflict in the organization and hindered effective and efficient employees performance in the organization. On the other hand every organization is established to achieve effectiveness and efficiency, and for these to be achieved they need to appreciate peace and harmony at all level, and collaboration has been seen as one of the fundamental approach to achieve it (Sternberg and Dobson, 1987). The most important resources in an organization are workers but are also the most difficult resources to manage due to differences in personality, values, goals, hopes, aspirations, styles and intentions (Dzurgba, 2006). The main aim of this study therefore, is to examine the influence of collaboration on employee performance in oil production companies in Nigeria using survey of the oil producing firms in Port Harcourt. Other specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between collaboration and improved productivity of employee in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt.
- ii. Examine the relationship between collaboration and excellent service delivery of employee in the oil producing companies in Port Harcourt.

The following research questions are presented with regards to the objectives of the study:

- i. What is the relationship between collaboration and improved productivity of employees in the oil producing companies in Port Harcourt?
- ii. What is the relationship between collaboration and excellent service delivery of employees in the oil producing companies in Port Harcourt?

Literature Review

The Concept of Collaboration

This is, I win you win strategy where you cooperate with the other party to find a resolution with mutually satisfying outcome, collaboration aims at finding same solution that can satisfy both parties. It is based on a willingness to accept a valid interest of the other party whilst protecting one's own interest. Collaborating aims to find a solution to the conflict through cooperating with other parties involved. Hence, communication is an important part of this strategy. In this mechanism, effort is exerted in digging into the issue to identify the needs of the individuals concerned without removing their respective interests from the picture. Collaborating individuals aim to come up with a successful resolution creatively, without compromising their own satisfactions Walker *et al* (1974).

Collaboration plays a major role within conflict resolution and requires great courage and much consideration. Collaborating with the other party involves listening to their side, discussing areas of agreement and goals, and ensuring that all parties understand each other. Collaboration requires thinking creatively to resolve the problem without concessions. Collaborators are usually admired and well-respected. Collaboration or Joint or mutual problem solving is a process of collaborating with others to resolve difficulties that are being experienced. The collaboration rule works when people are willing to collaborate, when there is enough time for discussion, when the issue lends itself to collaboration, where resources are limited and negotiation would be better, and when conflict and trust levels are not too high. The concern is to satisfy both sides. It is highly assertive and highly cooperative, the goal is to find a win/win solution.

The collaborating style can be used when integrating solutions, learning, merging

perspectives, gaining commitment, and improving relationship. Using this style can support open discussion of issue, task proficiency, and equal distribution of work amongst the team members, better brainstorming and development of creative problem solving. This style is appropriate to use frequently in team environment. Collaborating skill includes the ability to use active or effective listening, confront situation in a non-threatening way, analyze input and identify underlying concern. Walker *et al* (1974) in support of all these conflict resolution procedures frame up their five approaches to conflict residuum as: Autocratic decision-making, arbitration, moot, mediation and bargaining.

On reducing the line-staff conflicts in organizations, Seholeh and other management writers have suggested ways in which the dysfunctional aspects of conflict can be reduced. They sum them up as: spelling out responsibilities clearly, integrated activities, educate line to use staff properly; and then hold staff accountable for results, (Stoner and Wankel, 1988). Disagreement is addressed openly and alternatives are discussed to arrive at the best solution. This method therefore, involves high cooperation and low confrontation. Collaboration is applicable when both parties desire to solve the problem and are willing to work together towards mutually acceptable solution. Collaboration could be considered as the best method of handling conflict, as it strives to- satisfy the needs of both parties. It is interactive and has high concern for personal goals as well as relationship. According to literature in conflicts resolution, collaboration or cooperative conflict style is recommended above all others (Sternberg and Dobson, 1987).

The Concept of Employees Performance

Performance is linked with quantity of output, quality of output, timeliness of output, presence/ attendance on the job, efficiency of the work completed [and] effectiveness of work completed” (Mathis & Jackson 2009). Employee Performance is the successful completion of tasks by a selected individual or individuals, as set and measured by a supervisor or organization, to pre-defined acceptable standards while efficiently and effectively utilizing available resource within a changing environment. Aguinis (2009) described that “the definition of performance does not include the results of an employee’s behavior, but only the behaviors themselves. Performance is about behavior or what employees do, not about what employees produce or the outcomes of their work”. Perceived employee performance represents the general belief of the employee about his behavior and contributions in the success of organization. Employee performance may be taken in the perspective of three factors which makes possible to perform better than others, determinants of performance may be such as “declarative knowledge”, “procedural knowledge” and “motivation” (McCloy et al., 1994). HR practices have positive impact on performance of individuals.

Carlson et al. (2006) proposed five human resource management practices that affect performance which are setting competitive compensation level, training and development, performance appraisal, recruitment package, and maintaining morale. Tessema and Soeters (2006) have carried out study on eight HR practices including recruitment and selection practices, placement practices, training, compensation, employee performance evaluation, promotion, grievance procedure and pension or social security in relation with the perceived performance of employees. Therefore, it is concluded that these HR practices have positive and significant associations with the perceived performance of employees.

A good employee’s performance is necessary for the organization since an organizations success is hinged upon the employee’s creativity, innovation and commitment. Every organization has been established with certain objectives to achieve. These objectives can be

achieved by utilizing the resources like men, machines, materials and money. All these resources are important but out of these the manpower is the most important. It plays an important role in performing tasks for accomplishing the goals. The question arises that how these resources are utilized by manpower. Further, the business environment is changing drastically. The environmental factors are uncontrollable. These are beyond control of management of the firms. One has to adjust with the external factors to do the business in the market. Every environmental factor like social, cultural, legal, political, economic, technology and competition gets changed very fast. For effective working, the knowledge of these factors are used otherwise the plan will misfire. In present situation it is difficult to predict about anything. It is uncertain to say what will happen in the future. Again the need for highly skilled and dedicated manpower is felt, who can give the best output. Nowadays the markets are also very competitive and there is cut throat competition. For every organization it is difficult to start, survive, stabilize and excel in the business. The firm that gets the advantage over other competitors through their talented and dedicated manpower can take the lead in the market. The contribution of employees on job is the most important factor for development and excellence in business. The performance of employees on different jobs in close coordination is needed for success of the unit.

Measures of Employee Performance

Excellent Service Delivery

Quality and consumer satisfaction have been a crucial role for success and survival in today's competitive market. The core task of an organisation is to retain their customers which can be done by delivering excellent service quality. There are many definitions for the term Quality. Delivering excellent service quality involves customer care techniques. Excellence in service delivery includes personalised service, good return policies, complaints desk and hotlines, being able to communicate properly when calling for service. Delivering excellent service is all about providing the best quality service to external and internal clients, building genuine and open long-term relationship in order to drive up service standards and increase profit. (Shine, 2016).

Zeithaml and Bitner, (2000), defined quality as superiority or excellence. The issue on how service delivery should be measured has been discussed by Teas, 1993, Brady and Cronin, 2001 but also there is no agreement about how to access the service quality (Cornin and Taylor, 1992). The concept of service delivery is most debated subject in service literature due to lack of consensus (Gupta & Chen, 1995). To better understand excellent service delivery, we need to look at the three main characteristics of services: Invisible, Consistent and Diverse. Because services are none physical it is hard to determine, record, calculate or to test the service prior the sale in order to protect the quality on its delivery. (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). In most services, quality occurs during service delivery, usually when customer and service employee interacts (Lehtinen & Lehtinen 1982).

Research reveals that delivering high service quality produces measurable benefits in profit, cost savings, and market share. Therefore, an understanding of the nature of excellent service delivery and how it is achieved in organisations has become a priority for research (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). For that companies need to develop an environment inside the organisation that is more prone towards meeting excellent service delivery standards according to customer requirements. Success could be achieved only if the internal environment is strong enough to meet the challenges of external requirement. That is an organisation free of conflict.

Increased Productivity

Productivity is the efficiency of a company or economy in transforming resources into goods thereby generating more from less. Increased productivity is the ability to maximize less input to generate or achieve greater output (Erwin, 1982). Increased productivity increases the power of an economy through driving economic growth and satisfying human needs with the same resources. The benefits of increased productivity are extremely far reaching, benefiting participants within the system alongside the system itself (Benoit & Suzanne, 2011). Increasing productivity is a rare win-win, Improving the standard of living from governmental, commercial and consumer perspective (Duffy, 2009). Increased productivity can lead to the following: Profitability, Business growth, Meeting consumer demands and Market competitiveness. The beneficiaries of productivity are businesses, consumers and workers and the government. The success of an organization depends on how productive the organization is.

Collaboration and Employees Performance:

Though it requires a longer time, it is highly assertive and cooperative with low confrontation. This style supports open discussion, task proficiency, and equal distribution of work among employees, better brainstorming and development of creative problem solving. Collaboration allows the employees room to participate in conflict resolution thereby giving them a sense of belonging and boosting their moral which in turn increases their job performance level.

The win-win outcome occurs as a result of the use of the collaboration approach when all the conflicting parties meet and discuss the subject of the dispute explicitly and every party tries to care about the purpose of the other parties (Newstorm, 2007). A win-win negotiation outcome can help improve team performance by reducing tension, antagonism and distraction of members of a team Jehn & Mannix, (2001).

In light of the foregoing, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between collaboration and excellent service delivery productivity in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt
- H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between collaboration and improved productivity in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt.

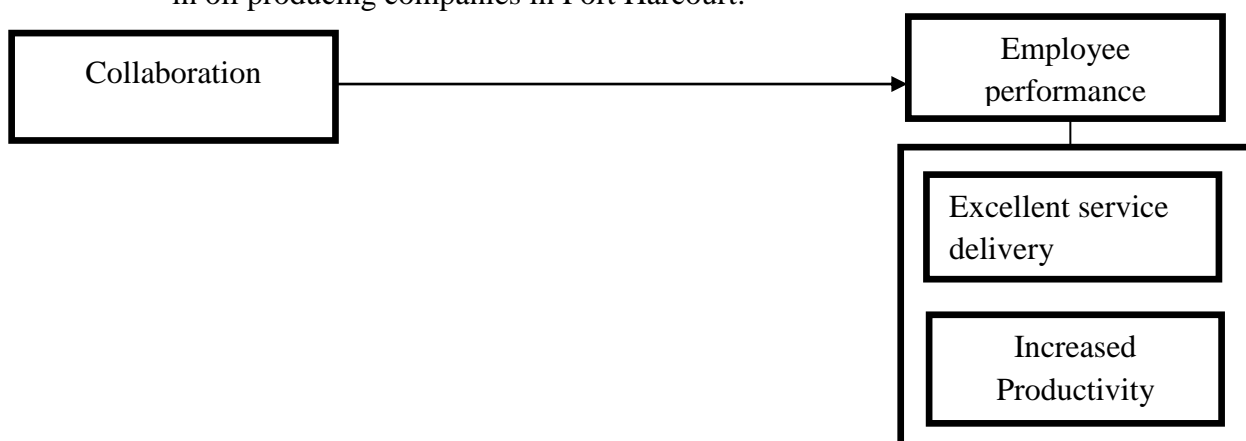


Fig. 1: Operational framework for the hypothesized relationship between collaboration conflict management strategy management and employee performance

Source: Author's Desk Research, 2017

Methodology

A cross sectional survey design was adopted in this study where major decisions of the study were based on. Primary data were drawn from five (5) oil producing companies operational in Port Harcourt and all duly registered with the Department of Petroleum (DPR), namely: Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC), Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC), Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Chevron and ExxonMobil. Primary data were collated using structured questionnaire administered to five (5) oil producing companies operational in Port Harcourt. The study population was 345 from a sample size of 181 was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. Also, the research instrument was designed with 5 point Likert scale method in measurement of collaboration and employee performance which range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The internal reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70 bench mark set by Nunnally (1978). Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment correlation was used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. Also, the research instrument was designed with 5 point Likert scale method in measurement of collaboration and employee performance which range from strongly agree to strongly disagree while the 5 oil producing companies were represented with numbers.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

The summary of data on collaboration and employee performance of oil producing companies in Port Harcourt, Nigeria are discussed and presented in tables below:

Table 1.1 Summarized Result of Univariate Analysis of Collaboration

Item	N Statistics	Minimum Statistics	Maximum Statistics	Mean Statistics	Standard Diviation
Collaboration	280	1.00	5.00	3.45	1.17

Source: SPSS Output based on 2017 field survey data (2017)

The result in the table above revealed that there are 280 cases with a 100% response rate in three (3) items of the collaboration variable. With an average mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 1.17 the respondents have high agreement of the questions raised concerning collaboration which presented collaboration has the variable that enhances employee commitment.

Table 2 Summarized Result of Univariate Analysis of Employee Performance

Item	N Statistics	Minimum Statistics	Maximum Statistics	Mean Statistics	Standard Deviation
Improved Services	280	1.00	5.00	3.48	1.32
Excellent Service Delivery	280	1.00	5.00	3.75	1.26

The results in table above revealed that there are 280 cases with a 100% response rate derived from all questions presented about the variables. The mean and standard coefficient of each of the variables revealed high agreement for improved service and excellent service delivery, to the presence and experience of variables in their organization. This is evidenced from a mean of $(x) = 3.48$ and 3.75 respectively while the standard deviation of $(s) = 1.32$ and 1.26 , implying substantial acceptance of the statements posed by the indicators of the variables.

Test of hypothesis

The secondary data analysis was carried out using the Pearson Product Moment correlation tool at a 95% confidence interval. Specifically, the tests cover hypotheses Ho₁ to Ho₃ which were bivariate and all stated in the null form. We have relied on the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to undertake the analysis. The 0.05 significance level is adopted as criterion for the probability of either accepting the null hypotheses at (p>0.05) or rejecting the null hypotheses at (p<0.05).

Table 3: Bivariate hypotheses of association between collaboration and employee performance variables (Improved Service and Excellent Service Delivery)

			Collaboration	Improved Service	Excellent Service Delivery
Pearson	Collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.387**	.457**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	280	280	280
	Improved Service	Correlation Coefficient	.387**	1.000	.457**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	280	280	280
	Excellent Service Delivery	Correlation Coefficient	.457**	.387**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	280	280	280

The correlation analyses stipulated in Table 3, showed that collaboration has a significant and positive relationship with employee performance ($r = .387$, $p = .000$; $r = .457$, $p = .000$). Particularly, with a correlation (r) value of .387 and .457 the relationship between collaboration and improved service and excellent service delivery showed moderate correlation. The study also revealed that the relationship between collaboration and improved service and excellent service delivery is significant at p-values of $p < .000$ respectively for all the variables and this is not up to .01. This made the hypothesis (Ho₁ and Ho₂) to be rejected.

Discussion of findings

The results from this study confirm that collaboration have a significant positive relationship with employee performance in oil producing companies in Port Harcourt. The reviews of studies from several scholars on the role of collaboration in an organization described it as a mutual problem solving process at workplace. This is likewise corroborated by a few studies have shown positive firm level results, (Stoner & Wankel, 1988). They found out that collaboration have a positive relationship with the level of performance of an employee. Walker et al (1974) study on the ways of resolving conflict at workplace, collaboration had a stronger influence on employee's commitment and enhancement at work place. Collaboration could be considered as the best method of handling conflict, as it strives to- satisfy the needs of both parties. It is interactive and has high concern for personal goals as well as relationship. According to literature in conflicts resolution, collaboration or cooperative conflict style is recommended above all others (Sternberg and Dobson, 1987).

This effort in promoting collaboration amongst employees is gaining recognition because of the important role employee's play in any organization. Employees have become strategic in

the achievement of the organizational objectives and also have been characterized as the most valued assets organizations possess. Therefore, through collaboration management could manage employee's diversity in a way that would enhance their level of performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Collaboration is observed to significantly enhance employee performance and impact on its measures such as improved productivity and excellent service delivery. Therefore, it is important to note that employees are an organization's most important asset and as such they need to be managed in a manner that will ensure that they achieve their full potential. Therefore, management in oil producing companies need to continuously encourage collaborative attitude amongst employees so that they can effectively and efficiently translate the friendly atmosphere at workplace into performance. Management team where possible should also encourage information sharing of ideas and knowledge between managerial and non-managerial employees as this enhances trust and commitment to the organization.

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