

## Best Practices for Human Resource Leaders Struggling to Manage the “Japa Syndrome” in Nigerian Organisations

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In recent times, HR professionals have tried to identify the best employee strategy. This is because of the mass resignation witnessed globally, or the ‘Japa’ Syndrome, notably in Nigeria which has led to high staff attrition rate especially among tech talent to overseas locations. As a result, HR professionals have been inundated with constant hiring, re-hiring and identifying best practices to retain talent to avoid operational gaps and achieve the bottom-line.*

*This article aims to provide an understanding of the causes of Japa syndrome, strategies for solving it and how organizations can help combat the issue. It aims to provide insights for organizations to help them combat the negative impact of losing their workforce to this unfortunate phenomenon.*

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**Keywords:** *Best practices, Human Resource leaders, Japa Syndrome, Nigerian Organisations*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The word ‘Japa’ has become a household name, especially among Nigerians home and abroad. Japa is a slang derived from the Yoruba language (spoken in south-west Nigeria), which simply means ‘to run swiftly out of difficult situation. Interestingly, this word is now widely adopted when referring to one migrating from Nigeria to another part of the world.

The problem of worker migration is not unique to Nigeria, as many countries around the world face similar challenges. However, the scale of the problem in Nigeria is particularly significant due to the country’s large population, high unemployment rate and lack of economic opportunities. According to the international organization for migration (UN Migration), the current volatile and unpredictable Nigerian economy are the major factors influencing the decisions of many Nigerians to flee the country. It is worthy of note that migration is not an evil in itself and it is a part of life as people would naturally want to move to a different country despite having the best environment. However, it becomes worrisome for HR leaders when the numbers are increasingly daily and talents are depleting within the certain sections of the organization and the economy at large.

According to a recent new research survey, 45% of Nigeria’s adult population have relocated to another country within five years. Within the pool of Nigerian Professionals, emigration has led to the loss of various worthy talents. A Recent survey by Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey revealed that seven out of 10 Nigerians are willing to relocate to other countries for various

reasons with a good number of them recording success. Now, the current net Nigeria migration rate is – 0.273 per population, which indicates that more people are emigrating from the country. A greater number of these migrants are skilled workers who have left their jobs to seek better opportunities abroad, particularly in developed countries such as the United States, Canada and Europe. These workers often possess specialized skills and knowledge that are difficult to replace which can negatively impact the productivity resulting into brain drain.

In the light of these, the question that lies on our lips is what impact does Japa have on Nigerian talents in organizations and what best practices can be adopted by HR leaders struggling to manage the Japa Syndrome. The impact of worker migration on Nigerian businesses can be significant, affecting various aspects of their operations in organizations. Some of them include:

**Brain Drain:** Brain drain occurs when educated professional workers leave an organization in order to move elsewhere where they can benefit from better pay, working conditions, life style and sometimes work-life balance. According to Letam (2020), Brain drain creates a gap in workforce management as the organization may loss it's valuable, most talented and educated citizens to other countries and organizations. This can be detrimental to the long-term development and growth of the organization and Nigerian economy.

**Difficulty in retaining employees:** The migration of workers from Nigeria to other countries can create a culture of instability among employees who may feel that they too can migrate in search of better opportunities. This can lead to difficulty in retaining employees and maintaining a stable workforce. Armstrong (2012) maintained that employee turnover can be disruptive and costly to the organization.

**Loss of skilled Labour:** The loss of skilled and experienced workers to Japa can be a major concern for organizations and businesses. These workers often possess specialized skills and knowledge that are difficult to replace, which can negatively impact on the productivity in the organizations.

**Difficulty in Recruiting and Training new workers:** Replacing skilled and experienced workers can be a difficult and time-consuming task. Organisations may struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacant positions, and the cost and time required to recruit and train new workers can be significant.

While the issue of worker migration is a complex and multifaceted problem involving the government, organizations and individuals; HR professionals in recent times, have tried to identify the best employee retention strategy that organizations can adopt. Research has shown that HR leaders have been besieged with constant hiring, rehiring and identifying best practices to retain talent to avoid operational gaps.

Some of the strategies HR leaders can adopt to keep people in the organization include:

**Creating a reward and recognition scheme:** This is a strategy to retain talent so that they can rethink the terms. Vos & Meganck (2009) revealed that rewards and recognition influence motivational aspects leading to employee participation, joy of working for the organization and ability to stay in the organization.

**Giving employees a voice:** Another strategy for keeping people in the organisation is giving employees a voice. As defined by Boxall and Purcell (2003) Employee voice is the term

increasingly used to cover a whole variety of processes and structures which enable and sometimes empower employees, directly and indirectly to contribute to decision making in the firm. Every employee wants to feel important and be heard. HR leaders can create a culture of psychological culture and safety for the employees.

**Adopting a humancentric approach to managing talents:** Human –centred leaders put their employees first and ensure they create an enabling culture for employees to thrive. According to Ogu (2003) when employees perceive that their welfare and well-being are being prioritized, they develop an attitude to remain in the organization these could help organization achieve its set goals and objectives. Employees should have more flexible working hours. Also, organizations should make sure that employees are compensated rightly; they should include additional benefits apart from the normal compensation package structure such that it is not just the employees that gets the benefits. For instance, the benefits could be extended to the family members of the employees.

**Invest in Training and Development Programs:** HR leader can invest in training and development programs to build a skilled and experienced workforce. This can include programs to provide education and training to current employees as well as programs to attract and retain new workers. Reynolds (2004) pointed out that engaging in training and development programs will help employees understand self-worth and build their confidence for the job. Employees will appreciate their environment and stay where they are valued because they feel wanted and appreciated by their employer.

**Job shadowing:** it is a type of on-the-job training that allows an interested employee to follow other highly skilled employees closely as they perform their day-to-day activities. This helps the shadowing employees learn more about these different roles. It also allows them to explore various opportunities in the organization. As a result, they become well-grounded and highly skilled talent. By engaging in job shadowing program, HR leaders can retain employees, give them opportunities to explore multiple career options and increase their productivity.

**Employee Bond Agreement -:** Employee bond agreement is a legally enforceable agreement between an employee and his or her employer that if the employee leaves the company before the agreed upon term, the employee will have to pay a certain amount to the organisation. Requesting that employees sign bond contracts has become a well-known strategy for reducing employee turnover. Organisations that invest in capacity development via training to grow employee expertise and improve on-the-job performances may expect some return on their investments. Consequently, they may introduce an employee bond which when signed stops employees from leaving the organization before a stipulated time post-training/certification. Any employee who decides to leave before the expiration of the bond would have to meet certain conditions most of which are monetary.

**Investment in Technology to increase efficiency and automation:** Organisations can also invest in technology to increase efficiency and automation. Organizations can offer a wide range of services such as automation, talent management platforms, cloud migration, data analytics, AI-based solutions to create a more efficient and productive work environment and reduce their dependence on human labour and increase their competitiveness in the global market.

**Conduct Stay Interviews:** A stay interview is an interview that an organization conducts with its current employees. It is when an employer sits down with an employee to gather information about the things employee values about their job and to discover what the worker

believes can be improved. Stay interview is a critical retention strategy given the scarcity of skills in recent times. Stay interviews are conducted to help employers understand why employees stay and what might cause them to leave. They are conducted to promote a more intimate relationship between employers and employees. . According to the society of human resource management (SHRM) stay interviews help increase employees retention rates.

**Partnership and collaborations with other organizations:** organizations can also form partnerships and collaborations with other organizations to share resources and expertise. This can include sharing recruiting and training resources, as well as collaborating on research and development projects to create new products and services.

**Encourage Remote working:** Encouraging remote working can also be a solution to mitigate the impact of Japa syndrome on organizations. With the advancement of technology, organizations can have their employees work remotely, even when they are in other countries. For instance, organizations can offer remote tools like google workspace to help organisations communicate seamlessly with their employees no matter the location.

### **Conclusion.**

The challenge of worker migration (Japa syndrome) is a persistent problem for Nigerian organizations as it results in the loss of skilled and experienced workers and creates difficulties in recruiting and training new employees. This can negatively impact the productivity of organizations. However, outlined in this article; there are several solutions that organizations can implement to mitigate the effect of worker migration. Organizations can create a reward scheme, adopt a humancentric approach to managing talents, provide a wide range of services such as cloud migration, data analytic and AI-based solutions to create a more productive work environment which can help reduce dependence on human labour.

In summary, we can say that worker migration is a significant challenge for most organizations in Nigeria but with the implementation of these appropriate solutions it is possible to mitigate the effects and contribute to the development of the Nigerian economy. It is also hoped that HR Practitioners in Nigeria will try as much as possible to put the suggestions offered into trials which are believed to be the solution to the identified problems.

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