

EFFECT OF TELECOMMUTING ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES IN ABUJA

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Abstract

This study is on the effect of telecommuting on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. The central objectives of this study are to determine the impact of internet technology on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja, to explore the effect of remote working on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Abuja and finally to examine the effect of social distance on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. The paper adopted a singular source of data collection. The population of the study comprise of Airtel, Globacom and MTN network providers in the metropolitan city of Abuja. The data was analyzed using the inferential statistics of Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was used to establish the relationship between the Independent and dependent variable. Findings revealed that social distancing, remote working and internet technology had a significant positive influence on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja.

Keywords: *Telecommuting, employee performance, telecommunication, social distance, remote working.*

INTRODUCTION

According to (Anekwe, 2019) working arrangements are fast becoming rising important issues to be taken seriously in human resource management. An employee in any organization needs to balance between personal life and work responsibilities if the employee is expected to give their best to the organization.

Flexible work arrangement (FWA) is useful if the overall organizational goal is to be achieved and if the organization intend to expand and seem more human centric. Decentralized and flexible work arrangements have been proclaimed by different researchers as a way for companies to reduce expenses, cope with variations in demand, and be more attractive for employees (Aya & El- Bedawy, 2015).

Telework is defined as the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises (ILO , 2020).

Employees prefer flexibility in working time and location in order to suit their preferred, more individualized life-styles and to be able to better combine paid work with other life activities flexible work arrangement minimizes the negative effects of work-life imbalance and hence tap on the associated benefits which include but not limited to increased productivity, increased employee morale, increased customer service, increased employee commitment, and reduced absenteeism (Akande, 2015).

Telecommuting is becoming very common in many countries in recent years, with many employers offering some form of flexible working to their employees and significant numbers of employees taking advantage of these opportunities (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2015).

(Lodovici, et al., 2021) opined that Flexible working arrangements are inexpensive for employers and exciting for employees, so may foster positive employee outcomes that could enhance performance.

This study, intends to analyse the association between having a flexible working arrangement and its impact on the employee's actual performance. Globally, every human being struggles to survive in the wake of competing challenges due to innumerable wants but limited resources. As organizations struggle to meet stakeholders demand of capital appreciation, increasing market share, survival in the industry and successful retention of valuable workers among others,

workers too are in a stiff competition to utilize their time among competing needs such as attending to family affairs, social and political events as well as other personal activities which sometimes conflict with organizational goals.

Employees in the telecommunication sectors in Nigeria are more involved in their jobs and longer working hours more than 48 hours therefore making it difficult for employees to keep a balance between job, family and other personal life.

The central objectives of this study are to determine the impact of internet technology on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja, to explore the effect of remote working on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Abuja and finally to examine the effect of social distance on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. This study also examined the research question how does internet technology impact employee performance and to what extent does remote working affect employee performance? Finally, to what extent does social distance affect employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja? The deduced null hypothesis for this research includes: **H₀₁**: Internet technology has no significant impact on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. **H₀₂**: Remote working has no effect on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Abuja. **H₀₃**: Social distance does not affect employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja.

Employee productivity is directly considered in the aspect of project and work performance in terms of employee's time management, commitment, execution, quality of work, customer satisfaction and retention. In order to be precise and more specific with the research coverage, the research would focus on three selected telecommunication companies in Abuja Nigeria with particular emphasis on; MTN, Globacom and Airtel network providers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Okemwa, 2016) opined that the benefits of telecommuting, both actual and perceived range from increased employee productivity, increased quality contact with customers, better work-life balance for employees, reductions in corporate real estate expenses, and reductions in traffic congestion and air pollution.

In addition, the ability to telecommute is also considered an attraction to job candidates. In the meantime, companies implementing telecommuting programs may also face significant challenges. (Anekwe, 2019)

This paper is especially intended for those organizations that have either an existing telecommuting program or are planning to launch such a program. Based on a mixture of earlier research and published industry best practices, the paper discusses a number of critical success factors that an organization must consider when deploying a telecommuting program.

It has been recognized as the management of frequently widely dispersed groups and individuals with rarely, if ever, meeting them face to face (Okolie and Ojomo, 2015). It is also the ability to organize and coordinate with effect a group whose members are not in the same location or time zone and may not even work for the firm (E-Castro, 2020). It requires deeper understanding of people, process and technology and recognition that trust is a more limiting factor compared with face to face interactions (Ansong and Boateng, 2017).

(Eleftherios, 2017) argued that Virtual management is managing work across boundaries of time and space by utilizing modern computer-driven technologies. (Koren and Peto, 2021) states that virtual management is the coordination of groups of distributed people working together to achieve a common goal and solve a shared problem through the use of computer-mediated communication technologies, linking them across time, space, and cultural barriers. Commitment, investments, and training are essential, but they have to be accompanied by measures that reduce uncertainty of virtual contacts and activities (Bahaj and Reis, 2020).

Dimensions of Telecommuting

Remote Working

Employees who work remotely on a full-time basis perform their entire assign task in other locations than their employers' office with little to no face-to-face interaction with managers and colleagues (Ansong & Boateng, 2017). Employees who telecommute part-time perform some of their tasks off-site and interact with managers and colleagues on a rare but scheduled basis. The frequency at which telecommuting is supported differs from one organization to another (Ali Baig, Hussain, & Hussain, 2020).

(Roghanizad & Bohns, 2017) stated that while information is being exchanged remotely in these examples, the focus in the present context is on remoteness from supervision. Telecommuting, of course, is both telework and remote work.

Remote work is work done by an individual while at a different location than the person(s) directly supervising and/or paying for it. It is important to note that remote working focuses on the individual worker, not on the firm (Godart, Görg, and Hanley, 2016).

Social Distance

According to (Jonathan & Kincaids, 2015) While virtual working has been widely appraised as being an effective organizational management system, the effect of employee's physical absence in the organization and how it affects their performance is still unknown.

Social distancing is a public health practice that aims to prevent sick people from coming in close contact with healthy people in order to reduce opportunities for disease transmission (Saif, 2020). Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness by reducing groups of people and crowded spaces (Milne & Xie, 2020).

Staying at least six feet away from other people reduces your chance of catching COVID-19. It can include largescale measures like cancelling group events or closing public spaces, as well as individual decisions such as avoiding crowds (Qun Li, 2020). According to (Aslam, 2020) With the coming of COVID-19, the goal of social distancing is to slow down the outbreak in (Messenger, 2017) opined that employee deployed or assigned specific responsibilities can perform them without physically being in the office and deliver accurate results, they believe that where an employee is located at the time-of-service delivery may not significantly affect their expected result as long as they are comfortable and safe and are given clear directive of what is expected of them.

Internet Technology

Technology is a means for humans to transform resources into outputs. An advance in technology is often identified as the key factors influencing changes in the nature of work. Some would argue "that current changes in the nature of work driven by the multiple uses of digital technology (digitization) are symptomatic of a third industrial revolution (Pordelan, Hosseinian, Heydari, Khalijian, & Khorrami5, 2021).

(Chirico, et al., 2021) enunciated that the technologies contributing to this transformation include microelectronics, robotics, computer integrated manufacturing, artificial intelligence, electronic data exchange, micro-computers, network computing, and digital telecommunications (Boudinet, 2019). believes that the unprecedented growth in the use of Internet telecommunication applications (e-mail, voice-mail, teleconferencing, wireless voice and data, remote access) has impacted how work is done and business is conducted. (Brynjolfsson, Horton, Ozimek, Rock, Sharma, & TuYe, 2020) asserts that changes in technology generally creates new occupations and reduces or eliminates some existing occupations they also increase the skills required in some jobs and decrease the skills required in others.

Telecommuting is on the rise and new technologies, global events, and the availability of coworking spaces have accelerated the growth in remote working. Companies can either to adapt to a new model of working that is massively popular with employees and beneficial to bottom-lines or remain with the traditional working arrangements (Boudinet, 2019).

Employee Performance

Performance is measured both to demonstrate program success and to make improvements. As telework becomes institutionalized, the difference between teleworkers and conventional workers begins to disappear (Parry & Battista, 2019).

According to (Mungania, 2017) Major key competencies identified as critical for being a high-performance virtual worker were consistent across research literature as including being self-motivated, self-efficacy, self-disciplined, having effective communication and time management skills, being technologically competent and results-oriented (Campbell, McHenry, & Wise, 1990) Assert that Some employers do not allow an employee to work remotely upon hiring and may require the employee to work with team members to demonstrate strong performance abilities.

To fully comprehend the impact of telecommuting on employee job performance. Attention needs to be given to the importance of telecommuting in the present corporate world, unlike 20 years ago where job seekers accepted whatever working conditions they were offered, nowadays, employees are demanding more flexibility (Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, & Casuneanu, 2020)

The four main theories used in this research paper are; motivation Theory, Performance and Satisfaction Theory, Computer Mediated Communication Theory and Social Exchange Theory. This study is based on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory, because the theory functions on the premise that computer and the internet technology when utilised effectively can act as a medium for human communication and work productivity it can also have a positive effect such as a swiftness to receive and distribute information. The Computer Mediated Communication Theory is adopted for this study for two reasons;

- i. The theory is appropriate in the context of a growing virtual workforce,
- ii. The theory addresses the communication relationship between managers and employees.

The theory emphasizes that the use of computers for communication and work activities can have a positive effect on productivity and the fact that for employees to actualise their work responsibilities and meet their performance goal, such an employee may most likely have an over reliance on the CMC which can have a negative effect on their social interactions as well. This theory is a perfect fit for this study as telecommuting is highly dependent on internet and computer technology for communication.

(Beckmann, 2016) carried out an empirical review on the correlation between telecommuting and its effect on employee performance. The purpose of the study was to examine the existence of a significant correlation between employee performance (the dependent variable) and telecommuting (the independent variable). The population of the study was virtual workers from Mtn, Globacom and Airtel different telecommunication companies that are Abuja.

(Lodovici, et al., 2021) carried out a study on “The Impact of Teleworking and Digital work on Workers and Society”. They analysed recent trends in the use of telework and internet technology-based work, investigating its impacts on workers, and society, and the challenges for policy-making, whilst identifying possible policy actions to be taken at EU level. The study recognized that there was a tremendous increase in full-time home-based telecommuting during and after the pandemic which circumscribed a much wider range of sectors and occupations than in the pre-pandemic period.

Even though working arrangements and distress is being managed gradually post pandemic, Telecommuting arrangements is still predominantly used by white-collar, highly-educated

workers with strong digital skills. With the return to post-COVID 'normality', the extensive use of teleworking is expected to continue, although not on a full-time basis. Hybrid forms are more likely to prevail, combining remote and office working.

(Austin Eghole, Iheriohanma, & Nwokorie, 2020) executed an empirical study on “Flexible Working Arrangements and Organizational Performance: An Overview” the study investigated that Employees prefer flexibility in their work time and location in order to suit their preferred, more individualized life-styles and to be able to better combine paid work with other life activities. They agreed that flexible work arrangement minimizes the negative effects of work-life imbalance and hence tap on the associated benefits which include but not limited to increased productivity, increased employee morale, increased customer service satisfaction, increased employee commitment, and reduced absenteeism. It is no doubt that flexible working has become increasingly common in many countries in recent years and many employers are offering some form of flexible working to their employees and a significant number of employees are taking advantage of these opportunity.

Flexible working has become increasingly common in many countries in recent years, with many employers offering some form of flexible working to their employees and significant numbers of employees are taking advantage of these opportunities (Eleftherios, 2017).

According to (Mitchell, 2015) flexible working arrangements (FWA) are among the many Work-Life Balance (WLB) initiatives that are becoming part of the foremost ideas in many organizations as they seek to encourage their employees to reconcile their work life and family responsibilities. (Titan, Doepke, Ramsey, and Tertilt, 2020) are of the view that flexible work arrangements enable employees to manage their work and family responsibilities harmoniously.

Literature Gap

In the meantime, companies implementing telecommuting programs may also face significant challenges. The most frequently cited problems include: difficulties in supervising and managing remote workers, feelings of isolation on the part of the employees, collaboration inefficiencies due to a lack of proximity among workers, and increased security risks. In view of the empirical studies, it can be deduced that the impact of telecommuting in Telecommunication companies in Abuja is a study that has never been researched in Nigeria. Although there are so many

literatures written about telecommuting in certain sectors in Nigeria none really talks about the telecommunication sector.

METHODOLOGY

This section will focus on the methodology selected for the study, the research for gathering the required information for the study and also states the sources of such information. The Cross-sectional research design is flexible when applied on a wide range of issues. The population of the study comprise of Airtel, Globacom and MTN network providers in the metropolitan city of Abuja. The targeted total population of the study for the selected telecommunication companies are 208 from 4 branches of MTN service centres, 186 from Globacom head office in Wuse and 219 from 8 branches of Airtel Service centres in the metropolitan area of Abuja. This brings the total population of the study to 613 from a cumulative of 16 branches of telecommunication companies from the metropolitan area of Abuja.

A simple random sampling technique was used in administering the questionnaire to employees of the selected telecommunication companies and the reason is to afford every member of the sample an equal opportunity of being selected and also to reduce the bias to the barest minimum. This implies that the researcher selected the respondent based on chances from all the staff of the head offices of the selected companies.

The actual population of the study is six Hundred and thirteen (613). Based on this population, the sample size will be determined at 95% level of confidence and 5% error tolerance using the Yamane (1967)'s sample size determination formula. The formula is presented as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

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Where

N = the population size

e = is the margin error (assume 5%)

1 = constant

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{613}{1 + 613(0.0025)}$$

$$n = 613 \times 0.0025 = 1.5$$

$$n = 1 + 1.5 = 2.5$$

$$n = 613 / 2.5$$

$$n = 245$$

A total of 245 questionnaires was an adequate representative of the population. Given the fact that some questionnaires may not be returned, Singer-Velush, et al (2020) reasoned that 20% should be added to the determined sample size. Therefore, in adding 20% (49) to 245, the research will have approximately 295 questionnaires distributed.

The Primary method of data collection was adopted, with the usage of well-structured questionnaire. The 5-point Likert scale measures was be used to determine the respondent's choice to the question. This research work adopted Cronbach's Alpha (α) test for reliability. Furthermore, inferential statistics of Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was used to establish the relationship between the Independent and dependent variable. All analyses will be done with the aid of computer software named IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.

Model Specification

The Ordinary Least Square Regression (OLS) technique was used to conduct this analysis. To evaluate the effect of the variables used in the study. The OLS Regression models for this study are therefore stated as follows;

Equations for the Ordinary Least Squares regression:

$$Y = \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 + \beta_4 + \beta_5 + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Employee Performance} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{Telecommuting} + \beta_3 \text{Internet Technology} + \beta_4 \text{Remote Working} + \beta_5 \text{Social Distance} + \varepsilon$$

The OLS method corresponds to minimizing the sum of square differences between the observed and predicted values. In summary, this section focused on the specific procedures' techniques used to identify select, process and analyse information about the effect of Telecommuting on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja.

DATA ANALYSIS

A total number of two hundred and ninety five (250) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Two hundred and twenty-two (222) copies of questionnaire were filled,

returned and found usable for the analysis. This represent 88.8% of the questionnaires were returned. In other words, less than 20% of the questionnaires were not returned. That is to say that the number of returned questionnaires is still above the acceptable sample size as determined in the previous chapter. Table 4.1 below shows the response rate based on the copies of questionnaire administered, returned and their percentage(s) in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Descriptive and Reliability Statistics

Panel A: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Employee Performance	4.412136536030340	0.433539324194425	222
Social Distance	4.030341340075850	0.713124394566593	222
Remote Working	4.166065998146728	1.139478001228911	222
Internet Technology	4.054203539823010	0.646694053840820	222
Organizational Success	4.202433628318580	0.405156007785585	222

Panel B: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	N
0.848	0.861	5	222

Source: Author's Computation

The study conducted the descriptive statistics and reliability test for the overall response of the questionnaire. These results posted in the table above reveals the summary statistics (Panel A) and reliability test (Panel B) of the relevant variable included in the research. In panel A the dependent variable is represented by employee performance and the mean value is reportedly 4.41, while the standard deviation is approximately 0.43 which yields a variance of 0.168 approximately. The independent variables include Social Distance Measures which shows the mean value is 4.030 while the standard deviation is 0.713 which will give a variance of 0.508 approximately. Another independent variable is Remote Working which has reported mean of 4.16 while the standard deviation is 1.139, which yields a variance of 1.297 approximately. The third independent variable Internet Technology with means value of 4.05 and the standard deviation is 0.646 which give a variance of 0.419 approximately. The fourth independent variables are Organizational Success, which has means value of 4.20 and the standard deviation is 0.405 which give a variance of 0.164 approximately. Finally, the Cronbach's Alpha for the four variables is 0.748 which is above the minimum requirement. Therefore, the questionnaire

passed the reliability test for both the pilot test in Chapter three and the entire questionnaire reported herein.

Hypotheses	Decision
Social distance	Significant
Remote Working	Significant
Internet Technology	Significant
Organizational Success	Significant

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research was piloted to investigate the impact of telecommuting on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. The research tested three hypotheses; first that Internet technology has no significant impact on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja. Second to ascertain if Remote working has no effect on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Abuja. And third to explore if Social distance does not affect employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja.

The study adopted primary data where the questionnaire was distributed to the sample of 222 employees of MTN, Globacom, and Airtel respectively in Abuja. The questionnaire was prepared through survey planet and distributed online, which ensured that high percentage of distributed questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaire was analysed, first by determining the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha which was satisfactory with the value of 0.848 for the five variables. The extracted variables were subjected to other preliminary tests like correlation which reveals suitability for multiple regression.

In summary, the findings from the study are presented in two forms: the demographic profile of respondents which gave descriptive inferences on the demographical characteristics of the respondents on one hand, and on the other hand, are the findings from the empirical tests of hypotheses raised in the study. The demographic profile shows that (119)54% represents male and (103)46% represents female. This shows that male participate more actively than female respondents in the study

Next, was the response of the respondents based on their unit. It shows that (52)23% represents customer service, (42)19% represents accounting, (30)14% represents Administration, (98)44% represents sales. This shows that Sales unit participates more actively than all other units in the study.

In conclusion, based on the results of the study, it was observed that social distancing, remote working and internet technology had a significant positive influence on employee performance in selected telecommunication companies in Abuja.

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