

**CARRIER DEVELOPMENT AND OFFICE MANAGER PERFORMANCE OF
TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE****Gbafah Beauty Lemabari, Ph.D***beautygbafah@ust.edu.ng***Department of Office and Information Management****Faculty of Administration and Management, Rivers State University, Nigeria****ABSTRACT**

The study determines the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State. This study was built on two theories: Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice by John L. Holland in 1950 and Diffusion of Innovation Theory by Roger in 1962. The explanatory cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of two hundred and sixty-two (262) office managers (branch, departmental and unit heads) drawn from 5 telecommunication firms operating in Rivers State. The study adopted census method of sampling which involves using the entire population of the study. Structure questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection after face validation. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument. Out of 262 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 253 were retrieved. Arithmetic mean was used for the univariate analysis while the test of hypotheses was done using Correlation Statistical tool such as Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The findings revealed that there is a very strong positive relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance is very strongly moderated by organizational culture. The study concludes the engagement of office managers in such programmes as digital capacity building, advancement professional programme, and degree advancement programme enhances their ability to discharge their duties with creativity and quickness of task completion. The study recommended among others that Office managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should learn to leverage on artificial intelligence tools that will lighten their jobs, thereby enhancing their creativeness and early task completion.

Keywords: Career Development, Office Managers Performance, Professional Programmes

INTRODUCTION

A major issue that prompted this study is the growing concern about the dwindling performance of office managers across telecommunication firms, such as heads of departments and units. The researcher has observed that a good number of them seem to have lost touch with the present day creative ability in thinking through issues and solving problems for employees and customers. A lot of them also have become lackadaisical in setting and achieving targets and goals, making their job performance drop drastically. In consonance with this, Kumar and Bansal (2017) stated that a major problem that many directors and department heads encounters in public and private sectors is low performance, especially in terms of poor service delivery and innovativeness. As sensitive as the telecommunication sector, having office managers who cannot competently handle the day-to-day running of offices will be disappointing, hence resulting to underperformance. Notwithstanding, the student suggests that a venture into career development may be the panacea to this situation.

Many telecommunication firms are yet to realize the importance of career development for their staff, especially their office managers. Some have left their office managers to cater for anything related to career development. For some, they care but on a very minimal level, as they feel that developing their office managers will make them want to leave them for bigger firms. This selfish reasoning and unwillingness to invest in their office managers have cause their office managers to lose touch of invoke of digital technologies in Cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence, Data Security, etc. Advanced professional programmes and degree advancement programmes have become far

fetch among many of these office managers, and this situation has robbed them competitive ability with their counterparts in sister organizations and as well as other organizations. Many telecommunication firms in Nigeria are yet to incorporate functional career development programmes such as on-the-job training method, degree advancement programmes, off-the-job training method, digital capacity building, and attending conferences (Kakui & Gachunga, 2020). Participant observer's experience reveals that many of those in managerial cadre do not attend conferences, computer-aided organizational learning is quite low, top management often find it difficult to delegate certain functions to junior colleagues, and off-the-job training efforts is relatively low. This has left a wide gap between managerial capacity of office managers and the skills required for performing higher managerial functions in telecommunication firms, hence increasing poor performance.

Another issue that prompted this study is the perceived dearth of empirical studies on the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Online search by the researcher suggests that this area of scholarship may not have received adequate research attention. Evidently, a study done by Jonathan *et al.* (2017) provided a holistic view of how employees' career advancement can affect organizational effectiveness among selected deposit money banks in Nigeria, and revealed that employee career advancement in the organization exert a great influence on the operations of deposit money banks in Nigeria, and as such banks management should invest in employee's development to stem employee turnover and improve productivity. In the study carried out by Ugwu *et al.* (2020), they examined the relationship between higher education and career advancement of female managers in Nigeria and found that lifelong learning relates with employee experience of top female managers. Dialoke and Paschal (2017) focused on the effects of career growth on employees' performance with reference to the Non-academic Staff of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike in Abia State, Nigeria and found that constant training of staff enhances their overall official performance.

For more evidence, Shadrack *et al.* (2022) established the relationship between career development programs and employee performance in Local Governments in Kanungu District Local Government. The study revealed that a positive but statistically significant relationship between staff training and employee performance. Also, the study of Malobi (2022) examined the effect of career management on organizational performance of teaching hospitals in South East Nigeria and showed that career planning, training, reward, organizational commitment and motivation had significant positive effect on organizational performance. In addition, Ramil (2020) investigated the relationship of Bohol Island State University (BISU) employees' awareness and implementation levels of their Career Development Plan (CDP) on their job performance and satisfaction, and revealed that employment experience indicated significant results on job performance and satisfaction, implying that the longer their stay in BISU, the better their performance, and the more satisfied they become. Although, the various studies cited above point to the fact various career development programmes are positively correlated with employee and organizational performances in various sectors within and outside Nigeria. However, none of these studies was able to provide empirical evidence on how dimensions of career development programmes, such as digital capacity building, advanced professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes interact with measures of office manager performance of telecommunication firms within the context of Rivers State, Nigeria. This suggests that the link between career development programmes and office manager performance of telecommunication firms has not received adequate research attention within the context of Rivers State. This is the knowledge gap which this study seeks to fill. This gives credibility to this study.

Research Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant moderating impact of organizational culture in the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

Concept of Career Development Programmes

Career can be said to be a pattern of job experiences, which comprise the entire life span of a person and which is also generally seen with regard to a number of phases reflecting the evolution from one stage of life to the next (Weinert, 2011). In the same way, Collin (2014) further explains the term career as the interaction that arises from an individual with organizations and society. This so called interaction, as Savickas (2009) put forward, is no longer simply just a progression of jobs but now involve a story that working people put up about themselves. Fundamentally, career theorists and researchers explained that career advancement helps employees evaluate their skills so they can move to jobs that are more congruent with their personal goals and plans. In other words, employees are able to find where they "fit" into the organization (Weinert, 2011). Placing an employee in job levels below their skill levels causes nearly as much discontent as placing them in jobs where they cannot perform satisfactorily (Noe, 2016).

Career development entails preparing individuals to assume different or higher responsibilities within the organization (Firman, 2021). It is usually seen as the pattern of work related experience that spans the course of a person's life. Development is usually associated with increasing the intellectual or emotional abilities needed to accomplish a better job. The aim of all career development programs is to match the needs and goals of employees with the career opportunities available in organisations today and in the future (Delbariet *et al.*, 2021). Career development programmes are beneficial to organisations because it helps to improve the skills, knowledge and experience of employees towards their work. It benefits not only the individual employee, but also the organization. Providing career development opportunities restrict employees from leaving the organization and increases their loyalty (Kibuiet *al.*,2014). Most organizations may use career development programmes to assist their employees to properly plan their careers because it is believed that, generally employees react positively to career development and advancement opportunities.

Career advancement normally entails a clearly marked path of progression through the ranks of an organisation. It is based on merit without regard for race, gender, age or ethnicity. Deserving cases become eligible for advancement. When employees get to know that each one of them has an equal chance of succeeding, it becomes easy for them to put in their best. Smit *et al.*(2007) agree and note that the prospect of career advancement might in itself motivate employees to work hard.

Mullins, (2007) also confirm that employees aspire to progress steadily in organizations for which they work. Under common belief, career advancement would involve the existence of alternative career paths based on the individual employee's and organisational needs. As Saariandand Judge (2004) point out lack of advancement, for any reason may damage a manager's chance to ascending the ranks within an organisation. Career advancement is significant to this study and employees involved as it presents them with the opportunity for long term success, higher pay, job security and job satisfaction. A commitment to career advancement will enable steps toward achieving a better motivated workforce and a high performing organization. It also presents employees with opportunities to further their education and undergo training, thus strengthening employees' skill sets to receive consideration for a promotion and advance their career.

Operationally, career development programmes refer to skills and courses development activities mapped out to enhance the knowledge of managers and employees and usher them into higher positions and responsibilities. According to (McDaniels & Gysbers, 2012), career advancement is the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to shape the career of any given individual over the life span. Hall and Associates (1986) describe career advancement as the products emanating from the communication of individual career planning and institutional career management processes. However Baer *et al.* (2008) see career advancement as a lifetime process that encompasses the growth and change process of childhood, the formal career education from school alongside with the maturational processes that persist throughout a person's working maturity and into retirement.

Concept Office Manager Performance

Operationally defined in this study, an office manager is a middle level manager who is a head of a department or unit in an organization. An office manager is quite different from the conventional one where the secretary is presumed to be the office manager. Here, by the concept "office manager" we meant the middle level managers who intermediate between the top and first level management in an organization. Thus, in this regards, the office manager (middle management) is the intermediate [management](#) of a [hierarchical organization](#) that is subordinate to the [executive management](#) and responsible for at least two lower levels of junior staff (Peter, 2016). Unlike the [line management](#), office manager (middle management) is considered to be a senior (or semi-executive) management position, with respective salary and a package of benefits (Dance, 2011). The office managers' job is to implement company strategy in the most efficient way. Their duties include creating an effective working environment, administrating the work process, making sure it is compliant with organization's requirements, leading people and reporting to the highest level of management (Zhang *et al.*, 2008).

In every hierarchical organization, the office manager (middle management) acts as important link and interface between the top management and the operating core, but also as central contact point for supporting service departments (Roth, 2016). This unit, metaphorical speaking, is horizontally and vertically placed in the heart of an organization. The office manager's job is tied among others to interpret and later transmit the defined strategies into management decisions and corporate action is only one of the main tasks. office managers at this level of organization (middle management) comprises of managers who head specific departments (such as accounting, marketing, production) or business units, or who serve as project managers in flat organizations. The office managers are responsible for implementing the top management's policies and plans and typically have two management levels below them. Usually among the first to be slashed in the 'resizing' of a firm, office manager constitutes the thickest layer of managers in a traditional (tall pyramid shaped) organization, according to Das (2011).

The office manager, otherwise known as the middle level managers, are in the unique position of being placed in such a way that they have access to the top management and they can command the loyalty of the regular member's employees. Hence, any organizational initiative has to necessarily take into account the importance of the Office Manager in the larger scheme of things. Among other things, the Office Manager's jobs are to: recognize the specific responsibilities and job functions often assigned to them; office managers are accountable to top management for their departments; they provide guidance to lower-level managers and employees under their designation, and inspire them to perform better. They make decisions that are functionally revolved around enabling teams of their jurisdiction; they keep to records of their departments, units and other outlets under their control. Within the context of administration in the telecommunication industry, we use the term office managers to capture administrative personnel such as departmental managers (production, marketing, human resource, accounting, procurement) and administrative assistants working in the offices of their designated principals.

The job performance of office managers in the Telecommunication industry depend largely on their effectiveness and efficiency in management information especially in today's digitalized business environment. In lieu of the above, it is imperative to briefly examine the concept of office managers' job performance. Job performance of the Office Managers here refers to the ability of designate personnel to accomplish his or her tasks, duties and responsibilities, effectively and efficiently. The Cambridge Dictionary (2016), indicated that effectiveness is the [ability](#) to be [successful](#) and [produce](#) the [intended results](#). While, efficiency denotes the attainment of expected results with minimal utilization of organization' resources, for examples: minimal use of time in achieving the set targets.

Concept of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as the set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi, 2016). Organizational

culture affects the way employees and teams interact with each other in an organization, with clients, and with stakeholders. Schrod (2016) asserted that organizational culture influences how much employees identify with their organization. Also, organizational culture is a deeply embedded set of values and beliefs that determine to a great extent and how employees react to various situations. But if an organization's culture cannot promote merit and efficiency, it can prove to be a drag on business productivity.

Culture also includes the firm's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, beliefs, and habits (Needle, 2014). Simply stated, organizational culture is "the way things are done around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 2016). Culture gives a group its uniqueness and differentiates it from other groups. Employees in a group share common values, beliefs and assumptions about what is wrong and right, effective and ineffective (Nikandrou *et al.*, 2017). Despite the methodological and conceptual approach, all studies agreed on one point: similar cultural backgrounds produce similar thinking and behavioral patterns, which are distinct for each culture. Impressions about people and their culture, however, are not static (Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2017). Organizational culture is a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi, 2016). Organizational culture affects the way employee and managers interact with each other, with clients, and with stakeholders. Also, organizational culture may influence how much employees identify with their organisation (Schrod, 2016). Organizational culture is inherent in the core organizational values, which is often unconscious and rarely discussable (Hofstede *et al.*, 2009). In other words, culture involved an evolution of the organizational context and is collectively held among members of the organization, as well as complex enough to resist direct manipulation (Denison, 2016).

One aspect of culture that makes a unified definition elusive is that it is a truly multi-disciplinary construct. In 2013, leading anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (2013) reported that there were 164 different meanings for the term "culture" in the anthropology literature alone. And, focusing specifically on the term "organizational culture," scholars reported 54 different definitions (Verbeke *et al.*, 2011). With fields such as anthropology, economics, finance, organizational behavior, sociology, and strategy focusing on culture, the various perspectives inevitably use different lenses in defining what it means (Jennifer *et al.*, 2019). But without clear agreement about how organizational culture is defined and measures that emphasize construct validity, it will continue to be difficult to accumulate knowledge and advance our understanding of organizational culture. Organizational culture, particularly from the 1980s onwards as a major field of organisation theory and management studies and theories about people who have taken the small or large live a believes of social system, beliefs; exchange Methods, traditions norms that are common in all cultures that make up the social system (Ramezan & Raheleh, 2013). Strengths or weaknesses of each system depend on the extent and depth correlation phenomena are mentioned. Undoubtedly be much stronger culture of a society, a culture change is harder. To the organizations for practical purposes (strategic) injured in line with the beliefs and culture of the organisation is its employees, it will be difficult and the obstacles encountered in the implementation process will be (Ramezan & Raheleh, 2013).

Jennifer *et al.* (2019) also stated that there are a number of empirical challenges that have stalled research on organizational culture. Some arise from the nature of the construct itself, while others are derived from weaknesses in popular approaches to assessing culture. An organisation is a group of people working together to achieve specific goals (Rezaeean, 1979). The system should take into account the culture of the organisation whose members have a common understanding of the phenomenon is relatively new. When an entity is organized, certain patterns of behavior will be acceptable to all agencies. Is the systematic process of mutual relations of people to achieve certain goals? This definition is composed of five elements: 1) the form is always the people. 2) This way people relate to one another and the relationship between them is established. 3) This relationship can be extended systems. 4) All people in the organisation with specific goals and objectives, some

of which affect the performance. Everyone expects that by working in organizations to achieve their personal goals. 5) This relationship also allows the organisation to achieve common goals and organizational members to achieve personal goals, achieve common objectives, the organisation will follow.

Organizational Culture, Career Development Programmes, and Office Manager Performance

Organizational culture, through norms and values, moderates the relationship between career development programmes and office manager job performance. It is the culture of an organization that propels every vision and implementation of any organization. An organization with supportive culture towards career development programmes will facilitate the trainings and higher degree education of their office managers, knowing that the managers and the organization will be better off at the completion of the programmes. The reverse becomes the case when the culture of an organization is not favourable to career development programmes of their employees and managers. Many norms, both written and non-written are operated across organizations. Telecommunication industry, being a very competitive one, will definitely need to have values and enact norms that will support the digital capacity building, advanced professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes of their office managers, as these will aid them compete favourably in the today's business environment. An organization with no competitive advantage over another in the same industry is easily knocked out of business, as there is no room for weakness in today's fiercely designed business environment (Deal & Kennedy, 2016). With favourable norms and values for career development programmes in a telecommunication firm, an office manager can develop their digital capacity to be in tandem with what is invoke, and hence improve on their creativeness, effective decision making, and early task completion. That is to say that when the culture does not favour this situation, it becomes but only a wish. It will, therefore, limit the performance of the office manager, as he is not abreast with current day customers' requirement and employee management. There are many organizations that are sponsoring in full or part the advanced professional programmes and degree advancement programmes of their employees and managers. It happens so, because there is an enabling culture to it. In the long run, the beneficiaries of the yield of these investments will not only be employees and managers, but the organizations as well. This is so, because the enhanced performances of the managers and employees will permeate to organizational performance. Telecommunication firms and sister organizations, therefore, need to understand the importance of career development on the job performance of their office managers and on the organization also, as this will enable them create a culturally supportive environment to career development programmes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The exploratory cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The explanatory cross-sectional survey research design is interested in the test of hypotheses using primary data generated from respondents. The recent nature of digital knowledge entrepreneurship in this part of the world also informed the choice of this research design.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers (departmental and unit heads) drawn from 100 telecommunication companies operating in Rivers State (Sourced: Rivers State Yellow Pages).

Sample Size/Sampling Techniques

The entire population of two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers drawn from 100 telecommunication companies in Rivers State was used for the study without sampling. Thus, the study adopted census method of sampling which involves using the entire population of the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

Instrument for data collection for the study was done through structured questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation were used for the univariate analysis while bivariate analysis was done using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. Partial Correlation was applied for the multivariate analysis.

Multivariate Analysis

Ho₁: There is no significant moderating impact of organizational culture in the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

Correlations of Organizational Culture as a Moderator to Career Development Programmes and Office Manager Performance

Control Variables			Career Development Programmes	Office Manager Performance	Organizational Culture
-none^a	Career Development Programmes	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.855**	.804**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		Df	0	253	253
	Office Manager Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.855**	1.000	.650**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		Df	253	253	253
Organizational Culture	Correlation Coefficient	.804**	.650**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	Df	253	253	0	
Organizational Career Culture	Development Programmes	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.737**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		Df	0	253	
	Office Manager Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.737**	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		Df	253	0	

Source: SPSS Output

Table above shows r value of 0.855 at a significant level of 0.00 showing a relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance. Obviously, this shows a very strong positive relationship since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05. The partial relationship controlling staff digital literacy, in a case is a relatively high or strong positive relationship (0.804) and measurably large.

Furthermore, the significance value of 0.00 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05 indicates that the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance are significantly attributable to organizational culture as a moderating variable. This implies that the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance is very strongly moderated by organizational culture

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown how these programmes positively relate with the performance of office managers, especially in terms of creativeness, effective decision making, and early task completion. Therefore, Telecommunication firms and other organizations owe their office managers regular training, retraining, and development on digital capacity building, professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes, as these have the capacity to boost their performance across the board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Office managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should undertake self-development efforts to improve their digital capability level that will help them deal with challenges of the digital age that comes with customer/staff interaction in their areas.
2. Office managers and others in telecommunication firms should go for degree advancement programmes, as this will expand their knowledge horizon and increase their job performance across the board.
3. Managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should seek out for overseas-sponsored courses, as these opportunities can be the game changer in their careers, hence building their creativity and speedy goal achievement.
4. Telecommunication firms should imbibe cultures that support the career development of their managers, thereby enhancing their creative ability, problem solving skill, and target achievement.

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