

**STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE ACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL
PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED OIL AND GAS FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT,
RIVERS STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between strategic human resource (HR) action and the organizational performance of selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, with productivity and profitability as the criterion measures of performance. The study was grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, Contingency Theory, and the AMO Theory. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. A population of 400 managers and supervisors was drawn from five selected oil and gas firms, and a sample of 200 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula. Bowley's (1926) proportional allocation technique was applied to distribute the sample across the firms. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ) with IBM SPSS version 21. The study found a significant positive relationship between strategic HR action and productivity ($\rho = .707, p < .05$), and a significant positive relationship between strategic HR action and profitability ($\rho = .835, p < .05$). It was concluded that deliberately directed HR actions are critical enablers of both productivity and profitability in oil and gas firms. Recommendations are made for the systematic alignment of HR strategies with organizational goals to maximise performance outcomes.

Keywords: Strategic HR Action, Productivity, Profitability, Organizational Performance, Oil and Gas, Human Resource Planning

1. Introduction

Strategic human resource action occupies a central place in the management of organizations that seek to sustain competitive advantage in dynamic and demanding industry environments. In the oil and gas sector, where technical complexity, skills intensity, and service demands converge, the deliberate alignment of HR initiatives with organizational strategy has become an imperative for survival and growth (Graf, Hemmasi & Strong, 1996; Pfeffer, 1994). Strategic HR action is defined as a disciplinary and creative process for determining where the organization should be in the future and how to take it there with the help of HR staffing activities (Graf et al., 1996). Unlike routine HR administration, strategic HR actions are purposefully directed at enabling the organization to achieve long-term goals through the optimal mobilization, development, and retention of human capital (Sullivan, 2004; Armstrong, 2012). The types of strategic HR actions that organizations employ include restructuring strategy, training and development strategy,

recruitment strategy, and outsourcing strategy, each contributing in distinctive ways to the overall performance posture of the firm (Sullivan, 2004).

Productivity, measured as the quantity and quality of work done relative to the cost and human resources utilized (Mathis & Jackson, 2003), is among the most direct organizational performance outcomes linked to strategic HR action. When HR activities are deliberately structured to ensure competency-based recruitment, purposeful training, and performance-aligned compensation, workforce productivity tends to improve significantly (Huselid, 1995; Youndt et al., 1996). In oil and gas firms, where production targets and service delivery timelines are tightly controlled, the quality of HR decisions determines whether operational objectives are met on schedule and within budget. Productivity in this sector is therefore not merely a function of capital and technology but is profoundly shaped by the strategic management of human resources (Nwachukwu, 2007; Brady, 2008). Adequate strategic HR action ensures that employees possess the right capabilities, are appropriately motivated, and are given adequate opportunities to contribute to organizational output (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2000).

Profitability, as the capacity of the organization to generate returns on its investments, assets, and equity above and beyond its operating costs (Sartono, 2001), is equally influenced by strategic HR action. Pfeffer (1994) argued that a firm's success in hypercompetitive markets is largely derived from its human resources, and that appropriate HR practices help elicit consistent behavior aligned with organizational strategy, ultimately driving financial performance. In the oil and gas context, profitability is sensitive to the quality of human capital management, as operational errors, project delays, high turnover, and skill gaps all carry direct and significant financial costs (Huselid, 1995; Wright, 1999). Despite this recognized importance, empirical evidence specifically linking strategic HR action to productivity and profitability within oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, remains limited, motivating the present empirical investigation.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt continue to face persistent challenges of suboptimal workforce productivity and declining profitability, attributed in large part to the absence of coherent, strategically driven HR management (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994). Many firms in the sector operate reactive HR systems that respond to immediate staffing emergencies rather than implementing proactive, strategically anchored HR actions (Graf et al., 1996; Armstrong, 2006). This results in persistent skill gaps, high employee turnover, low workforce morale, and ultimately reduced operational productivity and profitability. The theoretical literature consistently affirms that firms whose HR policies are aligned with business strategy achieve superior performance outcomes (Chandler, 1962; Miles & Snow, 1978; Guest, 1997), and empirical studies confirm that high-performance HR systems significantly improve productivity and financial performance (Huselid, 1995; Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Youndt et al., 1996). However, specific empirical tests of the relationship between strategic HR action and productivity and profitability in oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt are conspicuously absent from the literature. This gap limits the availability of locally grounded, evidence-based guidance for HR practitioners and senior management in the sector, and it is the gap that the present study is designed to fill.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Strategic Human Resource Action

Strategic HR action refers to the deliberate HR initiatives organizations undertake to align workforce capabilities with long-term organizational goals (Graf et al., 1996; Sullivan, 2004). It is a series of actions initiated to form and implement HR strategy, with each action targeting a specific dimension of workforce management. Sullivan (2004) identifies several types of strategic HR action, including recruitment strategy, targeted at attracting the right talent; restructuring strategy, aimed at realigning the organization's human configuration; training and development strategy, directed at enhancing employee competencies; and outsourcing strategy, designed to access specialized expertise without permanent employment commitments. Together, these actions form an integrated HR approach that enables the organization to navigate competitive pressures and achieve sustained performance (Armstrong, 2012).

Graf et al. (1996) describe strategic HR action as a disciplinary and creative process for determining where the organization should be in the future and for taking it there through purposeful staffing activities. This process is distinguished from operational HR management by its explicit orientation toward organizational vision and competitive strategy (Pfeffer, 1994). The strategic alignment of HR with organizational goals is the cornerstone of the resource-based view argument that human capital, when strategically developed and deployed, constitutes a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Takeuchi et al., 2007). Richard and Johnson (2001) established that strategic HR management effectiveness is positively associated with firm performance, underscoring the value of deliberate and strategy-aligned HR actions in driving organizational outcomes.

2.1.2 Productivity

Productivity is defined as a measure of the quantity and quality of work done, considering the cost of the resources used (Millar, 2007; Mathis & Jackson, 2003). McNamara (2005) asserts that measuring productivity involves determining the length of time that an average employee needs to generate a given level of production, as well as the amount of time employees spend on productive versus non-productive activities. Nwachukwu (2007) defines productivity as the relationship between units of labour input and units of output, serving as a scorecard of the effective use of organizational resources. Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (1999) extend this to define productivity as efficiency in the employment of factors of production including land, labour, and capital to produce higher output.

Nwachukwu (1992) identifies five determinants of productivity: technology, supervisor skill, economic factors, managerial ability, and training, all of which are amenable to strategic HR influence. Brady (2008) notes that HR activities including pay, appraisal systems, training, selection, job design, and compensation are all directly concerned with productivity. Bernardin (2007) affirms that controlling labour costs and increasing productivity through clearer linkages between pay and performance are crucial components of HRM for achieving competitive advantage. The PMBOK (2007) framework categorizes productivity measures across effectiveness, efficiency, and time management, providing a comprehensive lens for assessing workforce output quality in capital-intensive sectors such as oil and gas.

2.1.3 Profitability

Profitability is the output and benefit that organizations receive in the form of turnover, dividends, and monetary exchange for the organization's performance (Holt, 1993). Sartono (2001) defines profitability as the ability of the firm to obtain profit relative to sales, total assets, and company capital. Jensen (1986) defines free cash flow as cash in excess of that required to fund all positive net present value projects, and notes that high free cash flow indicates greater organizational flexibility in investing to improve performance and ultimately affect the firm's value. Chen and Chen (2011) opined that the profitability of an organization is the value attached to the firm, and that increased profitability signals improved corporate prospects that attract investor confidence.

The relationship between strategic HR actions and profitability is grounded in the service-profit chain argument that employee capability and commitment, shaped by HR strategy drive service quality, customer retention, and ultimately financial performance (Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995). Huselid (1995) established that well-formulated human resource programs not only reduce employee turnover but also make substantial contributions to financial performance and productivity. Paauwe and Richardson (1997) posited that HR planning positively affects employees in ways that increase job satisfaction and motivation, leading to positive operational results in terms of the quality and quantity of products and services, and further affecting financial and market performance, return on assets, revenue, and market share.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, Contingency Theory, and the AMO Theory. The RBV, as articulated by Barney (1991), posits that competitive advantage is generated through the possession and strategic deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources, with human capital being among the most strategically significant. Takeuchi et al. (2007) extended this to establish that competitive advantage comes from the internal human resources that the organization has, and that firms must build a valuable set of HR and bundle them uniquely to achieve firm success. Strategic HR action, in this framework, is the mechanism through which firms build and deploy human capital in ways that generate superior productivity and profitability outcomes.

Contingency Theory, as advanced by Chandler (1962), Miles and Snow (1978), Porter (1985), and Guest (1997), posits that HR strategies will be more effective only when appropriately aligned with business strategy and the environmental context. An organization that closely coordinates its business strategy and HR strategy achieves better performance than one that does not (Delery & Doty, 1996). The AMO Theory, initiated by Bailey (1993) and developed by Appelbaum et al. (2000), holds that HR practices influence organizational performance by enhancing employees' abilities, strengthening motivation, and providing opportunities to contribute, with researchers such as Huselid (1995), MacDuffie (1995), Appelbaum et al. (2000), and Purcell et al. (2013) validating this framework across diverse industrial contexts. Strategic HR actions that address all three AMO components through competency-based recruitment (ability), performance-linked rewards (motivation), and participative work design (opportunity) are expected to yield significantly improved productivity and profitability in oil and gas firms.

2.3 Empirical Review

Huselid (1995) provided comprehensive empirical evidence from 968 United States firms showing that high-performance HR systems characterized by extensive recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and incentive compensation substantially reduced employee turnover and made significant contributions to productivity and financial performance. Youndt et al. (1996) found in a study of manufacturing firms that HR management practices, particularly those oriented toward human capital enhancement and strategic staffing, significantly influenced employee productivity, machine efficiency, and customer alignment. Arthur (1994) demonstrated that HR management practices, when they increase employee discretionary effort, improve firm productivity and reduce turnover. Delaney and Huselid (1996) established that HR planning including selectivity in staffing, training, incentive and compensation are positively related to perceptual measures of organizational performance relative to industry competitors.

Wright (1999) found that human resource planning has been found to affect firm performance when it allows employees to contribute to the organization. Ramsey et al. (2000) found that human resource planning improves the performance of organizations. Bae and Lawler (1999) established that firms which align their HR management practices with their business strategy tend to become superior to their competitors. Richard and Johnson (2001) found a positive association between strategic HR management effectiveness and firm performance across multiple dimensions. Paauwe and Richardson (1997) posited that HR planning positively affects employees through increased job satisfaction and motivation, leading to positive operational results in terms of quality and quantity of products and services, and further affecting financial and market performance. Pfeffer (1994) argued that a firm's success in hypercompetitive markets is largely derived from its human resources, and that appropriate HR practices and policies elicit consistent employee behaviour aligned with organizational strategy.

Marwat (2006) reported seven variables positively related to employee performance, including selection, training, performance appraisal, career planning, compensation plans, employee participation, and job definition—all of which are components of strategic HR action. Sarkodie (2011) revealed that without proper human resource planning organizations cannot attain their goals, and that organizational resources must be managed strategically to ensure sustained growth and development. Mursi (2003) established a significant and positive relationship between human resource planning and organizational performance. Hiti (2000) posited that human resource planning has a positive relationship with organizational performance. Franklin (2011) found that HR planning is crucial for operational efficiency and performance effectiveness, and Hassan (2010) concluded that HR planning is an important process linking business strategy to its operations. Huselid et al. (1997) further established that both technical and strategic HR management effectiveness are determinants of firm performance.

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical review, the following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between strategic HR action and productivity of selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between strategic HR action and profitability of selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt.

3. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the relationship between strategic HR action and organizational performance, specifically productivity and profitability in selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The cross-sectional design was appropriate for capturing a snapshot of organizational perceptions at a specific point in time, enabling efficient collection of data on predictor and criterion variables from a representative sample (Sekaran, 2001). The target population comprised 400 managers and supervisors from five selected oil and gas firms: Keverner Oil Field Products (KOP) Nigeria Limited (85), Coolper Cameron Oil and Gas Nigeria Limited (75), Drill-Quip Oil and Gas Nigeria Limited (95), Vetco-Gray Oil and Gas Nigeria Limited (65), and FMC Technologies Oil and Gas Nigeria Limited (80). A sample size of 200 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula at a 0.05 significance level, and Bowley's (1926) proportional allocation technique was applied to distribute the sample across the five firms. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with items on strategic HR action, productivity, and profitability, each measured on a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through expert peer review, and reliability was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient at the Nunnally (1970) threshold of 0.70 (Zeb-Obipi, 2007). Normality tests using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk procedures confirmed non-normal data distributions for all variables, justifying the adoption of Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ) as the non-parametric inferential statistic. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 21, with hypothesis decisions made at the 0.05 significance level.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Strategic HR Action, Productivity and Profitability

Variable	N	Median	IQR	Min	Max
Strategic HR Action	200	3.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
Productivity	200	4.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
Profitability	200	3.50	1.00	1.00	5.00

Source: Survey Data, 2026

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. Strategic HR action recorded a median score of 3.00 (IQR = 1.00), indicating a moderate level of strategic HR practice adoption among the sampled oil and gas firms, with noticeable variability suggesting divergent HR strategy orientations across firms. Productivity returned a median of 4.00 (IQR = 1.00), indicating that respondents generally perceived their firms as achieving satisfactory productivity levels. Profitability recorded a median of 3.50 (IQR = 1.00), reflecting a moderately positive perception of financial performance. The IQR values across all three variables indicate moderate response variability, which is consistent with the diversity of HR management maturity levels among the sampled firms.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: Spearman's Rank Order Correlation – Strategic HR Action, Productivity and Profitability

Variable	Statistic	Strategic HR Action	Productivity	Profitability
Strategic HR Action	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.707**	.835**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200
Productivity	Correlation Coefficient	.707**	1.000	—
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	—	—
	N	200	200	200
Profitability	Correlation Coefficient	.835**	—	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	—	—
	N	200	200	200

***Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Source: Survey Data, 2026

Hypothesis One (HO1): There is no significant relationship between strategic HR action and productivity of selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt.

The Spearman's correlation analysis in Table 2 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between strategic HR action and productivity ($\rho = .707$, $p = .000 < .05$). Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is therefore a significant positive relationship between strategic HR action and productivity in the selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt. Oil and gas firms that engage in deliberate, strategy-aligned HR initiatives achieve demonstrably higher levels of workforce productivity.

Hypothesis Two (HO2): There is no significant relationship between strategic HR action and profitability of selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2 further reveals a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between strategic HR action and profitability ($\rho = .835$, $p = .000 < .05$). Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is therefore a significant positive relationship between strategic HR action and profitability in the selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt. Firms with more deliberate and strategically oriented HR practices achieve superior profitability outcomes.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The finding that strategic HR action is significantly and positively related to productivity ($\rho = .707$, $p < .05$) is consistent with the Contingency Theory proposition that HR strategies will be more effective when appropriately aligned with business strategy and environmental demands (Chandler, 1962; Guest, 1997). This result corroborates Youndt et al. (1996), who demonstrated that HR management practices oriented toward human capital development have a significant effect on employee productivity and machine efficiency. It also supports the empirical evidence of Huselid (1995), who established that high-performance HR systems make substantial contributions to organizational productivity.

Wright (1999) further confirmed that HR planning affects firm performance when it allows employees to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. The moderate-to-strong correlation ($\rho = .707$) reflects the reality that productivity in oil and gas operations is simultaneously influenced by other factors including technology, supervisor skill, economic conditions, and training (Nwachukwu, 1992; Brady, 2008), but affirms that strategic HR action is a significant and measurable determinant of productivity outcomes.

The finding that strategic HR action is significantly and positively related to profitability ($\rho = .835$, $p < .05$) provides strong empirical support for the RBV argument that strategically developed human capital constitutes a valuable, inimitable organizational resource that generates sustained financial performance advantages (Barney, 1991; Takeuchi et al., 2007). The high magnitude of this correlation reflects the particular sensitivity of oil and gas profitability to human capital quality, where operational errors and project delays carry direct and substantial financial costs. This result aligns with Pfeffer's (1994) argument that firm success in competitive markets is largely derived from strategic HR management, and corroborates Huselid (1995), who found that well-formulated HR programs make substantial contributions to financial performance. Paauwe and Richardson (1997) similarly established that HR planning positively affects financial and market performance including return on assets, revenue, and market share. Jensen (1986) and Chen and Chen (2011) provide additional grounding by establishing that organizational profitability signals improved corporate prospects, which in turn attract investment and support long-term value creation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between strategic HR action and organizational performance, specifically productivity and profitability in selected oil and gas firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Spearman's Rank Order Correlation analysis of data from 200 respondents revealed significant positive relationships between strategic HR action and productivity ($\rho = .707$, $p < .05$) and between strategic HR action and profitability ($\rho = .835$, $p < .05$). These findings confirm that deliberate, strategy-aligned HR initiatives are powerful drivers of both workforce efficiency and financial returns in the oil and gas sector. The study contributes empirical evidence to the growing literature on the strategic importance of HR management in the Nigerian oil and gas context, and provides a theoretical and evidence-based foundation for strengthening HR strategy formulation and implementation in Port Harcourt's oil and gas industry.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. HR managers in oil and gas firms should develop comprehensive strategic HR plans that explicitly link HR initiatives to production targets, revenue goals, and competitive positioning objectives, thereby operationalizing the strategic alignment demanded by Contingency Theory.
2. Firms should invest in structured competency-based recruitment programs to ensure that recruited employees possess the specific technical and behavioural competencies required for optimal performance directly enhancing the ability component of the AMO framework.
3. Strategic retention programs including career development pathways, competitive compensation, and employee engagement initiatives should be

institutionalized to reduce costly turnover and preserve critical institutional knowledge, contributing to sustained productivity.

4. Outsourcing decisions should be made strategically based on rigorous core-versus-non-core competency analysis to ensure that internal HR resources are concentrated on the highest-value activities.

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