

**IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CONTINUITY IN
NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

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Abstract

Performance is certainly a central topic although there is less written about what we mean by performance. It has been used to describe such aspects as: bottom-line profit, other financial indicators such as share price, doing better than competitors, maximum organizational effectiveness, given the resources deployed, and achieving specific organizational objectives. The most important factor underlying all of these is the idea of employee performance improvement. Performance is a process of identifying deficiencies or gaps, understanding their causes, and then developing strategies to remove those deficiencies. The present study employed literature survey method to obtain information necessary for the research. The information gathered were qualitatively analyzed. The study concluded that a critical factor related to an organization's long-term success is its ability to measure how well employees performance and then use that information to ensure that performance meets present standards and improves overtime. The research recommended that positive reinforcement system, positive disciplinary programmes, employee assistance programmes, employee counseling, and negative behavioural strategies should be adopted to improve employee performance.

Key-Words: Performance, Improvement, Organization, Employee, Management

Introduction

A critical factor which is related to an organization's long-term success is its ability to measure how well employees perform and then use that information to ensure that performance meets present standards and improves overtime. This process is called performance management, the handy umbrella term for all of the organizational activities involved in managing people on the job (Dick 2000). The improvement of performance is a fundamental part of the continuous process of performance management. The aim should be the positive one of maximizing high performance, although this involves taking steps to deal with under-performance. When managing under-performance remember what Handy (1989) said that this should be about applauding success and forgiving failure. Further, he suggested that "mistakes should be used as an opportunity for learning-something only possible if the mistake is truly forgiven because otherwise the lesson is heard as a reprimand and not as an offer of help". When dealing with poor performers, note should be made of the words of Risher (2003) that "poor performance is best seen as a problem in which the employer and management are both accountable". Thus, one can argue that it is

unlikely to emerge if people are effectively managed. This is another way of expressing the old Army saying: "There are no bad soldiers, only bad officers".

Steps to Manage Under-Performance

Managing under-performance is thus, a positive process that is based on feedback throughout the year and looks forward to what can be done by individuals to overcome performance problems and, importantly, how managers can provide support and help (Cynthia et al 2003).

Identifying Performance Gap: Employee performance is appraised in terms of job-related attributes, behaviours and outcomes, and also absenteeism. Just as these serve to determine performance, they also serve to identify performance gaps (Randall et al 1989). To do so, however, they must be utilized somewhat differently. For instance, goals can be used to identify performance deficiencies by measuring how well an employee does in relation to set goals. This method is valid as long as the goals can be quantified and measured, they are not contradictory, and the subordinate's performance can be measured by a format similar to that used to set the goals. If an employee had a performance goal of reducing the scrap rate by 10% but only reduced it by 5%, a performance gap exists. That is, the discrepancy between set goals and actual achievements can be used to spot performance gaps. Although all three conditions may not always exist, two other ways can be used to spot gaps. One is by comparing subordinates, units, or departments with one another. Organizations with several divisions often measure the overall performance of each division by comparing it with all other divisions. According to Randall et al (1989) the divisions that are ranked on the bottom become identified as problem areas; that is, they have performance gaps. Whether ranking individuals or units, however, using such comparisons does not provide an effective diagnosis of the cause of the identified gaps. Gaps can also be noted by comparisons over time (Ilgen et al 1979) for instance, a marketing manager who sold a thousand record albums last month but only eight hundred albums this month appears to have a performance gap. Although performance has apparently declined, it must again be determined whether this gap really represents a deficiency at all. The month in which a thousand albums were sold may have been at the peak of the buying season. Maybe this month the employer had to attend a conference vital to longer-run record sales. Regardless of the method employed to discover if a performance deficiency exists, once detected, managers want to remove it. If they hope to improve their employers' performance, however, Okere (2019) said they must begin by examining the causes underlying any actual gaps.

Determining the Causes of Performance Deficiencies: In order to uncover the reasons for performance deficiencies or gaps, a number of questions can be asked using a model of the determination of employee behaviour in organizations (Jacoby 1986; Weitzel 1987). This model enables the human resource manager to diagnose performance deficiencies and correct them in a systematic way. In general the model says that employees perform well if the following determinants are present: (1) Ability (2) Interest in doing the job (3) Opportunity to advance (4) Clearly defined goals (5) Certainly about what is expected (6) Feedback on how well they are doing (7) Rewards for performing well (8) Power to get resources to do the job.

These determinants and the specific questions to ask in determining the causes of performance deficiencies are depicted in Exhibit 1. Negative responses show that the item is probably a cause. Using a series of such responses, manager can establish the likely causes for a performance deficiency.

Exhibit 1: Diagnosing Performance Deficiencies

Check which of following factors affecting an individual's performance or behaviour apply to the solution you are analyzing.

	YES	NO
I. Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities of the individual		
(a) Does the individual have the skills to do an expected?	_____	_____
(b) Has the individual performed as expected before?	_____	_____
II. Personality, Interests and Preferences of the Individual		
(a) Does the individual have the personality or interested to perform as expected?	_____	_____
(b) Does the individual clearly perceive what's actually involved in performing as expect?	_____	_____
III. Opportunity for the Individual		
(a) Does the individual have chance to grow and use valued skills and abilities?	_____	_____
(b) Does the organization offer career paths to the individual?	_____	_____
IV. Goal for the Individual		
(a) Are there goals established?	_____	_____
(b) Are there goals very specific?	_____	_____
(c) Are there goals clear?	_____	_____
(d) Are there goals difficult?	_____	_____
V. Uncertainty for the Individual		
(a) Is the individual certain about what rewards are available?	_____	_____
(b) Is the individual certain about what to do?	_____	_____
(c) Is the individual certain about what others expect?	_____	_____
(d) Is the individual certain about job responsibilities and levels of authority?	_____	_____
VI. Feedback to the Individual		
(a) Does the employee get information about what is right and wrong (quality or quantity with performance?	_____	_____
(b) Does the information received tell the employee how to improve performance?	_____	_____
(c) Does the employee get information frequently?	_____	_____
(d) Is there a delay between the time the employee performs and receiving information on that performance?	_____	_____
(e) Can the information be easily interpreted by the employee?	_____	_____
(f) Are there no positive consequences of performing as desired?	_____	_____
VII. Consequences to the Individual		
(a) Is it punishing to do as expected (immediate)?	_____	_____
(b) Is it punishing to do as expected (long-term)?	_____	_____
(c) Do more positive consequences result from taking alternative action (immediate)?	_____	_____
(d) Do more positive consequences result from taking alternative act (long-term)?	_____	_____
(e) Are there no apparent consequences of performing as desired?	_____	_____
(f) Are there no positive consequences of performing as desired?	_____	_____
VIII. Power for the Individual		
(a) Can the individual mobilize resources to get the job done?	_____	_____
(b) Can the individual influence others to get them to do what is needed?	_____	_____
(c) Is the individual highly visible to others higher up in the organization?	_____	_____
Source: This format is based on R. F. Mager and P. Pipe, Analyzing Performance Problems or "You Really Oughta Wanna" (Belmont, Cal: Fearon Pitman 1970).		

When seeking the reasons for any shortfalls the manager should not be trying crudely to attach blame. The aim should be for the manager and the individual jointly to identify the facts that have contributed to the problem. It is on the basis of this factual analysis that decisions can be made on what to do about it by the individual, the manager or the two of them working together. It is also necessary first to identify any causes external to the job and outside the control of either the manager or the individual. Any factors that are within the control of the individual and/or the manager can then be considered.

Strategies to Improve Performance in Nigerian Organizations

Organizations in Nigeria can do many things to improve employee performance. They may want to implement programmes aimed at the eight sets of determinants shown in Exhibit 1. More specific and frequently used strategies says Randall et al (1989) include the following approaches:

1. **Positive Reinforcement System:** The positive reinforcement system lets employees know how well they are meeting specific goals and rewards improvements with praise and recognition. In the sense that no money is involved, it is a unique incentive system. This approach as asserted by Cavanagh (1984); Brewer and Dubnicki (1983) to improvement encourages desirable job behaviours by establishing several criteria and setting up rewards systems contingent upon achieving them. Implementing this strategy requires developing accurate behavioural measures of performance. This can be done by using the critical incidents technique of job analysis to identify critical behaviours of effective and ineffective performance. Also, goals can be established for each behavioural dimension and rewards specified for goal attainment. To obtain maximum benefit from the goal-setting, process, the goals should be relatively difficult, specific, clear, and acceptable to subordinates. Like all incentive systems, a basic premise of positive reinforcement is that behaviour can be understood and modify its consequences. That is, performance is elicited because of the consequences of getting rewards. Therefore, the consequences of behaving well are not monetary. By recording the attendance of a person or group of employees on a weekly rather than on a monthly basis, positive reinforcement programme can reduce absenteeism significantly (Okere 2019). Also, another programme of rewards used specifically to reduce absenteeism is known as "Earned Time". Earned time is a new approach to the way paid absence is accumulated and used. Under earned time, employees have more choice and responsibility in the way they use their paid time off (Cavanagh, 1984; Behrend 1979; Kuzmits 1981; McDonald, 1980). The principle behind the programme is that the number of earned-time days for which an employee may receive a cash payment is less than the previous total of sick vacation, jury, and all other benefits days combined. McEvoy and Cascio (1985) concluded that the programme's prime advantages are (1) a reduction in unplanned absences, (2) a reduction in employee – supervisor conflict over legitimacy of absences and individual responsibility, and (3) flexibility to suit individual priorities.
2. **Positive Discipline Programmes:** Flynn and Stratton (1981) observed that some organizations improve performance through the use of positive discipline or non-punitive discipline. Therefore, the essential aspects of positive discipline programmes can be described as follows: When disciplinary discussions have failed to produce the desired changes, management places the individual on a one day decision-making leave. The company pays the employee for the day to demonstrate the organization's desire to see him or her remain a member of the organization and to eliminate the resentment and hostility that punitive actions usually produce. But tenure with the organization is conditional on the individual's decision to solve the immediate problem and make a total performance commitment to good performance on the job. The employee is instructed to return on the day following the leave with a decision either to change and stay or to quit and find more satisfying work elsewhere (Campbell et al 1985; Campbell et al 1987).
3. **Employee Assistance Programmes:** Employee assistance programmes (EAPs) are designed specifically to assist employees with chronic personal problems that hinder their job

performance and attendance. Such programmes are often used with employees who are alcoholics or have severe domestic problems (Busch 1981). An organization that establishes an employee assistance programme generally thinks that it has a responsibility to the employee and that the employee should be given a chance to correct any undesirable job behaviour. It also make good economic sense to help alcoholic employees because 25% of each alcoholic's salary is the average cost to the employer in absenteeism, reduced productivity, accidents in the workplace, and use of the organization's medical plan (Hollman 1981). Nevertheless, employees must also help themselves. If they fail to participate in an employee assistance programme or recover through other means, employers may have no choice but to terminate them. The philosophy of most employee assistance programmes is to help individuals help themselves within a context of fairness yet firmness. However, in order for an employee assistance programme to be successful, it should possess the following attributes (1) top-management backing; (2) union or employee support; (3) confidentiality; (4) easy access; (5) availability of numerous services for assistance and referral; (6) skilled professional leadership; and (7) systems for monitoring, assessing, and revising (Hellan and Campbell 1981). Even though employee assistance programmes are designed to provide valuable assistance to employees, many employees in need fail to utilize the programmes unless with the alternative of being fired. When so confronted, the success rate of those attending employee assistance programmes will be high. Thus, the results can mean substantial gains in employee job performance and reductions in absenteeism (Randall et al 1989).

4. **Counseling:** To change the habits of chronically absent employees, organization should device an innovative counseling programme that stresses problem-solving and goal-setting techniques. This individual approach should focus on 5% to 10% of the workforce that has history of absenteeism. Randall et al (1989) posit that before beginning the actual counseling with individual employees, supervisors should take the following steps:
 1. Identify the consistently worst offenders. Make a list of all employees who have record of repeated absences, regardless of the presumed legitimacy or the underlying reasons for missing work.
 2. Centralize the absenteeism data. Records and information should be accumulated, analyzed, and maintained in one central location.
 3. Collect long-term data. Absenteeism records on individuals should be kept for a significantly long period to show that a clear pattern exists.

Once the decision is made to meet with an employee, Randall et al (1989) said supervisors should do the following:

1. Examine the attendance record with the employee.
 2. Be sure the employee is aware of the severity of the problem, as well as the organization's attendance standards.
 3. Prepare a brief, accurate memo at the session's end outlining the problem, noting the reasons given by the employee, and specifying whether the employee responded with a desire to improve.
5. **Negative Behavioural Strategies:** Unlike the strategies that seek to encourage desirable behaviour patterns through systems of reward or counseling, negative strategies according to Randall et al (1989) seek to discourage unwanted behaviour by either punishing it or ignoring it. Many organizations commonly use a negative strategy because of its ability to achieve relatively immediate results. Its negative effects can be reduced by incorporating several "hot stove principles", including the following:
 1. Provide ample and clear warning.
 2. Administer the discipline as quickly as possible.
 3. Administer the same discipline for the same behaviour for everyone, every time.

4. Administer the discipline impersonally.

Because the immediate supervisor or manager plays the integral role in administering discipline, Randall et al (1989) observed that human resource department and the organization should do the following to increase the discipline's effectiveness:

1. Allow managers and supervisors to help select their own employees.
2. Educate managers and supervisors about the organization's disciplinary policies and train them to administer the policies.
3. Set up standards that are equitable to employees, and that managers and supervisors can easily and consistently implement.

No organization can operate smoothly, safely, or efficiently without work rules and work policies (McEvoy and Cascio 1985). The general scenario is that employers make the rules and policies, supervisors enforce them, and employees follow them. However, no employer has a completely free hand to establish any rules or policies he or she wishes (Okere 2019). Work rules and policies are part of the internal discipline system because rule infractions only sometimes result in some form of discipline. Therefore, to be effective, work rules and policies must be reasonably related to appropriate management goals and should also be effectively communicated (Campbell et al 1985). Also, Randall et al (1989) posited that rules and policies should embrace the notion of progressive discipline and respect due process. In other words, the rules and policies (1) must apply equally to all employees, regardless of political affiliation, tribe, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability etc; (2) must be clearly stated; (3) must be enforced objectively; and (4) should reflect the information necessary to prove equal application and enforcement of work rules.

Whether a negative behaviour strategy is an appropriate remedy depends upon an analysis of the behavioural determinants, as shown in Exhibit 1. This is also true for the other strategies.

6. **Decide and Agree on the Action Required:** Action may be taken by the individual, the manager or both parties. This could include:

1. The individual taking steps to improve skills or change behaviour.
2. The individual changing attitudes.
3. The manager providing more support or guidance.
4. The manager and the individual working jointly to clarify expectations.
5. The manager and the individual working jointly to develop abilities and skills.

7. **Resource the Action:** Provide the coaching, training, guidance, experience or facilities required to enable agreed actions to happen.

8. **Monitor and Provide Feedback:** Both managers and individuals should monitor performance, ensure that feedback is provided or obtained and analyzed, and agree on any further actions that may be necessary.

Research Method Adopted

The study adopted literature survey method to collect information concerning the issues involved in the research. That is, the information needed were obtained by reviewing past studies. Qualitative technique was employed to analyze the information gathered.

CONCLUSIONS

Ineffective employee performance, whether anyone wants to admit it or not, plagues all organizations at least some of the time. A critical factor related to an organization's long-term success is its ability to measure how well employees perform and then use that information to ensure that performance meets present standards and improves overtime. Steps to manage under performance include identifying performance gaps, and determining the causes of performance

deficiencies. More specific and frequently used strategies to improve employee performance also include positive reinforcement system; positive discipline programmes, employee assistance programmes; employee counseling; negative behavioural strategies. To help ensure the effectiveness of programmes to improve performance, performance gaps and their potential causes must be identified first. Then alternative programmes can be selected and their relative utility measured.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research proffer the following recommendations to improve performance in Nigerian organizations.

1. Positive reinforcement system, positive disciplinary programmes, employee assistance programmes, employee counseling and negative behavioural strategies should be adopted to improve employee performance.
2. Employee performance should be appraised in terms of job-related attributes, behaviours and outcomes, and absenteeism.
3. Goals should be used to identify performance deficiencies by measuring how well an employee does in relation to set goals.
4. Performance gap can be noted by comparisons over time.
5. To uncover the reasons for performance deficiencies or gaps, a model of the determinants of employee behaviour in organization such as ability, interest in doing the job, opportunity to advance etc should be adopted.
6. To help ensure the effectiveness of programmes to improve performance, performance gaps and their potential causes must be identified first.
7. Performance appraisal data should be gathered by whatever form to make two kinds of decisions: (a) evaluation, that is salary, promotion, demotion, and layoff decisions; and (b) development that is, counseling, coaching, improving, and career planning decisions.

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