

An Investigation of Employee Voice and Employee Commitment in Oil Producing Firms in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study was conducted to examine the influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. The study was based on a survey research design and made use of questionnaire in obtaining data from office resident employees serving in five Oil Producing firms in Rivers State of Nigeria. The population of study was 20,116 while its sample size determined through Taro Yamane sample size determination formular was 1793. The analysis of data was done with descriptive and inferential statistics. The former used percentage method while the latter used simple regression. The test of hypotheses in the study indicated that employee voice had a positive and significant influence on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. The generalized model summary showed an R^2 of 0.431. The model also showed a goodness of fit at 95 percent (p -value < 0.05). It was concluded that employee voice was a good predictor of employee commitment in Oil Producing firms particularly those of Rivers State of Nigeria. In line with the outcome of this study, it was recommended that Oil Producing firms in Rivers State should recognize the expressed position of its employees and incorporate their suggestions into operations as an effective strategy to influencing employee commitment.*

Keywords: employee voice, employee commitment, oil producing firms, Rivers state, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the literature on employee voice has continued among organisational scholars and practitioners. This interest emanates from the belief and evidence that those with a voice in organisations exhibit positive work attitudes in such organizations. As an aspect of employee relations, employee voice represents a system put in place to ease effective communication in organizations between management and its employees. This could be with employees' representative or non-union forms. It can equally be a combination of these two. If such communication is with union, it implies communicating collectively.

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It has also been observed that recognizing the voice of employees has a positive impact on organization's service quality and overall performance; similarly, it facilitates early and timely dictation of challenges in the organization which if not identified on time can disrupt operations with time (Dundon and Rollinson, 2014). The rate at which workers leave their present organizations to others has been linked with employee voice. It has been suggested that given that staff are being encouraged to make their voice known in the business of their employers, this would influence their decision to remain with their current employers (Boxall and Purcell, 2013).

It is a well known fact that employees are the key variables that enhance the success of organisations. Therefore, it is believed that where staff of organizations work together coupled with a good working relationship with their employers, their jobs can be achieved with ease. Thus, with proper management, employee relations is imperative to organizational success. Hence, having in place, a sturdy relationship between employees and employers that results in the former's motivation, commitment and improved performance is needed. Employee voice, as a key component of employee relations is essential to the overall performance of the organization (Machokoto, 2019). Employee relations induces commitment and loyalty while reducing organizational conflict (Bajaj et al., 2013).

Employee commitment serves to show a vital component used in assessing the behaviour of organizational members and is viewed as a necessary and essential element in measuring employee behaviour in organisations, which itself depends on work conditions (Gospel and Palmer, 2014). Getting staff to be committed is a challenge being faced by executives in managing firms (Chew and Chan, 2018). It is employee commitment that depicts the cordiality of employer-employee relationship (Stites and Michael, 2011). It is considered as extent to which the employee is attached to the organisation (Stites and Michael, 2011). Herscovitch (2012) identifies three aspects of commitment, affective, continuance and normative. The first, affective commitment focuses on an emotional attachment of an employee to an organisation. The second, continuance commitment explains that the employee stays with an organisation because the employee senses negativity in leaving the organization. The third, normative commitment is concerned with employee's moral obligation to stay with an organisation.

Oil Producing firms require highly committed employees with quality job attitudes to support the production and delivery of goods and services while ultimately achieving their goal of profit maximisation. Having a committed and effective workforce in the Oil and Gas sector requires a conscious and deliberate attempt by management to implement well designed employee relations strategies. Due to the competitive nature of businesses in this sector, management of organisations are left with no other choice than creating and maintaining harmonious relationship with their employees. In the absence of this, employees tend to exhibit negative work attitudes such as; irregularity to work, poor service delivery, absenteeism and others. Thus, it is imperative that good employee relations be in place to make for a committed workforce. This stems from the fact employees' level of commitment has a direct bearing with their performance and by extension the ability of organisations to achieve their set goals.

Statement of the Problem

While Oil Producing firms in Nigeria have been adjudged by many as one of the most organised sectors in terms of good employee relations practices particularly, in terms of good working conditions, improved compensation packages, good employee management, and better conflict management mechanisms, there have been reported cases of management not paying attention to employee voice and suggestions in organizational management. This may suggest that oil producing firms in Nigeria are yet to pay serious attention to incorporating employee inputs and suggestions into its operational and strategic directions. Such disposition is likely to negatively influence employee loyalty and commitment, resulting in poor employee work attitudes. Against this backdrop, this study explores the influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State.

Research Objective

To explore the extent of influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State

Hypotheses of the Study

H₀: Employee Voice does not have any significant positive influence on Employee Commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Employee Voice

Also known as employee participation, employee voice represents a system put in place to ease effective communication in organizations between management and its employees. This could be with employees' representative or non-union forms. It can equally be a combination of these two. If such communication is with union, it implies communicating collectively. Non-union voice may be both representative which in this case include independent works councils, joint consultative committees and direct forms (examples team briefings and suggestion schemes) (Metcalf, 2013). Furthermore, data suggest that joint consultation has proved very useful in positively improving work place attitudes especially in the last two decades. This owes to the fact that both employers desirous of improved operational results and employees who desire that their rights be granted by such employers fully embrace joint consultation.

It has also been observed that recognizing the voice of employees has a positive impact on organization's service quality and overall performance; similarly, it facilitates early and timely dictation of challenges in the organization which if not identified on time can disrupt operations with time (Dundon and Rollinson, 2014). The rate at which workers leave their present organizations to others has been linked with employee voice. It has been suggested that given that staff are being encouraged to make their voice known in the business of their employers, their satisfaction levels and expectations, such would influence their decision to remain with their current employers (Boxall and Purcell, 2013).

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Jaja and Okpu (2013) defined suggestion scheme as formalized mechanism which encourages employees to contribute constructive ideas for improving the organisation in which they work. Employee suggestion schemes are employee relation practices used to capture employee ideas on areas that are often not within their control (Jaja and Okpu (2013). Landau (2019) posit that employees will be more committed if their suggestions facilitate improvement or change in the organisation. Similarly Lloyd (2016) believe that when organisations encourage employees to think more creatively and share their ideas for the benefit of the firm by the use of employee suggestion scheme, it will make employees more committed and involved in the organisation and less will think of leaving the and.

The reality in organizations is that as management makes it possible for employees' voices to be heard, encourages their involvement through participatory management, introduce suggestion programmes, these are likely to have a positive impact on both employee retention and enterprise productivity. Four key reasons for employee voice have been identified by Armstrong (2009). These include, letting known to management, respective level of satisfaction of employees; informing management of union's position on organizational issues; supporting management work and quality related decision making and engendering a cordial working relationship between management and labour.

Employee voice may directly involve staff. It can also take place with employees' representatives. As noted by Martin (2018), involving employees in organizational management is premised on the fact by encouraging the participation of employees in setting organizational goals, it influences employees' acceptance, ownership and commitment to such planned goals and that this achieves both positive employee work attitudes and improved performance of the organization. For this reason, the author counsels a managerial disposition that allows for effective management-labour interaction in sharing goals and agreeing on the approach to actualizing such goals.

This stud is theoretically founded on the Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) is the brain child of Blaus (1964). In the view of this theory, individuals voluntarily behave in certain ways. They also do certain things as they have an expectation of equal positive behaviour form other individuals. The idea of social exchange rest on having a belief that some other persons would return one's behaviour whether positive or negative.

Furthermore, it is also the position and belief of SET that an effective work place relationship engenders benefits. Therefore, individuals assess the worth of any relationship by deducting what is considered as costs from the sensed rewards provided by it. In this case, the outcome taken to be difference between benefits and costs. Put mathematically, $Worth = Rewards - Costs$. In the context of this study, SET is important in providing useful insights into the link between employee voice and employee commitment. It argues that given a disposition of the oil producing firms in allowing for employee voice in its management, this will motivate its employee's loyalty and commitment. Studies in the research area suggest there is a strong link between employee voice and employee commitment. For instance, Nsien, Effiom² and Umoh (2020) revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between employee voice and employee commitment. Again, Tantua & Vopnu (2019) found a

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significant influence of employee voice on employee commitment in insurance companies in Rivers State. Also, in a desk review of current literature on employee voice and employee commitment, Machokoto and Dzvimbo(2022) found that employee voice and employee commitment have become a global emergency, emphasizing the need for employers to encourage employee voice. Similar results were reported by Machokoto (2019).

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted and used in this research. The population of this study was made up of 2,116 office resident employees from five Oil Producing firms in Rivers State of Nigeria, namely, Shell Petroleum Dev. Company of Nig. Ltd, Chevron Oil Nigeria Plc, Eroton Exploration and Oil Producing Company, Belema Oil Producing Ltd and Newcross Exploration and Production Ltd. The study' sample size determined through Taro Yamane sample size determination formula was 1793. This number was administered with copies of the questionnaire. The research instrument specifically focused on employee voice and employee commitment. Instrument validation was done with experts in the field of Business Management. Furthermore, the Cronbach Alpha reliability test was carried out on research variables. The mean result of the reliability first test was 0.745 while result of the second test was 0.760. The result implied that the instrument was reliable. The instrument as designed reflected 5 – point Likert scale. It was scored as follows; strongly Agree (SA = 5); Agreed (A = 4); Disagree (DA = 3); Strongly Disagree (SD =2) and undecided (UN = 1). Descriptive analysis was used in data presentation while regression analysis was used in testing hypothesis.

Model Specification

In order to investigate the relationship between independent variable, employee voice and dependent variable, employee commitment, the following model was developed:

$$EPC = \beta_0 + \beta EPV + \varepsilon$$

Where; EPC, is the dependent variable (Employee Commitment); EPV- Employee Voice ; β_0 is the intercept ; β - the Beta coefficient; ε = error term.

Table 1: Respondents' Details

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender	Male	722	64.00%
	Female	406	36.00%
Age Range	Below 21	74	6.56
	21-34	238	21.10
	35-44	403	35.73
	45- 54	309	27.39
	55 and above	104	9.22
Education	SCE/WAEC	96	8.51
	OND	226	20.04
	BSc/HND	693	61.43
	Postgraduate	113	10.02
Work Experience	Less than 1 Year	73	6.47
	1-4 Years	228	20.21
	5- 9 Years	427	37.86
	10 -14 Year	253	22.43
	15 Years and above	147	13.03

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Table 1 presents respondents' details in the study. In the table, the sex distribution shows that out of the 1128 respondents, 722 of them was male representing 64.00% while 406 respondents were female representing 36.00%. Also In the table, 74 respondents fall in the range of under 21 representing 6.56%; 238 of them fall between 21-34 years representing 21.10%; 403 respondents fall between the age of 35 – 44 years representing 35.73%; Furthermore, 309 respondents were between 45-54 years representing 27.39% while 104 of the respondents were between the age of 55 and above representing 9.22%. Furthermore, in the table, 96 respondents possessed secondary certificate representing 8.51%; 226 respondents had OND representing 20.04%; 693 respondents have HND/BSC representing 61.43% and 113 respondents had masters and above representing 10.02%.

Again, the table showed the number of respondents that had years of experience less than 1 year as 73 representing 6.47%; Also, 228 of the respondents falls between 1-4 years of experience representing 20.21%, while 427 of them fall between 5-9 years of experience representing 37.86 %; furthermore, 253 respondents fall between 10-14 years of experience representing 22.43% while 147 of the respondents representing 13.03% had 15 years and above experience.

RESULTS/FINDINGS**Table: 2: Percentage Analysis of Employee Voice and Employee Commitment in Oil Producing Firms in Rivers State**

Statements on Employee Voice	SA	A	D	SD	UN
I am encouraged that my organisation has a system in place to take employees suggestions	211 (18.71%)	427 (37.85%)	196 (17.38%)	248 (21.99%)	46 (4.08%)
Many times, policies in my organisation are a result of staff suggestions	151 (13.39%)	276 (24.47%)	349 (30.94%)	297 (26.33%)	55 (4.88%)
My morale and commitment have been positively impacted as my organisation's management values and uses employees' opinions	166 (14.72%)	325 (28.81%)	273 (24.20%)	298 (26.42%)	66 (5.85%)
It is quite encouraging as authorities of our organisation relate well with us as a union on employee matters	254 (22.52%)	366 (32.45%)	188 (16.67%)	278 (24.65%)	42 (3.72%)
Total	196	349	251	280	52

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 2 shows the responses on the influence of employee voice on the commitment of employees of Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. In the table, 211(18.71%) strongly agreed that they are encouraged that their organisation has a system in place to take employees suggestions; 427(37.85%) respondents agreed; 196(17.38%) disagreed; 248(21.99%) strongly disagreed while 46(4.08%) were undecided. Also, 151(13.39%) respondents strongly agreed that many times, policies in their organisations are a result of employees' suggestions; 276(24.47%) agreed; 349(30.94%) disagreed; 297(26.33%) strongly disagreed while 55(4.88%) were undecided. Furthermore, 166(14.72%) respondents strongly agreed that their morale and commitment have been positively impacted as their organisation's management values and uses employees' opinions; 325(28.81%) agreed; 273(24.20%) disagreed; 298(26.42%) strongly disagreed while 66(5.85%) were undecided. Also in the table, 254(22.52%) respondents strongly agreed that it is quite encouraging as authorities of their organisation relate well with them as a union on employee matters; 366 (32.45%) agreed; 188(16.67%) disagreed; 278(24.65%) strongly disagreed while 42(3.72%) were undecided. In the analysis, majority of respondents who actually responded 545(50.20%) gave an indication that employee voice had an influence on the commitment of employees of Oil Producing firms in Rivers State

Research Hypothesis

H₀: Employee voice does not have any significant positive influence on Employee Commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State.

H₁: Employee voice has significant positive influence on Employee Commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Result on the influence of employee voice on Employee Commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.692 ^a	.479	.431	9.36172		
Goodness of Fit ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	201.461	1	160421.338	114.013	.000 ^b
	Residual	243.270	1126	152.011		
	Total	444.731	1127			
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standard Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.372	.309		4.054	2.046
	Employee Voice	.436	.215	.484	2.028	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Commitment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Voice

Table 3 shows the result of regression analysis on the influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. The generalized model summary showed an R^2 of 0.431 which implies that 43.1% of the changes in employee voice influences 43.1% change in employee commitment among employees of Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. The model also showed a goodness of fit at 95 percent (p-value <0.05). Employee voice impact on commitment showed statistically significant positive influence at 95% (also p-value <0.05). Following this result, the null hypothesis already stated that there is no significant relationship between employee voice and commitment of employees of Oil Producing firms in Rivers State is hereby rejected. This implies that there is a significant positive influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings and Implication to Research and Practice

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. The study was guided by the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. In the test of hypothesis, it was indicated that there is a significant influence of employee voice employee on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. This result strengthens Nsien, Effiom² and Umoh(2020) whose study in the brewing industry of Nigeria revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between employee voice and employee commitment. Again, Tantua & Vopnu(2019) found a significant influence of employee voice on employee commitment in insurance companies in Rivers State. Also, in a desk review of current literature on employee voice and employee commitment, Machokoto and Dzvimbo(2022) found that employee voice and employee commitment have become a global emergency, emphasizing the need for employers to encourage employee voice. In addition, a systematic review of related literature, by Machokoto(2019) found that there was a significant link between employee voice and affective commitment. In other literature, Allan, Dungan, and Peetz (2010) argue that companies with sound employee relations practices provide best quality services; enjoy high level productivity and high level of customer retention and comparatively good rate of employee retention. Thus, it is expected that that employee voice will trigger employee commitment, hence should be promoted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers. It was hypothesized that there is no significant positive influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. Findings of the study indicated that there is a significant positive influence of employee voice on employee commitment in Oil Producing firms in Rivers State. This result led to the conclusion that employee voice is a good predictor of employee commitment in Oil Producing firms particularly those of Rivers State of Nigeria. In line with the outcome of this study, it is recommended that Oil Producing firms in Rivers State should recognize the expressed position of its employees and incorporate their suggestions into operations as an effective strategy to influencing employee commitment.

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