

EMPLOYEE MORALE IN THE NATIONAL ELECTRIC POWER AUTHORITY (NEPA) OF NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE EASTERN ZONES

Onwuka, J. O.

Department of Sociology
Abia State University, Uturu

Abstract

Employee morale is one of the predictors of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This study, carried out in 2004, enquired into the morale of NEPA staff in the Eastern zones with a view to finding out if it can be held as one of the factors responsible for NEPA's dismal performance while it existed. Findings show that employee morale was high on three out of the four morale predictors investigated and that there was a relationship between sex and the way employees were treated. A few recommendations are made for the attention of NEPA's successor, the Power Holding Company (PHCN) of Nigeria.

Key words: Employee morale, Predictors, PHCN, Organizational efficiency, Eastern zones

Introduction

Employee morale is a very important and sensitive phenomenon in work organizations. This is because the extent of realization of organizational goals is a function of a number of factors, one of which is the level of employee morale defined by Flippo (1971:364) as "a mental condition or attitude of individuals and groups which determines their willingness to co-operate". Morale is that psychological feeling among organization members which fires their working spirit thereby making them effective tools for the realization of organizational goals. Consequently, a positive correlation has been established between employee morale and organizational productivity. Kossen (1975:150), for instance, states that "there tends to be a positive relationship between productivity and high morale. Under conditions of poor morale, favourable output is difficult to sustain for long".

Morale itself, it must be mentioned in passing, is anchored on motivation which Steers (1984) has defined as "that which energizes, directs and sustains human behaviour". In Human Resources Management (HRM), the term, motivation, refers to "a person's desire to do the best possible job or to exert the maximum effort to perform assigned tasks" (Gomez, Balkin, and Cardy, 1995:91). From these and other definitions in the literature, the very close relationship between motivation and morale is very clear; the latter is a product of the former. As Gomez et al go further to explain:

Motivation theory seeks to explain why employees are more motivated by and satisfied with one type of work than another. It is essential that managers have a basic understanding of work motivation because highly motivated employees are more likely to produce a superior-quality product or service than employees who lack motivation.

Vinacke (1962) appears to have made an inventory of work performance indices which, again, throws sufficient light on the close connection between motivation and morale. According to him; "there are a number of variables that affect the quantity and quality of an individual's work performance: intelligence, ability, muscular coordination, past experience, practice in the task, and motivation". Of all the enumerated variables, it is motivation and only motivation that can be said to subsume morale. This categorization also brings to the fore the primacy of motivation (or morale) as a performance index. It is the mobilizer and the galvanizer of other performance determinants.

The National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) was a federal monopoly parastatal established in 1972 to generate and distribute electricity to Nigerians for domestic and industrial purposes. From inception to 2005 when it was necessarily scrapped and replaced with the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), its performance was embarrassingly low. The situation did not only bring heavy economic losses to Nigeria, but also heavy social disgrace. Nwana (2000) states that, a study by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme puts Nigeria's economic losses from available power generation and supply at a staggering "N6.6 billion per year". Again, besides the usual trauma of frequent blackout which characterized the days of NEPA, its shoddy performance, on a number of occasions, exposed the nation to international ridicule and disgrace. During the World Under 20 Youth Championship and the Nations Cup hosted by Nigeria in 2000, for instance, many stadia were thrown into sudden darkness. This caused the Obasanjo administration to sack the management of NEPA on March 14, 2000 and to replace it with a 9-man technical board headed by the president himself who did not mince words in declaring that "there can only be one verdict, NEPA has failed and failed woefully". But in spite of this ambitious and unprecedented presidential measure, NEPA continued to ail until its demise in 2005.

The inability of an organization like NEPA to deliver can derive from many both internal and external factors. Internally, for instance, if the personnel are not working to form, or if equipment are not provided in the right quality and quantity, this can pose a problem. Again, externally, if the crime rate is high and equipment vandalization becomes the order of the day, service delivery is usually adversely affected. It is difficult in one research endeavour to focus attention on all the possible causes of a problem. This researcher, therefore, decided to beam research searchlight on the morale of NEPA employees with a view to ascertaining its state and whether it can be held as one of the factors responsible for NEPA unimpressive performance. This study which was conducted in 2004 can serve as a post-mortem on NEPA and its findings are considered instructive to NEPA's successor in assignment, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, (PHCN).

Methodology

Study Population

NEPA, when it existed, was made up of nine operational zones; Abuja, Benin, Enugu, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, and Port-Harcourt. Two of these zones (Enugu and Port-Harcourt) were located in the eastern part of the country. This was a study of all the employees (3,655) in all the thirteen districts of the two eastern zones. In effect, therefore, all the three thousand, six hundred and fifty-five employees located in Enugu and Port-Harcourt zones of NEPA (including Afam Generating station) comprised the population of this study.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The employees of NEPA in the two zones of the study, as in other zones, were subdivided into four major departments of the authority; engineering, accounts, administration and personnel, and marketing.

Proportional stratified sampling was employed to select 30 percent (1095) of the employees to serve as the sample. This ensured proportionate representation of these unevenly weighted departments in the sample. On the whole, therefore, one thousand and ninety-five employees of NEPA served as the sample for the study and responded to the questionnaire, the only data gathering instrument used.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

On the whole, this research set out and studied four different morale indicators in formal organizations.

Organizational Communication

The study attempted to find out the level of communication of official developments to employees.

Table 1: Communication Flow in NEPA

Responses	Frequency	%
Very High	143	13.1
High	387	35.3
Low	510	46.6
Very Low	55	5.0
Total	1,085	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Table 1 shows that less than 50% (48.4%) of the responding NEPA employees stated that the level of communication of official developments to staff was either high or very high. This shows that the level of communication of official developments to staff in the zones was low.

This is not a cheering discovery considering the benefits of adequate communication flow within an organization. Free flow of communication within an organization enables its members to keep abreast of the latest developments and for their decisions and actions to embody wisdom. It also gives organisation members a sense of belonging and gets rid of òweö and ötheyö feelings which do not help the development of a compact workforce that makes for healthy realization of organizational goals. Effective organizational communication whether vertical, horizontal, or lateral is a social glue that makes organizational members, irrespective of social class differences, to develop one focus and one spirit. As Johnson and Stinson (1978:165) have stated, öpeople want and need information relevant to their jobs. If they do not get this information through formal channels, they either make assumptions or turn to informal communication channelsö. I agree. Given differences between and among individuals in opinions, assumptions of this nature are likely to give rise to conflicting opinions and consequently conflicting decisions and actions. Informal communication or its euphemism, rumour, can also be

counterproductive in a group situation. Rumours are said to be at best half truths, and at worst blatant distortion of facts. Hence they do not augur well for organizational development.

Staff Productivity

Morale is one of the crucial predictors of productivity of employees of formal organizations. The equation is that when morale is high, productivity is high and vice versa. Consequently, productivity has become one of the indices employed in determining employee morale. A demoralized and disenchanted workforce is a spent force that hardly serves as a tool for the realization of corporate goals.

Table 2: Staff Productivity in NEPA

Responses	Frequency	%
Very High	272	24.9
High	653	59.6
Low	160	14.6
Very Low	10	0.9
Total	1,095	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Table 2 shows that staff productivity in NEPA, in the opinion of the sampled employees, was very high with 84.5% of them responding that it was either high or very high. However, no matter how much commitment staff exhibit at work, service delivery of the organization may not receive any significant boost if other important performance factors are ignored. This appears to be the case with NEPA. For instance, Ebonugwo and Udochukwu (2000) report that "South Africa with a population of 42 million has an installed capacity of 40,000 megawatts (MW), while Nigeria ... can only generate an embarrassing 5,800 megawatts for her 120 million citizens". Of course, while the nation had eight generating stations (three hydro and five thermal) with an installed capacity of 6,098 megawatts, the generating stations were just able to generate 1,330 MW. The reason, as reported by NEPA interviewees in a study carried out about the same time of this study by this researcher, was that half of the generating units of the stations were in a state of disrepair. Equipment constraint of this type will always impair service delivery regardless of the amount of commitment displayed by employees.

Friendliness and Co-operation Among Staff

This was another index used by the researcher to measure employee morale in NEPA. This is because high morale encourages friendliness and co-operation among employees of formal organizations and vice versa.

Table 3: Friendliness and Co-operation Among NEPA Staff

Responses	Frequency	%
Very High	333	30.4
High	634	57.9
Low	120	11.0
Very Low	8	0.7
Total	1,095	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Table 3 shows that friendliness and co-operation in NEPA, according to the employees who responded to the questionnaire, was very high. This is because 88.3% of them responded that it was either high or very high.

Workers who are in a good state of morale adopt a friendly and co-operative attitude toward one another. This encourages cohesiveness of the employees and their popular participation in the affairs of the organization. Popular participation, according to the Overseas Development Administration (ODA 1995:95), is a process by which people take an active and influential part in shaping decisions that affect their lives (Nwachukwu and Onwubiko 2007:68). Again, Nwachukwu and Onwubiko (2007) aver that popular participation as a process carries the people along through out the policy circle. Through it, all those who have an interest play active role(s) in decision-making and in all activities that affect them. Friendliness and co-operation among colleagues make for the development of mutual trust and confidence which enable them to work not as individuals but rather as a team.

Issues Arising from the Work Situation

Data were also gathered from NEPA employees to reflect their feelings on how they were treated at work.

Table 4: Issues Arising from the Work Situation in NEPA

S/No	Criterion	V.H	%	H	%	L	%	V.L	%	Total
1	Fair & objective assignment of tasks	98	8.9	708	64.7	256	23.4	33	3.0	1,095
2	Fair & objective appraisal of staff	123	11.2	733	67.0	219	20.0	20	1.8	1,095
3	Recognition for work well done	77	7.0	333	30.4	525	48.0	160	14.6	1,095
4	Proper enforcement of rules among staff	168	15.3	536	49.0	345	31.5	46	4.2	1,095

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

The way employees are treated in their work place can impinge on their morale. Quite often, workers expect fairness and equity in the way they are treated. Where these are perceived to be present in the workplace, high morale pervades the workforce. On the other hand, stick for one, and carrot for the other or selective justice in the workplace is usually a morale killer. Four criteria were employed by the researcher to measure how the sampled employees felt they were treated in NEPA.

Table 4 shows that with the exception of the third criterion (recognition for work well done), the sampled employees expressed a positive opinion of the other three criteria. These are fair and objective assignment of tasks, fair and objective appraisal of staff, and proper enforcement of rules among staff. It is important for every organization not to trifle with these criteria otherwise this leads to an ugly environment that is goal threatening. The absence of proper enforcement of rules among staff, for example, will lead to an anomic organizational environment which does not make for group solidarity.

Test of Hypothesis

One hypothesis was formulated for this study:

- H₁: There is a relationship between sex and the way NEPA employees are treated in the Eastern zones.
- H₀: There is no relationship between sex and the way NEPA employees are treated in the Eastern zones.

Table 5: Average Responses of Male and Female NEPA Employees on How They are Treated at Work.

Responses	Male	Female
Very High	84	32
High	414	164
Low	254	82
Very Low	32	33
Total	784	311

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Sex remains a crucial factor in the treatment of people the world over. It has, therefore, become a critical demographic variable in determining how people are treated in the work place. Table 5 shows the average scores of the sampled male and female employees on how they feel they are treated in NEPA.

A chi-square (X^2) test of the above hypothesis at 3 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance yielded the data below:

$$\begin{aligned}
 X^2_{cal} &= 18.67 \\
 X^2_{tab} &= 7.81
 \end{aligned}$$

This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that sex is a significant factor in the way NEPA employees are treated at work.

Women have always felt discriminated against and cried foul of the second fiddle roles bestowed on them in the society as daughters, wives, widows, employees, etc. This promptly reminds one of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945) aimed, in part, at bringing about equality of the sexes and the elimination of discriminatory practices that are based on sex. Article 1 of the Declaration provides that:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Furthermore, article 7 provides that:

All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this declaration.

Consequent upon this, the constitution of modern nation states have followed sooth to make provisions that favour equality of the sexes in virtually all ramifications of life.

Notwithstanding these provisions, there is the feeling that discrimination against women has become so culturally institutionalized that it persists today in spite of legislations against it. Commenting on the discrimination women suffer in their places of work, Eya (2002) holds that:

Some employers discriminate against women and in some cases sexually harass or molest them or seek sexual gratification as a condition for appointment, promotion and other benefits thus degrading them.

On the other hand, it is felt that women obtain undue favours in their places of work just because of their sex. Some times such favours come from their male counterparts without any inducement from the women simply because of common perception of women by men as the ðweaker sexö. Quite often, too, women go all out to secure such favours by seducing the men, a situation that has brought about the popular but unedifying expression, ðbottom powerö. Hence women secure undue favours and preferential treatments in such employment-oriented issues as appointment, promotion, transfer, enforcement of work rules, etc.

This way, or that way, the only hypothesis of the study shows that sex is a significant factor in the way NEPA employees are treated in the Eastern zones.

Conclusion

This study carried out in 2004 investigated the state of morale of NEPA employees in the Eastern (Enugu and Port-Harcourt) Zones. The survey which made use of a sample of 1,095 employees out of the 3,655 employees in the zones employed the questionnaire as the only instrument of data collection.

Findings show that employee morale was high or very high on three out of the four morale predictors investigated viz: staff productivity, friendliness and co-operation among staff, and issues arising from the work situation. Communication flow was however found to be low. Consequent upon the above, staff morale, as an index of organizational performance, is considered not one of the factors responsible for the dismal performance of NEPA while it existed. The only hypothesis formulated and tested in the study shows that sex was significant as a factor determining how staff were treated in NEPA.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

The management of PHCN must take immediate steps to boost organizational communication in the company, vertically, horizontally, and laterally.

Recognition for work well done was discovered to be poor. There is every need for PHCN to turn a new leaf by appreciating and rewarding workers who excel in task performance. The personnel unit should make excellence in service a hard criterion for the promotion of employees.

Preferential treatment of employees of different sexes is against the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945) and should be stopped. Besides, such preferential treatment against employees of a particular sex precipitates negative feelings among such employees which impair team spirit and good organizational performance.

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