

RETAINING AND PROPERLY DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES: COULD THIS IMPACT PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT?

*Christiana Kappo-Abidemi**, *Chux Gervase Iwu***, *Charles Allen-Ile****

Abstract

The relationship between public servants' professionalism and human resource retention and development (HRRD) is examined in this article. Variables such as performance appraisal, training and motivation are used to measure HRRD while the effect on professional output of public service employees is examined. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were adopted; four hundred and seventy six (476) useable questionnaires were retrieved from respondents and used in the quantitative analysis, while three different groups consisting of between eight to twelve people participated in focus group discussions. Inferential statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data, while the qualitative data were organised into themes. Findings indicate among others a lack of motivation among Nigerian public servants owing to remuneration and other incentives that are considered inadequate. We also found that the training and developmental strategies that are in place were not problem-specific. Therefore, a revamp of the current performance appraisal system is suggested amongst many others.

Keywords: Nigerian Public Service, Professional Conduct, Employee Retention, Training and Development

**Department of People Development and Technology, Walter Sisulu University, Potsdam Campus, South Africa*

***Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa*

****Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of the Western Cape, South Africa*

1 Introduction

Human resources are the most important source of competitive advantage for any organisation. How they are managed will determine the failure or success of the organisation. Therefore, effective and efficient human resources in an organisation will improve the quality of services as well as reduce absenteeism, employee turnover, and job dissatisfaction (Ayanda and Sani, 2010; Okeudo, 2012; Vathanophas and Thai-ngam, 2007). Retaining an efficient workforce is an arduous task but losing them is a very costly venture (Ndulue, 2012). Therefore, organisations must understand that employees are likely to go for better offers elsewhere if their needs are rarely met. But, considering Oldham and Hackman's (1981) counsel it is the duty of the organisation to put measures in place to ensure that employees resist such movements. The article examines the relationship between appropriate human resource retention and development (HRRD) schemes such as motivational structures put in place by the Nigerian public service (NPS) to support and encourage employees to deliver professional service. According to Tongo (2011), public perception of Nigerian public service is that the workers' performance is inefficient and of a low standard as a result of a lack of motivation and proper incentive measures. Therefore, Arowolo (2012) suggests that there should be an on-going assessment of performance in the public service in order to enhance professionalism and employee motivation.

2 Rationale for the study

Various motivational measures such as reward based performance appraisal, training, job security and pleasant work environment are perceived as factors that can be used to determine which employee to retain and develop in the workplace especially within public service. However, many discrepancies have been identified in the way Nigerian public service administers these tools to develop and retain its workforce. The Nigerian public service has a compromising basis for accessing its employee performance because actual performance expectations are not clearly stated. Over the years the Nigerian public service performance has been measured based on overall output of an entire organisation. Individual employee performance has been given little or no consideration (Dogarawa, 2011). Proper evaluation of individual employee by immediate supervisor and recipient of such service will enable the employer to identify appropriate training needed by such employee in order to be more efficient and competent. In fact this will help the NPS to know exactly where the employee was able to put in

his/her best performance and should help their placement within government institutions. Apart from the internal evaluation of Nigerian public servants' performance, public servants should also be assessed based on the level of competency displayed in carrying out their duties. Therefore, the study aims to examine the implication of existing HRRD schemes in relation to the professional output of public servants in Nigeria by focusing on the following objectives:

- Relationship between performance appraisal and professionalism,
- The relationship between training and professionalism, and
- Impact of reward system on professionalism.

3 Literature review

Workers who perform well, including permanent staff are known to be concerned with their personal growth and career development as well as organisational prestige while low performers and hourly employees are more concerned about monetary entitlement and the possibility of retention. It can be said that employee development and retention are serious sources of motivation for workers and can possibly improve output (Hausknecht, Rodda and Howard, 2009). Several reasons account for a prospective employee's consideration for a job. Some of these reasons could also influence an employee's intention to either stay longer in a job or not. Ramlall (2003) observed that majority of employees irrespective of their employment status, choose the location of the company and compensation as reasons that will make them stay longer with an organisation, while a lack of challenges and opportunities, lack of career advancement and salary are indicated as factors that could make employees leave an organisation. The narrative is different within the Nigerian public service. The Nigerian public service has a culture of employing mostly on permanent basis irrespective of output and consideration of any of the aforementioned criteria. The cost of retaining and developing valuable employees is relatively cheaper than the cost of replacing them.

3.1 Human resource retention in Nigerian public service

Employee retention is described as strategies adopted by employers to keep their best workforce using various measures such as meaningful rewards- performance pay, employee training, career development plans, creation of social community in the workplace, job security, high level of wage rate, organisational image, participative decision-making, and information sharing (Gberevbie, 2010; Nwokocha and Iheriohanma, 2012). Employee retention works better if the organisation understands the employee and presents appropriate rewards. This also presents an opportunity for the organisation to gauge the various factors that have kept the employee within the organisation (Sanusi, 2002).

However, according to Gberevbie (2010), the Nigerian public service seems to care less about retaining their valuable employees because it is crowded with employees who are more concerned about job security rather than job satisfaction, and from an economic perspective it looks like the only organisation that can accommodate such in recent times is a government establishment. Little wonder why El-Rufai (2011) said that the Nigerian public service had become the employer of dull, lazy, and unmotivated people; people with no career goals and who actually seem not to understand what job satisfaction means but are only interested in earning a living rather than making a difference in the society through their profession.

With the emergence of globalisation it is becoming easier for skilled and competent employees to move from one job to the other especially when the current job does not satisfy nor motivate. Within the Nigerian public service, it is important to identify the elements that attract and retain employees. Sadly, the non-specific measurement and evaluation of performance in Nigerian public service makes it difficult to identify the weaknesses, strengths, opportunities, and threats of individual employee and attribute reward and recognition accordingly (Moti and Vambe, 2011). This actually makes it difficult to understand which particular area of the public service requires special attention and which area is actually adding value to the organisation (Singh, Chauhan, Agrawal, and Kapoor, 2011). Meanwhile, organisations rely on the skill, knowledge and competency of their workforce in order to remain relevant (Nwokocha and Iheriohanma, 2012; Oginni, Ogunlusi and Faseyiku, 2013). This is why Agburu (2012) considers organisational competitiveness to depend on the capacity of the organisation to present job satisfying environments encompassing rewards and incentives such as payment of wages and salaries at prevailing rates in the local market and industry. Incentives, it must be noted should be organised in such a way that they are easy to administer and must equate expected efforts.

3.2 Human resource development (HRD) in Nigerian public service

Development is described as building on the knowledge and skills of employees so as to prepare them for new challenges and responsibilities (Ndulue, 2012). This involves training, education, and career development, which will give employees the basic understanding needed to carry out their duties effectively. Providing the necessary

human resource development plans facilitate the improvement of skilled and experienced workforce. Such a plan involves investment in education and training of employees (Appah, Tebepah, and Soreh, 2012).

It is therefore acknowledged that a functional human resource development project in an organisation helps employees to improve capability required to function in their current and future job responsibilities, develop individual capability as well as the discovery and expansion of their potential for both personal and organisational development and development of organisational interpersonal relationships that will enhance professionalism. In the light of all these functions of HRD, Vathanophas and Thai-ngam (2007) also reckon that HRD should encourage competency development by forming opportunities within the organisation for employees to develop their competencies for self-benefit and for the benefit of others. Within the Nigerian public service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has the responsibility to ensure that public servants are provided with opportunities to be constantly trained and developed in order to improve the needed skills and knowledge to do their jobs effectively. This is however dependent upon the availability of funds.

Training programmes are considered to be costly for employers and in most cases employees also have to leave work in order to attend training and developmental programmes which could result in a temporary work stoppage. Notwithstanding, training provides opportunities and benefits which outweigh these shortcomings (Frost, n.d). Agunyai (2015) acknowledge that training and development ensure that public servants have the needed knowledge and skill to carry out their jobs and face new responsibilities as demanded by the job. However, according to Ewoh (2014), the Nigerian government did not give attention to training and development of public servants early enough and when they eventually did, only three institutions of higher learning were identified and approved for staff development programmes for the entire public service. This is viewed as quite limiting considering the population of the Nigerian public service and the fact that public offices are situated all over the nation.

Manpower development is an important process of enhancing employee productivity and consequently organisational performance. According to Malaolu and Ogbuabor (2015), it is the only avenue whereby job related skills that were not given by formal education can be acquired. Arowolo (2012) also opined that some of the factors that enhance good performance which should be inculcated into training programmes include availability of work facilities, a pleasant work environment, capacity building, cordial work relationships, a team building spirit, performance appraisals, assurance of rewards and discipline.

4 Method

Mixed method research was adopted for the study in order to enhance a better understanding of the subject matter. Data were collected both quantitatively and qualitatively at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) focusing on course participants from various public ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). Participants were randomly selected and were advised to withdraw at any point they felt they were no longer willing to participate. Creswell (2006) and Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) describe mixed method research as the combination of both elements of quantitative and qualitative methods for the purpose of collecting and analysing data in a study. Both methods were concurrently used to collect data in order for the information gathered from qualitative response to validate and authenticate the quantitative data. HRRD variables such as performance management, training, reward systems, wages and salary were examined and interrelated with professionalism related questions so as to determine if there is any relationship between the two concepts.

4.1 Research instruments

Over the years the questionnaire has proven to be the most suitable instrument for data collection because the researcher is able to access a large number of participants within a shorter time period unlike interviews. According to Sivo, Saunders, Chang, and Jiang (2006) questionnaires are comparatively easier to administer and efficiently gather large amounts of data at low cost, which is why it was considered more efficient and reliable for this study. The focus group interviews (qualitative) were also chosen in order to save time and have a large number of interviewees under the same roof. Focus group interviews enable different opinions to be heard and countered without intimidation. Participants were not expected to write down their names or mention their ministry in order to remain anonymous. These two ways of using the questionnaire (quantitative) and the interview (qualitative) for data collection have been used over the years and accurate results have been achieved from their usage. Therefore, it was concluded that they were the most appropriate means of getting the expected results for this research.

4.2 Data analysis

Focus group interview was conducted and the information gathered was analysed using thematic analysis. The quantitative data were analysed using various descriptive and inferential statistical measures such as chi-square, and Cronbach Alpha. The data were cleaned, coded, captured and analysed using SPSS.

5 Results and discussion

Performance, wages and salary, motivation, promotion and personal development are some of the factors assessed and related to professionalism in the research and were found to have a positive correlation based on Cronbach alpha analysis result of 0.709 generated for reliability of the instrument used (questionnaire). This finding is consistent with that of Sutherland and Jordaan’s (2004) research which showed that the knowledge possessed by employees, as well as their ability to adapt to organisational challenges and possibilities of career development are key factors for retention. Possessed knowledge plus the pursuit of personal development through on-going learning do improve performance as long as the organisation provides an enabling environment.

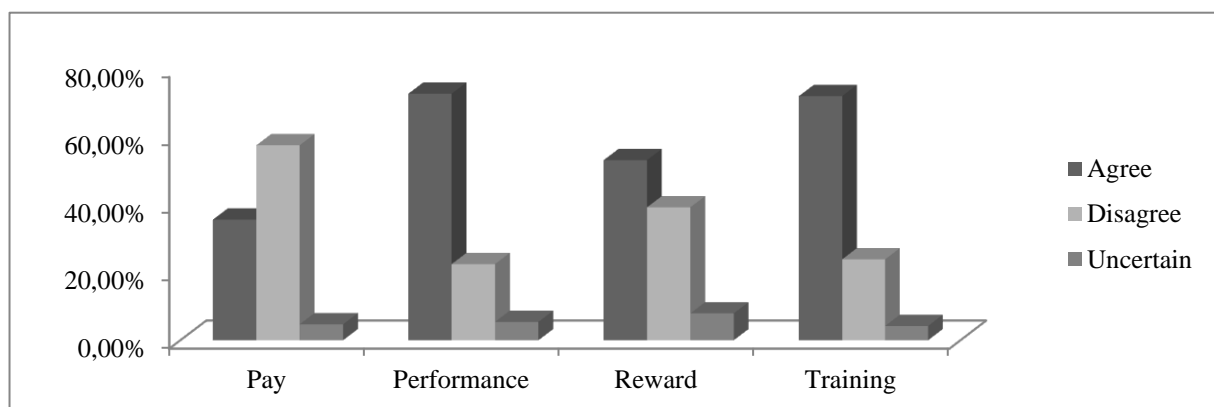
The effect of HRRD such as training and development, performance appraisal, and career planning and development within the Nigerian public service was also observed in relation to professionalism and using various questions to determine participants’ responses. The graphs below show the responses of participants to various questions. Cronbach’s Alpha was also used to evaluate the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was considered reliable at 0.719 as shown in Table 1. Correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between the two variables (HRRD and professionalism) based on the identified research items. Table 1 depicts the analysis:

Table 1. Correlation coefficient for HRRD and professionalism

| | | Professionalism | Human resource retention and development |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|--|
| Professionalism | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .700 |
| | Sig.(2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 477 | 477 |
| Human resource retention and development | Pearson Correlation | .700 | 1 |
| | Sig.(2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 477 | 477 |

The table above shows that there is a significant relationship between HRRD which was examined using training and development, performance appraisal and career planning and development and professionalism examined based on output, wages and salary, motivation and personal development. We further classified the examined variables into four categories namely pay, performance, rewards and training to determine respondents’ response to the relationship between HRRD and professionalism. The response is analysed in the graph below (Fig. 1):

Figure 1. Relationship between HRRD and professionalism based on pay, performance, rewards and training



This study found that less than 40% of the participants admitted that they were paid well, while over 70% assumed that their performance was up to the expected standard. Irrespective of performance, more than 50% admitted that rewards were given indiscriminately and over 70% agreed that training was provided irrespective of their significance. Inconsistent application of these tools could be discouraging for employees thereby

hindering them from striving towards professionalism, knowing that excellent performance and output are hardly recognised. Aktar, Sachu, and Ali (2012) considered rewards as a motivating factor that can encourage employees to contribute their best efforts towards new ideas in order to improve organisational performance. Likewise, Tella, Ayeni and Popoola (2007) proved that there is a strong relationship between employee professionalism and job motivation in terms of various rewards and incentives, irrespective of the level and qualification of employees in as much as they are attributed to performance.

5.1 Analysis of focus group interviews

Three different groups were engaged in the discussion. The responses of the three different groups are transcribed and presented in the form of themes. Three themes emerged from the focus group discussion in order to establish if there is any relationship between HRRD and NPS professionalism. In the context of this study, HRRD refers to various innovations and support systems put in place by the Nigerian public service to enhance its staff development and reduce brain-drain.

5.1.1 Theme 1: Are public servants motivated enough (in terms of remuneration, benefits, and their welfare) to give of their best to their job?

5.1.1.1 Group 1

There is no uniform remuneration package across the MDAs. There are some agencies where the new entrant earns almost the same as an assistant director in the ministry. This is one of the reasons why people are not giving their best to the service. Public servants used to be more interested in their career progression within the ministry/parastatal but due to disparity in remuneration between ministry and agencies they are now more interested in changing their job from ministry to a well-paid agency. Unless there is a uniform pattern of remuneration across all MDAs it might actually be impossible to get the best performance out of the employees.

5.1.1.2 Group 2

The participants in this group were of the opinion that they are not motivated enough to give their best. It was stated in labour law (according to one of the participants) that employers should provide accommodation, transportation and feeding, apart from the monthly remuneration for its employees but that is not the case. Even when one is injured on duty, the ministry simply leaves one to sort oneself out or at most, the employee will be retrenched. Almost all participants felt that if they could get a better job they would leave the service, while some have contrary opinions because they have flexible time to do other things while still employed by government and the perception of job security within public service.

The housing issue was raised in this group and one of the issues that emerged was that there is a kind of monthly deduction from public servants' salaries toward housing which is supposed to entitle them to a mortgage (bond) with a particular organisation (Federal Mortgage Bank) but unfortunately more than half of the group knew nothing about it and, in the case of those who are aware of it, they said that the procedure is not as easy as it was written and there is hardly anyone who has received a house through these means. The money might actually be part of the retirement package but there was a lot of argument about what is being done with the money as nobody seemed to be sure of what happens to the mortgage deductions. Some of the participants also said that some states built houses for their workers (at certain levels) and the bonds were deducted monthly.

5.1.1.3 Group 3

Civil servants are not motivated in any way. For example, the local government salary is always delayed. Some parastatals pay well above what the public service is paying and when it comes to welfare, workplace security and provisioning are not up-to-date. Notwithstanding this, the majority of the participants are not willing to leave the service due to job security and flexible conditions of service. People who are working in other parastatals are earning more but they do work under pressure and do not have the time to spend the money. Meanwhile, some are of the opinion that if they are able to get something better they will leave the public service. One of the participants also mentioned job satisfaction as part of the reason for working, but the public service is actually depriving its employees of that satisfaction. A civil service job is not actually encouraging and challenging. The older generation of workers claim that their passion and drive for joining the service have been destroyed by the current situation, so they are not doing what they love but are working for survival or monetary reasons alone.

5.1.2 Theme 2: What is the process for employee promotion in the public service?

5.1.2.1 Group 1

Generally, new employees are expected to spend at least three years before they are moved to another position should a vacancy arise irrespective of performance. Promotion is subject to performance evaluation through the use of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER). In this case, if about ten people are due for promotion and only five posts are available, the APER form will be used as a yardstick for evaluation. This is clearly stated in the Public Service Handbook. The use of the APER form as an appraisal system is still not giving the best to the public service because personal sentiments still take priority over the standards laid down in the APER system.

5.1.3 Theme 3: How does the public service contribute to the development of its employees?

5.1.3.1 Group 1

Training programmes organised by the institutions are paid for but personal studies embarked on by individual employees are not financially supported by the government. Some of the participants however said their studies were funded by their employer. This is an indication that payment for studies undertaken elsewhere other than ASCON varies from ministry to ministry. In the case of a study leave, in some cases, the study leave is without pay. If one is able to receive study leave without pay, he/she can stay away for as long as he/she wants to but whenever the study is done he/she will have a job to come back to, but an employee on study leave with pay has a limited time frame in which he/she has to come back to work.

5.1.3.2 Group 2

The public service is responsible for the development of its employees. Most of the participants agreed that their organisation even goes as far as to support skills development, paying for further studies while the employees still draw their normal salary.

5.1.3.3 Group 3

My organisation is trying their best in terms of providing an avenue for training both at local and international level but the question is “is the training actually achieving its purpose?” Most of the time people are more interested in attached benefits than the actual training itself. Employees are not made to be accountable for the training in terms of giving reports and the transferring of acquired knowledge obtained in the training.

5.2 Discussion

The provision of the Charter for African Public Service adopted by most African countries provide that training and development are an employee’s right and public administration in all African countries should provide a supporting environment as well as resources for improving and adopting, on a continuous basis, the skills and knowledge of employees (Musa, 2001). Gyang (2011) reckons that national development depends on the development and capability of available human power. However, most workforce development projects embarked on by different administrations in Nigeria have failed due to the lack of a proper assessment of the situation before proposing an intervention and subsequent mismatch of programmes. The research respondents also confirmed that most restructuring exercises in the public service lack proper implementation and continuity. No matter how good an innovation works, once a new administration takes over it is abandoned. Likewise, Olaopa (2014) agreed that the nation missed some vital opportunities to deliver capacities, competencies and public goods through its public service. Halleson’s (2011) explanations of the Charter for Africa Public Service acknowledged that most qualified personnel in Africa are more willing to work for private organisations than public ones because they are better remunerated and more professionally motivated.

5.3 Relationship between performance appraisal, reward system, training and professionalism

In light of the above analysis of both qualitative and quantitative responses, one gets the picture that the Nigerian public service has a culture of random promotion and payment of salaries that cannot be attributed to employee output. An increment of wages and salaries that does not contribute toward performance is not likely to be motivating because it is applicable to all employees, irrespective of performance. Hence, outputs should be the major determinant of employees’ professionalism and rewards. Basseyy and Akpan (2010) opine that leaders and

managers should be motivated and encouraged in order to achieve the expected results. Likewise, employees are expected to be motivated by leaders in order to achieve the set objectives. Manns (2007) showed that motivated employees are more committed and loyal to their organisation, perform better than their unmotivated counterparts, work harder, and have less chance of being absent from work.

Employers are expected to play a critical role in encouraging professionalism. Arowolo (2012) and Isife et al (2000) recommended that in order to get optimal performance, employees should be motivated and rewarded according to their performance so as to encourage good output. Rehman, Khan, Lashari and Lashari (2010) also found that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction, performance and any form of reward; both intrinsic and extrinsic employee rewards. Ajila and Abiola (2004) recommended that organisations should recognise their employees' performance by rewarding outstanding achievements and giving help in terms of training for those struggling to meet with set standards. Doing this will expose skills and knowledge shortfalls as well as indicate where the employee needs to be assisted (Atakpa, Okeni and Nwanko, 2013).

The Charter for African Public Service recommends that employees should be given opportunities to be responsible for their career development and that they should be compensated and remunerated according to their responsibilities and performances. Muwanga (2011) further agreed that the human resource manager, as the agent of change, should observe changes in employees' attitudes and make appropriate recommendations such as counselling and training to correct such behaviour. If these are strictly adhered to, the Nigerian public service will retain a competent and professional workforce instead of the current workforce that is characterised as incompetent, dull and lazy (El-Rufai, 2011). Ramlall (2003) concluded that line managers and supervisors depend on human resource functions to advise on strategies to retain valuable employees.

6 Recommendation and conclusion

Having understood that the examined concepts are interdependent, it is obvious that Nigerian public service can only achieve the competence and level of professionalism that will produce the expected results if the following are considered and implemented:

- Proper re-evaluation and restructuring of the current performance appraisal method.
- Proper skills audit in order to determine the lacked skill and identifying suitable candidates for training.
- Readjustment of salary structure amongst all MDA's, and
- Introduction of a reward system for outstanding performance as well as suitable punishment for non-abiding established performance standard.

The study has achieved all the set objectives and it has clearly shown that there is a relationship between efficient performance appraisal systems, effective administration of rewards, skill targeted training and employees' professionalism.

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