

Job Autonomy and Employee Performance in Public Institutions in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Federal Government Hospitals in Edo States

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Corresponding Author: EDONYABO, Fidelis	Abstract: This study examined the impact of job autonomy on employee performance in selected Federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. Job autonomy, a critical element of employee empowerment, was analyzed through four dimensions: flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, participation in decision-making, and clear work criteria. Questionnaire was employed as the research instrument for this study with 170 respondents deemed usable and the study relied on the Agency Theory as its theoretical framework. Data collected were analysed using Pearson's coefficient of correlation and linear regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23. The findings affirmed that flexible work schedules enable employees to balance professional and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Similarly, flexible working hours were found to improve employee engagement and productivity by allowing individuals to align their work times with their peak performance hours. The study recommends among others that hospital administrators in Federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States should implement policies that promote flexible work schedules. Flexibility can allow healthcare workers to balance their professional and personal lives, reducing stress and improving job satisfaction, among others.
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Introduction

In the field of human resource management, the idea of job autonomy has grown in significance. The degree of freedom an employee has to choose how work is done, including what procedures to use to complete the task, is referred to as job autonomy. The Greek word "autonomos"; "auto" which mean "self" and "nomos", which means "rule", are the origin of the English word "autonomy", which denotes self-rule. Someone that relies on its own rules and regulations to carry out actions and duties is said to practice "self-rule". In the past, Greek city states exercised autonomy in choosing their own leaders and managing the affairs of their citizens (Agich, 1994). Job autonomy is considered during the job designing procedure in HR administration in both the public and private organisations. Moreover, both profit and non-profit organisations, the idea of job autonomy is divisive since it is viewed negatively in certain cultures and as beneficial in others cultures (Jeet & Sayeeduzzafar, 2014).

Saragih (2011) makes the case that job autonomy improves employee and organisation performance by boosting satisfaction, boosting self-efficacy, and reducing stress at work. Sisodia and Das (2013) contend that increased job autonomy leads to a higher level of commitment and performance. It is important to note that the top management actively contributes to the organisational environment's integration of job autonomy. Fernet et al. (2015) argued that reflection on oneself, empowerment, and independent motivation are all connected to successful leadership and effective management. Studies reveal that there are disparities in the

attitudes and comprehension of executives regarding the notion of job autonomy. While some view job autonomy as a chance for employees to advance, others see it as a melting pot that will ultimately affect organisational outcomes (Lu et al., 2017). According to Strauss et al. (2020), workers who have a high degree of job autonomy report feeling of happy at work.

Yawalkar (2020) argues that in public organisations, more participation in decision-making, less political penetration, more respectful and supportive supervision and more opportunities for advancement are factors in employees' commitment to their organisations. Today, with the recent economic trend, every organisation strives for lasting success; they want to successfully implement strategies, achieve their set goals, gain competitive advantage and optimise the use of human capital. As a matter of fact, employees are the major driving force of exploiting of all other resources, and are considered to be vital asset of the organisation. Acquiring, maintaining and retaining best workforce is an important success factor in today's organisations. Moreover, Ashibekong and Ohiani (2019) argue that organisation's ultimate performance depends on the performance and commitment of its employees which in turn depends on various factors which may be related to work or family or both.

In Nigeria's public healthcare sector, particularly within federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States, there is a growing concern regarding the impact of job autonomy on employee performance. Job autonomy the degree to which employees have the freedom to make decisions about their work

has been linked to enhanced job satisfaction and performance in various settings. However, in many Nigerian public institutions, rigid hierarchical structures and centralized decision-making processes often limit such autonomy, potentially hindering employee motivation and efficiency.

Studies have shown that increased job autonomy can lead to improved employee performance (Yawalkar, 2020; Lee & Jo, 2023). For instance, research conducted at Central Hospital Agbor in Delta State by Okolie and Egbon (2024) demonstrated a positive correlation between job autonomy and employee performance, suggesting that when healthcare workers have greater control over their tasks, their productivity and job satisfaction improve. Despite these findings, many public hospitals in Nigeria continue to operate under strict administrative controls, limiting the potential benefits of job autonomy.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to ascertain the impact of job autonomy on employee performance in selected federal government hospitals Edo State.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the relationship between work schedule and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Edo State
- ii. Explore the relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Edo State

Research Hypotheses

These hypotheses guided this study

- **H₁:** There is no significant relationship between work schedule and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Edo State
- **H₂:** There is not significant relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Edo State.

Conceptual Review

Job Autonomy

In the context of this study, job autonomy at work can be defined as the ability of employees to make decisions about their work without having to go through a hierarchical chain of command. In other words, when an employer gives employees autonomy at work, it means that employees have the freedom to decide how and when to complete their work, as long as it aligns with the organisational goals. However, it is worth noting that employee autonomy and flexible work are tightly connected. According to the summary from the 'Work Autonomy, Flexibility and Work-Life Balance' project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, some common flexible working arrangements (i.e., flexible schedules and teleworking) provide workers with more working time autonomy and also enhance their control over their work pace and task orders (Chung, 2017). This implies a trend of the conflation of work autonomy with formal flexible working arrangements. In recent decades, work autonomy has not only been found important for employees' job performance and work commitments, but has also been found to improve employees' mental health (Chung, 2017; Wheatley, 2017; Yunus &

Mostafa, 2021). Thus, improving work autonomy has become an important objective of current occupational health and welfare policies.

Over the last decade, labour market policies in the UK have significantly increased access to flexible working and the autonomy of work, providing a new context to the research on work autonomy. Before 2014, British employees who requested flexible working were disproportionately from certain demographic groups, such as parents with childcare responsibilities (Chung & van der Horst, 2020), which was a very small proportion. Since 2014, the UK government has extended the right to request flexible work to all employees in the UK. Although there is a bit of difference between work autonomy and flexible working practices, the expansion of flexible working inevitably promotes work autonomy in the UK labour market. As a result, it is no longer certain whether work autonomy will benefit the general working population due to the increased diversity of national workers who have work flexibility and autonomy. For example, some research suggests that there are some negative consequences of work autonomy (e.g. blurred work-family boundary and flexibility stigma), which may offset or even outweigh its mental health benefits (Chung, 2018).

Employee performance

Performance reflects the organisation's ability to achieve its goals through positive contribution from organisational members. According to Okolie and Emoghene (2019), it is a combination of resources and capabilities of the organisation that are being used efficiently and effectively in order to achieve its objectives. It is also an important construct in industrial and organisational psychology. Chiniara and Bentein (2016) see it as all of the total set of work related behaviours that the organisation expects from individuals to display. Ikyanyon & Ucho (2014) define employee performance as the behaviour individuals engross themselves in or produce that are in line with and contribute to an organisation's goal. Similarly, Orhero and Okolie (2020) advanced employee performance as the observable behaviours that people display in the course of carrying out their jobs, which are relevant to the goals of the organisation.

In the context of human resource management, employee performance is defined as the outcomes, results, and progress of employees towards departmental and organisational goals. Performance that requires improvement can be either excellent or poor. Employee performance, according to Malkanthi and Ali (2016), is the completion of tasks with accurate and economical outcomes. According to other studies, productivity serves as a primary gauge of worker performance in managerial science, which focuses on the quantity of components produced by employees within a specified time frame (Inuwa & Idris, 2017). According to Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016), employee performance refers to the tasks that are expected of a worker and the quality with which those tasks are carried out. Employee performance comprises the goals that employees are expected to meet at the workplace, including established benchmarks, skill and ability prerequisites, development strategies, and outcomes delivery (Abiante, 2018).

The opinions of Hirlak et al. (2018) differ from those of the scholars previously mentioned. Employee performance is defined as the outcome of a worker's efficiency and efficacy in completing particular tasks. According to job descriptions, other studies

defined employee performance as the calibre and volume of work completed by employees. Thus, the entirety of a worker's capacity and productivity in achieving the anticipated value and completing daily tasks in accordance with the organisation's established protocol and schedule can be characterised as employee performance. Because it aids in identifying the business organisation's shortcomings, strengths, and possible managerial gaps, employee performance is crucial to its successful operation (Onuegbu et al., 2022).

According to Leonard (2019), when workers are carrying out their responsibilities well, the organisation as a whole experiences an increase in morale. Other staff members who weren't initially driven to work well tend to benefit from this boost as well. When workers are psychologically and physically stable enough to work and have a desire to work, particularly within an atmosphere of security and safety, their performance at work is more substantial (Onuegbu, 2020). According to Armstrong (2006), people are the primary source of competitive advantage. This is because, in contrast to other forms of competitive advantage that stem from improving factors like layout or procedure, the employee factor is very hard to replicate, which makes it extremely important to organisations.

In the words of Motowildo, Borman and Schmit (2019), job performance is the assessment of whether an employee has done their job well. It is an individual evaluation (one measured based on a single person's effort). In the words of According to Viswesvaran and Ones (2020), the term job performance is used in reference to actions that are scalable, behaviour and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to the goals of an organisation. It is linked to both employee- and organisational-level outcomes. The performance of healthcare workers in itself motivates management and policy makers to institute compensation packages, improved psychological aura through enhanced working environment and job design and implementing appropriate performance management policy for a continued performance enhancement.

Board (2017) asserts that tangible incentives are effective in increasing performance for task not done before, to encourage "thinking smarter" and to support both quality and quantity to achieve goals. Incentives, rewards and recognitions are the prime factors that impact on employee motivation. Aarabi, Subramaniam and Akeel (2013) confirmed this assertion by making use of factors such as payment, job security, promotion, freedom, friendly environment, and training and employee job performance to measure organisational motivation in relation to job autonomy.

Employee performance is the observable behaviour of employees that is relevant to the goals of organisation. It is the most significant dependent variable in the organisational context and the most important concept in industrial organisational psychology. This is because employee performance plays a major role in achieving overall organisational performance. Since effective realization of organisational goals and achieving performance are major concerns of any organisation, proper understanding of how to improve and promote same becomes vital for any management including hospital management board and directors especially in developing countries (Okolie & Emoghene, 2019).

In review of the literature on job performance, Mulu, Kalei and Achuora (2023) defines employee performance as a

multidimensional construct consisting of task performance and contextual performance, often production or deadline driven and sometimes referred to as 'in-role', was described as the behaviour that is directly linked with job completion. Behaviour is usually recognized as a formal requirement of an individual's job. Job description often explicitly stipulates that the job holders must perform these activities. Lee and Jo (2023) identified three dimensions of task performance namely: (i) Task proficiency - this involves demonstration of work expertise, display of work accuracy, paying attention to details, minimizing mistakes and providing high quality service; (ii) efficiency - this involves the capacity to operate in a cost effective manner, effective management of resources and time, accomplishing targets under any condition; (iii) solving - This has to do with the ability to take good decisions in the face of problems, possessing analytical and problem solving skills.

Also, the contextual performance is an individual's performance that maintains and enhances an organisation's social network and the psychological climate that supports technical tasks. Sometimes considered discretionary and often termed 'extra-role', this dimension of performance entails interpersonal behaviours and actions that benefit the organisation. It includes activities that may not represent formal work tasks although they still make important contributions to the effectiveness of the organisation. Examples of contextual performance include helping and collaborating with others, persevering with extra effort, volunteering to accomplish task activities, assisting and defending organisational goals and following organisational rules and procedures even when it is personally inconvenient, assisting and cooperating with co-workers and other discretionary behaviour. By strengthening the viability of social network, these activities are expected to enhance the psychological climate in which the technical core is embedded (Okolie & Emoghene, 2019).

Job Autonomy and Employee Performance

Autonomy is the degree to which a job gives employees discretion while working to control the work process on their own terms). Furthermore, it allows employees to determine how to do their job (including the selection of tools and instruments for planning and establishing the work process), and to take responsibility for the results. As autonomy gives employees a sense of control over their work and work responsibilities, it positively influences their job satisfaction and sense of achievement (Rhee, Hur & Kim, 2017).

Autonomy can be linked to motivation and passion for work, and a lack of autonomy may lead to lower job performance in specific areas. The range of autonomy includes task methods, composition of the task team, scope of the task, and goal setting (Lee & Jo, 2023). Job autonomy also refers to the degree of control that employees have to select a job for themselves and adjust the speed of work while performing the job. This can increase overall job satisfaction and improve and develop employee attitudes toward job performance. As an important motivational factor, job autonomy influences employees' attitudes (Clausen et al., 2021).

Job autonomy is also a major predictor of organisational and individual job performance and has been used as an independent variable that influences parameters and dependent variables in many previous studies. It is also known to affect the psychological status of an individual, eliciting positive work-related outcomes (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020). However, the

fundamental building blocks of every construct and variable used in scientific research are dimensions. It is recommended that reviewers as well as authors determine dimensions in order to ensure that their research is on the right trajectory (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Like any other construct, job autonomy has unique components that draw the attention of various authors. Below is a discussion of the major and minor components. Two primary dimensions of job autonomy are defined by Hackman and Oldham (1976) as work schedule and work procedures. In contrast, Sadler-Smith et al. (2003) supplement those dimensions with work criteria. This illustrates the employee's freedom to select the standards by which to judge her own performance. Khoshnaw and Alavi (2020) propose several dimensions of job autonomy, including work scheduling, work criteria, work evaluation and flexible working hours. Theurer et al. (2018) introduced decision-making as a further element of job autonomy.

Flexible Work Schedule and Employee Performance

A flexible work schedule is an arrangement in which employees can choose when to begin and end work-related activities. Typically, all employees must adhere to core working hours. Flexible work arrangements ensure that employees and managers can fulfill their social, economic, and religious obligations while still performing their jobs effectively for their employer(s). Based on unique demographics, a flexible work schedule guarantees several income streams. It gives people the freedom to pursue their careers and other life goals (Nwabali, 2018).

A flexible work schedule as a dimension of job autonomy represents an environment where managers and employees of both sexes have an equal opportunity to decide when to begin and end their workdays. This suggests that all employees and supervisors are granted flexible work schedules regardless of gender. The ability of employees to modify when, where, and how long they spend on tasks connected to their jobs is known as workplace flexibility (Rau & Hyland, 2012). Such flexible work arrangements are now commonplace within firms. They are frequently employed as a component of the human resource strategy to draw in, retain, and develop necessary talent. Additionally, the government encourages numerous firms to provide their staff with flexible working arrangements, such as flexible or remote locations and part-time employment opportunities.

Flexible work arrangements and rules are signs of a more committed workforce with fewer plans to leave the organisation. Employers frequently adopt flexible work arrangements, including telework, flexible work hours, and flexible workplaces, to assist employees in juggling their personal and professional lives. Employees who worked for intermediate to big-size firms experienced significant good outcomes simply by the existence of flexible working rules (Lim & Teo, 2015). According to Clarke (2017), a flexible work schedule is one in which employees, to some extent; work from multiple places or at non-standard hours.

Kandie and Chepkilot (2022) examined the effect of work scheduling on employee performance in private hospitals in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. A survey research design approach was adopted. The study population consisted of all the licensed private hospitals in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. However, out of the total 2,298 permanent employees of 31 private hospitals, a sample of

341 was selected based on Yamane (1967) procedure. A self-administered questionnaire was adopted for data collection. Data were then analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis was tested through the linear regression analysis technique. Evidence obtained from the analysis confirmed a positive effect of a strong statistically significant positive relationship between work scheduling and employee performance in selected private hospitals in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. The study concludes that hospitals that practice work scheduling and prioritisation as part of time management practice will enhance employee performance. Based on the findings, the study recommends that private hospitals should consider work schedules to enhance employee and overall organisational performance.

The study conducted by Ajayi, Olaniyi and Abubakar, (2022) showed that flexible working schedule positively influence employee performance in Information Communication Technological industry in Nigeria. The study recommended that organisations that seek to enhanced employee performance should adopt flexible work schedules. A similar study by Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma and Nwokorie (2020) revealed that flexibility schedules significantly affected the performance of employees. Therefore, healthcare employees may do better at work if they are not constrained by very tight work schedules.

Flexible Working Hours and Employee Performance

Idowu (2014) describes flexible working hours as the ability of the employee to control both the length of his/her working time and the location of his/her job (remotely from the office). Flexible working hours are used to increase productivity, job satisfaction, efficiency in the work, enhance performance, improved the quality of life, decrease absenteeism and overtime cost of the organisation. Flexibility in the working hours is a source of job satisfaction and the quality of life among employees. Many organisations encourage and support the flexible working hours because it is beneficial for both the employees and the organisation (Abid & Barech, 2017).

Flexible working hours are an employer tool used to reduce employee stress and improve employee performance and job retention. Flexible working hours' arrangements are preferable for employees across different cohorts, levels, gender, and are one of the most sought-after benefits. Flexible working hours is one of the most innovative ideas in the area of human resource management and the business environment and can only be an innovation of effective and successful leaders who understand the dynamics of the increasingly changing global business environment (Idowu 2019).

Idowu (2020) examined the role of flexible working hours' arrangement on employee job performance and the retention of employees. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from 227 permanent and contract employees from five manufacturing industries in Agbara, Ogun State. Data were collected through the use of a flexible working hour questionnaire developed by Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman, (2001). Linear Regression and Pearson Correlation were used to test the three hypotheses presumed for the study. This study found that flexible work-hour arrangements improved employee performance, increased retention of employees and reduced employee work stress. The study recommended that a proactive strategy be adopted by organisations to improve the alignment between flexible work-hour agreements and other human resource policies such as

recruitment, promotion, training, rewards and performance assessment.

Coenen and Kok (2014) noted that flexible working hours have been recognized as a solution to demographic changes in the labour market, including increasing women's participation and increasing competition in the global economy. They further argue that flexible working hours are advantageous because employee happiness and well-being result in decreased turnover and improved performance.

A similar study by Mgbemena, Oraegbunam, Ohuonu and Goddy-Utazi (2022) revealed that flexible working hour has a positive significant effect on employee performance in manufacturing industry in Anambra State. The study recommended among other things that management should imbibe self-roistering as part of the flexible timing procedure because it enhance the employees' abilities, interest and zealousness towards their jobs in the organisation and brings about good quality products.

Participation in Decision-Making and Employee Performance

Participative decision making is a special form of delegation in which employees gain greater power in making decisions or choices with respect to bridging the communication gap that exist between the management and the workers. It is a degree of autonomy where employees involve in organisational activities such as planning, directing among others to promote organisational commitment and productivity (Ugwu, Okoroji & Chukwu, 2019). Zubair, Bashir, Abrar, Baig and Hassan (2015) see employee participation as a process in which influence is shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchically unequal. Employee participation entails the involvement of the employees that are distinct yet similar in their work life; this may occur either directly or indirectly through trade unions which are the representatives of the employees. They further argue that high performing and effective organisations have a culture that encourages employees' involvement, since employees are willing to get involved in the decision making process, goal setting and problem solving activities, which further results in higher employee performance.

According to Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014), the involvement of workers in decision making is considered as a tool for motivation in workers leading to positive work attitude and high productivity. Employee involvement in decision making serves to create a sense of belonging among the workers as well as a suitable environment in which both the management and the workers voluntarily contribute to healthy industrial relations. In essence, worker's participation in management decision making will reduce industrial or organisational conflict, raise workers' productivity, ensure rapid grievance procedure and motivate workers.

Employee participation represents the combination of task-related practices, which aim to maximize employees' sense of involvement in their work, and human resource management practices that aim to maximize employees' commitment to the wider organisation. The solid foundation of any successful organisation is its people. Employees represent a source of knowledge and ideas, but oftentimes that resource remains untapped. Involving employees in the decision-making process not only empowers them to contribute to the success of an organisation, but also saves the organisation time and money, in

increased employee performance, reduced outsourcing, reduce turnover and absenteeism. Employee participation in decision-making has favourable effects on employee attitude, commitment & productivity even also on the efficiency of the managers. Thus participative management should be seen as inevitable tool in an organisation (Ezennaya, 2011).

A research carried out by Kuye and Sulaimon (2011) revealed that, an organisation that encourages employee's participation in decision making do better than its competitors. The authors therefore encourage organisations to promote high employee involvement in decision making in order to improve their work performance. According to Sofijanova and Chatleska (2013), employee participation in decision making gives employees the avenue to improve on their skills and competency to promote the goal of the organisation. Employee involvement in decision making of an organisation can serve as morale that can lead to high innovation, improve performance, commitment and job satisfaction in the organisation.

In many organisations today, the decision making power depends on the degree of autonomy built into particular jobs. These offers employees the opportunity to make suggestions and recommendations required to improve organisational commitment and performance and organisation that supports employee involvement in decision making outperforms better than its rivals (Ugwu et al., 2019).

Work Criteria and Employee Performance

A workplace modification to improve or adjust working conditions is called work criteria. It aims to adapt work to the workers and each worker to his or her job. Within this frame, a critical function of the healthcare workers is to assess whether such adaptation occurs spontaneously or if modifications or accommodations are necessary. Criteria are an all-encompassing term for knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications. Developing work criteria is at the center of and is critical to the recruitment process. It lays the foundation for a successful recruitment practices and equitable search (Matulčíková et al., 2023).

Basic and universal criteria of work performance are: work outputs, quantity and quality of work, on-time performance of work. A work criterion is necessary to deal with working and social behaviour of employees at work (Matulčíková et al., 2023). According to Parker and Grote (2019), poor quality work criteria results to tasks with high demands/low control and little variety which is contrary to human dignity and human rights (just and favourable conditions of work) and does not comply with Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work). Poor quality work criteria poses a risk to physical and mental health, entails costs for organisations and society, does not create sustainable employability, contributes to staff shortages, and leads to wastage of talent and sub-optimal organisational performance.

Employees are considered as the most valuable resource and asset to an organisation. Qualified and motivated employees create and deliver value out of other organisational resources. Dynamic and progressive organisations endeavour to attract and retain the right people for the right jobs at the right time through creating and sustaining their motivation in changing circumstances. Employee working conditions is essential organisation performance in competitive environment. Decent facilities make additional contributions to organisation performance. Employees

value work conditions as essential ingredients to their satisfaction; requiring regular maintenance and replacement of facilities that aid their comfort and reduce their stress (Mulianga, Sirai, & Mutinda, 2022).

The quality of working conditions in any organisation is a work criteria factor and may simply determine the level of employee's motivation, subsequent performance and productivity. There is no gain saying that how well an employee gets along with the organisation influence his enthusiasm, error rate, ability to work and remain on the job and the organisation, his level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, absenteeism and ultimately time period to stay in the job. Work criteria generally encompass a range of issues from work load and scheduling to systems-wide issues like professional identity to scope of practice. It aid employees while at work for their convenience and comfort on their job performance (Matulčíková et al., 2023).

Thus, work criteria in the workplace are one of the major elements that affect employee job performance. Nur, Florianna, Helmi and Sheila (2019) assessed factors affecting employee performance in an organisation, a case of Postal Corporation of Kenya. The study used descriptive research design and a sample size of 350 respondents selected using stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, analyzed through the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study findings showed that work criteria, employee motivation, management style, working conditions and job design have a positive correlation with employee performance in the workplace.

Work Practices that Promote Autonomous Regulation and Need Satisfaction

Hackman and Oldham (1975) affirm that organisations can promote autonomous regulation by addressing five key job characteristics: task identity, task variety, job autonomy, task significance, and feedback. First and foremost, a job should give workers the chance to work on a range of tasks that call for various abilities and skills (task variety). Second, by accomplishing all tasks necessary to complete their job from beginning to end, employees should be able to witness the fruits of their labour (task identity). In a similar vein, a job should grant its employees the freedom and autonomy to carry out their duties as they determine suitable (job autonomy) as well as the ability to accomplish tasks that are important and meaningful to the organisation (task significance).

Lastly, supervisors and/or coworkers should provide employees with candid, frank feedback regarding their performance (feedback). This feedback can be provided in a way that meets needs both positively and negatively. It is referred to as change-oriented responses (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). Subsequently manager does this by adopting a perspective-taking approach, offering options for solutions along with advice, based on clearly defined expectations, and speaking in an empathetic way without making personal remarks.

In the words of Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014), job crafting enables workers to actively initiate changes to their job based on their values and interests, while also meeting their basic psychological needs. Lastly, a variety of HRM procedures are also significant correlates of workers' needs being met. Marescaux et al. (2012) stated that workers who have access to mentorship, training,

and possibilities for career advancement at work are more likely to meet their basic psychological needs. As a result, autonomy can be categorised at the task, day, and job levels and is associated with higher levels of work engagement, especially at work levels (Osibanjo et al., 2018).

There may be varying degrees of task autonomy at the workplace; certain tasks have tight guidelines and little leeway in how they are completed, while others offer more latitude. People are "perceived to be of greater significance and encourage others to bring their entire selves into work" when given autonomy in their work (Kahn, 1990); this enables the employees to give their work their all. Possessing job autonomy allows one to experiment with novel and practical work approaches, which can yield more favourable results. It also fosters the vitality element of work engagement, which will improve job performance.

Agency Theory

The split that emerges after the industrial revolution between owners and managers, with the first holding the property but not a significant control over it, and the last controlling but not having a significant ownership brought about a new relationship in organisations worldwide was agent-principal problem. According to Chua, Chrisman and Sharma (2003), the agency problem is related to the divergence of interests, information asymmetry and limited rationality. The agency theory's unit of analysis is the contract that establishes the work relationship between the principal and the agent, containing the rights and responsibilities of each part. This contract includes remuneration agreements, information systems, functions assigned to the agent and rights of the principal. It is also through the contract that the principal tries to link his or her own interests to the agent's interests

Indjejikian and Nanda (2002) declared that the solution to the agency problem doesn't depend on a direct selection of monitoring systems and incentives. According to these authors, since the performance can be measured both by the actions and the results of these actions, the first choice of the principal should focus on creating a balance between base compensation (based on behaviour) and the additional incentives (based on results). This balance is known as "optimal contract", which maximizes the return of investment to the principal through modifications to the monitoring structure and compensation of the agent so that the desired changes in organisational success are achieved.

Several management tools can be used as monitoring, evaluation and incentives systems to mitigate the agency problem. Among the several internal monitoring strategies of the companies that mitigate the agency problem, Wickramasinghe and Alawattage (2007) highlight the performance evaluation systems. Luft (2009) added that performance evaluation may be used to give rewards like bonuses, capital instruments and promotions. The performance evaluation applies to both individuals and organisations and is, generally, operated by objective performance measures.

Agency theory is used to expand research in strategic human resource management (SHRM) by viewing the construct underlying SHRM as control over all employees. Although the HRM function is attempting to move toward a more strategic role, where the emphasis is less on administration and bureaucratic control and more on being a strategic partner or consultant within the firm, many HRM organisations remain bureaucratic and administrative in nature. For example, Heath (2019), when

commenting on the changes taking place in the field of HRM, note that the HR function has been largely an administrative one headed by individuals whose roles are largely in cost control and administrative activities.

Mustapha and Che-Ahmad (2021) note that the HRM function has been traditionally concerned with administrative activities and garnering power by "ensuring compliance". Thus, the traditional "policing" role of the HRM group serves to minimize uncertainty and to establish predictable routines for employees. These more administratively-oriented HRM functions can be viewed as serving the monitoring function through their administration of performance appraisal, job analysis, job evaluation, human resource audits, job postings, and by writing and formalizing policy and procedure handbooks. All of these HRM policies and procedures are designed to standardize and control employee behaviour, and they result in numerous bureaucratic systems that require administration and maintenance. According to agency theory, bureaucratic monitoring systems result in employees behaving in a compliant manner because it is in their best interests (e.g. do what's in your job description, and you get a raise) (Saltaji, 2023).

Agency Theory notably championed by Greenberger and Strasser (1986) places great value on autonomy in jobs. Agency Theory further supports the importance of job autonomy because it considers employees as agents (or ambassadors) of healthcare organisations. Therefore, employees should be given certain levels of control over their job duties to enhance their performance. Perceived sense of control is defined as individuals' belief in their abilities to effect a desirable change in their work environment (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986). When employees perceive sufficient control over their environment, they have substantial freedom and flexibility to go above and beyond to perform tasks correctly (Ma et al., 2021). A central premise of such perspectives is that having discretion over the parameters of work enables one to adapt those parameters to one's needs and creates a sense of responsibility and ownership. Personal control, then, facilitates psychological involvement in the work and satisfaction with the workplace.

More so, the main criticisms of agency theory include the assumptions that shareholders own firms and employees are their agents, the existence of agency costs due to conflicting interests

between shareholders and employees, and the assumption of rational, self-interested behaviour without non-pecuniary agent motivation. The theory focuses too much on financial aspects and overlooks other important factors within the company, assumes that individuals are rational, self-interested, and solely motivated by financial gain, ignoring non-pecuniary motivations, it fails to acknowledge the social context in which principal-agent relations occur, limiting its applicability to diverse settings and there is a discrepancy between the interests and goals of individuals, leading to agency problems (Chua et al., 2003).

Research Methods

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The cross-sectional survey design enables the researcher to capture information based on data gathered for a specific point in time from a sample of people with varied characteristics and demographics known as variables.

This study applied the mixed method of sourcing data, which includes quantitative and qualitative methods. This guarantee studies the opportunity to achieve a balanced data generation that would be more encompassing and detailed (Creswell, 2009). Data was sourced through primary and secondary means. Primary data was obtained from the respondents through the administration of questionnaire. That is, questionnaire was given to respondents to fill out, retrieved and collated to source for useful information about job autonomy and its impact on employee performance in selected federal government hospitals in Edo State. Secondary data was obtained from journals, newspaper publications, online publications and textbooks.

Method of Data Analysis

The data that was collected from the questionnaire will be collated, coded and imputed into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23.0, 2020) for data analysis. Percentage and frequency were used to analyse the socio-demographic data content of the respondents, which include gender, age, marital status, education and years of service in the hospital, etc. Pearson's product moment correlation, and simple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. These were found suitable for the nature of the study of this work.

Result and Discussions of Findings

Table 4.1: Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate

S/N	Hospital	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaire Retrieved
1	Federal Neuro-Psychiatric, Benin City	45	29
2	Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital	65	51
3	University of Benin Teaching Hospital	70	60
4	Stella Obasanjo Women and Children Hospital	48	30
	Total	228	170

Source: Researcher' Fieldwork (2026)

Job Autonomy in Hospital

Table 4.4 below showed the descriptive analysis of job autonomy in hospitals in Delta and Edo States. Questions 15 - 34 in the research instrument address the components of job autonomy in hospitals in Delta and Edo States

Table: 4.4: The Univariate Distributions for the Constructs of Job Autonomy in Hospital

Constructs	Items	Mean	S. D
Flexible Work Schedule	There is flexible work schedule policy in operation in your hospital.	3.90	0.75
	Flexible work schedule gives staff the freedom to pursue their careers and other life goals in your hospital.	4.15	0.68
	Work schedule guarantees several income streams for your hospital	3.80	0.80
	Staff and supervisors are granted flexible work schedules regardless of gender in your hospital.	4.00	0.70
	Flexible work schedule gives staff ability to modify when, where and how long they spend on tasks connected to their jobs in your hospital.	4.05	0.72
Flexible Working Hours	Directors encourage flexible working hours practice in your hospital	4.10	0.65
	Flexible working hours enhance performance and improved the quality of life of the staff in your hospital	4.20	0.60
	Flexible working hours' arrangements are preferable for staff across different levels and gender in your hospital	4.00	0.74
	Flexible working hours decrease absenteeism and overtime cost in your hospital	4.05	0.70
	Flexible working hours' arrangements are solution to demographic changes in the hospital today.	3.95	0.75
Decision-Making	Employee participation in decision-making promotes organisational commitment and performance in your hospital.	4.15	0.68
	Involvement of workers in decision-making leading to positive work attitude in your hospital.	4.10	0.70
	Your hospital has a culture and policy that encourages employees' involvement in the decision-making	3.85	0.78
	Employee involvement in decision-making creates a sense of belonging among the hospital workers.	4.00	0.74
	Employee participation in decision-making has favourable effects on employee performance, commitment and job satisfaction in your hospital.	4.10	0.65
Work Criteria	Work criterion is necessary to deal with working and social behaviour of employees at work in your hospital.	4.05	0.70
	Poor quality work criteria pose a risk to physical and mental health of staff in your hospital.	3.80	0.80
	Poor quality work criteria lead to staff shortages, and leads to wastage of talent and sub-optimal organisational performance in your hospital.	3.90	0.75
	Work criteria help to determine the level of employee 's motivation and subsequent performance of staff in your hospital.	4.15	0.68
	Work criteria influence staff enthusiasm, error rate, ability to work and remain on the job in your hospital.	4.10	0.70

Source: Author's Computation, 2026.

Table 4.4 presents respondents' perceptions regarding various dimensions of job autonomy in hospitals, broken into four main constructs: flexible work schedule, flexible working hours,

decision-making, and work criteria. Each item within the constructs is measured using the Mean (indicating the average response) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) (showing the variability in responses). Highest Overall Means: Items related to flexible

working hours enhancing performance and employee involvement in decision-making boosting organisational commitment scored the highest, suggesting these areas are highly valued. Lowest Overall Means: Items involving the economic aspects of work schedules and the institutionalization of decision-making culture scored lower, indicating areas for potential improvement. Standard Deviation Trends: S.D. values are generally moderate (0.60 – 0.80), reflecting relatively consistent opinions among respondents, with some variation on specific items.

Therefore, table 4.4 highlights the critical role of job autonomy constructs in hospitals. Respondents strongly value flexibility in work schedules and hours, as well as participatory decision-making. These elements are perceived to enhance performance, commitment, and job satisfaction. However, the need for better institutional policies supporting decision-making and clarity around the economic benefits of flexible work schedules presents opportunities for improvement. Additionally, robust work criteria are recognized as essential for motivation and performance, with poor standards posing risks to staff well-being and organisational outcomes.

Findings

This study explored the impact of job autonomy on employee performance in Federal government hospitals located in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. The results of the regression analysis reveal a significant positive impact of job autonomy on employee performance. Specifically, the study examined four key dimensions of job autonomy: flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, decision-making participation, and work criteria. All of these factors were found to contribute positively to employee performance. The findings, while revealing a moderate effect size, emphasize the need for hospital administrators to enhance job autonomy to improve overall performance in the healthcare sector. This section will discuss the findings in detail, and interpret their implications for hospital management.

With respect to hypothesis one, the study revealed that flexible work schedule has a significant positive relationship with employee performance in selected federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States. This suggests that increasing flexibility in work schedules can lead to better performance outcomes among hospital staff.

Studies have consistently shown that flexible work schedules improve employee well-being and satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to better work outcomes (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Muecke & Iseke, 2019; Mulu et al., 2023). In hospital settings, where work demands are often high and unpredictable, flexibility in scheduling helps to balance work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and burnout. Employees with flexible schedules are also less likely to experience absenteeism, as they can more easily adjust their hours to accommodate personal needs (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Mworio et al., 2021).

Furthermore, hospitals with flexible work schedules experience increased retention rates, as employees tend to stay with organisations that offer work-life balance opportunities (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Given the high turnover rates within healthcare institutions, offering flexibility may be an effective strategy to retain valuable employees, thus improving the continuity and quality of care provided to patients.

With respect to the second hypothesis, the study found that flexible working hours positively impact on employee performance in selected federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States. This indicates that flexible working hours, which allow employees to adjust their working times, have a moderate yet statistically significant effect on performance outcomes.

The impact of flexible working hours on employee performance has been widely studied in the literature. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that flexible hours lead to increased employee job satisfaction and engagement, which are strongly linked to improved performance. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of healthcare, where staff are often under immense pressure. By offering flexible hours, hospitals can reduce stress levels and prevent burnout, which ultimately improves the quality of care provided (Hill et al., 2008; Muecke & Iseke, 2019).

Moreover, the ability to select working hours allows employees to work when they feel most productive, leading to more efficient performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Mworio et al., 2021). Flexible working hours also contribute to decreased absenteeism and overtime costs, both of which were highlighted in the findings. These reductions in operational costs are beneficial for hospitals, as they contribute to financial stability and more efficient resource allocation.

Conclusion

The ability to adjust working hours allowed employees to work during their most productive periods, enhancing efficiency and reducing errors. This flexibility also alleviated stress and minimized burnout, leading to higher-quality patient care. Involvement in decision-making processes boosted employee morale and fostered a sense of ownership and commitment to organisational goals. This dimension was particularly important in healthcare settings, where rapid and informed decision-making directly impacts patient outcomes. Well-defined performance standards provided employees with a clear understanding of expectations, enabling them to align their efforts with organisational objectives. Clear criteria also reduced confusion and errors, enhancing overall performance.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of job autonomy in enhancing employee performance within Federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. By focusing on flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, decision-making participation, and clear work criteria, the research demonstrates that autonomy-enhancing policies can lead to significant improvements in employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

Recommendations

1. Flexible working hours should be prioritized to enhance employee productivity and engagement. Hospitals can allow employees to adjust their working hours within defined limits, enabling them to work during their most productive times. Introducing flextime policies, where employees can start and end their shifts earlier or later, can help reduce fatigue and burnout. Administrators should also provide guidelines to ensure that flexibility does not compromise operational efficiency or patient care.

2. Hospital administrators in Federal government hospitals in Delta and Edo States should implement policies that promote flexible work schedules. Flexibility can allow healthcare workers to balance their professional and personal lives, reducing stress and improving job satisfaction. Administrators can introduce staggered shifts, part-time options, and compressed workweek arrangements to accommodate the diverse needs of staff. These measures can lead to improved employee performance, lower turnover rates, and better patient care outcomes.

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