

The Role of Job Autonomy in Enhancing Employee Performance in Delta State Government Hospitals

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Abstract: The study examined the role of job autonomy in enhancing employee performance in Delta State government hospitals. The study adopted Self-Determination Theory as theoretical framework for this study. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative sources of data. The study revealed that participation in decision-making emerged as another significant predictor of employee performance, as it fosters a sense of ownership, accountability, and commitment to organisational goals. Moreover, clear work criteria, which outline performance expectations and task priorities, were shown to enhance employee confidence and consistency, leading to better outcomes in healthcare service delivery. In conclusion, the study highlights the transformative potential of job autonomy in enhancing employee performance, offering actionable strategies for improving public healthcare systems in Nigeria and beyond. The study recommended that to boost morale and enhance employee commitment, hospital management should involve staff in decision-making processes, especially in areas directly affecting their work. Structured mechanisms, such as staff committees or regular feedback sessions, should be established to gather input on scheduling, resource allocation, and patient care strategies. Hospital administrators should ensure that work criteria are well-defined and effectively communicated to employees. These criteria should outline performance expectations, task priorities, and quality standards to guide staff in their daily operations.

Keywords: Job Autonomy, Employee Performance, Government Hospitals, Decision Making, Work Motivation.

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Introduction

Any public service's ability to effectively and economically address the needs of its citizens is what gives it credibility. In order to safeguard society and all of its members as well as to advance general social welfare, public organisations frequently have wider and deeper missions (Lameck, 2017). According to Mboi (2014), the growing global population has led to a rise in the need for public sector services and products, which has put pressure on public sector organisations to perform better. Adequate job autonomy practises make it easy to achieve organisational and employee performance. According to Shobe (2018), job autonomy refers to a set of procedures or methods that involve the hierarchical entrusting of duties, giving workers more decision-making authorization to fulfill their main duties. According to earlier studies, employees can be very independent, passionate, and free to engage in these kinds of activities at work, which enhances their capacity and drive to develop further and get ready (Saragih, 2011; Zhou et al., 2019).

Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) suggests that autonomy in jobs enhances employees' decision-making abilities, thus making them happy with their working life (Oludeyi & Aborisade, 2018). Characteristics Model, job autonomy is viewed as one of the core task characteristics (i.e. task variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback), the elements that positively affect employees' psychological states and thus lead to better work consequences including higher intrinsic work motivation, quality of performance and work

satisfaction and lower absenteeism and turnover (Hackman and Oldman, 1975). In addition to the theoretical arguments, previous empirical studies have shown that job autonomy is positively related to job involvement, satisfaction, general health and well-being and employees' motivational and meta-cognitive learning processes. Job autonomy also is viewed as a protection against negative outcomes for those individuals who use emotional work strategies to counter the stress of high job demands, and it is related to less turnover intention. Moreover, increased job autonomy is related to increased task variability and more customized care for patients (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020).

Also, job autonomy has been recognized as an important factor that positively influences a number of desirable organisational outcomes such as employee performance, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, loyalty, job satisfaction and turnover. Therefore, organisational management need to be aware of autonomy when designing frontline jobs so that employees can strive for service excellence and contribute to organisational performance (Jindal, Boxall, Cheung & Hutchison, 2023). Thus, certain levels of autonomy are needed to give healthcare employees a sense of control over their jobs. Having control over their jobs is important because it could enhance employees' self-efficacy, which is essential for desirable workplace performance. When it comes to gauging job autonomy among Nigerian hospital employees, there is, however, a dearth of research to the best of my knowledge. Thus, this study examined how job autonomy influence hospitality employees' perception of their jobs and their



performance in selected government hospitals in Delta State. Also, this study examined workplace practices that promote job autonomy and recommend some policies that make employees to attain a better performance in government hospitals in Delta State.

Public healthcare organisations in developed countries appreciated the value of high-involvement work systems, characterized as a holistic work design of these interrelated core features: involvement, empowerment, development, trust, openness, teamwork and performance-based rewards. These features were found to be associated with greater employee satisfaction, greater employee performance and lower costs for patient services (Harmon, Scotti, Behson, Farias, Petzel & Neuman, 2003). Employees, who enjoy freedom in decision-making process, take responsibility of task play a pivotal role that strengthens performance at workplace. Studies have been conducted on job autonomy with respect to employee performance across the world especially in the developed countries (Özkoç, 2016; Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020; Strauss et al., 2020) to mention a few, but the reverse is the case in less developed nations of which Nigeria is not an exception and this trend creates a research gap which the current study tends to fill.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to ascertain the role of job autonomy in enhancing employee performance in delta state government hospitals.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between participation in decision-making and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State
- ii. Investigate the relationship between work criteria and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State

Research Hypotheses

These hypotheses guided this study

H₃: There is not significant relationship between participation in decision-making and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State.

H₄: There is not significant relationship between work criteria and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State.

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Job autonomy

Autonomy refers to a context of accountability, authority and responsibility. Job autonomy can be defined as a practice, or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchy so as to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks. This perspective views job autonomy as structural empowerment through access to information, support, resources and growth opportunities that directly affect workers' level of control (Lee & Jo, 2023).

The degree to which a job affords employees freedom of choice, independence, and self-reliance in carrying out their duties is known as job autonomy. It is the degree of power granted to

employees to decide the manner in which they intend to carry out their duties (Ozkoc, 2016). Individuals with autonomy are able to control their emotions and actions in order to pursue objectives that align with their own core beliefs, which may also be influenced by their professional expertise, enthusiasm, and knowledge. For people to enjoy their work, job autonomy is a crucial psychological requirement (Metin, 2019). Similarly, Khoshnaw and Alavi (2020) describe employee autonomy as the extent to which the work affords an employee significant autonomy, independence, and choice in planning the work and choosing the methods to be employed in completing it.

Examples of job autonomy that can be found in government hospitals in Delta State, Nigeria, include work approach, timetable for work, the flow of work, workplace procedures, office space, work evaluation, adjustable hours of operation, quantity of work, targets and priorities, and work guidelines. Scholars generally concur on the definition of job autonomy (Sisodia & Das, 2013). High-quality supervisor-employee interactions, which are marked by respect, mutual trust, obligation, and support, are particularly linked to autonomous regulation and need satisfaction with regard to managers (those who have close interactions with employees) (Graves & Luciano, 2013). Furthermore, feelings of fulfillment and self-regulation are more likely to be fostered by managers who: (a) actively give employees choice and minimise oversight ; (b) provide workers resources and training in addition to difficult duties, targets, and criticism; and (c) have frequent conversations with their workers, urge collaboration, and demonstrate their employees' feelings at work (Gagné et al., 2015).

Despite these results, the percentage of workers who report experiencing abusive supervision defined as publicly dissing and demeaning staff members, demeaning them through unfavourable assessments, frightening, and/or excluding subordinates is thought to be between 10% and 16% (Tepper, 2000). Abusing bosses are less likely to support their staff members' basic psychological needs being met when they engage in such behaviours (Lian et al., 2012). For example, employees who experience belittling may become less confident in their skills and accomplishments and may feel less competent. Employee autonomy may be compromised if they comply with a supervisor's wishes in order to prevent abusive behaviour, as a result of threats and unfavourable assessments (Graves & Luciano, 2013). Lastly, since it conveys to a worker that they are not valued team members, excluding behaviours may lessen relatedness satisfaction with work (Ferris et al., 2008).

Moreover, it is expected that how work autonomy shapes mental health depends on gender and social class due to widely argued gender and class differences in labour force participation and cultural norms. Regarding gender differences, the doing gender theory argues that due to persistent traditional gender norms, work autonomy may intensify gender inequality by increasing women's unpaid work hours and work-family conflicts (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). In addition, scholars argue that female workers with more work flexibility or autonomy may actually work longer and have more work-family conflicts, which is termed as the 'flexibility paradox' (Chung, 2022). For instance, Chung and her colleagues found that women tend to have more family-work or work-family conflicts when working from home, not for men (Yucel & Chung, 2021). Therefore, the mental benefits of work autonomy might be more pronounced among male employees.

Regarding class differences, studies indicate that different occupational groups have varying levels of work demands and task complexity, and that higher levels of work demands and complexity lead to more mental stress and role conflicts (Glavin & Schieman, 2012). Thus, the mental health effects of work autonomy may be more pronounced among the higher occupational classes, that is, employees in managerial or professional roles.

Job Autonomy and Mental Well-Being

Previous research from occupational psychology shows that job autonomy can improve workers' mental health and well-being by promoting work-life balance and job efficiency (Chung, 2017; Lott & Chung, 2016; Wheatley, 2017). Two core theories that have been widely used to interpret the mental benefits of work autonomy are the Job-Demand Control (JDC) model (Karasek, 1979) and the theory of work-family conflict (Chandola, Booker, Kumari & Benzeval, 2019).

The JDC model indicates that high levels of work autonomy can improve employees' job quality and decrease stress levels. Specifically, the JDC model identifies four types of jobs based on relative job control and demand. There are 'active jobs' with high autonomy and high demand; 'high-strain jobs' with low work autonomy and high demand; 'passive jobs' with low work autonomy and low demand; and finally, 'low-strain jobs' with high job autonomy and low demand (Karasek, 1979).

According to the arguments based on the JDC model, high job autonomy in 'active jobs' can effectively alleviate the stress employees feel due to high work demand (Chandola et al., 2019). For instance, previous studies have found that higher levels of work autonomy can improve employees' job satisfaction while relieving work-related stress (Chung, 2017; Clausen, Pedersen, Andersen, Theorell & Madsen, 2021). Therefore, we expect that work autonomy can improve employees' mental wellbeing by ensuring good job quality and alleviating the mental strain brought by work demands.

Similarly, arguments based on the work-family conflict theory indicate that job autonomy can alleviate the conflicts between employees' work and family life, thereby benefiting employees' mental health and well-being (Chandola et al., 2019). According to role strain theory (Goode, 1960), individuals' multiple social roles compete for finite resources (i.e., time and energy) and are frequently conflicting with each other. Such forms of inter-role conflict are associated with higher levels of stress and increased psychological strain (Chandola et al., 2019; Wang, Li & Lu, 2022). For instance, a strand of research shows that work-family conflict can lead to a series of mental health problems, such as burnout, depression, anxiety and mental distress (Enns, Currie & Wang, 2015).

Extensive studies from many different countries (including Sweden, the UK and the US) indicate that work autonomy enables employees to balance conflicting expectations and demands from the work and family spheres (Chung, 2017; Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). Therefore, organisations around the world have identified the alleviation of work-family conflicts as an effective way to promote employees' mental well-being (Li & Wang, 2022). Taken together, we expect that work autonomy will improve employees' mental well-being by alleviating the conflicts between work and life.

Challenges of Job Autonomy

The development of cutting-edge technology made it necessary for organisations of all sizes to give their staff members more autonomy (Alavi et al., 2016). In turn, this led to significant difficulties in various settings, regions, and organisational cultures. According to Daft (2010), centralization, formalisation, order of authority, and specialisation are examples of structural dimensions that restrict the practical application of autonomy. Sinding and Waldstrom (2014) draw attention to the fact that effectiveness and efficiency stifle organisational autonomy. Culture is a collection of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs that varies greatly among societies and greatly influences people, their families, communities, and government. Wu et al. (2015) stress that culture has an impact on job autonomy; those who are successful because of their personal principles are happy about it. As a result, it might be accepted in western culture while encountering resistance in societies that lack individualism and are hierarchical. Certain nations, organisations, and businesses severely hinder employee autonomy due to traditional management approaches and cultural norms. They result in demotivated workers, decreased output, and a loss of trust and devotion.

Empirical Review

Previous studies found that work autonomy is associated with employees' individual perceptions and assessments regarding the prediction of positive work outcomes. For instance, Sousa et al. (2012) found that work autonomy is positively associated with bank tellers' self-efficacy. Defined as individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to achieve designated levels of performance and influence over events in their lives, self-efficacy is an important predictor of service quality performance (Bandura, 1991). Saragih (2011) found that job autonomy partially mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, which assesses whether a person performs a job well (Campbell, 1990). In addition, work autonomy and self-efficacy have been found to be important mediators between high-performance work systems and work-family balance (Wattoo et al., 2020). The relationship between autonomy and organisational performance was positively correlated in a meta-analysis (Marchese & Ryan, 2021).

Research has acknowledged that job autonomy is a complex concept with many facets. These facets are thought to be useful instruments for assessing job flexibility in connection to employee performance (Oludeyi & Aborisade, 2018; Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Byabashaija et al., 2022). According to Malinowska et al. (2018), job autonomy, which is defined as the ability to set one's own hours, make choices, and hold workers accountable for their actions, can often increase employee's performance. In the work of Malinowska et al. (2018), employee performance was influenced by job autonomy. Zhou et al. (2019) examine when and how a representative's self-improvement is aided by job autonomy. The results showed that job autonomy predicted the representative's personal growth, and that the worker's innate creativity entirely mediated this relationship. The relationship between work independence and distinctive motivation was strongly influenced by group accessibility, which also influenced the therapeutic effect of built-in drive.

Saragih (2015) examined the relationship between self-viability as an intervening variable and the outcomes of the work (work execution, work fulfillment, and occupation stress) in

relation to job autonomy. The auxiliary relationship showed that job autonomy is not significantly correlated with work pressure, but rather with the fulfillment and execution of work. It also showed that the relationship between job autonomy, work fulfillment, and work execution was more mediated by self-adequacy. Similarly, this investigation discovered that work stress and job autonomy were not mediated by self-adequacy. While there was no significant correlation found between the career autonomy and work performance, the results of this analysis suggested that work performance and occupation fulfillment were inherently linked.

A meta-logical analysis of a holistic framework that links work performance and job autonomy was conducted by Muecke and Iseke (2019). Their findings demonstrate that job autonomy improved job performance, mostly by lowering stress levels and raising work motivation. Three categories of job autonomy were examined by the authors. They also noted that hypothetical elements vary depending on the type of autonomy. Dynamic autonomy was the factor that strengthened work motivation the most, whereas planning autonomy had the opposite effect. The effects of strain-reduction were stronger for technique and dynamic autonomy compared to for booking autonomy. Furthermore, preliminary evidence demonstrates that centre self-assessments mediated the effects of job autonomy measures on motivation at work and psychological strain.

Mworia et al. (2021) investigated how job autonomy affected workers' performance in the Isiolo, Kenya, county government. This study used a mixed-methods approach with an exploratory design. The Isiolo County Government employees were the study's target population. With the aid of SPSS, statistical methods such as descriptive and chi-square analysis of variance were used. According to the study, Isiolo County Government employees had a high degree of job autonomy. The study came to the conclusion that employee performance in the Isiolo county government is influenced by job autonomy.

Byabashaija et al. (2022) examined how employee performance in Uganda's capital city authority of Kampala was impacted by job autonomy. In terms of autonomy, the study found that workers have a clear and positive grasping of the purpose, vision, and fundamental beliefs of their work. Additionally, they commit to their work while carrying out their responsibilities and decisions. Additionally, the study showed a statistically significant relationship between job autonomy and worker performance in Uganda's KCCA. This suggested that employee performance in Uganda's KCCA is indeed impacted by job autonomy.

Nonetheless, Leach et al. (2005) found that job autonomy has a positive impact on employee performance when there is a high level of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA); in contrast, job autonomy has a small impact on performance when KSA is low. According to Langfred & Rockmann (2016), job autonomy has drawbacks since it causes executives to wonder about worker choices, characteristics, and gender parity with regard to the number of workers in their organisations. The aforementioned scholars demonstrate an adverse connection between job autonomy and performance among workers; however, they do not emphasise the impact of organisational culture on this relationship. Therefore, HR directors in the healthcare sector should increase employee control over their work assignments in order to promote job autonomy. Onuegbu et al. (2022) examined the role of job

autonomy in organisations and its relation to employee performance. The study specifically explored the effect of job autonomy on employee performance by critically reviewing the existing work of human resource scholars. The study concluded that job autonomy influences employee performance and recommends that Human resource managers in the public sector should enhance job autonomy by increasing the control employees have over what they are supposed to accomplish.

Mulu et al. (2023) examined the influenced of autonomy on performance of employees in Machakos County Government. This study was guided by Equity theory developed by John Stacey Adams A descriptive research design was used and the target population of 520 was constituting of top level, middle level and lower level employees of Machakos County government. Questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. The data was analyzed using the STATA version 17, by use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that autonomy as a non-monetary incentive influences employee performance. The study concluded that there was a strong relationship between employee autonomy and performance. This implies that a higher percentage of employees require independence to perform better in line with organisational expectations. Based on the findings, the study recommended that employers should capitalize on non-monetary benefits by giving their employees room for autonomy and also Kenya's government to institute labour rules prioritizing on workers' autonomy over monetary compensation.

Theoretical Framework

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) served as the basis for this study and the theory of human motivation known as SDT was created by psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was proposed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in 1985. Their groundbreaking work was presented in the book "Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behaviour", which laid the foundation for SDT. The theory has since been expanded and applied across various fields, including education, healthcare, workplace motivation, and psychological well-being.

According to Krause et al. (2019), SDT offers a comprehensive framework for researching human motivation and personality. It connects human motivation, personality, and optimal performance. It suggests the existence of two main sources of motivation, natural and external and that they both have tremendous influence over employees' identities and behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As a convincing theory, it focuses on what drives employees' behaviour and gets them moving, as well as how they manage their behaviour in various settings. As a result of the social environments in which they develop and employed, humans may become assertive and pulled in or, conversely, passive and detached from workplace (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Jung (2016), SDT illustrates the basic impact of social environments on employees' basic psychological needs, such as feelings of self-bearing, performance, and success, by either supporting or distressing them. SDT deftly illustrates the ways in which the methods and forms of mentors, leaders, protectors, and medical professionals, among others, can either strengthen or weaken employees' dedication and performance including the beneficial outcomes that ensue.

Deci and Ryan (2000) identified four motivational types that fall on a continuum from independent to centralised regulation, which SDT distinguishes between. Given that a captivating endeavour is undertaken for its own benefit, for the pleasure and enthusiasm it generates, it may lead to self-regulation. However, outside forces might be involved to encourage employees to complete a task that they find unpleasant at work. The degree to which these outside factors have been assimilated (or internalised) into a person's sense of self is what establishes where that person falls on the motivation continuum. Therefore, an employee's regulation becomes stronger as more of an external factor is internalised within the self. A doctor who is primarily driven by the conviction that their work matters to society, for example, has internalised the significance of the activity's result into his sense of self, which results in a relatively autonomous motivation. Therefore, the foundation of SDT is job autonomy.

According to the theory, employees must think that they are actually in charge of their own fate and that they exercise some degree of control over it. Employees' especially need to believe that they are in control of their behaviour (Krause et al., 2019); one of the fundamental elements in creating an effective representative devotion to improve employee performance is independence. This theory aims to pinpoint the aspects of work-life quality that have an impact on employee efficiency. Giving workers more freedom in terms of how their work is planned and/or carried out could help them meet their desire for autonomy. Lastly, job tasks that directly affect other people's work are probably going to promote the satisfaction of interpersonal relationships. Additionally, giving workers the freedom to design the demands for their jobs or their own resources, for instance, may present a chance to meet their fundamental emotional requirements (Le-Blanc et al., 2017).

There are four distinct motivational styles that employees can display in relation to their work. Given that autonomous regulation produces a variety of advantageous individual and organisational outcomes in contrast to controlled regulation, the comparable existence of the various motivational styles is significant. According to the self-determination theory, employees are motivated in different ways for their job duties. Given that autonomous regulation, as opposed to controlled regulation, produces a variety of positive outcomes, including job satisfaction and performance, it is crucial to take into account the various motivations behind employees' work efforts (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ojeleye & Jada, 2022).

SDT is based on the premise that people have innate psychological needs that drive motivation and behaviour. These needs include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the desire to be in control of one's actions and decisions, competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective, and relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to others and to have a sense of belonging. According to the theory, when these needs are met, individuals experience intrinsic motivation, which is motivation that comes from within and is driven by personal interest, curiosity, and enjoyment. Intrinsic motivation is associated with greater well-being, higher levels of creativity, and better performance outcomes. Conversely, when these needs are not met, individuals experience extrinsic motivation; which is motivation that comes from external factors, such as rewards or punishment. Extrinsic motivation is associated with lower levels of well-being, reduced creativity, and poorer performance outcomes (Le-Blanc et al., 2017).

In the light of these criticisms, SDT is still of utmost relevance in organisational policy formulation today and in relation to this study. Furthermore, the implications of SDT for practice are vast and have been applied to various domains, including education, healthcare, organisational management, and sports. For instance, in education, teachers can adopt autonomy-supportive teaching practices that encourage students to take ownership of their learning and feel more connected to their peers and teachers. In healthcare, providers can promote patient autonomy by engaging patients in shared decision-making and providing them with the information needed to make informed decisions about their care. In sports, coaches can create an environment that fosters athletes' intrinsic motivation by providing them with opportunities to develop their skills and feel connected to their teammates (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Result and Discussions of Findings

Out of the two hundred and twenty eight thousand (228) questionnaires distributed, one hundred and seventy (170) questionnaire were retrieved.

Employee Performance Practice in Hospital

Table 4.3 below showed the descriptive analysis of employee performance practice in hospital. Questions 7-14 in the research instrument address employee performance practice in hospital.

Table 4.3: Employee Performance Practice in Hospital

Construct	Items	Mean	S. D
	Staff rewards is based on accurate and realistic performance appraisal outcomes in your hospital	3.85	0.78
	Staff are promoted based on their work experience and seniority in your hospital	4.10	0.72
	Staff appraisal system is perceived as being fair and based on realistic standard in your hospital.	3.75	0.80
	Staff training and development results in higher performance in your hospital	4.20	0.65
	Adequate reward system increases job performance in your hospital.	4.15	0.70

Employee Performance Practice in Hospital	Inadequate reward system affects the pace of work and gives rise to brain drain in your hospital.	4.00	0.85
	Recognition helps in satisfying the esteem needs of the staff and leads to higher performance in your hospital.	4.05	0.68
	Directors embrace positive thinking to actualize organisational goals and objectives in your hospital	3.90	0.74

Source: Author’s Computation, 2024

Table 4.3 provide insights into employee performance practices based on various dimensions of organisational activities within the hospital. The Mean represents the average perception of respondents on a Likert scale (1–5), and the Standard Deviation (S.D.) reflects the variability of responses. High Agreement: Items on training and development (4.20), adequate rewards (4.15), and recognition (4.05) highlight their significant role in fostering performance. Moderate Agreement: Items such as fair appraisal systems (3.75) and director positivity (3.90) suggest areas for improvement. Variability: Higher standard deviations (e.g., 0.85 for inadequate rewards) point to potential disparities in experiences among respondents.

Thus, Table 4.3 indicates that employee performance practices in the hospital are generally positive, with strong

emphasis on the role of training, adequate rewards, and recognition in enhancing performance. However, variability in responses to some items suggests that efforts to standardize practices and address perceived inequities especially in appraisal systems and reward structures could further strengthen organisational performance.

Bivariate Analysis (Test of Relationship)

The bivariate analysis involves the test for the bivariate relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence of insignificant relationship and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of significant relationship between the variables.

Table 4.5 Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Job Autonomy on Employee Performance in Selected Federal Government Hospitals in Delta State

Variables		Employee Performance
Flexible Work Schedule	Pearson correlation	.783** .
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	170
Flexible Working Hours	Pearson correlation	.805** .
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	170
Decision-Making	Pearson correlation	.769** .
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	170
Work Criteria	Pearson correlation	.752** .
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	170

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels (2-tailed).

Source: Author’s Computation, 2024

Table 4.5 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) between job autonomy dimensions (Flexible Work Schedule, Flexible Working Hours, Decision-Making, and Work Criteria) and Employee Performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State. The significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) indicates the statistical reliability of the correlations, with N representing the sample size (170). The correlation coefficient matrix results showed that:

Flexible Work Schedule and Employee Performance

There is a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between flexible work schedules and employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State. This

suggests that employees with access to flexible work schedules are likely to perform better in their roles.

Flexible Working Hours and Employee Performance

Flexible working hours have the strongest positive correlation with employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State among all constructs ($r = 0.805$). This indicates that providing flexibility in work hours greatly enhances employee productivity and overall performance.

Decision-Making and Employee Performance

Decision-making involvement is strongly and positively correlated with employee performance in federal government

hospitals in Delta State. When employees participate in decision-making, their performance improves, likely due to increased commitment and motivation.

Work Criteria and Employee Performance

Work criteria also show a strong, positive correlation with employee performance in federal government hospitals in Delta State, though it is the weakest among the four constructs (r = 0.752). Clear and effective work criteria support better performance by providing structure and direction for employees.

Thus, all dimensions of job autonomy (flexible work schedule, flexible working hours, decision-making, and work criteria) have strong positive correlations with employee performance, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.752 to 0.805. The p-values (0.000) for all constructs confirm that the relationships are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the findings are highly reliable and unlikely due to random

chance. The strongest relationship is observed with flexible working hours (r = 0.805), while the weakest (but still strong) is with work criteria (r = 0.752).

Therefore, the results demonstrate that job autonomy significantly influences employee performance in the selected hospitals. Specifically, flexible working hours is the most impactful factor, suggesting that policies that allow employees to manage their work hours lead to the greatest performance improvements. Also, flexible work schedules, decision-making participation, and work criteria positively affect performance, emphasizing the need for autonomy in managing tasks and involvement in organisational processes. The findings highlight the importance of fostering autonomy-friendly work environments in hospitals to achieve better employee outcomes. This has implications for hospital management policies, suggesting a need to adopt more flexible and participatory approaches to enhance employee productivity.

Table 4.6: Summary of a Linear Regression Analysis of Impact Job Autonomy on Employee Performance in Selected Federal Government Hospitals in Delta State

Independent Variables	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Coefficient	F-stat	F-sig.	T-stat	t-sig.	D.W
Flexible Work Schedule	.113	.095	.419	21.105	.000 ^b	4.620	.000	1.947
Flexible Working Hours	.097	.081	.407	17.080	.001 ^b	4.338	.001	1.936
Decision-Making	.086	.076	.374	12.491	.003 ^b	3.857	.003	1.931
Work Criteria	.079	.0748	.357	10.536	.005 ^b	3.512	.005	1.928

Dependent variable: Employee Performance

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Table 4.6 presents the results of a linear regression analysis examining how the dimensions of job autonomy (flexible work schedule, flexible working hours, decision-making, and work criteria) impact employee performance in Federal government hospitals in Delta State. The table includes the R Square, Adjusted R Square, Coefficient, F-statistic, T-statistic, Significance levels, and Durbin-Watson statistic (D.W.) for each independent variable.

Flexible Work Schedule

Flexible work schedule explains 11.3% of the variance in employee performance (R² = 0.113), with the adjusted R² being 0.095, accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The coefficient of 0.419 suggests that for every one-unit increase in flexible work schedule practices, employee performance increases by 0.419 units. The F-statistic (21.105) is significant (p-value = 0.000), indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. The T-statistic (4.620) also shows that the effect of flexible work schedule on employee performance is statistically significant (p-value = 0.000).

Flexible Working Hours

Flexible working hours explains 9.7% of the variance in employee performance (R² = 0.097). The coefficient of 0.407 indicates that an increase in flexible working hours leads to an increase in employee performance by 0.407 units. The F-statistic

(17.080) is also significant (p-value = 0.001), and the T-statistic (4.338) further confirms the statistical significance of this variable (p-value = 0.001).

Decision-Making

Decision-making explains 8.6% of the variance in employee performance (R² = 0.086), with the coefficient of 0.374 indicating that participation in decision-making leads to a 0.374 increase in performance. The F-statistic (12.491) is statistically significant (p-value = 0.003), and the T-statistic (3.857) further supports the significance of this variable (p-value = 0.003).

Work Criteria

Work criteria explains 7.9% of the variance in employee performance (R² = 0.079), and the coefficient of 0.357 shows that a higher adherence to work criteria leads to a 0.357 increase in employee performance. The F-statistic (10.536) is significant (p-value = 0.005), and the T-statistic (3.512) further confirms the statistical significance of this variable (p-value = 0.005).

Thus, all independent variables (flexible work schedule, flexible working hours, decision-making, and work criteria) have a positive impact on employee performance in Federal government hospitals in Delta State. This indicates that increasing autonomy in these areas leads to better performance among hospital staff. The R² values (ranging from 0.079 to 0.113) indicate that the variables

explain a small but significant proportion of the variance in employee performance. Though the effect sizes are moderate, they are statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistics and T-statistics, all of which have p-values less than 0.05. The Durbin-Watson statistics are close to 2 (ranging from 1.928 to 1.947), suggesting that there is no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, which is a good sign for the validity of the regression model.

Therefore, job autonomy, as reflected in flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, decision-making participation, and clear work criteria, positively influences employee performance in the selected federal government hospitals in Delta State. The regression analysis confirms that these factors are statistically significant predictors of employee performance. Hospital administrators in Nigeria should consider implementing policies that enhance job autonomy to foster a more productive and committed workforce.

Findings

With respect to the third hypothesis, the study found that decision-making participation was another significant predictor of employee performance in selected federal government hospitals in Delta State. The positive relationship between employee involvement in decision-making and performance is well-documented in organisational behaviour literature. Hackman and Oldham (1976) and Lee and Jo (2023) argue that participation in decision-making enhances employee motivation and job satisfaction, leading to better performance. When employees feel they have a voice in decisions, particularly those related to their tasks and responsibilities, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to the organisation's goals.

In healthcare settings, where decision-making can directly impact patient care, the ability of staff to participate in decision-making processes is crucial. The study's findings align with those of Spreitzer (1995), Khoshnaw and Alavi (2020) who noted that employee involvement in decision-making enhances organisational commitment and performance by fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility among workers. This sense of autonomy in decision-making is particularly important for hospital staff, who are often required to make rapid decisions in high-stress environments.

Furthermore, decision-making participation promotes a positive work attitude, as employees feel more valued and respected by their supervisors and colleagues. This positive work attitude not only enhances individual performance but also improves team collaboration, which is essential in healthcare settings.

With respect to the fourth hypothesis, the study showed that work criteria positively impact on employee performance in selected Federal government hospitals in Delta State. The work criteria, which refers to clear and well-defined performance standards, showed a positive but moderate relationship with employee performance. Clear work criteria help employees understand expectations and provide a framework for assessing job performance.

The findings support the notion that work criteria are essential for guiding employee behaviour and ensuring consistency in performance (Locke & Latham, 2002; Mworio et al., 2021). In healthcare settings, where mistakes can have serious consequences

for patient care, clear work criteria are crucial for maintaining high performance standards. When employees understand the benchmarks for success, they are more likely to perform well and meet organisational objectives.

Poor work criteria, on the other hand, can lead to confusion, dissatisfaction, and lower job performance (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ngari et al., 2018; Nur et al., 2019). The study highlights that hospitals with well-established work criteria are more likely to have engaged and productive employees, as they feel supported and confident in their roles. Work criteria also help employees focus on the most important tasks and reduce errors, which is particularly important in a complex environment like healthcare.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of job autonomy in enhancing employee performance within Federal government hospitals in Delta State, Nigeria. The four key dimensions of job autonomy (flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, decision-making participation, and clear work criteria) are all positively related to better employee performance. Hospital administrators should prioritize these autonomy-enhancing policies to improve staff satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of job autonomy on employee performance within Federal government hospitals located in Delta State, Nigeria. The findings showed a significant positive relationship between job autonomy and employee performance, emphasizing the critical role that autonomy-enhancing policies play in healthcare management. The study focused on four dimensions of job autonomy (flexible work schedules, flexible working hours, decision-making participation, and clear work criteria) each of which was found to positively influence employee performance in selected Federal government hospitals located in Delta State, Nigeria.

While the overall effect size was moderate, the findings underline the critical role of job autonomy in fostering a motivated and productive workforce. Each dimension of job autonomy studied contributed uniquely to employee performance. Employees with flexible schedules were better able to balance work and personal responsibilities, resulting in reduced stress and improved job satisfaction. This flexibility also contributed to decreased absenteeism and turnover, which are common challenges in healthcare institutions.

Hospital administrators are encouraged to prioritize these policies to address common challenges such as burnout and turnover while fostering a more motivated and committed workforce. These changes will not only benefit employees but also contribute to better patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare delivery.

Ultimately, this study underscores the need for a strategic approach to job autonomy in public institutions, emphasizing its potential to transform organisational performance and enhance service delivery. By fostering a culture of autonomy and empowerment, public institutions can create work environments that support both employee well-being and organisational success.

Recommendations

1. To boost morale and enhance employee commitment, hospital management should involve staff in decision-making processes, especially in areas directly affecting their work. Structured mechanisms, such as staff committees or regular feedback sessions, should be established to gather input on scheduling, resource allocation, and patient care strategies. Empowering employees to participate in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership, accountability, and alignment with organisational goals, ultimately improving performance outcomes.
2. Hospital administrators should ensure that work criteria are well-defined and effectively communicated to employees. These criteria should outline performance expectations, task priorities, and quality standards to guide staff in their daily operations. Additionally, training programs can be organized to help employees understand and meet these expectations. Clear work criteria not only enhance performance by reducing ambiguity but also ensure consistency in the delivery of healthcare services, which is critical in public hospitals.

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