



Assessing Workforce Perception Of Administrative Change: A University's Perspective

Monyei Francis Ezieshi¹, Wilfred Isioma Ukpere^{2*}

^{1,2*}Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Citation: Monyei & Ukpere (2024), Assessing Workforce Perception of Administrative Change: A University's Perspective 30(5), 26-31, Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.2763

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Education at the university level is the cornerstone of growth. However, several problems plague university education, including the lack of qualified academic staff as a result of a biased recruitment process and the irregular and politicised appointment and retention of administrative roles. For this study, a Likert-styled questionnaire was used to collect data from primary sources. Using the convenience sampling approach, the study's sample consisted of 100 staff members - both academic and non-academic from the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. Enugu State, Nigeria. The factor analysis was employed since it is the most appropriate method for examining the connectedness between concepts. The results showed that the workforce's response to change conflicted with one another. It was suggested, however, that university administrations have sufficient channels for communication throughout any transition process.

Keywords: Employee, Perception, Change, University, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Organisational transformation is a necessary stage in the life of a business. Change is required as a result of expanding business globalisation, competitiveness, and interconnectedness brought about by technical improvements (Martinson, 2009). An organization's desire to address issues and overcome obstacles frequently drives the need for such change. In the modern world, where we live in a global village, organisational transformation is typically referred to as improving performance. This greater performance leads to better policies, organisational structure, behavioural changes in members, and changes in attitudes. According to Carnell (1990), modifications made to any organisation are intended to increase organisational effectiveness. These modifications might be made to the organization's culture or, in certain situations, its management style (Hellriegel & Slocum, 1999; Chen, 1999). Any organization's process of change is rarely easy, and occasionally the majority of its members may not fully accept the changes that are made. In certain instances, it can be argued that not every person in the organisation welcomes change and that not every employee opposes it. Nevertheless, the degree to which workforces embrace change largely depends on the type of change and how they understand it (Monyei, Ezinwa, Emejulu, & Moneme, 2020). So, there is a cost associated with change inside the organisation. Likewise, administrative changes are implemented to varying degrees, which affects employee productivity and conduct inside the company. Workforce responsibility and dependability may suffer as a consequence of a change that is not well thought out, executed, and made accessible. This could cause dissatisfaction misunderstanding and lower organisational performance. It is commonly believed that one of the elements that can influence an organization's ability to successfully implement change is how the change is perceived inside the organisation and how members react to it. Hanaysha (2016), and Mauer (1996) support this claim by stating that opposition from organisation members is typically overlooked, which is a major factor in the failure of half or two-thirds of organisational change initiatives. In certain instances, employees may oppose change because they view it as frightening, which makes them doubt their worth and reason. As a result, when adjusting to the transition, most staff implore defensive or self-justifying strategies. It is important to remember that regulatory requirements have the potential to alter an organization's traditional methods of operation.

This is frequently seen in Nigerian universities, where vice-chancellors are appointed for a term of five (5) years by the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC). Even if regulations are enforced, it has been noted that most Nigerian universities have a history of resistance to changing the Vice Chancellorship role, from both

internal staff members and external factors (the host communities). According to history, there have been instances of staff strikes at Nigerian universities, the federal government closing certain schools, and in other instances, host community indigenes dying as a result of riots that followed such a leadership transition. Administrative and top executives must so be aware that they might oppose such a change (Haghighi, Tehrani, & Kamkar, 2015; Carry, 2007). Top executives sometimes fail to realise that their perceived opposition to transition, whether positive or negative, could lead to the creation of policies that could be detrimental to the organisation. Workforces may find such transitions frightening or even scary, even though top management may think they are beneficial. Workforces may not be equipped to handle change and the company runs the danger of alienating such personnel when management ignores perceived opposition to change. This finally causes strategic plans and policies created with the organization's well-being in mind to fail. It has been viewed in both positive and unscrupulous ways. Workforces have occasionally reacted in different ways to such changes, including feelings of uncertainty, worry, fear of the implications of the changes, and potential threats to their professional growth and advancement (Van-Quaquebeke, 2016). However, such grievances should not be tolerated at educational establishments, particularly universities, which are meant to foster research and uphold the highest standards of academic performance. One may argue that education is the cornerstone of long-term national growth. The interconnectedness of academic functions brought about by technological innovation and the growing competitiveness in academia serve as proof for this statement. Unfortunately, there are many different issues and problems with university education in Nigeria. These include unpredictable and politicised tenure and appointment of administrative positions, insufficient funding, a shortage of qualified academic staff due to a biased and centralised recruitment process, an unstable and complex academic environment, technological stress caused by information, communication, and technology (ICT), depleted infrastructure, and an exponential rise in the number of universities. Tertiary institutions are beset not only by these shortcomings but also by societal vices including dishonest examination procedures and corrupt activities. As a result, investigations into administrative reform in a few Nigerian colleges have uncovered serious violations by staff members. Workforces are naturally drawn to leaders who they believe can help them achieve their professional and personal goals, particularly when it comes to employee welfare and progression (Hanaysha, 2016). However, the changes that these leaders have made may not have given workers normal working conditions or created an environment that would have allowed them to contribute as much as possible to the university's vision and mission, which has led to employee resentment. The administration of the university is charged with upholding law and order, regulating and approving student admissions policies, advising the council on issues about policy, finances, and administration, and overseeing staff and student welfare as well as discipline, among other responsibilities (NUC, 2016). On the other hand, it has been noted that staff perceptions will shift if they believe that a new administration may not uphold these fundamental duties. In the context of staff evaluations and promotions, this is particularly valid. Workforce perceptions of administrative change should thus be scientifically investigated.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The holistic objective of the study is to investigate the workforce's perception of administrative change, using leadership transition as a surrogate for administrative change. While the specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the workforce's response to participation in leadership transition,
2. Examine the workforce's response to confidence in leadership transition,
3. Ascertain the workforce's response to anxiety in leadership transition,
4. Evaluate the workforce's responses to career progression in leadership transition.

Research Hypotheses

To support the research objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated,

- Ho1. The workforce does not respond significantly to participation in leadership transition,
- Ho2. There is no significant confidence in workforce response to leadership transition,
- Ho3. The workforce does not respond significantly to anxiety in leadership transition,
- Ho4. There is no significant response to career progression in leadership transition.

Theoretical and Conceptual Literature

Cognitive Dissonance Theory: The assumptions that underpin psychological and interpersonal processes were modified by the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, especially regarding how perception affects behaviour. In the mid-1950s, Leon Festinger postulated the first theory of cognitive dissonance, which was explicitly and comprehensively stated for the first time in 1957. Festinger proposed that a condition of discomfort arises when a person possesses multiple views or pieces of knowledge that are all important to them yet differ from one another. The uneasy emotional condition he described was called dissonance (Kowol, 2008; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007). People's expectations of what would happen next can be used as a tool to measure perceptual dissonance, according to Frey, Irle, Möntmann, Kumpf, Ochsmann, and Sauer (1982). The notion of cognitive dissonance posited that individuals or entities had a propensity to uphold consistency

across many views, such as attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, or thoughts. Different perceptions lead to undesirable behaviours, which in turn motivate people to adjust one or more beliefs to bring about consistency with other beliefs (consonance). The idea that cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant psychological state that encourages people to minimise it on their own and in groups was one of Festinger's approach's unique features, according to Aronson (1969). More recent research has tended to focus on perceptions and behaviours, even though the original notion of cognitive dissonance was intended to encompass a wide range of psychological processes (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Festinger's theory serves as the main theoretical foundation for the current study and is one of many other theories that influence people's perceptions of change. According to Kowol (2008), all methodical, self-aware analyses of individual or collective occurrences are referred to as perceptions, which is a holistic phrase. Many academics have tried to define perception, but it is now hard to come up with a consensus. We will agree to define perception as any method by which people shape behaviours for this discussion. Festinger's theory is predicated on the idea that altering conduct is important, and it aims to comprehend the mental processes involved in processing persuasive input and observations. Thus, it supports its assertion that the theory is a behavioural, reaction, or perception theory (Monyei et al., 2020; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007).

In conceptualising the research variables, several theories have been proposed to characterise administrative change. Hanaysha (2016), and Lawin (1991) view administrative change as a means of correcting the forces applied in ensuring stability reactions within the organisation, whereas Hellriegel and Slocum (1999) see administrative change as involving two interrelated targets aimed at helping the organisation get adjusted to their external environmental change and assisting to change the behaviour of staff. Once more, Bryant (2006) believed that employees' personal security, confidence, and capacity to carry out their jobs were all at risk from change. Several conflicting and contrasting studies look at how workforce perception affects their choice of leadership. There is a pervasive belief among staff that the company might not preserve their relationship due to their perceived conduct and attitude, as noted by Gopinath and Becker (2000) and Eisenberger, Fusolo, and Davis Lemastro (1990). Thus, the divestment in activities can have a clear and practical justice component. Bias may occasionally arise from perceptions that are founded on incomplete sequences, which can affect employees' decisions and actions. Elias (2009) states that attitudes towards organisational change are perceived as the overall favourable or unfavourable evaluation choices made regarding a change plan that the organisation implements. This is relevant to attitudes towards administrative change. According to Bianey, Ulloa, and Adams (2004), it thus has to do with the impact that personal action choices or a response inclination towards the change has on individuals. It is described by Visagie (2010) as specific patterns of personal emotions towards a certain element of the workforce's surroundings. Various factors influence the leadership process in an educational setting. This comprises political, human, institutional, and instructional leadership, according to Newman (2004). Hellriegel and Slocum (1999) further proffer the five primary components of a change message to be as follows: discrepancy—which highlights the differences between the current and ideal states—appropriacy—which seeks to persuade organisation members that the change is the appropriate course of action in light of the discrepancy—personal valence, which elucidates the change's internal and external benefits—and self-efficacy, which gives group confidence in their ability to implement the change successfully. A brief review of studies examining the traits of effective educational leaders has shown that performance quality and staff motivation are significantly influenced by a leader's quality (Knight & Trowler, 2001, Birnia, 2011). Thus, a leader should tend to instil confidence in their team members to prevent resentment. According to Schmidt and Akdere's (2007) study on the workforce's perception of organisational vision and leadership, large organisations can benefit from their training programmes if they are implemented well. But eventually, this favourable impression tends to wane. Thus, it is recommended that new hires undergo orientation since it is an effective instrument that the company may use to redefine the organisational vision and leadership of its workforce. Additionally, it is advised that acquiring knowledge about an organization's mission and leadership should continue long after orientation. A quick scan of the relevant literature indicated a paucity of research on how workforces in Universities, particularly those in the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus respond to and perceive administrative change. Given the significance of universities as a fortress of education, this study makes it relevant.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research approach with a focus on the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, to investigate how the workforce perceives administrative changes in universities. It used a questionnaire with a Likert scale to collect data from primary sources. Academic and non-academic staff members of the University's Enugu Campus, made up the study's population. 50 academic staff members and 50 non-academic staff members totalling 100 workforces were chosen using the convenience sampling approach. By employing component analysis to test the research hypotheses, the researchers were able to investigate notions such as perception that are difficult to measure directly by combining other variables that can be interpreted about the underlying study constructs. They are career progression, confidence, employee participation in change, and anxiety about the consequences of change.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

To analyse the distribution of demographic information among the respondents from the University under study, a basic frequency test was performed, as Table 1 below illustrates.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study respondents [n=100]

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent [%]
Gender		
Male	61	61
Female	39	39
Total	100	100
Experience(years)		
2 – 5 years	16	16
6 – 10 years	29	29
10 – 15 years	25	25
More than 15 years	30	30
Total	100	100
Age group (years)		
31-35 years	11	11
36-40 years	13	13
41-45 years	43	43
More than 45 years	33	33
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Based on Table 1 above, it can be deduced that out of 100 respondents, 39 (39%) are female and 61 (61.1%) are men. Every age group is included in the sample. Ages 41 to 45 make up the majority of responders (43%) in this sample. It can be observed that when the respondents' experiences are taken into account, 84% of the sample includes respondents with more than six years of experience. It is evident from this that the survey elicited replies from a wide spectrum of respondents, sufficiently reflecting the diversity of the university's overall workforce.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test ^a		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.615
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	123.747
	df	6
	Sig.	.000
a. Based on correlations		

Source: SPSS Factor Analysis Result

The sampling adequacy for perception in Table 2 (KMO and Bartlett's test) is 0.615, which is significant at (p-value = 0.00 < 0.05). This suggests that the study's domain is highly relevant and significant.

Restating the Research Hypotheses

- Ho1. The workforce does not respond significantly to participation in leadership transition,
 Ha1. The workforce does respond significantly to participation in leadership transition,
 Ho2. There is no significant confidence in workforce response to leadership transition,
 Ha2. There is significant confidence in workforce response to leadership transition,
 Ho3. The workforce does not respond significantly to anxiety in leadership transition,
 Ha3. The workforce does respond significantly to anxiety in leadership transition,
 Ho4. There is no significant response to career progression in leadership transition,
 Ha4. There is a significant response to career progression in leadership transition.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix ^a		Rescaled Component
HO ₁	Workforce perceptions and responses to leadership transition and participation in change at the university are not positively correlated.	.118
HO ₂	The confidence that university workforces perceive and respond to transition in leadership is not positively correlated.	.284
HO ₃	Workforce perception and response to transition-related anxiety are negatively correlated with university leadership transition.	.776

HO ₄	Workforce perception and response to leadership transition are not positively correlated with career progression.	.987
-----------------	---	------

Source: SPSS Factor Analysis Result

The factor analysis's rotated component matrix findings are shown in Table 3. The findings showed that the null hypotheses for both hypotheses one and two are accepted, meaning that there is no positive correlation between workforce perceptions and their responses to leadership transition and participation in Nigerian universities (Rescaled component matrix = 0.118 < 0.5) or confidence and transition participation in Nigerian universities (Rescaled component matrix = 0.284 < 0.5). Nonetheless, the findings demonstrated that, in Nigerian universities, there is a positive association between the workforce's perception and response to anxiety in transition and its consequences (Rescaled component matrix = 0.776 > 0.5), as well as a positive correlation between the workforce's perception and response to leadership transition and career progression (Rescaled component matrix = 0.987 > 0.5). Contingent to the foregoing, the results from this present investigation have contradicted the findings proffered in the study conducted by Haghghi et al. (2015) who found no substantial positive influence of firm sensitivity and distress on staff job outcomes. However, it is entirely consistent with the research conducted by Van-Quaquebeke (2016), which highlighted how alterations in the range of control impacted people's perceptions of suspicion, especially those who could not make adaptive sense of things and responded to being demoted with more intense suspicion. It also supports Hanaysha's (2016) findings, which suggest that a favourable view of the workforce fosters beneficial job engagement, which is shown to have a major positive influence on task output for both the company and employees.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The results indicate that there is a contradiction in the workforce's views towards change. Regarding workforce perceptions and responses to change participation and confidence in leadership, there was no positive correlation found. Regarding career progression and leadership transition, there was a positive correlation observed in the way workforces perceived and responded to their anxiety about the consequences of change. This indicates that workforces are more concerned with their well-being than with participating in such leadership transition. This might not be unrelated to the leadership transition brought about by regulations at the case University. Therefore, this study suggests that administrators communicate effectively throughout the change process. It is important to consider change communication from both an affective and cognitive perspective. As inferred from the theoretical and conceptual literature review, the five main components of a change message are as follows: self-efficacy, which gives group confidence in their ability to implement the change successfully; principal support, which suggests that significant individuals within the organisation are committed to the change's successful implementation; discrepancy, which draws attention to the differences between the current and ideal states; appropriateness, which aims to convince organisation members that the change is the right course of action in light of the discrepancy; and personal valence, which clarifies the change's inherent and external benefits. As such, it is recommended that University administrators endeavour to follow and bear in the usefulness of the stated components of administrative change, while also expressing commitment to the change by not only encouraging workforces to embrace it but by offering all the help they can and setting an example for others to follow. Additionally, top management should communicate more widely from the bottom-up and involve workforces who could have a significant influence on the transformation process or provide insightful feedback on impending decisions.

REFERENCES

1. Aronson, E. (1969). Theory of cognitive dissonance: a current perspective. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 4, 1-34.
2. Brinia, V. (2011). Female educational leadership in primary education in Greece: A theoretical framework based on experiences of female school leaders. *Journal of International Studies in Educational Administration*, 39(3).
3. Carnall, C. A. (1990). *Managing Change in Organizations*. Prentice-Hall International. United Kingdom.
4. Carry, S. (2007). Employee commitment in times of change: assessing the importance of attitudes towards organizational change. *Journal of Management*, 35(1), 37-55.
5. Chen, C. (1999). Perception of Organizational readiness for change: factor related to employees reaction to the implementation of team-based selling. *Human Relation*, 53(3), 419-28.
6. Eisenberger, R., Fasolo, P., & Davis-LaMastro, V. (1990). Perceived organizational support and employee diligence, commitment, and innovation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75: 51-59.
7. Elias, S. (2009). Employee commitment in times of change: assessing the importance of attitudes towards organizational change. *Journal of Management*, 35(1), 37-55.
8. Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58, 203-210.
9. Frey, D., Irle, M., Möntmann, V., Kumpf, M., Ochsmann, R., & Sauer, C. (1982). Cognitive dissonance: Experiments and theory. In M. Irle (Ed.), *Studies in decision making*. 281-310. Berlin: de Gruyter.

10. Gopinath, C. & Becker, T.E. (2000). Communication, procedural justice, and employee attitudes: Relationships under conditions of divestiture. *Journal of Management*, 26(1), 63-83.
11. Haghighi, F., Tehrani, F.M. & Kamkar, M. (2015). Relationship of organizational anxiety and paranoia with the tendency to gossip and personal anxiety in the Mobarake-steel company's employees. *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences*, 5(12S), 869-872.
12. Hanaysha, J. (2016). Improving employee productivity through work engagement: Empirical evidence from the higher education sector. *International Journal of Industrial Engineering Computations*, 6, 61–70. Doi: 10.5267/j.msl.2015.11.00610.3389/fpsyg.2016.01446
13. Harmon-Jones, E. & Harmon-Jones, C. (2007). Cognitive dissonance theory after 50 years of development. *Zeitschrift für Sozial Psychologie*, 38(1), 7–16. Doi: 10.1024/0044-3514.38.1.7.
14. Hellriegel, H. & Slocum, K. (1999). Resisting change from within and without the organization. *Journal of Organizational Change*, 22(3), 275-289.
15. Knight, P. & Trowler, P. (2001). *Department Leadership in Higher Education: New Directions for Communities of Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
16. Kowol, A. (2008). The theory of cognitive dissonance. Retrieved from: <http://www.works.adamkowol.info/Festinger.pdf>. On the 10th January 2024.
17. Lawin, H. (1991). The positive effects of a protean career attitude for self-initiated expatriates. *Journal of Change*, 18(1), 56-77.
18. Martinson, G. (2009). Employee relations. *Athens University of Economics and Business*, 27(2), 160-174.
19. Mauer, M. (1996). Employees' perception of organizational change: The mediating effects of stress management strategies. *Public Personnel Management*, 38(1), 234-245.
20. Monyei, F.E., Ezinwa, P.N., Emejulu, G.A. & Moneme, P.C. (2020). The interplay between organisational paranoia and the productivity of deposit money banks. *International Journal of Development Research*, 10(02), 33944-33949.
21. Newman, M.T. (2004). *Practitioners' Meanings of School Leadership: Case Studies on Jamaican High School Principals*. DEd Thesis, Faculty of Education, Griffith University.
22. NUC (2016). *Guideline on Appointment of Vice Chancellors in Nigerian Universities*. Nigerian University Commission, Abuja.
23. Schmidt, M. & Akdere, F. (2007). *Human Resource Management*. London: Wiley Online Library
24. Van-Quaquebeke, N. (2016). Paranoia as an antecedent and consequence of getting ahead in organizations: time-lagged effects between paranoid cognitions, self-monitoring, and changes in the span of control. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1446. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01446