# IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND STRESS COPING STRATEGIES ON WORK PERFORMANCE OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN OWERRI

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper looks at the role of psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies on work performance. The paper tries to examine how psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies can improve work performance in an organization. Two hypotheses were tested. There will be no statistical significant difference in work performance amongst employees with high level of psychological empowerment and those with low level of psychological empowerment. There will be no statistical significant difference in work performance amongst employees with adaptive stress coping strategies and those with maladaptive stress coping strategies. The design of the study was a cross sectional survey design and a 2-Way Analysis of Variance was used to analyze the result. The hypotheses were all rejected. The results confirm the need for the management of organization to allow subordinates and line officers to contribute in decision making and day to day running of organizations.

Keywords: Psychological Empowerments, Stress Coping Strategies, Work Performance.

## INTRODUCTION

The concern of every organization is usually the best management practices that can enable the organization achieve its set objectives and goals. This process of continual improvement and development involves not only better management of the organization's resources but a wise implementation of maintenance schedules. In Nigeria, most organizations have become moribund as a result of inability to meet the goals set for the organizations. These, in most instances, affect the management that they try to proffer monetary compensations as a panacea to improved work performance.

The notion of psychological empowerment as a veritable tool for improved work performance is grounded on the body of research on alienation (Blauner, 1964 and Seeman, 1959), Participative management (Lawler, 1988 and Okpara, 2005) and Job enrichment (Hackman & Oldman, 1980)

Psychological empowerment is intrinsic task motivation; that is generic conditions by an individual pertaining directly to the task that produces motivation and satisfaction (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). It manifests in four cognitive dimensions. The first dimension is meaningfulness. It concerns the value of a work goal or purpose judged in relation to

employees own ideas and standards (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It refers to congruence between requirements of a work role and employees' beliefs, values and behaviours (Spreitzer, 1995). The second empowerment cognition is competence. It is an employee's belief in his or her capability to perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Self-determination; the third empowerment cognitive involves causal responsibility for a person's actions. It is the employee's perception on the autonomy in the initiative and continuation of work behaviours and processes (Bell and Staw, 1990). Impact which is the fourth dimension is the degree to which a person can influence administrative or operating outcomes at work (Ashfort, 1989).

Psychological empowerment in a work place operates within the context of some antecedents. These antecedents include the personality traits of the employees and the work environment in which the psychological empowerment is to operate; on the personality of the employee, two personality traits are significant that make psychological empowerment more effective. They include self-esteem and locus of control. Within the work environment antecedent to psychological empowerment, access to information and reward system and schedule are important. Kanter (1989) stated that in order to be empowering, organizations must make more information more available to more people at more levels through more devices. Without availability of information in an organization, people cannot be able to extend themselves to take responsibility or vent their creative energies. Psychological empowerment enhances feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organization practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. It connotes the sharing of power and information to give employees more conviction to their effort. It involves personal beliefs that employees have about their roles in relation to the organization (Dewettinck, 2003).

Another important factor in work performance is the stress coping capabilities of the employees in a work place. Occupational stress occurs more frequently in people's lives and social men must engage in one work or the other to make life worth living. Stress can cause physical, emotional and behavioural problems which can affect the health, energy, well-being and mental alertness, personal and professional relationships. It can also cause defensiveness, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, accident, reduce productivity and interpersonal conflict.

In this study, stress coping strategies are conceptualized to have two dimensions; adaptive stress coping strategies and maladaptive stress coping strategies. Newman and Beehr (1979) differentiated adaptive stress coping strategies from maladaptive stress coping strategies. According to these authors, an adaptive response to job stress is a response intended to eliminate or ameliorate the stress producing factors in the job content or intended to modify the individual reaction to stressful job situation in a beneficial way. Maladaptive stress coping strategies can be seen as those strategies that are detrimental to the individual well being and or adversely affects the person's work performance and hampers organizational effectiveness.

According to Igbojekwe (1991) in his research on the factors of productivity in relation to the structural adjustment program (SAP) stated that Nigerian organizations have alienating potentials. They alienate their workers in significant decisions that usually affect them and also on the goals and vision of the organizations. According to him, the workers experiences of dissatisfaction, powerlessness, self-estrangement and normlessness are great and long lasting. Most researches carried out in Nigeria on job satisfaction and work performance showed that most Nigerian workers are not satisfied with their job (Oloko, 1977). These studies and findings directly or indirectly link work performance and productivity to psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies available to employees. Both psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies are issues that require great attention in Nigeria work context. With the downturn in the economies of the world and the continued financial meltdown of the Nigerian economy, a critical study of ways psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies can help us overcome is very important. Thus, this study aims at empirically finding out the role of psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies on work performance in an organization.

## THEORIES OF WORK PERFORMANCE

### The Need Hierarchy Theory - Abraham Maslow (1954)

Abraham Maslow postulates that individuals experience a hierarchy of needs from lower level to higher level psychological needs. The basic needs include physiological needs, safety needs, needs for love, affection and belongingness, need for esteem and need for self-actualization. The physiological needs consist of oxygen, food, sex, water and a relatively constant body temperature. This safety need involves freedom from the threat or danger. Need for love, affection and belongingness comes next. Maslow states that people seek to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation. This involves both giving and receiving love, affection and sense of belonging. The satisfaction of the above three needs brings up the need for esteem. This involves needs for both self-esteem and for the esteem a person set for others. Human beings have a need for stable, firmly based, high level of self-respect, and respect for others Maslow's theory has been criticized for not addressing some issues. Muchinsky (1997) posits that 'we systematically progress from one need to the next, yet we all need to eat, drink and breathe every day. We never really have our physiological needs satisfied. We try to fulfill our self-esteem needs even if our social needs are not fully satisfied"

### The Hygiene Theory- Fredrick Herzberg (1966)

The hygiene theory was proposed by Herzberg (1966) to better understand employee attitudes and motivation. He performed studies to determine which factors in an employee's work environment cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to him, motivation at work is contingent on two sets of factors, the satisfiers which include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibilities, advancement and opportunities for growth. The dissatisfiers include company policy, supervision, and relationship with boss, work condition, salary and relationship with peers. Herzberg argued that management must

provide hygienic factors to avoid dissatisfaction, but must provide factors intrinsic to the work itself in order for employees to be satisfied with their jobs. Accordingly, the job should have sufficient challenges to utilize the full ability of the employees and employees who demonstrate increasing levels of ability should be given increasing level of responsibility. Critics of Herzberg's theory argue that the two factor result is observed because it is natural for people to take credit for satisfaction and to blame dissatisfaction on external factors.

## Social Learning Theory - Albert Bandura (1969)

This theory stresses the interaction among individuals as opportunities for learning. Albert Bandura postulates that we often observe others performance and action and rehearse those actions mentally until we have opportunity to try them. According to Albert Bandura, when the opportunity comes, we compare our actions to the memory of that action as performed by others. On the basis of this comparison, corrections that are necessary are made. Albert Bandura stated that memory, reasoning, judgment, motivation, emotion and changing levels of life esteem as important aspect that make social learning to be possible.

## Locke's Goal Setting Theory (1968)

This theory was postulated by Edwin Locke (1968). He stated in the theory that employees were motivated by clear goals and appropriate feedback. Locke went on to say that working towards a goal provided a major source of motivation to actually reach the goal- which, in turn, improved performance.

Finally, goal setting theory expects the management to provide sufficient time to meet goals and improve performance and also enough time for the employees to practice or learn what is expected and required for success. However, a number of studies have shown that weighting by importance does not improve the prediction of overall job satisfaction and performance (Ewen, 1967).

## Empirical Review

In reviewing the theoretical studies of the relationship between psychological empowerment, stress coping strategies and work performance, an integrate approach is used. This approach extracts clear empirical evidence on their unique relationship. In a study by Spreitzer (1987) and Liden (2000) this relationship between psychological empowerment and work performance seem strong for lower level employees, where psychological empowerment explains 40 percent of the variance in work performance. In a sample of mid level employees, R which was measuring the explained variance in the outcome variable in the four psychological empowerment dimensions was substantially smaller (14 percent) but still significant (Spreitzer, 1987). In another study of the relationship between commitments as a psychological empowerment dimension with work performance, (Krammer, 1999) noted from a study sample of 160 nursing staff in a community hospital, psychological empowerment explained about 30 percent of the variance in commitment.

In a comprehensive meta-analysis summarizing the relationship of psychological empowerment with a range of outcomes, Spector (1986) found a strong evidence of positive association with work performance. Thus, work performance can be enhanced when employees are given autonomy over how their work is to be accomplished (Locke, 1979).

Using a framework of intrinsic motivation, Thomas (1994) found that employees who had a choice regarding how to do their work were found to be higher performers than those with little autonomy. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), work stressors in an organization usually come in form of role conflict, role ambiguity, work load, job demands and job complicity. These stressors have effect on work performance. Brief and George (1985) posit that work provides economic security to individuals and therefore do not react in good ways whenever stress is experienced as they feel that it is a threat to their economic freedom.

## Hypotheses

1. There will be no statistical significant difference in work performance amongst employees with high level of psychological empowerment and those with low level of psychological empowerment.
2. There will be no statistical significant difference in work performance amongst employees with adaptive stress and those with maladaptive stress.

## METHOD

### Participants

Two hundred and fifty (250) participants were randomly selected from three organizations in Imo State.The organizations are Aluminium Extrusion Industry InyishiIkeduru,Rokana Industries Owerriand Vinal industries Company Owerri .150 were males and 327 were females.Out of the 530 males, 130 had high job status while 350 had low job status.On the other hand, out of the 327 females,76 had high job status while 251 had low job status.

### Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study. They are

1 Psychological Empowerment Scale

2 Stress Coping Strategies Questionnaire

3 Work Performance Questionnaire

These three instruments measure psychological empowerment, stress coping strategies and work performance respectively. Psychological Empowerment Scale was originally developed by Spreitzer (1995) with reliability co-efficient of .72, Cronbach alpha

.86.Onyishi (2006) validated the instrument to suit Nigerian Work environment. Stress Coping Strategies Questionnaire; this instrument was developed by Onyishi (2005) to measure how workers cope with occupational stress. The scale has a Cronbach alpha correlation of .83. Work Performance Questionnaire; this instrument was developed by the researcher to measure work performance. The questionnaire was developed to reflect different work performance parameters used to access and measure work performance that have been reported in scientific Literature. The item total correlations ranged from .30 to .61, a test retest reliability of .82, with Cronbach alpha of .79.

## Procedure

In the three organizations, 875 copies of a set of questionnaire were randomly distributed to the two organizations used. Out of the 875 distributed,869 were returned representing 96%.Twelve (12) of this number were discarded as a result of improper completion, leaving 857 that were used for data analysis.

## Design and Statistics

The design of the study was a cross sectional survey design while a 2-Way Analysis of Variance was used to analyse data collected

## RESULTS

**Table 1 – Mean and Standard Deviation Table for Psychological Empowerment and Stress Coping Strategy on Work Performance**

| Psychological Empowerment | Stress Coping | Mean | Std Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **High Empowerment** | Adaptive | 49.0597 | 5.00249 | 352 |
| | Maladaptive | 48.9833 | 7.82324 | 60 |
| | Total | 49.0485 | 5.49165 | 412 |
| **Low Empowerment** | Adaptive | 42.3415 | 5.28493 | 41 |
| | Maladaptive | 35.8391 | 7.98270 | 404 |
| | Total | 35.4382 | 7.99374 | 445 |
| **Total** | Adaptive | 48.3588 | 5.43008 | 393 |
| | Maladaptive | 37.5388 | 9.09718 | 464 |
| | Total | 42.6006 | 9.34704 | 857 |

The first Ho hypothesis was rejected f = 185.16, df = 1, p <.001. The average performance of those with high psychological empowerment is higher (mean = 49.06, SD = 5.00) than those with low psychological empowerment (mean = 48.98, SD = 7.82)

**Table 2: Summary Table Showing the Impact of Psychological Empowerment and Stress Coping Strategy on Work Performance.**

| Source | Type III sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A—Psy Empowerment | 8507 432 | 1 | 8507 432 | 185 159 | * |
| B --- Stress Coping | 933 280 | 1 | 933 280 | 20 312 | * |
| A * B | 890 280 | 1 | 890 470 | 19 381 | * |
| Error | 39192 492 | 853 | 45 947 | | |
| Total | 1622785 000 | 857 | | | |
| Corrected | 74786 260 | 856 | | | |

The second Ho hypothesis was rejectedf=20.31, df =1 1, P<.001. The average performance of those with adaptive stress coping strategy is higher, (mean = 48.36, SD = 5.43), than those with adaptive stress coping strategy, (mean 37.54, SD = 9.09).

## DISCUSSION

The finding may be explained by the fact that individuals like working in work environment that allows them to express themselves and contribute to the growth and development of the organization. Psychological empowered employees believe they are autonomous and have an impact on what is happening in the organization, they are likely to be creative and innovative and they are also likely to feel less constrained than others by technical or rule bound aspects of work. This result corroborates with earlier findings of Hyatt and Ruddy (1987), Brass and Mathieu (1986) that found a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work performance.

The second hypothesis, there will be no statistical significant difference in work performance amongst employees with adaptive stress coping strategies and those with maladaptive stress coping strategies. The null hypothesis was rejected. (M=37.54,SD=9.09,f=20.31,df=1,p<00.1) implying that employees with potent and adaptive stress coping performed better in their work. This can be explained by the fact that adaptive stress coping employees believe the events in life which can be stressful can be controlled by themselves. The finding of this research is consistent with the findings of Kobasa (1979) who studied employees who were laid off in large numbers by AT&T of USA. He found out that the people who were categorized as having hardy personality were mentally and emotionally better off in coping with the effect of the lay off.

### Limitation of Study

One of such short comings is time to use more than two production organizations in this research. This would have increased the reliability and validity of this study. The 857 participants used were too small considering the number of production companies in Imo state.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated the role of psychological empowerment and stress coping strategies on work performance. The implication of this study is very important as it applies to the conditions of service, management style of the manager and disposition of employees to their work. Managers of organizations should allow workers to contribute in the day to day running of the organization. Opinions and suggestions should not be stifled. More so, situations that encourage exercises, building of humour and internal locus of control are important for employees so that adaptive stress coping strategies can be maintained. Managers can implement strain reducing activities such as time off to exercise or socialize. Also there could be training to help employees navigate challenges.

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