

WORK SYSTEM AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: A MODERATING ROLE OF EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP IN COMMERCIAL BANKS IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

Nwambu, Gabriel Chibuzor, Ph.D
Department of Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Email: gloccolacanticorruption@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the relationship between work system and work-life balance: A moderating role of empathetic leadership in Commercial banks in South-South, Nigeria. The accessible population for this research was 232 employees of the main branches of eight internationally licensed Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria. The sample size for this research was 147 employees from the population of 232 employees in these banks, with the application of using the Taro Yamane formular. A total of 139 questionnaires were retrieved, which were used for data analysis. Hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 significance level. From the finding so far, the results revealed that, a significant relationship exist between project system, production system and service system with respect to time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance in Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria. However, the partial correlation showed that there was a statistically substantial positive correlation between work system and work life balance where $r (.620) N=139, P= .000$. indicating that empathetic leadership can increase or decrease the effect of work system on work life balance. It was recommended among others that; the service system of workers by the management of the Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria, should be such that centers and emphasizes on consistency, and equity, matching wages and salaries with workers actual contributions and efforts channeled toward the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.*

Keywords: *Work life Balance, Empathetic Involvement Balance Time Balance, Satisfaction Balance*

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that the banking industry is one of the industries that constantly regulate the activities of a nation on a regular bases and those working under this system are always engage to make the financial institution work to satisfy their teaming population who are always making transactions without time or period restrictions. This situation seems to make the workload of employees to outweigh their work life balance to attend to other things that concerns their personal life. This is why Ojo (2012) posited that given related labour market and skills imbalances in Nigeria, employment opportunities have significantly narrowed down with most individuals left with no option but to take whatever offers are thrown at them. This has led to the exploitation of manpower, leading to overwork and strain at the workplace.

Sometimes, the pressure of work may drag some bankers to expend more hour and even weekends working at the ATM machines which seems to extend their work days to be able to address lagging customer demands, this condition negatively impact on their work-life balance having to spend more time at work and less time with family or addressing personal issues which may affect organizational productivity. This condition or intrusions may have affected bank employees' social and mental repercussions, creating dissonance and long-term health issues which also negatively influence the workers relationships in the organization; leading to functional inconsistencies, tardiness, poor quality of service outputs which could significantly ruin profit

expectations, risk the financial security of the organization and cause strain between the organization and its customers.

Flexible work arrangements, supportive organizational policies, job autonomy and control, task variety and challenge and social support at work to improved employee well-being and to enhanced job satisfaction and increased organizational productivity are considered to be major challenges affecting employees work life balance. Work system design that ought to be structured to ensure that all organisational activities, both human and material resources are aligned to suit the organisational goals and objectives seem to be lacking. This situation hampers concentration at work and creates a clear conflict where employees struggle to balance responsibilities that come with their jobs and that of the family demands.

To create synergy between organizational productivity and employees work life balance, there is need to integrate and balance family engagements with career requirements, otherwise, work life balance would be in jeopardy, as most employees are unable to effectively and enjoyably perform their roles owing to tiredness from work or family responsibilities. The organization need to have affair work system design that focus on performance, productivity, safety of employees and the quality of work life and a lack of these may cause unattainable organizational goals and objectives.

Research Hypothesis

HO₁: Empathetic leadership does not significantly mediate the relationship between work systems and work life balance in Commercial banks in South-South, Nigeria.

Work System

A system is the set of things working together as part of a mechanism or interconnecting network which activities are coordinated toward achieving a purpose. In organizational settings, system encompasses the interaction of human, information, physical and other resources to produce goods and services for internal or external customers (Alter, 2016). It is made up of parts; each part can affect the way other parts work and the way all parts work together will determines how well the system works (Alter, 2016; Oludele, 2014).). Oludele (2014) defined work system as the creation of series of tasks by which organizational work load can be performed and carried out as required. These tasks include purchasing materials, selling services, hiring employees, responding to customers etc. Similarly, Rask and Johansson, (2018) noted that any organization that wishes to carry out its mission successfully must have functioning systems that allow it to carry out its work effectively.

Work system according to Alter (2016, p.12) is "the process of work structuring that includes division of labour, tasks performed, who perform them and how they are performed in the process of making a product or providing a service to internal or external customers is referred to as „work system". The new forms of work organization include; combined jobs, multi-tasking, teams, telecommuting, electronic performance monitoring, use of temporary workers, contract workers and alternative work schedules, are being introduced with very little attention to it potential to hurt workers (Swaen, van Amelsvoort, Bultmann, Slangen & Kant, 2014). In additions to this, work restructuring can result in intensification of work, leading to working faster and harder. This work intensification may be increasing stress on the job, with low worker control over the work, often coupled with higher job demands.

More so, Steijn (2017) observed that work system allows everyday tasks to operate in a coordinated manner and provide a basic framework to produce services and products. Thus, it is a vital tool for influencing the quality of working life and effectiveness of workers. Steijn further identified three common types of work system in work organization, which includes; the traditional system (Tayloristic), sociotechnical system and lean teamwork. The Tayloristic system (TS) was introduced in the early 20th century; it ensures all work being done in accordance with the principles of scientific management (SM) and finally division of work and shared responsibility between management and workman. In tayloristic system each worker is expected to have well

defined work task, which formed the base for workers training as well as feedback on performance and pay according to measured output.

Work System and Employees Work Life Balance

In organizational settings, work is the application of human, informational, physical, and other resources to produce products/services. A work system is a system in which human participants and/or machines perform work (processes and activities) using information, technology, and other resources to produce specific products/services for customers (Steven, 2013). By the system nature of work systems, the components and interactions in a work system need to be in alignment, which implies that all components and interactions should be aligned with the work system's goals. Work systems according to Sonnentag (2018) encompass the structures, processes, and interactions within an organization that collectively define how work is conducted. The concept of work systems significantly influences employees' work-life balance, shaping their experiences and well-being.

In the work system, the knowledge, skills, interests, and motivation of the participants also need to fit with the processes and activities in the system. The processes and activities of the work should be appropriate to match for with the attributes of the participants. Changes in the processes and activities may require related changes in the participants ranging from additional training or new incentives, all the way through changing participant roles, replacing some participants with others, or automating parts of the work, which thereby renders some roles unnecessary (Steven, 2013). The concept of a work system encompasses various elements that significantly impact employees' work-life balance. Organizations that recognize the importance of these factors and actively cultivate a supportive work environment are more likely to foster a culture where employees can thrive both professionally and personally. This, in turn, leads to increased job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being (Sonnentag, 2018).

Empathetic Leadership

Empathy is the ability to get an insight or recognize the emotions of others. Empathy does not mean that we live emotions of other people, but it means that we understand other people's emotions from our experiences. It is built on openness to feelings of others, on the ability to read information from nonverbal channels. Empathy is based on the ability to intuit people's feelings, attributing the utmost attention to nonverbal information: voice tone, mimics, gestures and movements of the person, etc. Empathetic leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between work system and work-life balance in Commercial banks. Work system is characterized by their emphasis on employee development, engagement, and empowerment to achieve superior organizational performance. In this context, empathetic leadership, characterized by understanding, support, and consideration for employees' well-being, is a critical factor in managing the potential trade-offs and promoting a harmonious balance between work system and work-life equilibrium (Rego, Owens, Leal, Melo, Cunha & Gonçalves, 2017).

Empathetic leadership involves a leader's ability to understand and resonate with the experiences, emotions, and needs of their employees. It goes beyond traditional management by focusing on building strong relationships, providing support, and considering individual circumstances. In the context of Commercial banks, empathetic leadership is crucial for promoting a positive work environment and addressing the challenges posed by work system (Rego et al., 2017). Empathetic leadership can influence the relationship between work system and work-life balance in several ways; empathetic leaders prioritize the well-being of their employees; they recognize that employees have personal lives and responsibilities outside of work and encourage employees to express their concerns, needs, and challenges. Empathetic leaders are more likely to embrace flexible work arrangements that align with employees' needs. This can include options like flex time, remote work, and part-time schedules, which can be instrumental in achieving work-life balance.

As a leader, by means of empathy we have the possibility to better understand our subordinates, to intuit their thoughts and feelings, to anticipate their behaviour and even to act on it accordingly. Empathy appears as a specific human need being based on a validated social experience that allows rejections as a reflex of the possible penetration of the psychology of the other. Grant (2013) pays particular attention to both empathy and ability to manage, lead and handle interpersonal relations, subsumed under the concept of "interpersonal power". Empathy is seen as a capacity of transposition that is imaginative-conceptual, but also emotional, with functions of knowledge, foresight, communication, and performance inclined contagion. Interpersonal power could be defined as a higher self-control state, the ability to overcome anxiety and stress (Mashud et al, 2010; Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Empirical Review

Abeba and Meskerem (2020) examined effect of work-life balance on organizational commitment in commercial Bank of Ethiopia. A total of 378 respondents completed the survey. Descriptive statistics results revealed that employees exhibited a low level of Work-Life Balance and Organizational Commitment with a low level of variability. Quantitative research approach was utilized. The result of the regression analysis indicated that work-life balance is a positive predictor of organizational commitment. Among the three dimensions of work-life balance, work-personal life enhancement was found out to be the highest predictor of organizational commitment. Although the model could not capture many of the variables that predict organizational commitment, the contribution of work-life balance in enhancing organizational commitment should not be undermined. It is also recommendable for the Bank to maintain the existing work-life balance initiatives and add some more as their effect on organizational commitment is significant.

This study and the current study are significantly related in the sense that, the both studies are of a significant view that the work system which is the organizational operation determine employees productivity and work life balance. That is, the extent to which the organization structure work activities in a way that is beneficial to workers in addressing their personal life with work would help in projecting organizational productivity.

Akanji, Mordi and Ojo (2015) undertook a study titled reviewing gaps in work-life research and prospecting conceptual advancement in which they examined the concept of work life balance by reviewing extant literature. As part of this study, the authors conducted a fieldwork between January to May, 2015 in which they highlighted the perspectives of work life conflict realities in Nigeria by interviewing 50 Nigerian middle-line management employees working in service management organisations. This qualitative study revealed that the provision of types of work life balance policies at the managerial level were weak and this was largely the cause of work life conflict in the Nigerian context. The study further revealed some reasons for the lack of WLB policies to be "high level of unemployment, fear of job loss, lack of WLB awareness, government insensitivity and organisational focus on performance and profits at the expense of employee wellbeing" (2015).

The work proposed the following conditions that can enhance the adoption of WLB practices in the Nigerian context; flexible work arrangements to be enforced by government legislations that will statutorily empower employees to request for atypical work patterns, raising the awareness of organisations to the advantages of protecting workers' rights to various leave initiatives that will improve employee wellbeing, provision of dependent care facilities by organisations especially, for working mothers and managerial training to ensure managerial support for the demands of these policies.

Mwangi, Boinett, Tumwet and Bowen Dave (2017) conducted a study on effects of work life balance on employees' performance in Institutions of Higher Learning, a case study of Kabarak University. The specific objectives were to establish the effects of work-family priorities conflict on

employees' performance, establish the effects of employee assistance programmes affect employees' performance. The target population of the study was 244 from which a sample size of 70 was determined. The research used descriptive technique, specifically case study. The method used to collect data was primary method. Primary data was gathered through structured questionnaires. Data was analysed using statistical package for social science (SPSS). The data was presented in table format where percentages were presented. To determine if the independent variables influence the dependent variable Chi-square tests was done. The study revealed that work family priorities conflict affected the performance of employees.

The study concluded that work life balance is an important aspect of work and family which should be embraced to improve employees' performance. The study recommended that, organization should come up with ways of balancing what employees do in their jobs and how they cater for their family needs to reduce the imbalance and thus improve their performance. The relationship here is that, this work addresses the importance of effects of work life balance on employees' performance which is what the current work based its focus on how organizational structure and operational system determine employees work life balance.

Bogofanyo and Emmanuel (2019) carried out a study on effect of work-life balance on performance of money deposit banks in south-south Nigeria. The study explores alternative work arrangement and managerial support as dimensions of work like balance (the predicting variable), and performance as a criterion variable used for goal attainment as measure. 2562 staff of 12 banks spanning through six states was used as population size. Cochran sample size determination statistical technique was used to determine 485 sample size for the study. Questionnaire was used to collate data and was analysed with Simple Linear Regression and Pearson product moment correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 17.0 windows). The result shows that work life balance demonstrated a great significant effect on the performance of money deposit banks as the dimensions alternative work arrangement such as compress work weeks, telecommuting, flexi time, job sharing and managerial supports predict employee goal attainment. research, the correlational research design is adopted. This follows Kothari (2010) position that the correlational design is suitable in assessing the extent of correlation between two or more distinct factors – explaining effects through the establishment of causes within particular contexts.

Research Population

The accessible population for this research was 232 employees of the main branches of eight internationally licensed Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria which are Access Bank (24), Fidelity Bank (19), First City Monument Bank (19), First Bank of Nigeria (37), Guaranty Trust Bank (33), Union Bank of Nigeria (18), United Bank for Africa (35) and Zenith Bank Plc (47).

Source: www.ncc.gov.ng/stakeholder/statistics-reports/industry-overview.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this research was 147 middle and junior level management employees of the eight internationally licensed Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria which are Access Bank (15), Fidelity Bank (12), First City Monument Bank (12), First Bank of Nigeria (23), Guaranty Trust Bank (21), Union Bank of Nigeria (11), United Bank for Africa (22) and Zenith Bank Plc (30). This was estimated using the Taro Yamane. Therefore, the sample size was 147 from the population of 232 employees.

Instrumentation for Data Collection

This research focused on primary data obtained directly from the study sample units. That is to say the research focused on primary data obtained from the specified members of the 8 internationally licensed Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria. Data collection for this research will be conducted using the structured questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of the data generated in this research was carried out using the Statistical Software for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, applied in various stages of the analysis. Descriptive tools such as frequencies, percentages and mode were applied in the assessment of the demographic characteristics of the sample; same including the mean and standard deviation was applied in the assessment of the univariate distributions for the variables. Inferential tools such as the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation (Rho) was adopted in the test for the bivariate variable.

The choice of the Spearman's Rho and the partial correlation bordered on the scaling (ordinal) of the variables and the flexibility of the tools.

Multivariate Analysis

The evidence on the moderating influence of empathetic leadership on the relationship between work system and work-life balance in Commercial banks in South-south, Nigeria is presented in this section of the chapter. The relationship between the variables provide insight as regards the role of empathetic leadership and the extent to which it can be affirmed as having an influence on the outcome of the relationship between the variables of the study. This influence is tested using the partial correlation technique at a 95% confidence interval. This test addressed the following hypothesis:

HO₁: Empathetic leadership does not significantly mediate the relationship between work system and work-life balance in Commercial banks in the South-South of Nigeria.

Partial Correction on the Moderating role of empathetic leadership and Work-Life Balance

Control Variables			WS	WLB	Empathetic Leadership
-none ^a	Work System	Correlation	1.000	.913	.858
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		Df	0	135	135
	Work Life Balance	Correlation	.913	1.000	.915
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		Df	135	0	135
Leadership	Correlation	.858	.915	1.000	
	Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
	Df	135	90	0	
Empathetic Leadership	Work System	Correlation	1.000	.620	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		Df	0	134	
	Work Life Balance	Correlation	.620	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		Df	134	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: (SPSS Output, 2023).

The partial correlation was run to determine the relationship between work system and work-life balance whilst moderating for empathetic leadership. There was a substantial positive partial correlation between work system (.913) and work life balance (.913) which was statistically significantly at $r (.915) N=139, P= .000$. However, the partial correlation showed that there was a statistically substantial positive correlation between work system and work life balance where r

(.620) $N=139$, $P= .000$. indicating that empathetic leadership can increase or decrease the effect of work system on work life balance.

To buttress this, this is why the coefficient of the relationship between work system and work life balance changed when the data was controlled for empathetic leadership. This is because, the first time the data was tested without minding the effect of empathetic leadership we arrived at .913, but when it was controlled through empathetic leadership, we then arrived at .620 showing how empathetic leadership positively affect work system and work life balance. Therefore, the different that occurred was as a result of empathetic leadership displayed by organizational leaders to prioritize the well-being of their employees by positively addressing the issues that concerns the work system and their work life balance. On this note, we can say that, empathetic leadership have a moderating effect on the relationship between work system and work life balance of employees in the Commercial banks.

Moderating Role of Empathetic Leadership

The findings of this research show that empathetic leadership significantly moderates the relationship between work system and work-life balance within the context of Commercial banks in South-south, Nigeria. This work is in consonance with the work of Mayer et al., (2012) whose work revealed that, employees' motivation to work can either depend on the job itself or be a function of leadership/management to motivate the employees to work. In the former case employees are motivated to work, because they found it interesting or found some separable outcome. From the perspectives of Rego et al. (2017) work system is characterized by their emphasis on employee development, engagement, and empowerment to achieve superior organizational performance. In this context, empathetic leadership, characterized by understanding, support, and consideration for employees' well-being, is a critical factor in managing the potential trade-offs and promoting a harmonious balance between work system and work-life equilibrium.

In the same vein, Ryan and Deci (2000) basing his findings on McGregor (1960) postulations, employees are held to be reluctant to work and leaders' intervention is considered necessary to persuade or direct them to work. In both situations, a leader needs to diagnose first the things or conditions that motivates employees or find best ways to motivate employees to work, so that he can adopt motivational tactics that persuade them to perform. To contribute to this, empathy has long been recognized as an important trait in interpersonal relationships and communication. However, empathetic leadership involves understanding and relating to the experiences and emotions of employees and utilizing this understanding to guide decision-making and communication. At its core, to be empathetic, it means one need possess the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.

In the context of leadership, empathy is often seen as an important factor in building positive relationships with employees, promoting a positive organizational culture, and achieving organizational goals. The work of Emhan (2012) revealed in line with this work that, a link between empathy and good leadership of empathic leaders are better able to develop relationships with staff members, create trustworthiness, and promote a healthy company culture. The work found that, empathetic leaders were more likely to create a sense of community within their organizations and build positive relationships with employees. Effective leaders also exhibit strong ethical and moral standards. Mayer et al., (2012) also supported this finding by revealing that, ethical leadership is associated with positive outcomes such as employee trust, commitment, and job satisfaction, as well as reduced employee turnover. Furthermore, in addition to personal traits and behaviours, organizational factors also play a role in leadership effectiveness as it helps to support organizational cultures in which employees feel valued, empowered, and included which have been found to be associated with higher levels of leadership effectiveness.

Increased employee engagement, lower turnover, and improved organisational performance are just a few of the advantages of empathy in the workplace as revealed by Fu, et al. (2015) in

support of this findings. Suffice this to say that, empathetic leaders are more likely to foster a productive and encouraging work environment because they are better able to comprehend the needs and viewpoints of their workforce.

The study of Eisenbeiss et al. (2018) also found that, empathetic leadership involves the ability of leaders to understand and share the feelings of their employees. It goes beyond traditional leadership styles by emphasizing emotional intelligence, active listening, and genuine concern for the well-being of team members. The leaders are attuned to the personal and professional challenges faced by their team members and this understanding forms the foundation for initiatives and policies that support work-life balance, recognizing the need for harmony between work and personal life. In the study, it was found that, empathetic leaders provide emotional support, creating a work environment where employees feel understood and valued. This emotional support in the findings of Barling et al (2022) is linked to higher levels of employee well-being, reducing stress and enhancing overall life satisfaction.

Still in consonance with this study, Hoffman et al. (2019) found that, empathetic leaders are often more flexible and adaptable in their leadership styles. This adaptability extends to accommodating diverse work arrangements, such as flexible schedules or remote work, to support employees in achieving a better work-life balance. They tailor leadership approaches and policies to accommodate these individual needs, contributing to a more personalized approach to work-life balance. Empathetic leadership significantly influences employee engagement and retention and employees who feel understood and supported are more likely to be engaged in their work and committed to the organization, contributing to long-term employee retention.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study affirms that the levels of work-life balance and the tendency for workers to experience relative levels of control and stability over their personal and professional lives can be attributed to the levels or extent to which the organization reflects work system. This is as the evidence of the study offers substantial and significant support for the association between both variables. It has unveiled how work system generally and significantly affect work life balance when it is mostly related to time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance respectively. This work has truly figured out how some inherent conditions and situations surrounding work system with respect to product system, production system and service system keenly relate and affect work life balance.

Furthermore, the study asserts in its general observations and conclusions that:

- i. The structuring of project systems such that allow for flexibility and autonomy is such that contributes to enhanced outcomes of time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance; and thus, improved outcomes of work-life balance in Commercial banks in South-south, Nigeria.
- ii. The development of production system programmes and activities is such that contributes to enhanced outcomes of time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance; and thus, improved outcomes of work-life balance in Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria.
- iii. The timely, equitable and consistent service system of workers is such that contributes to enhanced outcomes of time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance; and thus, improved outcomes of work-life balance in Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria.
- iv. The expression of empathy by the leadership of the organization contributes toward improving the relationship between work system and work-life balance; enabling a more stable and focused workforce in Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the findings and conclusions of this study on the relationship between work system and work-life balance, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

- i. It is recommended that the development and structuring of project systems by the management of Commercial banks in South-south, Nigeria, should build on ensuring flexibility and ensuring roles offer substantial levels of autonomy; that way impacting positively on the work-life balance of employees in the workplace.
- ii. It is recommended that the management of Commercial banks in South-south, Nigeria should focus on developing production system programmes and activities based on context-specific concerns, gaps and challenges. This is necessary for creating useful skills and that are suited to the particular needs and operational goals of the Commercial banks.
- iii. It is recommended that the service system of workers by the management of the Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria, should be such that centers and emphasizes on consistency, and equity, matching wages and salaries with workers actual contributions and efforts channeled toward the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.
- iv. It is recommended that the leadership of the Commercial banks in South-south Nigeria, express commitment toward building mutually respectful and trusting relationship with their employees or subordinates, by being more empathetic and understanding toward the workers; thus, effecting the necessary conditions for improved working conditions for increased levels of stability and work-life balance.

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