

CAREER SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN ROAD CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This work examined career support and employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State. The objective of the study was to examine the extent to career support and affects measures of employee commitment such as affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. The study was anchored Social Exchange Theory propounded by George Casper Homans. The study adopted the explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. A sample size 248 was drawn from a population of 700 staff of 19 road construction firms in Rivers State. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha. After validation by the supervisor, 248 copies of structured questionnaire were administered while 240 copies were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis, Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used for the bivariate analysis while Partial Correlation was used for the multivariate analysis. The finding was made there is a significant positive relationship between career support and employee commitment. The study concluded that career support is a major motivational tool that enhances employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study recommended more deliberate effort on the part of managers and senior staff to strengthen mentoring relationships so as to promote employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Career Support, Employee Support, Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment

INTRODUCTION

Human resource is one of the most important assets of road construction firms. Employees are the ones who man the machines and production processes in order to achieve optimal productivity level. The commitment level of employees in road construction firms goes a long way in determining the extent to which organizational goals and targets are met. Employee commitment refers to the willingness and dedication, workers show in remaining productive in an organization. It has to do with strong passion, love, and a sense of bond with the organization. Committed construction workers are known for identifying with organizational goals and making personal sacrifices in order to achieve set goals (Agada, 2019). The success of various departments in road construction firms is usually a function of the efforts of few committed workers. This work looks at commitment in terms of affective, normative, and continuance commitment.

Affective commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organization. Employees with strong affective commitment stay with an organization because they want to, not because they feel obligated or fear the consequences of leaving. In the context of road construction firms in Rivers State, affective commitment can be seen in employees who are passionate about their work and feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to their company. This type of commitment is often fostered through positive workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and organizational support (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Another aspect of employee is normative commitment. Normative commitment is the feeling of obligation an employee has to remain with their organization. This sense of duty often stems from personal

values or social norms, which might be influenced by the company's culture or the employee's upbringing and background. In Rivers State road construction firms, normative commitment could be observed among employees who stay because they believe it is the right thing to do. This could be due to the investment the company has made in their training or development, or because of a strong company ethos that emphasizes loyalty and ethical behavior (McMahon, 2021). Continuance commitment refers to an employee's calculation to stay with an organization based on the costs that they associate with leaving. This type of commitment is driven by the perceived lack of alternatives or the financial, social, and professional costs of leaving the current job. In the construction industry in Rivers State, continuance commitment might be prevalent among workers who remain with a firm because they believe it would be difficult to find another job with comparable benefits or stability. This form of commitment can be strengthened by factors such as competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits packages, and the availability of long-term employment contracts (Sharma & Dhar, 2022).

Employee commitment has remained a serious challenge in many road construction firms in Port Harcourt. Some of the workers show negative attitude to work such as absenteeism, lateness, and reluctance to performance of their duties. A study conducted by Michael (2018), revealed that there is an increase in employees' resignation and a high level of intention to quit among workers in the Nigerian construction sector. In his study, Okpara (2004) found that Nigerian Managers reported lower levels of commitment as compared to US managers. Similarly, Okpu and Jaja (2014) had regrettably noted that "there is still a problem of getting the commitment of workers, especially in Nigerian Organizations". While this scenario is attributable to many factors, Uchendu (2023) identified negligence of mentoring relationships as one of the factors capable of reducing employees' happiness and bond with their organizations.

Research Hypotheses

Base on the research questions, the following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.

Career Support

Career is a complex concept. It could be about meaning, sense of purpose and direction, which includes ideas of progression and development both at work and at a personal level. In this way, it embraces ideas about lifelong learning as well as skill improvement. It is also concerned with people's future that deals with the skills they want to develop, what they want to achieve at work and as a person as well as their future employability in a rapidly changing labour market. Greenhaus, *et al* (2018) posit that career is best described as "the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of one's life. This definition includes objective events, such as jobs, and subjective views of work, such as the person's attitudes, values, and expectations. Career is defined as an occupation undertaken for a specific period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress. They emphasized that a decent career is the one that has the opportunity to develop, maintain and increase commitment in employees (Saleem & Anim 2013). Therefore opportunities for in-depth discussion and exposure to relevance resources of career issues from someone with significant skill are called career support (Wendy, 2006).

Career support as one of the dimension of mentoring as used within the context of this study, is interested in addressing the sponsorship, coaching, exposure to important contacts and resources, visibility, facilitating protection of the mentee and assignment of challenging work to enhance the

mentee's calling. Organizations need to realize that career support for their workforce is a way of helping to attract and retain the best people: by recognizing and responding to the needs of employees, they will get the best out of them. More effective guidance will assist the development of a knowledge economy and benefit individuals, employers and society at large. It will, however, require a cultural shift in management behaviour in organizations towards self-management (Hackman, 1986 in Santos & Kram, 2022). Career support is a major tool for attracting, motivating and retaining good quality and committed employees in construction firm Rivers State.

Purcell (2003) postulated that providing career opportunities is one of the key practices which influence organizational performance. Career skills are important for both employees and employers, along with the career education to acquire those skills (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). Employees need career management skills to navigate the labour market. Employers who have more skilful employees can expect them to navigate their internal labour markets more effectively and for these employees to be more aware of the need to keep their skills relevant.

With their wealth of experience, supportive mentors' career wise often act as role models by practically showing their mentees how to balance their occupational demands/schedules with their own life engagements such as family, religion, Normative Commitments, and social affiliations.

Many organizations do use outplacement providers for employees who are losing their jobs, but this does not seem to influence career support for employees who stay within the organization. Most large organizations offer personalized career support for those individuals in senior roles and in 'talent pools', but this does not necessarily lead to the same personalized attention for other employees. This in-depth support may or may not be given by someone with specialist expertise in careers work. Purcell (2003) asserts that paying attention to the career support of individuals (employees) in organizations such as road construction firms in Rivers State will be vital not only for skill expansion but also to help motivate superior performance at work by giving people a clear sense of direction and purpose. This will mean that career professionals will need to think in new ways about how they: organize and provide career maintenance, work effectively with partners from other professional groups, use informal career support mechanisms and giving others career support more effectively. Within the context of this study, career support mean the sponsorship, coaching, exposure to important contacts and resources, visibility, facilitating protection of the mentee and assignment of challenging work to enhance the mentee's calling. This may be achieved through exposure of employees to relevant contacts and assigning them to challenging work.

Concept of Employee Commitment

Employee commitment has been described by scholars in several heights. This is a concept that tries to establish the sense on how employees are emotionally attached and dedicated to their respective jobs. However, as asserted by Dixit and Bhati (2012), the concept of employee commitment is derived from an article titled "The Organization Man" written by Whyte in 1956. It refers to the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations, which are seen as self-expressive. Salancik (1977) described commitment as that state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his action and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities of his own involvement. Dixit and Bhati (2012) defined commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization". Committed employees actually show high level of consistency in their participation and dedication to organizational activities. They do not give flimsy excuses about why a task or goal cannot be accomplished. Employees who are usually absent from meetings, and ongoing projects cannot be said to be committed.

To Brown (1969) commitment has to do with something of the notion of membership; it reflects the current position of the individual; it equally has a special predictive potential, providing

predictions concerning certain aspects of job performance, motivation to work, spontaneous contribution, and other related outcomes of organizational workers called "employees".

Okpu and Jaja (2014) outlined the following definitions of employee commitment given by various authors:

Daan (2013) described employee's commitment in the following ways:

- (i) The extent to which an employee is being bound to a goal or the determination in respect of a goal, regardless of the origin of the goal in his/her organization.
- (ii) The extent to which a staff believes in a goal and wants to achieve as long as it has to do with the organization
- (iii) A psychological state that binds an individual to the organization.
- (iv) Connection to a job: the probability that someone continues to work in that job and feels psychologically bound to it. This is regardless of whether it is fulfilling or not.
- (v) Someone's attitude towards their work.

Wiener and Vardi (1980) describe organizational commitment as behavioural intention or reaction, determined by the individual's perception of the normative pressure, while O'Reilley (1989) sees it as: "an individual's psychological bond to the organization, including a sense of job involvement, loyalty and belief in the values of the organization. Porter *et al* (1974) defined organizational commitment as: "an attachment to the organization, characterized by an intention to remain in it; identification with the values and goals of the organization; and a willingness to exert extra effort on its behalf. Becker (1960) posits that commitment comes into being when a person, by making a side bet, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activities."

Career Support and Employee Commitment

Career support is predisposed in addressing issues on sponsorship and exposure to important contacts and resources, visibility, facilitating protection of the mentee and assignment of challenging work to enhance the mentee's calling. To this end, the capability of more experience employee (mentor) exposing the less experience employee (mentee) to valuable persons and programmes will help in sharpening their competence, this will make mentees feel loved and will try to identify and execute organizational goals and set objectives. This is in agreement with the view of Sharma and Dhar (2022) that career support is a major tool for attracting, motivating and retaining good quality and committed employees in construction firm. When mentors which is said to be more experienced employee sponsors the mentees (less experienced employee) in organizations such as road construction firms in Rivers State, linking them up to certain connections, they may be enabled to be directed to places where they can run certain professional programmes. The skill they get there will make them to be more professional in doing their respective jobs hence being committed and productive to the organization. The more skill they acquire, the more their ability of getting challenging assignments/works done will improve in a very high rate, hence identifying, acceptance and pursuance of these goals. This tallied with the assertion of Purcell, (2003) that paying attention to the career support of individuals in organizations such as road construction firms in Rivers State will be vital not only for skill expansion but also to help motivate superior performance at work by giving people a clear sense of direction and purpose, hence being obedience to organizational rules and regulation; and employee feel obligated to stay in the organization showing unending commitment.

These career exposure and training make employees (mentees) get more familiar with personalities in line with their career pursue, hence improving the job performance. To this end, how far such employees have gone in the organization will matter to him or her. As such even in worst times, such employee will endure to remain in the organization which may be because of his investment in the organization, cost of leaving or as a result of no alternative. Thus, these employees (mentee) will be committed to their respective jobs especially in road construction firms in Rivers State.

Theoretical Review

This work is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Theory was propounded by George Casper Homans in the year 1958 (Olannye, 2014). Social exchange theory postulates that "give and take" forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions might vary as per the intensity of the relationships. The main assumptions of the theory are as follows:

- i. In a relationship, every individual has expectations from his/her partners. The extent to which such expectations are satisfied determines the strength and survival of the relationship;
- ii. Good relationships are mutually beneficial and not supposed to be one sided. An individual invests his time and energy in relationship only when he gets something out of corresponding or higher value from it (Olannye, 2014).

Young or less experienced employees have the social expectation of being guided and encouraged by superior and more experienced managers (Neil, 2018). The justification of the Social Exchange Theory as the theoretical anchor of this study lines the fact that the theory predicts that the more experienced managers and superior officers share their wisdom, experience, and provide career support to less experienced subordinates, the happier and more committed mentees become. On the other hand, dearth of meaning mentoring relationship is capable of making workers feel alienated and deprived thereby leading to dwindling commitment level (Ayşe, *et al.*, 2013; Mba & Godday, 2023; Akpan, *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the Social Exchange Theory predicts employee commitment as a reciprocal response to satisfying mentoring efforts in road construction firms.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is particularly relevant in predicting the relationship between mentoring and employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, as it highlights the mutual benefits that arise from supportive work relationships. According to Antonakis and Ashkanasy (2009), mentoring facilitates a reciprocal exchange where employees receive personal and professional support, fostering a sense of obligation to the organization. This sense of obligation, as noted by Petrides *et al.* (2007), often translates into greater commitment, as employees who feel invested in through mentoring are more likely to remain loyal and dedicated to the company. Furthermore, O'Boyle *et al.* (2010) argue that the supportive nature of mentoring creates a positive cycle of exchange, where employees, feeling valued and understood, increase their engagement and productivity, which ultimately strengthens their commitment to the firm's goals. Thus, SET underscores how mentoring not only enhances individual development but also reinforces a deeper emotional and professional connection to the organization, which is crucial for long-term retention and success in the demanding road construction sector.

METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of seven thousand (700) employees of nineteen (19) accessible road construction firms in Rivers State. Information regarding the above population was obtained from the Human Resource Department of each of the companies. Details of the population is provided in the table overleaf. The sample size of the study consisted of Two Hundred and Forty-Eight (248) respondents of the road construction firms. The above sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970. Considering the disparity in the staff strength of the organizations, Bowley's (1960) Population Appropriation Formula was applied to determine the sample unit for each of the organizations. Structured questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The data presentation and analysis of the study was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0. Descriptive statistical tools such as arithmetic mean and frequency tables were used to conduct univariate analysis (analysis of each of the sub-variables). The bivariate analysis was carried out using Pearson Product Moment

Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Partial Correlation was used to run the multivariate analysis.

Bivariate Analysis Career Support and Employee Commitment

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.
Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.
Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between career support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

Correlations between Career Support and Employee Commitment

		Career Support	Affective Commitment	Normative Commitment	Continuance Commitment
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.858**	0.862**	0.367**
	Career Support Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
	Correlation Coefficient	0.858**	1.000	0.58**	0.858**
	Affective Commitment Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
	Correlation Coefficient	0.862**	0.862**	1.000	0.862**
	Normative Commitment Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
	Correlation Coefficient	0.367**	0.367**	0.367**	1.000
	Continuance Commitment Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	240	240	240	240

** . Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Column two of table 1 above shows r value of 0.858 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating career support and affective

commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which states that there is no significant relationship between career support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt is rejected. This implies that there is a very high positive relationship between career support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Column three of table 1 above shows r value of 0.862 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating career support and normative commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which states that there is no significant relationship between career support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. This implies that there is a significant and very high positive relationship between career support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

Column four of table 1 above shows r value of 0.367 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating website development services and Continuance Commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that there is no significant relationship between career support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. This implies that there is a significant weak positive relationship between career support and continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

Career Support and Employee Commitment

The test of hypotheses one, two and three revealed that there is a very strong relationship between career support and of employee commitment in terms of affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt. This implies that mentors in organizations such as road construction firms in Port Harcourt who support their subordinate or mentees in their career line, stand a great chance in achieving better committed employees. Thus, exposing them to relevant contacts or personalities and allocating challenging assignment, will makes the mentee to be self-competent and willing in identifying with organizational goals, they will equally feel obligated and reciprocate to the organizational actions and will remain in the organization due to his or her investment in achieving these goals hence being committed. This finding is in line with Purcell (2003) that paying attention to the career support of individuals (employees) in organizations such as road construction firms in Port Harcourt will be vital not only for skill expansion but also to help motivate superior performance at work by giving people a clear sense of direction and purpose. This will mean that career professionals will need to think in new ways about how they: organize and provide career maintenance, work effectively with partners from other professional groups, use informal career support mechanisms and giving others career support more effectively. Within the context of this study, career support mean the sponsorship, coaching, exposure to important contacts and resources, visibility, facilitating protection of the mentee and assignment of challenging work to enhance the mentee's calling.

Thus, exposure to relevant contacts connotes one of the ways in which a mentor is beneficial to the mentee in supporting their career because it is the act of mentor exposing, linking or connecting the mentee to experts, professionals and other possible benefactor in the area of chosen career. The point here is that, referring employees in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, to meet people of higher capacity especially those that are successful or have succeeded in the same area of specialization could be a boost in a mentee's career pursuit. The relevance is that, there are certain things that may not be known to the mentee throughout the period of mentorship owing to the fact that the mentor may not have these things in his or her disclosure. Such relevant knowledge may be wield and helpful in the mentee's career line. The expert in which the mentor recommends for his mentee to enable him (mentee) have access to a more valiant and reliable source of acquiring knowledge may be well equipped and known in such

career practice. This could be regarded as a fabulous means of supporting mentees in their pursuit of chosen career.

However, mentors' aim in assigning challenging works to employees does not stand to destabilize him or her, but tries to see and ascertain the extent and the capability of the mentee in handling issues in difficult time and how employees (mentees) may proffer solutions to those problems. Thus, assignment of challenging works as used within the context of this study, represents the extent to which mentors allocate difficult tasks to mentees in a given career line. Most mentees are naturally lazy in executing tasks thereby they always want things to go very easy at all time. Sometimes, the mentor is aware of the level of difficulty attached to these tasks assigned to mentees but will stress mentees finish these jobs as soon as possible. This is not to victimize them, but to prepare them to be self-confident and competent in handling situations at all time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analyses of data and discussion of findings, the study concluded that career support is a major motivational tool that enhances employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria. It was also concluded that career support optimizes employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Managers should establish mentorship programs that match employees with experienced professionals to provide career guidance. This fosters **affective commitment** by building strong interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging within the firm.
2. **Managers should** provide transparent career pathways and regular promotions to help employees envision their future growth. This will enhance their **continuance commitment**, as they will see the benefits of remaining in the firm for long-term rewards.
3. Managers should organize continuous training sessions, both on-site and off-site, to improve employees' skills. Knowledge sharing through these platforms fosters **affective commitment**, as employees feel valued and supported in their career development.

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