

**ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES AND EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING OF
STAFF IN TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The study determines the relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective decision making of staff in Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State; The explanatory cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of two hundred and sixty-two (262) office managers (branch, departmental and unit heads) drawn from 5 telecommunication firms operating in Rivers State. The study adopted census method of sampling which involves using the entire population of the study. Structure questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection after face validation. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument. Out of 262 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 253 were retrieved. Arithmetic mean was used for the univariate analysis while the test of hypotheses was done using Correlation Statistical tool such as Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The findings revealed that there is a very strong positive relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective decision making of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State. The study concludes the engagement of office managers in such programmes as advancement professional programme enhances their ability to discharge their duties with creativity and quickness of task completion. The study recommended among others that Office managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should learn to leverage on artificial intelligence tools that will lighten their jobs, thereby enhancing their creativeness and early task completion.

Keywords: Advanced Professional Programme, Effective Decision Making, Career Development

INTRODUCTION

Creativeness as a measure of office manager performance can be defined as the introduction of new techniques or ways of doing things by an employee or manager for achieving the maximum potential of human labour which will result in achieving goals effectively. Creativeness is explained as a design in which the employee make such innovative construction in which the work related problems are resolved in rightful manner with step by step process. Some explain it as the ability of the individual on how they can develop useful solution to meet the challenges and overcome the problem them self individually (Amabile, 2017; Young, 2016). A unit or departmental head who cannot creatively bring up new ideas in which things should be done so to better the unit or department cannot be said to be performing. Performance of an office manager would not make much sense if it is void of creativity. This means that such individual only replicates what they see or hear; they cannot come up with anything on their own. In a world where humans do not run out of ideas in doing things differently from the way they were done before, office managers in telecommunication firms are supposed to be creative agents there.

Effective decision making is defined in this work as the process of making decisions that are action-based. It is also the process through which alternatives are selected and then managed through implementation to achieve business objectives. "Actionable decisions result from a systematic process, with clearly defined elements, that is handled in a distinct sequence of steps" (Bekefi& Epstein, 2016). Markson (2019) stated that for decisions to be actionable, the steps an individual should take should be: (i) identify the decision (ii) gather information (iii) identify alternatives (iv) weigh the evidence (v) choose among alternatives (vi) take action, and (vii) review your decision. However, many office managers suffer dearth of problem solving and prudent resource allocation

abilities that should have aided their effective decision making. This is a weakness that the study is yet to find out if career development programmes can solve, and thereafter make necessary recommendations.

Another measure to the performance of an office manager is early task performance. This is to say that an office manager cannot claim to be performing, if they do not take up tasks and goals and get done with them on time. Early task completion portends timely completion of the work, duty, task, responsibility or assignment as a designated portion by an individual on or before the time or date required. It is the attainment of a task or duty by an individual on or before the designated time required for such to be completed. In line with the above conceptual definition, timely task completion as a measure of job performance of an Office Manager means when an Information Manager attains a designated tasks or duties on or before the stipulated time. An Office Manager in a telecommunication firm, such as the unit or departmental head is expected to issue out memos, call for meetings, give reports, etc. on time, as this will permeate into their performance, thereby enhancing his performance as an office manager. Where these things are not happening, it becomes difficult to say that the office manager is performing. Unfortunately, it is the situation of some telecommunication firms in Rivers State and Nigeria by extension.

Despite the poor performance that trail some office managers in telecommunication firms, the above background seems to ignite confidence that career development programmes, such as digital capacity building, advanced professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes, have the capacity to enhance the performance of office managers in telecommunication firms. Although, empirical analysis is yet to prove it beyond reasonable doubt. Based on this situation, this study will embark on empirical investigation of the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of telecommunication firms in the confine of Rivers State.

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective decision making of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

Advanced Professional Programmes

Eric (2017) refers to professional programmes as all training, certification and education that a worker needs to succeed in his or her career. It is no secret that different jobs require different skills. Even if an employee currently has the necessary skills, he or she may need additional skills in the future. Through professional education, employees can learn these skills to become better, more efficient in their job delivery, which will enhance organizational performance. While job training is an essential part of professional education, this concept covers all forms of education and learning that is intended to help a worker succeed. Other examples of professional education include college studies, online training programs, industry certifications, coaching, mentoring and consultation (Eric, 2017).

Both employers and employees benefit from professional education. Employers can benefit from professional development in several ways. First, it promotes higher employee retention rates. Statistics show that the cost of employee turnover is up to 16% of the employee's annual income (Supovitz& Turner, 2018). This actually means an employee earning 36 million naira per year will cost the employer 5,760,000 naira if he or she quits. But employers who offer professional education will encourage employees to stay with their business. Professional education also signals competency on behalf of the employer. Some industries actually require workers to hold certifications. And if a worker does not have the necessary certification, it looks bad for the employer - not to mention the legal challenges it poses. Professional education/development, however, can help workers obtain the necessary certification and learning for their industry. Of course, professional education is also beneficial for employees. Employees that engage in professional development will feel more confident knowing that they have the skills needed to succeed in their line of work. If an employee lacks a particular skill, he or she may question their work. Employees

will also become better workers through professional education. By learning the right skills for their career, employees will be more productive and efficient, thus helping the business for which they work succeed. Finally, professional education can open the doors to new opportunities for employees. If an employee is struggling to get promoted to a higher, more lucrative position, professional education/development may help him/her secure this promotion.

Advanced professional programmes include trainings, workshops, conferences and webinars that not only provide valuable networking opportunities but insights from acclaimed practitioners and recognized educational experts, as well as rich information regarding the advanced continuous improvement system, and accreditation process and standards (UNESCO, 2019). A professional education is termed advanced because it is far or ahead or further along in progress, complexity, knowledge, skill, etc. than the basic professional education required for a certain course or career. This means moving a step or more further than what is the usual standard of required professional education/development for a certain career.

Advanced professional education refers to advanced courses offered by a conventional educational institution or a professional body to boost the skills and expertise of a member or individuals (The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017). The researcher conceptualizes advanced professional education as courses or higher educational engagements undertaken in order to deepen the knowledge, skills, and professional attitude of persons, staff, and members.

Depending on the nature, size, and philosophy of an organization, those occupying managerial functions may be required to possess various educational qualifications such as Ordinary National Diploma (OND), Higher National Diploma (HND), First Degree, Masters Degree, MBA (Master of Business Administration), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). It is also possible for a secondary school leaver to rise to managerial position. The idea of educational advancement (advanced professional education) emanates from the assumption that the more managers and senior staff undergo higher professional education, the better they become. It is also necessitated by the fact that as people progress on their job, they begin to face tasks and responsibilities that their base degree did not adequately prepare them for (Ameh, 2016). For instance, a manager who studied English Language or Engineering might decide to run a professional programme in Human Resource Management, Risk Management, Management Accounting, etc. as a result of current challenges or observed skill-gap in his new appointment. It is in recognition of this fact that telecommunication firms provide scholarship to their staff to enable them widen and deepen their expertise on the job. Individual managers can also enroll in formal or non-formal educational programmes to upgrade their skills. Furthermore, professional advanced programmes are indicated in this study using Business School and oversea sponsored course.

Effective Decision Making

The word "decision-making" conjures up the image of choice among alternative courses of action in a way appropriate to the demand of the situation. The ability of the decision maker to choose the best option that is capable of achieving the set objective or solving the problem demands structured decision guidelines (James & Edwin, 2017). To be actionable, organizations must, through their managers and employees, be able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Among the influences perpetuating this environment of widespread and rapid changes are significant developments in technology and research, demographic and socio-political shifts and the trend towards globalization. Moreover, these developments have brought the global economy to a cross roads between the industrial age and the postindustrial age (Yasodara *et al.*, 2016). Decision making can be regarded as an outcome of mental processes (cognitive processes: memory, thinking, evaluation) leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives. Actionable decision making is very paramount to the progress of every organization and institution as it leads or shows the next line of action. When office managers match their words with actions, then confusion is cleared and work can progress. Employees such as lecturers and non-academic staff under their leadership will know

what to do and how to do as management decision will be communicated to them. A decision can only be said to be actionable when it shows the next line of action.

What might be the reason behind a successful decision could be the expected outcome or the process taken to get there. If you chase the result, then you cannot be sure if the result was delivered by sheer luck or that the success can be repeated again. Some say actionable decisions require an actionable decision-making process. However, without instilling checks and balances, a mere method alone cannot provide a good foundation for business decisions. The biggest conflicts in business decisions come from a poor understanding of the needs driven by misguided data and unintentional biases. Having a decision-making process alone does not kick our clarity of choices, opportunities, and risks. There needs to be a quality check in the process to ensure decision-makers bring their highest quality intentions and clear minds.

Decisions taken across organizations are often regarded as rational, often relying on data and facts for clear choices. Yet, there is not enough facts and data in the world to predict a 100% outcome. The best decisions navigate the "heart vs. head" conflict, continually questioning facts, as well as your assumptions. Is your business built on passion or information? A great decision is created from passion (heart) and challenged with information (head). When it comes to actionable decision making with guided intuition, our cognitive process for making judgment calls and decisions shifts from intuitive to rational driven by five factors (Leading Lotus, 2017). We are never one or the other, as pop fiction would like us to believe as left-brained or right-brained. An actionable decision is one that yields its intended outcome. It therefore requires an office manager to employ all scientific and psychological tools while carrying out decisions in the workplace in order to ensure their effectiveness in the later end. The office manager would also need to set tools in place to ensure that the decision is strictly followed and implemented in order to attain its purpose.

Advanced Professional Programme and Effective Decision Making

One way advanced professional education affects organizational performance is that it enhances creativeness through critical thinking and creative problem solving. The idea of advanced professional education is necessitated by the fact that as people progress on their job, they begin to face tasks and responsibilities that their basic degree did not adequately prepare them for. It also emanates from the assumption that the more managers and senior staff undergo higher professional education, the better they become. As a result, they have grown creatively in their career such that they have a lot to contribute to product diversification, product rebranding, and making products and services look very appealing to omni-channel consumers. Business School and overseas sponsored course have the capacity to birth creative minds in office managers that can propel a telecommunication firms to its globally acceptable standard, where product (service) innovation is the order of the day, since clients and stakeholders are constantly searching for better options in products and service offer. It will take creativeness in products and services offer for telecommunication companies, such as ipNX, Smile, MTN, Glo, 9Mobile, Airtel, Spectranet, etc. to keep their customers in this present age of highly competitive market. One of the instruments that can propel this creativeness is higher professional learning, especially on the part of the office managers, as they head departments and units. Peter (2017) once wrote that managers, who have undergone extra higher trainings from internationally recognized organization aside the on-the-job trainings encountered in their workplaces, are much more likely to perform better in their job career and generic job duties.

It can be deduced from the foregoing statement that such managers contribute immensely to the growth of organizations, even as they contribute highly to critical thinking and creative problem solving that will satisfy customers, especially. It therefore implies that management of telecommunication firms that sponsor their office managers for advanced professional programmes end up doing it for the good of the firm, even as the performance of the office manager and that of the organization are boosted.

Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice (John L. Holland, 1950)

Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice, also known as the Holland Codes or the RIASEC model, is a widely accepted framework for understanding and classifying individuals' vocational interests and career choices. This theory was developed by John L. Holland, a psychologist, in the 1950s and has been influential in the field of career development. Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice, proposed by John L. Holland, is a widely recognized and influential theory in the field of career development. The theory suggests that individuals possess unique personality types that align with specific work environments. Holland's theory is also known as the RIASEC model, named after the six personality types that he identified: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. The assumptions of the theory that align with this study include:

- i. The theory assumes that individuals can be classified into one of six distinct personality types: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). Each person exhibits varying degrees of these personality types, but there is usually a dominant type that best characterizes an individual's preferences.
- ii. Holland's theory assumes that an individual's personality is relatively stable over time. It means that a person's interests, values, and preferences tend to remain consistent, making their career choices aligned with their dominant personality type.
- iii. The central assumption of Holland's theory is that individuals seek a person-environment fit, aiming to match their dominant personality type with work environments that correspond to it. The closer the fit between an individual's personality and the vocational environment, the higher the job satisfaction and career success.
- iv. Holland's theory proposes that as individuals explore and make career choices based on their dominant personality type, they develop a vocational identity. This identity represents a sense of self in the vocational domain and becomes an essential part of an individual's self-concept.

Implication of Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice

The implications of Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice on the relationship between Career Development Programmes and Office Manager Performance are multifaceted and can have a positive impact on both individual employees and the overall organizational performance. Career Development Programmes that incorporate Holland's Theory can help office managers identify career paths that align with their dominant personality types. When employees find jobs that match their interests and preferences, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their roles. Office managers can benefit from a highly engaged workforce, leading to improved productivity and job satisfaction. Also, Holland's Theory emphasizes the importance of person-environment fit in career satisfaction and performance. Career development programmes that take this into account can assist employees in finding roles within the organization that best suit their personalities. When employees experience a good fit between their personalities and job roles, they are more likely to perform well and remain committed to the organization.

Furthermore, career development programmes that consider Holland's Theory can assist office managers in designing effective career paths for their employees. When employees are guided along career trajectories that match their personalities, they are more likely to experience career growth and advancement within the organization. This can improve employee retention and reduce turnover. Office managers can use Holland's Theory to guide the training and development initiatives within their teams. By understanding the dominant personality types, they can offer personalized training programs that align with the specific needs and interests of their employees. This targeted approach can lead to more effective skill development and improved job performance.

Summarily, the application of Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice in career development programmes can lead to a better understanding of individual office manager personality types, interests, and career aspirations. When this knowledge is integrated into office manager performance strategies, it can result in a more engaged, motivated, and high-performing workforce.

By aligning individuals with roles that suit their personalities and providing tailored career development opportunities, organizations can create a positive work environment that fosters growth, productivity, and overall success.

Research Design

The exploratory cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The explanatory cross-sectional survey research design is interested in the test of hypotheses using primary data generated from respondents. The recent nature of digital knowledge entrepreneurship in this part of the world also informed the choice of this research design.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers (departmental and unit heads) drawn from 100 telecommunication companies operating in Rivers State (Sourced: Rivers State Yellow Pages).

Sample Size/Sampling Techniques

The entire population of two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers drawn from 100 telecommunication companies in Rivers State was used for the study without sampling. Thus, the study adopted census method of sampling which involves using the entire population of the study. The researcher is making the above decision based on the fact that the two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers drawn from 100 telecommunication companies could be covered. Therefore, a total of two hundred and seventy-six (276) office managers of the 100 telecommunication companies became the respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

Instrument for data collection for the study was done through structured questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation were used for the univariate analysis while bivariate analysis was done using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. Partial Correlation was applied for the multivariate analysis.

Result

Advanced Professional Programmes and Effective Decision Making

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective Decision Making of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

Correlations between Advanced Professional Programmes and Effective Decision Making

			Advanced Professional Programmes	Effective Decisio Making		
Spearman's rho	Digital Capacity Building	Correlation	1.000	0.899**	0.685**	0.881**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	253	253	253	253
	Creativeness	Correlation	0.569**	1.000	0.785**	0.786**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	253	253	253	253
		Correlation	0.685**	. 0.785**	1.000	0.646**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000

N	253	253	253	253
Correlation Coefficient	0.881**	0.786**	0.646**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
N	253	253	253	253

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

Source: SPSS Output

Column three of table 4.20 above shows r value of 0.685 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating advanced professional programmes and effective decision making. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₅) which states that there is no significant relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective decision making of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State was rejected. This implies that there is a strong positive relationship between advanced professional programmes and effective decision making of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown how these programmes positively relate with the performance of office managers, especially in terms of effective decision making. From the analyses and discussion of findings carried out, the study concludes the engagement of office managers in advancement professional programme enhances their ability to discharge their duties with creativity and quickness of task completion. Therefore, telecommunication firms and other organizations owe their office managers regular training, retraining, and development on digital capacity building, professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes, as these have the capacity to boost their performance across the board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Management should adopt cloud computing services that will enhance the processing as well as secure access to special purpose data/information across the organizations to enhance information contents, information sharing speed, and collaboration.
2. Office managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should undertake self-development efforts to improve their digital capability level that will help them deal with challenges of the digital age that comes with customer/staff interaction in their areas.
3. Office managers and others in telecommunication firms should go for degree advancement programmes, as this will expand their knowledge horizon and increase their job performance across the board.

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