

DEGREE ADVANCEMENT PROGRAMME AND CREATIVENESS OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to determine the correlation between degree advancement programme and creativeness of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State, determine the correlation between advanced professional programmes and creativeness of 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 degree advancement programme and creativeness of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State. The study concludes the engagement of office managers in degree advancement 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.

Keynote: Degree Advancement Programme, Office Manager Creativity, Career Development, Task Completion

INTRODUCTION

A major issue that prompted this study is the growing concern about the dwindling performance of office managers across telecommunication firms, such as heads of departments and units. The researcher has observed that a good number of them seem to have lost touch with the present day creative ability in thinking through issues and solving problems for employees and customers. A lot of them also have become lackadaisical in setting and achieving targets and goals, making their job performance drop drastically. In consonance with this, Kumar and Bansal (2017) stated that a major problem that many directors and department heads encounters in public and private sectors is low performance, especially in terms of poor service delivery and innovativeness. As sensitive as the telecommunication sector, having office managers who cannot competently handle the day-to-day running of offices will be disappointing, hence resulting to underperformance. Notwithstanding, the student suggests that a venture into career development may be the panacea to this situation.

Many telecommunication firms are yet to realize the importance of career development for their staff, especially their office managers. Some have left their office managers to cater for anything related to career development. For some, they care but on a very minimal level, as they feel that developing their office managers will make them want to leave them for bigger firms. This

selfish reasoning and unwillingness to invest in their office managers have cause their office managers to lose touch of invoke of digital technologies in Cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence, Data Security, etc. Advanced professional programmes and degree advancement programmes have become far fetch among many of these office managers, and this situation has robbed them competitive ability with their counterparts in sister organizations and as well as other organizations. Many telecommunication firms in Nigeria are yet to incorporate functional career development programmes such as on-the-job training method, degree advancement programmes, off-the-job training method, digital capacity building, and attending conferences (Kakui & Gachunga, 2020). Participant observer's experience reveals that many of those in managerial cadre do not attend conferences, computer-aided organizational learning is quite low, top management often find it difficult to delegate certain functions to junior colleagues, and off-the-job training efforts is relatively low. This has left a wide gap between managerial capacity of office managers and the skills required for performing higher managerial functions in telecommunication firms, hence increasing poor performance.

Another issue that prompted this study is the perceived dearth of empirical studies on the relationship between career development programmes and office manager performance of telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Online search by the researcher suggests that this area of scholarship may not have received adequate research attention. Evidently, a study done by Jonathan *et al.* (2017) provided a holistic view of how employees' career advancement can affect organizational effectiveness among selected deposit money banks in Nigeria, and revealed that employee career advancement in the organization exert a great influence on the operations of deposit money banks in Nigeria, and as such banks management should invest in employee's development to stem employee turnover and improve productivity. In the study carried out by Ugwu *et al.* (2020), they examined the relationship between higher education and career advancement of female managers in Nigeria and found that lifelong learning relates with employee experience of top female managers. Dialoke and Paschal (2017) focused on the effects of career growth on employees' performance with reference to the Non-academic Staff of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike in Abia State, Nigeria and found that constant training of staff enhances their overall official performance.

For more evidence, Shadrack *et al.* (2022) established the relationship between career development programs and employee performance in Local Governments in Kanungu District Local Government. The study revealed that a positive but statistically significant relationship between staff training and employee performance. Also, the study of Malobi (2022) examined the effect of career management on organizational performance of teaching hospitals in South East Nigeria and showed that career planning, training, reward, organizational commitment and motivation had significant positive effect on organizational performance. In addition, Ramil (2020) investigated the relationship of Bohol Island State University (BISU) employees' awareness and implementation levels of their Career Development Plan (CDP) on their job performance and satisfaction, and revealed that employment experience indicated significant results on job performance and satisfaction, implying that the longer their stay in BISU, the better their performance, and the more satisfied they become. Although, the various studies cited above point to the fact various career development programmes are positively correlated with employee and organizational performances in various sectors within and outside Nigeria. However, none of these studies was able to provide empirical evidence on how dimensions of career development programmes, such as digital capacity building, advanced professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes interact with measures of office manager performance of telecommunication firms within the context of Rivers State, Nigeria. This suggests that the link between career development programmes and office manager performance of telecommunication firms has not received adequate research attention within

the context of Rivers State. This is the knowledge gap which this study seeks to fill. This gives credibility to this study.

Research Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between degree advancement programmes and creativeness of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

Degree Advancement Programmes

Knowledge is infinite, and the more a person seeks it, the more relevant and problems the person can solve. One of the ways an employee or manager in an organization can develop their careers by going for degree advancement programmes, such as Master's and Doctoral degrees. This will obviously increase the individual's relevance and problem-solving skills, among other things. Many employees in organizations have not been promoted for years as a result of no advanced degree certificate. According to Jack (2019), an advanced degree is an academic degree that is earned beyond the bachelor's degree level, such as a master's or doctoral degree. An advanced degree programme will benefit a person in the following ways (Jack, 2019):

- i. It may be required for your chosen career. Some careers require at least a Master's degree for entry level positions, to legally practice or to be recognized as a professional. If this is the case for you, then you should spend time researching schools to determine which school offers the program that is the best fit for you.
- ii. Having one statistically provides higher earning potential and lower unemployment rates, regardless of what is happening with the economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015 the median yearly earnings for someone with a Master's degree was \$12,000 higher than someone with a Bachelor's degree. And the unemployment rate for those with a Professional degree (1.5%) was almost half of those with only a Bachelor's degree (2.8%). For more information, check out this infographic.
- iii. Pursuing an advanced degree is a wonderful way to satisfy your intellectual curiosity and passion. Your graduate program will be a more concentrated look at topics that are of particular interest to you and often involve a direct application to your chosen field.

From the forgoing, the study operationally defines degree advancement programmes as higher university programmes such as Master's and Doctoral degrees targeted at enhancing the relevance and skillsets of the participant. An advanced degree, in short, is an educational opportunity to specialize in a topic or topics within a given field of study (Michigan Technology University, 2021). Whether you work in a science-related field, communications, engineering, or management, new knowledge and discoveries are constantly being added. Those who pursue that knowledge through advanced degrees could become leaders in their field. In addition to the obvious financial benefit to the employee, employer-funded advanced education can carry financial and soft benefits for employers, employees, and colleagues alike. These benefits extend beyond the person who is pursuing advanced education, as they are explained below (Gabriel & Ian, 2020):

More Accessible to Working Professionals: As access to online education grows, the number of professionals seeking to advance their education also increases. In 2017, one in six students enrolled entirely online, and one in three enrolled in at least one online course. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools around the country shut down their physical locations, and students were forced to move to online learning. Now that most students have taken some form of online classes, it is likely that many will choose to continue this method of learning. Advanced education has become more attractive to employees and employers because it is a more accessible option for working professionals.

With the increase in availability of online education due to the pandemic, companies can leverage this opportunity to attract talent earlier to both their and the student's benefit. The heart of online school is the flexible pace; students choose any quantity of classes each semester, meaning they could offload during busy season and upload during the slow season. Some employers allocate otherwise-unassigned slow-season hours to degree-earning coursework.

Tax Incentives for Employers: Employers can sponsor employees with funds for academic training to build job-related skills. They may provide up to \$5,250 in employer education-assistance benefits for undergraduate or graduate courses tax-free each year. To receive the benefit, the funds must pay for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and/or equipment. As an added bonus, these funds qualify for a business deduction and are not required to pay FICA or FUTA payroll taxes. However, the education must be legally required for the employee to maintain their current position, or it must improve or maintain skills required for the position. One of these two stipulations must be met to satisfy the tax-free treatment.

There are limits, as these benefits are for employees only, and not for spouses or dependents. Also, there is no choosing between the education benefit and a cash payment to the employee. Employers should provide these rules and others as a written notice to employees interested in receiving the benefit.

Creativeness

In this study creativeness is also addressed as creativeness. Creativeness can be explained as production of new ideas; a creative employee is one who can come up with new suggestions/ideas for the services to be constructed, the flood of the communication and understanding it in the same way which would affect the work done by the employee during his working hour (Amabile, 2017). 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 individuals how they can develop useful solution to meet the challenges and overcome the problem them self individually (Amabile, 2017; Young, 2016).

Creativeness has been defined differently by different researchers. Some defined it as personal characteristics and others as a process (Amabile, 2017). Researchers in the past have revealed that a creative response can be a product, idea or procedure that fulfills two conditions: (1) they must be novel or original, and (2) they should be potentially relevant for, or useful to an organization (Barron & Harrington, 2018). Literature has revealed that at first, researchers have focused on determining a set of personal characteristics that are associated with creative achievements (Davis, 2015; Martindale & Dailey, 2019). They addressed the role of personal attributes and cognitive styles as the key determinants of employee creativity rather than job specific contextual factors that also play an important role in determining employee creativity. Unsworth (2016) has introduced a matrix of four creativity types that varies in two dimensions: (1) driver of engagement (external or internal) and (2) the problem type (open or closed). In external driver of engagement, an external situation demands an individual to engage in a creative behavior, however, in internal driver of engagement, an individual wishes to be creative. Open ideas are those that come from the individuals and closed ideas are those which are presented to individuals. The four types of creativity includes: responsive (responding to problems due to external drivers), expected (discovering problems due to external drivers), contributory (responding to problems due to internal drivers) and proactive (discovering problems due to internal drivers). Recent researches emphasis that it is not only the personal factors that enhance employee creativity but there are the contextual factors also that play

significant role in determination of employee creativity (Tierney & Farmer, 2014; George & Zhou, 2018; Rodan & Galunic, 2017).

Contextual factors may include goals and expectations for creative activity, social influence on individual's creativity (presence of co-actors, creative role model and presence of competitiveness of someone else), relationship with supervisor, co-workers and customers and organizational settings (Lodham & Cummings, 2017). When considered within organizational contexts, researches have yielded some inconsistent findings. For example, two studies (Lodham & Cummings, 2017; Zhou & Oldham, 2015) showed that rating high on creative personality and having a supportive supervisor interacted positively to affect employee creativity. On the other hand, Madjar *et al.* (2016) found no such support. Employees scoring low on creative personality measures show higher level of creativity when creative coworkers were present and they had non-controlling supervisors (Zhou & George, 2017).

The role of creativeness for firm's performance and growth cannot be ignored in a competitive dynamic environment. Researchers have suggested that creativity is the essential part for organization's survival and competency (Zhou & George, 2017; Oldham & Cummings, 2017; Zhou, 2016). Therefore firms need creative employees to initiate organizational innovation. Employee creativity is recognized as the key factor for generating a competitive advantage (Shalley *et al.*, 2014). The role of employee creativity of the frontline employees is of particular importance in the service firms as they serve as the boundary workers and enjoy exclusive right to gather first hand market information. Further, frontline service employees face customers with quite diverse needs, implying that they need to be more innovative. A creative employee is one who has the ability to be aware of the organization and must be sensitive so that he can tackle the problem, he must have sharp mind so he is able to remember his task for long time, and he must be adaptive, it is because due to Globalization there is rapid change in the technology as well the culture so a creative employee would be one who is able to adapt to all the changes before time, in this way he would be termed as creative (Evans, 2015). It has been long observed that employee's creativity is mostly seen by the large organization and team. Creativity is mostly involved in the generation of change in product, due to working in team the employees are constantly engaged in learning new knowledge, skills which are the necessary requirements needed by the organization from the employee so they can achieve timely goals (Amabile, 2017).

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. 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 (such as a university, polytechnic, college of education, monotechnic, etc.). Having this situation will birth improved performance on their part, thereby enhancing the overall performance of the institution. Creativity is therefore a strong measure with which the performance of an office manager can be checked, as this determines how innovative they are in their positions as office managers. Creativity of an office manager can further simply imply the extent to which a middle level administrative officer is able to think for himself and producing something unique, fascinating and result-oriented in the process.

Due to innovation and globalization, if an academic institution wants to compete with its competitor they must hire creative employees and managers who are extroverts, feeling easy

to work in groups. Office managers with proactive personalities are the ones which are mostly admired to make constructive change (Zhou & George, 2017). Office Manager's creativity can be most commonly referred to an individual who has new ideas for his work & working style, he must be flexible in order to work with teams rather than enjoying working in isolation always. A creative office manager is one who has better skills of understanding and is adaptable so that if a new technology or policy is introduced in the institution so he should be able to use or adapt to it in no time (Shalley et al., 2014). All these values indicate that office managers are empowered so they can complete the task. As they are feeling comfortable all these characteristics would help in getting to know new opportunities and use of advance technology (Runco, 2014).

Creativeness is adopted by the individual to do production with new ideas. The creativity may depend on the employee/manager or situation; a manager may want to be in contact at highest or lowest level although he or she has great potential. An office manager may use all of his/her capabilities, skill knowledge in effort to produce creative outcomes (Drazin et al., 2018). However, proactivity, problem solving, and suggesting new ways have been conceptualized by the researcher as the indicators of creativity. Additionally, a creative office manager is one who engages in critical thinking and creative problem solving, among others.

Degree Advancement Programmes and Office Manager Performance

Degree advancement programmes promote office manager creativeness through critical thinking and creative problem solving. Office managers are confronted with diverse work challenges which they need creativity to deal with. Degree advancement programmes play a vital role in promoting the creativity of office managers through fostering critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. As office managers face diverse work challenges on a daily basis, it is essential for them to possess the capability to think critically and find innovative solutions. These programmes offer them the knowledge, tools, and techniques necessary to excel in their roles. By participating in degree advancement programmes, office managers are exposed to a wider range of concepts, theories, and perspectives that stimulate their creativity (Jack, 2019). They gain a deeper understanding of various disciplines, such as business management, psychology, and communication, which enables them to approach situations from different angles. This multidisciplinary approach enhances their ability to analyze problems holistically and generate unique solutions.

Moreover, degree advancement programmes often incorporate practical case studies and real-world scenarios, which further enhance office managers' creative problem-solving skills (Gabriel & Ian, 2020). By applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations, they gain the confidence and competence to tackle complex challenges effectively. These programmes also encourage collaboration and interaction among participants, providing a platform for exchanging ideas and insights. Through these interactions, office managers can broaden their perspectives and learn from the experiences of others, leading to further creativity and innovation in their work. Degree advancement programmes empower office managers with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills necessary to excel in their roles. By fostering creativity, these programmes enable office managers to approach challenges with a fresh perspective, find innovative solutions, and drive positive outcomes for their organizations.

Degree advancement programmes also promote problem solving and prudent resource allocation abilities of office managers. This leads to effective decision making, among other things. Degree advancement programmes play a pivotal role in enhancing the performance of office managers. These programs provide office managers with the opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills and improve their abilities in prudent resource allocation. As a result, office managers become more proficient in making effective decisions that positively impact the

organization. One of the key benefits of degree advancement programmes for office managers is the ability to enhance problem-solving skills (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). These programs offer comprehensive coursework and real-world case studies that challenge managers to think critically and analytically. Through this process, office managers learn how to identify problems, analyze various factors, and develop creative solutions. By honing their problem-solving abilities, office managers can address challenges in a proactive and efficient manner, ultimately benefiting the overall productivity and success of the organization.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Roger, 1962)

Diffusion of Innovation Theory was propounded to explain how people accept new technologies and innovative skills set as cited in Amadi-George (2018). The theory assumes that:

- i) In a social system, there will always be a disparity in the level and time at which individuals within a given social system adopt new ideas, techniques, and technology.
- ii) Individuals and arms of institutions that adopt innovations early will naturally outperform late adopters and the laggards (Rogers cited in Amadi-George, 2018).

The implication of this theory is that as some Telecommunication Firms find the need to allow their office managers to develop their careers, especially in terms of digital capacity building, advanced professional programmes, and degree advancement programmes, there will obviously be a discrepancy on the mode of adoption – some will quickly adopt while others will be reluctant about it. In some cases, the reluctant ones want to first of all see how it benefits the early adopters before they make the decision whether to toll the same line or not. The fact is that management of Telecommunication Firms that fail to support their office managers in going about developing their careers in the aforementioned areas early enough are likely going to experience poor performance, especially in terms of low creativity, poor decision making, late work delivery, poor work quality, etc. (Odu, 2018) while those who embrace and adopt these enhancement techniques on time will experience performance. This means that there will be a significant gap in the performance of office managers of early and late adopters.

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.

Results

Degree Advancement Programmes and Office Manager effective completion of tasks

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

Correlations between Degree Advancement Programmes and Office Manager Effective Decision Making

		Degree Advancement Programmes		creativity		
Spearman's rho	Degree Advancement Programmes	Correlation	1.000	0.863**	0.792**	0.799**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	253	253	253	253
		Correlation	0.863**	1.000	0.785**	0.786**
		Coefficient				
	Effective Decision Making	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	253	253	253	253
		Correlation	0.792**	0.785**	1.000	0.646**
		Coefficient				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	253	253	253	253
	Correlation	0.799**	0.786**	0.646**	1.000	
	Coefficient					
	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 two of table above shows r value of 0.863 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating degree advancement programmes and creativity. 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 degree advancement programmes and creativeness of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State was rejected. This implies that there is a very strong positive relationship between degree advancement programmes and creativeness of Telecommunication Firms in Rivers State.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown the value in the advancement of career programmes in the area of degree advancement programmes. From the analyses and discussion of findings carried out, the study concludes the engagement of office managers in degree advancement 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. Managers in telecommunication firms and other organizations should seek out for overseas-sponsored courses, as these opportunities can be the game changer in their careers, hence building their creativity and speedy goal achievement.
2. Telecommunication firms should imbibe cultures that support the career development of their managers, thereby enhancing their creative ability, problem solving skill, and target achievement.

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