

STRATEGIC EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT: A ROUTE TO SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS FOR TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT.**¹Okwurume, Clarence Nkasirim Ph.D. and ²Igwe, Chinyere Emmanuel Ph.D.****¹Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Rivers State University, Nkpolu Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt. ²Maurison Academy, Port Harcourt, Nigeria***Email: cigwe1865@yahoo.com***ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impact of employee empowerment on organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design to carefully explain the problem at hand. The population consisted of top management of the four major telecommunication firms in Nigeria. A research questionnaire was drafted and administered to twenty (20) respondents of the various departments in Port Harcourt. Hence, twenty (20) copies of the questionnaire was filled accurately and retrieved. It was found that there was a significant impact of employee empowerment on organizational of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. It was concluded that employee empowerment which include, (employee autonomy, employee reward system and employee recognition), to a great extent, can influence organizational success, (organizational success and employee morale) when used appropriately by telecommunication firms' managers in Nigeria. Thus, it was then recommended that telecommunication firms should involve their employees in all aspect of organization decision making, meaning that the firms should adopt the employee co-creation strategies. Also, the firms should continuously provide skill based training for their employee.

Keywords: Autonomy, Commitment, Employee Empowerment, Recognition, Reward System, and Morale.

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic business environment, characterized by rapid technological advancements and intense global competition, telecommunication firms are under increasing pressure to remain competitive and achieve sustainable success. One strategy that has gained prominence in management literature is employee empowerment, which refers to the delegation of authority, provision of resources, and granting of autonomy to employees to make decisions affecting their work (Nwachukwu, 2016). Empowered employees are considered to be more engaged, motivated, and innovative, thereby contributing positively to organizational success (Majed, 2020; Gill et al., 2017).

Employee empowerment is often linked to enhanced organizational performance through various mechanisms, including improved decision-making, increased job satisfaction, and higher levels of commitment and trust (Nwachukwu, 2016; Wong, 2020). For instance, Maynard et al. (2012) argue that high-involvement work practices, which include empowerment initiatives, are key determinants of high-performance organizations. Wood et al. (2015) also emphasize that adopting empowerment practices can create a competitive advantage by leveraging human resources effectively. Despite these theoretical and empirical endorsements, several studies highlight the complexity of implementing empowerment strategies.

For instance, Seyed et al. (2016) argue that many organizations aspire to excellence but fail due to a lack of deep understanding of empowerment and its criteria. Empowerment is not simply about delegating authority; it also requires a supportive organizational culture that fosters trust, collaboration, and shared values (Gorji, 2010). Moreover, empowerment efforts must be aligned with organizational objectives and supported by effective leadership to ensure accountability and performance (Nwachukwu, 2016). In the telecommunication sector, the role of employee empowerment is important. The industry is characterized by rapid technological changes, high customer expectations, and intense competition. To remain relevant, there is a need for telecommunication firms build a workforce that is adaptable, innovative, and capable of making swift decisions in response to market demands.

Port Harcourt, being a major hub for Nigeria's oil and gas and telecommunications sectors, faces unique challenges such as infrastructural bottlenecks, security concerns, and a competitive labor market. These factors necessitate a workforce that is skilled and also empowered to take initiative and respond proactively to emerging challenges. However, empirical studies examining the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational success within the telecommunication sector in Port Harcourt are sparse. Furthermore, while previous studies such as Abbasi et al. (2012) and Doaei et al. (2014) have investigated the link between empowerment and organizational performance in healthcare and educational contexts, these findings cannot be directly extrapolated to the telecommunications sector without considering industry-specific dynamics. Similarly, studies (Rafiei et al., 2015; Ghorbanizadeh & Aghaverdi, 2013) focused on cognitive empowerment and its relationship with organizational excellence in Iranian contexts, which may differ significantly from the Nigerian setting.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing research gap by investigating the impact of employee empowerment on the organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Specifically, it seeks to examine how empowerment initiatives, such as authority, reward, and recognition influence key performance indicators (employee commitment and employee morale).

Statement of the Problem

Organizational success is a cornerstone for sustaining competitive advantage in dynamic industries such as telecommunications. It is the attainment of strategic objectives that enable firms to outperform rivals and secure long-term viability in the marketplace (Wood et al., 2015; Maynard et al., 2012). Within the telecommunications sector, where technological advancement and customer expectations continuously evolve, firms are adopting innovative human resource practices to remain competitively relevant (Nafei, 2016; Wong, 2020). Despite the recognized importance of organizational success, evidence suggests that many telecommunication firms in Rivers State Nigeria continue to underperform (Obafemi & Onuoha, 2023). Factors contributing to this underperformance include rigid hierarchical structures, slow decision-making processes, and limited employee autonomy, which impede agility and innovation (Siame & Gorji, 2011; Uddin et al., 2013). Research underscores that empowered employees demonstrate higher levels of motivation, job satisfaction, and performance, which collectively enhance organizational outcomes (Majed, 2020; Gill et al., 2017). Empowerment also fosters a culture of innovation and continuous improvement, critical for navigating the complexities of the telecommunications sector (Nafei, 2018; Wong, 2020). Empirical studies in various contexts affirm the positive impact of empowerment on organizational success. For example, Gorji (2010) found that human resource empowerment significantly influences employee performance in Iran's telecommunication industry. Similarly, Siame and Gorji (2011) identified a

positive relationship between employee empowerment and organizational effectiveness in the telecommunications sector. However, most of these studies are geographically concentrated outside Nigeria, thereby limiting their generalizability to Port Harcourt's unique socio-economic and cultural environment. Given the strategic relevance of employee empowerment in enhancing organizational success and competitiveness, especially in a sector as dynamic as telecommunications, it is imperative to investigate the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational success in the telecommunication sector in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to determine the effect of employee empowerment on organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Specifically, it was also aimed to:

1. analyze the nature of relationship between employee autonomy and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
2. determine the extent of relationship between employee reward system and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
3. establish the magnitude of relationship between employee recognition and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

- Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between employee autonomy and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between employee reward system and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho3:** There is no significant relationship between employee recognition and organizational success of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Literature Review

This study is anchored on the Administrative Management Theory (Fayol et al., 2006). This classical management theory provides a foundational perspective on organizational design. It emphasizes the importance of structured administrative processes to achieve operational efficiency. According to Fayol (2006), the scalar principle underlines the necessity of a hierarchical structure that defines lines of authority and facilitates clear communication and supervision within the organization. This principle ensures that each employee understands their role and responsibilities, thereby reducing ambiguity and enhancing accountability (Waldo, 2006). Additionally, the exception principle suggests that routine decisions should be delegated to subordinates, while exceptional matters are escalated to higher-level management. This delegation of authority is considered key to empowerment practices, enabling employees to make operational decisions within their scope of responsibility (Gulzar & Durrani, 2014).

Furthermore, the span of control principle posits that managers should oversee only as many subordinates as they can effectively supervise. This principle ensures that employees receive adequate guidance and support (Nwachukwu, 2016). Employee empowerment aligns seamlessly with Administrative Management Theory. Delegating authority and defining roles clearly empower employees to act autonomously within their scope of work, trust, and encourage proactive problem-solving (Majed, 2020). Empowered employees, guided by clear administrative lines and specialized roles, are more likely to innovate and contribute to organizational success (Gorji, 2010; Obafemi &

Onuoha, 2023). In the telecommunications sector, where rapid technological change demands adaptability and responsiveness, combining administrative clarity with empowerment practices can enhance organizational agility and competitiveness (Nafei, 2016). Empowered employees can leverage their specialized skills to respond effectively to dynamic customer needs and industry demands, ultimately driving organizational success (Gill et al., 2017).

Employee Empowerment: A Conceptual Overview

The concept of employee empowerment, although often perceived as a modern management innovation, has its roots in earlier organizational practices that emphasized human-centered approaches such as participative management, quality circles, and team-based structures (Seyed et al., 2016). Fundamentally, empowerment involves granting employees the autonomy, authority, and resources to make decisions that influence their work and organizational outcomes (Randolph, 2022). Goetsch and Davis (2014) argue that true empowerment extends beyond mere delegation of tasks; it encompasses providing employees with the necessary information, training, and authority to act responsibly and accountably. This perspective aligns with the notion that empowerment is a holistic process, that enables employees to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept that comprises access to information, opportunities for learning and development, support for effective performance, and the availability of resources (Clavelle et al., 2013). According to Haghighi et al. (2014), empowerment enhances psychological characteristics, promotes adaptability, and strengthens organizational conditions, all of which are vital for sustained performance. Moreover, Tamunomiebi and Chika-Anyanwu (2020) argue that empowerment facilitates autonomy, choice, and active participation in decision-making. Also, Majed (2020) and Wong and Laschinger (2013) emphasize that managers play a crucial role in creating the conditions for empowerment by sharing information, resources, and rewards, thereby enabling employees to fully realize their potential. Hence, empowerment can be considered a managerial strategy and a cultural transformation that supports organizational success through enhanced employee engagement and performance.

Organizational Success (OS)

Organizational success (OS) reflects an organization's ability to achieve its objectives effectively and efficiently. It is measured by how well a firm fulfills its purpose and accomplishes its strategic goals (Stoner et al., 2006). This success is evident across all operational activities, whether internal processes or external engagements (Oparanma, 2010). Richard et al. (2009) identify three primary dimensions of organizational success: financial performance (e.g., profit, return on investment), market success (e.g., sales, market share), and shareholder value (e.g., economic value added). These dimensions are both tangible and intangible outcomes that indicate a firm's competitive position and long-term viability. OS is the continuous setting, monitoring, and adjusting of organizational goals to ensure sustained performance (Randeree & Al Youha, 2009).

A comprehensive understanding of organizational success includes both financial and non-financial measures. Financial indicators like profitability and return on investment often receive priority, yet non-financial aspects such as customer satisfaction, employee morale, and product or service quality are equally vital (Janepuengporn & Ussahawanitchakit, 2011; Boyatzis & Ratti, 2009). Organizational success thus involves evaluating the effectiveness of business models, operational efficiency, and outcomes achieved relative to goals. In this study, the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational success is explored, emphasizing that empowerment strategies can influence both financial results and broader organizational

outcomes. This perspective aligns with the view that success is not only measured by financial metrics but also by how organizations enable their employees to contribute meaningfully to strategic objectives.

Organizational Commitment (OC)

Organizational commitment (OC) has emerged as a key concept in organizational behavior research; it focuses on employees' attachment and loyalty to their organization (Hanaysha, 2016b). OC is the extent to which employees identify with the organization's values and goals, influencing their willingness to contribute to its success (Allen & Meyer, 1990). As employment relationships evolve, characterized by increasing emphasis on employee engagement and adaptability (Breitsohl & Ruhle, 2013), organizational commitment becomes a critical factor in aligning individual and organizational interests (Devece et al., 2016). McCunn and Gifford (2014) argue that committed employees perceive themselves as integral members of the organization, enhancing their motivation and performance.

This commitment, often described as a psychological state, signifies employees' acceptance of organizational values and goals and their intention to remain with the firm (Yao et al., 2019). A highly committed workforce is more likely to exhibit behaviors that contribute to organizational growth and resilience, particularly in competitive industries like telecommunications. Organizational commitment, therefore, not only strengthens individual performance but also supports the organization's efforts to navigate challenges and pursue strategic objectives.

Employee Morale (EM)

Employee morale represents the level of enthusiasm and optimism that workers exhibit toward their job responsibilities and the organization as a whole (Haddock, 2010). It is shaped by factors such as leadership practices, communication, and the overall work environment (Finger, 2005). Seroka (2009) defines morale as employees' general sense of confidence and optimism, which directly affects productivity and discipline. High morale contributes to positive workplace behaviors like punctuality, creativity, and effective communication, which are essential for organizational success (Mazin, 2010).

Conversely, low morale is often linked to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and higher turnover rates (Ewton, 2007). Scholars suggest that morale is closely tied to job satisfaction, which refers to an employee's emotional state regarding their work (Suzuki et al., 2006; Reddy & Rajasekhar, 1990). Aziri (2011) emphasizes that job satisfaction is a key determinant of organizational success, reinforcing the need for organizations to cultivate positive work environments that support employee morale and satisfaction.

Employee Empowerment and Organizational Success

Employee Autonomy and Organizational Success

Employee autonomy is widely acknowledged as a key contextual factor that enhances innovation and creative problem-solving in the workplace (Hammond et al., 2011). Autonomy allows employees the freedom to design their work processes and make decisions that best suit their tasks, enabling them to find solutions to challenges in innovative ways (De Spiegelaere et al., 2015). Dierdorff and Morgeson (2013) suggest that by granting autonomy, employees can take initiative and demonstrate creativity because they are less restricted by rigid role expectations. Autonomy also contributes to increased motivation, well-being, and satisfaction, offering employees a sense of control and ownership over their work (Camerino & Mansano Sarquis, 2010; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

In addition, research indicates that job autonomy significantly influences psychological capital and performance (Avey et al., 2010; Wang & Zhang, 2016). Empowering employees through devolved responsibility and delegated authority encourages them to apply their skills and talents effectively, contributing to organizational goals. Managers play a crucial role by providing direction and monitoring progress while allowing employees to make decisions aligned with organizational objectives. This

perspective submits that employee autonomy is an important mechanism for enhancing commitment, morale, and ultimately, organizational success in the telecommunications sector.

Employee Reward Systems and Organizational Success

Reward systems represent another essential component in enhancing organizational success by recognizing employee efforts and motivating performance. Rewards can be intrinsic, such as praise and recognition that strengthen self-esteem, or extrinsic, including salary, bonuses, and promotions (Nawab et al., 2011; Badrinarayan & Tilekar, 2011). Effective reward systems align employee efforts with organizational goals by creating a sense of reciprocity employees are motivated to perform at their best in exchange for the rewards and recognition provided (Downes & Choi, 2014; Hafiza et al., 2011). Organizations today face the challenge of designing reward systems that both attract and retain top talent while promoting sustained performance. Empowerment practices complement reward systems by giving employees greater responsibility, leading to enhanced satisfaction and a stronger sense of competence (Danish & Usman, 2010). An effective reward system motivates employees and also reinforces their commitment to organizational objectives, which is essential for success in the competitive telecommunications sector.

Employee Recognition and Organizational Success

Employee recognition functions as a vital feedback mechanism that reinforces desired behaviors and highlights accomplishments (Mone et al., 2011). Recognition has been shown to boost satisfaction, motivation, and morale, all of which contribute positively to organizational performance. Managers should be strategic about when and how recognition is delivered to maximize its impact without diminishing intrinsic motivation (Mone et al., 2011). According to Brun and Dugas (2018), there are four categories of recognition: personal recognition, recognition of results, recognition of work practices, and recognition of job dedication. Interaction whether organizational, vertical, horizontal, external, or social plays a key role in making recognition meaningful and impactful. In today's dynamic business environment, effective recognition strategies are increasingly seen as part of strategic HR management. They enhance engagement, support employee development, and help build a work environment conducive to success.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which enabled the collection of data from a defined population at a single point in time. Given the study's aim to examine the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational success in the telecommunications sector, a cross-sectional survey provided a practical and efficient approach. The target population comprised top-level managers of MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9Mobile operating in Port Harcourt. The accessible population included top-, middle-level managers, and supervisors (such as brand managers, marketing managers, and customer service personnel) who had been employed in these telecommunication firms for at least one year. This accessible population was selected to ensure that respondents had sufficient experience and exposure to organizational practices to provide informed responses. A convenience sampling technique, a form of non-probability sampling, was employed to select participants for this study. This method allowed the researcher to access respondents who were readily available and willing to participate, given potential logistical and time constraints. A total of 20 questionnaires were distributed evenly across the selected firms, with each firm receiving five (5) questionnaires allocated to top, middle-level managers, and supervisors. This approach ensured representation across managerial levels and functional areas relevant to the study. The study utilized the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient to test the formulated hypotheses

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypotheses Testing

The findings reveal a strong, significant positive relationship between employee autonomy and organizational commitment ($\rho = 0.803$, $p = 0.000$). Additionally, employee autonomy

Table 1: Employee Autonomy and Organizational Success Measures

		Employee Autonomy	Organizational commitment	Employee Morale	
Spearman's rho	Employee Autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		N	20	20	
	Organizational commitment	Correlation Coefficient	**	1.000	**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		N	20	20	
	Employee Morale	Correlation Coefficient	**	**	**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	20	20	20
			.000	.000	.000
			.20	20	20

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS-Output)

demonstrated a strong, significant positive correlation with employee morale ($\rho = 0.898$, $p = 0.000$). These results suggest that higher levels of employee autonomy are associated with increased organizational commitment and enhanced employee morale. Consequently, the study rejected both null hypotheses regarding employee autonomy's relationship with organizational commitment and employee morale, as the p-values (0.000) were less than the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance.

Table 2: Employee Reward System and Organizational Success Measures

		Employee Reward System	Organizational commitment	Employee Morale	
Spearman's rho	Employee Reward System	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		N	20	20	
	Organizational commitment	Correlation Coefficient	**	1.000	**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		N	20	20	
	Employee Morale	Correlation Coefficient	**	**	**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	20	.89 ²⁰	1.000 ²⁰
			.821		

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS output)

The results indicate that the employee reward system exhibits a strong and statistically significant positive relationship with organizational commitment ($\rho = 0.844$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, the employee reward system was found to be strongly and positively correlated with employee morale ($\rho = 0.821$, $p = 0.000$). These findings suggest that effective reward systems enhance both organizational commitment and employee morale, contributing positively to organizational success. As a result, the study rejected the null hypotheses regarding the relationships between the employee reward system and both organizational commitment and employee morale, since the p-values (0.000) were below the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4.3: Employee Recognition and Organizational Success Measures

		Employee Recognition	Organizational commitment	Employee Morale	
Spearman's rho	Employee Recognition	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.851**	.898*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	20	20	20
	Organizational commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.851**	1.000	.892**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	20	20	20
	Employee Morale	Correlation Coefficient	.898	.892**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	20	20	20
Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS output)					

The results reveal that employee recognition has a strong, significant positive relationship with organizational commitment ($\rho = 0.851$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, employee recognition demonstrates a strong, positive correlation with employee morale ($\rho = 0.898$, $p = 0.000$). These findings indicate that effective employee recognition practices contribute meaningfully to both organizational commitment and employee morale, enhancing overall organizational success. Consequently, the study rejected the null hypotheses concerning the relationship between employee recognition and both organizational commitment and employee morale, as the p-values (0.000) were below the 0.05 significance threshold.

Discussion of Findings

Employee autonomy significantly and positively correlates with organizational success

The analysis identified employee autonomy as a significant factor influencing organizational success, enhancing key outcomes such as organizational commitment and employee morale. Accordingly, the null hypotheses were rejected, as the findings indicated a statistically significant relationship between employee autonomy and organizational success. The results demonstrated that employee empowerment, particularly autonomy, contributes to a telecommunication firm's ability to develop a competitive edge, enhance service delivery, and build a strong reputation. These findings align with previous studies by Camerino et al. (2010), Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), Avey et al. (2010), and Wang and Zhang (2016), which reported that employee autonomy positively influences psychological capital and performance in various organizational contexts.

Employee reward system significantly and positively correlates with organizational success

The analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between the employee reward system and the organizational success indicators of commitment and employee morale. The null hypotheses stating no significant relationship were therefore rejected. This suggests that an effective reward system meaningfully contributes to organizational success by enhancing key aspects such as employee commitment and morale. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Koffarnus et al., 2013; Rudge, 2011; Gohari et al., 2013; Whynter-Palmer, 2012; Siami & Gorji, 2011) that highlight the motivational power of rewards, encouraging employees to exert greater effort and commitment, which in turn helps sustain high levels of organizational performance, even though such reward systems may entail additional organizational costs.

Employee recognition significantly and positively correlates with organizational success

The analysis demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between employee recognition and the organizational success indicators of commitment and employee morale. Consequently, the null hypotheses of no significant relationship were rejected. This finding suggests that employee recognition serves as a key predictor of organizational success, strengthening essential dimensions such as organizational commitment and employee morale. These results align with prior research by Koffarnus et al. (2013), Rudge (2011), Gohari et al. (2013), Mone et al. (2011), and Brun and Dugas (2018), all of whom emphasized the crucial role of recognition in motivating employees and enhancing organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

The study examined how employee autonomy, reward systems, and recognition affect organizational success in telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. Utilizing the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient, the results revealed that each empowerment dimension has a significant and positive relationship with organizational success, as measured by organizational commitment and employee

morale. This indicates that employee empowerment is a key driver of organizational performance, fostering an environment where employees feel valued, engaged, and aligned with organizational goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Management should promote employee autonomy by involving staff in decision-making processes. This approach enhances employees' sense of ownership and accountability, contributing positively to organizational success.
2. Organizations should design comprehensive reward systems that include both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Recognizing employees' efforts through fair compensation, bonuses, and non-financial incentives can strengthen commitment and morale.
3. Management should prioritize timely and meaningful recognition of employees' achievements. Recognition, whether formal or informal, reinforces positive behaviors, enhances motivation, and improves overall organizational success.

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