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Career Planning and Development: The Realities in Nigerian Organizations

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Abstract: Employees are veritable sources of competitive advantage and planning and developing their careers is beneficial to both the organization and the employees. This study focuses on whether organizations in Nigeria give premium to career planning and development activities; the programmes engaged in and the perceived effectiveness of programmes generally. The investigation, which adopted a cross sectional survey and utilized structured questionnaire and interviews, centred on 10 firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically percentages and means, and simple regression. The results indicate that organizations recognize the need to invest in people and do embark on career planning and development programmes but employees do not perceive programmes as overly effective. Also, although firms recognize employees as important assets for organization success, they do not give as much attention to personal needs of employees as they do corporate needs. This is potentially counterproductive. Thus, we recommend the full incorporation of employees needs in career development activities so as to address the issues of employability of employees and long term competitiveness of organizations.

Key words: Career planning resources; Career development programmes; Investing in people; Personal needs of employees; Employability; Perceived effectiveness; Nigeria organization

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, individuals are expected to take responsibility for planning and developing their careers. Decisions concerning the desired skill, occupation or the organization to work have been regarded as essentially personal. Very often, before individuals join organizations, they would have already made occupational choices via the subjects and courses taken at educational institutions. In this scheme, a career is conceived as “the successive progress of an employee in his chosen field of work throughout life” (Oladunni, 1998:72); “a development process of an individual along a path of different work experiences and jobs in one or more organizations” (Foong-ming, 2008:2). To emphasize the active part the individual plays in creating his or her career, Inkson (2008) conceptualizes career as, among other metaphors, a journey, story, action and series of roles.

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In all, the 'logic of advancement' defines the traditional perception of career. The individual moves through a series of related jobs hierarchically arranged in progression of status and prestige. Career development practices of organizations shape this progression (Armstrong, 2001). They provide increased opportunities for promotion as individuals are thus enabled to acquire more knowledge and skills. In this perspective, therefore, organizations play a dominant role and significantly influence the career path of employees (Nadler and Nadler, 1989; Foong-ming 2008).

However, increasing competition, relentless change and the attendant need to boost productivity have forced employers to cut costs and rethink how work is done (Halal, 1998; Chen, 2004; Cummings and Worley, 2005). To contend with the turbulence, organizations are drawn towards becoming more flexible (Halal, 1998) making the traditional career to increasingly loose its attributes such as advancement and stable pathways (Beardwell and Holden, 1997, Grober et al. 2006). This trend may have informed more recent views that employees should take greater responsibility in managing their own careers if they are to achieve career success (Halal, 1998; Baruch, 2003; Torrington et al, 2008), but which may probably lead to less commitment to an organization.

However, Foong-ming (2008) suggests that organizations should still be actively involved in planning and developing employees' careers. He draws attention to an apparently popular view that when organizations so cater for the career plans of their employees the latter often perceive the former as caring and supportive and are likely to feel obliged to reciprocate the gesture with greater effort and loyalty. Thus, aside from 'internal career', the employer is expected to offer "enhanced employability ... enabling employees develop skills that are in demand" (Torrington et al, 2008:445). As Beardwell and Holden (1997:301) also remark, employability "means that individuals must engage in continuous learning and development so that they update their skills and acquire others that will be needed in the future".

This study seeks to investigate the dominant trend in Nigerian organizations. That is, of interest is to ascertain whether organizations in Nigeria actively get involved in and give a premium to planning and developing employees careers. Or, is it the case that the emergent view that a "career... should be shaped and managed more by the individual than by the organization" (Cascio, 2003:373) holding sway?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Career Planning and Development: Concepts and Measures

There appears to be a growing interest in the planning and development of employees careers (Rothwell, 1995; Oladunmi, 1998; Cumming and Worley, 2005). Organizations want to be reasonably certain that they have the proper complement of relevant staff at their disposal to boost their present and future capability in attaining their goals. They are matching individuals to jobs and helping employees to gain necessary skills, knowledge and information needed to perform and develop. Career planning and development as a process, "aligns the interests and skills of the employees with the needs of the organization" (Stone, 2005:372). The rationale seems to be achieving organizational growth and effectiveness through the integration of corporate business objectives and human resource needs with the personal needs of employees. Thus, Oladunni (1998:72) emphasizes that "organizations must create an avenue for sustained development and upward mobility of workers thus ensuring greater productivity on a continuous basis...and develop young managers for leadership...". As he further argues, the intensely competitive environment firms are operating means that, to achieve excellence, they must necessarily seek "ways and means of capturing the interest of employees and making them see their career in the organization as worthwhile". In effect, the fates of organizations and their employees seem intertwined.

Beardwell and Holden (1997:312-313) observe that many organizations seem acutely aware of the "need to provide an environment in which the capacity to learn and adapt can be harnessed to benefit the organization". Since individuals also do have interest in developing their capacities, and indeed some "employees think that the organization should bear the major responsibility in career development" (Grobler et al., 2006:252) organizations must provide, for their employees, environments that enable professional enhancement and self esteem. Foong-ming (2008) makes the point that generally, an employee's decision to stay or leave often may

depend on whether he/she perceives management as providing opportunities for self growth and development. Provision of career development opportunities is seen as indicative of management's interest to encourage employees' career growth. As Perkins and White (2009: 306) emphasize, "Access to learning opportunities... may be perceived among workforce members as a form of 'progression' and so potentially valued as an intrinsic benefits".

Further, employees are a veritable source of competitive advantage and investing in them leverages the firms knowledge base (Hill et al; 2003). Besides when employees are supported to learn and develop they would be sufficiently motivated to give their best thus ensuring the continuous growth and successful performance of the firm (Oladunni, 1998; Armstrong, 2001, Cummings and Worley, 2005, Heijden, 2008, Foong-ming, 2008). Career planning and development programmes enable organizations achieve this.

Career development is seen as "a long-term effort in which the organization helps employees utilize their full potential" (Gomez-Mejia et al, 2008:410). Also, Gutteridge (1986:52-58) defines career development as "the outcomes of actions on career plans as viewed from both individual or organizational perspectives". He stresses and that organizations "adopt career development programmes in response to pragmatic human resource concerns and because they believe it will help ensure a continued supply of qualified talented personnel". Hence, these programmes provide employees opportunities to acquire necessary skills and competencies required to perform their jobs successfully.

Career planning resources provided by organizations include communication, workshops, career counseling, etc. The organization communicates available career opportunities and resources as well as its expectations from employees, the organizational culture and value systems. Workshops are organized to enable employees formulate career development plans after proper assessment of their interests, abilities, and job situations. Career counselling and self-development material are meant to help employees "develop and strengthen their ability to envision viable possibilities to cope with their work life and career issues" (Chen, 2004:22). Also organizations expose employees to assessment programs for testing vocational interests, aptitudes and abilities relevant to setting career goals (Cummings and Worley, 2005). In effect, career planning activities enable employees to become aware of career opportunities in-house, assess their abilities preparatory to availing them of appropriate training and development.

Career planning activities feed into and support career development activities. Career development programs are designed to prepare employees for present and future responsibilities. In providing these programmes, organizations seem to recognize deficiencies among employees and the need for continuous learning to remedy these. Through the programmes, employees develop new skills and capabilities which not only enable them cope with changes in the environment but also motivate their commitment thus improving organization's overall performance (Beardwell and Holden 1997; Armstrong, 2001). Programs include among others, organizationally-relevant skill training, performance feedback and coaching, mentorship, job rotation and challenging work assignments.

Mullins (1995) stresses that providing employees training opportunities is vital for personal development and career success. Specifically, skill training, which may be on-or off-the-job, aims at providing new job skills and knowledge or indeed providing experienced, knowledgeable executives with the skills and knowledge for training and coaching others. Feedback on performance enables younger and less-experienced employees know whether they are performing up to expectation and are acquiring the skills necessary for advancement. Coaching by the boss helps the employees to get the job done properly. With mentorship/sponsorship, a close relationship is established between more experienced executives and less knowledgeable employees. The executive takes special interest in a junior employee's career, shares his/her knowledge and experience and provides general guidance. Usually, sponsors help protégés feel confident and capable (Daft, 1995) and "ensure that a person's hard work and skill translate into actual opportunities for promotion and advancement" (Cummings and Worley, 2005:407). Job rotation increases the number of different tasks an individual performs thus providing employees with new challenges and opportunities for learning and contributing. On the other hand, challenging work assignments make employees more visible and provide opportunities for them to take up new challenges and display their managerial talents to higher executives.

2.2 Human Resource Supply and Career Management Policies

There are variations in the human resource supply and career management policies of organizations (Armstrong 2001). Generally, there may be a 'Grow' or 'Buy' policy or some combination of both. A 'grow' policy would seek to access, attract and mobilize capable individuals who may be deficient in some ways for meeting the organization's success needs; provide these employees with

"training and experience to equip them to assume a level of responsibility compatible with their ability and with practical guidance, encouragement and support so they realize their potential, satisfy their career ambition and wish to remain with the organization" (Mullin, 1995:689).

In this scenario, employees are afforded opportunities for career growth and attainment of their career goals and, for the organization, simultaneous improvement in corporate performance. Undoubtedly, for the employer, there is the attendant risk of uncertain returns on investment but a 'grow' policy ensures a better fit between the work and the worker as well as improves the likelihood of meeting future manpower needs. Dire consequences seem to await organizations that do not place due emphasis on the strategic development of their human resources for they are likely to be outplayed in the competition. In effect, a 'grow' policy implies a recognition of the need to 'invest in' employees and should encourage the provision of a wide array of career resources and programmes.

On the other hand, a 'buy' policy is likely to deemphasize such provisions. Here, talents are bought as needed. It seems to tout the idea that to deliberately train managers for a future that is not certain but ever changing is a waste of time and resources. This scheme accepts a reasonable amount of wastage. Also, there is a willingness to buy-in talents from outside to take care of human resource shortfalls (Armstrong 2001:600) particularly in so far as people are repositories of knowledge (Inkson 2008). In today's world where organizations are increasingly unable to provide 'job for life' (Chen, 2004) and increasingly, employees seem to be free agents pursuing "liberated boundary less careers" (Inkson, 2008:276) and prepared to pitch their tents only with companies that offer them the best returns, it actually appears unreasonable for organizations to plan or invest in employees' careers long term.

But, a recognition that competent managers are often among the scarcest resources seems to make the adoption of a buy policy, wherein talents are bought as needed, inadequate. Besides, in view of the rot in Nigeria's education system at the moment (Okpala, 2009; Omosowon, 2009; Thomson, 2009) which means the right crop of people may not be readily available when needed, a 'buy' policy appears grossly unrealistic. This scenario should logically persuade Nigerian organizations to actively embark on career planning and development programmes so as to improve the skill and knowledge base of organization members, a precursor of organizational success. However, in the current socio-economic realities, characterized by "increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment" (Inyang and Esu, 2010:65), it is also quite possible that organizations may actually be shying away from investing in employees careers. They may be interested in achieving improved organizational performance without a corresponding interest in the desire of employees to achieve their individual career goals.

Therefore, it is of interest to determine the dominant career management policy, whether premium is accorded the development of employees careers, and if so the career resources and programmes provided in some Nigerian organizations. In this context, we make the following prepositions:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between a career management policy to that recognizes the need to invest in people and provision of career development programmes.

Ho2: Recognition of employees as important assets for organization's success is not associated with the provision of career development programmes.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between management's consideration of the personal needs of employees in career development activities and the perceived effectiveness of career development programmes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

Ten organizations representing a broad range of industry sectors including, financial services, construction, oil and gas, and manufacturing were surveyed. Data were gathered via a self-completion questionnaire given to 20 managers in each of the workplaces as well as interviews, where possible, with managers in HR/Personnel department in some of the workplaces. The questionnaire items covered existing career management policies, whether employee personal needs are taken into cognizance, and subjective assessment of the extent of provision of career resources and programs.

A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents that cut across different managerial levels. Of this 85 useable copies (42.5%) were retrieved.

Many of the items in the questionnaire were structured to yield Yes/No responses or to provide opportunity of choosing from options. Also, perceptions of respondents on the career resources and programmes were assessed using a likert 4-point scale that ranged from 'Great extent' (4) through 'moderate extent' (3), and 'little extent' (2) to 'Not at all' (1). The only control variables are the location and ownership status of the organizations studied. All are privately owned and located in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The likelihood of the organizations being interested in career development programmes was measured with the items: "career is a personal thing and should be left to individual employees decision", "The organization needs to invest in employees for good performance and advancement"; and "Does your organization recognize employees as important assets for organizational success?". To assess the existence of career resources and programmes and their perceived effectiveness, the following items were used: "Does your organization actually engage in planning and developing employees careers?", and "what is your general assessment of career resources/programmes offered by your organization?".

Armstrong (2001:608) had suggested that in career management, it is important to consider both organizational and individual needs since "organizational needs will not be satisfied if individual needs are neglected". The considerations of organizations for providing programmes, were also assessed using: "Is the achievement of corporate objects and human resource needs of the organization the reason for engaging in career management activities?"; and "The organization gives consideration to personal needs of employees in career management activities.

We identified a range of variables to, as much as possible, cover the wide array of resources and programmes deployed across organizations. Career resources, the provision of which is used as proxy for existence of career planning initiative include communication about available career opportunities, workshops, career counseling, self development materials and assessment programmes to test vocational interests, aptitudes and abilities. For career programmes, we included skill training on – and off – the job, job assignments, performance feedback, mentoring, job rotation, consultative roles and phased retirement. These variables were considered relevant to all respondents irrespective of job types and levels and all items were drawn from existing literature (for example Cummings and Worley, 1997; Beardwell and Holden, 1997; Rothwell 1995).

3.2 Data Analysis

The data were analysed by determining percentages and mean scores for measured variables as well as simple regression analyses to test the hypotheses.

4. THE RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Results

The percentages of responses on the independent variables of the study are presented in table 1. As shown, the dominant HR supply policy reported by respondents is the 'grow and buy' policy (62%). Singular pursuit of a 'grow' or 'buy' policy recorded 32% and 6% respectively. Further, 74% of respondents affirmed

that their company policy support investment in the development of employees; 26% take the view that their company considers employees career as personal to them. An overwhelming number of respondents (81%) acknowledged that their organization recognize employees as important assets; only 4% held a contrary view but a considerable number, (15%), were silent on this. Furthermore, a good majority (79%) affirmed that their firms engage in career planning and development activities, but 20% hold contrary view. Also, 67% of respondents viewed achievement of corporate objectives and HR needs as the reason for firms involvement in career development activities. Although so many affirmed the involvement of the firms in career activities, fewer (51%) agreed with the statement that their organizations give consideration to personal needs of employees in the career activities. Besides, respondents were almost equally divided on whether or not career programmes are effective. Whilst 17% and 33% respectively perceived programmes as very effective or effective, as much as 27% and 20% respectively perceived programmes as moderately effective or not effective.

Table 1: Items and Percentage Responses

S/N	Items	No of responses	percentage age
1	HR supply policy in the organization		
	A. Grow managers	27	32.00
	B. Buy	05	5.90
2	C. Grow within and buy from outside for short falls	53	62.40
	Organization's Policy on Career Management		
	A. Career is a personal thing for individual employees	22	25.9
3	B. The Organization needs to invest in employees	63	74.0
	Does your organization recognize employees as important asset for organization success?		
	A. Yes	69	81.2
4	B. No	03	3.5
	Does your organization actually engage in planning and developing employees careers?		*15.0
	A. Yes	67	78.8
5	B. No	17	20.0
	Is the achievement of corporate objectives and HR needs the reason for engaging in career development activities?		* 17.0
	A. Yes	57	67.06
6	B. No	04	4.71
	The organization gives consideration to personal needs of employees in career management activities		*18.23
	A. Yes	43	50.6
7	B. No	32	37.6
	What is your general assessment of career development activities in your organization?		*11.80
	A. Very effective	14	16.5
	B. Effective	28	32.9
7	C. Moderately effective	23	27.1
	D. Not effective	17	20.0
			*3.50

Source: Field Work, 2009

* Non responses

Table 2 presents the weighted and mean scores of the career resources and programmes provided by the organizations. For career resources provision, counselling, self development materials and assessment programme are below average, recording 2.20, 2.43 and 2.12 respectively. However, when aggregated the

indices for career resources are only slightly below average (2.44). On the other hand, the overall mean of the indices for career programmes is above average (2.62). But, closer examination shows that organizations generally give below average attention to provision of skill training Off-the-Job (2.15), consultative roles (2.43) and, phasing of employees retirement (2.03). However, above average attention is given to On-the-Job training (3.22), job assignments (2.90), mentoring (2.84), job rotation (2.74) and performance feedback (2.65).

Table 2: Weighted and Mean Scores of Career Resources and Programmes

Career resources provided	Total attained score	Mean score
Communication about available opportunities	220	2.75
Workshops	229	2.69
Counselling	178	2.20
Self development materials	192	2.43
Assessment programmes to test vocational interest, aptitudes and abilities	172	2.12
Overall Mean		2.44
Career development programmes available		
Skill training on-the- job	251	3.22
Skill training off-the-job	172	2.15
Job assignments	229	2.90
Performance feedback	212	2.65
Mentoring	230	2.84
Job Rotation	225	2.74
Consultative roles	192	2.43
Phased retirement	158	2.03
Overall mean		2.62

Source: field work, 2009

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

Table 3 charts the aggregated scores of the responses on variables used in testing the hypotheses. The relationships were tested using simple regression, the regression equation estimated using the least squares technique computed with the Eviews software. The first hypothesis H_{01} proposed that no significant relationship exists between career management policy that recognizes the need to invest in people and the provision of career development programmes by management. The results in table 4 do not support the hypotheses. That is, the results show that there is a significant relationship between recognition of the need to invest in people and the provision of career development programmes. This is because the adjusted coefficient of determination is significant and positive (0.401). The F-statistic of 7.03 is quite significant at 10% level given a probability of 0.029. Also the policy to invest in people recorded a beta coefficient of 0.543 and a standard error of 0.206. This translates to a t-statistic of 2.65, significant at 10% level judging from a probability of 0.029.

Table 3: Aggregated Weighted Scores of Responses on the Dependent Variables (Y) and, Responses on the Independent Variables (X).

Items	Organizations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Aggregate weighted scores of responses on the provision of career development programmes (Y1)	175	103	187	186	207	224	116	156	145	161
Aggregate weighted scores of responses on perceived effectiveness of career development activities (Y2)	31	12	28	26	22	25	14	12	19	13
Responses affirming policy to invest in people (X1)	9	4	7	6	8	10	6	4	5	4
Responses affirming recognition of employees as important assets (X2)	8	6	8	8	9	10	6	7	7	0
Responses affirming managements consideration of employees personal needs (X3)	6	4	4	5	7	5	3	4	5	0

The second hypothesis (H_{02}), proposed that recognition of employees as important assets for organization's success is not associated with the provision of career programmes. As presented in table 5, the adjusted co-efficient of determination has a negative value of -0.088 with the associated F-statistic of 0.028. The table also shows that recognition of employees as important assets for organization's success has a beta coefficient of 0.057, standard error 0.109; a t-statistic of 0.52 with a probability of 0.61. These results suggest the acceptance of the hypothesis.

H_{03} examined the relationship between management's consideration of the personal needs of employees in career management activities and the perceived effectiveness of career development programmes. The results, presented in table 6, show the perceived effectiveness of career programme has the adjusted coefficient of determination of 0.026 and the computed F-statistic of 4.17, significant at 10% level. Consideration of employee personal needs has a beta coefficient of 2.224, standard error 1.089; t-statistic of 2.04 with a probability of 0.76. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between management's consideration of employees' personal needs in career development activities and the perceived effectiveness of career development programmes.

Table 4: Regression Results between Managements Policy That Recognizes the Need to Invest in People and the Provision of Career Development Programmes: Dependent Variable is Career Development Programmes

R-squared	0.467848			
Adjusted R-squared	0.401329			
F-statistic	7.033307			
Variable	Coefficient	Std Error	t-statistic	Probability
C	2.556054	1.507650	1.695389	0.1284
Recognition of the need to invest in people	0.542601	0.204598	2.652036	0.0292

Source: Computer Print out

Table 5: Regression Results between Recognition of Employees as Important Asset for Organizational Success and the Provision of Career Development Programmes: Dependent Variable is Career Development Programmes

R-squared	0.033274			
Adjusted R-squared	-0.087567			
F-statistic	0.275350			
Variable	Coefficient	Std Error	t-statistic	Probability
C	4.899183	2.763196	1.773013	0.1142
Recognition of employees as important asset for organization success	0.057176	0.108961	0.524738	0.6140

Source: Computer Print out

Table 6: Regression Results between Consideration of Personal Needs of Employees in Career Management Activities and the Perceived Effectiveness of Career Development Activities: Dependent Variable is the Perceived Effectiveness of Career Development Activities

R-squared	0.342569			
Adjusted R-squared	0.260390			
F-statistic	4.168576			
Variable	Coefficient	Std Error	t-statistic	Probability
C	10.63551	5.074920	2.095701	0.694
Consideration of personal needs of employees	2.224299	1.089430	2.041709	0.755

Source: Computer Print out

5. DISCUSSION

Career planning and development in organizations is about achieving organizational growth and effectiveness through ensuring the continued availability of employees with relevant skills and competences. To remain competitive, organizations cannot afford to make do with average or mediocre performance and so need to plan and develop employees careers. Employees are helped to gain the necessary skills and knowledge required to achieve set goals.

This study set out to ascertain the dominant career management policy; whether employers give a premium to planning and developing employees careers; and to investigate approaches to career planning and development across a sample of organizations in Rivers State, Nigeria. The results of the study indicate that many of the organizations studied pursue a 'grow and buy' HR policy (62%). Only 6% adopt a solely 'buy policy'. Also, organizations recognize the need to invest in employees and that employees are important assets for organization success. As demonstrated in the analysis, recognition of the need to invest in people is significantly related to the provision of career development programmes. That is, in spite of a common belief about paucity of financial resources resulting from the global financial meltdown, Nigerian organizations are not shying away from providing for the career development of employees. A rather surprising result is the lack of association between recognition of employees as important assets and the provision of programmes. A significant and positive relationship was expected here given the need for continuous improvements in organizations human assets. However, one compelling argument to explain this result may be that organizations recognize employees as important assets but, for cost considerations, may not have given attention to all career activities that would benefit employees. For instance, as shown earlier, the mean scores for counseling, selfing development materials and assessment programmes are all below average.

While results of the study suggest managements recognition of the need to invest in people and to provide career development programmes, it appears personal needs of employees are not as important as corporate needs. Contrary to the view that career development should be "the outcome of interaction between individual career planning and institutional career management processes" (Fong-ming, 2008:4), employers seem more concerned with providing career programmes that meet their current and future needs. As evident, more attention is given to activities that are organization-specific such as On-the-Job training, job assignment, mentoring and job rotation while relatively little attention is given to skill training Off-the-Job. That the latter holds little attraction to employers is not unexpected since, often, skills acquired there from may not be entirely organization-relevant. But it also means that equipping employees for employability, that is, with "the skills and experiences needed to obtain another appropriate job when he or she is no longer needed by their present employers" (Torrington et al, 2008:445) seems not be in the scheme.

Availability of programmes may address skill deficiencies of both the organization and the employee but may not go far enough in so far as personal needs of employees are not given enough consideration. There is little doubt that this may negatively influence the levels of job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty of employees. However, interview responses indicate that individual employees do make effort to manage their careers, privately enrolling for further education, part-time, in tertiary and professional institutions without involving their employers. As one manager in an oil company remarked "your career is in your hands". In any event, some organizations when informed, do encourage such efforts by subsidizing the fees for such programmes.

Further, evident from the results is the little attention given to longer-serving employees nearing their exit years. Provision of consultative roles is below average (2.43) and phased retirement much less so (2.03). This may be counter-productive since it might send negative signals to younger employees. It seems quite probable that younger employees would be wary of an organization that appears not to take care of older employees and hence show reduced commitment to it (Cumming and Worley, 2005).

Lastly, we hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between taking the employees personal needs into cognizance and the perceived effectiveness of career development programmes. But, as noted earlier, as significant relationship exists. Obviously, programmes that take employees personal needs into consideration are likely to lead to satisfaction of these needs and hence likely to be perceived as effective.

6. LIMITATION OF STUDY

A number of limitations which hinge principally on methodology, and may well provide opportunity for future research, are acknowledged. First, the number of organizations studied was relatively small. Besides there was no control for industry effects on the provision of career programmes. These limit the strength of the conclusions we can draw from the analysis. To improve on the generalizability of the results, further research that adopts a comparative design and includes many more organizations may be useful.

Second, provision of career resources and development programmes may actually have little relevance in matured organizations existing in stable environments and saturated with experienced employees. Future research should explore whether the significant relationship identified between recognition of the need to invest in employees and the provision of programmes is mediated by industry type, size and age of organizations. For instance, construction firms are often largely dependent on government patronage which often fluctuates. Hence, these firms may not seriously invest in developing employees careers.

Lastly, the study was a cross-sectional survey which would not yield to a test for causality. The study is unable to show whether the policy to invest in people causes provision of career programmes or whether consideration of employee personal needs actually leads to perceived effectiveness. Future research should investigate these.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, results of this study persuade the conclusion that organizations in Nigeria engage in providing career resource and development programmes but which are not clearly perceived as effective by employees. Very importantly, Nigerian employers still seem to leave much of the development of careers in the hands of individual employees as employees personal needs are not given as much attention as corporate needs. Employers need to rethink this trend since the needs and wants of employees “certainly should be fulfilled to help the organization in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage” (Fong-ming, 2008:14). A challenge for employers is to fully incorporate employee needs in career development activities giving more attention to programs that are overly organization-specific. This may be difficult and expensive because it would certainly mean provisions beyond organization – specific needs and catering for employability of employees. But the perceived organization support deriving therefrom may lead employees to feel obliged to repay their organizations with extra effort and loyalty, resulting in long term competitiveness of such organizations.

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