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Work Environment and Employees' Commitment in Agro-Based Industries in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract This study examines the effect of work environment on employees' commitment in agro-based industries in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study drew participants from two major agro industries in the state. One thousand, one hundred and ninety four (1194) respondents were purposively selected for the study. Information was elucidated from participants using four point Likert scale questionnaire. Data obtained was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation (r). Findings revealed that work environment such as consistent communication flow, manageable workload, availability of electricity, and work place that is free from known dangers are positively associated with employees' commitment, and hence performance. The study recommended among others that management of agro-based industries in Cross River State should establish and promote good work environments in their organizations so as to boost employees' commitment, wellbeing and overall performance and productivity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are very complex in their psychological make-up and hence, managers cannot influence employees' inner state directly, they can however create work environment that encourages quality performance. According to Onwuka (2002), many managers and supervisors labour under the mistaken impression that the level of employees' performance on the job is proportional to the size of the employees pay pocket. Although this may be true in a minority of cases. In fact, salary increases and bonuses for performance in many instances, have a very limited short term effect. The extra money soon come to be regarded not as an incentive but as an entitlement.

There are other factors such as conducive working environment free from danger, communication flow, manageable work load when combined with other factors provide a more powerful determinant of employees commitment. However, when these factors are missing, the employee come to work only for a check and is present at work in body only leaving their mind outside the gate. It is the quality of the employees work environment that must impact on their level of commitment and consequently on performance.

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According to Beiz (2001) work environment involves the physical, geographical locations as well as the immediate surroundings of the work place. Typically, it involves other factors relating to the place of employment such as security, additional perks and benefits of employment.

Employees commitment is of a critical importance for the success of an organization since it influence the key employee related variables such as absenteeism, low productivity, low morale, labour turn over and other negative tendencies. To Onuka (2012) the level of cooperation desired to achieve the institutional goal demand a deliberate and fortified work environment for both the management and workers. This assertion is fundamental because both the management and employees are the stakeholders.

DeCremer (2012) expressed that the quality of work environment has an impact on the employees self-esteem and job satisfaction and hence performance; for workers are the most variable and the least easy to understand and control of all management resources. Employers are sometimes baffled when their high rated employees under-perform and others reign and leave. Management fail to understand why some employees are not committed to the organization even though they have proactively implemented fair compensation policies and human resource practice to motivate and retain them. It can be costly if employees are not committed to their jobs, and if they lack the motivation in their work environment to exercise their full potentials.

The environment where people work, especially in Nigeria is unsafe and unhealthy. Often times we have poorly designed workstations, unsuitable furniture, lack of ventilation, inappropriate lighting, excessive noise, insufficient safety measures in fire emergencies and lack of protective equipment. According to Chandrasekar (2011), people working in such environment are prone to occupational disease and it impact on their performance. This implies that commitment is affected due to work environment. This paper presents therefore analysis of the working environment in two selected agro-based industries to understand the level of commitment due to the work environment.

a) Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the overall effect of work environment on employees'

commitment in agro-based industries in cross River State. Arising from this broad objective, the following research hypotheses are considered.

- i. There is no significant relationship between consistent communication and employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries.
- ii. Manageable workload does not significantly affect employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between availability of electricity and employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries.
- iv. Safe environment has no significant relationship with employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries.

b) *Study area*

This study was carried out in Cross River State. Cross River State is a coastal state in the South-Eastern Nigeria. It's capital is Calabar. The state is located in the Niger Delta and occupies 20,156sqkm. It's bounded with Benue State in the North, Ebonyi and Abia States to the West, to the East by Cameroon Republic and to the south by Akwa Ibom and the Atlantic Ocean.

The state is made up of three ethnic groups; Efik, the Ejagham and the Bekwarra. Cross River State epitomizes the nations linguistic and cultural plurality and it is important to note that, inspite of the diversity of dialects, all the indigenous languages in the state have common linguistic root as Niger Congo languages. Besides, the state boasts of being the venue for the largest Carnival in Africa. The state is divided into eighteen local government areas (Wikipedia, 2014) with a population of 2,892,988 (NPC, 2006).

i. *Pamol Nigeria Ltd*

Pamol (Nig) Ltd is a private limited liability company and has rubber plantations in Cross River, Delta and Edo States. The company's headquarters is situated in Calabar. In 1936 Pamol (Nig) Ltd, a direct subsidiary of Unilever Plc was formed to take over the Natural Rubber and oil plantations owned by the Niger Company Ltd and the Eastern Trade Cooperation Ltd in Nigeria and the then Southern Cameroon. The company has a staff strength of 1,960 employees (Pamol Annual Report, 2011). The company has oil palm (about 6,000hrs.) and natural rubber (about 3,000hrs).

ii. *Real Plantations Ltd*

Real Plantation Ltd is a subsidiary of Real Oil Mills Ltd with headquarters at Lagos. It is the major producer of vegetable oil and fuels in Nigeria. It is an agro-based industry engaged in the production of crude palm oil and palm kernel from its estate in Cross River State. The company has staff strength of 1358 employees (Real plantations Annual Report, 2013).

The choice of Pamol Nigeria Limited and Real Plantations Limited is due to proximity, accessibility and willingness of the subjects to participate in the study and they are amongst the major agro-based industries in the state.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) *Work environment*

Work environment involves the physical geographical location as well as the immediate surroundings of the work place. Typically, it involves other factors relating to the place of employment, such as the quality of communication flows, secure environment, manageable work load and other additional perks and benefit of employment. Onuka (2012) observed that aside from the job scope itself, one factor that significantly influences employees commitment is the work environment. Accordingly, Ali and Zia (2010) noted that a positive work environment makes employees' feel good about coming to work and this provides the motivation to sustain and increase productivity. Akintayo (2010) Posits that keeping employee happy and productive requires frequent and open communication.

Anugwom (2004) stated that un-conducive work environment creates a feeling of un-fulfilment, inhuman treatment and neglect for the workers and with this feeling, they can really put in their best. Onogori (2007) asserts that when the worker fail to find his work fulfilling and satisfying, it lead to boredom, reduced efficiency, fatigue, frustration and dependency.

Onuoka (2006:15) asserts that "if a worker is not carried along in terms of good working environment and given all the necessary assurances and incentives to convince him that the days of militarizing the work is over, he will continue to live in fear and unsatisfied. The fear according to him will cause lack of commitment and job satisfaction. It is in support of this statement that Maicibe (2002:83) maintains that "if employees are not deprived of what they are supposed to get from their work environment, it prevents them from feeling dissatisfied, possible protest or complains. Ribelin (2003) lamented that poor work environment leads to decreased employee performance, absenteeism, turnover, early retirement and job dissatisfaction.

Okoh (2003) expressed that where basic facilities are available and the work environment is conducive, the workers morale and productivity may be positively affected. Unfortunately, Okoh lamented that many public and private establishments in Nigeria lack basic facilities to work. Therefore, a worker without enthusiasm for work, finding himself in an un-conducive environment feel frustrated and demoralized such a worker can leave the office at any time and may possibly turn his attention to other things (Ushie, et al, 2010). Environmental factors such as temperature, lighting and ventilation can have direct impact on health. For example, Chandrasekar (2011) maintained that very high temperature can lead to heat stress and heat exhaustion. Also, Physical factors in the work place such as poor layout or overcrowding can lead to common types of accident such as tripping or striking objects

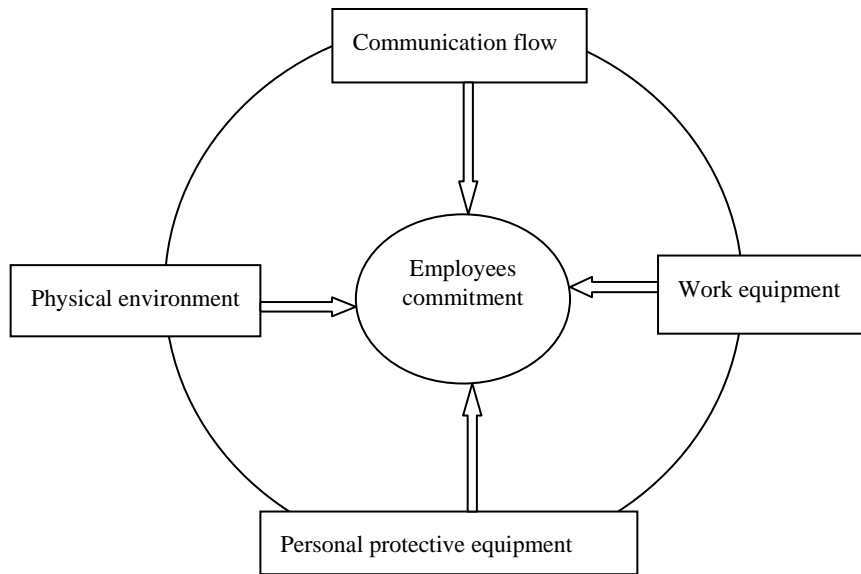


Figure 1 : Environmental factors affecting employees' commitment

Source: Authors' conceptualization

b) *Work environment and employees' commitment*

Commitment to the organization, profession and role has received wide attention in recent organizational behaviour literature (Buchanan, 1974). Becker (1960) argues that commitment involves consistent lines of activity in behaviours that are produced by exchange considerations. Commitment is a more active and positive orientation towards the organization. It is an attitude or an orientation toward organizational goal or objectives.

Most organizations have realized that the performance of their workers plays a vital role in determining the success of the organization. As such it is important for employers and managers alike to know how to get the best of their workers. According to Awonusi (2004) one of the antecedent determinants of workers performance is believed to be employees' commitment. Employees' commitment has become one of the most popular work attitudes studied by practitioners and researchers. Akintayo (2010) noted that one of the reasons why commitment has attracted research attention is that organizations depend on committed employees to create and maintain competitive advantage and achieve superior performance.

Committed employees who are highly motivated in terms of conducive work environment contribute their time and energy to the pursuit of organizational goals and are increasingly acknowledged to be the primary asset available to an organization (Hienja, 2010). They provide the intellectual capital that for many organization, has become their most critical asset. Furthermore, employees who share a commitment to the organization and their collective

wellbeing are more suitable to generate the social capitals that facilitate organization learning.

Ribelin (2003) noted that it is therefore, important for companies to know the aspects that play important role or have big impact in boosting the commitment of their employees. The findings of Chuah (2012) suggest that employees' commitment with an organization could be significantly increased by enhancing organizational fairness, particularly conducive work environment in terms of job security, communication flow, manageable workload which would consequently reduce employees' intention to leave. Ale (2011) found that there is positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and employees' commitment and organizational performance. He concluded that organization can improve their performance through employees' commitment by engaging in social activities since such activities also include the welfare of employees and their families.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is mainly based on the Human Relation School and Expectancy Theory.

a) *Human Relations Theory*

This theory was developed by Elton Mayo and others. The theory believe in the importance of recognizing human beings and their needs as paramount in achieving organizational commitment and high productivity. Human relations theory emphasize the fact that participation aid management in integrating workers with the organization. Both managers and employees can realize goal and attain stronger

commitment and satisfaction. The theory asserts that, there are many rewards which managers expect from participative management. These include conducive work environment, greater commitment, motivation, manageable workload, greater freedom to manage resources to reach objectives and greater job satisfaction (McGregor, 1960).

According to Agba, Ushie & Nkponyen (2010) the school contends that participative decision making is a veritable management tool. The demands by employees to participate appear to be deeply rooted in the culture of freedom around the world and are probably a basic drive in human beings. They want some control over things that affect them. Thus employees' work environment affects commitment in organizational activities. Onuka (2012) asserts that human relations school also believe that effective communication facilitates employees commitment and participation in decisions that affect them in the work place. This is because people are the main factor of productions and unless they have conducive work environment and employees' committed to their work, the organization will die overtime.

While the Human Relations School revolutionized management theory, they are also quite problematic. Wilson and Rosenfeild (2001) observed that for example, most of the major studies in this series consisted of very small samples of workers (6 in the relay study, 13 in the bank wiring study), so the results are definitely suspect from a scientific vantage point. Furthermore, some people would agree that Hawthorne effects were really the result of workers who were more afraid of unemployment, rather than communication relationship.

b) *Expectancy theory*

Expectancy theory is a contingency model, which states that there is no universal method of motivating people towards achieving organization objectives. This theory was propounded by Vroom (1964) in his study of "staff motivation and job satisfaction". The major tenet of the theory is that whether a person works hard will depend essentially upon what he expects to get out of the effort put into work. Ushie, et al, (2010) observed that the basic tenet of the theory is that human behaviour in a given situation is a joint function of the degree to which that behaviour is instrumental in attaining an outcome and the subjective probability that the outcome will be forthcoming. Outcome may be positive such as good work environment, pay, security, manageable workload, trust etc or negative such as harsh work environment, non-payment of salary, and threat of dismissal among others.

The key to expectancy theory therefore, is th understanding of an individual's goal and the linkage between effort and performance; between rewards and individual goal satisfaction.

Motivation of staff to work is closely affected by the amount of rewards that people derive from jobs, while their level of performance is closely affected by the basis for attainment of rewards. Individuals are satisfied with their jobs and are ready to put in their best for the attainment of organizational objectives to the extent that effective performance leads to the attainment of what they desire.

In summary, expectancy theory indicates only the conceptual determinants of motivation and how they are related. It is however of value in understanding organizational behaviour and especially as will be applied in this study. For instance, employees in formal organizations have their expectations. Therefore, in order to get their necessary cooperation for the efficient administration of the organization, which will lead to the attainment of organizational objectives, the manager should strive to create conducive work environment to discover the workers' expectations such as conducive work environment that would enhance commitment and satisfy them accordingly.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The survey inferential method was employed. This method was preferred because it describes a phenomena as it exist at the time of investigation and make inferences about the population under study using the sample drawn from the population. Thirty six percent of the population formed the sample for the study selected based on the size of each industry; for Pamol (Nig) Ltd 706 respondents were selected and for Real Plantation Ltd 488 respondents were selected randomly summing up to 1194 subjects.

The instrument used for data collection was the four point Likert scale questionnaire. The instrument had two sections (A and B) made up of ten questions which deals with the substantive issue of the study. The psychometric properties of the instrument was established through Cronbach alpha procedure and yielded coefficient of 0.89, which implies that, the instrument is valid and can elicit reliable data. The instrument was administered to the sampled respondents and analysed using Pearson Product moment correlation with SPSS version 20, the result is presented in Tables 1 through 4.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) *Hypothesis one*

There is no significant relationship between consistent communication and employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries. Two variables were identified here consistent communication is the independent variable and employees' commitment as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 : Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Consistent Communication And Employees' Commitment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Consistent communication	1194	15.89	2.08	0.706	.002
Employees' commitment	1194	16.73	2.34		

*significant at $P < .05$; critical r -value = 0.138; $df = 1192$.

Source: Data from fieldwork, 2015

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between consistent communication and employees' commitment. As presented in Table 1, the calculated r -value of 0.706 is greater than the critical r -value of 0.138 with 1192 degree of freedom, this result therefore implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that, there is statistical significant relationship between the two variables. The result of the finding collaborate Akintayo (2010) who posits that keeping employee happy and productive requires frequent and open communication and therefore makes employees show commitment to their work. Also Onuka (2012) assertion confirm the present study lending credence that human relations school also believe that effective communication facilitates employees commitment and participation in decisions that affect them in the work

place. The finding also confirms the result of Chuah (2012) that employees' commitment with an organization could be significantly increased by enhancing organizational fairness, particularly conducive work environment in terms of job security, communication flow, manageable workload which would consequently reduce employees' intention to leave.

b) Hypothesis two

Manageable workload does not significantly affect employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries, Two variables were identified here, manageable workload is the independent variable and employees' commitment as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Manageable Workload and Employees' Commitment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Manageable workload	1194	15.92	2.15	0.811	.000
Employees' commitment	1194	16.73	2.34		

*significant at $P < .05$; critical r -value = 0.138; $df = 1192$.

Source: Data from fieldwork, 2015

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was employed to investigate the relationship between manageable workload and employees' commitment. As presented in Table 2 the calculated r -value of 0.811 is greater than the critical r -value of 0.138 with 1192 degree of freedom, this result therefore implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that, when employees' are assigned manageable workload there is reasonable commitment. The findings of this result confirmed Okoh (2003) who asserted that where basic facilities are available and the work environment is conducive, the workers morale and productivity may be positively affected. Unfortunately, Ushie, et al, (2010) lamented that many public and private establishment in Nigeria lack basic facilities in the work place. Such a

worker without enthusiasm for work, finding himself in an environment that is not too conducive feel frustrated and demoralized. Such a worker can leave the office at any time and may possibly turn his attention to other things. Also, Chandrasekar (2011) maintained that very high temperature can lead to heat stress and heat exhaustion.

c) Hypothesis three

There is no significant relationship between availability of electricity and employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries. Two variables were identified here; availability of electricity is the independent variable and employees' commitment as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 : Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Availability of Electricity and Employees' Commitment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Availability of electricity	1194	16.28	2.20	0.374*	.000
Employees' commitment	1194	16.73	2.34		

*significant at $P < .05$; critical r -value = 0.138; $df = 1192$.

Source: Data from fieldwork, 2015

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between availability of electricity and employees' commitment. As presented in Table 3, the calculated r-value of 0.743 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138 with 1192 degree of freedom, this result therefore implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that, when electricity is made available employees' show commitment to their job. However this result corroborated the findings of Anugwom (2004) who stated that un-conducive work environment creates a feeling of un-fulfilment, inhuman treatment and neglect for the workers and with this feeling, they cannot really

put in their best. Also, Onogori (2007) asserts that when the worker fail to find his work fulfilling and satisfying, it lead to boredom, reduced efficiency, fatigue, frustration and dependency.

d) Hypothesis four

Safe environment has no significant relationship with employees' commitment in Agro-based Industries. Two variables were identified here; Safe environment is the independent variable and employees' commitment as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 : Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Safe Environment and Employees' Commitment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Safe environment	1194	16.89	2.01	0.591**	.000
Employees' commitment	1194	16.73	2.34		

*significant at $P < .05$; critical r-value = 0.138; df = 1192
Source: Data from fieldwork, 2015

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between safe environment and employees' commitment. As presented in Table 4, the calculated r-value of 0.591 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138 with 1192 degree of freedom, this result therefore implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that an employee who perceive his/her work place as being free from known danger is likely to show commitment towards his job. This result is well corroborated with the assertion of Ali and Zia (2010) who noted that a positive work environment makes employees' feel good about coming to work and this provides the motivation to sustain and increase productivity.

VI. CONCLUSION

The pattern of relationship between the variables investigated shows that the contributions of each factor (consistent communication, Safe environment, availability of electricity and manageable workload) correlate significantly with employees' commitment. This seems to be the scenario in the Nigeria work environment were either employees are denied these privileges or administrators/employers of labour don't give considerable attention to them. This suggests the importance of employers of labour to give premium attention to these areas since it affect employees' commitment. This is because the work environment is very vital and can greatly affect employees' morale and therefore commitment. Management should therefore make the workplace look attractive in terms of good office space, ventilation and furnishing. In addition, and in line with the human relation prescription, management should assign a manageable workload to its workers and also encourage open communication system. It would

therefore be expected that employees would show enough commitment to their work without any formal monitoring and supervision mechanism if they perceive their work environment as being supportive of their overall aim and objectives.

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