



## ORGANISATIONAL SILENCE, PRESENTEEISM AND STAFF PRODUCTIVITY IN PUBLIC TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Productivity in any tertiary institution depends highly on the right application of human resources in the organization part of the factors affecting productivity in an organization is organizational silence and presenteeism which has not been considered today. Since silence can have unfavourable consequences, identifying the factors and their relationship with other phenomena is important. Presenteeism take place when an individual choose to go to work even when he/she is ill and when resting at home is highly recommended. At the organizational level, this phenomenon reduces productivity whilst at the individual level, presenteeism may aggravate one's illness, resulting in poor job performance by the staff. The study, therefore, recommended that presenteeism should be discouraged among members of staff. Also, adequate provision of substitutes in the absence of a member of staff due to ill health should be made. Future researchers should work on the comparism and cost of presenteeism and absenteeism be carried out because it was discovered that absenteeism (cost) is been given more attention. In public tertiary educational institutions in Lagos sate Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Organisational silence, Presenteeism, Staff productivity and Public Tertiary Educational Institution

### Introduction

Staff productivity is the driving force behind any organisation's growth. Staff productivity is the relationship between output of goods and services of workers in an organisation and input of resources,

human and non-human, used in the production process. In other words, staff productivity is the ratio of output to input. The higher the numerical value of this ratio, the greater the productivity (Li, Zhang, Wang & Guo, 2019). Productivity has again been defined as the measure of how well



resources are brought together in an organisation and their utilisation for accomplishment of a set result (Alqarni, 2020; Karakas, 2019).

The term staff productivity is commonly used to denote the volume of goods and services produced or rendered per employee in a specific unit of time (year, month, week, day or hour) (Akinyele, 2009). The aim of every organisation is to increase and manage productivity. Thus, all factors of production must be channelled adequately to attain a particular goal. However, an organisation to achieve its aims, man stands out among all the factors of production, because he puts all the other factors like land, capital, machine, time, skill, knowledge and so on, to use (Oladoja, 2017). This notwithstanding, man and his skills remain insatiable which pose problems to work in organisations.

Staff productivity in tertiary educational institutions has aroused the interest of education stakeholders globally. This is because staff productivity in education constitutes the fulcrum upon which investment in education is transformed into reality. Studies such as those of Emunemu and Iuku (2012); Schleicher (2012); and OECD (2012) attest to the significance and the cardinal role of teachers' productivity in educational growth and development. Emunemu and Iuku (2012) stated further that the importance attached to teachers' productivity has informed the need for adequate training and empowerment of teachers with up-to-date knowledge, skills,

and methodologies in order to cope with the dynamics of the 21st century education market with the hope of raising their productivity.

Organisations, therefore, could experience a lot of issues surrounding productivity of employees at work. Managing such issues with varieties of managerial strategies require careful handling in order to optimise productivity. Some of such pressing challenges revolve around organisational silence (Oduyoye, Francis-Odii, & Asikhia, 2020) and presenteeism (Lui, Andres & Johnson, 2018). The basic origins of silence could include negative feedback of the top managers; they ignore the message, attacking the credibility of the source (Fatima, Salah-Ud-Din, Khan, Hassan & Hoti, 2015). Employees under organisational silence have knowledge about the reality but due to certain threats they prefer to be silent in the presence of their supervisors. Another major pressing challenge is centred around issues of presenteeism, as employees are stretched out of their capability, going to work even though not feeling well (Achieng, 2014; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2020; Mohammadi, 2016). Presenteeism is characterized by the inability to produce what should be or would be to capacity; due to health problems which do not take employee to be absent from workplace (FONSECA, 2009). Consequently, employees who are likely having medical conditions are less productive at work than those who are able and physically healthy.



Schools as an organisation need academic staff and non-teaching staff in the school to express their thoughts and ideas for the vision and mission of the school to be achieved. This will bring about improvement and success in the education sector. Teachers and school leaders would be effective, efficient and record high performance in school organisations that are devoid of silence in the operation of their duties.

As modern organisational environments become more diverse, the information and communication processes within them also become more complex and interactive. As a result, employees have been identified as a rich source of feedback to address and solve work problems and issues (Pourakbari, 2016). Despite this, research has indicated that employees often feel a sense of insecurity when asked by management to express opinions and ideas as they believe that comments and recommendations for change may upset the current balance and organisation or upset administrators. It is this feeling of insecurity by employees which results in the subconscious or conscious decision by an employee to remain silent.

It has also been found that an employee's productivity to the organisation can produce both positive and negative effects on the choice of employees to speak their mind or remain silent depending on the situation and particular type of commitment. Many academics have discussed the effects of

silence and presenteeism on staff productivity separately and together to understand the relationship (Alqarni, 2020; Yang, Guo, Ma, Li, Tian, & Deng, 2017).

It is noteworthy to state at this juncture that employees are also an important source of the factors that are critical such as invention, revolution and change for the success of the organisation. Moreover, majority of the employees have very critical ideas and thinking in relation to the organisation, so the preference could be to remain silent. Meanwhile, current scenarios show that organisations are becoming dynamic day-by-day so the employees continuously discuss their knowledge, opinions and practices (Shirvani, Arab, Karami, Delavari, & Kiani, 2019; Liu, Wu, & Ma, 2009). It is also observed by Aylsworth (2018) that, although employees seem to be committed and loyal toward their organisation when they remain silent, past research shows an environment in the organisation could produce the incapacity to attain the projected benefits of the staff loyalty and job satisfaction. Furthermore, it is discussed by Cakici (2018) that it would be very beneficial to work on that situation in which staff of the organisations alert on the matters which are compulsory for the development of the organisation but conversely hesitate to discuss with the top management. Advanced management practices are giving very shining chances for the flow of information and communication which is conducted in the form of meetings, face to face discussion, feedback and open-door policies



within the organisation. In addition, advance management practices also contain some fears such as losing colleagues, respect and trust and seem to be as a potential complainant, fear associated to loss of job or taking at stake the promotion for the flow of information between employees and top management so the employees remain silent.

It had been empirically examined by Aylsworth (2018) that silence is considered to be equal to the loyalty in prior discussions and not to give suggestions is not the challenging situation but is proved by the recent researches that an environment of silence in the organisations will discourage the productivity of the employees. Also, productivity of the employee toward the organisation is the total contribution of an employee toward the organisation as observed by Shirbagi (2017). Thus, much research has been conducted and many questions have been asked for both organisational silence and presenteeism but still there are some unanswered questions. Two of these questions include (i) what is the difference in cost of presenteeism compared to absenteeism? (ii) What is the number of unproductive late hours at work? For these reasons, it is better to acknowledge the relationship between the influence of employee silence and presenteeism on staff productivity.

According to researchers, such as Johns (2012) and Miraglia and Johns (2016), presenteeism represents an important and understudied phenomenon that exists in the

“grey area” (Johns, 2010) between these two extremes of importance and understanding. Research into presenteeism dates back to the mid-1950s with Canfield and Soash’s (1955) early work on absence control. However, it is only more recently that there has been a surge in research related to presenteeism. Presenteeism poses a degree of problem which could be easily measured and also, most employers of labour have not given time to quantify or address it.

According to the results of a widely-cited study based on a survey of nearly 30,000 U.S. workers, individual employees lose the equivalent of 1.32 hours per week in reduced performance due to personal or family health reasons. The loss in productivity attributable to presenteeism has a real financial impact on U.S. companies and businesses (Kaiser, 2014). According to the same study, the total annual cost of loss in U.S. productivity that were attributable to health-related conditions exceeds \$225 billion, with the cost of presenteeism estimated at more than \$150 billion, or two-thirds of the total.

### **Organisational Silence and Staff Productivity**

Achievement of goals in an organisation depends on the proper understanding of issues, resources and facilities. There are many factors which determine the productivity in organisations. Among all, human resource plays a key role and the effectiveness and efficiency of other factors are influenced by human behaviours and



performances. The main reason of organisation failure in achieving its goals is lack of human resource productivity.

Previously, productivity has been emphasized by scholars and researchers in different disciplines such as economics, industrial and organisational psychology, accounting and so on, and that the various knowledge, experience and environmental fields and conditions contributed to different definitions of productivity in different science disciplines. Indeed, productivity is an intellectual view which attempts to promote the current situations. Productivity is based on this opinion that human can do his duties better than before over the time (Latifian, 2013).

One of the main goals of any organisations is the improvement of productivity level. For this reason, identification of factors contributing to decrease of productivity is very important. One of the factors which affects the decrease of productivity is organisational silence. It is a new phenomenon in which employees hide their opinions about the organisational problems. Organisational silence is a phenomenon in which employees do not pay attention to issues such as illegal and unethical activities, legal standards and defeating persons and they do not show any reaction in this regard (Doustar, Esmaeilzadeh & Hosseini, 2014). Organisational silence is a social phenomenon which emerges in an organisational level and it is influenced by many organisational features such as

decision-making processes, managerial processes, culture and employees' perceptions of factors affecting the behaviour of silence (Dimitris & Vakola, 2017).

Factors affecting the organisational silence includes: managerial factors (negative reaction of manager to comments, coercive leadership style, fear of employees from negative feedback to their comments, distrust and suspicion atmosphere), organisational factors (job inertia, centralized organisational structure and lack of upward feedback procedure), social factors (compliance with others, existence of group responsibility instead of personal responsibility and group thinking) and personal factors (preserving the current situation and pessimism to the manager) (Mokhtari, Seyyedini, & Sattari-Ghahfaroghi, 2014).

The term 'presenteeism' was coined by Sir Cary Cooper, American-born British psychologist and professor at Lancaster University Management School in the UK. He defined presenteeism as attending work whilst having medical conditions (Cooper, 2011). Presenteeism in the literature is noted as an opposite of absenteeism (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). It has been described as attending work while being ill, and at work but unable to work with full capacity (Halbesleben, Whitman & Crawford, 2014; Lack, 2011; Li, *et al.*, 2018). This concept has been employed by several organisational practitioners and researchers, both implicitly and explicitly, as one leading to productivity



loss (Scuffham, Vecchio & Whiteford, 2014). Thus, presenteeism results when employees come to work despite physical or psychological illness that should keep them away from work and as a result reduces productivity (Quazi, 2013). The cost and productivity loss connected with presenteeism is found to be greater than that of absenteeism (Weaver, 2010).

There is no distinct, unified definition of presenteeism in the literature. Chapman (2005) noted that, “as with all new endeavours, no single authoritative definition of presenteeism is in common use”. Moreover, presenteeism has been defined from employees’ behavioural as well as economic perspectives. For example, some researchers focus on the issue of sick employees being at work and not being productive, and others consider their behavioural responses. Hence, the definition of presenteeism can be stated from both economic or financial and behavioural perspectives. This study examines presenteeism from the productivity perspective, where employees are becoming less productive in their performance outcomes.

### **Factors affecting Presenteeism**

**Health-related Factors:** Hemp (2004) reported that the biggest productivity drains are relative benign ailments, like headaches and arthritis. Hemp reported that research on presenteeism has focused on chronic or episodic ailments. The most common health conditions studied were gastrointestinal,

musculoskeletal, neurological, respiratory, mental and dermatological (Goetzel, *et al.*, 2004). The previous studies have also reported the associations between presenteeism and obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases (Karakas, 2019), migraine and asthma (Mitchell & Bates 2011). Previously, the interest of presenteeism research focused on groups of high-risk (Mitchell & Bates 2011) employees and those with chronic illnesses.

### **Psychosocial Workplace Factors:**

Presenteeism has been associated with non-health-related factors such as psychosocial issues and organisational practices (Gilbreath & Karimi, 2012). Some studies reported that presenteeism may be culturally dependent (Dew *and others*, 2005). For example, some organisational cultures favour long working hours (Worrall & Cooper, 2007). In addition, Li *et al* (2015) reported more than 2.5-fold higher odds of presenteeism among those who worked for a private company than in the public sector. Gilbreath and Karimi (2012) reported the association between negative supervisor behaviours, whereas Bierla, Huver and Richard (2010) and Ramsey (2006) found that managers’ high commitment to the team and working during illness motivated employees to work when they were ill. Other studies found that poor leadership was associated with absenteeism, worker stress and poor productivity.

**Socio-Demographic Factors:** The role of age and gender in presenteeism is still



unclear although it seems that presenteeism varies among age groups. Li *et al* (2019) reported that migraines or chronic headaches were the leading cause of presenteeism among men aged 18–39 years, whereas mental disorders were the leading cause of presenteeism among men aged 50 years and older. Among women under 50 years, a leading cause was mental disorders, whereas insomnia was the main reason in women over 50 years. Stewart *et al.* (1992) reported that the prevalence of migraine was high for both genders aged from 35 to 45 years. Yang, Gu, Ma, Li, Tian and Deng (2017) reported that the health status of an employee decreased with age, and presenteeism increased in the ageing working population.

**Sickness Absence:** Several studies have focused on the economic effects of absenteeism. Recently, interest has been paid to the mechanism of presenteeism because absenteeism has been well documented (Bierla, *et al.*, 2013). It was reported that the bases of presenteeism and absenteeism are not only similar (Hansen & Andersen, 2009) but also related (Johns, 2010). A worker's individual assets and organisational issues may be factors affecting absenteeism or presenteeism (Munir *et al.*, 2008). It was reported that high levels of presenteeism may be a predictor of sickness absence in the future, and presenteeism may occur both before and after sickness absence (Brouwer, 2002; Kumar *et al.*, 2003). According to Brouwer (2002), 25% of employees experienced

production losses (presenteeism) before an absence and 20% experienced production losses (presenteeism) after an absence. The related costs were about 14% of the total productivity costs.

### **The Concept of Staff Productivity**

The word productivity was used by Quizny in 1776 for the first time. Adam Smith discussed about the work productivity, specialisation for profit increase, reduction of fatigue in 1776. He pointed to the efficiency and specialisation in relation to the productivity and considers the work division as a foundation of efficiency and productivity. A number of economists explored the productivity based on workers' physical quality, intellectual, spiritual, skill and stamina. But the revolution of productivity was initiated by Taylor in 1881 which can be regarded as history of formal and scientific studies in productivity management (Nazem, 2007).

Productivity shows the level of system success in applying resources to achieve goals (Bordbar, Safari-Shad, Rahimi, & Abbasi-Rostami, 2019). In this simple definition there are several points: (a) productivity is a systematic concept which can be applied for different entities, an individual, a machine, an organisation, as adjective or national economy. (b) according to this definition productivity is description of system success in doing works and is an evaluative concept.

(c) definition of productivity consists of two concepts of efficiency (doing things right)



and effectiveness (doing right things) (Kazemi, 2002).

### **Presenteeism and Staff Productivity**

Presenteeism refers to workforce productivity and considers the employees who are present at work but may not be working to full capacity due to their psychological or physical ailments (Burton *et al.*, 1999). In recent years, the discussion on workforce productivity has shifted its focus away from employee absence to presenteeism (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), measured as the extent of various diseases, conditions and symptoms that negatively affect the work productivity of employees who choose to work through the illness (Chapman, 2005). For example, poor or no health care benefits (Athey, 2009), perceptions about work environment (Pilette, 2005), perceived pressures from supervisors or co-workers (Grinyer & Singleton, 2000), fear of disciplinary action and the risk to promotion opportunities, meeting job demands (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), job insecurity and employees' belief that their illness or medical condition is not severe enough to warrant staying home (Johns, 2010) may result in employees presenting to work when they are in ill health, but their presence is merely physical and their productivity suffers.

From the individual perspective, presenteeism may result from employees' perceptions of their given workload (Athey, 2009). For example, some employees work with ill health and feel they have too much

work to do, need to meet deadlines, feel morally obligated and feel there is inadequate coverage to handle their job responsibilities (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Athey, 2009; Johns, 2010). As a result, they damage the quantity and quality of employees' productivity, as well as that of their work team and their co-workers as individuals. Hence, presenteeism can result in the exacerbation of existing medical conditions, accidents and errors due to impaired functions, additional time needed to complete tasks, irritability, fatigue, poor concentration, and decreased motivation (Hemp, 2004; Johns, 2010; Pilette, 2005). Therefore, presenteeism can decrease performance output and negatively affect workgroup productivity (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Scuffham, *et al.*, 2014). The current study considers the productivity perspective for presenteeism and examines its influence on employee productivity with the mediational influence of organisational commitment and employee turnover intentions.

Employee productivity is directly related to the success of an organisation; therefore, whatever the reason that interferes with that performance will reach the organisation as a whole, that is, both the lack of work force, as well as the minimisation of workers' performance are problems for the organisation. Thus, it is understood by absenteeism the absence from the official working day for reasons related to ill health. Fonseca (2009) clarifies that this absence may be due to scattered faults, compensation





and absence of short- and long-term disability.

### **Factors Affecting Staff Productivity**

According to Whitaker (2001), among the factors that affect health and quality of life and, consequently, the performance of an employee at work, are:

- (i) social insurance systems, benefit payments and medical certification practices, which influence work participation.
- (ii) occupational safety, availability of alternative employment and attendance, which affect economic climate.
- (iii) organisational factors, such as firm size, personnel policies and procedures affecting service management.
- (iv) job satisfaction, job stress and psychosocial work environment, which affect service.
- (v) individual factors such as personality, social support, marital status and health problems affecting attendance.

### **Organisational Silence, Presenteeism and Staff Productivity**

The study of organisational silence, presenteeism and staff productivity is significant, given the cycle of lost productivity in the workplace, the consequent effects on the health and safety of individual workers, and the negative economic impact on the organisation. This takes into account the number of working days lost through sickness absence, presenteeism and the cost of replacement of

employees who have left their jobs due to ill mental health.

Within this study and other practitioner reports, such as MIND (2011) and the Shaw Trust (2010), silence is suggested to play a crucial role in these costs as, by remaining silent, these employees are unable to obtain support within the workplace and necessary accommodations cannot, therefore, be made. These studies advocate that through alleviating silence, employees will be greatly more inclined to inform their employer of their general health condition and to receive support and any necessary reasonable adjustments. This in turn reduces the risk of them taking a health-related absence, maintain their levels of productivity and ensure the organisation can get the best out of their employee.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) The public tertiary educational institutions should give room for the 'voice' of their staff to be heard. Appropriate channels should be created for members of staff to hear their views in contribution to the staff productivity and invariably the process of the organization. Every act of intimidation/victimization should be suppressed within the organization.
- (ii) Presenteeism could be discouraged among members of staff. Adequate provision of substitutes in the



absence of a member of staff due to ill health should be made. Staff training and retraining is also encouraged. Supervisors should be up and doing to monitor without victimization.

- (iii) Measurement indices such as KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and OKR (Objective and Key Results) can be set to check how well a staff is doing with their assigned deliverables. This removes the need of supervisors to be overbearing and allows for a more objective check on the staff's work.

### Conclusion

The researchers therefore conclude that there is a strong rationale for the development and implementation of policies and practices to improve the management of mental health within the public tertiary educational institutions.

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