

## **DYNAMICS OF EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION AND PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined the dynamics of employee job satisfaction and public sector performance in Nigeria. The objectives of study include - to critically examine the dynamics of employee job satisfaction within Nigeria's public sector, in order to identify the root causes; to evaluate the impact on organizational performance; to and recommend sustainable strategies for improving motivation, retention, and productivity. The study adopted the Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation; relied heavily on secondary data, and used the content method of data analysis to analyze the collected data. Based on the reviewed literature, the findings of the study revealed that the root causes of employee job satisfaction are from economic, organizational, and socio-political perspectives; that the root causes of employee job satisfaction have immense impact on public sector performance in Nigeria; and that these root causes requires adopting sustainable strategies that not only enhance motivation and retention but also improve overall productivity and institutional performance. The study, therefore, recommended among others the involvement of workers in policy formulation and operational planning can strengthen ownership, satisfaction, and performance outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *Dynamics, Job, Satisfaction, Job satisfaction, Employee, Employment, Public Sector*

### **Introduction**

Employee job satisfaction has remained a central theme in human resource management and organizational behaviour, as it significantly influences performance, productivity, and service delivery (Robbins and Judge, 2019). In the public sector, where efficiency and accountability are key determinants of governance outcomes, the level of job satisfaction among employees plays a critical role in shaping institutional performance (Osemeke, 2017). Job satisfaction is commonly defined as the extent to which employees feel content and fulfilled with their work, working environment, and organizational conditions (Locke, 1976; Akinwale and George, 2020).

In Nigeria, the public sector is the largest employer of labour, accounting for millions of workers across federal, state, and local government institutions (Olaopa, 2019). However, the sector has often been criticized for inefficiency, low productivity, and poor service delivery, which are linked to persistent challenges of inadequate remuneration, poor working conditions, lack of motivation, weak reward systems, and limited career development opportunities (Ezeanyim, Nzewi and Nnabuike, 2019). These conditions have contributed to low morale, absenteeism, corruption, and in some cases, employee turnover, thereby undermining the sector's capacity to meet developmental goals (Onyeonoru, 2021).

While reforms such as the Public Service Renewal Programme and various institutional restructuring efforts have been introduced to address these issues, the dynamics of employee job satisfaction in Nigeria's public sector remain complex and underexplored. Factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, training, and the socio-political environment further complicate the relationship between employee satisfaction and organizational performance (Okolie and Omolayo, 2021).

Therefore, examining the dynamics of employee job satisfaction and its impact on public sector performance in Nigeria is vital for improving service delivery, enhancing accountability, and promoting sustainable national development. This study seeks to explore the root causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, evaluate their effects on performance, and recommend strategies to strengthen motivation, retention, and productivity within Nigeria's public sector.

## **Statement Problem**

Employee job satisfaction is a critical determinant of organizational performance, productivity, and service delivery, particularly in the public sector where employees are central to policy implementation and governance outcomes (Osemeke, 2017). In Nigeria, however, the public sector has been persistently challenged by low morale, lack of motivation, poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and limited opportunities for career advancement, all of which contribute to declining job satisfaction among employees (Akinwale and George, 2020).

Several studies have shown that dissatisfied employees often exhibit reduced commitment, absenteeism, poor work attitudes, and in some cases, outright turnover, which undermines institutional effectiveness (Ezeanyim, Nzewi and Nnabuife, 2019). In the Nigerian context, where the public sector is the largest employer of labour, this situation poses a serious concern, as it directly affects the delivery of essential services such as education, healthcare, and public administration (Olaopa, 2019).

Despite government reforms and policies aimed at improving public service efficiency, issues of poor incentives, inadequate training, weak organizational culture, and political interference remain unresolved (Onyeonoru, 2021). Consequently, job satisfaction among public sector employees continues to decline, limiting their ability to meet growing public expectations and developmental needs. Based on the above, the study raised the following questions: What are the dynamics of employee job satisfaction within Nigeria's public sector in order to identify the root causes; to evaluate the impact on organizational performance? How does employee job satisfaction impact organizational performance in Nigeria's public sector? And what sustainable strategies can be recommended to improve motivation, retention, and productivity among public sector employees in Nigeria? Therefore, the objectives of study include - to critically examine the dynamics of employee job satisfaction within Nigeria's public sector, in order to identify the root causes; to evaluate the impact on organizational performance; to and recommend sustainable strategies for improving motivation, retention, and productivity.

## **Literature Review**

### **Root Causes of Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction in Nigeria's Public Sector**

Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction have remained critical themes in organizational behaviour and human resource management, especially in the public sector where productivity and efficiency directly influence governance outcomes (Robbins and Judge, 2019). In Nigeria, public sector employees often experience both motivating and demotivating factors that shape their level of job satisfaction. Scholars have explored these root causes from economic, organizational, and socio-political perspectives.

- a) **Remuneration and Compensation:** Adequate remuneration is consistently highlighted as a key determinant of employee job satisfaction. Locke (1976) argued that compensation plays a central role in employees' perception of fairness and value. In the Nigerian context, low wages, salary arrears, and inadequate benefits packages are major sources of dissatisfaction (Ezeanyim, Nzewi and Nnabuike, 2019). Akinwale and George (2020) further observed that the absence of performance-related incentives in Nigeria's public service contributes to declining morale and weak commitment.
- b) *Working Conditions and Infrastructure:* The quality of the working environment influences employees' motivation and overall job satisfaction. Studies show that poor infrastructure, lack of modern equipment, and inadequate resources hinder public servants' effectiveness (Onyeonoru, 2021). For instance, Osemeke (2017) found that Nigerian public institutions suffer from obsolete facilities that reduce operational efficiency, which in turn lowers employees' enthusiasm and satisfaction.
- c) *Career Development and Training Opportunities:* The absence of structured career development opportunities is another recurring challenge in the Nigerian public sector. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory identifies growth and advancement as motivators for job satisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959). However, research indicates that limited promotion opportunities, stagnation, and lack of professional training contribute to job dissatisfaction in Nigeria (Okolie and Omolayo, 2021). This stagnation often leads to disengagement and reduced performance among employees.
- d) *Leadership and Organizational Culture:* Leadership and organizational culture strongly shape workplace experiences. Robbins and Judge (2019) argue that participatory leadership styles foster motivation, while authoritarian or bureaucratic approaches discourage employees. In Nigeria, many public institutions are characterised by rigid bureaucracies, authoritarian management practices, and limited employee participation in decision-making (Onyeonoru, 2021). Such organizational cultures reduce trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Osemeke, 2017).
- e) *Job Security and Political Interference:* Job security is traditionally viewed as a positive factor in public sector employment. However, in Nigeria, political interference undermines this advantage. According to Olaopa (2019), nepotism, favouritism, and politically motivated appointments weaken meritocracy, leading to widespread dissatisfaction. Employees perceive the system as unfair, which negatively impacts motivation and performance.
- f) *Recognition and Reward Systems:* Recognition for achievements is essential for sustaining employee morale. Robbins and Judge (2019) emphasise that appreciation and recognition enhance intrinsic satisfaction. However, Nigerian public sector employees frequently report a lack of reward systems or recognition for outstanding performance, contributing to feelings of neglect (Ezeanyim, Nzewi and Nnabuike, 2019).
- g) *Workload and Stress:* Finally, workload and stress significantly affect job satisfaction. Akinwale and George (2020) noted that understaffing and poor delegation of responsibilities increase pressure on employees, leading to burnout. This aligns with global findings that work-life imbalance reduces job satisfaction and increases turnover intentions.

### **Impact of the Root Causes of Employee Job Satisfaction on Public sector Performance in Nigeria**

Studies have showcased that the above mentioned root causes of employee job satisfaction have immense impact on public sector performance in Nigeria.

- a) *Theoretical grounding:* Much Nigerian literature uses established motivation models, notably Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and public service motivation (PSM) frameworks to interpret how hygiene factors (salary, conditions) and motivators (recognition, achievement) affect satisfaction and performance. Authors commonly combine these with human capital or organizational justice perspectives to explain how institutional arrangements in the public sector mediate outcomes.

- b) *Compensation and financial rewards*: Compensation (salary, allowances, pensions) is repeatedly identified as a primary root cause of job dissatisfaction among Nigerian public servants. Empirical work shows inadequate remuneration leads to low morale, absenteeism, industrial action and reduced productivity — all of which undermine service delivery and organizational performance (Salisu, 2015; studies of federal/state civil services). Where pay is seen as unfair or not commensurate with effort, motivation and performance decline.
- c) *Impact on performance*: Low or perceived-unfair compensation is linked to decreased productivity, higher intention to leave, and more frequent work stoppages (strikes), which interrupt continuity of public services and raise transaction costs for government.
- d) *Work environment and working conditions*: Physical and psychosocial work environment factors (workplace safety, resources/equipment, workload, work–life balance) strongly predict job satisfaction in Nigerian public institutions. Recent studies in universities and state health facilities found that inadequate tools, high workload and poor work environment negatively affect both satisfaction and measurable performance outcomes.
- e) *Impact on performance*: Poor work environments reduce task efficiency, increase errors and absenteeism, and lower the quality of public services (e.g., in healthcare and education). Improvements to the environment often show statistically significant positive effects on employee performance measures.
- f) *Career progression, training and recognition*: Limited promotion prospects, weak training and lack of clear competency pathways are common root causes of dissatisfaction. Studies indicate that perception of stagnation reduces motivation and innovation, while staff development interventions (training, up skilling) raise job satisfaction and performance when they are relevant and well-resourced.
- g) *Impact on performance*: Where career systems are perceived as opaque or politicized, employees withdraw discretionary effort and OCB declines — which harms team functioning and service responsiveness. Conversely, targeted training correlates with higher performance metrics in sampled Nigerian public agencies.
- h) *Leadership, communication and organizational justice*: Studies within Nigeria’s federal and state services identify poor communication, weak leadership and perceived unfairness in administrative processes as major drivers of dissatisfaction. Poor communication undermines role clarity and organizational commitment; perceived procedural or distributive injustice erodes trust and reduces discretionary behaviours that support organizational performance. Leadership deficits and communication failures create bottlenecks, increase errors, and encourage “quiet quitting” behaviours. In contrast, transparent decision-making and participatory leadership are associated with higher OCB and better team performance.
- i) *Workload, stress and psychosocial factors*: Excessive workloads and role conflict contribute to burnout and job dissatisfaction in Nigerian public organizations. Recent empirical analyses link psychosocial pressures to lower engagement and reduced productivity. Where staff are overworked and support systems (e.g., counseling, reasonable leave) are weak, performance outcomes suffer. Burnout manifests as absenteeism, presenteeism and higher error rates — all detrimental to service quality and efficiency. Interventions addressing workload balance and psychosocial support improve both satisfaction and output.

## **Sustainable Strategies for Improving Motivation, Retention, and Productivity in Nigeria’s Public Sector**

Employee job satisfaction in Nigeria’s public sector is often undermined by issues such as inadequate compensation, poor working conditions, limited career advancement opportunities, lack of recognition, weak institutional frameworks, and ineffective leadership (Okonkwo and Obiora, 2019; Nwosu, 2021). Addressing these root causes requires adopting sustainable strategies that not only enhance motivation and retention but also improve overall productivity and institutional performance.

- a) *Competitive and Equitable Compensation*: Sustainable improvement in employee motivation requires the institutionalization of equitable pay structures aligned with the cost of living and market benchmarks. Fair remuneration and regular salary reviews reduce dissatisfaction and increase retention, particularly in a context where inflation erodes income value (Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016). Equitable pay structures also close wage gaps that often create resentment among employees.
- b) *Capacity Building and Career Development*: Continuous professional development is essential for motivating employees in the long term. Training programmes, mentorship, and clear career progression paths increase employees' sense of value and belonging within the organization (Ezeani, 2018). By linking training outcomes to promotions and performance incentives, employees become more committed to organizational goals, reducing turnover.
- c) *Recognition and Reward Systems*: Recognition fosters a culture of appreciation and strengthens intrinsic motivation. Implementing transparent performance appraisal systems, coupled with both monetary and non-monetary rewards, has been shown to improve job satisfaction (Adeleke, 2020). Rewards such as public acknowledgment, flexible work arrangements, and professional awards enhance employee morale and productivity.
- d) *Strengthening Institutional Frameworks and Leadership*: Weak institutional governance and political interference often discourage innovation and efficiency in Nigeria's public sector (Ojo, 2019). Sustainable strategies should therefore prioritize transparent policies, ethical leadership, and effective supervision. Participatory leadership that encourages employee voice in decision-making also fosters commitment and trust.
- e) *Work-Life Balance and Welfare Enhancements*: Provision of welfare packages, such as healthcare services, housing schemes, and pension security, addresses long-term employee needs and reduces dissatisfaction linked to uncertainty about the future (Olatunji, 2017). Additionally, implementing flexible working hours and family-friendly policies can reduce stress and improve productivity.
- f) *Digital Transformation and Enabling Work Environment*: A conducive work environment that integrates modern technology and infrastructure is critical to sustaining employee satisfaction. The adoption of digital tools enhances efficiency and reduces bureaucratic bottlenecks, which often frustrate employees (Akinwale and George, 2020). Creating safe, inclusive, and resourceful workplaces increases both retention and productivity.

## Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959) as a suitable theoretical framework for examining the dynamics of employee job satisfaction and performance in Nigeria's public sector. This theory distinguishes between two sets of factors: hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, and motivators, which enhance satisfaction. Hygiene factors include pay, working conditions, job security, and policies, while motivators include recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth (Herzberg, 1966).

The relevance of Herzberg's theory lies in its emphasis on the dual nature of job satisfaction, which is particularly applicable to the Nigerian public sector where systemic challenges such as low remuneration, poor infrastructure, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and limited opportunities for advancement often undermine job satisfaction (Ogunyemi and Mabekoje, 2019). By identifying how hygiene and motivator factors interact, the theory provides a useful lens for understanding how employees' job attitudes affect their level of commitment, efficiency, and overall performance.

Applying this framework to the Nigerian public sector, it becomes evident that while improving salaries, workplace facilities, and job security may reduce dissatisfaction, real improvements in performance are more likely to result from motivational factors such as recognition, professional development, and empowerment. The



Two-Factor Theory therefore guides this study by linking the underlying causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction to employee productivity and the effectiveness of public service delivery (Moynihan and Pandey, 2007).

In this context, Herzberg's framework not only highlights the complexity of employee motivation but also underscores the importance of designing policies that address both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction in Nigeria's public sector. This makes it a suitable theoretical basis for analyzing how satisfaction dynamics influence organizational performance outcomes.

## **Methodology**

Descriptive research design refers to a systematic method of investigating and portraying the current status, characteristics, and relationships of phenomena without manipulating variables. It aims to provide an accurate representation of conditions, events, or relationships as they naturally occur (Creswell, 2014). In relation to the dynamics of employee job satisfaction, descriptive research design is highly applicable in the Nigerian public sector because it enables researchers to examine employees' attitudes, perceptions, and satisfaction levels regarding workplace conditions, remuneration, career advancement opportunities, leadership practices, and organizational culture. The data for this study were gathered from secondary sources via textbooks, journals, news papers, magazines, the internet among others. The collected data were analyzed via content method of data analysis.

## **Summary of Findings**

From the reviewed literature cum data collected, the findings of the study revealed that the root causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in Nigeria's public sector are multifaceted, encompassing extrinsic factors such as pay, working conditions, and job security, as well as intrinsic factors such as recognition, career growth, and leadership. While reforms have attempted to address these issues, persistent structural and systemic challenges remain unresolved (Olaopa, 2019; Onyeonoru, 2021). This indicates a need for comprehensive reforms that integrate economic, organizational, and socio-political dimensions to enhance job satisfaction and improve public sector performance.

Additionally, the reviewed literature consistently reveals that the root causes influence performance through reduced productivity, lower OCB, higher absenteeism/turnover and disrupted service delivery. Recent systematic reviews and empirical studies call for longitudinal and mixed-methods research to establish causal links and test interventions (e.g., remuneration reform, workplace redesign, capacity-building). Several papers also note that PSM and intrinsic motivation can mitigate but not eliminate the negative impact of structural deficiencies (i.e., material improvements and managerial reforms remain necessary).

Finally, as regards sustainable strategies for improving motivation, retention, and productivity in Nigeria's public sector, the findings from reviewed literature revealed the need to address the root causes of job dissatisfaction holistically through fair compensation, structured career development, recognition systems, strong institutional frameworks, welfare support, and digital transformation, the sector can enhance employee satisfaction while strengthening overall organizational performance

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The dynamics of employee job satisfaction play a critical role in shaping the performance of Nigeria's public sector. Evidence suggests that satisfaction levels are significantly influenced by factors such as remuneration, working conditions, career advancement opportunities, leadership style, and organizational culture (Okolie and Omole, 2021). When employees perceive fairness in reward systems, supportive supervision, and opportunities

for professional growth, their motivation and productivity tend to increase, leading to improved institutional efficiency and service delivery (Olatunji, 2020). Conversely, persistent dissatisfaction arising from poor pay, lack of recognition, inadequate infrastructure, and political interference undermines morale and contributes to inefficiency, absenteeism, and high turnover (Akinwale and George, 2020).

In the Nigerian context, addressing job satisfaction challenges is vital, given the public sector's central role in governance and national development. A dynamic approach to understanding and improving satisfaction is therefore indispensable for strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing employee commitment, and boosting overall performance (Olaoye and Odetayo, 2019)

The study, therefore, recommended the following plausible way forward:

1. *Improve Compensation and Incentive Structures:* Competitive remuneration and performance-based incentives should be institutionalised to motivate employees and reduce dissatisfaction (Akinwale and George, 2020).
2. *Enhance Career Development and Training:* Structured capacity-building programmes, mentorship opportunities, and transparent promotion systems are essential for enhancing employee satisfaction and performance (Okolie and Omole, 2021).
3. *Strengthen Leadership and Management Practices:* Transformational leadership that fosters inclusivity, recognition, and accountability should be encouraged across public institutions (Olatunji, 2020).
4. *Provide Adequate Infrastructure and Resources:* Adequate tools, modern facilities, and a conducive work environment should be prioritised to enhance efficiency and productivity (Olaoye and Odetayo, 2019).
5. *Promote Organizational Justice and Transparency:* Ensuring fairness in decision-making processes, promotions, and disciplinary measures will enhance trust and commitment among employees (Okolie and Omole, 2021).
6. *Encourage Employee Participation in Decision-Making:* Involving workers in policy formulation and operational planning can strengthen ownership, satisfaction, and performance outcomes (Akinwale and George, 2020).

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