

INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT ON OUTPUT QUALITY: EVIDENCE FROM ENI OIL AND GAS INDUSTRIES, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of employee empowerment on output quality: evidence from Eni Oil and Gas industries, Nigeria. An explanatory research design was adopted in the study, while primary data were collected via a cross-sectional survey. The study population consist of two thousand, five hundred and thirty (2,530) employees of Nigerian Agip Oil Company Limited -NAOC, Agip Energy and Natural Resources Limited - AENR, and Nigeria Agip Explorations Limited - NAE as presently constituted. Three hundred and forty-five (345) employees served as the sample size of the study; this figure was determined through the application of Taro Yemane's formula for sample size determination. The test units were arrived at, using the judgmental sampling technique. A structured questionnaire, designed in the Likert five-point scale, which was validated by measurement and evaluation experts, human resource professionals and industry experts served as the instrument for primary data collection. The reliability of the instrument on the other hand was confirmed via the Cronbach's alpha test. The simple regression technique was used as the test statistic to determine the influence of employee empowerment on output quality. The study found that employee empowerment positively and significantly influences output quality. It concludes that employee empowerment is an appropriate means of achieving output quality; and recommends that Eni companies and other organizations that desire to achieve output quality should institute employee empowerment schemes like employee involvement and employee participation.

Keywords: Employee empowerment, Employee involvement, Employee participation, Output quality

JEL Classification: L7; L72

1. Introduction

The notion that “human elements” are the strategic resource that largely determines efficiency and effectiveness that often predict organizational success has gained considerable attention in both profit and non-profit organizations. Therefore, it is essential that the human elements which have the ability to think and reason with respect to the business environment be developed and allowed to appropriate their discretion and initiatives in matters that have direct bearing on the performance of their job. The idea of building employee capacity and giving them discretionary authority is captured in the concept of employee empowerment. Therefore, employee empowerment becomes an approach targeted at developing human capital at workplaces by getting the people who are responsible for the work processes to be involved in decision making because quality starts with those who know the processes best (Kumar & Kumar, 2017). Employee empowerment helps to promote conditions necessary for employees to become more proactive and self-sufficient in assisting

organizations to achieve their goals (Herrenkohl, Judson, & Heffner, 1999). Also, there is the likelihood that output quality may result when the organization is flattened and employees become more proactive and rely on their initiative in doing their jobs, rather than micromanaged.

A major structural defect at workplace that often hinders initiative to improve work process and to take action is the traditional work arrangement that rigidly concentrate authority at the top level of organizational ladder. The top-down structure of the organization does not take into cognizance the fact that every employee has a wide range of discretionary effort that is totally within the employee's power to contribute for the success of the organization or withhold, even when such withheld discretionary effort could occasion harm to the success of the organization (Jaja, 2003). This hierarchical structure has over the years killed employees' initiatives and commitment. Employees get demoralized when they are victimized for intuitive, following their initiatives or

implementing their decision in the best interest of the organization; just as micromanaged employees may not be motivated to improve performance; especially, when they are aware that their initiatives, ideas, or suggested solutions to problem will neither be respected nor acted upon.

These and other initiative-stifling workplace practices lower employees' interest to put-up effort that will focus on high quality outputs and continuous improvement. To reverse the structural malady which often concentrates all organizational authority at the top by refusing to give employees more information, more control over the performance of their jobs and more decision-making

authority, this study attempts to investigate the influence of employee empowerment on output quality of Eni companies operating in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria. It is expected that the outcome of this study will enrich extant knowledge on employee empowerment and establish empirical evidence of the predictive power of employee empowerment on output quality.

Operational Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is largely the foundation upon which academic studies are based (Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016); as it provides a graphic illustration of the main variables in a study and the hypothesized interaction between the variables.



Fig. 1: Operational conceptual framework of the influence of employee empowerment on output quality

Hypothesis

Ho₁: Employee empowerment does not significantly influence output quality of Eni oil and gas industries, Nigeria

2. Literature Review

2.1 Baseline theory

Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions (Howe, 2009). Theoretical framework is thus a structure that supports the foundation of a study. It introduces and describes the theory or theories that potentially, explain why and how constructs under investigation could interact. This study on employee empowerment and output quality is anchored on theory X, Y & Z.

Theory X and theory Y (McGregor, 1960) and theory Z (Ouchi, 1981) also referred to as Neo-human relations approach or organizational humanism, represent a class of theories that explain workplace motivation. McGregor (1960) propounded theory X and Y to distinguish two approaches adopted by managers to control the behaviour of their human resources. The main thrust of the theory is that "the assumptions managers hold about controlling their human resources determine the whole character of the enterprise" (Sapru, 2013); and that managers tend to be one of the two approaches in employees' management: Coercive compulsion approach (theory X)

and motivational self-control approach (theory Y) (Stewart, 1997).

Theory X managers view subordinates as lazy, unambitious, and selfish individuals that shirk responsibility; and are uninterested in the performance goals of the organization; hence, must be forced to work. Managers with this perception thus delegate and control employees with enforcement, reward and punishment (Stewart, 1997). Theory Y managers on the other hand believe that employees are capable and motivated to work towards corporate goals, if top-management provides the necessary conditions; and that the main management task is to provide the conditions that spur subordinates to reach their own personal goals by working towards corporate goals (Stewart, 1997). Theory Z per se takes a Japanese approach to management and proposes employee empowerment as a better human resource management strategy than coercive compulsion approach (theory X) and motivational self-control approach (theory Y). Theory Z managers, like their theory Y counterparts, believe that employees can and want to put up a better performance, if the necessary conditions are guaranteed by management. The difference between theory Y and Z however, is that theory Z, goes beyond the common assumptions and focuses on the decentralization of power (Kantsperger, 2001). This is done by facilitating the work of employees, as well as supporting them. Theory Z managers act as coaches and enablers, instead of supervisors (Kantsperger, 2001).

The Concept of Employee Empowerment

Development of human resource management (HRM) and total quality management (TQM) thinking of the 1980s and 1990s popularized the notion of employee empowerment (Wilkinson, 1998); even the concept is traceable to Taylorism (Jo & Park, 2016), with roots in psychology, sociology and theology (Whetten & Cameron, 2011). The relevance of empowerment to employee performance is derived from its original meaning, which establishes that empowerment is all about knowledge sharing, improvement of intellectual abilities, and autonomy in decision making (Karim & Rehman, 2012). The whole essence of employee empowerment is to motivate employees to evolve workplace behaviour that are capable of making them perform optimally (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Employee empowerment is perceived as a motivational managerial practice that facilitates opportunities for participation and involvement in decision making. It is primarily related to the development of trust, motivation, participation and involvement in decision-making, and bridging the gap between employees and management (Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012). Employee empowerment constitutes a strong base for employee performance as well as overall firm sustainability. Studies on employee empowerment consider the importance and presence of employees at various levels in organizations' hierarchy. Studies reveal that employee empowerment plays a dominant role in encouraging employees to perform at their best; hence, orchestrates job satisfaction, improves output quality, company successes and generally confer competitiveness (Chu, 2003; Robbins, Crino & Fredendall, 2002).

Employee empowerment as a human resource management philosophy is anchored on the principle of enriching employees' jobs and giving them power to exercise control, and take responsibility for the outcomes of their efforts; and is practiced as part of total quality management; although its historicity is traceable to "employee involvement" (Lawler, 1988; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1998) or employee participation. In this study therefore, employee participation and employee involvement are adopted as dimensions of empowerment. Participation refers to a situation where employees play greater roles in the decision-making process by being given the opportunity to influence management decisions and to contribute to the improvement of organizational performance through improving individual employee's performance. Simply put, participation is an arrangement that gives workers some influence over organizational and workplace decisions (Williams & Adams-Smith, 2006). Involvement on the other hand occurs when employees are able to

discuss issues concerning them with management. Williams and Adams-Smith (2010) suggest that involvement is a useful management initiative designed and applied to help further the flow of communication at work; and enhance organizational commitment and performance of employees. In essence, involvement at the most modest level refers to consultation, or solicitation of opinion that may or may not be applied by management while participation has to do with according employees genuine and clearly defined level of input to make concerning how the organization is to be governed, even if the input is limited (Wood, 2010; Brewster, Croucher, Wood, & Brookes, 2007).

Output Quality

Output quality can be described as customers' or users' perception of the overall superiority of products with respect to intended purpose, relative to alternatives (Eriksson, Kalling, Åkesson, & Fredberg, 2008). Czabke (2007) explains that output quality is an intangible, overall feeling about a brand, usually based on underlying characteristics of the products to which the brand is attached such as reliability and performance. Herein, output quality is construed as a product's fitness for purpose, the level or percentage of errors, as well as its superiority compared to alternatives. The output quality is a testament to employees' effort. It reflects employees' efforts as demonstrated in the outcome of goods and services produced in terms of standards, errors, waste and rework. This also helps in recognizing employees who produce quality work, work which meets standards and work with few errors or mistakes. High standard work does not just happen. It evolves over some time as a result of experience. Organizations can improve and secure their future by engaging in a process of continuous improvement and adopting new processes of conformity assessment (Czabke, 2007). To ensure that employees remain within the circle of standard work, quality work or few error outcomes; periodic upgrade of knowledge, skills, abilities, competences and attitude of employees is inevitable.

Employee empowerment and Output Quality

Extant management discourse situates employee empowerment as management strategy that has gained the most support in the delivery of consistent quality services that result in enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gibson, 2003). Empowered frontline employees have the potential to increase service quality, due to inherent characteristics of services, which require the presence of both the consumer and frontline employee in the production and consumption process. Employee empowerment is a means for improving output quality because it breeds moral commitment to work which is an inherent problem in most organizations where workers

are powerless. When employees are allowed to put their knowledge and experiences into play by participating in decision making concerning their jobs, they tend to display high level of ingenuity and this will impact on the quality of work (Bhatti, & Qureshi, 2007). Scholars argue that investments in human capital development results in employee motivation, and affect organizational innovation, decisions made, and the quality of goods and services positively (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991; Lashley, 2001; Yukl & Becker, 2006). Furthermore, other studies have supported the opinions of Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) that employees play crucial roles in delivering high quality outputs, shaping customer satisfaction, creating competitive advantage, and enhancing organizational performance (Chiang & Birtch, 2011; Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011; Lashley, 2001; Guiry, 1992). Also, developing human capital through employee empowerment fosters commitment and intrinsic motivation which enhances employees' ability to take responsibility for their actions and create ownership of quality delivery (Lashley, 2001).

Abbasi, Khan, and Rashid (2011) studied the impact of employee empowerment on service quality and customer satisfaction in the banking sector and observed a positive relationship between employee empowerment, service quality and customer satisfaction. This implies that employee empowerment results in higher level of service quality and customer satisfaction in the banking sector. Likewise, Sok and O'Cass (2015) investigated the effects of service innovation-exploitation on financial performance through the delivery of quality services, with additional emphasis on examining the extent to which employee empowerment and slack resources enhance or suppress the performance benefits of service firms engaging in service innovation exploration versus exploitation. The study found that excelling at both exploitative and exploratory innovation helps enhance the quality of services, which, in turn, yield superior financial performance; and that empowering employees enhances the relationship between exploratory and exploitative service innovation and service quality.

Also, Tsaor, Chang, and Wu (2004) examined the relationship between employee empowerment and

service quality, mediated by service behavior. The study found that more empowered employees deliver better service quality to customers. In addition, Albaqqali and Sankar (2019) investigated empowerment and its relation to job performance among bank employees in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and found a strong correlation between empowerment of employees and job performance. This suggests that empowerment is essential for employee job performance to thrive. Similarly, Hanaysha (2016) examined the effects of employee empowerment, teamwork, and employee training on employee productivity in higher education Sector. The study found that employee empowerment has significant positive effect on employee productivity. Furthermore, Tutar, Altinoz, and Cakiroglu (2011) examined the effects of employee empowerment on achievement motivation and contextual performance of employees and found that perceived employee empowerment had a positive impact on achievement motivation and contextual performance of employees. In view of the foregoing, the study hypothesizes:

Ho₁: Employee empowerment does not significantly influence output quality of Eni Oil and Gas industries in Nigeria

Based on the understanding that quality demonstrates excellence in a product; including such attributes as attractiveness, lack of defects, reliability, and long-term dependability (Bateman & Snell, 2002), the study conceptualize output quality in terms of:

- (i) Fit for purpose,
- (ii) Percentage of error, and
- (iii) Product superiority.

Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory research design and collected primary data in a cross-sectional survey. The population of the study consist 2,530 employees comprising managers, senior matriculated staff, and senior third-party staff in all the departments/divisions of Eni oil and gas industries, Nigeria as currently constituted. The population was collected from the HR departments of the companies under survey.

Table 1: Population Distribution of the Study Companies

Eni Oil & Gas Industries, Nigeria	Number of Staff
Nigeria Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC)	2, 024
Nigeria Agip Exploration Ltd (NAE)	344
Agip Energy & Natural Resources Ltd(AENR)	162
Total	2,530

Source: https://www.eni.com/en_NG/who-we-are/eni-in-nigeria.page

The sample size of the study comprised 345 staff, and was determined using the Taro Yemane's formula, while the judgmental sampling technique was used to arrive at the test units.

Table 2: Sample Proportion from each of the Study Companies

Eni Oil & Gas Industries, Nigeria	Population	Sample Size
Nigeria Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC)	2, 024	276
Nigeria Agip Exploration Ltd (NAE)	344	47
Agip Energy & Natural Resources Ltd (AENR)	162	22
Total	2, 530	345

Source: Simulation from SPSS output of data analysis on influence of employee empowerment on output quality (2021).

The study collected primary data using a structured questionnaire. The instrument was structured in the Likert five-point scale format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The validity of the instrument was confirmed by academics and industry experts in measurement and evaluation and human resource management. The reliability of the instrument was

determined using the Cronbach's alpha test, with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). The questionnaire was administered through email. The simple regression served as the test statistic. All statistical analysis was aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0

Model Specification

In line with the operational conceptual framework of the study, the mathematical model below was developed.

$$OQ = f(EE) \dots\dots\dots (i)$$

Where:

OQ = Output Quality
EE = Employee Empowerment

Applying econometric form, the model becomes:

$$OQ = f[\alpha_0 + \beta_1 EE - - - \mu_i]$$

Where:

OQ = Output Quality
EE = Employee Empowerment
 α = Regression Constant
 β = Regression Coefficient
 μ = Stochastic term

Results

Table 3: Model Summary of the influence of employee empowerment on output quality.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.866 ^a	.749	.749	1.956
a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Empowerment				
b. Dependent Variable: Output Quality				

Source: SPSS output of data analysis on influence of employee empowerment on output quality (2021).

The SPSS result on the model summary as displayed on Table 3 shows that the regression coefficient (R) is 0.866; which means that employee empowerment has a very strong, positive influence on output quality. Equally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.749;

indicating that 74.9% of changes in the output quality are attributable to employee empowerment, while the remaining 25.1% are due to factors outside employee empowerment.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA^a) showing the significance of the influence of employee empowerment on output quality

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3646.546	1	3646.546	953.525	.000 ^b
	Residual	1219.946	319	3.824		
	Total	4866.492	320			

a. Dependent Variable: Output Quality

b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Empowerment

Source: SPSS output of data analysis on influence of employee empowerment on output quality (2021).

The result on the ANOVA Table reveals that employee empowerment influences output quality, and that this influence is statistically significant at $F(1,319) = 953.525$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.749$. This means that the model

has a good fit. In view of the aforesaid, we reject the null hypothesis which states that employee empowerment does not significantly influence output quality (given that the probability value of $0.000 < 0.05$).

Table 5: Regression Coefficients^a of Employee Empowerment and Output Quality

Model		Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.687	.478		5.617	.000
	Employee Empowerment	.828	.027	.866	30.879	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Output Quality

Source: SPSS output of data analysis on influence of employee empowerment on output quality (2021).

The regression coefficient on Table 5 reveals that the value of the constant is 2.687, while the slope for employee empowerment is 0.828. This result signifies that output quality can be predicted by employee empowerment; which implies that a unit change in employee empowerment will result in 0.828 changes in output quality. Similarly, the significance of the predictor variable (employee empowerment) is shown in sig. column (where probability value is $0.000 < 0.05$), which indicates that employee empowerment significantly predict output quality. The standardized Beta value is 0.866, same as the regression coefficient (R) in model summary Table above. A model to determine how the dependent variable (output quality) changes with respect to the predictor variable (employee empowerment) is stated thus:

$$OQ = f[\alpha_0 + \beta_1 EE]$$

Putting the values in the model above

$$OQ = 2.687 + 0.828EE$$

Discussion of Findings

The results of the empirical analysis demonstrates that employee empowerment has a very strong positive and statistically significant influence on output quality as evident in the regression coefficient (R) of 0.866 with a probability value of 0.000 less than critical value of

0.05. Likewise, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.749; indicating that 74.9% of the variations in output quality is attributable to employee empowerment. Equally, the regression coefficient has a constant value of 2.687, while the slope for employee empowerment is 0.828. This implies that employee empowerment predicts output quality, and that a unit increase in employee empowerment will attract 0.828 increases in output quality. These findings suggests that if Eni oil and gas industries, Nigeria, empower their workforce through participation and involvement; their experience, capabilities, and problem-solving skills will improve, and at same time, they will feel intrinsically motivated to perform better; and this will translate to improved output quality.

Our findings support that of Abbasi, Khan, and Rashid (2011) whose study observed that a positive relationship exists between employee empowerment, service quality and customer satisfaction; suggesting that employee empowerment results in higher level of service quality and customer satisfaction. Our findings also corroborate the findings of Tsaur, Chang, and Wu (2004) that employee empowerment predicts service quality; and that more empowered employees deliver better service quality to customers. In addition, our findings corroborate the observation that employee empowerment, teamwork and employee training have

significant positive effect on employee productivity (Hanaysha, 2016).

Furthermore, our findings support the position of scholars that employee empowerment is a suitable management strategy that enable the delivery of consistent quality services, which results in enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gibson, 2003). Empowered frontline employees have the potential to increase service quality, due to inherent characteristics of services, which require the presence of both the consumer and frontline employee in the production and consumption process. Our findings further align with the finding of Tutaret *al.* (2011) that perceived employee empowerment enhances achievement motivation and performance of employees; and that of Albaqqali and Sankar (2019) that a strong correlation exists between empowerment of employees and job performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of employee empowerment on output quality. Going by the results of the empirical analysis and the discussion of findings

that ensued, the study concluded that employee empowerment has a very strong positive and statistically significant influence on output quality of Eni oil and gas industries, Nigeria; and that output quality in the form of fitness for purpose, percentage of error, and product superiority depends on employee empowerment as manifested in employee participation and involvement. Empowering employees to perform their assigned jobs is fundamental to quality delivery, because quality is assumed to begin with experienced and knowledgeable employees. The study thus recommends that Eni oil and gas industries in Nigeria should adopt employee empowerment as a strategic posture in their resolve to continuously deliver output quality. The understanding of output quality in relation to employee empowerment should not only be perceived in the context of how it adds to profit margin of firms; but as a strategy that is capable of transforming the entire workforce which is the most 'valuable assets' of firms.

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