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Correlates of job autonomy, personal initiatives and employees' psychological well-being in ministry of agriculture, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed whether job autonomy and personal initiatives are predictors of psychological well-being among employees in the Ministry of Agriculture, Ogun State, Nigeria. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 208 employees for the study. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean scores, and correlational analysis. Results showed that 85.6% of the employees noted that they were able to choose the way to go about their job while 83.6% reiterated that they were allowed to decide how to go about getting their job done. Also, the result on personal initiative showed that 97.0% noted that they chose the role they wish to have in a group while 84.1% reported that they have a plan for making their lives more balanced. For psychological well-being, 97.6% of the employees accounted that the demands of everyday life always get them down while 87.5% affirmed that they have confidence in their own opinions, even if they are different from the way other employees think. There were significant relationships between job autonomy ($r = 0.01^{**}$), personal initiatives ($r = 0.01^{**}$), and psychological well-being. Employees' job autonomy and personal initiative are predictors of psychological well-being. The ministry should encourage the use of job autonomy and personal initiative by the employees where necessary to improve the psychological well-being and administrative strength of the ministry.

Key words: Job autonomy, personal initiative, psychological well-being, correlates, ministry of agriculture

Introduction

Employee's psychological well-being in recent times has been confronted with a myriad of workplace-related challenges, and lots of these challenges occur within the work organization where employees spend about eight hours of their time daily. Therefore, one of the ways organizations can improve the well-being of employees is to provide them with autonomy

and allow them to use their initiative, these will help them make decisions and initiate plans that would allow them to adapt or resolve the threats that confront them. However, several factors can determine whether or not the psychological well-being of employees will be improved. In this study, job autonomy experienced and personal initiative exhibited by the employees are

used as predictors to determine employees' level of psychological well-being.

Job autonomy refers to the degree of employees' autonomy in work progress and methods (li, 2018). It is the extent to which the organization provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the workers in determining the procedure to be used in doing their job tasks. Adu and Maxwell (2018) noted that job autonomy relieves some level of pressure on the part of the organization since it enables employees to explore, innovate, create, and make more important decisions that concern their area of work. This implies that employees with high job autonomy are likely to engage in doing their designated work and thus, may feel responsible for the outcome. In addition, Dorssen-boog *et al.*, (2020) accentuates that giving employees more job autonomy may increase their internal motivation, thus leading to more energetic, enthusiastic, and dedicated work. Meanwhile, job autonomy is described as an individual's amount of independence in determining how work is done, which includes making a decision on the sorts of processes to carry out the job (Ade-Adeniji *et al.*, 2021).

Investigating the association between job autonomy and psychological well-being, it is hypothesized that an increase in job resources particularly job autonomy improves the well-being of employees (Clausen *et al.*, 2022). Job autonomy is often measured by the extent to which employees decide what to do, how and when to do it Ford *et al.*, (2018), this may increase employees' sense of control and reduce work-life conflict Karhula *et al.*, (2020) thereby serving as a predictor to improved employees' overall well-being such as emotional exhaustion Dettmers and Bredehoft (2020) mental well-being Stiglbauer and Kovacs (2018) , job satisfaction Karhula *et al.*, cognitive

irritation and work engagement (Dettmers and Bredehoft 2020).

The importance of employee initiative has become increasingly important for organizations due to advancements in globalization and technological development (Jill, 2020). Personal initiatives can reinforce employees' sense of responsibility and prosocial motivation Cal *et al.*, (2019) and self-efficacy Zacher *et al.*, (2019) which in turn support employees' behaviour, hence improve their psychological well-being. In addition, Joshi *et al.*, (2021) asserts that personal initiative is one of the important personality characteristics that induce employees to take action toward tasks that need to be resolved and for which outcome may not be very certain. It implies that employees with high levels of personal initiative work better on their tasks and improve their well-being.

Therefore, psychological well-being is a critical aspect of employees and organizational performance. Employees who have a high level of psychological well-being are more likely to be engaged, satisfied, and productive at work and less likely to experience burnout or turnover (Stiglbauer and Kovacs, 2018). The study brought to the fore empirical evidence of employees' level of job autonomy experience, personal initiative exhibited, and the state of their and how this can be improved upon through their work. The study's analysis was guided by the following research objectives; examine employees' experience of job autonomy in the organization, personal initiatives exhibited and examine the state of employees' psychological well-being. The study also hypothesized if there exists a significant association between predictors (age, household size, work experience, monthly income job autonomy, personal initiative) and psychological well-being.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in year 2023 in Ogun State, one of the states in southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria with the coordinates of 6.9980° N and 3.4737° E. The population of the study was all employees in all departments/units in the Ministry of Agriculture, Ogun state. A two-stage sampling procedure was used to select two-hundred and forty-seven (247) from six (6) departments in the ministry. Simple random selection was done in the first stage to select five departments namely; administration & supply, fishery services, livestock services, account & finance, mechanical engineering, and veterinary services from where the sample frame of the respondents from the six (6) departments/units were generated. This gave a total of 443 respondents (84 from administration and supply, 57 from fishery services, 115 from livestock, 25 from account & finance, 22 from Mechanical engineering, and 140 from veterinary services as of 2023. In the second stage, proportionate sampling selection of the respondents using Watson (2021) sampling determination at variation in sample size determination of 84.2% of the total respondents of the selected departments and this gave a total sample size of 208 respondents.

Job autonomy was measured by adapting a 9-item scale developed by Mworira *et al.*, (2012) on a four-point rating scale of 'always', 'occasionally', 'rarely', and 'never' with scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 assigned. The minimum obtainable score was 9 and the maximum was 36. The weighted mean score was generated to rank their responses to determine the most experienced job autonomy. The personal initiative was measured by a list of nine statements developed by Frese *et al.*, (1997) with the response options of always,

occasionally, rarely, and never with scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 assigned respectively. The minimum obtainable score was 9 and the maximum was 36. The weighted mean score was generated to rank their responses to determine the most exhibited personal initiative.

To measure the state of employees' psychological well-being, 13 psychological well-being statements were developed by Brunetto *et al.*, (2011) with the responses options of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree with a score of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 assigned respectively for all positive statements and was reversed for the negatively worded statements. The maximum obtainable score was 65 with a minimum score of 12. A weighted score was generated and used to rank the employees' state of psychological well-being. Data were analyzed using correction analysis and the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.70 and above for the variables were obtained.

Results and Discussion

Job Autonomy Experienced by the Employees

Job autonomy experienced by the employees (Table 1) shows that 47.1% of the respondents occasionally decide on how to get their job done and 62.0% possess the ability to choose a correct approach to go about their job duties. In addition, 61.5% and 54.3% noted that they are free to choose a convenient method to execute their work and modify their job objective to accomplish them respectively. This finding connotes that employees have the autonomy and freedom to decide how better and more convenient ways and approaches of getting their jobs done. This agreed with the findings of Yunus and Mostafa (2022) and Adu and Maxwell (2018) who noted that job autonomy provides employees with substantial freedom, independence, and discretion in

determining the procedures to be used in carrying out job tasks.

Personal Initiatives Exhibited by the Employees

Results in Table 2 showed the personal initiatives exhibited by the respondent in their workplace. About 56.7% noted that they always exhibited a good sense of progression in their career and 52.4% exhibited specific action plans to help them achieve their career goal. Furthermore, 66.8% and 46.6% reiterate that they know how to change direction in career progression and are aware of the direction to

reaching their career goals respectively. This finding infers that employees within the study area do not only exhibit work plans that help them achieve their career goals but also know how to adjust their plans to achieve career progression. In other words, employees develop ideas about their job and organizational improvement. According to Zacher *et al.*, (2019), employees' initiatives reinforce a sense of responsibility and personal motivation which in turn support work behaviour and influence their psychological well-being.

Table 1: Job Autonomy experienced by the Employees

Items	WMS	SD
Decide on how to go about getting my job done	408.3	0.88
Choose the way to go about my job duties	401.8	0.92
Free to choose the methods to use to execute my work	387.4	0.80
Control over job objectives and their accomplishment	373.6	0.88
Decide when to do particular work activities	367.3	0.87
Modify my job objectives and accomplish it	356.4	0.71
Control over work scheduling	317.8	0.82
Control over my job sequence	305.9	0.70
Decide when to do particular work activities	304.8	0.71

Source: Field survey (2023); Weighted Mean Score (WMS); Standard Deviation (SD)

Table 2: Personal Initiatives Exhibited by the Employees

Items	WMS	SD
Have a good sense of career progression	440.6	0.91
Specific action plan to help achieve career goals	438.9	0.76
Know how to change direction in career progression	436.3	0.74
Know the directions to reaching career goals	435.5	0.90
Take career life initiatives	427.7	0.61
Ability to choose career roles	420.8	0.75
Have a good understanding of career contribution	411.2	0.68
Planning to make career life more balanced	383.1	0.80
Initiate transition process for change in career	352.8	0.62

Source: Field survey (2023); Weighted Mean Score (WMS); Standard Deviation (SD)

State of Psychological Wellbeing of the Employees

The state of the psychological well-being of the employees (Table 3) reveals that 66.3% noted that they had new experiences that challenged their perception, 60.1% reported that life had been a continuous

process of learning and growth while 51.4% and 55.3% had confidence in their opinion and never wonder aimlessly in their career respectively. This connotes that employees maintain a healthy, happier, productive, and satisfying experience in the workplace. This concurs with the reports of Brim *et al.*,

(2019) that a good state of employees' psychological well-being maintains a social, productive, and satisfying dimension to health-related behaviours that add meaning to life and allows the attainment of maximum potentials.

Correlation between biographies, Job Autonomy, Personal Initiative and Psychological Wellbeing

The result shows that age ($r = 0.01$), work experience ($r = 0.01$), and monthly salary ($r = 0.01$) of the respondents were significantly ($P=0.01$) related to employees' initiatives. Also, job autonomy ($r = 0.01$) and personal initiative ($r = 0.01$) significantly ($P=0.01$) affect psychological well-being.

This implies that age, work experience, and monthly salary of employees influenced their level of personal initiative. That is, the more the work experience the better they take initiative in the workplace. Also, job autonomy and personal initiative exhibited by the employees influenced their state of psychological well-being. Practically, it means that for organizations to improve the state of employees' well-being, they must be provided with a degree of job independence to make decisions and initiate action to resolve threats that confront them. According to Greenier *et al.*, (2021) a good state of employees' psychological wellbeing can be maintained by allowing job discretion and initiating personal ideas.

Table 3: Psychological Wellbeing of Employees

Items	WMS	Sd
Had experiences that challenged my perception of myself	425.1	0.63
Life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth	332.6	0.45
Have confidence in my opinions though different from other employees	434.9	0.89
Never wonder aimlessly in life	245.5	0.66
Intake of the situation of my present situation	234.9	0.72
Always appreciate my personality trait	238.8	0.51
Influenced by employees with strong opinions	412.4	0.62
Good at managing daily work responsibilities	598.5	0.58
Willing to share my time with other employees	252.5	0.64
Judge by what is important and not what other employees feel	463.3	0.60
The demands of everyday life get me down	455.7	0.58
Do not make huge improvements a long-time goal	394.6	0.55
Never experience trusting relationships with other employees	302.4	0.58

Source: Field survey (2023); Weighted Mean Score (WMS); Standard Deviation (SD)

Table 4: Correlation between biographies, job autonomy, personal initiative and psychological wellbeing

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age							
HHS	0.01**						
Experience	0.01**	0.01**					
Salary	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**				
JA	0.04*	0.34	0.14	0.02*	(0.85)		
PI	0.01**	0.10	0.01**	0.01**	0.03*	(0.74)	
PW	0.14	0.27	0.15	0.35	0.01**	0.01**	(0.76)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 levels

Diagonal figures in parenthesis are Cronbach alpha values

Job Autonomy (JA), personal initiative (PI), Psychological well-being (PW), Household Size (HHS)

Conclusion and Recommendation

Job autonomy and employee's initiative were predictors of psychological well-being while biographies such as age, work experience, and monthly salary were predictors of employees' initiative. Employees freely decide on how best to go about getting their job done, exhibit a good sense of career progression, and have experiences that challenge their perception of work. The ministry should encourage the use of job autonomy and work initiative by the employees where necessary to improve their psychological well-being and administrative strength.

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