

Examining Team Communication and Mutual Support as Drivers of Work Performance among Team Members

ABSTRACT

This study examined team communication and mutual support as drivers of work performance among team members in the organization. The cross-sectional research design was used and with standardized instruments, data were collected from 133 participants from manufacturing organizations consisting of 63.9% males and 36.1% females whose age ranged from 21-54 years with a mean age of 31.71(SD, 8.7). Work performance was grouped into task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. The hypotheses were tested with the simple regression analysis. Data analysis revealed that team communication positively predicted task performance ($\beta = .56, p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($\beta = .55, p < 0.01$) while it negatively predicted counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = -.21, p < 0.05$). Also, mutual support positively predicted task performance ($\beta = .80, p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($\beta = .80, p < 0.01$) while it negatively predicted counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = -.17, p < 0.05$). The study recommends that management should encourage employees to work together and also educate them on these key behaviours (communication and mutual support) to help enhance employee performance in the organization.

Keywords: team communication, mutual support, task performance, contextual performance, counterproductive work behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Today's work environment is constantly faced with a lot of changes due to globalization, competition in the market, increased demand of goods and services by the consumers, and the consistent changes in consumer preferences (Scott & Tiessen, 1999). To deal with these consistent changes in the business environment, organizations have searched for new flexible ways of working through collective action of employees to achieve its goals and objectives. The human capital in an organization remains the most important factor that can aid the actualization of the organizational goals and objectives, especially in today's competitive market. An expected outcome for all organizations around the world is increased productivity. Therefore, all organizations are concerned with what should be done to increase and sustain high performance among employees and this has led to the grouping of workers to perform similar jobs, thereby placing a high demand on teamwork. Increasing organizational productivity is largely dependent on the performance of the human capital in the organization.

Teamwork is largely the foundation of all successful management, and it is also the means through which the overall result in relation to employee performance is improved. Teamwork is one of the measures taken by organizations to utilize and improve the performance of employees, while also providing the ideal environment for employees to develop their skills and knowledge of the job (Hartenian, 2003). Most notable studies on teamwork had majored in performance in the organization. Recently studies have been conducted to measure the influence of teamwork on team performance (e.g. Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; LePine et al., 2008; Hwang, 2018), job performance (Manzoor et al., 2011; Agwu, 2015; AI Salman & Hassan, 2016; Onyekwelu et al., 2018) and organizational trust (Isik, Timuruglu & Aliyev, 2015). Although numerous attempts have been made to investigate the relationship between teamwork and employee job performance, two major features in the literature necessitated the current study. Firstly, team performance is built on the performance of individuals that work in a team; therefore, it will be logical to measure how specific teamwork behaviour (team communication and mutual support) influences performance at an individual level. Performance at the individual level is usually measured along three dimensions; task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour (Koopmans et al., 2014). There exists a gap in the literature with regards to these three selected teamwork behaviour (team communication and mutual support) and how it impacts employee job performance across these three dimensions - task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. Since science relies on generalization, it will be appropriate to conduct research in this area to complement the existing one. This study seeks to contribute to the extant literature, and provides results that have potentials for generalization. The current study is focused on examining the impact of team communication, mutual support and balance of member contribution on employee work performance.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Team communication and mutual support

The changing trends towards prioritizing teamwork activities arise from the idea that they can allow the organization to fully utilize the skills of workers during restructuring so as to gain competitive advantage (Isik et al., 2015). A team is a special kind of group in which members have a set of skills that complement one another, have a common purpose, performance goals

and an approach to the task at hand (Dubrin, 2012). Teamwork is the process of working collaboratively with a group of people in order to achieve a goal and it is characterized by a common understanding and commitment to group goals by all members (Dubrin, 2012; Agarwal & Adjirackor, 2016). Alan (2003) described teamwork as an idea of working collaboratively in a group in order to achieve similar goals and objectives for the good of the people who use their service and the organization. Teamwork is the ability of a group of people to work together to achieve common goals and objectives that have the capacity of enhancing organizational growth.

Several outcomes of teamwork have been studied. The literature categorizes these outcomes into three groups; operational performance- performances that are directly related to the work processes which include workplace productivity (Doorewaard, Huys & Van Hootegeem, 1997; Glassop, 2002), product or service quality (Doorewaard et al, 1997; Glassop, 2002), transparency of the work processes (Doorewaard et al, 1997) and customer satisfaction and innovation (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). The other group looks at human resource management outcomes and the general performance of employees in the organization. Factors here include employee turnover and absenteeism (Doorewaard et al, 1997; Glassop, 2002) while other studies have looked directly at employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and the intention to leave (Doorewaard et al, 1997; Glassop, 2002). Several organizations have built a structure that encourages employees to work in a team because it empowers them and helps them develop autonomy, which is a source of job satisfaction and also helps reduce stress (Hayes, 2005). Employees working within a team can produce more output as compared to individuals.

Teamwork behaviour is a multifaceted construct that has become difficult to conceptualize because of the large varieties of behaviour that scholars consider to be team-related (Nijland, 2015). The concept of behaviour denotes covert and overt experience; teamwork behaviour takes the form of overt demonstrations and verbal statement that largely contributes to the overall demand of the team task (Rousseau, et al., 2006). There are specific behaviours that every team member is expected to demonstrate to help actualize the goals and objectives for which the team has been set up. Research has indicated that team trust, esprit de corp and information sharing are some necessary behaviour that every team member is expected to carry out (Agarwal & Adjirackor, 2016). According to Stevens and Campion (1994), team work behaviour could be divided into two broad categories namely; interpersonal (which include behaviours such as conflict resolution and communication) and self-management

(which includes task coordination and performance management). This study focuses on three selected behaviours (which include team communication and mutual support) and how they influence team members' work performance in the organization.

Communication which is one of the key variables in this study is defined as the exchange of information between two or more individuals irrespective of the medium used in making this exchange happen (Salas, Burke & Cannon-Bowers, 2003). Communication remains a fundamental aspect of any team. According to Pinto and Pinto (1990), communication provides a means through which information is exchanged, ideas are shared among team members, efforts are well coordinated and feedback provided. Through consistent communication trust is established among team members (Jarvenpaa & Leider, 2006). Effective communications among team members help facilitate the continuity in the team's shared mental model (Salas et al., 1997).

According to Hoegl and Germuenda (2001), the basic idea behind teamwork is mutual support; team members should support each other mutually instead of giving in to unhealthy competition between them. Mutual support is embedded in cooperation among team members and respecting team member's ideas and decisions. The quality of contribution and acceptance of ideas generated by members of a team increases when members effectively work together (Cooke & Szumal, 1994). Mutual support is very important in actualizing the major goal of the team and in increasing the performance of assigned tasks by team members.

Work Performance

The performance of employees has been a major challenge and reoccurring issue in management. Organizations are devising ways to motivate employees to achieve high performance at work (Lee & Wu, 2011). According to Liao et al. (2012), employee job performance is defined as "workers total performance in meeting the anticipated worth and achievement of tasks under the procedure and time requirements of the organization." They also went further to state that it is the standard for which most decisions are made in the organization for advancement, redundancy, rewards, punishments, reviews and salary changes. Employee performance embodies the total beliefs an employee has about their conduct and contributions to the general goals and objectives of the organization (Ahmad & Shahzad, 2011). Judge and Kammeyer-Muller (2012) considers job performance as the behaviours of employees that are consistent with the role expectations and that largely contributes to the performance of the organization.

Job performance is largely approached from three major dimensions- task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). Task performance entails the proficiency with which a worker performs central job roles and contributes to the technical core of the organization (Murphy, 1989; Campbell, 1990; Sonnentag & Frese, 2002). Borman and Motowidlo (1993) defined Contextual performance as “the individual behaviour that supports the organizational, social and psychological environment in which the technical core must function.” It related concepts include extra-tasks, efforts, initiative, and attention to duty, resourcefulness, creativity, politeness, effective communication, interpersonal relations and organizational citizenship behaviour (Johanim et al., 1982). Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) refers to the behaviour that harms the wellbeing of the organization (Retundo & Sackett, 2002) and it includes but not limited to behaviour such as complaining, tardiness, theft, misusing privileges and carrying out job tasks incorrectly.

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Generally, existing literature supports the claim that teamwork promotes employee job performance in the organization (e.g. Manzoor et al., 2011; Agwu, 2015; Onyekwelu et al., 2018). The literature on the role of team communication and mutual support on employee work performance is in dearth especially as it relates to task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. As a result, the bases for the empirical review and development of hypothesis are derived from studies on related studies on team communication, mutual support and work performance in the organization. Such findings are relevant to understanding the relationship that exists between the variables of interest. Using specific teamwork behaviours to measure employee productivity, Nijland (2015) found a positive significant relationship between five major indicators of teamwork behaviour (communication, mutual support, team cohesion, balance of member contribution and mutual performance monitoring) and employee productivity. Also, Asamu (2014) and Onifade et al. (2018) found significant relationship between communication and workers performance while Walid and Zubair (2016) demonstrated that teamwork behaviour such as communication, leadership, level of trust and accountability have a positive significant impact on employee performance while other factors such as intrapersonal skill and cohesiveness had no significant impact on employee performance.

Cheah et al. (2019) studied sustainable job performance among employees in young firm and found that mutual support is positively related to sustainable job performance. Hence, mutual support is highly considered to be important for teamwork and employee job performance. The framework guiding the current study is shown below:

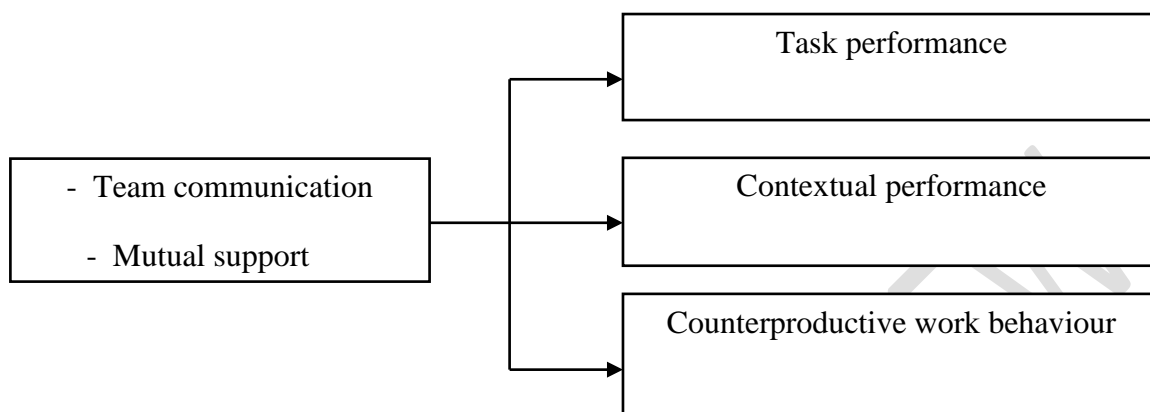


Figure 1: conceptual framework depicting the relationship between the variables

Hypotheses

In line with the reviews above, the following hypotheses have been generated to test the identified model:

Hypothesis 1: Team communication will significantly predict (a) task performance, (b) contextual performance, and (c) counterproductive work behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Mutual support will significantly predict (a) task performance, (b) contextual performance, and (c) counterproductive work behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Participants for the study were 133 employees selected from three privately owned manufacturing companies in Lagos state, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 85(63.9%) males and 48(36.1%) females whose age ranged from 21 to 54 years with a mean age of 31.71(SD, 8.7). The marital status of the participants was also reported. 72(54.14%) were married,

59(44.36%) were single while 2(1.50%) separated. All the participants had a formal education with a minimum of O' Level certification which also accounted for the efficient response to the scale items and also the high return rate of the questionnaires.

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the management of the three manufacturing companies enlisted for the study. Data was collected from the employees selected from the three manufacturing companies. A selection criterion was necessary to help identify workers who are actively working in a team. The help of the line managers and supervisors was then solicited to help identify employees who work in teams. Workers that do not meet this requirement were excluded from the study. Probability sampling technique (simple random) was adopted in selecting the participants who meet this criterion so that they will have an equal chance of being selected for the study. A total number of 180 questionnaires were distributed across the three manufacturing companies within an interval of three weeks, 156 questionnaires were retrieved. However, after sorting out the questionnaire, 133 were used for the analysis of data.

Instruments

A structured self-report questionnaire was used to gather relevant information from the participants. The questionnaire contains information such as gender, age, marital status, type of organizational and educational qualification, designation in the organization, and the four scales used in the study. The three scales are discussed below:

Team communication: team communication was measured using the Weimar (2013) 5-item scale on teamwork communication. The measure was based on a 5 –point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Sample items for the scale include: “there is frequent communication within my team” and “Information passed across are useful for the team to work better.” Nijland (2015) test of reliability of the instrument yielded a cronbach alpha of .81. For this study, a coefficient alpha of .79 was obtained.

Mutual support: mutual support was measured using the Weimar (2013) 6-item scale on mutual support. The measure was based on a 5 –point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Sample items for the scale include: “Suggestion and contributions of team members are respected” and “the team members help and supported each other as best as they can.” Nijland (2015) test of reliability of the instrument yielded a cronbach alpha of .89. For this study, a coefficient alpha of .84 was obtained.

Work performance: this was measured with the individual work performance scale developed by Koopmans et al. (2014). It is an 18-item scale with three dimensions used to measure task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. The internal consistency and construct validity of the overall scale was good (Koopmans et al., 2014). The scale is highly suitable for generic use, i.e. workers from all types of occupation can participate. Sample items on the scale are: "I keep in mind the result that I have to achieve in my work", "I took on a challenging work task when I am available" and "I complain about unimportant matters at work." The 5- point likert scaling (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) was also utilized here. For this study, a coefficient alpha of .80, .86 and .79 was obtained for task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour respectively.

Design and Statistics

The cross-sectional research design was adopted in the study. The cross-sectional research design is appropriate because the sample will be drawn from the larger populations and data will also be collected from the sample at one point in time (Shaughnessy et al., 2003). The hypotheses were tested with the simple regression analysis. Conditions necessary for the use of regression analysis were strictly adhered to. For instance, likert scale will be used to establish interval scaling while the scatter plot produced by the IBM-SPSS from the data showed a linear relationship between the individual variables in the study. IBM-SPSS Statistics version 24 was used for the data analysis.

Common Method Variance

Due to some challenges encountered in survey research, some procedures were adopted to help reduce common method variance that may affect the final result of the study. The first challenge was how to deal with participant's misinterpretation of scale items. As suggested in the literature, the wording of the questionnaire was very clear and concise for the participants to understand. To reduce social desirable response, anonymity was guaranteed on the cover later of the questionnaire while also stating that there are no correct or incorrect responses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Steenkamp, de Jong & Baumgartner, 2010).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics reveals a moderate degree of team communication, mutual support, task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. With a five point likert summated rating scale, $\bar{x} = 3.91$ (SD, 0.78), $\bar{x} = 3.42$ (SD, 0.77), $\bar{x} = 3.20$ (SD, 0.91), $\bar{x} = 3.30$ (SD, 1.10), and $\bar{x} = 3.64$ (SD, .61) were obtained for team communication, mutual support, task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour respectively. The degree of correlation between the predictor variable and the criterion variable were modest. This indicates the absence of multicollinearity in the model.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix of the variables

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Team communication	3.91	.78				
2 Mutual support	3.42	.77	.79**			
3 TP	3.20	.91	.56**	.80**		
4 CP	3.30	1.10	.55**	.80**	.43**	
5 CWB	3.64	.61	-.21*	-.17*	-.15	-.14

Note: TP= Task Performance, CP= Contextual Performance, CWB= Counterproductive Work Behaviour, * $p < 0.05$ level (two-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$ level (two-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing

Statistics from table 2 shows the simple regression analysis predicting task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour from team communication and mutual support. As indicated by the individual variables, team communication positively and significantly predicted task performance ($\beta = .56$, $p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($\beta = .55$, $p < 0.01$) while team communication had a significant negative relationship with counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = -.21$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 statistics indicated that team communication accounted for 32%, 30% and 5% variance for task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour respectively. On the basis of Cohen's (1988) criterion, R^2 of 0.32 and 0.30 indicates large effect size for task and contextual performance while R^2 of 0.05 indicates small effect size for counterproductive work behaviour. The B value of .67 and .77 indicates that for every one unit increase in team communication, task performance and contextual performance increases by 0.67 and 0.77 respectively, while B value of -.17 indicates that for every one unit increase in team communication, counterproductive work behaviour reduces by 0.17. The Durbin-Watson values were within the acceptable range with reference to autocorrelation.

Table 2: Simple regression analysis between the predictors and criterion variables

	B	SE	β	Durbin-Watson	95% CI
Team communication					
Task performance	.67	.08	.56**	1.80	(.50, .84)
Contextual performance	.77	.10	.55**	1.90	(.56, .97)
Counterproductive work behaviour	-.17	.07	-.21*	1.62	(-.30, -.04)
Mutual support					
Task performance	.97	.06	.80**	2.01	(.83, 1.10)
Contextual performance	1.14	.07	.80**	1.90	(.99, 1.28)
Counterproductive work behaviour	-.14	.07	-.17*	1.64	(-.28, -.03)

**p < 0.01 level (two-tailed), *p < 0.05 level (two-tailed).

The table also showed the simple regression analysis predicting task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour from mutual support. The table indicated that mutual support significantly and positively predicted task performance ($\beta = .80$, $p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($\beta = .80$, $p < 0.01$) while mutual support had a significant negative relationship with counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = -.17$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 statistics indicated that team communication accounted for 64%, 65% and 3% variance for task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour respectively. On the basis of Cohen's (1988) criterion, R^2 of 0.64 and 0.65 indicates large effect size for task and contextual performance while R^2 of 0.05 indicates small effect size for counterproductive work behaviour. The B value of .97 and 1.14 indicates that for every one unit increase in mutual support, task performance and contextual performance increases by 0.97 and 1.14 respectively, while B value of -.14 indicates that for every one unit increase in mutual support, counterproductive work behaviour reduces by 0.14. The Durbin-Watson values were within the acceptable range with reference to autocorrelation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall aim of the current study was to examine the predictive role of team communication and mutual support on work performance across three fundamental areas of performance namely; task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviour. A distinctive feature of the study was to measure the impact of team communication and mutual support on employee performance across these three areas.

The hypothesis indicating that there will be a significant predictive relationship between team communication and the three dimensions of work performance was supported. Specifically, team communication positively and significantly predicted task and contextual performance. This is an indication that working in teams is highly significant in enhancing employee task and contextual performance in the organization. Therefore, the organization's technical core (related to specific tasks in the organization) will benefit from team communication. Also, this result also indicated that employees will be willing to go beyond their formal job roles and take on extra roles that can enhance performance in the organization as team communication increases. This result is also in congruence with the extant literature on team communication and work performance (Asamu, 2014; Onifade et al., 2018; Walid & Zubair, 2016). The results for hypothesis 1 also indicated that team communication negatively and significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviour. This is an indication that as communication among team members increases in the organization; counterproductive work behaviour tends to decrease.

The hypothesis which stated that mutual support will significantly predict the three dimensions of work performance was also supported in this study. In specifics, mutual support positively and significantly predicted task and contextual performance. These findings indicate that mutual support among team members promotes task and contextual performance in the organization. The results are in line with Cheah et al. (2019) who found that mutual support is positively related to sustainable job performance. The results for hypothesis 1 also indicated that mutual support negatively and significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviour. This is an indication that as mutual support among team members increases in the organization; counterproductive work behaviour tends to decrease. The research objectives were achieved and the following conclusions were drawn based on the research findings. The results indicated that team communication and mutual support are significant drivers for work performance in the organization. Therefore, by promoting team communication and mutual support, performance of employees is enhanced.

Managerial Implications

Teamwork, as shown in the existing literature and this study, is of great importance to employee's work performance. The findings of this study stressed the importance of team communication and mutual support in enhancing task and contextual performance on one hand, while diminishing counterproductive work behaviour on the other. This has direct implications for management practice. Management should encourage employees to work together and also educate them on these key behaviours (communication and mutual support) to help enhance the performance of employees in the organization.

Limitations and Future Studies

Although some steps were taken to control for common method variance which is one of the weaknesses of self report measures, it is important to state other limitations of the study which may influence the interpretation of the results. The design of the study was cross-sectional. The cross-sectional research design made it difficult to establish cause-effect relationships. Therefore, it will be difficult to establish that one variable is as a result of the other. Future studies can employ field experimentations in organizations and longitudinal study to provide causal explanations of the variables of interest. Also, the research was carried out in a specific kind of organization (manufacturing). Future studies should consider other types of organizations.

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