

THE CHALLENGE OF JOB APATHY AND THE EXIGENCY FOR WORK-LIFE FLUIDITY IN EMERGING WORK SYSTEMS

Kuroakegha Bio Basuo PhD

Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, P.M.B. 071, Amassoma. Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

E-mail: kuroakeghabasuo@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: *This paper addressed the challenges of job apathy and the imperatives of work-life fluidity in not only addressing such but also as a more suitable framework (compared to that of work-life balance) in emerging work systems. The paper, draws on the cognitive dissonance theory, in explaining the implications of perceived contractor information on the mental health of the individual. Job apathy is identified as an expression of the workers' cognitive dissonance, following the contradictions they experience with their expectations and the realities in work systems. The paper is designed as a theoretical review, espousing the concepts of work-life balance, work-life fluidity and job apathy; and also advancing literature on the importance of fluidity between employee organisational responsibilities and life obligations work systems, in boosting their engagement and commitment levels to their job and the organisation as well. It was concluded that the structuring of roles and the adapting of work systems to be more accommodating and supportive of work-life fluidity, facilitates improved employee perceptions of placement and value to the organization; that way reducing behaviour of apathy in the workplace.*

Keywords: *Work-life fluidity, work-life balance, job apathy, cognitive dissonance theory.*

INTRODUCTION

Work systems are changing. Much of these changes stem from the need for sustained performance and effectiveness, in the face of evolving markets and developments in the global business context (Nadeem, 2020; Bartunek & Woodman, 2015). Report (Akintaro, 2023) indicates mounting economic pressure on organizations, such that have led to significant staff cuts and the divestiture of units. Ukpe (2023) revealed that 36.96% of Nigerian businesses were forced to lay off staff in 2023 due to various reasons, ranging from naira shortages to unstable market conditions. This follows the departure of some notable manufacturing companies and conglomerates such as Unilever, P&G, and GSK, from Nigeria due to the increasing challenges and cost of operating in the country; thus, worsening concerns of job loss across the country (Ikpoto & Egola, 2023). These have impacted negatively on workers' sense of safety, and feelings of organizational membership (Ukpe, 2023; Akintaro, 2023). Ukpe (2023) asserted that such uncertainty with regard to placement and relevance creates disillusion with the organization and an apathetic disposition toward the job and also the organization.

Job apathy describes a state or feeling of lack of motivation, interest or concern for one's role or responsibility in the organization (Jain & Kaur, 2014; Taiwo, 2020). Job apathy, as Akintayo (2012) noted, slows down production as workers are not driven and lack the required morale for advancing the objectives of the organization. It is in this vein a major setback for the organization as it stalls the organization's performance and effectiveness. Research (Saddat et al, 2013; Vikas & Ravi, 2011; Al Shbail et al, 2018) trace such feelings to the worker's experience of lack of control over events related to their roles or work, and their disenchantment with their work. Scholars (Taiwo, 2020; Vikas & Ravi, 2011) identify these as not only an individual-level concern but also one that emphasizes organizational management or leadership involvement in addressing this challenge. Sirota and Klein (2013) asserted that workers desire some level of control over their roles. They

want to be able to dictate how they apply themselves and not seem or appear as mere pawns in the hands of others, superiors or employers.

Vikas and Ravi (2011) researched working conditions and the impact of such on the mental and social well-being of employees. The study offered implications that also drew into consideration outcomes of employee apathy and disconnection with others in the organization. Likewise, Saddat et al (2013) observed that there was a close link between workers' experiences and their apathetic disposition toward their roles and responsibilities. These experiences, as was observed, bordered not only single, and unconnected events such as conflict between staff, but on prevalent and recurring workplace features that they (employees) appear unable to escape, control and are imposed upon by. One such, is the pressure linked to the changes and increasing volatility of the business environment, and the apparent lack of control over role demands (Abildgaard et al, 2018). Such pressure, as Abildgaard et al (2018) asserted, can be depriving of employee quality and personal time, and create cognitive dissonance in the individual. There is therefore the need to address this concern, one for which this paper identifies the role of work-life fluidity.

Work-life fluidity prescribes the scheduling and structuring of jobs or roles in ways that ensure flexibility and the effective fusing of work roles with personal or family roles (Demetrious, 2023). This echoes the growing refute of the work-life balance theory, and the establishment of boundaries between work and personal life (Darcy et al, 2012; Gregson, 2023). According to Gregson (2023), both work and family life or responsibilities are dynamic. Meaning, such obligations are not clear-cut in the actual sense. Emergencies occur, and most often, exceptions have to and are continually made. Work-life fluidity describes the integration of work and life responsibilities in ways that support the seamless transition between roles (Demetrious, 2023). This paper is a theoretical review of literature, and it is designed to reinforce and at the same time, expand knowledge on the concept of job apathy, and the role of work-life fluidity in addressing such. The paper is justified on the basis that it clarifies the imperatives and substantiality of work-life fluidity as a more applicable approach and perspective in emerging work systems.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

The cognitive dissonance theory describes the implications of perceived contradictory information on the mental well-being of the individual (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019; Koller & Salzberger, 2012). Initially proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957, in explaining psychological changes in individual behaviour, the theory has gained a significant foothold in the management and social sciences, adapted by recent scholars in explaining relationships and in predicting individual actions, especially within organizational settings (Gaweonski, 2012; Harmon-Jones, 2019). According to McGrath (2017), the cognitive dissonance theory expatiates on the link between perceptions and individual attitudes and disposition toward their work or co-workers.

The adoption of the cognitive dissonance theory as the theoretical framework in this paper is such that is designed to clarify the worker's experience of work-related stress, the lack of control over their roles and the inability to address personal obligations due to the pressure from work (Westmeyer, 2012). Job apathy is identified in this paper as an outcome of inadequate functional frameworks that are highly demanding of the worker, even exploitative, as such use and when convenient, readily dispose of the individual (Taiwo, 2010; Vikas & Ravi, 2011). This paper thus examines work-life fluidity as necessary, in enabling a more supportive and humane approach to work; one where workers' interests and well-being are integrated into the organisation's overall disposition and pursuit of its objectives.

BALANCE OR FLUIDITY: THE NATURE OF WORK

Work can be considered as a human and social behaviour (Barley & Kunda, 2001). Human, because it is internalized, involving both mental and physical activities targeted at attaining a specific purpose or goal; social because it can also be externalized, communicated and related to significant others who may be partners, or collaborators in the accomplishment of such, or also in the assessment

and validation of its outcome (Florisson & Mandl, 2018). The relegation of the concept to the narrow bracket or confines of actions that generate profit or that are solely for monetary gain strips it of its fundamental principle or essence; and that is the fact that work offers meaning and is essential to well-being (Jacobs, 2017; Barley & Kunda, 2001). However, work in the organization, or employment, describes such, dedicated to the interest and goals of the organization and for such, the individual is compensated or rewarded in line with their contributions or efforts (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

The theory of work-life balance describes a disposition to organizational work, that emphasizes on the establishment of boundaries between organizational work, and the life or personal affairs of the individual (Gregson, 2023; Darcy et al, 2012). It prescribes the use of factors such as time, in advancing parameters that determine when to work, and when to address family or personal obligations. However, as studies (Allen et al, 2014; Barrett, 2014; Darcy et al, 2012) argue, work systems are by their nature, microcosms of a larger and more complex and dynamic environment. One within which time, itself, is relative (depending on your location), and one which is constantly imposed upon by the underlying factors of politics, ideologies, technology and also culture (Darcy et al, 2012). For this reason, scholars (Darcy et al, 2012; Ammons, 2013; Greenhaus et al, 2012) have criticised the theory of work-life balance, noting that one of its major flaws is that it assumes some form of stability in the environment; assumptions which as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the observed 24-hour demand for health workers on their duty posts, are fallible and inapplicable in the reality of work systems (Demetrious, 2023; Gregson, 2023).

The theory of work-life fluidity, on the other hand, identifies more, with the relativity of time, and the instability of the business environment (Kossek & Michel, 2010). According to Darcy et al (2012), Work-life fluidity extends beyond the scheduling of roles, to the structuring and adapting of work systems to be reflexive and anticipatory of change and other inconveniences that way arise from environmental or even personal disruptions at the workplace or to the organization (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010; Glavin & Schieman, 2011). Work-life fluidity, offers a flexible disposition toward functions and operations, one that is emphatic of support staff, and even replacements where necessary. It is a system that incorporates family values and facilities that recognize family responsibilities (for example the setting up of a creche facility within the organisations' premises) and the imperatives of integrating such into the framework of the work system (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010). Work-life fluidity in this sense is the extent to which the employee can effectively transverse between their work and family roles with much ease and support from the organization (Hahn & Dormann, 2013; Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010).

JOB APATHY AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Job apathy is the employee's experience of disconnectedness with their roles and as such their lack of concern or interest in its outcome (Van den Broeck et al, 2013). Apathy is expressed in the employee's nonchalance toward their roles as a result of a lack of morale or motivation toward addressing it (Jain & Kaur, 2014). Jain and Kaur (2014) argued that workers bring with them, to the organization, a set of expectations, which when unfulfilled, or when the reality of their situations counter or contrast with their expectations, leads to cognitive dissonance, and as such, a form of detachment or alienation from their role or the organization. Akintayo (2012) posited that conditions of pressure, unease, fear (especially over the loss of a job or particular placements), disrespect, and the lack of control or autonomy, are some of the major factors or conditions that could spur outcomes or feelings of job apathy. This agrees with Taiwo's (2010) position that apathy, precedes turnover.

Some (Yusuf & Metiboba, 2012; Sirota & Klein, 2013) argue that apathy is more expensive and costs the organization much more than turnover. This is because, unlike turnover, which entails the employee exit from the organization, employees who experience apathy are yet with the organization and continue drudgingly with their work, producing less, and negatively impacting the behaviour of their co-workers. Workers who experience job apathy, become robotic and lacking of

affection for or identification with their roles. Moreover, job apathy can be difficult to observe, except as Ballaro et al (2020) pointed out, through the effective application of performance measurement systems that provide consistent reports on workers' performance and can track their social and task behaviour in the workplace. Job apathy, in this vein, is sapping and detrimental to the overall well-being and health of the organization (Sirota & Klein, 2013; Allen et al, 2007).

WORK-LIFE FLUIDITY AND JOB APATHY

The structuring of roles and work systems to be more accommodating and supportive of the fusing of the work and life roles or obligations of the employee is such that enhances the worker or employees' control over their time and functionality in the workplace (Demetrious, 2023). Demetrious (2023) described work-life fluidity as such that emphasizes outcomes, rather than the process, hence, the required leverages and frameworks are instituted in line with ensuring workers are at their most creative and engaged state of mind when it comes to their job and the performance of such. Work-life fluidity is empowering as it creates or facilitates the conditions that recognise the value of the employee and place them as central and important to the organisation. The system, thus, validates and makes room for other concerns of the worker, demonstrating commitment to their welfare and well-being (Glavin & Schieman, 2011; Park et al, 2011).

Studies (Greenhaus et al, 2012; Kossek & Michel, 2010; Park et al, 2011) indicate that work-life fluidity is enabling of improved levels of control and autonomy for employees, and enhances their interpretations of placement and relevance to the organization. Hahn and Dormann (2013) in their study, demonstrated that fluidity in work and life obligations, enriches the quality of the employees' relationships, at home and the workplace. This is because they can prioritise their responsibilities in ways that reduce distractions at both spectrums. Workers in this vein are more focused, and involved, and have a higher collaborative spirit than those who are constantly missing out on their family events, and responsibilities as family members (Hahn & Dormann, 2013). One finds that while the benefits of such fluidity are far-reaching, it is also important to be cognizant of some of the challenges associated with or linked to the development or adoption of fluidity in work systems or work-life fluidity.

Some of the dominant and prevailing concerns of the system are the additional costs or expenditures incurred in operating additional facilities that cater to the family needs or concerns of employees in the organization (Barrett, 2014; Ammons, 2013). Ammons (2013) also pointed to the concerns of intrusions or disruptions arising or caused by the interference of one responsibility unto the other (for example work disruptions from family phone calls, or involvement in the individual's workspace). These as Ammons (2013) posited, demonstrate the apparent gaps in the approach, but as Darcy et al (2012) argued, measures can be installed or instituted to help ameliorate such disruptions or the effects of such, on the process and outcome of work in the organization. When it comes to the funding of family-oriented facilities, workers can be taxed in line with their use of such facilities.

Furthermore, as earlier pointed out in this paper, organizations can make use of supportive staff that can stand in in the case of emergencies or disruptions to a particular employee's role (Barrett, 2014; Gregson, 2023). Park et al (2011) affirmed that the potential of work-life fluidity for emerging work systems is such that accommodates the concerns of remote work and also contributes positively toward the effective management and coordination of human resources in global organizations. This is the recognition of time differences and the relativity of such, is more tolerant and favourably disposed toward communication and collaboration between team members or workers operating from different time zones (Demetrious, 2023; Park et al, 2011). It is by its very nature, a more integrating and cohesive framework, with its theory, appropriately adapted and suited to addressing the ills and functional gaps, linked to outcomes of job apathy.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The position of this paper on the role of work-life fluidity in addressing job apathy identifies with the workers' need for control and autonomy in their jobs and the performance of such. Drawing on the

review of literature, work-life fluidity is presented as a more applicable and suitable approach, one designed to address the concerns of emerging work systems within a highly volatile, dynamic and unstable business environment. From the discussion, it was affirmed that the fluidity in work systems allows for increased control over work and personal life obligations, enabling a more engaged and productive workforce. This as pointed out in the research, is a boost to the workers' sense of placement and commitment to roles and organizational responsibilities.

The implications of this paper are such that emphasizes the structuring of roles to be more flexible, accommodating and anticipative of change and as such adaptive in its outlook. Work systems are on this basis expected to integrate contingency plans and arrangements that are strategic and in line with their capacities. This can include the use of scheduling of roles, the availability of temporary or support staff, job rotation practices that allow for role flexibility and also the role or work arrangements that stress the effectiveness and adequacy of communication across levels and units of the organization. The paper thus contributes toward the reinforcement of the work-life fluidity theory, based on its capacity and suitability for enriching working conditions and increasing workers' experience of relative control over their time and priorities.

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