

WORK EMPOWERMENT IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study was on work empowerment: a comparative examination of Chief Librarians and staff in university libraries. The design for the study was descriptive survey. One hundred and fifty one (151) librarians and 5 Chief Librarians in five federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria formed the population for the study. The study used the entire population and questionnaire was used for data collection. However, after questionnaire administration and retrieval, 142 copies of the staff questionnaire were found usable. All the 5 Chief Librarians were also used in the study. Data were analyzed with frequency count, mean and chi-square statistics. The study revealed that the librarians (staff) were work empowered in their various libraries, while the Chief Librarians were pro work empowerment. The mean scores of staff and University Librarians scores agreed on work empowerment, though there was a significant difference in mean scores between the two groups. Library Management must make sure that staff have the correct combination of information, comprehension, and authority to work with passion and independently.

Keywords: Leadership empowerment, work empowerment, university libraries, Nigeria, Educational Leadership, Career Development, academic Leadership

Introduction

Establishments believe in assigning authority to workers to enable them exercise control over tasks and be held accountable for result of efforts. In this era, establishments are more worried about information workers as a result of the fact that they are the actual drivers of products and services. An organization that empowers put emphasis on autonomy, accurate information and individual worker participation, all geared towards excellence in the organization. Hence, Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2015) noted that to enable the achievement of empowerment, the leaders are obliged to make sure that their workers have the correct combination of information, understanding, authority and rewards to make work more interesting. Therefore, empowerment helps to make independence possible for employees by allowing the distribution of responsibility and authority at all levels, build worker confidence in addition to stimulating the work force for improved performance (Yin, Wang & Lu, 2019). Individually, the factors which could make empowerment possible are difficult jobs, enthusiasm, skill, maturity, and self-confidence amongst others. A number of these highlights could be improved via training and development because the factors are playing enhancing function in staff empowerment and participation.

Permitting workers to have autonomy and providing feedback is what makes the empowerment idea to thrive. When workers are empowered, their self-confidence level and independence are enhanced and the self-confidence produces job satisfaction and enhanced production effectiveness (Kuyea, & Sulaimon, 2011). The study is on work empowerment: An empirical examination of University librarians and staff in academic libraries.

Statement of the Problem

Empowerment ought to be the leader's mostly used approaches or strategies for making a replica of himself. Regrettably, a good number of leaders have found shelter in the cocoon of 'without me' complex. No one is a self-made man; somehow, some of your talents were obtained from persons you have encountered. The predisposition that good results and effective decisions only come from top management, time and again has a tendency to disregard the assistance of those at lower echelon. As a consequence, the importance of staff involvement in decision making is disregarded. It was observed that most university Librarians are not empowering their staff hence the need for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study specifically is to find:

1. The mean score of University Librarians on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making) in university libraries.
2. The mean score of library staff on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making) in university libraries.
3. The mean scores difference between University Librarians and staff on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making)?

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

1. What is the mean score of University Librarians on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making)?
2. What is the mean score of subordinates (staff) on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making)?
3. What is the mean scores difference between University Librarians and staff on work empowerment (work delegation and staff involvement in decision making)?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in mean scores between University Librarians and staff on work empowerment.

Literature Review

Empowerment is a powerful leadership idea which is used to share vision that the organization is expecting to come to fruition. A good number of authors have agreed that the central element of empowerment involves allowing staff to use their discretion over certain actions. Ba (2015) argued that empowerment involves not only giving out the free will to take action, but also increase in responsibility. This signifies that leaders are of necessity required to empower their staff in order that they will be encouraged, dedicated and satisfied.

Empowerment is a very essential method that librarians could employ to improve staff motivation. Empowerment is the practice of allowing staff to set goals for themselves and make decisions regarding their own work. Empowerment is to some degree a broad idea that encompasses participation in a number of areas, such as work itself, work context, and work environment (Yin, Wang, & Lu, 2019; Raub & Robert, 2010).

According to Chand (2019) and Tran and Tian (2013), empowerment is the practice of permitting a staff to think, act and control work as well as decision-making independently. Empowerment has

become very important because time to take action on issues is becoming elusive and much shorter in establishments. With empowerment, staff feels much more in control since authority is given to individual staff for decision-making. In fact, the undiscovered potential in staff could be revealed through empowerment. The confidence exuding from staff improves effectiveness and efficiency. Despite the particular technique or system used, staff empowerment would improve library efficiency only if certain conditions are met (Chand, 2019). Firstly, all the sections in the organization must be involved when empowering workers not a selected few. Secondly, the library must be seen to be unswerving in sustaining staff empowerment and involvement. Thirdly, workers must sincerely accept as true that they and their leaders are working for their common good. In addition, workers given more freedom regarding how they work would likely require extra training to assist them apply that autonomy successfully.

Staff Involvement in Decision Making as Empowerment

Staff involvement in decision making, at times called participative decision making has to do with collective decision making in the work environment. Kuyea and Sulaimon (2011) define it as shared decision making between administrators and other staff. Noah (2008) and Kuyea and Sulaimon (2011) further acknowledged that it is an exceptional type of delegation whereby the staff gets greater command of issues and enhanced freedom of choice in an attempt to bridge the communication gap between administrators and their employees. High staff participation in decision making makes provision for front end workers in planning. This is because they are the workers that are nearer the patron who make the identification of new service possible, which is an essential building block in the entrepreneurial activities (Li, Tse, & Gu, 2006). Staff participation enhances recognition and propagation of potential ideas all over the institution (Sarwar, & Khalid, 2011). Their taking part in decision making provides a sense of belonging for the workers and additional friendly atmosphere in which management and the workers gladly have a say for a healthy industrial harmony (Noah, 2008).

Singh (2009) and Kingir and Mesci (2010) noted that in order to enhance workers dedication and also improve work performance attitude, leaders need to allow for a high degree of staff involvement in decision making. The involvement of staff in decision making is seen as a means for stirring up motivation in the workers and eventual positive work disposition and efficiency (Jones, 2013; Noah, 2008; Hewitt, 2002). Supervisors who regularly entrust to their staff the idea of participation in decision making activity enhance their sense of independence at work. Also, leaders who have trust in their staff and with little supervision encourage them to believe that they are empowered to consider how they perform their job (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Businessknowledgesource.com, 2010).

Delegation as Work Empowerment

The concept delegation is a practice that involves handing over essential responsibilities to subordinates, giving them the responsibility to take action on decisions initially the prerogative of the manager (Sutherland, De Bruin, & Crous, 2007). Delegation is different from other decision making practices, such as involvement in two key ways (Gur & Bjørnskov, 2017; Bloom, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2012). Firstly, delegation involves decision making by a particular staff but not by a number of staff. Secondly, delegation puts emphasis on staff independence in making decisions. Delegation in management literature is a multifaceted practice in which leaders hand over every day jobs, increase staff work load and give power to their workers to act without any further authorization. A lot of people confuse delegation with consultation. In delegation, the decision making power is entirely in the hands of the staff, while consultation could be when the staff

presents his or her opinion, but the authority is with the leader (Ghejan & Gal, 2017). Therefore, delegation is not about merely distributing authority, but about handing it out to others in the organization's chain of command (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard & Dineen, 2009). Delegation allows leaders enough time to attend to other essential responsibilities. When a response requires immediate attention decision quality again could be enhanced if power has been delegated. In all of these situations, skilled staff are required.

Why it is Necessary to Delegate

Delegative leadership is related to participative leadership. A number of leaders use delegation differently as the situation permits and only after detailed guidelines on the decision alternatives have been determined (Kingir, & Mesci, 2010; Yukl, 2010). However, other leaders assign to their followers absolute autonomy to proffer solution to issues through:

- Increasing staff fulfillment and encouraging them (Navahandi, 2006).
- Making it easier for staff to be observed and evaluated as they do new responsibilities.
- Permitting staff to be more involved in organizational tasks.
- Giving staff the opportunity to gain knowledge and develop them (Howell & Costley, 2006).
- Gives the leader enough time to work out new responsibilities and strategic activities

The likely gains of using delegation in workplaces include it: Delegation gives staff the opportunity to attempt novel responsibilities as well as creative skills, which in turn enriches their jobs and subsequent increase in motivation and satisfaction (Popoola, 2020; Ricketts & John, 2011).

Methodology

The design for the study was descriptive survey. The population for the study consisted of 151 librarians (staff) and 5 Chief Librarians in five federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire structured on a 4-point scale (Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (DA) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The Mean score cutoff point was 2.50, i.e. an item was accepted if it has mean score 2.50 and above. There were two questionnaires- one for the University Librarian and the other for librarians (staff). This category of library staff was chosen because they are the front end staff representing the university library in the various sections of the library. The entire population was used for the study. However, after questionnaire administration and retrieval 142 copies of staff questionnaire were found usable. All the 5 copies of the University Librarians' questionnaire retrieved were also found usable. Data were analyzed with frequency count and mean, chi-square statistics.

Population/Demographic of Respondents

Figure 1: Population of the Study

S/N	Name of University libraries	Chief Librarians	No of Questionnaire	
			Administered	No Retrieved
1.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University Library, Nsukka.	1	59	56
2.	Federal University of Technology, Owerri.	1	38	36
3.	Michael Opara University of Agriculture, Umudike.	1	23	21

4.	Alex Ekwueme Federal University Library, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo.	1	12	12
5.	Prof. Festus Aghagbo University Library, Awka.	1	19	17
Total		5	151	142 (94%)

Figure 1 shows that out of the total population of 151 staff studied 142 was used for the study. This represents 94% of the population. Also, all the 5 (100%) university librarians were used for the study.

Data Analysis/Findings

Table 1: Staff Empowerment

Options	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Scores	
1.	My University librarian provides feedback to us every weekday.	17	49	57	19	142	2.5	
2.	My University librarian sends us to training programmes often.	45	56	25	16	142	2.9	
3.	My University librarian allows us to evaluate development plans regularly.	34	60	22	26	142	2.7	
4.	My University librarian allows us to provide constructive feedback when needed.	37	69	22	14	142	2.9	
5.	My University librarian intentionally assigns tasks to staff to enable them to develop their skills.	56	42	9	25	142	2.8	
6.	My University librarian provides all the resources needed in the workplace to enable staff to be effective.		29	54	41	18	142	2.7
7.	My University librarian doesn't do tasks that could be done by his subordinates.		56	39	24	23	142	2.9
8.	Delegated responsibilities are agreed upon and clear in terms of performance expectations.		27	54	28	33	142	2.5
9.	My University librarian in conjunction with staff set clear timelines for the completion of delegated tasks.		45	37	41	19	142	2.8
10.	My University librarian in conjunction with staff outlines action steps for delegated tasks for less skilled library staff.		49	40	33	20	142	2.8
11.	My University librarian gives experienced staff more latitude to decide how they accomplish allotted responsibilities.		28	65	44	5	142	2.8
12.	My University librarian purposely limits the amount of control over delegated tasks to staff to enable them gain experience.	34	36	45	27	142	2.5	
13.	My University librarian doesn't take back							

delegated responsibilities when staff experience challenges.	42	55	20	25	142	2.8
14. My university librarian permit staff involvement in decision making.	38	45	29	30	142	2.6
15. My university librarian allow staff to use their initiative while performing their work.	27	56	34	25	142	2.6
Grand Mean						2.6

Adapted from Curphy (2019)

Table 1 revealed that “My University Librarian sends us to training programmes often,” and “My University Librarian doesn’t do tasks that could be done by subordinates” had the highest mean score (2.9) respectively. Furthermore, all the other items had mean score above the cutoff point (2.5). The study concluded that the librarians were work empowered in their various libraries.

Table 2: University Librarians’ Opinions on Empowerment of Staff

Items	Options				Total	Mean Scores
	SA	A	D	SD		
1. I provide feedback to My staff on a weekly basis.	1	1	2	1	5	2.4
2. I send my staff to training programmes as needed.	-	5	-	-	5	3.0
3. I allow staff to evaluate development plans regularly.	-	3	1	1	5	2.4
4. I provide constructive feedback to staff as needed.	-	5	-	-	5	3.0
5. I purposely assign tasks to my staff That which will develop their skills.	2	3	-	-	5	3.4
6. My staff have all the resources they need to be successful.	-	1	3	1	5	2.0
7. I am not doing tasks that could be done by my staff.	-	5	-	-	5	3.0
8. The performance expectations for delegated tasks are agreed upon and clear.	-	4	1	-	5	2.8
9. We have set clear timelines for the completion of delegated tasks.	5	-	-	-	5	4.0
10. I outline the action steps for delegated tasks for less experienced staff.	-	3	2	-	5	2.6
11. More experienced staff have more latitude to decide how they want to accomplish assigned tasks.	2	3	-	-	5	3.4
12. I purposely cut back on the amount of control I have over delegated tasks as followers gain knowledge and experience.	-	4	1	-	5	2.8
13. I do not take back delegated tasks when staff experience problems.	2	3	-	-	5	3.4

14.	I permit staff involvement in decision making.	2	3	-	-	5	3.4	
15.	I allow staff to use their initiative while performing their work.	1	1	4	-	-	5	3.2
Grand Mean							3.0	

Adapted from Curphy (2019)

Table 2 reveals that aside ‘I provide feedback to My staff on a weekly basis (2.4)’, ‘I allow staff to evaluate development plans regularly (2.4)’ and ‘My staff have all the resources they need to be successful (2.0)’ all other items in the table have mean scores above the cutoff point (2.5). This means that the University Librarians are pro work empowerment in their university libraries.

Hypothesis Testing

There is no significant difference in mean scores between University Librarians and staff on work empowerment.

Table 3: Chi-square Analysis of no mean scores difference between University Librarians and their staff on work empowerment

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Total
University Librarians’ Scores	60	141	20	3	224
Subordinates (staff) Scores	564	757	474	350	2145
Total	624	898	494	353	2369

Level of significance = 0.05.

Df = 3.

$X^2 = \sum (O-E)^2$

E = 88.9

Decision: Table 3 showed that the hypothesis was rejected since the calculated chi-square (88.9) is greater than the table value (7.82) at 3 degree of freedom. Therefore, the hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in mean scores between University Librarians and staff on work empowerment was rejected. There was a significant difference in mean scores between the two variables.

Discussions

The study revealed that the librarians were work empowered in their various libraries. This finding corroborates Greasley, Bryman, Dainty, Price, Naismith and Soetanto (2008). In their survey the respondents agreed that they were work empowered and that they desire more empowerment in their places of work. The findings revealed that most of the subordinates generally were empowered, however, the extent and nature of the empowerment differs. Also, Yin, Wang and Lu (2019) established in their study that empowerment practices had a positive impact on organizational effectiveness, and empowerment practices facilitated the relationship between human ability details as well as performance. Results further revealed that task interdependence reinforced the effect of empowerment practices on productivity. The central aim behind staff work empowerment has been to use the natural potentials of staff. This may be the reason why a number of leaders in recent time have a preference for the term empowerment instead of participation due to its being more all-inclusive in nature.

University Librarians were pro work empowerment in their university libraries. This finding also agrees with Ba (2015) investigation on understanding leadership and empowerment in the workplace. The study revealed a relationship between staff opinion of their leader and perceived

level of empowerment. The University Librarians want to succeed in their assignments hence the librarians studied choose to empower staff. Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2015) in their study that was based on the data of the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) noted that empowerment practices have positive and significant influence on job contentment. That is, empowerment practices such as distribution of information with respect to goals and effectiveness, enabling access to work-related information and abilities, and permitting the use of discretion in managing work procedures has positive and significant impact on satisfaction in the workplace.. According to Sahoo and Das (2011), when employees are empowered it increases their level of commitment and attainment of organizational goal.

Conclusion

The study revealed that there was agreement between University Librarians and their staff on work empowerment. The librarians agreed that they were work empower, thereby corroborating the opinion of the University Librarians. This goes to show that the Librarians studied were not ‘the leader knows it all type’. Therefore, there should be a sustained effort to further improve on the situation. The study also concluded that there was a significant mean scores difference between University Librarians and their staff on work empowerment

Recommendation

The research has added to knowledge on work empowerment practices by providing a wide range and balanced investigation of why and when empowerment is to be effective. In this century, service organizations are more concerned about knowledge workers because they are the actual drivers of the economy. In order to realize work empowerment, library leaders must make sure that their subordinates have the correct combination of information, comprehension, and authority to work with passion.

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