ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE STRATEGIES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SECTOR HRM PRACTICES

Aramide Arinola KUFORIJI∗

Abstract: *Organizational change strategies and employee engagement at Nigerian public sector institutions is a concern, where 65% of the workers showed job dissatisfaction because of bureaucracy, political intervention and change resistance. Organizational reforms did not solve employee commitment and motivation issues which created work plan setbacks. This research investigated how change strategies boost public institution employee engagement. Kotter's Change Model and Lewin's Change Theory was used to understand the generated concerns. Explanatory approach research design was adopted because the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Ministry of Finance and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) fit the criterion of active reform implementation. Data was collected from 376 staff through hard and soft questionnaire copies and analyzed by PLS-SEM. Findings revealed that change strategies significantly enhance engagement levels among staff ($\beta = 0.227$, $p = 0.000$), while public sector HRM practices; strategic recruitment, performance appraisal, and continuous development had an even stronger direct effect ($\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$). The study confirmed that HRM practices moderate the relationship between change strategies and engagement ($\beta = 0.109$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that Organizational reforms are most effective when HRM systems are robust and strategically aligned. Findings suggest that policymakers and agency heads in the selected institutions must prioritize HRM reforms to complement change initiatives. The study recommends the institutionalization of participatory HRM models, investment in staff training, and the establishment of feedback-driven performance systems.*

Keywords: *organizational change; government agencies; HRM practices*

∗ Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria, Corresponding author: aramide.kuforiji@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng.

1. Introduction

Organizational change has emerged as a critical concern in contemporary governance, particularly within public sector institutions that aim to align with global standards, enhance service delivery, and meet evolving citizen expectations (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Previous research has emphasized the restructuring of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to promote employee engagement, which is widely regarded as a key driver of successful change initiatives (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2023; Albrecht et al., 2015). Scholars have consistently shown that engaged employees are more committed, adaptable, and responsive to transformation efforts (Saks, 2022; Kuforiji et al., 2024). Building on this foundation, the present study investigates the relationship between organizational change strategies and employee engagement in the context of public sector reforms, using structural equation modelling to provide empirical evidence. This research contributes to the field by bridging the gap between HRM and change management, offering new insights into how integrated strategic HR practices can enhance engagement during periods of change. Future studies could explore moderating variables such as leadership style, innovation culture, and institutional capacity to advance a more nuanced understanding of sustainable change implementation in public sector organizations (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006).

2. Organizational Change

Organizational change involves adjustments in structures, strategies, operations, or culture to respond to various pressures (Fernandez & Rainey, 2018). Research shows that employee commitment, trust, and involvement are key to successful change (Iverson, 1996; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). In the public sector, change is often top-down, leading to resistance when employees feel excluded (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). In Nigeria, poor staff engagement has weakened reform outcomes (Kuforiji & Tobi, 2022), highlighting that employee participation and trust are essential for effective organizational change in government institutions.

2.1. Organizational Change Strategies

Organizational change strategies are structured approaches used to guide transformation within institutions, involving communication, training, employee participation, and reward systems (Fernandez & Rainey, 2018). Line managers also play a key role in driving cultural change (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2011). Evidence from Zimbabwe and Ghana shows that unclear strategies and limited employee

involvement can undermine reforms (Ohemeng et al., 2020), while Egypt and Ethiopia have achieved better outcomes by aligning change efforts with national goals and leadership engagement (Saad et al., 2021). In Nigeria, the lack of well-defined change strategies has led to resistance and inefficiencies, highlighting the importance of adopting structured models for effective public sector reform (Kuforiji, 2024).

2.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement refers to the emotional, mental, and behavioral commitment employees show toward achieving organizational goals (Albrecht et al., 2014). Engaged employees are more adaptable to change, contribute innovation, and enhance service delivery (Jones & Sambrook, 2016). Evidence from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya shows that engagement improves when organizations invest in recognition, communication, and training (Sibanda et al., 2014), while studies in Nigeria link disengagement to poor transparency, unclear roles, and limited growth opportunities (Kuforiji et al., 2019). Alhajaj and Ahmad (2023) further highlight the role of effective HRM in strengthening engagement and reducing turnover. In Nigeria's hierarchical public sector, promoting engagement is essential to overcoming resistance and ensuring reform success.

2.3. Government Agencies

Government agencies are established to create policies and deliver public services, but their rigid structures often make change difficult (Brunetto & Beattie, 2020). In countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Ghana, agencies that adopted performance-based and citizen-centered approaches achieved better service outcomes (Ohemeng et al., 2020). In contrast, Nigerian government offices face challenges such as politicization, poor management, and low employee motivation (Kuforiji, 2024). Many Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) operate with significant constraints that hinder innovation and overlook the role of people in policy implementation. This highlights the urgent need to reform HRM strategies and change approaches to improve staff engagement and performance.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996) and Lewin's Change Theory (Lewin, 1951) to explain how organizational change can be effectively managed in Nigerian public institutions. Kotter's model emphasizes leadership, vision, and employee involvement, while Lewin's model outlines the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing to support lasting transformation.

Together, these frameworks help identify barriers to reform and highlight the importance of employee engagement in driving successful change within bureaucratic systems.

3. Research Design and Philosophy

This study used an explanatory research design and a positivist approach to investigate how organizational change strategies influence employee engagement in selected Nigerian government agencies. The explanatory design allowed for the analysis of key factors like leadership, communication, participation, and motivation in the change process (Albrecht et al., 2014; Fernandez & Rainey, 2018). A positivist paradigm was appropriate due to the study's reliance on measurable and observable data, enabling objective analysis and validation. Four federal agencies—FIRS, NNPC, Ministry of Finance, and CAC—were deliberately chosen for their active involvement in reforms, offering a varied yet representative view of public sector transformation in Nigeria.

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The unit of analysis for this study was individual employees, both managerial and non-managerial who were actively involved in organizational change initiatives within four selected government agencies. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure balanced representation across departments and job levels. From an estimated population of 5,200 staff, a sample of 376 respondents was calculated using Cochran's formula, based on a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Questionnaires were distributed through both hard-copy and digital formats to improve accessibility and response rates. All 376 completed responses were cleaned and used for analysis, allowing for valid insights into how employees across different organizational settings perceived, resisted, or supported change efforts.

3.2. Materials

The five Likert scale questionnaire was organized in three areas: demographic details, aspects of organizational change (communication, leadership, participation, training) were adapted from Fernandez & Rainey (2018); Barratt-Pugh et al. (2011), employee engagement was measured with physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement and adapted from Albrecht et al. (2014); Saks (2006); Zahari &

Kaliannan (2023), while Public Sector HRM Practices were adapted from Brunetto & Beattie (2020) focused on transparency, career management, and ethics.

3.3 Measures and Analysis

Tests for data analysis were carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The researcher picked this method because it was suitable for complex models with latent constructs and handled the unusual distribution of data commonly found in organizations (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Therefore, this study validated construct validity by performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and assessed reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability indicators. Bootstrapping was conducted at 5,000 resamples to test the significance of path coefficients. All the measurement models met the thresholds for convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted ≥ 0.5) and discriminant validity (HTMT ratio < 0.85). The structural model tested hypothesized relationships between organizational change strategies and employee engagement outcomes, allowing the study to explain the degree to which reforms influence staff motivation and productivity across government agencies.

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

The unit of analysis for this study comprised HR officers, departmental managers, and reform implementation personnel across four key government agencies: the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Ministry of Finance, and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). These institutions were purposively selected based on their active implementation of internal reform strategies between 2015 and 2024. A total of 400 structured questionnaires were administered using both hard-copies and digital formats, of which 376 valid responses were retrieved and used for final analysis, representing a 94% response rate.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed diverse sample across gender, age, education, work experience, and organizational affiliation. Male participants formed the majority, accounting for 61.2% of the total respondents, while female constituted 38.8%. Most respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years (45.7%), followed by those aged 41-50 years (24.5%). Younger participants aged 21-30 years represented 18.6%, and those above 50years made up 11.2%. In terms of educational attainment, a significant portion held a Master's degree (46.8%),

followed by Bachelor's degree holders (36.7%), with fewer respondents having professional certifications (10.6%) or a PhD (5.9%).

Work experience among respondents also varied, with the largest group have 5-10 years of experience (37.5%), followed by 11-15 years (28.7%), over 15 years (17.3%), and less than 5 years (16.5%). Participants were drawn from four government institutions. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) had the highest representation at 27.1%, followed by the Ministry of Finance (25.0%), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with 24.2%, and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) accounting for 23.7%. This distribution reflects a well-balanced sample across relevant public sector organizations, contributing to the validity and generalizability of the study's findings.

4.2 Structural Model Analysis (PLS-SEM)

To test the study's conceptual model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 was adopted. The analysis proceeded in two stages: (i) assessment of the measurement model, and (ii) evaluation of the structural model.

4.2.1 Measurement Model Assessment

In line with standard procedures of assessing measurement quality, reliability and validity of the study, constructs were confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Each construct met the recommended benchmarks: CR values were above 0.70. AVE exceeded 0.50, and Cronbach's Alpha was greater than 0.70, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022). Organisational change strategies recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.821, CR of 0.883, and AVE of 0.649; Employee Engagement showed 0.85, 0.902, and 0.698 respectively, while, Public Sector HRM Practices had 0.844, 0.889, and 0.662. All factors loadings were above 0.60, and discriminant validity was confirmed using Fomell-Larcker criterion.

4.2.2 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural path model tested three key hypotheses:

H_1: Organizational Change Strategies → Employee Engagement

H_2: Public Sector HRM Practices → Employee Engagement

H_3: Moderating role of Public Sector HRM Practices → Change Strategies and Employee Engagement

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to assess the path coefficients and t-values. Figure 1 shows the path coefficient of organizational change strategies and employee engagement on HRM practices in government agencies or public sector; while Table 1 demonstrates the hypothesis testing of the variables.
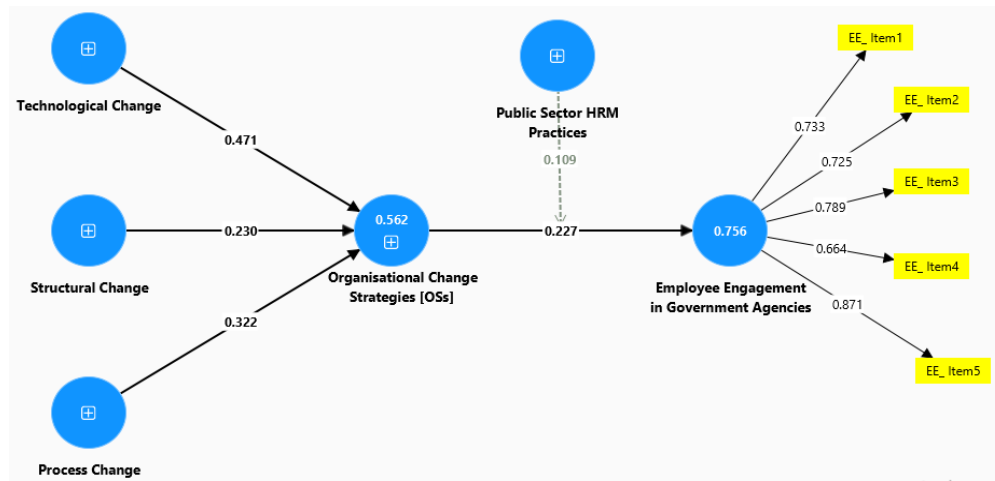

Figure 1. path coefficient of Organizational change strategies and HRM practices on employee engagement on HRM practices in government agencies or public sector

Table 1. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Path Relationship	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Change Strategies → Employee Engagement	0.227	11.294	0.000	Supported
Public Sector HRM → Employee Engagement	0.455	7.187	0.000	Supported
Moderating role of Public Sector HRM Practices Change Strategies and Employee Engagement	0.109	6.024	0.000	Supported

4.3. Discussion of Key Findings

The findings confirm that organizational change strategies positively influence employee engagement in Nigerian public sector institutions. This supports earlier assertions (e.g., Fernandez & Rainey, 2018) that inclusive and well-communicated change processes foster greater employee involvement. The results also demonstrate that public sector HRM practices significantly contribute to engagement levels,

aligning with Albrecht et al. (2014), who emphasized the centrality of strategic HRM in motivating employees amid change.

Most notably, HRM practices were found to moderate the relationship between change strategies and engagement, implying that robust HRM systems enhance the effectiveness of change initiatives. This echoes insights from Khilji and Wang (2006) and Farndale et al. (2011), who argued that HRM must be integrated into reform efforts to build trust, reduce resistance, and support sustainable change. Oreg et al. (2018) further support this view, suggesting that perceptions of HR support critically shape employees' emotional and cognitive engagement with transformation processes.

The study highlights the strategic importance of embedding HRM frameworks within the implementation of organizational change in public sector agencies. While change strategies are necessary, their success is contingent on strong HRM foundations that promote commitment and adaptive behavior. This reinforces the view of Kuforiji, (2024) that HRM is not merely an administrative support function, but as a pivotal driver of employee engagement during institutional transformation.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study confirms that organizational change strategies significantly enhance employee engagement in Nigerian government agencies, especially when supported by modern and flexible Human Resource Management (HRM) practices. Key HRM elements such as strategic workforce planning, clear communication, talent development, and performance recognition are instrumental in motivating employees and strengthening their commitment to reform initiatives, highlighting HRM's evolving role as a central driver of public sector transformation. In response, the study recommends that core institutions like the OHCSF, FCSC, and BPSR collaborate to establish a dedicated HRM framework tailored to managing change, including mandatory training in change management and reform communication for HR personnel. It further suggests that agencies such as FIRS, NNPC, the Ministry of Finance, and CAC develop customized HRM policies aligned with their goals, monitored annually through performance metrics and HR data. To ensure long-term accountability and reform success, the National Assembly Committee on Public Service Matters should conduct quarterly evaluations supported by digital tools and employee feedback systems, thereby fostering innovation, sustained engagement, and reform readiness across the public sector.

6. Limitations, Suggestions, and Contributions to Knowledge

This study provides important empirical evidence on the role of HRM practices in moderating the relationship between organizational change strategies and employee engagement in Nigeria's public sector, using PLS-SEM. However, its reliance on a quantitative approach limits deeper behavioral insights, and its focus on four federal agencies narrows generalizability. Future research should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs and include a wider range of institutions. Despite these limitations, the study advances Kotter's and Lewin's change models by integrating HRM-specific factors relevant to bureaucratic reforms in emerging economies.

7. References

Albrecht, S.L., Bakker, A.B., Gruman, J.A., Macey, W.H., & Saks, A.M. (2014). Employee engagement, human resource management practices and competitive advantage: An integrated approach. *Journal of organizational effectiveness: People and performance*, 2(1), 7-35. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-08-2014-0042

Alhajaj, W.E., & Ahmad, S.Z. (2023). The effectiveness of human resource management practices, work engagement and self-efficacy in minimizing talent turnover intention. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 73(8), 2414-2440. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-02-2023-0090

Barratt-Pugh, L., Bahn, S., & Gakere, E. (2011). Managers as change agents: Implications for human resource managers engaging with culture change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 26(4), 748,-764. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-Feb-2011-0014

Brunetto, Y., & Beattie, R. (2020). Changing role of HRM in the public sector. *Public Management Review*, 22(1), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1645876

Fernandez, S., & Rainey, H. (2018). Managing successful organizational change in the public sector. In B. G. Peters & J. Pierre (Eds.). *The handbook of public administration* (pp. 18–33). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315095097-2

Iverson, R.D. (1996). Employee acceptance of organizational change: The role of organizational commitment. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(1), 122–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585199600000121

Jones, N., & Sambrook, S. (2016). Employee engagement in the public sector. In C. Hughes (Ed.). *Human capital management research: Influencing practice and process* (pp. 31–45). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kuforiji, A.A., & Tobi, A.A. (2022). Influence of employee's anxiety on human factor dimensions and successful change implementation: Evidence from Nigeria. *Kelaniya Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.4038/kjhrm.v17i1.95

Kuforiji, A.A. (2024). The ethical implications of nepotism and corruption in professional environments. *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance*, 4(3), 101–110. https://doi.org/10.61090/aksujacog.2024.042

Kuforiji, A.A., Egwakhe, A. J., & Binuyo, O. A. (2019). Human factor dimensions and workplace climate of food and beverage firms in Lagos State, Nigeria: An empirical paper. International *Journal of Business and Social Science*, 10(4), 137–145. https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbss.v10n4p16 (rajpub.com, researchgate.net)

Morgan, D., & Zeffane, R. (2003). Employee involvement, organizational change and trust in management. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), 55–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190210158510

Ohemeng, F.L., Obuobisa Darko, T., & Amoako-Asiedu, E. (2020). Bureaucratic leadership, trust building, and employee engagement in the public sector in Ghana: The perspective of social exchange theory. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 16(1), 17–40. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-06-2019-0026

Saad, M.M., Gaber, H.R., & Labib, A.A. (2021). Investigating the impact of human resource management practices on employee engagement, and the moderating role of strategy implementation in Egypt. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19, Article a1412. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v19i0.1412

Sibanda, P., Muchena, T., & Ncube, F. (2014). Employee engagement and organizational performance in a public sector organisation in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 4(1), 89–99. https://archive.aessweb.com/index.php/5007/article/view/2607

van der Voet, J., & Vermeeren, B. (2017). Change management in hard times: Can change management mitigate the negative relationship between cutbacks and the organizational commitment and work engagement of public sector employees? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(2), 230–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074015625828

Zahari, N., & Kaliannan, M. (2023). Antecedents of work engagement in the public sector: A systematic literature review. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 43(3), 557–582. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X221106792