

**HUMAN RESOURCE OUTSOURCING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND THE
PLIGHT OF OUTSOURCED EMPLOYEES' IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES
TEACHING HOSPITALS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary times, human resource outsourcing has become a new trend in public organizations. The potential economic benefits of outsourcing are thought to be highly desirable, and consequently the management focuses largely on the economic aspects thereby ignoring the human and social impact of outsourcing policy implementation. Arising from this scenario, the purpose of this study is to investigate human resource outsourcing policy implementation and the plight of outsourced employees. This study applied qualitative research method. Primary data about the perceptions of the targeted groups was collected through in-depth interview. The in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve Directors, three SERVICOM Unit Heads and six executives of Union Leaders across the three Federal University Teaching Hospitals in Southwestern Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that reduction in wages and salaries was established on the one hand, this notwithstanding, on the other hand, the plight of the employees has also nose-dived. The study concluded that, even though human resource outsourcing policy implementation is good and desirable, it does not have a human face and value. There is thus the inevitable need to cushion outsourcing policy implementation in order to make it have some human face.

Keywords: *Human Resource, Outsourcing, Public Organization*

Background to the Study

Outsourcing policy implementation is a global phenomenon that is widely embraced both in public and private sectors. The most important advantage of outsourcing policy is cost reduction. This is why organizations in the private sector are attracted to it because of their desire and orientation to maximize profits. In government circles where the main concern is not profit making because public organizations are largely for service rendering; this notwithstanding, they are still attracted to the outsourcing policy. There is no rose without its thorns, and invariably outsourcing policy implementation has two sides. The proponents of the policy are attracted to

the cost reduction analysis which they found overwhelming. Those against the outsourcing policy and largely from the perspective of Human Relations School are of the opinion that outsourcing has tremendous negative impact on the workers and that workers cannot be treated as machines but as social beings. In the final analysis, there is the inevitable need to examine arguments from both sides of the divide. (i) If outsourcing policy implementation ensures cost reduction, is that enough to overlook the negative or adverse consequences associated with it? (ii) Shouldn't we be concerned with workers' plight under outsourcing policy? (iii) Do we abandon outsourcing policy or do we introduce measures that can help to ameliorate the adverse connotations.

Statement of the Problem

Public Administration deals with human beings and governance, policies, designed programmes of action and their implementation which usually have direct impact and consequences on human beings. Outsourcing policy implementation even though well-conceived and designed has often turned out bringing unintended negative consequences. This study was conceived to investigate the extent to which outsourcing policy implementation is affecting workers adversely in the workplace. We need to investigate and know the nature, direction and magnitude of the other side of outsourcing policy implementation. In order words, the logical and pertinent questions are (i) To what extent is outsourcing policy functional (ii) To what extent is outsourcing policy dysfunctional (iii) What is it that can be done to ameliorate the dysfunctional aspect of outsourcing policy implementation (iv) Is outsourcing policy inevitable or is outsourcing policy the most desirable?

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study was to investigate Human Resource outsourcing policy implementation and plight of outsourced employees in Federal University Teaching Hospitals in Southwestern Nigeria. The study was guided by the following objectives

- i. To investigate to what extent is outsourcing policy functional
- ii. To determine to what extent is outsourcing policy dysfunctional

- iii. To examine what can be done to ameliorate the dysfunctional aspect of outsourcing policy implementation, and
- iv. To assess whether outsourcing policy is inevitable or most desirable.

Significance of the Study

When the literature was perused and reviewed, it was observed that there are a lot of arguments and discussions on human resource outsourcing in public organizations. Apart from reduction in personnel costs, there has not been any other significant reason or reasons that push organizations to consider the adoption outsourcing policy. Again, there has been very little empirical research on outsourcing policy implementation and the plight of outsourced employees. This study helps to fill this gap.

Literature Review

Human Resource Outsourcing (HRO)

Outsourcing policy according to Adeyemi & Salami (2008) is the process of transferring activities previously performed within an organization to external suppliers due to high transaction costs, risks, allowing the organization to benefit from the suppliers' higher production economies, finding a partner with which a firm can establish a bilateral relationship and having the partner undertake relationship-specific investments so that it is able to produce goods or services that fit the firm's particular needs. The outsourcing of Human Resource (HR) activities has been lauded as one of the strategic tools available to organizations in a competitive environment (Stewart, 1996; Jamrog, Groe & Pyle, 1997). Its popularity is fast gaining ground, due in great measure, to the need for the HR department to play a much more strategic role in the organization (Ulrich, 1996). Today's HR managers are expected to shed their traditional roles associated with policies and procedures; and the hiring, selecting, training and compensating of workforce, for more strategic roles that include improving customer's perception of quality, reducing overall costs of HR administration and the managing of scarce resources (Marinaccio, 1994). It is in response to this shift in paradigm and orientation that many HR managers are now outsourcing their more conventional functions (Cook, 1999; Davidson, 1998).

As opposed to internal procurement where the HR functions are performed by the employees of the organizations, outsourcing policy implementation involves signing out parts or the whole of the HR functions to external vendors or service providers (Adler, 2003; Patry, Tremblay, Lannoie & Lacombe, 1999). It encompasses many different commercial relations stretching from outsourcing only routine and repetitive HR functions, such as payroll and benefits, to the more elaborate arrangement where recruitment, training and even HR strategic planning are given to outside providers (Patry, *et al*; 1999; Klaas, McClendon & Gainey, 1999). HR managers are expected to be more flexible, responsive, and efficient than personnel managers of old, and to contribute to the strategic decisions of their organizations. In response to this paradigm shift and orientation, many HR managers are turning to outsourcing policy as a way of meeting these contemporary demands (Cook, 1999; Lepak & Snell, 1999).

In making HR outsourcing decisions, organizations need to consider the likely impact of outsourcing these activities on organizational performance. To do so, they may need to distinguish between “core” and “non core” activities. Finn (1999) suggests that a basic distinction can be made between HR “core” and “non core” services. The former include top-level strategy, HR policies, and line management responsibilities (For instance, appraisal and discipline), while the latter include specialist activities (For example, recruitment and outplacement), routine personnel administration (For instance, payroll and pension), and professional HR advice (for example, legal advice related to employment regulations).

Ulrich (1998) goes one step further by suggesting that core activities are transformational work that creates unique value for employees, customers, and investors. Non-core activities would be transactional work that is routine and standard and can be easily duplicated and replicated. Hall & Torrington (1998) find that training and management development, recruitment and selection, outplacement, health and safety, quality initiatives, job evaluation, and reward strategies and systems were the likely HR activities to be outsourced, either because they were considered non-core or because the organization lacked the expertise to handle them internally. Hall and Torrington’s findings are supported by Shaw & Fairhurst (1997) who found that training and

development along with facilities management were the most likely services to be outsourced, while industrial relations expertise was the least likely area.

There are a number of reasons, at both the strategic and operational levels, why organizations want to outsource HR activities. Many share similarities with the outsourcing of other organizational functions. In particular, demands for increased performance or productivity, profitability, and growth have forced organizations to examine their internal HR processes, resulting in a move toward strategic outsourcing services and away from discrete services (Seth & Sethi, 2011).

As Greer, Youngblood & Gray (1999) observe, HR outsourcing decisions are frequently a response to an overwhelming demand for reduced costs for the services. Downsizing and tougher competition mean that the HR functions is under increasing pressure to demonstrate value, both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (Roberts, 2011). Although some elements of the HR functions may have always been performed by external service providers; Brewster (as quoted in Turnbull, 2002) observes that a new dimension is this finance-driven idea connecting outsourcing to human resource management – the idea that you can save a lot of money by outsourcing some services.

In addition, outsourcing is seen as a way of liberating HR professionals within the client organization to perform the more consultative and strategic role of designing and implementing programmes aimed at retaining the workforce and enhancing its performance (Seth & Sethi, 2011). This rationale and logic is in line with Ulrich's (1998) influential thesis of the four roles of HR in which he proposes that HR should be a strategic partner, an administrative expert, an employee champion, and a change agent. In a similar vein, Greer, *et al.*, (1999) argue that HR outsourcing is consistent with the business partner's role that the in-house HR department is attempting to assume. These roles arguably are where HR can add the greatest value to the organization, but they are difficult to measure quantitatively – outsourcing HR is also seen as an effective way to bypass organizational politics and improve efficiency (Seth & Sethi, 2011).

In short, the main reasons for outsourcing HR appear to be fairly consistent (Sissen & Storey, 2000). Typical reasons include seeking specialist services and expertise, cost reduction, and enabling HR specialists to take on a more strategic role. In general, according to Seth & Sethi (2011), most commentators are convinced that outsourcing is seen not only as a cost-cutting exercise but also as a strategic tool. As Oates (1998) suggests, the outsourcing decision is a strategic one and is generally taken at a senior level.

Although there may be consensus that organizations should perform core functions in-house and outsource those functions that are non-core to other organizations, what is considered core and non-core varies from one organizations to another. Hence, the decision as to which HR functions should be outsourced is often driven by the organization's business strategy (Abdul-Halim & Che-Ha, 2008).

Sullivan (2004) in the book *Out of Site* articulates the case against HRO on four main premises. First, outsourcing does not provide an organization with a competitive advantage. Secondly, HRO limits the growth, the image and the capabilities of the HR function and stunts the development of HR professionals. Thirdly, in most cases no actual cost-savings are realized. Vendors are proving value by listing customers. Sullivan (2004) suggests that HRO vendors offer reductions in costs or penalties, if they don't meet quality, time and cost promises. Fourthly, Sullivan (2007) deals with the problem of maintaining company secrets and data security. Another concern is that in spite of the transfer of the work, outsourcing of HR services does not necessarily shift all legal liabilities to the vendor (Norman, 2009).

The areas of HR functions that may be provided internally or by an external party include the following: Recruiting and selection (Recruiting Process Outsourcing), Training and development (Learning Outsourcing), Benefits design and administration, Compensation and salary surveys, Performance Management, Mentoring and coaching, Employee relations/Labour relations, Employee assistance programs, Corporate relocation, Employee communication, Organizational design and development, HRIS/HRIT and Payroll.

Human Resource Perspective – The Nigerian Experience

Before outsourcing policy implementation, the Nigerian workers' plight is nothing to write home about. As a matter of fact, most Nigerian workers live in a state of acute deprivation and lack of social welfare (Aluko, 2004). They earn abysmal low wages and the economy is characterized by persistent inflationary trends. In addition to this is the problem of inadequate and decaying social infrastructures which inevitably makes life unbearable, the cost of living is invariably high while the standard of living is inevitably low. The working class do not earn living wages, thus affecting the standard of living and subsequently entrenching low capital income. (Aluko, 2016).

From this kind of background, it is clear that the implementation of outsourcing policy is inherently a case of double tragedy for a typical Nigerian worker. The worker is suffering before outsourcing policy implementation and suffers the more thereafter. From the foregoing submissions, it is logical to posit that outsourcing policy implementation will further aggravate the severity and depth of suffering among the outsourced employees in Nigeria.

Benefits of Outsourcing Policy

The rapid growth and demand for outsourcing suggests that both public and private organizations expect benefits from outsourcing. Naturally, different organizations in different circumstances will expect different benefits. The most often discussed benefits of outsourcing are connected with improved financial performance and various non-financial performance effects, such as a heightened focus on core competences (Malgorzata, 2004). For example, all organizations may expect cost savings even though in government outsourcing, the typical cost savings are only about half of what the private sector achieves (Kakabadse & Kakabase, 2000).

It is impossible to exhaustively list every conceivable benefit but many of the desired benefits are generally enough that they are shared across organizations. The benefits of outsourcing policy implementation include realizing the same or better services at a lower overall cost, increased flexibility and/or quality, access to the latest technology and best talent, and ability to re-focus scarce resources on core functions. For the political organization, additional expected benefits may include better accountability and management, and a better political posture. Many

believe that if these expected benefits are realized, outsourcing policy implementation will remain one of the strongest and most sustained trends in business over the next ten years (Lewin & Johnson, 1996).

Risks of Outsourcing Policy Implementation

Outsourcing policy transaction is risk prone. This is not unexpected as all business transactions carries with it elements of risk. Ikediashi, Ogunlana, Bowels & Mbamali (2012) define outsourcing risks as the likelihood of occurrence of uncertain, unpredictable and undesirable outcomes that can mar the success of an outsourcing relationship between a principal (client) and its agents (outsourcing vendors). The literature discusses numerous risks associated with outsourcing. Because outsourcing is a rather recent tool for management, the complete costs are not yet known, and this is a risk in itself. The literature suggests that there is an initial tendency to overstate benefits and that the suppliers are likely to perform better in the beginning of a contract to make a good and captivating first impression (Schwyn, 1999).

The lack of universal methodology in the attempt to evaluate outsourcing is believed to be responsible for some outsourcing policy failures (Bounfour, 1999). This line of thought is supported by Lonsdale (1999) who suggests that outsourcing policy failures are not due to an inherent problem with outsourcing itself but rather the lack of guiding methodology for managers. According to Harland, Knight, Lamming & Walker (2005), more risks are associated with outsourcing policy in the public sector than in the private sector. They went further by arguing that unchecked outsourcing policy within the public sector may create problems. First, as individual organizations within a public sector independently outsource, they reduce government control. Second, it creates powerful players who assimilate many independently arranged outsourcing contracts, gaining leverage and power over the sector. Third, it can worsen employment patterns in a sector, reducing consistency of training and development impacting on skills and knowledge levels under government guidance. Forth, it can weaken some public sector stakeholders (for example, politicians and trade unions) who influence public sector activities but have more difficulty influencing private sector outsourcing policy (Harland, *et al.* 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Human Relations Theory was adopted for this study. This theory postulates that organizations should see and treat the workers as human beings rather than machines. The Human relations theory sees social relations, motivation and employee satisfaction as the main determinant of organizational performance. It was a product of the Hawthorne studies by George Elton Mayo which examined the effects of social relation, motivation and employee satisfaction and productivity (Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert, 2007). The application of Human Relations Theory to this study shows that if employees are given special attention, humane and relaxed supervision and are encouraged to participate in decision making; inherently they see their work as significant and as such they are motivated to be more productive, thereby resulting in high quality service delivery.

Methodology

This research covers the three Federal University Teaching Hospitals in Southwestern Nigeria. These Teaching Hospitals are: Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex (OAUTHC), Ile-Ife and University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan. The population for this study comprises all the Directors, Head of SERVICOM Units and the Executives of Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU) in the three Teaching Hospitals. Data was collected using in-depth interview. In-depth interviews on outsourcing policy implementation were conducted with twelve Directors, three SERVICOM Unit Heads and six members of the union leaders in all the three teaching hospitals.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the content analysis in the three locations of this study revealed that outsourcing policy implementation reduced overall costs of human resource administration to a large extent. To support this, one of the interviewees explained:

Outsourcing policy has cut down the cost drastically. The reason is that in a public organization where two or three people are needed, the place may be jam-packed with ten people all because of the belief that the salary comes from the federal government. So, there is likely to be underutilization of workers. This is not so in the post- outsourcing.

Another interviewee has this to say:

The federal government introduced outsourcing policy in order to reduce the unskilled labour so that the wage bill would go down drastically. The private contractors who now provide the services will not pay leave bonus, gratuity, pension or minimum wage. Therefore, looking at outsourcing policy implementation from this angle, the wage bill has reduced.

This outcome corroborates the evidence from the existing literature which showed that most outsourcing policy implementation is primarily motivated by the organization's efforts to reduce costs (Meckbach, 1998; Hendry, 1995; Arnold, 2000; Fan, 2000). Also Kinyua (2015) argued that, the main reason for the adoption of outsourcing policy is cost reduction. He went further by saying that the organization is able to reduce cost of staffing, training, health insurance, employment taxes and retirement plans. Therefore to this extent, outsourcing policy implementation is functional, beneficial and desirable.

Outsourcing policy implementation has side effects and the main side effect is that as it is reducing the burden of overhead cost, it is transferring the burden to the outsourced staff. The consequence is that the outsourced workers bear the brunt where they are made to work under the conditions where their plight and social welfare is at zero level. The findings of this study revealed that at the initial stage of outsourcing policy implementation, the Federal Government was financially committed to it. Later, subsequent governments were no longer committed to the policy. This eventually led to non-payment of salaries to outsourced staff. In one of the locations, the outsourced workers were owed up to ten months' salary. One of the interviewees said:

One of the major challenges facing outsourcing policy is that government is not paying money to the vendors. Initially we used overhead to cater for the contractors. But suddenly the Federal Government started reducing the allocation for overhead and we are unable to pay them again. As we are talking now, the hospital owes the outsourced workers more than ten months' salary.

In another location, one of the interviewees stated:

It is actually the duty of the Federal Government to pay the contractors but there was a shortfall in the monthly subvention for the past five years. This has affected payment to the vendors. Most of the time, the Hospital

Management paid the contractors from internally generated revenue which should have been used for other things.

The researcher observed that in the three locations outsourced workers (security personnel) were always found to be soliciting for financial assistance from well to patients and visitors to the hospitals. This is a direct fall out of either (i) the inadequacy of their salaries and (ii) the irregularities in the payment of their salaries. It is a double tragedy for people who are not adequately paid and at the same time be owed backlog of salaries.

The findings of this study also revealed that outsourcing of services led to casualization of jobs which was regarded as labour exploitation/slave labour. Workers who offer same services or shoulder even more responsibilities receive lower wages than their colleagues is anti-ethical to national developments. In the three study areas, the interviewees complained:

Outsourcing policy is pure slavery. Their conditions of service are very poor. They are underpaid; they earn less than N10, 000.00 a month. They don't have associations or unions, no job security, no gratuity or pension, no leave or leave bonus, they work longer hours a day. In summary, casualization + outsourcing = slave labour.

This finding corroborates the earlier ones by Okafor (2007), Fapohunda (2012) and Adegbami, Makinde & Shiyanbade (2014) that losses suffered by causal employees (outsourced workers) include abysmal low wages, absence of medical care allowances, job insecurity, irregular work hours, lack of collective representation by unions, none access to gratuity, pension and sick leave. They work for many years without promotion and necessary entitlements, and sometimes they do what normal employees should do but are not compensated for such. As a matter of fact, promotion opportunities are not available to outsourced employees.

The poor conditions of service experienced by outsourced workers increased labour turnover among these category of workers. The findings showed that the rate of labour turnover is very high among outsourced workers. One of the interviewees said:

The rate of turnover is very high. For instance, a set of people (cleaners) can be seen doing the work this week and in another one or two weeks, one begin to see another set of people doing the same work. This shows that these workers are not fully committed to their work because they

don't have anything at stake, there is no sense of belonging, and therefore they don't see the hospital as theirs.

This finding corroborates the thesis of Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) that once an employee does not see himself or herself as part of the organization, the step to actual turnover is almost taken. They went further by saying that there are many factors affecting turnover, these include job security, poor job compensation and ability to locate other fitting jobs. Therefore, considering the plight of outsourced workers, it can be stated that outsourcing policy implementation is dysfunctional and undesirable

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing research findings, we recommend that to ameliorate the dysfunctional aspects of outsourcing policy implementation, private sector practices should not be made a yardstick to solve the problems confronting organizations in the public sector. There should be no rush in implementing and extending initiatives without properly evaluating both the manifest and latent consequences of outsourcing policy implementation. Since public organizations are not primarily about profit making, it should not have cost reduction as the main objective. Consideration should therefore be given to the social welfare of outsourced workers.

Conclusion

The main thesis of this study is that Human resource outsourcing policy implementation is a mixed bag. It has been a phenomenon of love and hate, blessings and curses. On the one hand, it reduces cost of running an organization but on the other hand the burden of the cost reduction is inevitably placed on the shoulders of the innocent workers. We therefore, conclude on the note that even though Human resource outsourcing policy implementation is good and desirable, it does not have a human face and value. In the final analysis, the plight of employees under Human resource outsourcing policy implementation is unpalatable and nothing to write home about. The plight of a typical Nigerian worker under outsourcing policy implementation is better imagined than experienced. In every situation, workers' plight and welfare must be given prominence in the workplace.

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