Assessment of Factors Underpinning Employee's Interest and Preference for Telecommuting in Lagos Island, Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

Public awareness on environmentally sound practices viz-a-viz strategies that may also sustain a balanced work life culture cannot be overemphasized. Telecommuting represents one of those viable environmentally sound practices that offer flexibility to employees through working from their homes which to a great extent have improved employee's productivity. This study assessed the level of awareness about telecommuting as well as the factors underpinning employee's interest and preference for telecommuting in Lagos, Nigeria. A total of 220 responses from structured questionnaires was designed to capture the level of awareness, interest, readiness, and perception of employees towards telecommuting in Lagos Island, both descriptive and inferential analysis was used for the study. The study shows that 72% were aware of telecommuting and its associated benefits while about 90% opined that telecommuting will be suitable to their work. There was also a significant positive but weak relationship among employee's preference for telecommuting and factors such as age, marital status, awareness about telecommuting, and the experience of traffic gridlock and its associated stress .This study concluded that with the high level of awareness of telecommuting, organisations should gainfully harness the wide array of prospects that accompanies the adoption of telecommuting which has the long term advantage of stimulating labor productivity.
Keywords: *Telecommuting; Employee, Preference, Factors, Lagos Island.*

1. Introduction

Massive increase in greenhouse gases (GHGs) emission especially CO_2 which is being contributed majorly by the transport sector as a primary cause of global climate change coupled with the problem of traffic congestion and associated stress resulting from poor ambient air quality via built-up exhaust of vehicle emission during commuting and the relative bad public transport system constitute a public health risk particularly in Lagos and other developing climes (Raimi *et al.,* 2018; Raimi *et al.,* 2018; Raimi, 2019; Raimi *et al.,* 2019; Raimi *et al.,* 2020; Morufu *et al.,* 2021; Morufu *et al.,* 2021). More so, it is hypothetical to say that traffic-related stress is bound to affect work productivity (Gift & Obindah, 2020). The word Telecommuting was first mentioned in University of California with a focus on traffic reduction and was funded by the National Science foundation (Nilles & Alexandar, 1974). In 1980, pilot telework programs

were initialized in US. In 1990, states, local governments and corporations have started telecommuting but with poor acceptance by the organizations. In 2001, according to International Telework Association and Council, there are 28.8million Teleworkers (Grippaldi, 2002). In 2006, US Bureau of Transportation Statistics recorded 30% of the Labor force practices Telecommuting, which grew by 79.7% according to global workplace Analysis in 2012 (Mello, 2007). In 2016, 3.9 million has already kick-started telecommuting which amounts to 21% increase from the current level. Since the advent of Information and communication technologies (ICT), the diffusion of innovation in the workplace has been unprecedented (Bris *et al*. 2017). Hence, pushing the boundaries of what was technically infeasible in the past decades and improving human ways of life. For instance, mobile telephony has created a global village by making it possible for employees to conveniently work and communicate with people beyond borders. However, the flexible work culture that allows employee to work from home with the aid of telecommunication infrastructures (e.g., telephones, computers, wireless devices and other communication technology devices) is called Telecommuting. In other words, telecommuting is not constrained by time and space unlike the traditional workplace (Yao *et al.,* 2017).

Studies have averred that Telecommuting may benefit organizations and employee in terms of improved job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation for employee due to flexibility, real estate costs, lower levels of absenteeism, healthy work-family balance increased levels of employee loyalty, reduced travel cost, a better retention of skilled employee, reduced energy usage and carbon footprints, increased productivity, cost savings (Pinsonneault, 1999; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Greenberg and Nilssen, 2008; Raimi *et al.,* 2018; Ebuete *et al.,* 2019; Morufu *et al.,* 2021). However, scholars have equally argued that telecommuting may cause greater absence of best employees from the office (Kashani and Najafbagy, 2016). Other key priority areas identified are difficulty in evaluating performances of teleworker and the fear of corporate data theft by third party (Pinsonneault, 1999, Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Most bottlenecks to harnessing employees' benefits of telecommuting include managerial resistance or reluctance perhaps due to difficulties in supervising and managing remote workers, adequacy of manpower training and appropriate technology infrastructure support, feelings of isolation on the part of the employees, and increased security risks on the part of the organizations and the fear that telecommuting may limit opportunities for promotions and organizational rewards (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Karnowski & White, 2002; Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Ye, 2012; Tavares, 2017). Toksoz (2016) have opined that telecommuting would be of particular interest to women employees handling clerical posts than male counterparts; and that young adults and well-educated employees were more inclined towards telecommuting than other groups (Mokhtarian & Salomon, 1996; Bailey & Kurland, 2002 Peters *et al.,* 2004; Gift & Obindah, 2020).

The benefits of Telecommuting have been increasingly harnessed in developed parts of the world while it is still a relatively new concept in Nigeria and perhaps other developing countries. Harnessing the benefits of Telecommuting may be due to increased level of awareness about its health and economic benefits amongst other factors. More so, there is dearth of information as to whether gender, age, religion, and education influences employee's choice of telecommuting. Based on the above concerns, this paper intends to assess factors underpinning employee's interest and preference for telecommuting in Lagos, Nigeria with a view to recommending strategies towards greater penetrations of telecommuting for employees in Lagos State and by extension to Nigeria's urban cities where telecommuting could be useful.

2. Research Methodology: Data Collection

This study assumed a quantitative research methodology. The study area covered Lagos Island, Lagos. Lagos is one of the cities in South-western part of Nigeria often described as the commercial nerve of the country which has within her belly virtually the bulk of private and public enterprises, their headquarters as well as multinational companies which may account for increased population and heavy traffic gridlock. It is also one of the most populous cities in the world. A structured questionnaire and guided dialogue technique encompassing several statements on the level of awareness, interest, readiness and perceptions of employee towards telecommuting was developed to measure the research constructs using field officers. Some of the questions that formed the integral part of the questionnaire were opinions or suggestions well-communicated *via* earlier studies on the subject matter. A total of 250 questionnaires were administered, 235 were retrieved but 220 questionnaires were sorted and considered valid for analysis. A simple random sampling method was employed to select samples from each sub-population strata and hence, offering each member of the population an equal chance of being included in the sample. Basic Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's moment Correlation was used in tandem with specific objectives analyzed by means of the SPSS statistical software package (version 22).

3. Results and Discussions

The socio-demographic information of respondents used in this present study is summarized in Table 1. 60(30.9%) of the respondents are female while 151(68.6%) of them are male which forms majority of the population. It was observed that most of the respondents are married people with 153(69.5%). Nevertheless, 90% of employees sampled in this study were computer literate, hence fulfilling the basic requirement for effective telecommuting programs. Based on the information presented on the table, it was clear that there was a fair representation of gender, religion, marital status, sector etc. among respondents recruited for this study.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Information of Respondents

Factors	Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. Gender	Male	151	68.6
	Female	68	30.9
	Total	220	100
2. Age (years)	18-25	44	20.0
	25-35	140	63.6
	36-45	30	13.6
	46-55	6	2.7
	Total	220	100.0
3. Marital Status	Single	61	27.7
	Married	153	69.5
	Divorced	6	2.7
	Total	220	100.0
4. No. of Children	0 to 1 Child	118	53.6
	2-4 Children	99	45.0
	5 & Above	3	1.4
	Total	220	100.0
5. Highest Education	BSc / BTech.	129	58.6
	MPhil/MSc.	87	39.5
	PhD.	1	.5
6. Religion	Christianity	167	75.9
	Islam	47	21.4
	Others	6	2.7
	Total	220	100.0
7. Sector	Private	163	74.1
	Public	53	24.1
	Total	220	100.0

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of workplace being far from home against the experience of Traffic congestion and stress

		Traffic congestion and stress while going to work and back			Total
		Yes	No	Not Sure	
Workplace far from home	Yes	150 (82.8)	24 (13.2)	7 (3.8)	181 (100)
	No	18 (81.8)	1(4.5)	3 (13.6)	22 (100)
	Not Sure	12 (70.5)	5 (29.4)	0 (0)	17 (100)
Total		180	30	10	220

Note: Figures in parenthesis are row percentage, **1**– Yes, **2**– No, **3**– Not Sure

The result in table 2 indicates the cross-tabulation of workplace being far from place of residence against the experience of traffic congestion and stress. Majority (82.8%) of respondents affirm

that their workplace is far from their home. This could be as a result of high rate of rent in Lagos Island where these employees work; consequently, they rather live-in suburbs where house rent is affordable and flexible. The implication of this action on workers is that they often leave home for work before dawn and come back home after dusk from Monday to Friday of every week in a tensed traffic congestion and stress which is in line with (Murmu, 2014) thought about workers working under pressure not minding the need to balance their lives. In the opinion of Kinman and Jone (2003) stress could lead to depression and anxiety. Over the years, telecommuting helps in flexibility workers working hours in order to deal with the problem of stress (Peters, 2001) because workers that works from their homes may tend to perform well compare to workers that spend most of their working hours in the traffic trying to get to work (Gripsrud & Hjorthol, 2012). Another scenario about traffic congestion is immense pressure on public facilities and excessive pollution of the environment especially from green-house gasses emitted by the huge traffic of automobiles (Raimi *et al.,* 2018). The study clearly shows that fewer numbers of respondents (24 persons) do not experience traffic congestion and stress while commuting to and fro from work while 7 respondents were not sure of their experiences about the subject matter.

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation of the Experience of Traffic Congestion and Stress against Productivity (Both at work and home)

		Traffic congestion affecting productivity				Total
		Missing data	Yes	No	Not Sure	
Experience of Traffic congestion and stress to and fro to work	Yes	1 (0.56)	169 (93.9)	4 (2.2)	6 (3.3)	180 (100)
	No	0 (0)	25 (83.3)	5 (16.7)	0 (0)	30 (100)
	Not Sure	0 (0)	10 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (100)
Total		1	204	9	6	220

Note: Figures in parenthesis are row percentage, **1**– Yes, **2**– No, **3**– Not Sure

Table 3 addresses a question of whether respondents recruited in the study experience traffic congestion and whether traffic congestion affects their productivity both at work and home. It is quite logical to posit that traffic congestion and stress will ultimately lead to lower productivity from workers end and in return affect the turnover of the organization. The result shows that majority of respondents (about 93%) responded that traffic congestion affects their productivity. It can be deduced that organizations who expect increased productivity should address critically the constraints to productivity (such as traffic congestion) (Potter, 2003; Kossek *et al*, 2015). An earlier study (DuBrin, 1991) observed an increased productivity in employees that were given the opportunity to telecommute based on their need compared to those that were not given such opportunity. This is due to the fact that those workers who are allowed to telecommute are likely to have the trust of their employer through a sound work ethic (The, 2013)**.**

Table 4. Cross-Tabulation of Awareness of Telecommuting against the Experience of Telecommuting

		Telecommuting Experience			Total
		Yes	No	Not Sure	
Telecommuting Awareness	Yes	34 (21.4)	125 (78.6)	0 (0)	159 (100)
	No	1(1.6)	58 (95.1)	2 (3.3)	61 (100)
	Total	35	183	2	220

Note: Figures in parenthesis are row percentage, **1**– Yes, **2**– No, **3**– Not Sure

Table 4 illustrates the awareness of telecommuting and experience of telecommuting via a cross-tabulation matrix. Only few employees (about 21.4%) had both the awareness and experience of telecommuting while majority (about 78%) were aware about telecommuting and its associated benefits but with no work experience. This gap further shows that the adoption rate of telecommuting is abysmally low and that mere awareness of telecommuting and its benefits by employees does not necessarily translate to practical experience. The implication of this finding is that while most employees in this area are aware of telecommuting, their respective employers are yet to incorporate telecommuting into the office working policy despite its benefits on work productivity. Identifying this gap will help organization to respond to internal business problems, and to devise a transportation demand management strategy which will enhance work productivity and by extension affects innovation activities (Mokhtarian, 2000).

Table 5. Correlation Matrix Showing Factors Influencing Employees Preference for Telecommuting

	Preference	Age	Marital Status	No. of Children	Education	Awareness	Traffic gridlock & its related stress
1	1	.242**	.282**	.443**	-.025	.691**	.272**
2		1	.491**	.271**	.114*	.145*	.070
3			1	.496**	.309**	.377**	.093
4				1	.131*	.596**	.102
5					1	.042	.035
6						1	.198**
7							1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
As clearly indicated in Table 5, there was a significant and positive but weak relationship among employee's preference for telecommuting and factors such as age, marital status, awareness about telecommuting, and the experience of traffic gridlock and its associated stress. This goes to

explain that the older or younger an employee is, the more the tendency to prefer telecommuting and vice-versa.

Table 6. Employees' Interest and Perception on Telecommuting programs

Factors	Yes	No	Not Sure
Computer literacy as a basic requisite for Telecommuting	200 (90.9)	14 (6.4)	6(2.7)
Awareness of Telecommuting and its benefits	159 (72.3)	61 (27.7)	0(0.0)
Work suitability to Telecommuting	200 (90.9)	14 (6.4)	6(2.7)
Adequacy of ICT tools to support Telecommuting	76 (34.5)	119 (54.1)	25 (11.4)
Telecommuting is likely to limit promotion and rewards (extrinsic motivation)	35 (15.9)	149 (67.7)	33(15)
Telecommuting is likely to cause isolation of employees	35 (15.9)	149 (67.7)	33(15)
Traffic congestion and related stress	180 (81.8)	30 (13.6)	10 (4.5)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are row percentage, **1**– Yes, **2**– No, **3**– Not Sure

Table 6 above indicates employees' interest and perception on telecommuting programs. According to Tavares (2017) "Telework, as a form of flexible work arrangement, became more and more significant in the late 1990s as the use of home computers, laptops, mobile phones and sophisticated telecommunications software become an everyday work tool". A good number of respondents (about 90%) agreed that computer literacy is a basic requisite for telecommuting, but a few (about 6%) of them gave a contrary opinion about computer literacy being the basic requisite for telecommuting while others (about 2%) were not sure. Hence, computer literacy is vital for the efficiency and proper implementation of telecommuting (Tavares, 2017)**.** A large number of employees (about 72%) were aware of telecommuting and its associated benefits while (27.7%) of them are not aware of telecommuting and its benefits. A good number of the respondents, (about 90%) believe telecommuting is suitable to their work; 6.4% of them gave a contrary opinion while others (about 2%) were not sure of their position. About 34% of respondents stated their respective organizations are not adequately equipped with modern ICT tools to enhance telecommuting, while about 54 % affirmed the adequacy of ICT tools in their organisations for enhancing telecommuting programs while others (11.4%) respondents were not sure of their position. Many scholars have pointed that the adequacy of ICT tools is necessary for an effective telecommuting program (Mokhtarian, 2000; Tavares, 2017). Additionally, about 15.9% of the respondents were of the opinion that telecommuting is likely to limit promotion and rewards (extrinsic motivation); 67.7% gave a contrary view; others (about 15%) were not sure of what they stand for. The possibility of telecommuting been a major cause of isolation of employees is been affirmed by 15.9% of the respondents; a large number (67.7%) gave a contrary view to the statement while others (15%) were not sure of their positions. Also, majority of respondents (81.8%) believed that the experience of traffic congestion and related stress is an important factor that may affect employees' interest and preference for telecommuting programs;

only few (13.6%) gave a contrary view and others (4.5%) were not sure of their position on this view. Thus, the awareness of telecommuting among employees in this study as vividly shown in Figure 1 as commendable. However, more rigorous awareness and training on the functionalities of telecommuting may go a long way in improving work productivity and preserving the work culture and values.
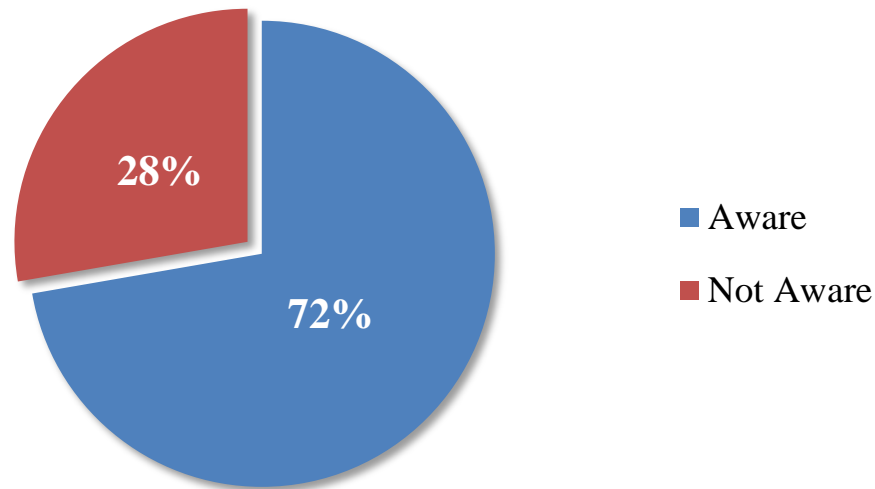

Figure 1. Awareness of Telecommuting among Employees

4.   Conclusion and Recommendations

Deducible from the analysis of the data collated and collected is that the embracing of telecommuting by public and private employers of labour is rather infantile and slow-pacing. The need to boost the nation's economy by creatively maximizing the tremendously large labour force to stimulate high labour productivity demands the adoption and embrace of Telecommuting as an effective strategy to tackle the myriad of factors inhibiting employee's productivity in the country. Therefore, in concluding, this study strongly acknowledged that telecommuting is an environmentally sound and cost-effective practice that have the potential to benefit organisations and even the employees if the policy is well planned for. In other words, Organizations should develop a plan on how they intend to ensure the successful adoption of telecommuting practices.

As observed in this study, the level of awareness about telecommuting and its related benefits among the respondents recruited were high. However, factors underpinning their interest and preference for telecommuting being the focus of this study were: experience of traffic congestion and stress associated with it; awareness of telecommuting and its benefits; work suitability to telecommuting; and adequacy of ICT tools to support telecommuting policy. On the other hand, the tendency for loose monitoring, redundancy; ICT Literacy; and the fear of loss of promotion and other fringe benefits are the factors restraining the acceptance, adoption and promotion of telecommuting on the Lagos Island.

Thus, there is a need for public awareness through seminars, symposium and other channels through which both public and private employers of labour are educated on the advantages of telecommuting and how it can be harness to boost high labor productivity. Additionally, a large-scale ICT training for employees is direly needed since ICT literacy is found out to be a factor through which telecommuting can be effectively carried. Labor unions and their employers are encouraged to create a platform through which strategic policies on telecommuting can be devised and implemented to regulate the adoption and practice of telecommuting. It is therefore submitted that telecommuting is a trending modern productivity strategy which if embraced in Lagos state and indeed in Nigeria, given its teeming population, will greatly enhance labor productivity, and will serve as a catalyst for the projected economic growth recovery for the country. Additionally, since this study observed a significant positive but weak relationship among employee's preference for telecommuting and factors such as age, marital status, awareness about telecommuting, and the experience of traffic gridlock and its associated stress. It is recommended that future studies should consider an in-depth study of these factors and other variables as to validate the strength of our findings.

Acknowledgements

Authors' contributions

All authors included in the manuscript provided substantial contribution to (i) conception and design, (ii) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content and (iii) final approval of the completed manuscript.

Declaration of competing interests

We affirm that we have no conflict of interest that may be alleged as prejudicing the impartiality of the study reported. This researcher did not receive special assistance from government, not-for-profit sectors or commercial institutions.

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