The impact of commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change: The case of Nigerian Civil Aviation Industry

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This study explored the influence of commitment and job insecurity as predictors of openness to organizational change. Using a cross-section survey design, 205 employees from aviation industries in Nigeria participated in the study (58% males and 42% females; mean age = 34.21 years, SD = 7.57). Majority of the participants (87%) had at least Bachelor degree or Higher Diploma. Data were collected using Perceived Job Insecurity Measure, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire and Openness to Organizational Change measure while hierarchical multiple regressions was used for the analyse. The result showed that demographic and psychological factors yielded 3 and 19%, respectively on openness to organizational change. Specifically, commitment and job insecurity contributed significantly to openness to organizational change. The findings provided empirical support for the idea that commitment and job insecurity influence openness to organization change. Plausible implications for employees’ perception and work attitude are emphasized.

Key words: Job insecurity, commitment, openness to change, attitude.

INTRODUCTION

The ability of an organisation to deal with change provides a competitive advantage, as change is a constant factor in the world of work (Jordon, 2004; Mossholder et al., 2000; Skinner et al., 2002). Hence, organizations need to understand how to manage and cope with change. According to Aderamo (2010), the success of any organisation is closely related to how the management foresees the future and development strategies. Moreover, nearly all contributors to the change literature have placed greater importance on human factors (such as employees’ openness to or acceptance of organizational change) as central to the success of an organization’s change efforts (Szamosi and Duxbury, 2002). Openness to organizational change can therefore be referred to as the extent to which people are open to new ideas, flexible and are in agreement with a change; a willingness to tolerate and embrace change (Warberg and Banas, 2000), which is not equivalent, but related to readiness to change (Hinduan et al., 2009). During change, employees’ social identity disintegrates and individuals seek unity to confer security (Ehrhart and Klein, 2001). This study investigates the role of perceived job insecurity and organizational commitment on openness to change among employees in the Nigerian aviation industries.

Employees are very much affected by major organizational change such as seeing others lose their jobs as employment is assumed to hold the keys to not only socio-economic but also psychological benefits (De Witte, 1999; Reisel et al., 2007). Job insecurity has been defined as an individual’s expectations about continuity in a job situation (Davy et al., 1997); overall concern about the future existence of the job (Rosenblatt and Ayalla, 1996); perception of potential threat to continuity in one’s current job (Heaney et al., 1994); and powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). According to Hartley et al. (1991), job insecurity in part influenced individual’s perceptions and interpretations of the immediate work environment. In contrast to actual job loss, job insecurity
is the perceived risk of the nature and continued existence of one’s job due to anticipation of stressful event. Organizational commitment refers to the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in an organization (Mowday et al., 1982). It consists of three facets: an acceptance of the organization’s goals; a willingness to work hard for the organization; and the desire to stay with the organization. While, Walsh and Taylor (2002) stated that most researchers agree that organizational commitment reflects a multidimensional psychological attachment of an individual to the organization. In this study, organizational commitment means that employees will be willing to allow organization change to take place. It is also expected that organizations engaging in rapid changes in operations will attend to job insecurities in employees.

Job insecurity among today’s employees is not surprising given the competition that businesses endure and the intense pressures to remain profitable (Reisel et al., 2007). One of the common means of reducing variable costs for organizations is through layoffs (Nixon et al., 2004). In US for instance, employers terminate appointment of millions of workers to reduce costs (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2010). Terminating workers appointment may be of little concern to the organisations except that surviving employees usually react negatively to the perceived job insecurity. This is particularly true in managerial positions where strategic decision-making has a great influence on organizational performance (Hitt et al., 2001).

The Nigerian aviation industry

The Nigerian aviation industry is selected as the study population due to recent reorganisations and changes within the industry. Some of these changes might have arisen due to the frequent air traffic accidents, technological updates and repositioning of the industry for economic viability. For instance, Aderamo (2006) reported that between 1969 and 2006, over 1, 267 passengers lost their lives as a result of aircraft disasters in Nigeria. Similarly, Adebiyi (2008) reported that there was 58-air traffic accidents in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007 with 93.10% either fatal or serious accidents. No wonder the resultant loss of both human and material resources due to air traffic accidents has not only called for sober reflection (Adebiyi et al., 2006; Sacks et al., 2002), but also the reorganization in the industries. The Federal Ministry of Aviation, which is a body that is overseeing the aviation industries, has been re-engineering its core operational services through the provision of robust safety reform agenda such as granting full autonomy to Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority by empowering the body to regulate aviation safety without political interference; providing aggressive training programme to address acute shortage of skilled man power; and recapitalization of airline etc. (Demuren, 2007). These series of changes are bound to not only create panic but psychological defeat to employees with adjustment problems through the entire industry.

Factors influencing job insecurity, according to Furda and Meijman (1992), are predictability and controllability. Research suggested that explicit and open communication regarding organisational changes is effective in reducing insecurity (Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991). That is, open, honest and early communication increases the predictability and controllability of future events (De Witte, 2005). Similarly, Parker et al. (1997) observed that participation in decisions about the organisation’s future (and thus about employment) also reduces insecurity as employees increase their control over the situation through participation. This is because participating in the decision-making process heightens the predictability of events.

Job insecurity influences various organisational attitudes and behaviours, which have consequences for the organisation (Sverke et al., 2002). According to Ito and Brotheridge (2007), it is associated with both job loss strain and psychological distress; with deterioration in organisational commitment (Sverke et al., 2004); and with negative employee attitudes and behaviours such as increased deviant behaviour (Lim, 1996). On the impact of job security on attitudes toward work, researchers such as Davy et al. (1997) and Rosenblatt and Ayalla (1996) reported that job insecurity adversely affects organizational commitment and resistance to change.

Association with desirable work behaviours has primarily made organizational commitment to be of great interest (Dunham et al., 1994; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Shore and Wayne, 1993). Thus, organizational commitment is seen as a bond that the employee has with his/her organization (Lambert and Paoline, 2008). According to Đorđević (2004), organizations value commitment among their employees because it is assumed that committed employees engage in “extra-role” behaviours, such as being creativity or innovative. Organizational commitment occurs in two major ways, according to Lambert and Paoline (2008); first, the ‘calculative’ commitment, that is, the act of “being bonded to the organization because of sunken costs”. An employee ‘calculates’ the gains and losses of working for a given organization in terms of economics, psychological, or social liabilities and assets. The outcome of such calculation then determines the level of commitment to the organization (Lambert et al., 1999). Second, through attitudinal commitment, this is the type that is more frequently measured (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). It is seen as stressing the strength of an individual’s feelings toward the organization, loyalty to or/and cognitive desire to belong to the organization (Steers, 1977).

Studies have shown that organizational commitment buffers the relationship between stress and job dis-
pleasure interpreted to be job dissatisfaction (Begley and Czajka, 1993); gives employees feeling of stability and belongingness (Mowday, et al., 1982); and also protects employees from the adverse effects of stress, such as caused by organizational hardship (layoffs), and thus enables them to attach direction and meaning to their work (Kobasa, 1982). On the other hand, Colman and Kilman (1990) suggested the need to gain insight into how employees view change efforts so as to understand such employees’ behaviour. This is because openness to change may be influenced by dispositional emotional stability and openness to experience (Edwards, 2003).

Individuals that are open to change presuppose that change, not stability, is normal and provides opportunities for growth, not a threat to security (Kobasa, 1982). When employees are satisfied with their jobs, major changes are still unlikely to be successful unless individuals are committed to the initiatives; thus, commitment to change is ‘a force’ that binds an individual to a course of action which he/she deems necessary for the successful implementation of change initiative’ (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002). As Hinduan et al. (2009) put it, if employees are less open to change, organizational leadership should make effort to highlight the processes that will ensure a sense of security and stability. Furthermore, Hinduan et al. (2009)’s study revealed that commitment to change rather than commitment to the organization are more important in predicting support for change. This is in line with Higgins (2000), suggestion that regulatory fit indicates that individuals who seek growth and advancement experience harmony when the context encourages risky rather than cautious processing.

Goals of the study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the level of openness to organizational change among aviation industry employees and the roles play by commitment and job insecurity. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to:

1. Investigate the independent and joint influence of commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change.
2. Investigate main and interaction effects of commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change, and;
3. To examine the relationship between employees’ personal demographic characteristics and openness to change.

This study therefore sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Do commitment and job insecurity jointly or independently influence openness to organizational change among aviation industry employees?
2. What type of relationship exists between aviation industry employees’ demographic characteristics and their openness to organizational change?

METHOD

Research design

This study was based on cross-sectional survey design. According to Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1997), this type of design can be used to evaluate interrelationships among variables within a population and is ideal to describe and predict functions associated with correlative research. The main independent variables of study are commitment and job insecurity while other independent variable is demographic factor; comprising gender, age, work experience and marital status. The dependent variable of study is openness to organizational change.

Participants

The sample size consisted of 205 employees from four aviation organizations with 119 (58.0%) males and 86 (42.0%) females while their age ranges from 22 to 50 years with a mean of 34.21 years and (SD = 7.57). Eighty (39%) of the participants were single while 125 (61.0%) were married. Their educational background varied from GCE/OND certificates with 25 (12.2%), 143 (69.8%) having B.Sc./HND certificates while the remaining 37 (18.0%) had postgraduate qualifications. In addition, their working experience ranges from 1 to 30 years with a mean of 6.13 years, SD = 6.39. The roles of the participants ranged from management employees and non-management positions (staff and clerks).

Measures and psychometric properties

Survey in paper-and-pencil format, which was in four sections — the instruments for commitment, job insecurity, and the demographic variables- was administered to participants. Section A covered the demographic information such as gender, age, educational qualification, working experience and marital status. Section B contained a 20-item scale that measures Job Insecurity (Ugboro and Obeng, 2001) regarding the probability of occurrence of certain job related events that influence job security which were measured using Likert scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5). Items 1 to 8 measure threats to the total job, while items 9 to 20 measure threat to job features. Ugboro and Obeng (2001) reported an internal consistency reliability of 0.87 for the scores from the measure. An alpha reliability of 0.82 and split half reliability coefficient of 0.71 were observed for this study. Section C was a 24-item Likert type Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Allen and Meyer, 1990) used to assess commitment. The items were presented using 5-point Likert-type scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Allen and Meyer (1990) reported a Cronbach alpha co-efficient of 0.89 for the scale. An internal reliability α = .70 was observed for this study. Section D was an 18-item Openness to Organizational Change Measure (Dunham et al., 1989). Response choices ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” on a 5-point Likert format. Dunham et al. (1989) reported Cronbach’s coefficient alpha reliabilities of 0.82 to 0.92 for the subscales. Huang (1993) reported high reliability coefficients for each subscale. The present study showed that the instrument yielded acceptable internal reliability α = .76).
Statistical analysis

The data from this study were coded and scored using SPSS statistically package. In measuring the internal consistency of the instruments, Cronbach alpha coefficient (α) was used (George and Mallery, 2003). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were also used. Pearson product-momentum correlation coefficient was used to specify the relationship between the variables as hierarchical multiple regression analysis was undertaken to assess the interactive effects of commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change. In Step 1, socio-demographic variables, that is, age, gender, marital status and work experience were entered. Step 2 contained the commitment and job insecurity, while all the variables were entered in Step 3. Variance inflation scores were examined to determine the influence of multicollinearity (Chatterjee and Price, 1991; Stine, 1995). A test of the change in $R^2$ indicates whether job insecurity adds to the explanation of the dependent variable after controlling the background characteristics. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Procedure

Each participant was asked to pick a paper from the paper baskets containing the odd-even numbers. Each employee that picked odd number was politely excused from the study while individual with even numbers was given a questionnaire to fill. Some filled the questionnaires instantly while some others requested that they should be allowed to take it home and return at a later day. Participants were not required to write their names and organizations on the questionnaires. The Human Resources department of each organization assisted in collecting the completed questionnaires from participants. The researcher checked through completed questionnaires and removed those that were not properly filled. A total of 205 questionnaires were found useable out of the 270 administered, representing a response rate of 75.93%.

Ethical consideration

Permission for the study was obtained from the Human Resources department of the organization after which employees were briefed on the purpose of the study. Then, participant informed consent was obtained while debriefing took place after the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The first analysis involved inter-correlation of all variables under study. The result is presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the relationship between job insecurity and openness to organizational change.

Predicting commitment and openness to organizational change from job security

Table 2 presents the results for the analysis to predict commitment and openness to change from job security. As can be seen in Table 2, employees that scored low on job insecurity were more opened to organizational change ($M = 55.68$) than employees that scored high on perceived job insecurity ($M = 52.88$), [f (1, 201) = 9.12, $p < 0.01$]. Similarly, employees that scored higher on commitment were more open to organizational change ($M = 55.41$) than employees that scored low on commitment ($M = 53.05$), [f (1, 201) = 3.73, $p < 0.05$].

Effects of demographic variables

Research question two was analysed using hierarchical multiple regression statistical analysis to detect the unique variance contribution of each set of factors (demographic factor—‘age, gender, marital status and work experience’, and the psychological factor—‘commitment and job insecurity’). Each set of factors were entered in each step separately. The result of demographic factor of age, gender, marital status and work experience in the first step showed an explained 3% [$R^2 = .03$; $F (4, 201) = 2.48; p > 0.05$] on openness to organizational change; these contributions were however not significant. With the psychological factors of commitment and job insecurity, the analysis showed an explained 19% [$R^2 = .19$; $F (2, 203) = 12.71; p < .01$]. The variance explained by commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change was significant (Table 3).

However, in the third step the variance explained by all the factors (age, gender, marital status, work experience, commitment and job insecurity) as shown in Table 3 was 6% [$R^2 = .06$; $F (7, 198) = 2.65; p < .05$] on openness to organizational change. Commitment, job insecurity, age, gender, marital status and work experience contributed just 6% to openness to organizational change among the employees. Job insecurity negatively contributed significantly to openness to organizational change ($\beta = - .22; t = 2.12; P < .05$). Commitment explained openness to organizational change ($\beta = .23; t = 3.23; P < .01$). This indicated that employees that scored higher on commitment reported higher level of openness to organizational change.

DISCUSSION

The psychological factors of commitment and job insecurity under study showed significant independent effect on openness to organizational change. Job insecurity negatively contributed towards openness to organizational change. This confirmed Rosenblatt and Ayalla’s (1996) study, which stated that job insecurity adversely, affect resistance to change. It is also in line with Ronald and Edgren (2001)’s study, which suggested that perceptions of vaguely formulated goals lead to employee’s resistance of organizational change. This might be because perceived job insecurity relied on the
Table 1. Linear correlation matrix showing the relationships among variables of study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Insecurity</th>
<th>Commit</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Exp.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>54.14</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>53.31</td>
<td>8.48</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
<td>45.20</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>34.21</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Change = openness to change; Insecurity = job insecurity; Commit = commitment; Experience = work experience; * = p < 0.05; ** = p < 0.01.

Table 2. Summary of 2 x 2 ANOVA showing the main and interaction effects of commitment and job insecurity on openness to organizational change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
<td>162.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>162.60</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>397.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>397.53</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity X Commit</td>
<td>125.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>125.43</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>8761.33</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>43.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9446.90</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Insecurity = job insecurity; Commit = commitment.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showing the influence demographic factors, job insecurity and commitment on openness to organizational change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>12.71</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>&gt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>&lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Experience = work experience; Insecurity = job insecurity; Commit = commitment.

The significant impact of commitment on openness to organizational change among employees of the aviation industries appeared to confirm Wiener’s (1982) position that commitment induced the feeling of obligation to remain with the organization. For instance, the wave of aircraft disasters (Adebiyi, 2008; Aderamo, 2006) might have motivated the employees to desire a fundamental shake up in the industry and also willingly accepted and supported such changes. As, Wiener and Gechman individual’s perception and interpretation of the immediate work environment (Hartley et al., 1991). Consequently, it can be assumed that those employees who perceive their job as insecure may be less open to organizational change.
(1977) stated, the pattern of behaviour from commitment reflects personal preoccupation with the organization; such as devoting a great deal of personal time to organization related actions and thoughts (such as, open mindedness to any change that might accomplish organizational goals and results). This is because commitment emits willingness to make personal sacrifice, perform beyond normal expectations and endure difficult times with an organization (Đorđević, 2004; Steers, 1977). As Kobasa (1982) puts it, commitment protects employees from any adverse effects that organizational hardship might cause. In the same vein, Meyer et al. (1993) noted that commitment is a psychological state, which characterized the employee's relationship with the organization with implication for the decision to continue or stop membership in the organization. These views indicated that committed employees would be better prepared to confront organizational problems that have employment-related implications, such as job insecurity and threat to belonging. This might have explained the direction of this finding.

Finally, none of the demographic factors examine in this study showed significant influence on openness to organizational change. This runs contrary to Edwards' (2003) assertion that openness change might have been influenced by dispositional openness to experience. In this study, the psychological factor is the deciding factor, hence, making it an important factor for intervention and policy implementation in terms of human capital development.

Conclusion

This study investigated commitment and job insecurity as predictors of openness to organizational change in aviation industry, and from the findings, the researcher concluded that employee's openness to organizational change is more affected by the factors of psychology than demographic.

Recommendation

When implementing significant organizational change, management needs to be aware of how employees' perception is associated with their behavioural intentions, as this will assist the management to develop, promote, implement appropriate intervention strategies and to make employees more open to organizational change. This will in turn assist employees to identify and interpret their perceptions of change. The personal awareness is likely to alter an individual's perceptions of organisational change, thereby reducing the level of close-mindedness. Organizations in aviation industry should endeavour to develop human resources management strategies that support organizational change. This could be in terms of building information resources management strategies and technology framework that support process of change; integrate change efforts; and other improvement efforts across the organization. Also, organizations should create favourable climate that encourages innovation and change while pushing for training and retraining opportunities for employees that are poor in adjustment and higher level of job insecurity. Employees must be properly educated to understand that organizational change is important, necessary and indeed inevitable.

Finally, the outcome of this study provided support for the adoption of a balanced approach to implementation of change, mostly in the aviation industry. That is, attention and energy should be shared between the technical aspects and the human factors that are associated with openness to organization change process.

Limitations of the study

The limitation of the study is that the findings may be true only to the aviation industries surveyed. Data collection method used was highly structured, while the use of other measures or combination of both structured and unstructured may have yielded different results. In addition, self-reporting based on questionnaire is subjective and respondents may have overestimated or underestimated the level of openness to organizational change, thus producing respondents' bias. There is therefore, a need for further study of these variables in relation to work participation factors.

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