

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INCENTIVES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP AND PRODUCTIVITY OF POLYTECHNICS STAFF IN BAUCHI STATE:

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Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of incentive program on the relation between employee relationship and productivity of Bauchi State Polytechnics. We draw from human relations theory to justify the relationship. Copies of questionnaires were distributed to 360 polytechnic staff and 287 out of the retrieved were usable. The data collected was analysed using SMARTPLS 4.4.9. The findings established Employee relationship significantly influences productivity and an incentive mediates the relationship between employee relationship and productivity. This study results have some practical implications for managers and policy makers that are interested in getting the best out of the employees' which will boost the employee motivation, commitment and productivity of their organizations.

Keywords: Employee Relationship, Employee Incentives & Employee Productivity

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the increasingly competitive global business environment, organizations are compelled to invest in capacity building and development in order to be more cost effective, innovative, and generally more competitive than other industry players (Awan & Tahir, 2015). One of the key issues that most organizations face nowadays is the need to improve employee productivity. Employee productivity is one of the leading factors for organizational competitiveness and this has partly led to an increase in research on how it can be improved (Bankert, et al, 2015). Improving employee productivity has been the core and the most important objective of several organizations. This is because higher levels of employee productivity provide an organization and its employee with various advantages. Additionally, employee who is more productive can obtain better wages/salaries, better working conditions and favorable employment opportunities. All of these benefits have made employee productivity worthy of attention.

Looking at its antecedents it is very important to ensure good employee relationship within the organization. According to Stallard (2009) and corroborated by Arimie and Orosaye, (2020), employees in an organization with strong positive employee relationship are more engaged, efficient in the productivity of their duties, and less likely to leave the organization for another. He outlined the constructs of employee relations in an organization to include communication, mutual trust, conflict resolution and cooperation among others between the employee which will enhance skills and abilities of the employee in the achievement of the organizational goals and objectives.

According to Bhasin (2023) Incentives can be defined as a thing that organizations use to encourage or motivate their employees to increase their productivity. In general, an incentive scheme (payment or program) is any compensation that has been designed to recognize some specific accomplishment on the part of an employee. It is expected that the prospect of the incentive payment will "trigger" the desired employees' productivity behaviour in the employee. Incentives are either individual or group (organization wide). In this study, both financial and non-financial incentives are designed to motivate employee to improve their productivity to increase effort and output and by producing better results expressed in such terms as objectives for profit, productivity, sales turnover, cost reduction, quality customer service and on time delivery. This financial and non-financial compensation provide employee with the moral for achievement in terms of contribution or output to the organization.

Poor employer-employee relationships over the years have aggravated due to poor remuneration standards resulting in constant friction and strikes which have reduced productivity level of employees of many tertiary institutions. Many employees are performing below expectation and others are leaving the

institutions to other places for better incentives and good working relationship at workplace, thereby contributing to the much touted brain drain currently affecting the institutions. In addition, some staff members go for further studies outside the state and country and do not come back upon completion of their studies because many seek for better opportunities while on studies. Obviously, employee relations and incentive are emerging as competitive weapons that allow organizations to counteract current market evolution and competitive levels because they can boost employee productivity. In the situation where good employee relationships and incentives are lacking in an organization, poor employee productivity is bound to occur. This study therefore, used the mediating role of incentive programs to explore the relationship between employee relationship and productivity of Bauchi State Polytechnics

With an array of consistency in the past literature as given by Sequeira & Shriti, (2015), Hasen & Salman (2016), Arimie and Oransaye (2020) and Malve (2023) revealing that employee relationship (communication, trust and conflict resolution) has significant influence on employee productivity, the study seeks to introduce “incentive” as an intervening variable to influence the strength of the relationship the independent and the dependent variables.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to investigate the mediating role of incentive programs on the relation between employee relationship and productivity of Bauchi State Polytechnics.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that, it will add value to the body of existing knowledge around the relationships in the study and to significantly contribute to practical, theoretical and policy used to tackle problems arising from work situations that will lead to proper employee productivity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This section discusses various concepts used in the study, the theory that underpins the study, and a review of related empirical studies.

Employee Relationship and Productivity

In general terms, productivity refers to the conversion of inputs such as human resources, money, and time into outputs (Shivangi and Nirmala, 2022). Similarly, Yunus and Ernawati (2017) defined productivity as the capability to produce goods and services in order to achieve the goals of the organization. Improving employee productivity has been one of the most important objectives for several organizations. This is because higher levels of productivity provide an organization and its employees with various advantages. All of these benefits have made employee productivity worthy of attention.

Employee relation is defined as the relationship between employees and managers to enhance moral, commitment and trust of employees and to create suitable working environment which enables them to exert their energy at most effort for the achievement of organizational goals (Bajaj et al., 2013). Furthermore, Michael (2005) quoted in Som (2015) stated that Employee Relationship is defined as the process of managing relationship between employer and employees with ultimate objectivity of achieving optimum level of productivity in terms of goods and services, employee motivation taking preventive measures to resolve problems that affect adversely the working environment.

Good employee relation creates pleasant atmosphere for employees which can increase their motivation. Increased employees moral can lead to increase workers' productivity as well. Organizations investing in employee relation programs may experience an increase in productivity which leads to increase in profit for the business (Kelchner, 2017). In the research conducted by (Sequeira and Dhriti, 2015) it was identified that employee relations practices followed in the organization had a direct effect on the productivity of workers in the organization. The study also revealed that improving the employee relations practices of an organization can improve the productivity of employees. In similar way the research conducted by (Kuzu and Ozihan, 2014 and Al-khozondar, 2015) revealed that there is strong relationship between employee relations and employee productivity.

H1: Employee relationship has significant relationship with productivity.

Employee Relationship and Employee Incentives

An incentive is an inducement which rouses or stimulates one to action in a desired direction (Milton, 2013). They are benefits that are promised to employees to motivate them to give their best and improve their behavior, productivity and output continuously. Incentives can be financial and non-financial depending on the instrument used (Meridith, 2015).

A harmonious relationship between employers and employees leads to higher motivation and employee engagement. When employees are happy, they are more productive. They will put more effort into their work, and this translates into satisfied customers and more revenue (Sammi, 2023). While developing and maintaining good employee relations can be challenging in most workplaces, healthy relationships among workers are beneficial not only to the individuals but to the entire organization. Also, in workplaces, incentives may come to employee based on the strength of employee engagement which may not necessarily be monetary but can take the form extra time off, flexible working hours, rewards, recognition and praise, just to name a few. These rewards have a powerful psychological effect on employees, stimulating their desire to work harder or achieve more (Cusson, et al, 2023).

H2: Employee relationship has significant relationship with employee incentives.

Incentive and Productivity

According Boela (2005) incentives are offered in order to focus the employee's attention to the business objectives of the employer, and add that they are normally used to stimulate productivity and particularly to increase sales and control costs. Furthermore, study on this relationship shows that financial incentives improved productivity (Ajibade & Salako, 2021). Also, other researchers like Holtmann and Grammling (2005) found that 83% of the total respondents agreed on the fact that incentive schemes had a high effect on increasing the productivity of employees. They also said that many managers use incentive schemes to try to improve productivity. Thus, staff incentive schemes have powerful effects on the staff productivity of the organization and thereby are able to boost staff productivity (Woodruffe, 2006).

H3: Incentives has significant relationship with Productivity.

The Role of Employee Incentives

The review of literature and empirical studies by Arimie and Oransaye (2020) and Malve (2023) show that employees’ relationship influence on productivity positively as it is practiced in various countries and sectors of the world. With array of consistencies from the previous studies necessitates the need for a constructs to strengthen the relationship between employee relationship and productivity. However, to the best of my knowledge there is dearth research work conducted using this variable of employee incentives to mediate between employee relationship and productivity.

H4: Employee Incentives mediates the relationship between employee relationship and productivity



Figure 1 Research conceptual frame work
Source: research field work 2022

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is underpinned by Human Relation theory.

Human Relations Theory

Human Relations Theory introduced in 1933 by Elton Mayo. The results of Professor Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies proved that the factor most influencing productivity is relationships. Human Relations has the assumption that men have social needs and desires rewarding relationships in the work place and answers more to the peer pressure than to the superiors' authority and administrative control forms its main contribution for management. This theory attempts to focus attention on the behavior of the employees and their production capacity keeping in view their psychological, physical, economic and physiological aspect. Therefore, this theory is suitable to explain "the influence of employee relationships on Employee productivity: the mediating role of incentives". When employers creates environment where relationships thrive, it will motivate and spur commitment of employee toward increasing productivity.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology to be used in conducting the study. It outlines the research design, population and sample, sampling technique, sources and methods of data collection, and instrument of data collection.

Population and the sample

The study investigated the effects of employee relationship and employees incentives on employee productivity. The respondents were Staff of Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic and Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, totaling 2049 Staff. The sample size of this study is 327 Employees which is drawn from Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table for sample size. The sample size for this study is increased to 360 to avoid non-response problem and sample size error as supported by Salkind (1997). The author of this study decided to increase sample size up to 10%. We administered 360 questionnaires in anticipation of 50% response rate. However, 287 were received and found useful for analysis, suggesting a response rate of 86%.

Measures

The study adapted structured questionnaire as measurement instrument from the previous studies of (Rachel, Becky & Jen, 2012; Elisenda, *et al.*, 2016; Morakinyo, 2017). The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7.

ASSESSMENT OF RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHY

The respondents' profile in Table 1 reveals that 53 percent of the respondents are male, which shows that there are more male respondents than 47 percent female which tends to show that there are more male of Federal Polytechnic and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (ATAPoly) Bauchi, Bauchi State. 33 percent (the greater number of the population of valid respondents) are between the ages of 35 to 45 years. In addition, 66 percent of the respondents were married which indicates that more of the respondents were married. From the generated data, most of the employee (53%) across various levels holds Bachelors (First) degree; 40% of the respondents have worked between 15 – 20year in their respective workplaces and 48% of the respondents were from Federal polytechnic while 52% from the Abubakar Tatari Ali polytechnic.

Table 1: Assessment of Demography

Indices	Frequency n = 287	Percentage %
GENDER		
Male	152	53
Female	135	47
	287	
AGE		
Less than 25	14	5
25 – 35	86	30
35 – 45	95	33
45 – 55	75	26
Greater than 55	17	6
	287	
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	98	34
Married	189	66
	287	
QUALIFICATIONS		
SSCE	6	2
ND/NCE	29	10
BSC/HND	152	53
M.Sc	72	25
Ph.D	29	10
	287	
YEARS OF WORK		
Less than 5 Year	57	10
5 – 10 Years	94	15
10 – 15 Years	155	29
15 – 20Years	79	40
Greater than 20Years		6
	287	
EMPLOYMENT		
Permanent	177	46
Contract	208	54
	287	

Assessment of Measurement Model

This section discusses the measurement model process in this study. Hair et al., (2011) suggest an acceptable composite reliability value of between 0.6 to 0.7 in an exploratory factor analysis, while a value with threshold of 0.708 as ideal in a measurement model. However, Hair et al (2011) suggested that an indicator with factor loading of between 0.4 to 0.7 is considered for deleting if doing so improves the composite reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 2 Convergent Validity Report

Construct	Item	Loadings	CR	AVE
Employee Productivity	EP1	0.740	0.955	0.752
	EP2	0.901		
	EP3	0.899		
	EP4	0.902		
	EP5	0.910		
	EP6	0.828		
	EP7	0.879		
Employee Relationship	ER1	0.822	0.971	0.773
	ER2	0.877		
	ER3	0.883		
	ER4	0.900		
	ER5	0.898		
	ER6	0.904		
	ER7	0.904		
	ER8	0.880		
	ER9	0.862		
	ER10	0.859		
Incentives	INCEN1	0.862	0.95	0.703
	INCEN2	0.877		
	INCEN3	0.865		
	INCEN4	0.750		
	INCEN5	0.881		
	INCEN6	0.849		
	INCEN7	0.821		
	INCEN8	0.797		

NOTE: ER, Employee Relationship; EP, Employee Productivity; Incent, Incentives

According to Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) of more than 0.5 and composite reliability (CR) of 0.7 or above are deemed to be acceptable. As can be seen from the results presented on Table 2; all loadings and AVE are above 0.5 and the CR values are more than 0.7. Therefore, the criterion is not violated hence, we can conclude that convergent validity has been established.

Discriminant Validity Assessment

This research work considers Heterotraits and Monotraits (HTMT) criteria to determine the discriminant validity. According to Henseler et al, (2015) the exact threshold level of the HTMT is debatable; after all, some authors suggest a threshold of 0.85 (Clark and Watson 1995; Kline 2011), whereas others propose a value of 0.90 (Gold et al. 2001; Teo et al. 2008). Table 3 below indicated high discriminant validity since the values in the construct do not exceed the threshold of 0.85 and 0.9 and the acceptable region of -1 and 1.

Table 3 Heterotraits and Monotraits (HTMT)

	1	2	3
EP			
ER	0.732		
INCEN	0.515	0.511	

NOTE: Indicators ER: Employee Relationship; EP, Employee Productivity; Incent, Incentives

Assessment of structural model

PLS-SEM structural model analysis involves basic analysis procedure such as assessment of goodness-of-fit (GoF), assessment of collinearity, significance and relevance of relationship in structural model, level of R², level of F² and Q² (Hair et al., 2014). Additional analysis such as mediation assessment is also conducted as it is the case in this study.

Assessing Path Coefficient and Hypotheses Testing

In assessing the path coefficient, various relationships that were hypothesized earlier are tested to establish the nature of the relationship as well as its significance. In order to assess the path coefficient in line with the hypotheses direct relationships in this study such as;

A 5,000 sample bootstrapping command was carried out using PLS-SEM 4 and the results displayed the path coefficient or the direct effect, t-statistics and the p-value on table 4

HYP	REL	β	STDEV	T stat	P val	VIF	Decision
H1	ER -> EP	0.610	0.052	12.092	0.000	1.343	Supported
H2	ER -> INCEN	0.508	0.047	10.768	0.000	1.000	Supported
H3	INCEN -> EP	0.194	0.058	3.344	0.001	1.343	Supported

NOTE: ER, Employee Relationship; EP, Employee Productivity; Incent, Incentives

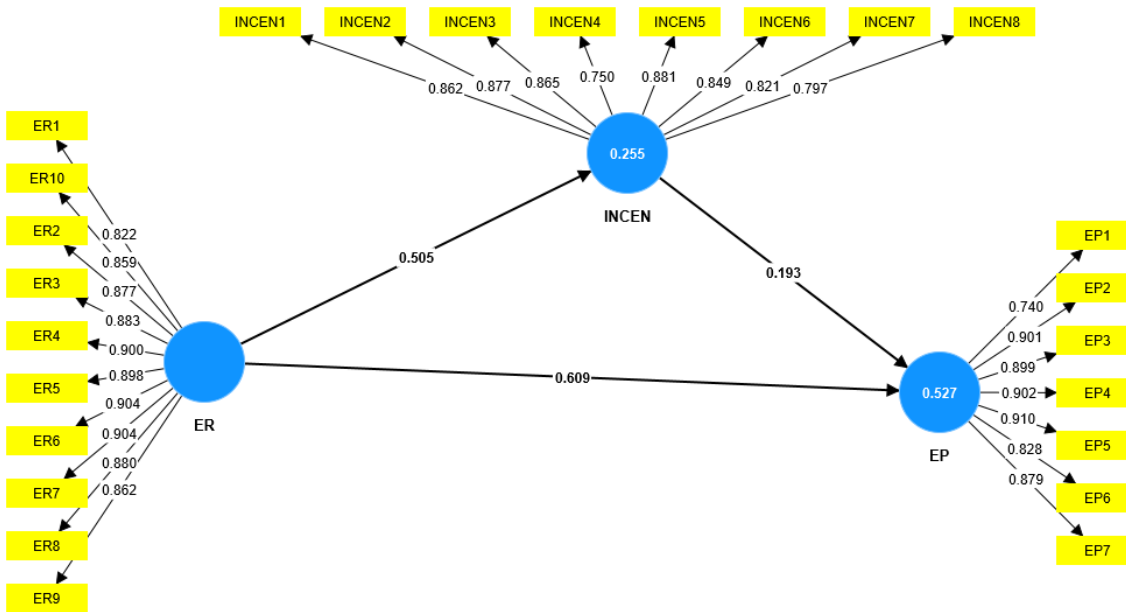
Based on the direct effect on two-tailed test at 95% level significance as stated in the hypotheses, all the relationships were indeed in the expected direction. The results reveal the significance in the direct relationship between the variables; H01 ($\beta = 0.610$, t-stat = 12.092 and p-value = 0.000), H02 ($\beta = 0.508$, t-stat = 10.768 and p-value = 0.000), H03 ($\beta = 0.194$, t-stat = 3.344 and p-value = 0.001). These hypotheses were supported because their t-values were found to be more than the threshold of 1.96 for two tailed test and their P-values were below 0.05. Which shows that all the direct relationships: employee relationship has significant influence on Productivity; employee relationship influences Incentives and incentives influences productivity of employees.

Assessment of mediating effect of Incentives

Further analysis was done to ascertain the mediating role of Incentives in the direct relationship; the results in table 7 reveals the indirect relationships H04; ($\beta = 0.098$, t – stat value = 3.219 and p-value = 0.001). The null hypothesis was rejected for not meeting the criterion for two-tailed test (t – stat value \geq 1.96 and p-value). This therefore reveals that the alternate hypothesis takes precedence and mediating role of Incentives in the relationship between Employee Relationship and Employee productivity is established.

Hyp	Relationship	β	STDEV	T stat	P values	Decision
H04	ER -> INCEN -> EP	0.098	0.030	3.219	0.001	Supported

NOTE: Indicators: ER; Employee Relationship; EP, Employee Productivity; Incent, Incentives



4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the results according to the hypotheses tested. The hypotheses stated in the path analysis were based on direction of relationships one-tailed test and they are thus:

The relationship between Employee relationship and Productivity, the results are presented in table 2 and 4 above. Results of path analysis in line with hypothesized relationships were evaluated in table 4. Findings revealed H1 ($\beta = 0.610$, $t\text{-stat} = 12.092$ and $p\text{-value} = 0.000$), the result of the hypothesis is statistically significant because it met the 1.96 threshold (significance level = 95%) for two – tailed test. Therefore, the hypothesis stands supported which states that there is significant relationship between Employee relationship and Productivity. This finding is in conformity with the findings of researchers on the position of employee relationship as it relates to productivity; Kumar & Manjula (2017), Sequeira & Shriti (2015), Hasen & Salman (2016), Brown, et al (2015), Hasen & Salman (2016), Okechukwu (2013), Mwangi & Ragui, (2013) and Ifeyinwa & Chinonso (2016) The above position of scholars proved the significant relationship between Employee relationship and Productivity.

The result of the analysis of data on the extent to which Employee relationship influences subordinates’ Incentives revealed that there is a significant influence of Employee relationship on subordinates’ Incentives. The results on table 2 and 4 showed that H2 ($\beta = 0.508$, $t\text{-stat} = 10.768$ and $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) which shows that the position of the hypothesis stands supported which imply that Employee relationship has significant relationship with Incentives. The t -value score is above the threshold for acceptance of two-tailed test of 1.96 at 95% level of significance therefore the criterion for acceptance was not violated hence, the hypothesis is supported. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Palmon and Ziv (2010) who discovered a positive relationship between Employee relationship and Incentives. The employment relationship established over the years between employers and employees can attract some level of incentives whether financial or otherwise.

The relationship between Incentives and Productivity H3 ($\beta = 0.194$, $t\text{-stat} = 3.344$ and $p\text{-value} = 0.001$), the result shows the significant relationship between Incentives and productivity which is the position of the hypothesis and so it stands supported because the t -score value is above the threshold for acceptance of two-tailed test of 1.96 at 95% level of significance; therefore, the criterion for acceptance was not violated. It therefore, implies that an increase in Incentives leads to increase in productivity. The

findings of the study further revealed a positive relationship between Incentives and Productivity among staff of polytechnics in Bauchi state: Incentives increases the propensity of Productivity. This finding is in tandem with the discovery of Cross, (2019), Wahna, (2018), Ajibade and Salako, (2021) and Awotidebe, (2018) who discovered a positive significant relationship between Incentives and productivity.

The study hypothesized that Incentives have an explanatory role in the relationship between Employee relationship and Productivity. The results of the indirect relationship stated by the hypothesis was not statistically significant H4; ($\beta = 0.098$, $t - \text{stat value} = 3.219$ and $p\text{-value} = 0.001$) because the t -stat value is below the 1.96 at 95% level of significance threshold for acceptance. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported which shows that Incentives mediates the relationship between Employee relationship and Productivity.

5. CONCLUSION

In line with the research objectives which are to investigate the relationship between Employee relationship, employee incentives and productivity of Polytechnics staff in Bauchi State and reviewed of literature. Four hypotheses were formulated for this study and all of them were rejected, based on these empirical findings, adequate building and maintaining healthy relationship with employee can increase employees' Incentives and productivity. These research findings make several significant contributions to literature. It has contributed to extant literature on Employee relationship, Incentives and productivity. Extant literature has suggested that, organizations should emphasize building and maintaining good employment relationships and making provision for good incentive packages and reward systems will naturally increase productivity.

The study looked at the interplay between employee relationship, incentive and workers' productivity in Organizations using staff of Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic and Federal Polytechnic Bauchi as the study context. The study concluded that a number of incentives (monetary, tangible and non-tangible non-monetary) play prominent and significant roles in enhancing employees productivity in organizations.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the bases of the findings of this study, following recommendations were offered:

Firstly, Management should increase the level of incentives they give their employees or as enjoyed by their employees (in the following order: special rewards, initiative rewards, gain sharing, profit sharing, career development, participation, recognition, feedback, base pay, benefits, better working environment and training) in order to increase and sustain their employees' levels of efficiency.

Secondly, Management should continue to give their employees financial incentives (such as base pay, profit sharing, gain sharing, benefits, initiative rewards and special rewards) in order to increase and sustain their employees' efficiency, make them be willing to increase the speed at which they work, and for them to continue to do their work with no errors.

Thirdly, Management should continue to allow their employees enjoy non-financial incentives (such as training, feedback to employees, career development, recognition, employee participation and better work environment) in order that employee efficiency can continue to improve and so that employees may continue to do their work with no errors.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

1. The model used in this study adds new understanding of the individual characteristics and the mediating role of Incentives on employees' productivity in Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic and Federal Polytechnic Bauchi.
2. The present study is limited to incentive schemes at Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic and Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Bauchi state; further studies in this area should consider a bigger sample size and also try other contexts.
3. Attention should also be giving to the role of incentive packages on employees' attitudes and efficiency as they work within groups. In addition, the method of data analysis used in this

research work was limited to the use of few study area; further studies can engage some more companies or organization to arrive at findings that can be generalized

Contributions to Knowledge

This study has contributed the following to the body of knowledge:

Development of a model on the effect of employee relationship and employee incentives on employee productivity.

Development of employee productivity construct through incentives.

Giving an insight into the study of the relationship between employee relationship, employee incentives and employee productivity.

The laying of a research foundation, which other researchers can build on with regard to employee relationship, employee incentives and employee productivity.

IMPLICATION OF FINDING

Theoretical implication; the research work x-ray on the Human Relations Theory, it's Relevance to the Study help in explains the relationship between Employee relationship, employee incentives and employee productivity. Specifically, strong human relations theory portrays the relationships between emphasis on employee welfare and wellbeing at work by introducing humane policies that promotes good employment relationship. Employees are more willing to share mutual respect, identity, trust, obligation with their supervisors when they perceived that their welfare and wellbeing are a priority to management.

Practical implication is that Employee relationship has been seen to be productive and should be encourage to a large extend. Consequently, promoting employees' wellbeing through improved financial and non-financial reward system will boost confidence in generating ideas that would arouse high-quality job outcomes. This study results have some practical implications for leaders, managers and policy makers that are interested in getting the best out of the employees' which will boost the economy of their organizations.

Policy implication, the research has shown that lack of Employee relationship and good reward system at work can be counterproductive to every productive setting. Therefore, it advisable that organizations and all its functional units devote more attention on their human resources by building good relationship and preparing incentive packages that motivate employee and spur commitment to work towards increase productivity.

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