

Organizational performance and time management: The Nigerian context

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Abstract - The ability to manage time is an ever-important skill that managers in organizations should master and effectively apply in the day to day running of official operations. Mastering this skill is essential for employee performance, efficiency, and organizational productivity. This paper discusses time management and how it effects the way organizations perform, behave and function in Nigeria. It examines how cultural perceptions of time influence time and how it shapes organizational performance, employee behavior, and productivity. It reveals that organizations are faced with time management problems which have become a burden towards an effective performance and service delivery. Through Participant Observation methodology and the application of the Contingency theory, it is recommended amongst others that organizations and government take into cognizance Nigeria's unique diverse socio-cultural environment and support employees' autonomy, relatedness and competence through effective leadership styles to promote time management and organizational performance and also enact policies in accordance with specific regional prevailing circumstances.

Keywords: organizational performance, time management, service delivery, participant observation, contingency theory

1. Introduction

The importance of time cannot be overemphasized due to its importance in observing global occurrences and monitoring people and their activities (Akintayo & Shadare, 2024). Before the advent of modern time keeping gadgets such as analogue clocks, digital clocks, wrist watches, alarm clocks, cell phones, etc., came into being, various parts of the world practiced time keeping one way or the other (Amanpreet, 2025). In Africa and in Nigeria to be precise, there had been a form of traditional time keeping that has been practiced from the pre-colonial period to the post-post-colonial period through the observation of shadow cast, cock crow, ebftide and flow tide, sun rise and sun set, morning dew, the chiming of birds and sounds of insect etc. (Etire, 2024). According to Etire (2024), around 1300AD in Egypt, Rome and Greece, time was also measured and managed by observing the position of the shadow of a pole and by doing so people could tell how far the day has gone. Time is an important resource that is why several tribes and nations have had their different unconventional ways of reckoning with it.



In the world today, the term 'African Time' is used to tag African countries (Nnaji, 2016). It is quite embarrassing that the use of this term is employed to symbolize the African continent as one that connotes a situation where good ethics towards promptly honouring schedules and invitation is lacking. Tardiness, laziness, unpunctuality, lateness, delay, belatedness, lousiness, slowness is some of the words used to describe Africans attitude towards time keeping. According to Nnaji (2016), these nomenclatures are terminologies that is linked to a region recognized for its enormous backwardness, non-stop rotational cycles of poverty, corrupt leadership in governance, and a seemingly unending over-dependence on other nations or people for basic amenities required for survival. Since Africa is still viewed as a developing nation, it becomes so easy attributing these qualities to them. However, it was argued that these terminologies are global issues and familiarities and as such should not be used to tag the African continent alone.

This paper concentrates on the concept of time management in Nigeria and the influence it has on organizational performance. It discusses the prevalent habits and cultural practices of time keeping of the people and propagates improved good time habits that is geared towards enhancing organizational success. It also divulges ways organizations can support employee's performance and productivity through an autonomy-oriented leadership style in relation to time management.

This theory was developed by Fred Fiedler in 1964 and postulates that there is a no-one-size-fits-all approach to management. However, the most effective management style will depend on the specific context, situation, or variables that are involved. Joan Woodward came up with structural contingency arguing that technology and environmental stability are also determinants for organizational effectiveness (Pacheco-Cubillos et al, 2024). According to Guthrie (2023) contingency theory is defined as simply matching leadership styles to specific situations. As regards to this study, the contingency theory acknowledges that organizational contexts such as culture, technology, structure etc. requires different management approaches and in Nigeria, there are diverse cultural and environmental factors that may influence time management practices (Okeke et al, 2022, Okafor et al, 2022, Mesigo et al, 2022, Ugwu et al, 2020). Adaptability and the contingency theory go side-by-side as pointed out by Guthrie (2023). These are seen to be interrelated because the theory places emphasis on the need for adaptability and flexibility as organizations in Nigeria are faced with different contextual factors thus there lies the need to adapt time management strategies to accommodate these specific factors.

Contingency theory can aid organizations in optimizing their time management practices and improve performance as they take cognizance of the contextual factors and unique cultural heritage of the geographical location of study which is Nigeria in this case. It also increases organizational effectiveness as the theory helps managers to identify the most effective time management approaches for unique situations. In the context of this study, to approach Nigeria's rich cultural landscape, the contingency theory seeks to employ tailored approaches to time management due to cultural differences, environmental factors, and organizational characteristics.

2. Method

Participant observation is a qualitative research methodology that enables researchers gather very rich data that offers insight into the lives and cultural practices of the people being studied. It entails a direct participation in the activities of a host culture and keeping records of observations thereby. Hasty et al. (2022) in their book titled "Introduction to Anthropology" postulated that participant observation requires three basic things such as direct observation, observation, and record-keeping.

This methodology is important for this study because in time management, being conscious of oneself, setting goals and priorities, structuring time appropriately, increasing personal effectiveness and efficiency, scheduling time for events, and scheduling relaxation



time are very necessary as identified by Shipman in his book titled “Effective time-management techniques for school administrators”. Furthermore, engaging in the mechanics of time management and having a preference for the organization are all put into consideration. Prioritization is pertinent in time management because it determines what one should do by setting goals, deciding which events are the most important to the organization.

By participant observation, researchers or employees as it may be should ask these three basic questions which are; which tasks are most valuable to the organization? Which task does my manager consider most important? and peradventure, I cannot finish all the tasks, which ones should I focus on? (Ziekye, 2016).

There is always a passion that sparks up from time to time within an employee to help the organization to be productive and meet certain goals. For a researcher who is an employee carrying out research for his/her organization, at the end of a certain period, it is vital for them to measure progress made by checking boxes and compiling stock of actual results of his/her action for the benefit of the organization (Onuorah, 2019). By doing so, employees contribute by observing the situation and with appropriate timing, they participate accordingly because it is one thing to have a passion and it is another thing to achieve that passion.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Organizational Performance

Whilst there is no universal definition of organizational performance, Nigerian scholars have defined it in various ways to reflect the practical managerial realities of a developing economy while considering issues like resource constraints, government regulations, and how informal practices affect its performance outcomes. Okoye and Nnamani (2023) defined organizational performance as entailing both financial and non-financial outcomes that show the extent to which organizations accomplish their mission and satisfies their stakeholders. Eze and Uzoechi (2024) defines it as the measurable output of an organization towards achieving its goals that are assessed through productivity, profitability, and employee engagement within the Nigerian business atmosphere. According to Oladipo et al. (2023), organizational performance in the Nigerian context portrays a firm’s ability to survive in the midst of infrastructural challenges, policy inconsistencies and market instability while delivering top notch value to its stakeholders.

From the definitions, it is crystal clear that one thing in common is that of accomplishing their mission and satisfying the stakeholders through several ways. Some of these ways as postulated by Eze and Uzoechi (2024) are evaluated through productivity, profitability, and employee engagement. With some emphasis on employee engagement, there is a need for managers to assist employees get organized. Doing this largely contributes in reducing stress, and help staff to properly manage themselves by freeing up time to do other activities. This increases work performance and productivity and should be a major concern of the organization.

3.1.2 Time and Time management

Time is an observed phenomenon and a mechanism used by human beings to record changes around them and the universe. It is a unique scarce resource that is available to everyone irrespective of race, age, sex, or societal position. It is unique because unlike other resources available to man, time cannot be stored, paused, or compiled to be used at one’s freewill (Adejo, 2012; Channar et al, 2014). According to Akintayo (2024), time cannot be controlled or replaced but flows at a natural pace and mankind is expected to flow along with it. The adage that “time waits for no man” is indeed true because one cannot recover lost time by turning back the hands of time but can certainly utilize and leverage on current realities by managing the present judiciously.

Time management is the prioritization of activities and a focus-oriented approach of doing the right things at the right time with minimum effort and resources leading to the



achievement of organizational or personal goals. It is therefore seen as a set of certain skills and methods needed to manage time in order to meet deadlines and achieve goals and objectives. Such skills are; setting goals, analyzing, allocating and organizing (Abd-el-Aziz, 2012). Time management isn't about achieving and getting more tasks executed in a day. It's not about having speed while doing the wrong things or going in an opposite direction but it is rather about accomplishing the operations that matter most. Zucas and David (2012) opined that time management is mainly the process of arranging and aligning work and private activities in a manner that allows an employee to show up when, where and how he/she have planned to. This however, has to be done as effortlessly as possible with the aim of finishing tasks promptly with minimal use of resources that may take the form of money, people, time, or energy.

Time management focuses on preventing unnecessary activities, minimizes excuses and increases employee and organizational performance. According to Eze and Uzoehi (2024) it is the grouping and planning of tasks or activities by first estimating and forecasting the duration of a task and adjusting possible occurrences that would delay its completion, so that completion is finally reached in the exact anticipated time. This helps managers to eliminate waste and better utilize time by focusing their attention on matters of highest priority capable of enhancing employee satisfaction and organizational performance.

3.1.3 The Nigerian Concept of Time

In Nigeria, time is approached with a relaxed attitude (Adegbite, 2020). It is being influenced by traditional norms, socio-cultural values and environmental factors. While most western societies conceptualize time as being linear and measurable, many Nigerian cultures perceive it to be periodic, event based, and one that is extremely rooted in societal relationships and understanding these cultural perspectives about time is essential for social interaction and organizational performance (Ogunyemi & Okonkwo, 2021). For example, the Yoruba indigenes who occupy the southwestern part of Nigeria view time as event-based rather than clock-bound. They believe that time is controlled divinely rather than being strictly measured (Adewale, 2022). Hence, time is tied to natural and social events (market days, festivals, and agricultural cycles, etc.). They prioritize human relationships and social obligations over strict adherence to clock time (Afolayan & Oladipo, 2023).

The Igbos according to Eze and Nwosu (2021), and Okorie (2023) perceive time as a treasured resource that is centered on humanity, social order, and productivity. The Hausa/Fulani people in the northern region of Nigeria view time through the lenses of religion and tradition. The Muslim religion strongly forms a crucial part of their identity where many prayer times structure the day (Abubakar, 2024). Hence time for them is organized around Islamic rituals and communal life rather than mechanical schedules (Abubakar, 2024, Aliyu & Mohammed, 2020). In the central part of Nigeria, the Tiv and Idoma people see time as a communal resource that evolves around agriculture and social activities. Activities such as farming seasons, festivals, and community meetings determine when events occur instead of clock time (Tor-Anyiin, 2023).

The Niger Delta and coastal communities is of the perception that time is measured by environmental and economic factors like fishing, trade, and the tides (Ebiye, 2024). In this region, natural elements like tides and weather determine work patterns. The blend of indigenous and modern elements due to trade (being exposures to oil-related activities, etc.) has further affected their perception of time as fluid or situational (Tamuno & Owei, 2022).

3.1.4 How has the Nigerian concept of time affected organizational performance in Nigeria?

According to Adegbite (2020), Nigerians have this inclination to be relaxed and exhibit an unbothered attitude towards time and not commence business meetings and other fixed organizational procedures at their scheduled time. With such relaxed mindset, there lies a notion that events do not commence at the actual time indicated on the schedule. This view of most Nigerians and their time keeping concept has formed a tradition and this has affected the grasp of time management in organizations. This approach to time and the need for punctuality is one of the main reasons for the continuing underdevelopment in Nigeria (Kanu, 2015).



Okorie (2023) opined that modernization in terms of urban and organizational contexts has triggered a clash between traditional flexible time and western clock-based time that most organizations operate on. Ibrahim & Nwachukwu, (2025) posited that one of the major flaws of the Nigerian concept of time is lateness and weak adherence to schedules. In organizations, businesses, and government sectors, official activities often start late or even extend beyond its original scheduled durations thus causing fatigue, reducing performance and productivity. Aliyu and Mohammed (2020) discoursed that the reason for such lateness to functions and official activity has many times been explained off as 'African Time' and this weakens organizational efficiency especially in international partnerships where punctuality connotes professionalism. Hence the concept of Nigerian time affects organizational performance by exhibiting poor time discipline and punctuality thereby reducing overall productivity (Aliyu & Mohammed, 2020).

Nigerian concept of time has created weak working ethics in organizations, business, government establishments etc. and as such when time is not strictly managed and practiced, official task mismanagement, reduced efficiency and performance, project delays, and missed deadlines become inevitable (Tamuno & Owei, 2022). A culture that smiles at lateness of a truth tend to encourage complacency among employees. Following the Nigerian style of flexible timing, Ogunyemi and Okonkwo (2021) opined that this leads to resource wastage, reduced accountability, and difficulty meeting certain performance targets. Staff may not feel pressured, bothered or see any importance or urgency to optimize their working hours or to improve personal performance and productivity. This is quite detrimental particularly in areas like healthcare, logistics and banking, where timing is vital.

The African concept of time is one that is centered on people where events dictate the sense of timing rather than adhering strictly to minutes or hours and this has established a contrast with the western culture of punctuality. According to Hofstede's insight (2023), the British who colonized Nigerians are very time conscious and have a high regard for punctuality and lateness is seen as disrespectful. For Nigerians, the opposite is the case as Agbese (2021) recalled that Nigerians notion of time emphasizes togetherness and harmony and as such lateness is not seen as being disrespectful but a reflection of their social interconnectedness. However, urbanization and globalization has made it necessary for punctuality to be a watchword in corporate organizations and in the business world (Okorie, 2023). So, in other for organizations rendering the services of such western organizations (white collar jobs) to perform well in the Nigerian environment, certain intentional global practices have to be taken by both employees and their employers to ensure that punctuality is met.

3.1.5 Consequences of Poor Intentional Behavioral Attitudes and choices towards Time Management in Organizations

One of the most effective management principles is time management (Eze & Uzoечи, 2024). Being late to any function is mostly based on the choice made by an individual or group of people. In Nigeria, people seldom get late for activities of which they are very much interested in or appointments that will benefit them one way or the other. They already know the key factors that are likely to affect their journey and as such will go a step further to put modalities in place in other to checkmate them. As mentioned earlier, culture is something that has been practiced over time and employees' behavioral practices of lateness is like a cankerworm that eats into the productive time of the organization which results to customers and stakeholders being frustrated when assured delivery dates are continually extended or not realized at all. This damages an organization's performance and reputation and can lead to loss of patronage.

The practice of African time among Nigerians has hampered events, affected organizational productivity and has also caused rift among staff especially when engaged in teamwork (Kanu, 2015). Its effects on organizational performance becomes alarming because employee fraud the organization by wasting its productive hours. In Nigeria, many government employees who ought to be in their offices during working hours attending to their



respective tasks are usually seen arriving late or caught engaging in discussions that are not meaningful or related to the growth of the organization.

Various studies (Chanie et al., 2024, Terefe et al, 2023, Channar et al., 2014, etc.) have postulated that time is better being managed among employees in private organizations than employees in public organizations. These studies are true because employees in the bid to waste time against all odds in public organizations in Nigeria always console themselves by speaking in local slangs saying “*Na government job be this oooo*”, “*I can’t come and kill myself. Abegi, make I relax small*”. This nevertheless are personal choices that can be reverted hence there should be a positive rebirth in the mindset of the average Nigerian citizen if not Nigerian organizations will suffer a constant loss when competing globally. Nigerian organizations that don’t effectively manage time jeopardize their spot in the global market thus losing out to foreign competitors who operate on strict schedules and global performance metrics.

3.2 Discussion

Several factors can actually militate against punctuality. Olawale and Musa (2023) posited that factors like natural occurrences such as heavy downpour, flooding, snowstorms can cause traffic congestion which can lead to delay and reduced punctuality. Natural disasters like earthquakes, wildfires, hurricanes etc. can also disrupt transportation thus making punctuality a challenge. In a developing country like Nigeria, Eze (2024) opined that irregular power supply, internet failures, and technological challenges, etc. can delay physical and virtual meetings. These among many others can affect one’s punctuality irrespective of an employee’s time management skills or how well he or she has planned towards an activity. If these are the reasons for employee’s lateness in organisations, managers will give an understanding nod because they are things that cannot be controlled.

When comparing Africa and their counterparts around the world especially Europe, it is true that generally, life moves at a much slower pace in Africa (due to lack of essential infrastructures and amenities) and people tend to give priority to their time based on what they perceived to be most vital at that period. Nigerians can actually activate personal discipline and be punctual to the things and events they place value on and discipline themselves to navigate certain obstacles just to arrive on time (Adebayo, 2023). Hence excuses like bad roads, traffic congestion, insufficient transportation vehicles, rainy season, power outages, bad personal work and time management ethics, e.t.c are factors tagged as controllable factors because certain strategies can be put in place to effectively navigate them. These are some factors used by employees as an excuse for being late to work and this study frowns at them because they are factors that can be controlled.

The organizational culture of organizations determines to a large extent the leadership style that is being practiced. According to Eke and Nwachukwu (2024), an organization that values punctuality will set standards for attendance, carve out time-conscious behavior through an effective leadership style and also reward timely performance. Since no specific leadership style is appropriate for all situations, the contingency theory supports using leadership styles that are tailored to specific situations geared towards producing positive time management. Hence managers in organizations can adopt various people-oriented leadership styles such as democratic leadership style, transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, charismatic leadership style, lazier-faire leadership style etc. to tackle specific situations as determined by the prevailing factors in host states and communities. The prevailing laws and norms that pertain to regions accommodating organizations should be taken into consideration.

Adopting a people-oriented leadership approach towards time management in organizations enables employees to be confident and self-reliant especially when it comes to managing their time and that of the organization. Such freedom and autonomy give them a sense of belonging and commitment towards the organization as they will be determined to be more productive and time conscious knowing fully well that they are responsible for the



success or failure of any task that is assigned to them. Nigeria being a country with a very rich cultural heritage as can be seen through the lens of religious and traditional practices, with each unique to specific regions only shows that time management is flexible in Nigeria. This inevitably results to the general tardiness attached to the Nigerian concept of time and in turn affects organizations who don't recognize and key into the factors responsible for such flexibilities, factors or diversities. However, Nwachukwu (2019) has posited that in order to adapt to the Nigerian concept of time, one should intentionally try to arrive on time in organizations, business meetings or to any other event but still be patient and considerate if others arrive late.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the profound influence of Nigeria's cultural orientation on attitudes toward time, punctuality, and ultimately, organizational performance. The concept of "African time"—a widely recognized societal norm that tolerates lateness—has become deeply embedded in Nigerian society, shaping both individual and collective behaviours regarding time management. This cultural flexibility around time is not merely a matter of personal habit but is rooted in broader social, historical, and institutional contexts that affect discipline and efficiency at both the individual and organizational levels (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2022; Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Ogundipe, 2025; Olowookere, 2021). Nigeria's cultural landscape is characterized by collectivism, strong social relationships, and a high value placed on family and community ties. These cultural dynamics often take precedence over strict adherence to schedules or punctuality, as social obligations and relationships are prioritized (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2022; Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere, 2021).

The "African time" phenomenon, therefore, is not simply a disregard for punctuality but reflects a worldview where time is flexible and relational rather than rigid and linear. This orientation can lead to misunderstandings and inefficiencies, especially in organizational settings where global standards of time consciousness are increasingly expected (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere et al., 2021). The tolerance for lateness and flexible time management has tangible effects on organizational discipline and performance. Managers often perceive Nigerian workers as requiring close supervision and external motivation, such as sanctions or rewards, to ensure compliance with organizational rules [9](#). This perception is reinforced by the need to balance traditional cultural values with the demands of modern organizational life. While collectivist values can foster teamwork and mutual responsibility, they may also contribute to a lack of urgency and accountability in meeting deadlines and organizational goals (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere et al., 2021; Onaolapo & Makhasane, 2024).

Nigeria's vast regional, religious, and ethnic diversity further complicates the landscape of time management. Different regions and communities may have distinct customs, religious practices, and infrastructural realities that influence attitudes toward time and punctuality (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2022; Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Suleiman & Saxena, 2024). For example, hierarchical and conservative business practices may be more prevalent in the northern regions, while entrepreneurialism and innovation are emphasized in the south [12](#). Managers must therefore be sensitive to these contextual differences and adapt their time management strategies accordingly (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2022; Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Suleiman & Saxena, 2024).

To address the challenges posed by cultural attitudes toward time, there is a pressing need for both organizational and legislative interventions. Lawmakers are encouraged to develop policies that promote time consciousness while respecting Nigeria's unique cultural and regional diversities (Adisa et al., 2017; Olowookere et al., 2021). At the organizational level, leaders should implement culturally sensitive training programs that raise awareness about the



importance of punctuality and time management, while also fostering respect for local customs and traditions (Iguodala-Cole, H. (2024; Olowookere et al., 2021). Professional bodies and associations can play a pivotal role in advocating for national standards on working hours and time management practices, as seen in other sectors such as healthcare (Adisa et al., 2017).

As Nigeria becomes increasingly integrated into the global economy, the need to align with international standards of punctuality and time management becomes more urgent. Globalization and urbanization are driving changes in workplace expectations, making it essential for Nigerian organizations to adapt if they are to remain competitive on the world stage (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Aruku et al., 2025; Olowookere et al., 2021). This does not mean abandoning indigenous cultural values, but rather finding a balance that allows for both cultural authenticity and operational efficiency (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere et al., 2021).

To enhance organizational performance in Nigeria, a multifaceted approach is required: (a) Cultural Sensitivity: Organizations should blend global best practices with indigenous cultural values, ensuring that time management strategies are contextually appropriate (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere et al., 2021). (b) Training and Development: Regular training on time management and the importance of punctuality should be provided to all employees, with an emphasis on how these practices contribute to organizational success (Iguodala-Cole, 2024; Olowookere et al., 2021). (c) Policy Reform: National and organizational policies should be reviewed and updated to promote time consciousness, with input from diverse stakeholders to ensure cultural relevance (Adisa et al., 2017; Olowookere et al., 2021). (d) Leadership Commitment: Leaders must model punctuality and effective time management, setting clear expectations and providing support for employees to meet these standards (Olowookere et al., 2021; Adegoke & Opuala-Charles, 2025). (e) Continuous Evaluation: Organizations should regularly assess the effectiveness of their time management policies and practices, making adjustments as needed to respond to changing cultural and economic realities (Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Olowookere et al., 2021).

Nigeria's cultural orientation toward time significantly shapes organizational discipline and performance. While "African time" reflects deep-rooted social values, it also presents challenges in a rapidly globalizing world. By acknowledging and addressing these cultural dynamics—through policy, leadership, and training—Nigerian organizations can foster a culture of punctuality and time consciousness that supports both local authenticity and global competitiveness (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2022; Opuala-Charles & Salau, 2023; Adisa et al., 2017; Aruku et al., 2025; Iguodala-Cole, 2024; Ogundipe, 2025; Olowookere et al., 2021; Adegoke & Opuala-Charles, 2025; Suleiman & Saxena, 2024; Onaolapo & Makhasane, 2024).

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