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SUPERVISORY COACHING PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' OCCUPATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS IN RIVERS STATE- OWNED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study looked into how supervisory coaching practices affected the occupational development skills of workers in tertiary institutions owned by Rivers State. It specifically looked at how employees' occupational skills relate to goal-setting assistance, constructive criticism, and career counseling. A sample of 350 employees was chosen by proportionate stratified random sampling in a correlational study design. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for analysis. The results showed that goal-setting support ($r=0.612$), constructive criticism ($r=0.553$), career counseling ($r=0.671$), and occupational development skills were significantly positively correlated. This underscores the critical role that good supervisory coaching plays in developing employees' technical, problem-solving, and communication skills. To improve occupational development among university staff, the study suggests creating formal mentoring schemes, improving supervisors' feedback skills through focused training, and putting in place structured goal-setting programs.

KEYWORDS: Supervisory Coaching, Goal-Setting Support, Constructive Feedback, Career Guidance, Occupational Development Skills, Universities, Employee Development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Particularly in knowledge-intensive establishments like universities, occupational development skills have become a vital tool for workers attempting to meet the ever-changing

demands of the twenty-first century workplace. According to Nguyen et al. (2022), occupational development skills are a collection of competencies that allow workers to perform well and advance professionally in their positions. These competencies include technical proficiency, flexibility, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal communication abilities. Because they promote innovation, service delivery, and institutional competitiveness, these abilities are essential for both individual career advancement and organizational effectiveness. Nonetheless, a major obstacle to achieving the best possible job performance and institutional growth in many public universities, including those owned by Rivers State, is the absence of organized and encouraging processes for staff to develop these skills (Oparaji & Agbara, 2023).

Intentional, goal-oriented interactions between supervisors and subordinates with the goal of improving performance and career development are known as supervisory coaching practices, and they are essential for developing employees' occupational development skills (Kariuki & Njoroge, 2024). Heads of departments, deans of faculties, directors of administrative units, and other senior officers are tasked with overseeing, mentoring, and assessing the work of both academic and non-academic staff members in a university setting. Three essential components are usually included in effective supervisory coaching practices: career counseling and mentoring, constructive criticism, and assistance with goal-setting. In order to align personal development with institutional goals, goal-setting support involves supervisors working with staff members to establish SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) professional objectives (Adeoye & Johnson, 2021). In order to reinforce positive behaviors and address deficiencies, it is crucial to communicate performance evaluations in a timely and meaningful manner that provides clarity on areas that require improvement as well as strengths (Zhang & Patel, 2022). Supervisors can inspire and equip employees to pursue and accomplish their career goals by providing individualized advice, sharing information about opportunities for advancement, and modeling professional behaviors (Hassan & Okoro, 2023).

Several Rivers State-owned universities continue to struggle with issues like inconsistent coaching practices, supervisors' lack of mentoring training, and heavy workloads that hinder effective employee engagement, despite the acknowledged significance of these supervisory functions (Oparaji & Agbara, 2023). As a result, workers frequently don't have clear professional guidance, get sporadic or imprecise feedback, and pass up chances to improve

their skills, which eventually halts their occupational development. Additionally, the potential advantages of supervisory coaching practices may be further undermined by the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of public universities, which can inhibit open communication between supervisors and subordinates (Kariuki & Njoroge, 2024). In order to address these issues, a thorough examination of how supervisory coaching practices affect university staff members' occupational development abilities is necessary, with an emphasis on the crucial elements of goal-setting assistance, constructive criticism, and career counseling in the context of Rivers State-owned universities.

Statement of the Problem

Concern over the noticeable deterioration in workers' occupational development skills which shows up as decreased technical proficiency, poor problem-solving skills, limited ability to adjust to new technologies, and weakened interpersonal communication among academic and non-academic staff is growing in Rivers State-owned postsecondary institutions. According to reports from recent internal assessments and anecdotal observations, the universities' overall effectiveness and service delivery are compromised by a number of issues, including strained departmental collaboration, a slow response to changing educational demands, and frequent errors in administrative tasks. The persistent absence of supervisory coaching practices or their inefficiency in these institutions seem to be contributing factors to this concerning trend. Employees lack the professional guidance and support they require to develop essential occupational skills because many supervisors, including department heads, deans, and senior administrators, either neglect to offer timely and constructive feedback, engage in meaningful career guidance and mentoring, or consistently support goal-setting. Staff members miss out on opportunities to pinpoint skill gaps, get pertinent guidance, and develop competencies in line with organizational objectives when there is no formal supervisory coaching in place. The aforementioned deficiencies not only hinder the advancement of individual careers but also make it more difficult for Rivers State-owned universities to fulfill their administrative and academic obligations in a more competitive higher education environment. As a result, it is imperative that the ways in which supervisory coaching practices impact employees' occupational development skills be investigated immediately. Examining how supervisory coaching practices affect workers' occupational development skills at universities owned by Rivers State is the goal of this study. The study aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To ascertain how employees' occupational development skills at universities owned by Rivers State relate to supervisors' assistance in goal-setting.
2. To investigate how employees' occupational development skills and supervisors' constructive criticism relate to each other in universities owned by Rivers State.
3. To evaluate how employees' occupational development skills at universities owned by Rivers State relate to the career counseling and mentoring provided by supervisors.

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions guided the study

1. How do employees' occupational development skills at universities owned by Rivers State relate to supervisors' assistance in goal-setting?
2. What is the relationship between employees' occupational development skills and supervisors' constructive criticism in universities owned by Rivers State?
3. How do employees' occupational development skills at universities owned by Rivers State relate to the career counseling and mentoring provided by supervisors?

In line with the research questions the following null hypotheses were stated to achieve the objectives

H_{01} : In universities owned by Rivers State, there is no discernible correlation between employees' occupational development skills and supervisors' assistance in setting goals.

H_{02} : In universities owned by Rivers State, there is no discernible correlation between employees' occupational development skills and the constructive criticism they receive from supervisors.

H_{03} : In universities owned by Rivers State, there is no discernible correlation between employees' occupational development skills and the career counseling and mentoring provided by supervisors.

Methodology

To ascertain the relationship between supervisory coaching practices (goal-setting support, constructive feedback, and career guidance) and employees' occupational development skills in universities owned by Rivers State, this study used a correlational research design. This design is appropriate because it allows for the evaluation of correlations between variables without changing them, offering insight into relationships that naturally exist in organizational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

All academic and non-academic employees of the four universities owned by the Rivers State, namely Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Ken Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic, and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, were included in the target population. Recent data from the Rivers State Ministry of Education (2024) indicates that there are roughly 5,120 employees working for these institutions combined.

Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 370 respondents was calculated with a 5% margin of error. To ensure representation and minimize sampling bias, the study used a proportionate stratified random sampling technique, first dividing the population into academic and non-academic staff from the four tertiary institutions. Participants were then chosen at random from each stratum.

A structured questionnaire called the Supervisory Coaching Practices and Occupational Development Skills Questionnaire (SCPODSQ) served as the main tool for gathering data. The survey was divided into two parts: Section A gathered demographic information, and Section B dealt with the dependent variable (occupational development skills) and the independent variables (support for goal-setting, constructive criticism, and career counseling). Consistency in responses was ensured by the 4-point Likert scale used for all items, which ranged from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Three experts one in educational management, one in human resource development, and one in measurement and evaluation validated the instrument's face and content. The questionnaire items were improved for comprehensiveness, relevance, and clarity based on input from these experts.

Thirty staff members from a comparable institution outside the study area participated in a pilot study to assess the questionnaire's reliability. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the instrument's internal consistency; a coefficient of 0.80 indicates that the instrument is good if it has a coefficient of 0.70 or higher (Stet et al., 2022).

The validated questionnaire was personally distributed to the sampled respondents at the chosen institutions in order to gather data. Permission from department heads and university officials was obtained before distribution. In order to promote truthful responses, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. Within two weeks of distribution, completed surveys were collected.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the collected data. The perceptions of the respondents are summarized by descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation). Using inferential statistics, the three hypotheses will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), which will determine the direction and strength of the relationships between occupational development skills and supervisory coaching practices.

RESULTS

To test the three hypotheses, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to analyze the data gathered from 350 respondents. Table 1 below presents the findings.

Results for Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between goal-setting support by supervisors and employees' occupational development skills in Rivers State-owned institutions.

Table 1: Relationship between Goal-Setting Support by Supervisors and Employees' Occupational Development Skills.

		Goal-Setting Support	Occupational Development Skills
Goal-Setting Support	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.612
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	350	350
Occupational Development Skills	Pearson correlation	0.612	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	350	350

Employees' occupational development skills and goal-setting support had a strong, positive, and significant relationship ($r=0.612$, $p<0.05$), according to Table 1 analysis. This suggests that workers who have supervisors who provide them with clear and encouraging goal-setting advice typically demonstrate higher levels of occupational development skills. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which holds that goal-setting support and occupational development skills do not significantly correlate, is disproved.

H₀₂: In institutions owned by Rivers State, there is no discernible correlation between employees' occupational development skills and the constructive criticism they receive from supervisors.

Table 2: Relationship between Supervisors' Constructive Feedback and Employees' Occupational Development Skills.

		Supervisors' Constructive Feedback	Occupational Development Skills
Supervisors' Constructive Feedback	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.553
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	350	350
Occupational Development Skills	Pearson correlation	0.553	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	350	350

Constructive feedback was found to have a moderately positive and significant relationship with employees' occupational development skills ($r=0.553$, $p<0.05$), as shown in Table 2. This implies that workers exhibit improved technical, problem-solving, and communication skills when managers give them timely and targeted feedback. The null hypothesis, which states that there is no meaningful connection between occupational development skills and constructive criticism, is thus disproved.

H₀₃: In institutions owned by Rivers State, there is no discernible correlation between employees' occupational development skills and the career counseling and mentoring provided by supervisors.

Table 3: Relationship between Supervisors' Career Guidance and Employees' Occupational Development Skills

		Supervisors' Career Guidance	Occupational Development Skills
Supervisors' Career Guidance	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.671
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000

	N	350	350
Occupational Development Skills	Pearson correlation	0.671	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	350	350

The findings in Table 3 demonstrated a strong, positive, and significant correlation between employees' occupational development skills and career counseling and mentoring ($r=0.671$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that managers who actively coach and offer career counseling have a positive impact on workers' acquisition of critical occupational skills. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which holds that career counseling and occupational development skills do not significantly correlate, is disproved.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study showed that employees' occupational development skills in institutions owned by Rivers State were significantly positively correlated with supervisory coaching practices, particularly goal-setting support, constructive criticism, and career guidance. These findings support the vital role supervisors play in promoting professional development, skill acquisition, and general worker efficacy in higher education environments. First off, the importance of involving employees in creating specific, demanding, and attainable professional goals is highlighted by the significant positive correlation ($r=0.612$) between goal-setting support and occupational development skills. This supports the claims made by Adeoye and Johnson (2021), who discovered that goal-setting improves motivation and gives staff development in Nigerian universities direction. Additionally, it supports the Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), which holds that setting clear goals improves performance by energizing effort and defining expectations. According to the findings, workers who work with managers to establish SMART goals are more capable of concentrating their efforts, developing their technical skills, and adjusting to new duties.

Second, the correlation ($r=0.553$) between occupational development skills and constructive feedback emphasizes the importance of feedback in enhancing employee performance. This result supports Zhang and Patel's (2022) study, which showed that prompt and targeted feedback helps staff members in educational institutions solve problems and be more flexible. According to the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), giving constructive criticism enables staff members to see, adjust, and set an example of successful behavior. The

outcome suggests that employees acquire knowledge that directly translates into improved occupational skills when managers offer transparent performance evaluations and suggestions for development.

Thirdly, the strongest correlation ($r=0.671$) was found between occupational development skills and career counseling and mentoring. This corroborates the findings of Hassan and Okoro (2023), who found that mentoring relationships are critical for academic staff members in Nigerian universities to develop their professional development, research proficiency, and communication skills. The outcome supports the notion that managers who mentor employees not only impart useful knowledge but also encourage self-assurance, flexibility, and career progression. This demonstrates how mentoring is a game-changing technique for developing the professional skills necessary for workers to succeed in fast-paced learning settings. All things considered, these results imply that good supervisory coaching techniques greatly improve workers' occupational development abilities. The study demonstrates that the lack or insufficiency of career counseling, constructive criticism, and goal-setting assistance may be a factor in the noticeable skill deterioration of staff members, which may jeopardize the effectiveness and competitiveness of institutions owned by Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how employees' occupational development skills in tertiary institutions owned by Rivers State were affected by supervisory coaching practices, such as goal-setting support, constructive criticism, and career counseling. The results showed a strong positive correlation between each component of supervisory coaching and workers' occupational skills, indicating that technical proficiency, problem-solving skills, flexibility, and communication abilities among university employees are all significantly influenced by effective supervision. The findings highlight the necessity of institutional policies and interventions to strengthen supervisory roles across Rivers State-owned universities and the significance of structured, supportive coaching by supervisors in reversing the discernible decline in occupational development skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To ensure alignment with institutional objectives and encourage ongoing skill development, universities should set formal frameworks requiring supervisors and staff to set and review SMART goals on a regular basis.

2. Supervisors should receive regular training on effective feedback techniques so they can give prompt, transparent, and helpful performance reviews that help staff members develop their occupational competencies.
3. In order to promote individualized career guidance and expedite the development of vital occupational skills, organizations should establish and maintain structured mentoring programs that pair seasoned supervisors with junior or less experienced employees.

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