



# The Empirical Validity of the Adjustment to Virtual Work Arrangement by Business Organisations in Anambra State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

For an organisation to ensure business sustainability and come out successful in the ordeal of business competition, virtual work arrangement would come hardly. The concept of virtual work explains that work can be done anywhere, at a distance and outside the normal office and work places. Organisations must leverage on effective communication technology to win business competitive advantage. Employees waste valuable man hours on traffic commuting from one location to another. The resultant negative effect on health can be imagined. Virtual work arrangement will ensure flexibility and reduce productivity cost. Thus, this study examined the empirical validity of the adjustment to virtual work arrangement by business organisations in Anambra State, the central automotive business area in Nigeria. Therefore this study adopts a survey method to examine whether the introduction of virtuality in work places can lead to high employee productivity and attempts were made to generate responses from different employees of organisations operating in the selected area in the state. These include vehicle assembly companies, banks, cosmetics, fabrics, transportations, telecommunications, educational institutions, oil and gas servicing companies. The study found that the level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity present a positive domestic balancing framework for the operation of virtual arrangement in the country. The Findings also revealed that the nature of interpersonal relationship among employees of business organisations play a significant role in the application of virtual work arrangements in the country. Lucid recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Business sustainability, internet connectivity, organisational commitment, work independence, virtuality, virtual work arrangement.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of virtuality in work places is increasingly discussed for its practical relevance in the determination of employee-employer relations and its integration as a vital component of the work process, which will provide greater resources and variety of demand for accelerated growth through greater efficiency and productivity. Virtual work creates distance between employees and their organisations, their supervisors, co-workers, subordinates and the tangible elements of the organisation as a whole (Raghuram, Garud, Wiesenfeld & Gupta, 2001). More specifically virtuality in work places refers to a context in which work is done at a distance, generally outside conventional offices, regardless of when and where and in which interactions are mediated by technology (Cascio & Shurygaiho, 2003).

The growth in the demand for virtuality in work places is orchestrated by developments in the economy in recent times. The downward slide of the economy coupled with the growth in the application and the acceptance of communication technology have made virtuality in work places popular and practicable in majority of business organizations in developed and emerging economies. The recent proliferation of virtual work has been fueled more by economic necessity than by strategic planning. Organizations continue to downsize and cut costs while seeking ways to become more flexible and customer oriented. The shifting economic pressures of the 1990s have been characterized by the advent of new organisational forms- virtual enterprises imaginary corporations, dynamic networks and flexible work terms (Davidow & Mahane, 1992; Hedberg, 1994; Lucas & Garud, 2000; Miles & Snow, 1986).

Virtual work forces have been painted as a boom to both employee productivity and retention. Effective organisations view virtual work as an incentive that adds to the overall employment value proposition without significantly impacting expenses. With stagnant salaries and unpredictable energy prices looming as big concerns for employees, virtual work provides a way to reduce an individual's cost of employment (Thompson & Caputo, 2009).

Many factors have been identified to be responsible for the recent surge in virtual work practices across the globe in the recent years technological and organisational changes have contributed immensely in this new work schedule countries and organisations that are caught in the vicious cycle of decline must develop alternatives work schedule that is different from the traditional technique. The process of realignment to new work process involves adaptation to new environmental demands (Nicholson, 1984). These environmental demands stem from both the way the work is structured and the changing nature of interpersonal relationships (Nelson, 1990).

Another important factor is the influence of geographic distance which separates workers from their work places, tier colleagues and superiors. Temporal dimension represents another vital factor which is explained as the different time zones that separate individuals thereby making communications and logistics of meeting face to face impossible and complicated. The quality and compatibility of the technologies to be used in the virtual work process is compelling instrument in the hands of a desiring employee. The difference in these technologies, newness, cost and maintenance, cost of learning the complicated types are almost part of the recent challenges confronting virtual workers and their organisations. Other forms of challenges may arise from cultural diversities which include values, languages and beliefs. All these factors have been captured by Chudoba, Wynn, Lu and Watson-Manheim (2005) and classified as six

elements and the extent to which they impact on the circumstances of the virtuality in work places is left to productivity and performance to appraise.

In Nigeria, economic fundamentals and similarities decrease potentials for growth and development and do not pave way for new work standards like virtuality in work places. For creating the necessary environment for this form of work schedule to operate all that is required include the assessment of the extent of involvement of such variables like teledensity, organisational commitment and emotional attachment, job satisfaction, organisational connectedness, clarity of evaluation criteria, work independence, interpersonal relationship, internet connectivity, telephone network and experience with virtual work. Effective harnessing and coordination of these variables will definitely add impetus in the application of virtual work arrangement in the country. Further, it tends to resolve problems associated with employee strains and stress created by forced captivity in private cubicles, inflexible rigid work days, long, traffic bound commuting and family conflict (Raghuram et al., 2001).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study highlights a typical way to define some special features of virtual work practices that have serious socio-economic implications for developing the local non-standard frame work and for eliminating randomly identified operating costs such as costs of recruitment, hire, training and accommodation in business organisations in the country. It is argued here that the application of virtual work arrangement would be determined by the level of its acceptability by the organisations and the labour market.

For large business organisations, dependence on virtual work strategy as a method of recruiting and retaining employees would be strongly underpinned in facilities that exist within the organisation and the virtual worker. Modifying this perception is vital bearing in mind that organisations differ in size, resources and location with the individuals that they want to engage as virtual workers. It is even not remotely suggested that the only difference that exists between virtuality in work places and other forms of work schedule is specified in its definition.

World at work (2009) cited by Thompson and Caputo (2008) explained that virtual workers constitute employees whose primary work location is their home or other non-traditional location and they have been sustained largely over the years by the availability and accessibility to high-speed internet connections, software solutions that permit collaboration and information exchanges through the using of telephone conferencing systems by employees in different localities, regions or countries.

The empirical validity of the basic propositions connected with the linkages between organisational productivity and virtual work arrangements lies in the competencies of the management to ascertain the impact of critical socio-economic variables like income, technology, fixed costs savings and engagement terms and enter into the human resources management policy of the organisation and national labour policy.

Keeping in mind the theoretical background of non-standard work practices as in the area of virutality in work places from advanced economies, business organisations in developing economies like Nigeria should evolve work schedules that will act in pattern that seem to pin down the belief that no single work schedule can be expected to be applicable to all organisations and at all times. This is likely because different organisations are characterized by different

institutional structures and arrangements and therefore no single work schedules would fit all organisations equally well.

## Research Questions

The following questions were been developed to measure the reactions of workers about the relevance of virtuality in work places in the country.

- Is the level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity sufficient enough to encourage the application of virtuality in work places?
- Have employees in the country developed strong emotional attachment and high level of satisfaction required to boost organisational commitment?
- Can the desire to work at any time and from any place be a significant measure of the need to introduce virtuality in work places?
- How important is the interpersonal relationship in the construction of virtual work strategy?
- Is the independent work practice among employees in the country effective enough to sustain the growth of virtuality in work places?

## Hypotheses Formulation

The following are combinations of hypotheses formulated for this study:

- **Hypothesis One:** The level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity do present a positive domestic balancing framework for the operation of virtual work schedules in the country.
- **Hypothesis Two:** The extent of emotional attachment and satisfaction among employees is not statistically significant in estimating the practice factors that can influence the levels of organisational commitment in the country.
- **Hypothesis Three:** The nature of interpersonal relationship among employees of business organisations does not play a significant function in the application of virtual work arrangements in the country.

## METHODS

This study seeks to examine the empirical validity of the adjustment to virtual work arrangement by business organisations in Anambra State, the central automotive business area in Nigeria. In order to further examine whether the introduction of virtuality in work places can lead to high employee productivity attempts were made to generate responses from different employees of organisations operating in the chosen area. These include vehicle assembly companies, banks, cosmetics, fabrics, transportations, telecommunications, educational institutions, oil and gas servicing companies.

We modified our survey instrument to permit response from majority of the employees who would like to switch over to virtual work arrangement should the opportunity arise. To a

greater extent we included experienced virtual workers to create a feeling of balanced analysis. The study relied on the use of questionnaires as major source of our data. The questionnaires were self-administered to 1200 employees of these organisations out of which a total of 900 responses were recorded representing a response rate of 75 percent. A random sampling method was adopted to eliminate bias in the selection. We have not discriminated against all forms of workers since this will give room to identify sections where virtuality in workplaces is needed in the organisation.

The age bracket included in the study varies between 25 and 65 years. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A is made up of 4 items covering the demographic profile of the respondents. These include name, age, place of work, positions, gender, marital status and ethnicity while section B comprises the major research variables such as connectivity to internet facilities, telephone connection (availability of networks and usage), emotional attachment and job satisfaction, interpersonal relationship, work independence, organisatioanl connectedness clarity of evaluation criteria, gender and age qualification. The rating of the responses was made possible using a 5 point Likert scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The analysis was conducted with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Statistical model of mean, standard deviations and correlations coefficient were applied while cross tabulations provided more clarity in the analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Organisational commitment	900	3.8111	1.21076	1.466
Emotional attachment	900	4.1111	1.24295	1.545
Job satisfaction	900	4.2222	.91676	.840
Organisational connectedness	900	3.7889	1.03868	1.079
Clarity of evaluation criteria	900	3.9556	1.05374	1.110
Work independence	900	4.3556	.93517	.875
Interpersonal relationship	900	3.5778	1.24771	1.557
Internet connectivity	900	4.4444	.89630	.803
Telephone (network)	900	4.5556	.68532	.470
Experience with virtual work (years)	900	3.4444	1.25778	1.582
Valid N (listwise)	900			

From Table 1, the mean standard deviations of the variables measuring virtual working arrangement in the country are presented. The variable with the highest mean is “Telephone (Network)”. This variable has a mean score of 4.56 and a standard deviation of 0.69. The variable that follows is “Internet Connectivity”. This variable has a mean score of 4.44 and a standard deviation of 0.89. The variable that has the least mean score is “Experience with virtual work (years)”. The variable has a mean score of 3.44 and a standard deviation of 1.26. Generally, all the variables mean are high indicating that virtual workplaces are useful in an information age where technology is increasing rapidly and consumer needs are being achieved globally.

A virtual workplace facilitates employees or individuals to work from anywhere or place in the world at any time. This is suitable not only for the employee, but also for the consumer. For an international organisation, it fits the need for outstanding and timely customer service.

Thus, virtual workplaces streamline systems from various facets of work into one combined unit easily reached by both the consumer and the employee. Decreasing costs and increasing efficiency, due to the single system, is an instant improvement. A virtual workplace is easier for employees because it frequently reduces business travel, consolidates services, and assists in the communication process and vice versa.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations

		Internet Connectivity	Telephone (Network)
Internet Connectivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.956**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	900	900
Telephone(Network)	Pearson Correlation	.956**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	900	900
Emotional attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	.930**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	900	900
Organisational commitment	Pearson Correlation	.930**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	900	900
Interpersonal relationship	Pearson Correlation	1	.949**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	900	900
Experience with virtual work (years)	Pearson Correlation	.949**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	900	900

This section presents the test of the three hypotheses formulated in the study. The tests are conducted using correlation analysis which indicates whether there is a significant relationship between the variables. From Table 2, the output of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) computation is shown. The SPSS highlighted the correlations that are significant with one star indicating significant correlation at 5 percent level while two stars; shows that correlation is significant at 1 percent.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** The level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity does not present a positive domestic balancing framework for the operation of virtual work arrangement in the country.

From Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient is .956\*\* while the p value is .000. The H<sub>0</sub> that level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity does not present a positive domestic balancing framework for the operation of virtual work arrangement in the country is rejected since p value (.000) is less than 0.01. This is further confirmed by the result which was flagged with two stars showing that the level of internet connectivity, usage and teledensity does present a positive domestic balancing framework for the operation of virtual arrangement in the country.

**H02:** The extent of emotional attachment and satisfaction among employees is not statistically significant in estimating the practice factors that can influence the levels of organisational commitment in the country.

From Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient is .930\* while the p value is .000. The H0 that the extent of emotional attachment and satisfaction among employees is not statistically significant in estimating the practice factors that can influence the levels of organisational commitment in the country is rejected since p value (.000) is less than 0.01. This is further confirmed by the result which was flagged with two stars showing that the extent of emotional attachment and satisfaction among employees is statistically significant in estimating the practice factors that can influence the levels of organisational commitment in the country.

**H03:** The nature of interpersonal relationship among employees of business organisations does not play a significant function in the application of virtual work arrangements in the country.

From Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient is .949\* while the p value is .000. The Ho that the nature of interpersonal relationship among employees of business organisations does not play a significant function in the application of virtual work arrangements in the country is rejected since p value (.000) is less than 0.01. This is further confirmed by the result which was flagged with two stars showing that the nature of interpersonal relationship among employees of business organisations play a significant function in the application of virtual work arrangements in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

Adjustment to virtuality in work places is gaining momentum in most developed nations as a way of redressing employee-employer conflict and also a technique of increasing worker productivity (Thompson & Caputo, 2009). Virtual work arrangement permits a worker to participate in the production process of his or her organisation from appointment outside the work place. Within this arrangement the worker is able to optimize the work privilege provided by his employer to offer his best to the organisation. Many organisations have resorted to this form of work schedule in order to eliminate labour market frictions, reduce labour cost, real estate cost and actualize the numerous benefits of communication technologies.

In developing economies like Nigeria the level of interest connectivity, usability and teledensity has been identified as a welcome framework to popularize and advocate the application of virtual work arrangement. Furthermore, our cultural heritage, values and beliefs cannot be discretionally regarded as non-contributory factor in this adjustment process. This is true because organisational commitment and emotional attachment to duty by workers can be influenced by family ethics, training and culture and when it is so strong it becomes a binding force on the capacity of the worker to perform irrespective of the distance from the workplace.

## **Recommendation**

It is important to explain that virtuality in work places is significant to organisational growth and productivity in the era of dwindling resources, low power generation, stringent monetary policies and low consumption expenditure of the populace organisations in the country can as well

sustain operational process and human capital requirements through the adjustment of work schedule to virtual work arrangement.

Again introduction of virtual work arrangement in large cities in Nigeria like Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Onitsha and Kaduna can as well reduce the level of traffic congestions and number of hours workers spent on travelling between their work places and home on a daily basis.

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