Employee Relationships in Healthcare Organizations and Its Impact on Healthcare Delivery: A Case of Edo Specialist Hospital, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Employee relationships constitute a critical component of human resource management in healthcare organizations because healthcare delivery depends largely on collaboration among healthcare professionals. This study examines employee relationships in healthcare organizations and their impact on healthcare delivery, using Edo Specialist Hospital, Edo State, as a case study. The paper explores the concept of employee relationships, theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and the influence of workplace interactions on service delivery outcomes. Drawing on Systems Theory, Organizational Behaviour Theory, and Social Exchange Theory, the study argues that positive employee relationships foster teamwork, communication, employee motivation, and organizational commitment, all of which contribute to improved patient care. Evidence from healthcare literature suggests that effective employee relationships enhance staff satisfaction, reduce workplace conflicts, improve patient safety, and increase organizational performance. However, challenges such as inadequate staffing, poor communication, leadership deficiencies, and industrial disputes continue to affect employee relations within many healthcare institutions in Nigeria. The study concludes that healthcare managers should prioritize employee engagement, participatory leadership, continuous professional development, and effective communication systems to strengthen employee relationships and improve healthcare delivery. The paper recommends the adoption of comprehensive employee relationship management strategies as a means of achieving sustainable healthcare service improvement in Edo Specialist Hospital and similar healthcare institutions.

Keywords: Employee relationships, healthcare delivery, healthcare organizations, human resource management, patient safety.

Introduction

Healthcare organizations are among the most labour-intensive institutions in society. The quality of healthcare services provided to patients depends significantly on the competence, motivation, and relationships among healthcare workers. Employee relationships encompass the interactions that exist between employees and management as well as among employees themselves within an organization. In healthcare institutions, employee relationships are particularly important because healthcare delivery requires continuous collaboration among

physicians, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory scientists, administrators, and other healthcare professionals.

Effective employee relationships promote trust, teamwork, communication, and cooperation among staff members. These factors are essential for ensuring patient safety, quality healthcare services, and organizational efficiency. Conversely, poor employee relationships can result in conflicts, low morale, reduced productivity, poor communication, and compromised patient outcomes (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

In Nigeria, healthcare institutions face numerous challenges, including workforce shortages, industrial disputes, poor working conditions, and inadequate funding. These challenges often affect employee morale and workplace relationships, with implications for healthcare delivery. Edo Specialist Hospital, a major healthcare institution in Edo State, operates within this broader healthcare environment and therefore provides a useful context for examining the relationship between employee relations and healthcare delivery.

The objective of this paper is to examine employee relationships in healthcare organizations and evaluate their impact on healthcare delivery, with particular reference to Edo Specialist Hospital, Edo State.

Conceptual framework

Employee Relationships

Employee relationships refer to the interactions, attitudes, and behaviours that exist among employees and between employees and management within an organization. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), employee relations involve the management of relationships between employers and employees with the aim of creating a positive work environment that enhances productivity and organizational effectiveness. Employee relations practices encompasses the processes of regulation and control over workplace relations, the organization of tasks, and the relations between employers and their representatives, and employees and their representatives, and is the sum of economic, social and political interactions in workplaces where employees provide manual and mental labour in exchange for employability, rewards as well as the institutions established for the purpose of governing workplace relations (Dessler, 2008). According to Makombo et al., (2024) Employee relations refer to the relationship that exists between employers and employees at the workplace. This relationship goes beyond the formal roles and responsibilities of workers who follow organizational guidelines, extending to employee engagement and well-being, both of which are essential for motivating productivity. Employee relations operate at both individual and collective levels, as employees are often organized into associations or trade unions to engage employers on issues of mutual concern Employee relations refer to the relationship that exists between employers and employees at the workplace (Makombo et al., 2024). This relationship goes beyond the formal roles and responsibilities of workers who follow organizational guidelines, extending to employee engagement and well-being, both of which are essential for motivating productivity. Employee relations operate at both individual and collective levels, as employees are often organized into associations or trade unions to engage employers on issues of mutual concern (Wellbeck & Thelma, 2025).

Globally, there has been a growing recognition of the role of employee relations in ensuring not only organizational efficiency but also the wellbeing of workers. Studies from both developed and developing countries show that organizations with robust employee relations policies and harmonious workplace cultures report higher productivity, reduced turnover, and improved service delivery (Badi & Al-Zubaidi, 2024).

In healthcare organizations, employee relationships extend beyond traditional employer–employee interactions to include multidisciplinary collaboration among healthcare professionals. Effective employee relationships facilitate teamwork, improve communication, and promote coordinated patient care (Sung, & Hsu, 2025). They also contribute to employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Positive employee relationships are characterized by trust, mutual respect, effective communication, fairness, and shared organizational goals. In contrast, negative employee relationships are often marked by conflicts, mistrust, poor communication, and low employee morale.

Types of Employee Relationships in Healthcare Organizations

Employee relationships in healthcare organizations may exist in different forms depending on the nature of interactions among employees and management.

Employee-Management Relationship

This refers to interactions between healthcare workers and organizational management. Positive employee-management relationships promote trust, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Interprofessional Relationship

Interprofessional relationships occur among different healthcare professionals such as: Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists, Medical Laboratory scientists, Physiotherapists and other allied health professionals. This can also be referred to as clinical relationships. Effective inter-professional relationships improve teamwork, communication, and patient outcomes.

Intragroup Relationship

These relationships exist among employees within the same professional group. Strong intragroup relationships facilitate knowledge sharing and mutual support.

Intergroup Relationship

Intergroup relationships occur between different departments or professional groups within healthcare organizations. Poor intergroup relationships often result in communication breakdowns and workplace conflicts.

Union-Management Relationship

Healthcare employees often belong to professional associations and labour unions such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) and so on. The relationship between management and labour unions influences industrial harmony and organizational stability.

Formal Employee Relationship

Formal relationships are governed by organizational policies, reporting structures, and job descriptions. The characteristics include: official communication channels, defined authority structures, and organizational procedures

Informal Employee Relationship

Informal relationships develop naturally among employees through social interactions and personal connections. These include friendships, peer support groups, and informal mentorship relationships. Research suggests that positive informal relationships improve morale and teamwork (Robbins & Judge, 2022).

Healthcare Delivery

Healthcare delivery refers to the organized provision of healthcare services to individuals and communities through healthcare professionals, institutions, and support systems with the aim of promoting health, preventing diseases, diagnosing illnesses, treating patients, and rehabilitating those with health conditions. Healthcare delivery encompasses all activities involved in providing healthcare services from the point of first contact with patients to the completion of treatment and follow-up care (Krachler, & Bach, 2024).

According to the World Health Organization, healthcare delivery involves the manner in which healthcare services are organized, managed, financed, and provided to populations in order to improve health outcomes (World Health Organization, 2021). Effective healthcare delivery depends on the availability of qualified healthcare personnel, adequate infrastructure, efficient management systems, and positive employee relationships.

Healthcare delivery is a multidisciplinary process involving physicians, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory scientists, physiotherapists, administrators, and other healthcare workers. Since healthcare services require coordinated efforts among different professionals, the quality of relationships among employees significantly affects service delivery outcomes.

In the Nigerian healthcare system, healthcare delivery remains a critical challenge due to inadequate funding, shortage of healthcare personnel, poor infrastructure, and industrial disputes. Consequently, strengthening employee relationships has become essential for improving healthcare service quality and patient satisfaction.

Types of Healthcare Delivery

Healthcare delivery can be classified into several categories based on the level and nature of services provided. Based on the level of care we have primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare. However, based on nature of services we have formal, informal and rehabilitative care.

Primary healthcare represents the first level of contact between individuals and the healthcare system. It focuses on health promotion, disease prevention, basic treatment, immunization, maternal and child healthcare, and health education. This include Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs), community health centres, and Family medicine clinics. The Alma-Ata Declaration identified primary healthcare as the foundation of effective healthcare systems (World Health Organization, 1978).

Secondary healthcare involves specialized medical services provided through referrals from primary healthcare facilities. These services are usually offered by specialist physicians and general hospitals. Examples are General hospitals, Specialist hospitals and District hospitals. Tertiary healthcare refers to highly specialized medical services requiring advanced technology and specialized expertise. Examples include: Teaching hospitals, Federal medical centres and Specialized referral hospitals. Edo Specialist Hospital falls within this category because it provides specialized medical services to referred patient.

Preventive healthcare focuses on preventing diseases before they occur through vaccination programmes, health education, screening services, and disease surveillance. On the other hand, curative healthcare involves diagnosing and treating illnesses to restore patients' health. These include medical consultations, surgical and diagnostic interventions, and pharmaceutical treatment. Rehabilitative healthcare assists patients in regaining physical, mental, and social functioning after illness or injury. They are physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and mental health rehabilitation.

Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory

Systems Theory was developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. In the 1920s and 1930s, he introduced the concept of open system to describe how living organisms interact with their environment. He later expanded this into general systems theory in the 1940 to apply this principles to across all scientific disciplines. Since then, this theory has become so popular in all fields of human endeavour. The systems theory views organizations as interconnected systems whose components work together to achieve common objectives The systems theory views organizations as interconnected systems whose components work together to achieve common objectives (Jackson, 2000). The systems theory views organizations as interconnected systems whose components work together to achieve common objectives. Healthcare organizations operate as complex systems comprising healthcare professionals, patients, infrastructure, technology, and management structures.

Employee relationships form a critical subsystem within healthcare organizations. Effective interactions among healthcare workers improve coordination and service delivery, whereas dysfunctional relationships can disrupt organizational processes and negatively affect patient outcomes.

Organizational Behaviour Theory

Organisational behaviour studies the behaviour, attitudes and performance of people in organisations. This field puts the lens of analysis on how employees' work contributes to or detracts from the effectiveness and productivity of the organization (Dailey, et al., 1990). Organizational Behaviour Theory examines how individuals and groups behave within organizations. Robbins and Judge (2022) argue that employee attitudes, communication patterns, leadership styles, and group dynamics significantly influence organizational performance. In healthcare settings, positive organizational behaviour promotes teamwork, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement, all of which contribute to improved healthcare delivery.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory was developed by Blau (1964). It posits that relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges of benefits and obligations. Employees who perceive organizational support and fair treatment are more likely to demonstrate commitment, loyalty, and positive work behaviours. In healthcare organizations, supportive management practices encourage healthcare workers to contribute positively to organizational objectives and patient care.

Employee Relationships and Healthcare Delivery

Healthcare delivery refers to the provision of healthcare services aimed at promoting, maintaining, or restoring health. Effective healthcare delivery requires coordination among healthcare professionals and organizational units. Employee relationships influence healthcare delivery in several ways.

Healthcare services require collaboration and teamwork among different professional groups. Effective communication is also essential for preventing medical errors and ensuring continuity of care. Employees who experience supportive workplace relationships tend to be more motivated and committed to their work. Motivation enhances productivity and service quality.

Patient safety depends heavily on teamwork, communication, and adherence to clinical procedures. Organizations characterized by healthy employee relationships generally experience lower staff turnover, reduced absenteeism, and higher productivity levels. Positive employee relationships enhance teamwork, facilitate coordinated patient care, encourage open communication and information sharing among healthcare workers, contribute to safer healthcare environments and improved patient outcomes.

Empirical Studies

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of employee relationships in healthcare organizations. According to Muthoka (2017) in her study of the Influence of employee relations practices on organisational performance of public healthcare sector in Kenya, concluded that employee relations practices influence organizational performance of public healthcare sectors. Aiken et al. (2014) found that positive work environments and supportive relationships among healthcare professionals were associated with improved patient outcomes and reduced mortality rates. Similarly, West et al. (2015) reported that healthcare organizations with strong employee engagement and supportive leadership achieved better service quality and patient satisfaction. To Wellbeck and Thelma (2025) in their study of 'The impact of employee relations and workplace harmony on productivity in government hospitals and Pharmacists' Association in Ghana, revealed that commitment and loyalty are central to fostering a positive employment relationship in the public health service. Many participants noted that being committed to their work motivates them to go the extra mile for patients, even when faced with limited resources, thereby strengthening their loyalty to their organization. This agrees with Sawada et al. (2021) who highlighted that loyalty is nurtured when management recognizes their efforts, involves them in decision-making, and demonstrates concern for their welfare and professional growth. Several respondents explained that a sense of duty to serve the community reinforces their commitment, which in turn enhances their dedication to organizational goals.

In Nigeria, Adeloye et al. (2017) identified workforce challenges, poor working conditions, and management deficiencies as factors affecting employee morale and healthcare service delivery. Oleribe et al. (2019) further noted that human resource challenges remain a major obstacle to effective healthcare performance across African healthcare systems.

This study is in agreement with above studies as they suggest that employee relationships play a significant role in determining healthcare quality, patient safety, and organizational effectiveness.

Challenges to Effective Employee Relationships in Healthcare Organizations

Several challenges affect employee relationships in healthcare institutions. These challenges often reduce employee morale and negatively affect healthcare delivery. They include:

i. Workforce shortages.
ii. Poor remuneration and welfare packages.
iii. Inadequate communication systems.
iv. Professional rivalry among healthcare workers.
v. Weak leadership and management practices.
vi. Limited opportunities for training and development.
vii. Industrial disputes and labour conflicts.
viii. High workload and employee burnout.

Impact of Employee Relationships for Healthcare Delivery in Edo Specialist Hospital

At Edo Specialist Hospital, effective employee relationships among healthcare professionals and management facilitates coordinated patient care, reduce clinical errors, and improve healthcare outcomes. The inclusion of these different forms of employee relationships contributes to healthcare delivery through:

i. Improved communication
ii. Better teamwork
iii. Reduced workplace conflicts
iv. Enhanced employee motivation
v. Improved patient safety
vi. Increased organizational efficiency
vii. Higher patient satisfaction

Strategies for Improving Employee Relationships

ESH adopted some strategies to improve employee relationships and healthcare delivery. They are as follows:

1. Promote participatory leadership and employee involvement in decision-making.
2. Improve communication channels within healthcare institutions.
3. Strengthen conflict management and dispute resolution mechanisms.
4. Provide continuous professional development opportunities.
5. Improve employee welfare and motivation programmes.
6. Enhance teamwork through multidisciplinary collaboration.
7. Implement fair and transparent performance management systems.
8. Improve staffing levels and working conditions.

Implications for Edo Specialist Hospital

For Edo Specialist Hospital, strengthening employee relationships can improve service delivery, patient satisfaction, and organizational performance. Management should prioritize staff welfare, communication, teamwork, and professional development. The establishment of employee engagement programmes and regular feedback mechanisms can help strengthen workplace relationships and improve healthcare outcomes. As there exist the formal relationship in the work place, the informal relationships should also be encouraged to strengthen overall relationship that will act as catalyst for peace and conducive environment to foster a better health outcome.

9. Conclusion

Employee relationships are a vital determinant of healthcare delivery in modern healthcare organizations. Positive employee relationships foster teamwork, communication, employee motivation, and organizational commitment, which ultimately improve patient care and organizational performance. The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that effective employee relationship management contributes significantly to healthcare quality and patient safety. Although challenges such as workforce shortages, poor working conditions, and leadership deficiencies continue to affect healthcare institutions, appropriate management strategies can strengthen employee relationships and improve healthcare delivery. Healthcare administrators at Edo Specialist Hospital and similar institutions should therefore regard employee relationship management as a strategic priority for achieving sustainable healthcare improvement.

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