

Remote Work and Employees' Productivity in the Nigerian Telecommunication Sector (2020-2025)

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Abstract

The sudden upsurge in remote work, coupled with the rapid adoption of communications and collaborative technology, means many organisations have either seen no significant change, or have rather, witnessed positive change in employee productivity. The telecommunication sector is an ideal context for studying remote work during and after COVID-19 because it is naturally more adaptable to remote work due to its reliance on digital technologies. It is on this background that the study assessed remote work and employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector between 2020 and 2025. The study adopted a pure qualitative research design that relied on interview responses to arrive at a logical conclusion. The data from the interviewees is thematically analysed. The study found that flexibility has had a positive impact on employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector by allowing employees to set their own schedules and work hours that suit their personal needs and lifestyle. The study also found that work-life balance and employees' productivity are closely intertwined, noting that when employees have better work-life balance, they are less likely to suffer from burnout and more likely to be motivated and engaged in their work. As the Nigerian telecommunication sector strives for effective service delivery, the study recommends, among others, the need to see work-life balance and Flexible Work Arrangements as essential ingredients in attracting and retaining dedicated talent for higher productivity and better performance in the industry.

Keywords: Remote Work, Employee Performance, Telecommunication and Technology.

Introduction

Remote work has been the best for years, as more occupations use computers and telecommunications; the COVID-19

pandemic fast-tracked this process by forcing a large segment of the global workforce to switch to remote work at least temporarily. Compared to working from the Office

(WFO), remote work has the power to reduce travel time, provide more flexible working hours, work at your own pace depending on your job role, increase job satisfaction, and improve Work-Life Balance (WLB) (Financial Times, 2021).

The relevance of studying remote work in the Nigerian context is underscored by the rapid transformation of work culture following the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within technology-driven sectors like telecommunications. Despite infrastructural and regulatory challenges, the Nigerian telecommunication sector represents an important benchmark for understanding how remote work models can influence productivity in developing economies.

Needless to state here, that some organisations in Nigeria have emerged stronger during COVID-19 (e.g. the Nigerian Telecommunication Sector), whereas others have actually succumbed to the negative effects of the pandemic. Therefore, introducing remote working at that point in time is an indication that employees may continue working from home permanently, even after the pandemic. The telecommunication sector is an ideal context for studying remote work during and after COVID-19 because it is naturally more adaptable to remote work due to its reliance on digital technologies. More so, the data on remote work in this sector is expected to be more extensive due to the nature of the industry (Ogunmonye and Muiyiwa, 2020).

The sudden upsurge in remote working, coupled with the rapid adoption of communications and collaborative technology, means many companies have seen no significant change, or rather, there is positive change in employee productivity. Telecommunication companies, for example, who realised that their employees can be just

as productive away from the office, capitalised on it and accelerated the shift towards more agile working, which has had a significant effect on the economy (Neil, 2020). It is against this background that the study assessed remote work and employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector between 2020 and 2024.

Statement of the Research Problem

Notwithstanding the flexibility and autonomy offered by remote work, working at one's own pace and improving Work-Life Balance (WLB) as other advantages, there is a pressing need to address the issues of remote working arrangements, as many workers have reported difficulties in maintaining boundaries between personal and professional life. This, according to Epie (2023), has consequently led to increased stress and decreased productivity. In addition, the lack of clear organisational remote work policies and the digital divide among employees pose critical barriers to sustained productivity in remote settings.

In the Nigerian telecommunications sector, the transition to remote work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique set of challenges to employees; this shift while necessary for public health and safety (by offering flexibility and autonomy and improving Work-Life Balance (WLB)), has raised questions about the long-term impact on employees' productivity (Assessment report on remote work in the Nigerian Telecommunication sector, 2021). It is against this stated problem that the study is out to assess the effect of remote work on employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector between 2020 and 2024. Five years, i.e. 2020-2024, is enough to help the researcher assess long-term trends and compare the productivity patterns during the peak of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19.

Research Questions

Arising from the background of the study, as well as to put the study into a sharp focus, this study is guided by the following specific research questions:

- i. To what extent has the flexibility offered by remote work enhanced employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector?
- ii. To what extent has Work-Life Balance offered by remote work enhanced employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector?

Research Propositions

- Po1** Flexibility offered by remote work has not impacted employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector.
- Po2** Work-Life Balance offered by remote work has not impacted employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector.

Conceptual Review

The study conceptually discussed the variables (both predictor and criterion variables) that featured prominently in the study. Starting with the mother variable - **remote work** and the advantages it offered – **flexibility and Work-Life Balance**. Finally, a conceptual clarification of **productivity** is thoroughly done as follows.

Remote Working

The emergence of digitalisation and the growing advancements of ICT contribute to the impact on the quality of people's work and community life (Elshaiekh, 2018; Shahbaz, Jam, Bibi, & Loganathan, 2016). In early 1980, the accessibility of Wi-fi and internet-based tools paved the way for workers to connect from different locations, thus minimising the cost and time (AlMarar, 2021). Moreover, the prevalent use of cloud services and access to work applications

enables workers to perform work responsibilities outside the usual work premises (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022). This gives rise to alternative ways of establishing work known to many as "remote work," "telework," or "WFH" (Ali et al., 2010; Monteiro, Straume, & Valente, 2019).

Flexibility

Flexible working arrangements, according to researchers and scholars, are one way to boost employee outputs together with other job-related results (Solanki, 2013; Hofäcker & König, 2013). Flexible work arrangements (FWAs), often known as flextime, are work environments and schedules that are not bound by typical work constraints. According to Hidayah (2021), these arrangements take into account the demands of employees, particularly in terms of balancing work and personal life. Flexible working arrangements refer to the extent to which employees can change the time and place of work-related activities, as well as how their job is conducted regularly. It is also characterised as a choice given to employees to agree with their employers on when, where, and how long they work for certain periods.

Flexible work arrangements are a way for employees to balance work and non-work obligations, according to O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2004). Workplace breaks, shorter workdays, telecommunications, and part-time labour are all requirements in this scenario. According to Russell (2007), flexible working arrangements include flexitime, working from home, which includes telecommuting and teleworking, job sharing, and part-time work, as well as a variety of organisational activities to support work-family balance. According to the definitions, the adaptable working arrangement has multiple dimensions. It

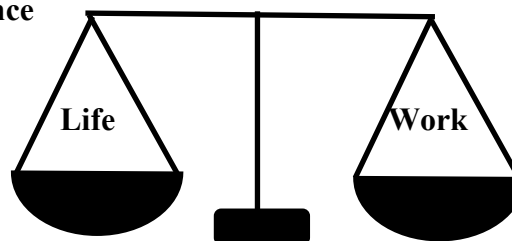
includes not just the option of working at a different time or location, but also working from home, job sharing, and taking career breaks, all of which assist employees in planning their work hours and achieving work-family balance (Torrington, Taylor, Hall, & Atkinson, 2011; Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is generally defined as the equilibrium between work demands and personal life responsibilities, enabling individuals to fulfil both professional and personal roles satisfactorily. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) introduced the concept of work-family conflict, highlighting the bidirectional nature of the interference between work and family domains. Later, Clark (2000) introduced the work/family border theory, suggesting that individuals manage and negotiate the boundaries between work and family to achieve balance. Various dimensions of work-life balance

have been identified in the literature. These include time balance (allocation of time between work and personal life), involvement balance (level of psychological involvement in work and personal life), and satisfaction balance (satisfaction with the respective domains) (Fisher, Bulger, & Smith, 2009). Several factors influence an individual's ability to achieve work-life balance. Organisational policies and practices, such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and telecommuting options, play a significant role in facilitating balance (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Additionally, individual coping strategies, including time management skills, social support, and personal resilience, are crucial in managing work-life demands (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Figure 1 explains Work-Life Balance in a simplified form with additional pictorial information in the appendix section:

Figure 1: Work-Life Balance



Source: Adopted from www.brackobit.com

Benefits of Work-Life Balance

The impact of work-life balance on job satisfaction and employee performance has been a focal point in the literature. Numerous studies have established a positive correlation between work-life balance and job satisfaction and workers' or employees' well-being. For instance, Carlson, Grzywacz, and Zivnуска (2009) found that employees with higher work-life balance reported greater job satisfaction, employees' well-being and organisational commitment. Similarly, Haar

(2014) demonstrated that work-life balance positively affects job satisfaction and employees' well-being, which in turn enhances employee performance.

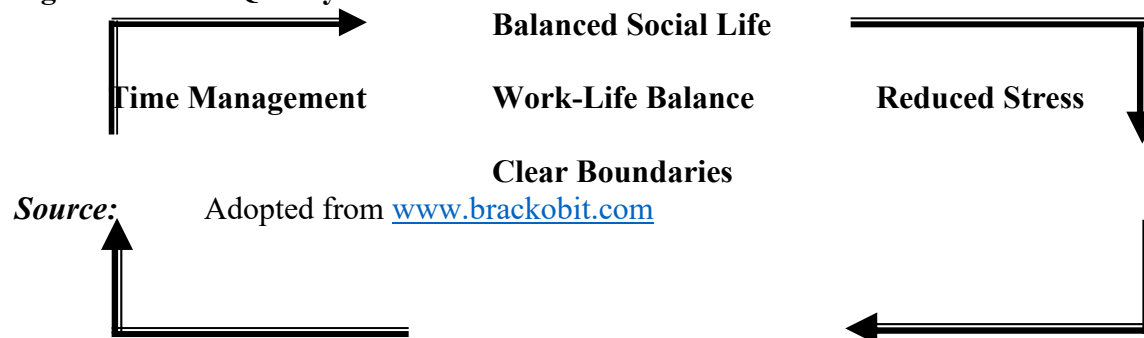
Work-life balance also influences employee performance through various mechanisms. Satisfied employees are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement, motivation, and productivity (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Moreover, work-life balance reduces stress and burnout,

which are significant factors that impair employee performance (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Employees who perceive a supportive work environment that promotes balance are less likely to experience turnover intentions, further contributing to organisational stability and performance (Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013).

Walton (1985), a Harvard Business School professor, popularised the framework of Quality of Work-Life, an important component of which was highlighted as the integration of work and life space. He defined Work-Life Balance as a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. Theoretically, it

can be understood in terms of Time Balance, Involvement balance and importantly, Satisfaction balance. Time balance is about contributing equal time to work and family demands. Involvement balance refers to an equal level of involvement at work and also in family, while satisfaction derived from both work and life constitutes satisfaction balance (Greenhaus, 2003). The concept of Work-Life balance is crucial as it emphasises that an Individual's job and life are equally important for his/her well-being. The quality of life of an individual is said to be influenced by the quality of work and vice versa. Both are seen as two sides of the same coin. The following diagram illustrates our explanation further:

Figure II: A Quality Work-Life



Remote Work and Employee Productivity

Hanaysha (2016) defined "employee productivity as an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers." Kristina (2019) explained that "productivity can be measured by the level of output, tasks, or goals assigned to a particular worker in a defined time frame. Companies inspiring workers' productivity drives profitability in their business". Beatson and Zheltoukhova (2015) regarded productivity as the effectiveness of an organisation and workers in producing value from a given input. Barjan (2021) believed that higher productivity in the work environment indicates a good work culture in the business. When workers are happy, supported, and provided with the right

tools to accomplish their tasks or assigned responsibilities, productivity increases. For example, **flexibility offered by remote work and Work-Life Balance** from the implementation of a remote work strategy are expected to increase profit, lessen production costs, and improve business relations and customer satisfaction, which are byproducts of high productivity.

In today's dynamic work landscape, a remote working environment has evolved into a critical paradigm shift, reshaping how organisations operate and employees engage with their tasks. A remote working environment, often called telecommuting or teleworking, encompasses a work

arrangement where employees perform their job responsibilities from a location outside the traditional office setting. This arrangement is facilitated by digital technology, allowing employees to collaborate, communicate, and contribute to their organisation's objectives from remote locations (Jalagat and Jalagat, 2019). This calls for remote training programs to sustain and enhance employee productivity by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to excel in a remote working environment. This ensures they can fulfil their roles effectively and efficiently. The existing body of research indicates a substantial correlation between remote work and heightened productivity. Remote workers are frequently reported to dedicate longer hours to their tasks and outperform their office-based counterparts (Pokojski, Kister, and Lipowski, 2022). For instance, a study by Jalagat and Jalagat (2019) discovered that remote workers experienced a remarkable 25% surge in productivity compared to their office-bound colleagues.

Review of Empirical Studies/Gap

Few studies have been conducted in the area of remote work and employees' productivity or performance. For example, Awala (2024) examined Remote Work and Employees' Performance with particular reference to Ultima Studio, Lagos State. The research design was a survey design that relied on a structured questionnaire. The results obtained revealed a negative relationship between remote work and employee performance; A positive relationship between managerial supervision and employees' performance in Ultima Studios. This result implies that there is a significant relationship between remote work and managerial supervision and employees' performance in Ultima Studios, and that there is a significant relationship between remote work and organisational commitment

of employees in Ultima Studios. The result of the analysis led to the conclusion that Ultima Studio provide all the work tools needed to work remotely effectively and that there is a significant relationship between stable information technology and employee performance. The study recommends that the Management of Ultima Studio needs to implement policies that will give employees the opportunity to enjoy the same benefits while working from home. Organisations need to pay close attention to the benefits of remote work and the effect it could have on their employees' problem-solving ability, particularly those employees who require fewer interruptions and distractions to do their job, among others.

Abiodun, Mariam and Tunde (2024) analysed the impact of remote work on employees, employers, and the state in Nigeria through a systematic and thematic review based on PRISMA guidelines. Twenty-four (24) publications from 2013 to 2023 were reviewed and sourced from Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus, and Web of Science. The authors used 24 papers through a systematic review process that involved comprehensive literature searches across multiple databases. The study utilised purposive sampling techniques to select studies that met their predefined criteria. The findings indicate that while organisations have begun to adopt remote work and virtual communication tools, these resources are primarily accessible to larger companies due to associated costs. Additionally, the study highlights the pressing need for enhanced infrastructure and structural improvements to support remote work at a societal and economic level. The study recommends that the government enhance infrastructural development and that organisations implement better strategies for remote work. Furthermore, individuals should pursue

advancements in technology to adapt to the changing landscape.

From the above empirics, we could straightly say that the study filled a vacuum that cannot be overemphasised. The significance of the study is twofold: Content and Methodological significance.

- i. **Content Significance:** From the myriad extant studies above, it is glaring that none of the aforementioned studies comprehensively assessed the effects of multiple advantages offered by remote work (flexibility, self-paced work and Work-Life Balance) on a single criterion variable – employees' productivity.
- ii. **Methodology Significance:** One of the previous studies adopted survey research with complete reliance on a questionnaire instrument, analysed both descriptively and inferentially. The study of Abiodun, Mariam and Tunde (2024) adopted a systematic and thematic review based on PRISMA guidelines with reliance on Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus, and Web of Science (in essence, it's a doctrinal research). The current study adopts a pure qualitative research method.

Theoretical Framework: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Fred Davis (1985).

The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Fred Davis in 1985. TAM is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. Fred Davis proposed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in his doctoral thesis at the MIT Sloan School of Management (Davis, 1989). This model is grounded in social psychology theory in general and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in particular (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA asserts that the use of the internet has made work simple to an extent that there is work flexibility and work-life balance (Ma & Liu, 2017). In summary, the

Technology Acceptance Model explains how a computer improves the performance of a business activity. It tells us how a business owner's perception of the simplicity of using a computer system (PEOU) will determine the perceived usefulness of the computer in his business, therefore having a subsidiary effect on the productivity.

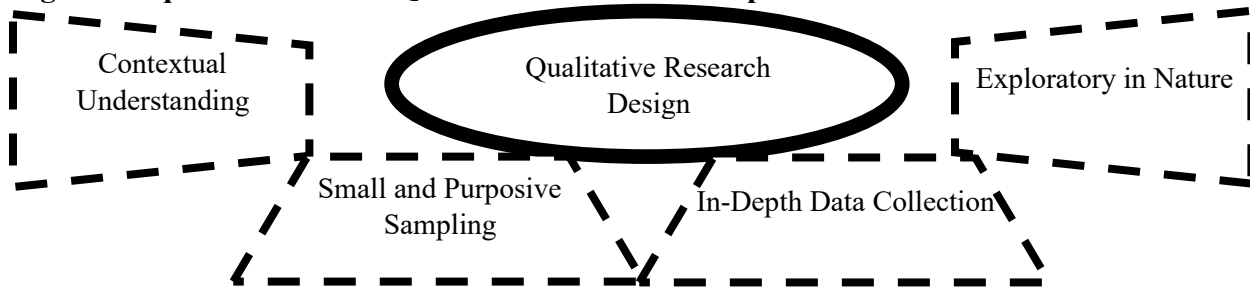
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is viewed by one of the exponents as an information system theory which helps to understand the adoption and use of the internet to adopt work flexibility and promote work-life balance in order to hasten work productivity with ease. Therefore, given the operational guidelines of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), especially as espoused by Gibbs (2007) and Davis (1989), it is rather pertinent to apply the theory to this study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was entirely qualitative in nature. Qualitative research was conducted using observations, interviews, and document reviews or a combination of all. In the process of qualitative research, detailed data is gathered through open-ended questions that provide direct quotations. The main focus in qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people (Kumar, 2017). In the same vein, McMillan and Schumacher (2013) see qualitative research as "primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories". This definition implies that data and meaning emerge "organically" from the research context. The diagram below briefly summarises qualitative research:

Fig. 1: Unique Attributes of Qualitative Research Adoption



Source: deMarraise, 2016.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprised principal staff of service providers (MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile); regulatory authorities (like The Nigerian Telecommunication Commission responsible for licensing, supervising and regulating the performance of the sector). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the course of this study. The purposive sampling was used to select the principal staff of service providers (MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile). The snowball sampling technique was used to identify the interviewees who were hitherto left out (some staff of The Nigerian Telecommunication Commission). Needless to say, it is argued by Kumar (2011) that: The sample size of fifteen was justified based on the principle of data saturation, a point at which no new information emerges from additional interviews. This aligns with qualitative research standards for in-depth, exploratory analysis. The sample size in qualitative research does not play any substantial role, as the purpose is to explore and describe in order to identify the spread of diversity and not its magnitude (Kumar, 2011). In another view, he proclaimed that the sample is inextricably related to the survey, making it hard for a researcher to reach out to a diverse population, hence, the need for a sample.

The study sample size, therefore, was fifteen (15) respondents. The sample size was determined during the data collection phase at a time when we realised we had reached a point of data saturation.

Methods of Data Collection

The methods required for data collection are both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary Instruments of Data Collection:

Data that is obtained from the primary sources is through the following:

- a. **Interview:** One major source of primary data for the study is an interview (Face-to-face Interview). Among the target population, some principal staff of service providers (MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile), regulatory authorities (like The Nigerian Telecommunication Commission, responsible for licensing, supervising and regulating the performance of the sector) were interviewed to corroborate the information from secondary documents. The rationale for interviewing only this category of staff was that open-ended questions require greater thought and contemplation on the part of the respondent, and are, therefore, more time-intensive to answer (Salant & Dillman, 1994).

Secondary Instruments of Data Collection

The following documents were useful in the course of the study to complement the responses of the interview:

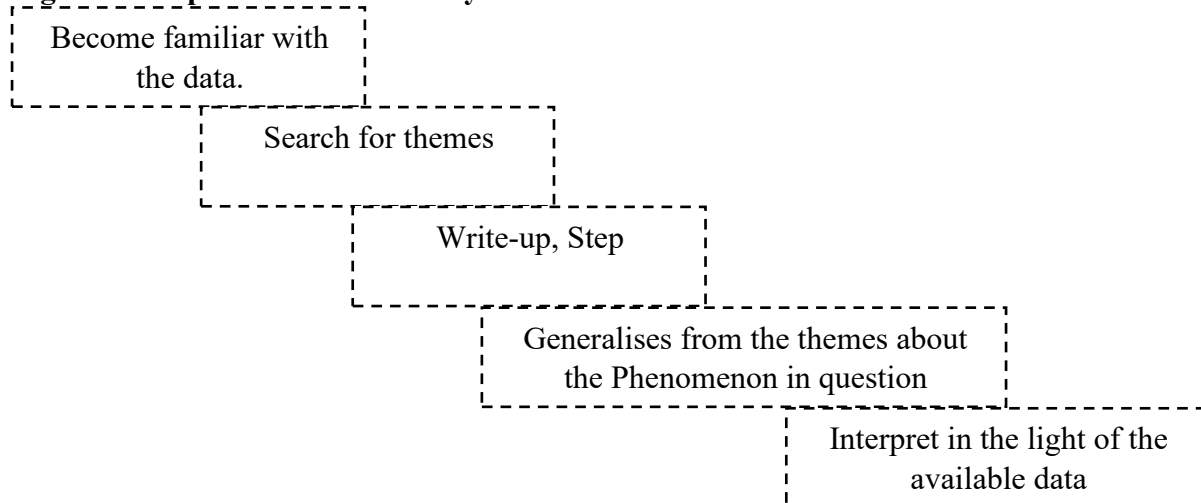
- Assessment report on remote work in the Nigerian Telecommunication sector, 2021;
- Financial Times report (2021);

Method of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted for the study. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing data by putting similar responses in the same category (Kerlinger, 1986). He added that the goal of a thematic analysis is to identify

themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research questions. The rationale behind the choice of thematic analysis was that ‘the approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers the research questions’. The study adapted Clarke and Braun's (2022) 5-step framework as: Step 1: Become familiar with the data, Step 2: Search for themes, Step 3: Write-up, Step 4: generalise from the themes about the phenomena in question and Step 5: interpret in the light of the available data. This is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Steps in Thematic Analysis



Source: Braun and Clarke, 2022.

Results from Oral Interviews

Theme I: Flexibility offered by remote work and employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector

The respondents unanimously agreed that:

Flexibility offered by remote work has had a positive impact on employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. For example, remote work allows employees to set their own schedules and work

hours that suit their personal needs and lifestyle. This freedom can result in improved motivation and increased productivity, as workers are able to work during the hours they feel more productive (R₁₋₃). Other respondents further added that: working on flextime from home eliminates distractions such as office chatter and lengthy

commutes, allowing employees to focus more on their tasks and achieve higher productivity (R4-7).

Theme II: Work-Life Balance offered by remote work has not impacted employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector

According to the respondents, work-life balance and employees' productivity are closely intertwined; they noted, thus:

When employees have better work-life balance, they are less likely to suffer from burnout and more likely to be motivated and engaged in their work. This increased engagement can lead to higher productivity and better overall performance. Some of the examples of work-life balance methods in the telecommunication sector include, among others, Paid Time Off (PTO) packages, self-vacation days, sick days, and working from home. These help employees take the time they need to relax, recharge and attend to personal commitments without affecting their productivity at work (R1-7).

Discussion of Major Findings

The study assessed remote work and employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector between 2020 and 2024. From the presentation and analysis of data above, the study arrived at the following findings: These findings are consistent with previous literature suggesting that autonomy and flexibility can drive employee performance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010;

Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). The improved motivation and reduced stress associated with remote work environments highlight the strategic advantage of flexible work arrangements in the modern economy.

- i. The study found that flexibility has a positive impact on employees' productivity in the Nigerian telecommunication sector by allowing employees to set their own schedules and work hours that suit their personal needs and lifestyle. This freedom results in improved motivation and increased productivity, as workers are able to work during the hours they feel more productive. Additionally, working on flextime from home eliminates distractions such as office chatter and lengthy commutes, allowing employees to focus more on their tasks and achieve higher productivity.
- ii. The study also found that work-life balance and employees' productivity are closely intertwined, noting that when employees have better work-life balance, they are less likely to suffer from burnout and more likely to be motivated and engaged in their work. This increased engagement can lead to higher productivity and better overall performance in the Nigerian telecommunication sector.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fostering a strong Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) in the Nigerian telecommunication sector is highly necessary. By recognising the unique challenges faced by most Nigerian telecommunication sector, e.g. overload on the part of the employees and inefficiency on the part of the organisation resulting from fatigue, the telecommunication sector can create an environment that promotes flexibility and supports work-life balance, thereby allowing employees to thrive both

personally and professionally. A balanced approach not only leads to happier and more engaged employees but also contributes to better performance. As the Nigerian telecommunication sector strives for effective service delivery, work-life balance and Flexible Work Arrangements are assumed to be essential in attracting and retaining dedicated talent for higher productivity and better performance in the industry. The study further recommends that organisations in the telecommunication sector establish robust digital infrastructure, adopt inclusive remote work policies, and invest in regular remote-work-specific employee training to sustain productivity gains.

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