

# TASK ASSIGNMENT AND ORGNIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN PAINT MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

By

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## **Abstract**

*The study seeks to assess the effects task assignment to employees can make on organizational performance, especially in paint manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Relevant literature was reviewed to provide theoretical backing to the study. A cross sectional survey design sampled the entire 312 staff of all the 14 listed paint companies in Rivers State. Questionnaire earlier validated by management experts was used to collect data and analysis made using five-point rating scale and Pearson Product Moment Correlation via SPSS 0.15. Major findings include (1) contrary to expectations, paint manufacturing firms in Rivers State practiced task assignment well as proved by the tested hypothesis. (2) problems threatening the survival of paint companies are those of product adulteration, lack of infrastructural facilities (like electricity, good roads), too many taxes by three tiers of government and extortions on the road by law enforcement agencies. Recommendations: (1) Managers should not only assign tasks properly, but should also permit workers to be flexible in carrying out the assigned tasks especially when situation demands immediate change. (2)A government taskforce should be set up to identify, arrest and punish quacks in the paint manufacturing sector and paint manufacturing sub-sector.*

The way and manner in which managers assign task to workers in the organization can, to a great extent, determine the level of performance of its employees. As an essential human resource management function, task assignment is done by the manager who understands the details of the tasks involved in a particular job and, most importantly, the required skills,, competencies and capabilities of the employee.

Job design and the assignment of jobs to employees should take into account the personality of the individual, his seniority, age, academic achievements and experience. In fact jobs designed to suit an individual, should take into consideration the idiosyncrasies of the individual and his abilities. Koontz, O'Donnel and Wehrich (1980) suggested a situational approach to job deign and job description.

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When tasks are appropriately assigned, employees are happy and this in itself is motivational, leading to better performance. The reverse is the case when employees are made to handle tasks in which they have little or no skills poor performance is the end result. The whole exercise of assigning tasks to employees, it is observed, is an overflow of departmentalization in the organization. It is only when departmentation is done well that managers, or unit heads will begin to talk of ever effectively assigning tasks to employees for better performance.

In the manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy we observe task assignment as one of the key factors that affect performance either positively or negatively. In other words, the way available manpower resources are mobilized and tasks assigned to workers greatly determine successes or failure in the sector. Paint manufacturing business as a sub-sector of the Nigerian manufacturing sector is the focus in this paper.

Paint is a term used to describe a number of substances that consist of pigments suspended in a liquid or paste vehicle such as oil or water. With a brush, a roller or a spray gun, paint is applied in a thin coat to various surfaces such as wood, wall, metal or stone. Although its' primary purpose is to protect the surface to which it is applied, paint is also for decoration and aesthetics. The main reason for the use of paints, according to Pan African Liberation, International Project (PALIP, 1999) is identification, decorations, safety insulation, etc. Paints basically are made up of four components, namely pigments, binder, solvent and additives.

In Rivers State firms that manufacture paints abound. Like any other sub-sector, paint manufacturing firms face daunting challenges that are ever present in the manufacturing sector. In whichever form, size, scale of operation and environment, there exit problems, some of which include poor record keeping, inadequate planning, faulty job description, job analysis, inappropriate task assignment to employees, incompetence of management and lack of required skills. These problems continued to plague paint companies and adversely affect their survival and growth.

This study, therefore, aims at finding out the effects of task assignment activities of managers on organizational performance. In other words, to determine whether the way and manner tasks are assigned to workers in the paint manufacturing firms in Rivers State can, in any way, affect the organizations performance.

### **Statement of the Problems**

Any interested watcher of paint market in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular, may easily discover the volatile nature of the sub-sector's movement. Long existing paint manufacturing firms may suddenly go out of production and new ones emerge; but soon afterwards they go down also. Competition grows very severe and sometimes becomes unhealthy and unethical. The situation as it is now may make one to easily conclude that paint manufacturing firms in Nigeria are facing difficult times.

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Poor handling of some essential areas of management easily call to mind. Could it be poor job design, inappropriate assignment of tasks to employees, disregard to competence and capability of workers, skills and proficiency of workers not considered in the assignment of tasks, etc?

Piqued by this sad situation, this study seeks to find out what impact a well, effective and integrated task assignment plan can make on the performance of workers, especially the paint manufacturing firms in Rivers state.

### **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of task assignment practice on organizational performance. Specifically, the objectives aimed at include.

1. To determine the extent paint manufacturing firms in Rivers State appropriately assign tasks to the employees.
2. Determine the extent employees skills, competences and capabilities are considered by the managers of paint companies in task assignment.
3. To determine the effects of proper or improper task assignment to workers on the performance of paint manufacturing firms in Rivers state.

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>. There is no significant positive relationship between task assignment to workers and organizational performances in the paint manufacturing sub-sector.

H<sub>1</sub>. There is significant positive relationship between task assignment to workers and organizational performance in the paint manufacturing sub-sector

### **Task Assignment and its Effects on Organizational Performances**

As earlier stated in the introduction, the way and manner in which tasks are assigned in the organization can, to a great extent, determine the level of performance of its employees. In the organization, task assignment should be done by the manager who understands the details of the task involved in a particular job and, most importantly, the required skills, competencies and capabilities of the employees.

Nwachukwu (2009) observed that “Job design and the assignment of jobs to employees should take into account the personality of the individual, his seniority, age, academic achievements and experience”. Koontz O’Donnel and Wehrich (1980) suggested a “situational approach” to the job design and job description. When tasks and jobs are appropriately assigned employees are happy, and this in itself is motivational, leading to better performance. The reverse is the case when employees are made to handle tasks in which they have little or no skills; poor performance is the end point. The whole exercise of assigning tasks to employees is an overflow of departmentalization in the organization. It is only when departmentation is done well that managers or unit heads will begin to talk of ever effectively assigning tasks to the employees for better performance. This is never an easy task. Managers are frequently

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both concerned and baffled about where, within a department, particular activities should be placed. The techniques and principles of departmentation provide no answer to questions as to whether claims should be the responsibility of the legal department, whether competition between activities should be encouraged or discouraged, and whether executive interest in the activity should influence where the work should be done. Koontz, et al (1980) suggested some very useful guides for managers to follow.

### **Assignment by Similarity of Activities**

The practice of grouping together similar activities are both apparent and logical. The search for a basis of classifying activities that lead to the association of those which are similar eventually brings organizers to the skills of people. At first, they may be persuaded that the important element is the object to which labour is applied. But that which results from labour depends upon the skills applied to it. After determining what needs to be done and what skills are required, the organizer can then group them under such headings as typing, chemical analysis, process engineering, and accounting. In this way, people who perform similar activities can be grouped in one department, and the advantages of occupational specialization can be realized.

### **Assignment by Most Use**

Activities which managers have the most use should, normally, be assigned to them. For instance, in a manufacturing establishment, the traffic function, which includes such activities as the purchase of transportation services, the use of equipment for transportation materials to the plant, in-plant movement of materials, and warehousing, may be assigned to the production manager.

### **Assignment by Executive Interest**

Executive interest may also be a reason for assigning a particular activity to a particular manager, if he or she is especially interested in it and has the capacity to direct it intelligently.

### **Task Assignment and Job Design/Description in the Organization**

Job design is part of the total organizational design and analysis. An organization is made up of positions, jobs and people; positions exist before an employee is hired and it is the organization, through analysis, that decides on the number of positions that exist and the job attached to each position. It is the job that tells the employee what he must do and the relationship between his job and others. Jobs help to define authority and responsibility, and also help in the training and development of employees.

Job design is the “specification of the contents, methods and relationship of jobs in order to satisfy technological and organizational requirements of the job holder” (Davies, 1996). Job itself is, according to Nwosu (2002), “a collection of tasks, duties and responsibilities which, as a whole, is regarded as the regular assignment to

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individual employees”. Job description, on the other hand, is “an organized, factual statement of the duties and responsibilities of a particular job covering the work to be done, the responsibilities involved, the skill or training required, with what machines it will be done and the relationship of the worker to people, data and things” (Nwosu, 2002).

It is seen that job description really begins where job design ends; both are intricately interwoven and help to make the task holder more relevant to the organizational needs and overall performance. Task assignment, therefore, is seen to come after job design and job description have all been done and well too.

In all, Armstrong (2006) advised that flexibility should be an essential tool in ensuring effective job design, description and analysis. Employees’ commitment to organizational objectives is highly valued. But at a level it is observed that strict commitment leads to conformist approach which not only fails to reflect organizational reality, but can be narrowing and limiting for the organization. If employees are expected and encouraged to commit themselves tightly to a single set of values and goals they will not be able to cope with the ambiguities and uncertainties that are endemic in organizational life in times of change. Conformity, to imposed values will inhibit creative problem solving, and high commitment to present courses of action will increase both resistance to change and the stress that invariably occurs when change takes place.

If commitment is related to following a tightly defined plan, then this will become a real problem. To avoid it emphasis should be on overall strategic directions. These would be communicated to employees with the proviso that changing circumstances will require their amendment. This is what is meant by flexibility - ability and wisdom to understand that there is need to shift grounds or relax rigid decisions in line with the requirements of the present situation and reality, Emeti (2011). A manger that fails to build in flexibility in his job design is most likely to fail.

## **Methods**

This is a cross-sectional survey research as it cuts across many companies. Paint manufacturing firms in Rivers State constituted the population for the study. The researcher traced all the paint manufacturing firms that are established and doing business in Rivers State during the period of the research. The population does not include paint companies that are established outside Rivers State but merely operate paint depots or retail outlets with few staff in the State. The researcher then listed a total of 14 paint companies in this category with a population of 312 workers. This figure does not include factory/casual workers who were engaged only to load and off-load paint products and raw materials as the need arises. They have no skills, basic education and are not permanent staff of the companies.

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To boost reliability of the study, the entire 312 staff were taken as sample size. Questionnaire instrument that was validated by experts in management was used to extract information from them as respondents in the study. Five-point rating scale (strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed and undecided) was used to generate data from the respondents. Formulated hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 0.15).

Meanwhile, out of the 312 questionnaire distributed only 276 were returned and validly used. Organizational performance was mirrored in the study via innovativeness, productivity (output) and effectiveness of workers.

**Table 1: Workers Rating of Task Assignment Practice on Organizational Performance**

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Und	Total	Mean Score
I believe that Y							
Effective task assignment practice in the company has positively influenced organizational performance X	90 (360)	85 (225)	64 (128)	34 (34)	3 (0)	276 (777)	2.82
Effective task assignment recognizes workers skills and competence in the organization	96 (384)	83 (249)	46 (49)	49 (0)	2 (774)	276	2.80
With good task assignment plan, workers innovativeness and creativity on the job have been evoked	86 (344)	101 (303)	35 (70)	50 (50)	4 (0)	276 (767)	2.78
Workers total output increased in the company due to the effective task assignment plan put in place.	79 (316)	88 (264)	55 (110)	48 (48)	6 (0)	276 (738)	2.67
Workers effectiveness on the job has improved as a result of proper assignment of tasks to them	78 (312)	92 (276)	45 (90)	56 (56)	3 (0)	274 (734)	2.68
The major reason for effective task assignment is to accomplish time target	80 (320)	99 (297)	60 (120)	35 (35)	2 (0)	276 (772)	2.80

Given below is correlation tables in which the formulated hypothesis, as tested, are presented.

**Table 2(a) Correlation Table for the Hypothesis**

		Organizational Performance	Task Assignment
Organizational Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.547	1
	Sig (1-tailed)	0.170	
	N	5	5
Computation from SPSS 0.15			

**Table 2(b) Paired Sample Test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair	Organ 1 Performance: Task Assignment	1.34400	.33642	.15045	.92628	1.76172	8.933	4	.001

Computation from SPSS 0.15

**Hypothesis Testing**

From the correlation test using the data in table 1 and SPSS 0.15 computations in tables 2(a) and 2(b) above, it was observed that task assignment has 54.7% correlation with organizational performance, although it was not significant at 0.5 and 0.01 levels of significant. However, from t-statistic test, it was seen that t-test was 8.933 at 4 degree of freedom with significance level of 0.001. This implies a high level significant relationship between task assignment to workers as practiced by the companies under investigation and organizational performance. The therefore agree with the alternate hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) by accepting that there is significant positive relationship between task assignment and organizational performance in the paint manufacturing sub-sector.

**Discussion**

Task assignment plan as seen practiced in the organizations under study has shown positive results in the area of workers innovativeness, productivity and effectiveness. There was significant positive relationship between good task assignment and organizational performance. Fiedler (1965) and Nwachukwu (2009) all collaborated this situation. Nwachukwu (2009) advised that “the assignment of jobs to employees should take into account, the academic achievements and experience” of the employees while Fiedler (1965) stated that “it could make the task holder more relevant to the organizational needs and overall performance”. This is what paint manufacturing companies did, and on close observation it was discovered that these companies hardly have more than one qualified hand in a particular job/task. It was therefore not faulty assignment of tasks to workers that was threatening paint manufacturing business, but other factors (as seen from our analysis in table 1).

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The importance of flexibility (from our literature) in job design and or assignment has been made manifest. Inflexibility or conformity to tightly defined plans stifles initiative and creativity in times of great need. Managers should therefore be sensitive to the organizational needs challenges in a given situation and then ensure that tasks are designed and assigned accordingly.

From where respondents were asked in the questionnaire to freely state the major problems of paint manufacturing business, all the 14 companies listed in common, the following: product adulteration, lack of infrastructural facilities like electricity and good roads, too many taxes by three tiers of government and high level extortion on the roads by law enforcement agencies.

### **Conclusion**

From all analysis and discussions it is observed that paint companies in Rivers State practiced task assignment to their employees well and this resulted to better performance. Effective task assignment cannot be separated from job design, job description and analysis. When jobs are properly designed, described and analyzed they become clearer to the task holders resulting to overall organizational high performance.

It was serendipitously discovered that flexibility in job design and assignment is very necessary in order to provide for changes that were not originally pictured in the organization structure. It is sad to note that more than 50 years of our nationhood, Nigeria's industrial sector still suffers problems of infrastructure (electric power, bad roads), too many taxes by three tiers of government and most embarrassingly, high level extortion from motorists on the high ways by the law enforcement agencies. As it is, paint manufacturers must distribute their paint products in heavy-duty trucks along the highways and must come across law enforcement agencies.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been made;

1. Managers when assigning tasks should not only take into consideration the skills capability, qualification and competence of the employees, but should also expressly permit and encourage the workers to be flexible when the need arises in implementing plans of the organization. If possible let flexibility be built into job/task design.
2. As product adulteration continued to threaten the survival of paint companies, it is recommended that a special task force be set up by the federal government to work in collaboration with paint manufacturers association (PMA), NACCIMA, and Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) to identify, arrest and prosecute these quack manufacturers who adulterate paint products.



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