# Mediating Role of Distributive Justice in the Relationship between Career Incentives and Employee Performance

Abdussalaam Iyanda Ismail, Abdul-Halim Abdul-Majid, and Mohd Hasanur Raihan Joarder

Abstract—This paper is unique for being among the very few studies that examined the influence of career incentives on employee performance with the mediating role of distributive justice. A total of 140 Nigerian working adults have participated in this study but 116 questionnaires were good enough for further analysis. Descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyze data and to test the hypotheses. The overall finding indicated that there is positive relationship between career incentives, and employee performance. It was also found that distributive justice partially mediated the relationships between career incentives and employee performance. Future researches should examine the various aspects of organizational characteristics and personal characteristics in relation to career incentives within organizations. Organizations thrive through the instrumentality of people because they possess the required skills, knowledge and competencies needed for the execution of organizational strategy and planning. Hence, organizations should entrench a competitive total remuneration package that consists of career incentives programs and various organizational benefits based on the principle of distributive justice. In addition, management should build up an effective pay design and management systems in organizations. Openness in communication and employee participation in the pay design and management help in achieving this goal.

*Index Terms*—Career incentives, distributive justice, employee performance, Nigeria.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance has become a source of worry to most organizations in Nigeria. Like in the construction industry, employee performance's challenge has caused a set back to the sector. This has consequently affected the organization's performance, quality of work, duration of projects and finally firm's profits [1]. In the education sector, prevalent poor academic performance of students in Nigeria has been associated with the poor teachers' performance [2]. Teachers who were rated as ineffective actually produced students of lower academic ability [3], [4].

Past studies have also pointed out that the performance-related challenges are associated with poor compensation and application of old-fashioned retention strategies [5], [6]; lack of employee participation in decision making [7]; faulty employee recruitment strategies [8]; poor

working environment [9]; and failure of organizations to create and employ rational decisions [10]. It is obvious that organizational success is attained through the blend of people and system. Human capital possesses the required skills, knowledge and competencies to execute strategy and planning in the organization.

On January 25, 2014, it was reported by the Punch newspaper that Nigeria Union of Journalists lamented the spate of industrial actions in the country pointing to the fact that there is need for the people at the helm of affairs to find a way of resolving the issues that give rise to the prevalent anomaly. The Union called for a summit through which the welfare of entire workforce would be re-examined in order to prevent industrial disharmony. The recurrent demands in those sectors of the economy should be critically addressed to find enduring solutions to all the pending issues relating to workers welfare [11].

This has tremendously affected a lot of things in the sector; the most paramount of which are employee perfomance and overall performances of the organizations; public and private, in the country. Competitive reward package has been established by many past researchers to be a factor in the organization which enhances workers performance and thus upturn the organizations productivity [12]-[15]. The existing global economic trends have made most employers to understand the fact that for their organizations to have competitive advantage, the performance of their employees is germane in determining the success of the organization. Employee performance does not only benefit the organization, it also benefits the workers themselves in terms of their growth.

Based on the above background, this study is bent to answer two research questions below:

- 1) Is there relationship between career incentives and employee performance among the Nigerian working adults?
- 2) Does distributive justice mediate the relationship between career incentives and employee performance?

This study is unique for being among the very few studies that examined the influence of career incentives on employee performance with the mediation of distributive justice. In fact, it would play an important role in unravelling the secrets behind the enhancement of employee performance. Moreover, this contributes to the present body of knowledge on career incentives can drive employee performance. It could also be used as existing scientific evidence for future and continuing studies.

In the same manner, the study could be an integral part of the academic writing as well as a policy paper for policy makers in Nigeria. The findings can be a useful guide for the

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Abdussalaam Iyanda Ismail is with the Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia (e-mail: iyandaismail@yahoo.com).

Abdul-Halim Abdul-Majid and Mohd Hasanur Raihan Joarder are with the School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia (e-mail: ahalim@uum.edu.my, hasanur@uum.edu.my).

policy and decision making as well as for academic resources.

#### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed literatures on career incentives in relation to employee performance and of previous related researches on mediating role of distributive justice.

# A. Employee Performance

Boyne, Farrell, Law, Powell, & Walker [16] observed that it is important for the organizations to have information on performance. This will enable organization to know whether they are improving, deteriorating or stagnant. Also, it enables organizations to adjust with a view to improving on their services for survival and growth.

Managing individual performance within organizations has conventionally centralized on measuring performance and allocating remuneration. Good performance is perceived to be the outcome of the collaboration between individual ability and motivation. It is gradually being recognized that planning and an enabling environment affect individual performance, with performance goals and standards, appropriate resources, guidance and support from the managers all being central [17].

According to Anitha [18], employee performance refers to employee's monetary or non-monetary result which is absolutely connected with the performance and success. Employee job performance has two characteristics; employee's abilities and skill be it natural or acquired and employee's motivation. Researchers have indicated that employee's abilities, competency, and innovation enhance organizational success [19].

## B. Career Incentives

Generally, incentive implies a way through which employers give out their end-product of the employment agreement which is known as reward in exchange for the work rendered by employees. Largely, incentive reward is any kind of reward patterned to acknowledge employee accomplishments in the organization. Incentive type of reward can ignite and enhance anticipated performance. Employers do, sometimes reiterate the kind of behaviour expected to be ignited by the incentives [20].

Some researchers are of the view that incentives that are based on performance is a new phenomenon and has a high effect on economics, accounting and human resource management [21]. Hsu, et.al [20] observed that there are five elements of incentives that entice employees which include salary, short term incentives, long term incentives, employee benefits and perquisites.

Employee can leave his workplace for the sake of money but it should be pointed out that monetary incentives cannot be the only reason [22]. Pay and organizational benefits are not the only elements in the job offer; incentives in the form of job location, job security, balance with personal/family time, potentiality for job advancement, and work-related challenges (i.e. career incentives) form the part of incentives in the job offer [23].

Hsu et al., [20], recommended that organizations should

frequently review employee attitudes about their career incentives and take advantage of the chance to determine their job attitudes. One considerable advantage of good communication is to keep expectations of employees more manageable.

# C. Distributive Justice

Based on the past scholastic studies, three types of organizational justice are discernible. According to Greenberg [24] and Greenberg [25], organizational justice are of distributive justice and procedural justice while Bies and Moag [26] and Skarlicki and Folger [27] added interactional justice to be the third type. Scholars like Adams [28]; Colquitt *et al.* [29]; Greenberg [30] observed that distributive justice constitutes integral part of organizational justice.

Distributive justice, according to Janssen [31] implies the view of employees regarding the overall justice between the comprehensive scope of investments made and the attached compensation. Based on the equity theory propounded by Adams [28], it is a fact that employees would normally make a comparison between his contribution in terms of work rendered to the organization and the returns from the organization [28], [31]. If employee perceives justice in the comparison, then he will feel satisfied [25], this can lead to positive behaviors like extra role behaviors [31].

It should be noted that distributive justice is not just restricted to the justice of payments, but also a broad set of organizational outcomes, such as promotions, rewards, punishment, work programs, benefits and performance evaluation encompasses. The basic premise is that the distribution of resources primarily on the perception of distributive justice, justice, trust, commitment and organizational impact. Served justice or compensation based on merit, is considered equivalent [32].

Distributive justice is an important predictor of personal outcomes such as pay and job satisfaction and organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment and supervisory assessment of the pad. Reverse distributive injustice occurs when people are expecting a reward that others may receive the fact of rewards such as new job, new responsibilities, power, rewards, promotion [33]. If an outcome is unfair perception, discrimination and injustice of these personal feelings such as anger, or guilt of pride and satisfaction and recognition, such as switching inputs and outputs such as yield and composition of their behavior with others and also affects the organization and ultimately behavior (such as performance or turnover) affects [34].

## D. Career Incentives and Employee Performance

Surveys have signified that incentive is an important factor that can impact the performance. The worthiness of the pay given to employee can induce good performance [35]. Organizations can achieve their managerial goals through giving meaningful incentives that would be based on the level performance to their employees. Incentives can be effective if it is tailored towards job criteria of individual employee and should constitute a portion of the total reward system. Compensation packages and programs should centralize on individual employee performance and competency. Performance evaluation that would determine appropriate incentive allocation has become a challenge to organization.

It is noteworhty here that little is known about linking career incentive to employee performance.

#### E. Distributive Fairnes and Employee Performance

A number of theories support the concept of distributive justice. Equity theory made it known that employees anticipate fair outcomes in terms of pay, incentives, benefits, job security, recognition perks in exchange for his contribution in terms of education, effort, time, commitment and experiences to their jobs. If employee believes that his contributions are more than what he gets as reward, he would feel cheated and it will affect his satisfaction and consequently affect his performance. However, the reverse is the case if employee perceives that his pay is fair [36], [28]. Cole and Flint [37] postulated that if employee perceives justice in the reward given to him, it can impact his personal outcomes.

Interestingly, observations have shown that this kind of relationship between the effect of pay design issues and job satisfaction is indirectly affected by perceptions of distributive justice [38]. Similarly, the findings of the study carried out by Ismail, Ibrahim and Girardi [39] on the mediating effect of distributive justice in the relationship between pay design and job satisfaction showed that distributive justice can mediate the relationship between pay design issues and job satisfaction in the public college sector.

The question here, is distributive justice also mediates the relationship between career incentive and employee performance?

#### III. METHODOLOGY

Based on the above section, the research framework is drawn below:



Fig. 1. Research framework.

Based on the research framework, the hypotheses of this study are:

H1: Career incentives are positively related to employee performance.

H2: The relationship between career incentives and employee performance is mediated by distributive justice.

Cross sectional survey design as well as quantitative method is adopted for this study. Research design in this study entails a technique through which data is collected and analyzed to be able to identify the impacts of career incentives on employee performance with mediation of distributive justice.

The definitions of key terms used in this study include:

• Employee Performance: The employee's monetary or non-monetary result which is absolutely connected with the performance and success. Employee job

performance has two characteristics; employee's abilities and skill be it natural or acquired and employee's motivation. [18].

- Career Incentives: The basic things that employee needs from his career. It is divided into two; one is internal career anchor while another is external career anchor. Internal anchor refers to employee perception that direct his career such as job security, location, and autonomy in the workplace. External career anchor means how well the internal career anchor are satiated as external career incentives [20].
- Distributive Fairnes: The view of employees on the overall balance between the broad scope of investments made and rewards received at work [31].

This research makes use of close-ended questionnaire to be measure variables which are career incentives, distributive justice and employee performance.

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF VARIABLES					
Variables	No of Items	Scales	References		
Career Incentives	Ten	Likert scale 1-5	Omaro [44]		
Distributive Justice	Four	Likert scale 1-5	Colquitt [20]		
Employee Performance	Seven	Likert scale 1-5	Omaro [44]		

The questionnaire consists of 26 questions. Five questions belong to demographic section; ten questions were asked under career incentives; four questions under distributive justice while the last seven questions were under employee performance. The answers to the questions were scaled on the five point Likert Scale. 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The reliability of the questionnaire are usually evaluated through using Cronbach's Alpha or Alpha Coefficient to indicate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The table below shows the result of the reliability test that was carried out:

TABLE II: RELIABILITY STATISTICS					
Measure	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha			
Career Incentives	10	.800			
Distributive Justice	4	.882			
Employee Performance	7	.759			

Factor analysis was also carried out on this study explicated the model of the relationships between the three variables on the questionnaires and indicate that the factor analysis in this study is appropriate. This is due to the fact that KMO value is .739 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (p=.000) as shown in Table III, below.

TABLE III: FACTOR ANALYSIS	
KMO and Bartlett's Test	

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure	.739	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	196.898
	Df	10
	Sig.	.000

The population of this study comprises of the Nigerian working adults who are currently studying at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The total population of this study is 278. In this study, simple random sampling technique was - used. Simple random sampling technique's adoption is based on the premise that the technique is the most efficient among all the probability designs and every element of the - population has the equal chance of being selected and thus would enhance the objectivity of the study's findings.

Out of the total population of 278 Nigerian working adults studying in UUM 140 samples were chosen to be the respondents based on the list provided by the Nigerian Students Community of UUM.

A set of 140 questionnaires were dispatched to the target population, however 120 questionnaires were retrieved back. Four out of 120 collected questionnaires were not fully filled by the respondents and were exempted from the analysis. This means that response level was an approximate of 83%.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The findings of the analyzed data would determine the conclusion on the link between career incentives and employee performance with the mediation of distributive justice.

#### A. Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Data

It was found that the senior staffs among the respondents were 73.3% while the junior staffs were 26.7%. This reveals that over one third of the sampled respondents were senior staff in their various places of works. Also, it shows that 85.3% of the respondents were permanent staff while the temporary staffs were 14.7%. This indicates that majority of the respondents were permanent staffs in their various workplaces. In addition, 32.8% of the respondents were new employee as their years of experience was below one year, 25.9% have between 2-3 years of experience. 26.7% were of 4-5 years of experience while the most senior among them were 14.7%.

Concerning the respondents' level of education; it is noted that 9.5% held diploma while 30.2% have bagged degree in various fields of study, 60.3% held postgraduate degrees. Majority of the respondents were married as their percentage was 62.1%, others are either single or divorced/separated or widows; singles among them were 35.3%, divorced were 1.7% and the widows were .9%.

From the above, it is discernible that 73% of the respondents were senior, while 85% were permanent. Married among them were 62%. Those that have higher level of education were 90% while 15% of the respondents have more than five years of working experience. This indicates that they (respondents) are suitable because of the fact that majority of sampled respondents are well acquainted with reward system process in their individual workplaces and able to articulate their state of mind (feelings) better during questionnaire administration.

#### B. Descriptive Analysis of the Variables

Below is the table displaying the summary of the descriptive statistics for the independent variable which is

career incentives; mediator which is distributive justice and dependent variable which is employee performance.

TABLE IV: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE VARIABLES

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewnes s
CI	116	2.00	5.00	3.791	.627	762
DF	116	1.00	5.00	3.435	.986	203
EP	116	2.14	5.00	4.134	.577	-1.000

Note: EP = employee performance, C1 = career incentives, DF = distributive justice.

Table IV above showed that mean values for the variables are from 3.435 to 4.134, signifying that the amount of career incentives, as well as the levels of distributive justice and employee performance are ranging from moderately high (3.0) to highest (5.0). It also showed that employee performance has the highest mean score which is 4.13 with the standard deviation of 0.58. This is followed by career incentives that have the mean score of 3.79 with the standard deviation of 0.63. Distributive justice; the mediator has the mean score of 3.44 with the standard deviation of 0.99.

# C. Testing of Research Hypotheses

This section indicated the intensity and direction of the linear relationship between career incentives, distributive justice (as mediator) and employee performance.

TABLE V: CORRELATIONS					
	1	2			
Employee Performance	-				
Career Incentives	.384**	-			
Distributive Justice	.271**	.655**			
		.655**			

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 116.

Correlations between variables in this study are held in the expected directions. The dependent variable, employee performance, correlated with career incentives, r = .384, p < .01; and distributive justice (r = .271, p < .01 respectively).

Furthermore, Baron and Kenny [40] suggested that a mediating variable can be accepted when it satisfies four conditions: First, the independent variables (i.e. career incentive) should correlate with the postulated mediator (i.e., distributive justice); second, the independent variables must (i.e. dependent variable correlate with employee performance); third, the mediator must correlate with the dependent variable (i.e., employee performance). Fourth, a previously significant effect of predictor variables is decreased to non-significance or decreased in terms of effect size after the inclusion of mediator variables into the analysis. In this regression analysis, standardized coefficients (standardized beta) were adopted [41].

With respect to Hypotheses 2, it was postulated that distributive justice mediates the relationship between career incentive and employee performance. The models in Table VI is referred to describe how or why correlation between independent and dependent variables exist in reality. The first step taken is the adoption of two conditions to test the hypothesis. In the first condition, two models were tested by regression analysis where the dependent variable (distributive justice was made a dependent variable) and the control variables were included in Model 1 and career incentives was then added as independent variable in Model 2.

TABLE VI: HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

DV	Distributive Justice		Employee Performance			
	Model1	Model2	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4
Control Variable						
Job Position	.196*	.128	053	077	118	110
Nature of job	067	116	393****	308**	371***	278**
Years of Exp	155	162*	134	144	083	103
Level of Edu	068	.054	.145	.202*	.167	.189*
Marital Status	.156	.079	078	133	129	153*
IV						
Career incentive		.119		.407***		.377**
Distri-justice					.329***	.255*
$\mathbb{R}^2$	.097	.503	.160	.311	.258	.343
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.056	.466	.122	.259	.217	.287
F	$2.38^{*}$	13.55***	4.19**	6.03***	6.31***	.000

Note: N = 116. Standardized regression coefficients are shown in columns marked Model 1, 2, 3, and 4. \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

In condition two, the dependent variable was employee performance and the control variables were added, career incentive and distributive justice were also added as independent variables in turn. The independent variable (i.e. career incentive) affected the mediator (i.e., distributive justice) ( $\beta$ =.12 p>.05). Hence, the first condition suggested by Baron and Kenny [40] was fulfilled.

The second condition was also fulfilled as the independent variable predicted the dependent variable (i.e. employee performance) ( $\beta$ =.41 *p*<.0001). It should be noted here that career incentives correlated significantly with employee performance. The third condition was fully satisfied as the mediator (distributive justice) correlated significantly with the dependent variable (i.e., employee performance) ( $\beta$ =.33 *p*<.0001).

The fourth condition was partially fulfilled. In the model 2 of the condition 2 of the model, before distributive justice was added, the standardized regression coefficient of the relationship between career incentives and employee performance was .41 (p<.0001). However, when distributive justice was included in Model 4 as the independent variable, the coefficient between career incentives and employee performance decreased from 0.407 to 0.377. In this case, only career incentives fulfilled the fourth condition of Baron and Kenny [40]. Hence, this result provided partial support for Hypothesis 2. Thereby, distributive justice partially mediates

the relationship between career incentives and employee performance.

# V. DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between career incentives and employee performance. It equally aimed to investigate the mediating role of distributive justice in the relationships between these variables (i.e. career incentives and employee performance).

Furthermore, career incentives were found to have a significant and positive relationship with employee performance. The studies conducted by Omaro [35] also found the same results as this study does. This result is also consistent with the studies of Laine *et al.* [42]; Lu *et al.* [43]; Reisel *et al.* [44]; Tsai and Wu [45]; Feather and Rauter [46].

This indicates that organizations can improve their employees' performance through career incentives. Employee who has the chances to reach higher position and to grow within the same capacity in the organization would be motivated and thus improve his performance. Surely, several employees may quit their jobs for better money, but the monetary-focused incentives may not be the only, nor the most effective, method to holding desired employees and enhancing their performances [47]. Some employees generally viewed money as a pointer of their achievements, rather than an end in itself but pay and employee benefits are two of the most important factors in a job offer, other incentives include job location, job security, balance with personal/family time, potential for job advancement, and work-based challenges should be included to enhance performance [23]. This is symbolizing that employee have more preference for their career success and they would be motivated if their organizations can avail them of it.

Based on the result of the hierarchical regression analysis, it can be said that distributive justice partially mediates the relationship between career incentives and employee performance as the variable (i.e. career incentives) fulfilled the whole four conditions of the mediation. This demonstrates that employees would feel satisfied and motivated if they perceive justice in the distribution of career incentives in their organization compared to other organizations.

Generally, the findings of this study are in consistent with equity theory and expectancy theory. Adams [28] observed that employee will like to do in turn; if they receive a fair reward for the work they do compared to other colleagues. This is also consistent with equity theory, performance is achieved when employees feel that the inputs (efforts) to outputs (rewards) in the same ratio is equal to that of his colleagues [34].

# VI. CONCLUSION

This study extends the researches on career incentives and employee performance by indicating the importance of inclusion of career incentives package in the total reward system. Going by the findings of this study, organizations are implored to put in place career incentives plan so that employee would be motivated and thus enhance their respective performance.

This can serve as guide for the management to build up an effective career incentive plans in organizations. Openness in communication and employee participation in the design as well as planning for better career incentives would help in enhancing performance. This is because of the fact that this will prevent any misunderstanding relating to the system. Hence, positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes will be attained and this will inspire employees to support the organizational and human resource department strategies and goals in the organization.

Based on the aforesaid, the overall finding of this research is that there is relationship between career incentives and employee performance with the partial mediation of distributive justice. By this result, it can be established that objectives of this study were attained, the research questions were answered and the two hypotheses were all supported.

On a final note, it can be evidently established that employee performance can be enhanced if career incentives are enshrined in the reward system of the organization. It is also important to state that employees' feeling of distributive justice is critical to the enhancement of employee performance through career incentives plans.

However, the perception of distributive justice measure used in this study evaluated only the justice aspect and may not have completely portrayed the different dimensions of the construct. Future researchers should also endeavor to research on the relationship and effects of career incentives on employee performance and probably add another kind of incentives or benefits in order to dig it further. Also, future researches should focus on examining the dimensionality of distributive justice and authenticating how it should be measured.

All in all, employers and managers in Nigeria should endeavor to design their reward system to include career incentives in order to enhance employee performance which is very critical to the success of every organization. Various forms of benefits, career as well as monetary-based incentives are encouraged to be introduced.

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Abdul-Halim Bin Abdul-Majid was born in Malaysia. He completed his first degree in bachelor of business administration (BBA) from Mississippi State University, Starkville USA. Then he pursued his master degree (MBA) at Cardiff Business School, University of Wales, UK and his doctoral degree in Business Administration at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. He has been promoted to an associate

professor at College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, since 2006. His area of research interest includes human resource management; pay and remuneration; work and career motivation; and NGOs.



Mohd Hasanur Raihan Joarder is a visiting scholar in the Department of Human Resource Management at the School of Business Management of Universiti Utara Malaysia. He has been teaching various courses of human resource management for more than 10 years. Before joining as the visiting faculty, he was an assistant professor in the School of Business and Economics at United International University in

Bangladesh. He received B.A in English literature from University of Delhi, M.A in international business from University of Wollongong and PhD in human resource management from Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Dr. Joarder conducts research and teaches all levels of students-from undergraduate to executives in human reource management, performance management, training and development and organizational behavior. His current resaerch interests is HRM practices, organizational citizenship behavior, employee involvement and employee retention and turnover intention.



Abdussalaam Iyanda Ismail was born in Nigeria. He is currently a postgraduate student in the Department of Human Resource Management at Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He holds B.Sc (Hons) in industrial and labor relations from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye Ogun State, Nigeria, in 2007.

He held the position of manager for three years in a Lagos-based NGO in Nigeria. He has many years of experience in teaching. He had attended a number of seminars and workshops on different academic areas. He has interest in human resource management, industrial relations, islamic finance and islamic human resource management, compensation and rewards management and organizational performance.