

When the Employer Neglects his Contractual Obligation Push and Pull Factors for Employees to Come to Work Which is not Paid: A Case of Zimbabwean Parastatals

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Abstract

The paper establishes the reasons why employees from selected parastatals continue coming to work even though they have not been paid their salaries for months. A qualitative study was conducted using 2 different interview guides, one for employees and the other one for human resource managers who acted as key informants. Twenty employees, 10 from each parastatal were interviewed and 4 key informants, 2 from each organization also took part in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. It has emerged from the study that employees in parastatals continue reporting for duty for different reasons which included desire for professional growth, hope that the fortunes of their respective organisations may turn for the better, abuse of organisational resources and vending at the workplace. Some participants also highlighted a number of social reasons such as seeking company from fellow workmates, avoiding lengthy periods with spouses who were deemed to be demanding and difficultly to handle. As recommendations, it is argued that organisations value and prioritise the welfare of their employees and engage in sound corporate governance decisions.

Keywords: Parastatal; Motivation; Job dissatisfaction; Corruption; Salary; Wage theft

Introduction and Background

Among other things, employees work in order to earn an income in the form of a wage or salary. Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe, as in many other parts of the world there is no guarantee of regular and adequate wages and salaries even for employed workers [1].

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing economic challenges that have severed the well-functioning of its various production sectors [2]. Zhou [3] has it that the period 2000-2009 experienced some deep seated economic woes from which many companies including state owned enterprises are still struggling to recover. On that note, the government is failing to service its wage bill that is reported to gobble over 80 percent of its national budget, leaving less than 20% for other operations. Employment costs between January and June 2016 consumed 96.8% of the total revenue. The poor economic performance obtaining in Zimbabwe has also had a ripple effect to both public and public sectors. At best, this has seen workers of most companies in Zimbabwe being paid late every month in the past couple of years and at worst, going for months without being remunerated. Most organisations including state owned enterprises are paying their employees as and when money is available without talking about arrears [4]. This is not in line with contracts of employment which stipulates specific time periods when employees should be paid after rendering their service. Some of the companies have gone for months without paying employees. Muchichwa [1] in a study by the Labour and Economic Development Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRIZ) conducted a research with 442 companies and established that an estimated 80,000 employees have not received their salaries and benefits on time. It is argued that the majority of these employees have gone for more than 12 months without receiving their monthly salaries yet their respective employees still expect them to report for duty without fail. Non-payment of salaries is no longer a characteristic of the private sector, but has extended its wings into the public sector where employees are also not getting their salaries on time. Both the government and state owned enterprises employees have been subjected to untimely payment

of their salaries [1]. Muchichwa (opcit) argues that the number of employees going without pay is on the increase contributing to family disintegration, higher poverty rates as well as an increased number of the working poor.

The importance of timeous payment for job done in organisations cannot be ignored for this is instrumental to the well-functioning of the whole system. Without the pay incentive organisations are likely to experience low output, thefts, corruption, absentisms among other related social ills. Best practice and international standards, specifically, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Protection of Wages Convention, 1949, No. 95 clearly stipulates the regular payment of wages to workers and the priority of such payments over other financial obligations of the employer.

State owned enterprises in most African countries are known for deep fiscal problems. These entities are characterised by inefficiencies, losses, budgetary burdens as well as provision of poor products and services [5]. Zimbabwe is not spared from these challenges facing other parastatals on the African continent. In recent years, most state owned enterprises in Zimbabwe were plagued by salary gate. Top executives in these parastatals were known to be paid absurd salaries and allowances. Some would even go home with financial and non-financial rewards amounting to US\$500 000 per month [1,2,6,7]. Such poor corporate governance and other ills are the responsible factors that have contributed to management failing to pay employees for months.

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ECSAFA (2004) has it that parastatals are bodies set up by specific Acts of Parliament. These bodies are managed by Boards of Directors appointed by the government. Parastatals are established outside the Central Government and engage in commercial economic, service oriented or social activities requiring significant levels of autonomy and freedom from bureaucratic interference. The affairs of state owned enterprises are subject to the scrutiny of Parliament and their respective Ministries, thereby placing their responsibility in the hands of the Minister in charge of that particular ministry.

The Zimbabwean public companies are wholly owned by government. They are not for profit making but serve to provide a service where the private companies cannot. They are just an extension of the government. Zimbabwe has a number of parastatals which include the following; National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), Air Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), Zimbabwe National Family Planning (ZNFP), National Archives (NA), Zimbabwe Institute of Public Administration and Management (ZIPAM), Premier Service Medical Aid Society (PSMAS), National Social Security Authority (NSSA) among others.

According to Nyoni [8] employees of non performing state owned enterprises have resorted to putting up at their companies head offices to push for salary payments after months of reporting for work without getting any payment. The Grain Marketing Board (GMB) employees left their homes and camped at the parastatal's Dura House which is its headquarters demanding their over 10 months' salary which they were owed by the organisation.

In an interview with some of the disgruntled employees by Nyoni, they had to say [8];

I have been coming to work every day for the past 15 months without pay, but I can't continue donating my labour to a company that does not care for its workers and their families. As it stands, I can't even bring food to the table, yet every day my children see me leaving for work.

I am a failed parent because I can't even send my children to school and industry in Bulawayo has collapsed, meaning I am the sole breadwinner with no bread to bring home," Terrence Tshuma, a father of five, said.

It has emerged from Nyoni [8] and Muchichwa [1] that the industrial action is different from other forms as those displayed by some employees of the National Railways of Zimbabwe and Hwange Colliery is incorporating their immediate family members such as spouses and children in order to force management to act on the issue of salaries. It is thus clear that non-payment of employees not only affect the employees, but their immediate family members as well. Muchichwa technically calls the non-payment of salaries by organisations for longer periods "wage theft" [1].

Due to high unemployment rate and limited economic growth, Zimbabwean workers are not able to fight 'economic theft' [1]. They just hope that one day, fortunes will turn for the better and they would be in a position to enjoy the sweat of their labour in the form of descent and timely salaries.

Despite being unpaid for over 10 months, it is interesting to note that some employees of state owned parastatals still hope that one day they would be paid their dues [8]. The Labour Act clearly stipulates that labour rendered should be paid for and this could be the source of these employees hope.

Underlying theoretical framework

This study is informed by three theories of motivation namely Adam's Equity Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. According to Mullins and Brooks [9,10], Equity Theory stipulates that individual employees are keen to be treated fairly in terms of what they bring into the organisation (inputs) and what they get in return (outputs). Employees compare themselves with significant others in as far as their inputs and outputs are concerned [11]. When employees perceive an imbalance between their inputs and outputs, compared to significant others, they either adjust on their inputs or their outputs. In this case, employees may either adjust their commitment to the organisation (inputs) or they may adjust on their outputs in the form of some unsolicited benefits. The effort is aimed at addressing the perceived imbalance between one's inputs and outputs at the workplace. This theory can be used to explain the likely response of state owned enterprises to the non-payment of their salaries by their respective organisations. They may compare their inputs and outputs with those of their counterparts in some other organisations who are being paid well and on time. In order to address the perceived sense of inequity, state owned enterprise employees may start altering their outputs through such behaviours as theft and abuse of resources. Alternatively, they may alter inputs in the form of commitment.

Expectancy Theory argues that an individual will decide to behave or act in a particular way because they are motivated to select a specific behavior over other behaviours due to what they expect the result of that selected behavior will be. According to Schultz and Schultz and Mullins [9,12], the theory by Vroom emphasises much on the needs of organisations to relate rewards directly to performance and to make sure that the rewards provided are those deserved and wanted by the recipients. In this study, commitment of employees to do their work and to produce is a function of their faith in the organisation to reward them accordingly. State owned enterprises should therefore reward the commitment by its workforce by prioritising them in as far as remuneration and opportunities are concerned. It is, however, important to note that when employees expect no benefits from their effort and behaviours, then, they may not engage in those behaviours that promotes the organisation. Due to non-payment of salaries, employees may see no reason to commit themselves to the goals of the organisation since they expect no reciprocity from the system.

Mullins and Robbins, Judge & Campbell [9,13] note that according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, money is important for the lower order needs. The lower order needs comprise physiological, security and social needs. The first two are directly related to the aspect of money which one should earn, according to this study, from their employer. Kalchmanov and Kaliannan have it that money is a strong motivator [14]. In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, money satisfies lower order needs. In other words, money does not motivate employees to do their best, thus higher order needs. Employees who are not getting satisfying salaries or who are not paid on time are then likely to have reduced motivation to address the higher order needs. Desire for growth and self actualising can only be relevant after one would have addressed the lower order needs according to Maslow. Considering this theory, state owned enterprises employees are struggling to address lower order needs hence commitment to the organisation and the desire to see it grow is compromised.

Early writers such as FW Taylor of the famous scientific management believed in economic needs motivation. He argued that workers would be motivated by obtaining the highest possible wages through working in the most efficient and productive way. Physiological fatigue would

limit performance. It was believed that motivation was simple, all what workers would want was more money in the form of high wages. The issue of working and being motivated by money has been called rational-economic concept of motivation. This approach and some subsequent arguments have led to the debate among scholars over the role of financial rewards in the motivation of employees [9]. It has also been established by Mullins [9] that for the majority of people, money is clearly important and a motivator at the workplace. However, the extent of money being a motivator as well as its importance depends upon the employees' personal circumstances and the other satisfaction they derive from work [15].

Findings and Discussion

Reasons for coming to work

'Economic' Reasons for coming to work: The study has revealed that a significant number of participants come to work with an intention to engage on some fraudulent behaviours. Fifteen (75%) of the participants highlighted that one of the main reason why they continued coming to work despite not being paid their dues was engaging in some fraudulent behaviours. It has emerged that the majority of these (80%) had positions which allowed them to deal with some resources, either financial or material. In order to cushion themselves from the continuously declining economy coupled with the organisation's inability to pay on time, employees with access to some resources would engage in fraudulent behaviours. These behaviours included stealing, misappropriation of funds, possession of parallel receipt books. Participant 16 had to say;

I know we can go for months without being paid but if I do not come to work, I tend to lose more because coming to work will allow me to make use of my office in order to make money. If I don't do that my family will starve to death and I may not be able to send my children to school.

The above remark by one of the participants of not being paid for months concurs with the findings by Muchichwa and Sibanda [1,4] who have it that some of the state owned enterprises can go for months without paying their workforce and only pay them when as and when they get some money. Some of the employees then settle for some unorthodox means of earning a living through fraudulent means. The importance of money is also revealed. As noted by Kalchmanov and Kaliannan highlight that money in the form of a salary is a strong motivator [14]. This is in line with the argument by Maslow who argues that money satisfies lower order needs, those which are important for basic living. By failing to pay their workers, state owned enterprises are going against the best practice as noted by the International Labour Organisation. ILO's Protection of Wages of 1949, number 95 clearly stipulates that wages of employees should be prioritised ahead of other expenses.

Three of the key informants admitted that there has been a steady increase in cases involving fraudulent and corruption related behaviours in their organisations. Fraudulent behaviours may be linked to Equity Theory by Adams which states that when employees perceive that their inputs are exceeding their outputs vis-à-vis the inputs and outputs of significant others, they can alter their outputs. Outputs can be altered through unorthodox means as witnessed in this study. George and Jones, Mullins and Brooks also have it that when employees perceive some form of imbalances between their inputs and outputs, they may alter their outputs and/or inputs. In this case, employees are attending to their outputs [9-11].

It has also been established that 4 (20%) of the participants indicated that one of the reasons why they come to work even when they are not being paid is to sell their wares. It has been argued that the workplace is a conducive environment for one to engage in some personal economic activities such as selling some imported goods from neighbouring countries. These may include clothes, electronic gadgets and jewellery. According to participant 3;

I travel to South Africa or Botswana once every month to buy some wares to resell to my workmates and some surrounding organisations. My employment circle has become a very good market place for many of us here. Our wares are relatively cheap as we do not pay any rentals or bills. We just use these premises to do our business. If I do not come to work, it means I lose out.

Such behaviours automatically mean low levels of commitment to one's job. Focus is on one's personal interests not on the growth of the organisation. This also tallies with the arguments by George and Jones, Mullins and Brooks, in relation to Adams Equity Theory [9-11]. When employees perceive some form of imbalance, they find ways of bringing equity between their inputs and outputs, even though unorthodox means. In this case, employees are channeling their energies to personal economic developments at the expense of organisational development. Commitment to the welfare of the organisation is reduced in order to restore equity. Mullins and Schultz & Schultz also have it that employers [9,12], according to the Expectancy Theory, should reward commitment as employees expect it that way. If this not done, as in the case of the parastatals under study who are failing to pay their salaries, employees will have no reason to engage in positive behaviours or behaviours that reflect high levels of commitment. Among other things, workers trade their effort for money, which in this case, is not being paid.

Abuse of infrastructure such as phones, internet, company vehicles and other resources has been cited as one of the economic reasons why employees in parastatals continue coming to work even though they can go for months without receiving their salaries. Participant 7 had this to say;

When I come to work, I make sure I do all my calls, including international calls. I also print all my assignments since I am a student at one of the tertiary institutions. I am also forced to come to work because that is where I get free internet for my academic work.

Similar sentiments were also echoed by two of the key informants who had it that at times employees come to work to pursue their academic endeavours and to use the organisation's resources. It has emerged from the key informants that management was considering getting stricter with organisational resources. As already mentioned, when employees perceive some imbalances between their inputs and outputs, they make efforts to either alter inputs and outputs. This is in line with the arguments by George and Jones, Mullins and Brooks in relation to the Equity Theory by Adams [9-11]. Employees will generally lose interest in the welfare of an organisation if they feel they are being shortchanged by the same system that should be taking care of them.

Socially related reasons: A number of social reasons have emerged as to why employees continue coming to work. Eighteen (90%) of the shop floor participants highlighted that the reason for them coming to work on a daily basis even though they had gone for months without remuneration was to meet fellow friends whom they had been with for years. In relation to this theme, participant 17 had to say;

If I do not come to work, how will I spend my day? Days at home can be very long and stressful. I am therefore better off at work where I chit chat with my friends and even before you know it, it is already 17:00 h and we are going home.

This trend is in line with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs of 1963, particularly the social needs [9,13]. Being an employee at an organisation does not take away the need for one to be social and to belong to a certain grouping. It is also important to note that of these 55.5% of these were males. This could be linked to the African traditional culture in general and Zimbabwean in particular which argues that males are more outgoing and are culturally ‘allowed’ enjoying outdoor activities more than their female counterparts. Three of the key informants however highlighted that indeed people form social circles but these could not be the reasons why they come to work as they can as well meet outside the work premises. The workplace could however be more strategic than most of the alternative meeting places. The workplace is more central and there is free and conducive space to meet and socialise.

Still under social related reasons for one to come to work, the study has revealed that (6) 30% of the participants alluded to the fact that one of the reasons why they come to work despite being unpaid for several months was to have time with their ‘loved’ ones who were employed at the same organisation with them. Participant 11 had to say;

My girlfriend and I work here and by not coming to work, it means I won’t see her for that day. So coming to work guarantees that we see each other without fear of being seen by my future-in-laws whom I am not yet prepared to see as of now.

Of those participants who had romantic relationships at the workplace, (4) 66.6% of them were not married. Employees on average spend about 40 h at the workplace and in some cases, romantic relationships may develop, especially to those who are not married. It is also now a common trend that people are postponing marriages with a desire to personally develop first; hence, a significant number of employees in organisations are not yet married. One (16.7%) reported to have been a divorcee and was male while the other one (16.7%) was married. This theme was however not mentioned by all the four key informants.

Another important social theme that motivates employees to come to work was that of need to maintain good social contacts so that one has company in times of future positive and negative social gatherings. Nine (45%) of the participants argued that they have sought to invest in social relations at the workplace so that they have a fall back when they need people during their ups and downs in life such as funerals and weddings. According to P8;

I have since incorporated most of my workmates into my inner social circle. They are now as good as my blood relatives and these are the people who would stand by me in times of funerals, parties and weddings. You see we have children and soon they could be engaging in some weddings and these are the people I bank on during such events. I then have to continuously come to work to make sure these relationships are kept intact.

The theme of company on social events such as funerals and weddings tallies highly with the collectivistic nature of Africans in general and Zimbabweans in particular whereby life is lived as a society and one’s joys and sorrows are shared by the whole community.

The study has also revealed that 3 (15%) of the participants indicated that one of their reason for coming to work even though it is rarely paid for was running away from ‘troublesome’ spouses. Participant four had to say;

Spending the day at home would mean spending the day arguing with my wife and I do not want it that way. The best for me is to minimise the time we are together by making sure I spend the whole day at work.

They highlighted that being away from home saved them from unnecessary arguments with their spouses which are inevitable when they spend the day together at home. In relation to marital related arguments, Muchichwa argued that wage theft by state owned enterprises were leading to family disintegration and an increase in the working poor [1]. Table 1 below depicts the social reasons for coming to work although employees are not getting rewarded on time.

Although key informants alluded to the fact that social ties were important within an organisation, they argued that these ties were not the reason why employees would come to work. They argued that employees do come to work to perform specific tasks which are in relation to the organisational growth.

Psychological related reasons: One of the themes that emerged from the study was that of psychological well-being that they derive from being at work. Eight (40%) of the participants highlighted that they come to work mainly to grow in their respective professional fields. This confirms the argument presented by such scholars as Maslow’s higher order needs, Herzberg’s two factor theory, particularly the motivators as well McGregor’s theory X and Y, in this case, focus is more on the latter [9,13].

It is however important to note that these theories do not completely disregard the importance of money. Money still serves an important function to an extent that its absence may cause challenges both to an organisation as well as individual workers. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, one has to satisfy basic needs before they move on to higher order needs and money is usually instrumental in the satisfaction of lower order needs [9,13]. Kulchmanov and Kaliannan have it that money remains the strongest and compulsory factor for employees [14], which can satisfy only basic needs. Findings from this study then are in contradiction with the arguments by most theories of motivation which states that growth needs should come after basic needs have been met and in order for these to be met; there is need for remuneration in the form of money. It is however important to note that the majority of these theories were derived from economically stable societies where one’s salary is definite and it is in most cases above the poverty datum line.

Another theme which relates to an individual’s psychological well-being was the notion of job security. The study has revealed

Social reasons sub-themes	Participants
Sense of belonging and to socialise with fellow workmates	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
Romantic relationships	P6, P11, P12, P15, P18, P20
Guaranteeing company in future social events	P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P13, P17, P18
Avoiding marital disputes	P9, P14, P16

Table 1: Social reasons for coming to work.

that 17 (85%) of participants argued that one reason why they keep on presenting themselves to an employer who is failing to honour the contractual obligation of remunerating for work done was the issue of job security or what Pilbeam and Corbridge termed job for life [15]. According to Participant 10;

I have to carefully look after this job till I retire. So far I have been with the employee for 28 years. Where would I go if I leave this place?

It is important to note that the findings of this study differ from the arguments presented by Pilbeam and Corbridge who has it that employees are no longer valuing job security as before [15]. The difference could be emanating from the fact that Pilbeam and Corbridge focused on developed countries where economies are rather stable and employment opportunities are vast [15]. In contrast, in Zimbabwe, the unemployment rate is high and employment is not easy to come across. One will realise it is important to keep the job that they have. Three of the key informants highlighted that the economy is very depressed and employers should bear with their respective employees as the options are limited. These findings concur with the arguments presented by Muchichwa [1] who has it that the prevailing high unemployment rate obtaining in Zimbabwe is one of the major reasons why employees find it difficult to move out of an unrewarding relationship with an employer who is failing to meet their contractual obligation of paying wages and/or salaries.

Participants also highlighted the fact that they are sure that as long as they have worked, it is clear that that they will eventually be paid. This theme was raised by (16) 80% of the participants. These argued that although the salaries were delayed, they will still get their money. Seventy five percent of these argued that they believed they would one day get a lump some of their dues. Participant 11 had to say;

Each and every day I work would one day be paid for, so I feel I am investing and they are keeping my money. When I receive it in bulk, I am able to do something more meaningful than when I receive my salary on a monthly basis.

The Labour Act clearly stipulates that labour rendered should be paid and these employees could be basing their arguments on this. The remaining 25% were of the opinion that although they would eventually be paid, their amounts would come in parts. All the key informants however alluded to the fact that although the salaries are erratic, they will eventually be paid according to the Labour Act.

Conclusion

The study sought to unravel the factors that lead employees of some state owned enterprises to continue reporting for work despite being paid their salaries intermittently or at worst, going for months without receiving their salaries. Such a scenario is not in line with the both the international standards and the local Labour Act. The study was informed by Adams's Equity Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

It has emerged from the findings that employees are driven by a number of factors to report for work. The reasons have been categorised as social, psychological and economic. Participants highlighted that they report to their respective work stations in order to grow their professional lives, to seek company at the workplace as well as avoiding potential conflicts with spouses. The study has also revealed that some employees are keen to report to work even though they have not been receiving their dues for months because they tend to abuse some resources such as money, internet and vehicles among other resources.

Work premises, it has been established, can also be used by some participants to study. Some participants highlighted that they come to work simple to sell their wares to fellow employees.

In general, employees of the majority of state owned enterprises, although they are reporting to work, they are not coming to work to offer their labour. Most of them are present at the workplace for other reasons, nothing to do with the mission and vision of their respective organisations. Most of the employees are no longer committed to their work. They have lost interest in the welfare of their organisations.

Recommendations

Management of state owned enterprises must review their human resource policies if they wish to take full advantage of their personnel. Motivated employees are more committed and productive than disgruntled workers.

In order to make sure that operations at state owned enterprises are above board and compatible with best practice, the government and Boards must ensure that sound corporate governance decisions are made, especially on executive pay. In most cases, company executives are earning unrealistically high salaries and enjoying huge benefits at the expense of ordinary employees who are going for months without being paid their salaries.

Employees must also be made to realize their own contribution to the deplorable state of their respective organizations. Abuse of resources coupled with limited commitment on the part of workers only help to plunge their organizations deeper. Employees must be made aware of their potential ability to turn the fortunes of their respective organizations for the better.

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