Organisational Change Strategies and Employee Engagement in Government Agencies: Implications for Public Sector HRM Practices

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Abstract

The research focused on understanding how organisational change strategies affect employee engagement at Nigerian public sector institutions because civil servants face ongoing disengagement problems. At least 65% of public sector Nigerian workers showed dissatisfaction in their jobs because of inefficient bureaucracy and political intervention along with resistance against change. Multiple organisational reform ventures did not solve the employee commitment and motivation issues which created work plan setbacks together with major staff changes. This research investigated how particular change strategies function to boost public institution employee engagement. The study applied Kotter's Change Model along with Lewin's Change Theory to understand the generated concerns. The research design selected for this study applied an explanatory approach because the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) together with the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) fit the criterion of active reform implementation. Research data was collected from 376 staff members and managers through hard and soft questionnaire copies followed by PLS-SEM analysis of the data. The findings of this study underscore the central role of organisational change strategies and public sector HRM practices in shaping employee engagement within Nigerian government agencies. Specifically, change strategies were found to significantly enhance engagement levels among staff ($\beta = 0.227$, $p = 0.000$), while public sector HRM practices such as strategic recruitment, performance appraisal, and continuous development had an even stronger direct effect ($\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$). Most notably, the study confirmed that HRM practices moderate the relationship between change strategies and engagement ($\beta = 0.109$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that organisational reforms are most effective when HRM systems are robust and strategically aligned. These findings suggest that policymakers and agency heads in institutions like FIRS, NNPC, the

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Ministry of Finance, and CAC must prioritise HRM reforms to complement change initiatives. The study recommends the institutionalisation of participatory HRM models, investment in staff training, and the establishment of feedback-driven performance systems.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement; Government Agencies; HRM Practices; Organisational Change, Public Sector*

1. Background and Problem Statement

Organisational change is a central feature of modern governance, especially in public sector institutions that strive to align with global standards, improve service delivery, and respond to citizens' evolving expectations. Across the globe, human resource management (HRM) practices are being redesigned to promote employee engagement as a catalyst for effective change. Research underscores that engaged employees are more receptive to organisational change, display stronger commitment, and contribute more positively to public service outcomes (Albrecht et al., 2015; Gould-Williams, 2007). Still, public sector organisations in Africa deal with problems that are not found elsewhere, making it hard for employees to engage in and support change (Brunetto & Beattie, 2020; Barratt-Pugh et al., 2013). Research has shown worldwide how employees react to change, but the impact of these dynamics on employee engagement in Nigerian government agencies is rarely studied.

The analysis of public sector HRM practices in Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Egypt, Rwanda and Tanzania points to mixed achievements in combining HRM with strategies for engaging employees. As one example, when social exchange theory was added to Ghana's public sector reforms, employees became less committed and lost trust due to continuous bureaucratic leadership (Ohemeng et al., 2020). The lack of engagement in Zimbabwe's civil service reforms was caused by senior officials limiting the way information was shared with the workforce (Chiwawa, 2022; Sibanda et al., 2014). In South Africa and Kenya, trying to decentralise these tasks in HRM had some benefits, but not enough was done to train managers or hold them responsible (Buick et al., 2015; Barratt-Pugh et al., 2013). Even though Ethiopia strengthened work engagement using frameworks, it met with resistance owing to leaders taking most decisions by themselves (Tensay & Singh, 2020). Also, Egypt's management strategies increased worker involvement most when they were supported by his government's national plans (Saad et al., 2021). The two countries carried out performance-based reforms but could not keep

it up because their workforce felt unheard and believed in unfairness in their application.

However, the public sector HRM in Nigeria usually involves transactions, suffering from problems such as nepotism, weak leadership, political roots and an aversion to improving practices (Kuforiji, 2024; El-Ghalayini, 2017). Due to a lack of enthusiasm by the workforce and limited successful communication of these reform concepts, both the SERVICOM initiative and the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) suffered from poor implementation. When workers were left out of deciding on important matters, stability and productivity fell, leading to widespread tension (Kuforiji & Tobi, 2022; Brown & Cregan, 2008). Besides, the strict structure of MDAs has hindered HRM from being adaptive, so many employees feel unengaged from upcoming transformations. But even as efforts are made to reform government, people's confidence is still being eroded by change fatigue, mistrust and employees' limited commitment (according to Morgan & Zeffane in 2003, as well as Van der Voet & Vermeeren in 2017).

Because HRM strategies and worker motivation are not matched in Nigeria, there is an essential lack of understanding about how organisations in the public sector can achieve lasting improvement. According to research in other African countries, inclusive leadership, using performance-based engagement and aligning human resource management are very important (Triguero-Sánchez et al., 2022; Zahari & Kaliannan, 2023). However, there are not enough studies in Nigeria that investigate how HRM be used to support employee involvement during changes within the unique public sector. In view of the mounting pressure on government organizations to do better, it is critical for HR policy decision-makers to understand these connections.

Employee engagement and organisational change are often examined one at a time, yet not many have looked at how both link in the Nigerian public sector. This research seeks to solve that problem by exploring how policies about change in government agencies impact employee involvement in Nigeria. In particular, we will examine how HRM can make team members feel more involved when change is introduced, learning from countries across Africa. This study therefore addresses the research gap: How do organisational change strategies affect employee engagement in government agencies in Nigeria, and what HRM practices can enhance successful change outcomes in the public sector?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Synthesis

2.1 Organisational Change

Organisational change refers to the process through which organizations alter structures, strategies, operational methods, technologies, or culture to adapt to internal and external pressures (Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). It is often aimed at improving performance, responding to policy reforms, or enhancing public service delivery in the public sector. Iverson (1996) emphasised the role of organisational commitment in determining employees' acceptance of change, while Morgan and Zeffane (2003) highlighted that trust and involvement are critical to successful change efforts. In public administration, organisational change is often mandated by political shifts or reforms, and thus employees may perceive it as externally imposed rather than collaboratively designed (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). For instance, in Nigeria, change initiatives like IPPIS faced backlash due to insufficient engagement with staff, undermining the reform's effectiveness (Kuforiji & Tobi, 2022). This suggests that the success of organisational change in government settings is contingent on employee participation, trust, and the perceived legitimacy of the change process.

2.2 Organisational Change Strategies

Organisational change strategies are deliberate approaches designed to manage and implement transformation within institutions. These strategies include communication plans, training programs, participation mechanisms, and reward systems that support behavioural and structural shifts (Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). Barratt-Pugh et al. (2013) proposed that involving line managers as change agents strengthens cultural transformation by embedding change within daily routines. Brown and Cregan (2008) also found that transparent communication and participatory decision-making significantly reduce change cynicism and foster buy-in. In the African context, studies in Zimbabwe and Ghana revealed that lack of strategic clarity and exclusion of employees during reform efforts led to failed implementation (Chiwawa, 2022; Ohemeng et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Egypt and Ethiopia used strategic alignment with national visions and leadership-driven engagement to achieve relative success in public sector change (Saad et al., 2021; Tensay & Singh, 2020). In Nigeria, the absence of a clearly articulated change strategy in government agencies has often led to resistance and operational inefficiencies (Kuforiji, 2024), reinforcing the need for structured change models.

2.3 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement encompasses the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural commitment employees exhibit toward their organisation's goals (Albrecht et al., 2015). It includes vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's job (Bakker et al., 2015). Engaged employees are more likely to adapt positively to change, contribute innovative ideas, and improve public service outcomes (Jones & Sambrook, 2016). Research across public institutions in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya found that where engagement was prioritised through recognition, training, and communication, there were stronger organisational outcomes (Sibanda et al., 2014; Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Conversely, studies in Nigeria revealed that disengagement stemmed from lack of transparency, unclear expectations, and limited career development (Kuforiji et al., 2019). Alhajaj and Ahmad (2024) argue that effective HRM practices boost engagement and reduce turnover intentions. Given the complex and hierarchical nature of Nigerian government agencies, fostering employee engagement is critical to overcoming apathy and resistance during reform.

2.4 Government Agencies

To make policies, deliver services and regulate areas for the benefit of the public, the government sets up government agencies when needed. Most of these agencies are rigidly organized, with clear policies, so changes are hard to implement and usually go slowly (Brunetto & Beattie, 2020). According to El-Ghalayini in 2017, public agencies find it hard to be flexible and their culture makes innovation and active participation from the bottom rare. In Rwanda, Ethiopia and Ghana, agencies that used performance-based and citizen-focused methods were better able to answer and serve citizens (Pham et al., 2023; Ohemeng et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in Nigeria, many government offices experience ongoing politicisation, weak management and low staff motivation (Kuforiji, 2024). There are often too many limitations in MDAs in Nigeria, so innovation is restricted and the importance of people is ignored when carrying out policies. For this reason, we need to study how to adjust HRM strategies and change tactics to raise involvement and performance among staff at these agencies.

2.5 The Functionality of Human Resources in the Public Sector

Some of the main activities within public sector HRM are recruitment, training, performance management and looking after relationships with staff similar to public organizations. Because they are governed by rules, financial constraints and political guidance, public organizations find it more difficult to innovate and respond (Burke

et al., 2013). Yet, some scholars point out that focus on employees' growth and motivation can boost the success of a business (Gould-Williams, 2007; Albrecht et al., 2015). Work engagement, found Luu (2019), can improve service quality through the use of service-oriented HR practices in public organisations. In countries like Kenya and South Africa, investment in HR development yielded better employee commitment and administrative efficiency (Buick et al., 2015). In contrast, Nigeria's public HRM suffers from nepotism, politicisation, and lack of training (Kuforiji, 2024). Zahari and Kaliannan (2023) found that misaligned HRM practices in the public sector weaken morale and productivity. Therefore, understanding the interaction between HRM practices and change engagement is key to reforming Nigerian government institutions.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996) and Lewin's Change Theory (Lewin, 1951). The steps in Kotter's model help managers lead change by establishing a feeling of urgency, gathering people who support the change, forming a vision and instilling the change into company culture. The process suggests that for change to work, we must have strong leaders and eager employees. In African public institutions, using this model has helped leaders be more inclusive and to involve society, though the weak capacity of institutions has often blocked progress (Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). On the other hand, Lewin's theory divides the change process into: unfreezing (getting ready for change), changing (putting the new process in place) and refreezing (establishing the new procedures). It is thought that increasing motivation and providing support can help to manage resistance. In Nigeria's bureaucratic system, these models are used to study what gets in the way of change and how employee engagement supports reform efforts. When applied jointly, these methods holistically explain social and managerial changes in government agencies in Nigeria.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1 Research Design and Philosophy

This research design included an explanatory approach and a positivist perspective to look at the effect of organisational change strategies on employee engagement at a range of Nigerian government agencies. Explanatory design was suitable for testing how leadership, communication methods, staff involvement and motivation fit together in change processes (Albrecht et al., 2015; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017).

The decision to use a positivist orientation was made because all the data used could be tested mathematically and met the criteria of observability and measurability. As a consequence, the study was able to focus on objective investigation and supporting its models by making use of evidence from public institutions undergoing reform. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Ministry of Finance, and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) were purposively selected due to their active and documented involvement in institutional transformation and human resource reforms in recent years. These agencies represent distinct dimensions of federal government operations—revenue generation, oil and gas management, fiscal policy, and corporate governance—making them ideal for generalising insights into the broader Nigerian public sector reform landscape.

3.2 Participants and Procedure

The unit of analysis in this study was individual employees—both managerial and non-managerial staff—actively engaged in organisational change initiatives within the four selected government agencies. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to reflect a balanced representation across departmental functions and hierarchical levels. Out of a study population estimated at 5,200 staff across the four agencies, a sample size of 376 respondents was determined using the Cochran formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Structured questionnaires were distributed via both physical (hardcopy) and digital (email/online) formats to enhance reach and response rate. A total of 376 responses were collected and cleaned for analysis. This procedure ensured the validity of data across varied organisational cultures and change experiences, particularly regarding how employees perceived, resisted, or embraced change efforts.

3.3 Materials

The questionnaire was organized in three areas: demographic details, aspects of organisational change (communication, leadership, participation, training) and engagement indicators (vigour, dedication and absorption) among employees. Respondents were given the option to choose among 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. In Table 1, you will see the constructs and the sources for each one:

Table 1. Questionnaire Constructs and Sources

Variable	Source(s)	Description
Organisational Change Strategies	Fernandez & Rainey (2017); Barratt-Pugh et al. (2013)	Captured communication, leadership support, participation, and consistency
Employee Engagement	Albrecht et al. (2015); Saks (2006); Zahari & Kaliannan (2023)	Measured physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement
Public Sector HRM Practices	Brunetto & Beattie (2020); Gould-Williams (2007); Burke et al. (2013)	Focused on transparency, career management, and ethics

3.4 Measures and Analysis

Tests for data analysis were carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The researcher picked this method because it was suitable for complex models with latent constructs and handled the unusual distribution of data commonly found in organisations (Buick et al., 2015; Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Therefore, this study validated construct validity by performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and assessed reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability indicators. Bootstrapping was conducted at 5,000 resamples to test the significance of path coefficients. All the measurement models met the thresholds for convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted ≥ 0.5) and discriminant validity (HTMT ratio < 0.85). The structural model tested hypothesised relationships between organisational change strategies and employee engagement outcomes, allowing the study to explain the degree to which reforms influence staff motivation and productivity across government agencies.

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

The unit of analysis for this study comprised public sector employees—specifically HR officers, departmental managers, and reform implementation personnel—across four key government agencies: the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Ministry of Finance, and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). These institutions were purposively selected based on their active implementation of internal reform strategies between 2015 and 2024. A total of 400 structured questionnaires were administered using both hardcopy and digital formats, of which 376 valid responses were retrieved and used

for final analysis, representing a 94% response rate. The response distribution is shown in Table 2

Table 2. Response Rate

Sample Size	Number	Percentage (%)
Correctly filled and returned	376	94.0
Not returned or incomplete	24	6.0
Total	**400**	**100**

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the 376 respondents are summarised in Table 3. These variables were assessed to ensure the diversity and credibility of perspectives relevant to public sector organisational change and HRM practices.

Table 3. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 376)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	230	61.2
	Female	146	38.8
Age	21–30 years	70	18.6
	31–40 years	172	45.7
	41–50 years	92	24.5
	Above 50 years	42	11.2
Education	Bachelor's Degree	138	36.7
	Master's Degree	176	46.8
	PhD	22	5.9
	Professional Certifications	40	10.6
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	62	16.5
	5–10 years	141	37.5
	11–15 years	108	28.7
	Above 15 years	65	17.3
Organisation	FIRS	102	27.1
	NNPC	91	24.2
	Ministry of Finance	94	25.0
	CAC	89	23.7

The majority of respondents fell within the 31–40 age group (45.7%), with over 60% possessing postgraduate qualifications (Master's or PhD). This reflects a well-educated and mid-career workforce positioned to provide informed insights into organisational change and employee engagement processes. Furthermore, the distribution across the four agencies ensured balanced representation and institutional diversity.

4.2 Structural Model Analysis (PLS-SEM)

To test the study's conceptual model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 was adopted. The analysis proceeded in two stages: (i) assessment of the measurement model, and (ii) evaluation of the structural model.

4.2.1 Measurement Model Assessment

Reliability and validity of constructs were established using Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's Alpha. All indicators met the recommended thresholds: CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5, and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Organisational Change Strategies	0.821	0.883	0.649
Employee Engagement	0.856	0.902	0.698
Public Sector HRM Practices	0.844	0.889	0.662

All factor loadings exceeded 0.60 and the Fornell-Larcker criterion confirmed discriminant validity.

4.2.2 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural path model tested three key hypotheses:

H1: Organisational Change Strategies → Employee Engagement

H2: Public Sector HRM Practices → Employee Engagement

H3: Moderating role of Public Sector HRM Practices → Change Strategies and Employee Engagement

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to assess the path coefficients and t-values. Figure 1 shows the path coefficient of organisational change strategies and employee engagement on HRM practices in government agencies or public sector; while Table 5 demonstrates the hypothesis testing of the variables.

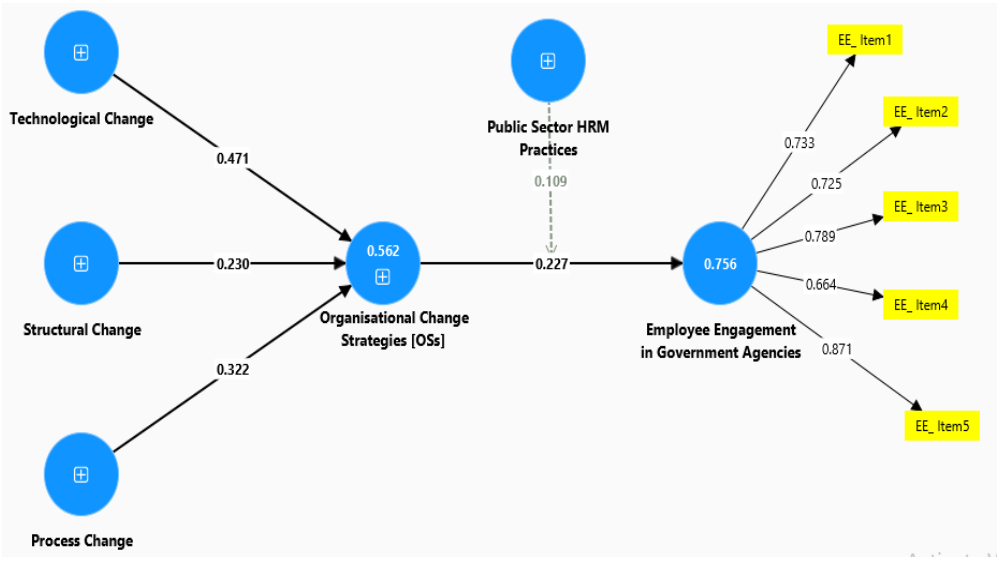


Figure 1. Path coefficient of organisational change strategies and HRM practices on employee engagement on HRM practices in government agencies or public sector

Table 5. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Path Relationship	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Change Strategies → Employee Engagement	0.227	11.294	0.000	Supported
Public Sector HRM → Employee Engagement	0.455	7.187	0.000	Supported
Moderating role of Public Sector HRM Practices → Change Strategies and Employee Engagement	0.109	6.024	0.000	Supported

4.3 Discussion of Key Findings

Based on the analysis of the moderating role of Public Sector Human Resource Management (HRM) practices on the relationship between organisational change strategies and employee engagement in Nigerian government agencies, the findings show significant and positive effects across all tested hypotheses. As reflected in Table 5, change strategies have a direct and significant impact on employee engagement (β = 0.227, t = 11.294, p = 0.000), suggesting that well-designed and effectively implemented organisational change initiatives play a pivotal role in energising and involving employees within public institutions. This finding aligns with the work of **Fernandez and Rainey (2006)**, who posited that transparent and

inclusive change efforts can positively influence employees' willingness to contribute towards institutional goals in public sector settings.

Furthermore, the study found that public sector HRM practices significantly affect employee engagement ($\beta = 0.455$, $t = 7.187$, $p = 0.000$), confirming that strong HRM systems—marked by strategic recruitment, employee development, and performance management—enhance employee motivation and commitment during periods of change. This result resonates with **Albrecht et al. (2015)**, who argued that supportive HRM practices are central to sustaining employee engagement, especially in the face of institutional transformation. The results reaffirm that HRM in the public realm helps create both a sense of ownership and trust as changes are put in place.

What this research shows best is that public sector HRM practices play a moderating role in how organisational change strategies influence employee engagement ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 6.024$, $p = 0.000$). Having solid Human Resources practices increases the good effects of strategies for change on engagement. It means that HRM policies and practices can make organisational changes more meaningful and effective. The result agrees with the view presented by Khilji and Wang (2006), who noticed that linking HRM with planned changes is necessary to achieve continuity, lessen resistance and encourage permanent behaviour change in public administration

These findings further support the argument of Farndale et al. (2011), who contended that HRM must be positioned as a strategic function within government agencies, capable of facilitating cultural and structural adaptation. The evidence from this study adds weight to their claim by empirically demonstrating the moderating power of HRM in enhancing the effectiveness of organisational reforms. It also echoes Oreg et al. (2018), who emphasised that employees' perception of HR support during change directly influences their emotional and cognitive engagement with transformation efforts. Thus, when HRM practices are aligned with reform visions, employee buy-in and productivity are significantly amplified.

Specifically, the findings of this study underscore the strategic importance of integrating HRM practices into the design and execution of organisational change initiatives within Nigerian public sector agencies. Change strategies, though essential, are insufficient in isolation. Their success hinges on the robustness of institutional HRM frameworks that guide and reinforce desired behavioural outcomes. This study, therefore, makes a decisive contribution to public sector reform literature by establishing that HRM is not just a supporting mechanism but

a powerful moderator in advancing employee engagement during systemic transformation.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study concludes that organisational change strategies significantly influence employee engagement within Nigerian government agencies. Regardless, it is necessary to have modern and flexible public sector Human Resource Management (HRM) approaches to support this relationship. The research results show that strong HRM methods—including planning the workforce, clear communication, talent growth and appreciating results—push workers to work harder and be more loyal to the reform process. As a result, HRM is not limited to a supporting position and also helps decide the outcomes of change programs in the public sector.

After these discoveries, it is suggested that the OHCSF, FCSC and BPSR partner to institutionalise an HRM framework designed for public sector change situations. The framework ought to require mandatory training in change management, engaging employees and communicating reforms to HR managers and directors. Going further, the reform process requires each agency—most importantly the FIRS, NNPC, Ministry of Finance and CAC—to have their own internal HRM policy that fits their objectives, carefully monitored and measured through performance checks and HR data every year.

A good way to guarantee sustainability and accountability is for the National Assembly Committee on Public Service Matters to monitor the implementation of HRM within reform activities throughout government agencies. This needs to happen through review meetings every three months, as well as charts that compare performance to standards relevant to funding. Also, using digital tools and surveys to collect employee feedback can help monitor both morale and productivity while moving through change. If these proven strategies are set as frameworks, organizations in the Nigerian public sector can maintain interaction, creativity and readiness for reforms.

6. Limitations, Suggestions, and Contributions to Knowledge

Despite the robustness of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research adopted a purely quantitative approach, which, while offering generalisability and statistical precision, limited the exploration of deeper behavioural or perceptual nuances behind employee engagement during organisational change. Future studies could employ a mixed-methods or longitudinal design to capture evolving dynamics and contextual interpretations over time. Additionally, the study focused on only four federal government agencies—FIRS, NNPC, Ministry of Finance, and CAC—thereby narrowing the scope of institutional diversity. Expanding this research to include state-level and local government agencies would enhance the representativeness and comparative insights across different administrative layers of public governance.

Nonetheless, this study offers significant theoretical and empirical contributions to global public sector reform discourse. It is among the first to empirically test and validate the moderating role of public sector HRM practices in the relationship between organisational change strategies and employee engagement within African government contexts using PLS-SEM. The research also extends Kotter's Change Model and Lewin's Change Theory by integrating HRM-specific variables as critical enablers in bureaucratic environments. These contributions provide a novel analytical lens for both scholars and practitioners in emerging economies, offering actionable insights for governments worldwide seeking to balance institutional reforms with employee motivation and performance in public service delivery.

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