



Labour Market Restructuring and the Nature of Employment Relations in Nigeria

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Abstract: The Nigerian labour market has experienced remarkable structural changes in the last two decades following the dictates of globalisation. These changes manifested in the sectoral composition of employment, growth in the service and informal sectors, increased youth unemployment, increased self-employment, and growth in female labour participation. These developments equally affected employment arrangement by shifting attention from the traditional employment arrangement characterised by full-time permanent employment to a more flexible employment arrangement and non-standard jobs. This paper examined the emerging structural changes in the labour market and their consequences for employment relations in Nigeria. The paper adopted desk review methodology which involved analysis of secondary data from relevant research institutions, government agencies and corporate organisations. Evidence from the secondary data revealed that Nigeria has witnessed increased youth unemployment and underemployment, the decline in full-time permanent jobs, rise in casual/contract and part-time work, rise in female labour participation, rise in outsourcing and increase in labour shedding in the last two decades. The observed implications of these developments for employment relations include a decline in union density and bargaining power; a gradual increase in non-union representation; a shift in skill requirement; emphasis on employee loyalty and commitment; emphasis on work-life balance and flexible working hours. The paper, therefore, concludes that structural changes in the Nigerian labour market have affected traditional institutionalised employment relations, which are gradually being replaced by flexible and individualised employment relations.

Keywords: Labour market, restructuring, globalisation, employment arrangement, employment relations

1. Introduction

The Nigerian labour market, like other labour markets in industrialising and industrialised countries, has undergone remarkable structural changes. It appears that there is a shift from what was originally regarded as conservative labour market to a new or evolving liberal labour market. This development, though not surprising, is a product of the neo-liberal economic arrangements as dictated by the increasing globalisation of the world's economy. In effect, there are observed changes in the sectoral composition of employment, growing service and informal sectors, increasing youth unemployment and self-employment, and growing female labour participation. In addition, there are also observed structural changes in employment arrangements such as declining rate of full-time employment, increasing rate of casual/temporary and part-time employment, increasing rate of outsourcing and off-shoring of organisational functions as well as the increasing rate of labour shedding.

These developments became evident following the implementation of the recommendations of the Breton-wood institutions (International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) in the 1990s and 2000s in Nigeria. The structural adjustment programme and the twin programmes of privatisation and commercialisation of the Nigerian economy which were in tandem with the requirements of globalisation introduced changes that provided the needed impetus and zest for labour market restructuring. Globalisation means a move towards flexible labour market that opens a window

of choices for labour market operators to decide on the nature of employment they wish to undertake. The nature of the employment decisions of employers is primarily influenced by many factors such as cost considerations, the state of unemployment, availability of skill mix, existing employment policies/regulations, nature of the business among others. However, employment styles are not exclusively decided through the strategies of employers; they are also fashioned by way of the alternatives of the personnel (Bray, Deery, Walsh, & Waring, 2011). Whatever the nature of the employment, the objective is always to withstand the tide of global competition since organisations are under pressure to adopt a common labour market pattern as being orchestrated by globalisation.

As being observed in the Nigerian Labour market today, there is a decline in employment in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors and an increase in employment in the service sector, which has precipitated major changes in the stock of standard and non-standard jobs. Rising female labour force participation, the increasing occurrence of part-time and casual/contract work, the extra significance of educational attainment as a precursor to employment, and the shift in employment from production to services are all traits that were evident at some point during (Wooden, 2002) the late 1990s and have, for the most part, continued into 2000s. Thus, some of these developments together with the rising rate of youth unemployment and under-employment have “made the Nigerian labour market volatile and precarious” (Onyeonoru, 2008; Okafor, 2011).

Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the structural changes taking place in the Nigerian labour market and its consequences on the nature of employment relations. Attention focuses on three key issues: changes in sectoral employment composition, emerging structural changes in the labour market, and nature of employment relations. In the process, the paper employed desk review methodology which involved analysis of secondary data from relevant research institutions, government agencies and corporate organisations.

2. Theoretical Consideration

The emerging structural changes in the Nigerian labour market are vividly captured by the transitional labour market theory where this paper is anchored on. Transitional labour market theory provides both a normative and analytical framework for understanding the nature of transitions that occur in the labour market. The theory was propounded by Günther Schmid and Peter Auer (Schmid 1995; Schmid & Auer 1997) in Germany in the middle of the 1990s. “The transitions have been first defined as any departure from the reference situation of a full-time long-term job” (Gazier & Gautié, 2009). It views “labour market as a system of employment transitions over the life course: transitions (flows) between education and employment or ‘school-to-work transitions’; transitions within employment or ‘job-to-job transitions’; transitions between employment and unemployment; and transitions between the two other forms of economic inactivity, unpaid household-work or the status of being severely disabled, ill or in retirement” (Schmid, 2017). The normative point of view sees labour market as a social institution supporting and guaranteeing ‘full employment’ not just regarding pay security, especially amid joblessness, yet in addition regarding the ability in openly picking career viewpoints over the life course that incorporate unpaid yet socially profoundly esteemed periods of work. Notwithstanding its normative viewpoint, the theory additionally contends for another analytical way to deal with the changes in the labour markets, which centres specifically, on transitions from one employment status to the next, including mixes of work and education or work and unpaid consideration.

The import of this theory is that it aims at designing policies targeted “towards ‘good’ and ‘bad’ transitions, where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ can be defined by various quality criteria: wages (low vs. high pay), working time (part-time vs full-time) and labour contract (temporary vs open-ended or dependent vs self-employment).

3. Changes in Sectoral Employment Composition

In the last two decades, Nigeria has witnessed a change in sectoral employment composition. Prior to the last two decades, the major sectors that employed the highest percentage of workers were an agricultural sector, manufacturing sector and the public service. However, the last two decades have shown that employment in the manufacturing sector has declined with a remarkable increase in employment in the service sector. The implementation of the privatisation and commercialisation policies resulted in takeovers of formally public enterprises by private individuals whose business model are service-oriented. The recapitalisation of the banking sector and the introduction of the GSM telecommunication services gave a boost to the development of the service sector. PricewaterCoopers (2018) reported that Nigeria has advanced in this way as the services sector has taken up dwindling portions of output and employment in agriculture. In addition, “estimates of employment elasticity suggest Nigeria’s services sector has the highest employment potential at 0.5, relative to agriculture’s -0.1 and manufacturing’s 0.3.” Weak employment elasticity in agriculture at -0.1% reflects rapid urbanisation and productivity gain from mechanisation (PricewaterCoopers, 2018). See figure 1 below:

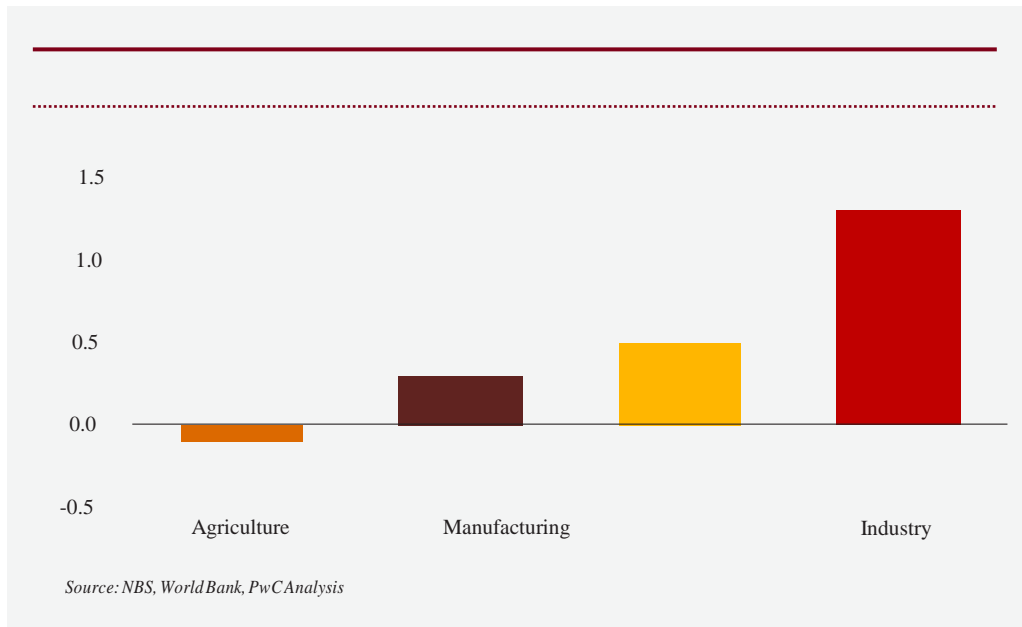


Fig. 1 - Sectoral employment elasticity, 2010-2014

The high cost of doing business in Nigeria has been a major challenge to the manufacturing sector. Some manufacturing companies have closed shops due to their inability to cope with the high cost of doing business, while others have moved their businesses out of Nigeria to neighbouring countries due to lack of sustainable energy. The decline in the employment generation capacity of the manufacturing sector has exacerbated the problem of youth unemployment. As a panacea to the rising rate of unemployment, self-employment has become the available option for the unemployed. Hence, the last two decades have seen remarkable growth in the informal sector as well as the number of workers that are absorbed in that sector. Thus, based on trends observed in recent years, the informal sector continues to absorb the largest proportion of Nigeria’s workforce, accounting for 73.7% of jobs created in 2016, up from 54.0% in 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This sharp increase in new jobs created in the informal sector was associated with a decline in the share of jobs created in the formal and public sectors from 37.2% and 8.8% in 2013 to 29.9% and 0.0% respectively in 2016 (PricewaterCoopers, 2018).

The agricultural sector which used to be the major employer of labour in the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s has witnessed a declining employment generation rate. The percentage contribution of total employment by the agricultural sector from 1991 to 2019 had an average value of 44.15% with a minimum of 35.1% in 2019 and a maximum of 50.25% in 1991 (World Bank, 2020). Thus, the composition of sectoral employment within the Nigerian economy shows that the agricultural sector and the manufacturing sector have continued to decline with an observed resultant increase in the services sector. Figure 2 below shows the composition of employment by sector in 1991, 2004 and 2017.

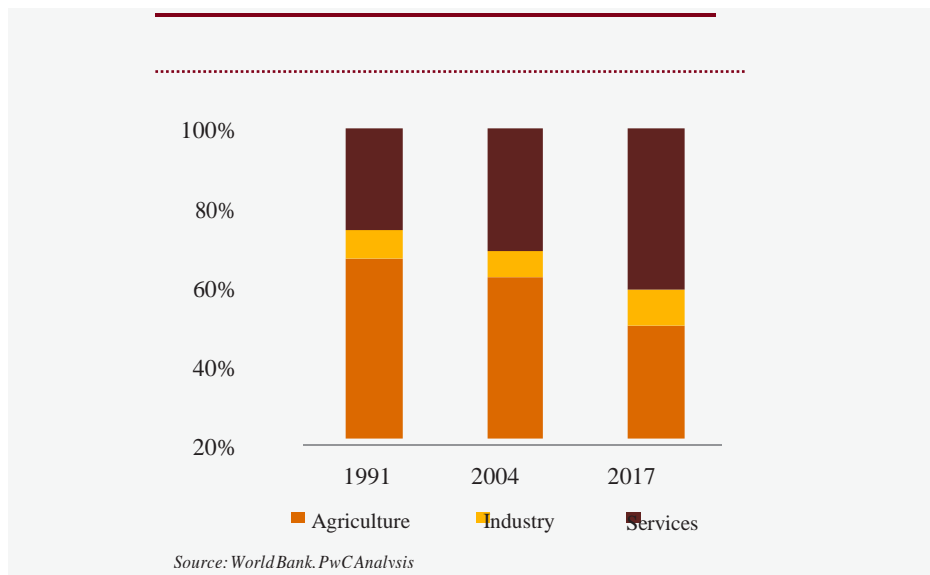


Fig. 2 - Composition of employment by sector

Traditionally, the service industry was dominated by services such as wholesale and retail trade, public administration, accommodation and food services and transportation with low employment potential (PricewaterCoopers, 2018). However, this situation has changed especially with the growth in the small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria - the majority of which provide different kinds of services. Although these small and medium scale enterprises operate within the informal labour market, however, they provide services to the formal sector of the Nigerian economy. "The high rate of unemployment which has left many graduates in Nigeria with no job in the formal economy has necessitated these graduates to establish small businesses in order to provide a particular service or another to the corporate organisations" (Ikeije, Lekan-Akomolafe & Onuba, 2016). The current business model whereby many corporate organisations in the formal sector are outsourcing and contracting out most of their functions have provided the impetus for the growth in employment generation in the service sector. As part of its effort to create employment, the government has mandated the integration of entrepreneurial programmes into the academic curriculum of tertiary education. As such, the emphasis has shifted to self-employment, where small and medium scale enterprises now provide a kind of safety-net for many job seekers in the labour market. Thus, in terms of employment composition, the service sector absorbs those who could not find a place in the manufacturing sector and those who have been released from the agricultural and the mining sectors.

4. Emerging Structural Issues in Nigerian Labour Market

The current state of the Nigerian labour market manifests several issues that depict the changing structure of the market. Emerging structural changes mirror issues such as increasing youth unemployment and under-employment, growth in informal sector employment, the declining rate of full-time employment, growth in casual/contract and part-time employment, growth in female labour market participation, outsourcing and off-shoring of organisational functions, and increasing rate of labour shedding (retrenchment and downsizing).

4.1 Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

In the last two decades, the Nigerian labour market has witnessed a rise in the rate of youth unemployment. Generally, unemployment and under-employment have been identified as the main feature of the Nigerian labour market due to the inability of the economy to provide jobs for those qualified and willing to engage in productive activities (Okafor, 2011). The terms unemployment and underemployment do not necessarily suggest the same thing. While unemployment is a situation where qualified and willing men and women within the working-age are "actively looking for a job, but unable to find paid employment under prevailing economic conditions" (Fajana, 2000), underemployment is a situation where people are employed in a job they are over-qualified or below their qualification thereby making optimal utilization of labour capability unattainable. The national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2000 and 2009 showed that the number of unemployed persons constituted 31.1% in 2000; 13.6% in 2001; 12.6% in 2002; 14.8% in 2003; 13.4% in 2004; 11.9% in 2005; 13.7% in 2006; 14.6% in 2007; 14.9% in 2008 and 19.7% in 2009 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009; 2010). The data showed that as in the first quarter of 2009, 41.6% of the unemployed constituted young people between ages 15 and 24.

In addition, the National Bureau of Statistics puts Nigeria's unemployment rate at 18.8% as at third quarter of 2017. Two years prior, this rate was 9.9%. Similarly, the underemployment rate stood at 21.2%, from 17.4% over the same period (PricewaterCoopers, 2018). Unemployed youth numbered about 11.1 million in 2012. And, in terms of gender, available statistics show that a majority of unemployed youth are female. As shown in Table 1, women accounted for more than 50% of unemployed youth between 2008 and 2012 (Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2013).

Table 1 - National youth unemployment figures by gender, 2008-2019

Year	% of Unemployed Youths that are	
	Male	Female
2008	9.42	7.72
2009	10.22	8.58
2010	10.31	8.84
2011	9.92	9.44
2012	9.52	10.04
2013	9.01	10.90
2014	11.94	13.48
2015	16.04	16.63
2016	21.26	19.91
2017	20.50	19.28
2018	19.93	19.35
2019	19.47	19.73

Source: ILO Estimate (2019)

Information in the table above shows that youth unemployment is mostly in rural areas and rapidly growing. From 2010 to 2011, the share of unemployed youth in rural areas increased from 47.59% to 59.95%. The population of unemployed youth in rural areas rose from 2.9 million in 2008 to about 5.9 million in 2012 (NISER, 2013). These figures suggest the potential challenges that youth unemployment portends to the effective functioning of the Nigerian labour market. This is very instructive as it has great implication for the determination of the price of labour following the forces of demand and supply of labour services in the labour market.

4.2 Growth in Informal Sector Employment

As a result of the high rate of unemployment, job seekers are being encouraged to seek an alternative in establishing small and medium scale enterprises. Government through the establishment of micro-finance banks provided the support for young unemployed graduates to assess soft loans to establish small scale businesses instead of relying on the formal sector for employment. Thus, informal sector employment is currently part of the features of the Nigerian labour market. Although the informal labour market operates within an unregulated environment, however, the market play host to many job seekers or provides a cushioning effect for those who could not find a job in the formal labour market. Most of these small scale enterprises are into various kinds of trading activities and service provisions. Such services like cleaning services, laundry services, courier services, consultancy services, business centres, printing, barbing saloon, transport services among others are labour services that are provided by the operators in the informal sector. With the growing in-formalization of the Nigerian economy, there is also an increasing employment generation capacity being observed in this sector over the last two decades.

According to the International Labour Organization Report in 2015 cited in Ajuwon, Ikhide & Akotey (2017) “small businesses net share of job creation stood at 54% while that of larger firms stood at 46% in the low-middle-income countries of which Nigeria belong.” A survey conducted by the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in 2013 revealed that informal micro-businesses dominated Nigeria enterprise with a 98% share of the entire enterprise in Nigeria. In terms of employment generation, the report indicated that small businesses employed 57,836,391 in Nigeria. Table 2 shows the employment generation by different categories of small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria according to the SMEDAN survey.

Table 2 - Small business share of employment in Nigeria in 2013

Enterprise Size by Employment	Employment Generation	In Percentage
Micro (0-9)	57,836,391	96.81
Small (10-49)	1,863,749	3.12
Medium (50-199)	40,071	0.07

Source: SMEDAN Survey (2013) cited in Ajuwon, Ikhide & Akotey (2017)

The above data is an indication that “small businesses are the net job provider in the Nigerian economy accounting for over 80% of employment in the economy, in absolute term, 59,740,211 representing 84.02% of the total labour force in 2013” (SMEDAN, 2013). In other words, the data also points to the fact that the growing employment generation capacity of the informal sector is contributing significantly to labour market restructuring as being witnessed in recent years in Nigeria.

4.3 Declining Rate of Full-Time Employment, Growth in Casual/Contract and Part-Time Employment

In line with the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, the Nigerian government over the years has implemented various economic reforms ranging from structural adjustment programme to privatisation and commercialisation programmes. These programmes, which are elements of globalisation are regarded as the panacea to the problem of unemployment and the part to economic development for Nigeria. However, privatisation and commercialisation programmes have contributed to labour market restructuring as being observed currently in Nigeria. In order to comply with the requirements of the global labour market and survive global competition traditional full-time employment are being replaced by casual/contract and part-time employment arrangements. This current labour market phenomenon can be observed in every sector but to a varying degree. Oil and gas industry, banking industry and telecommunication industry are the major industries that have a high percentage of the incidence of casual/contract and part-time workers in Nigeria. At average, 60% of the employees in the oil and gas industry are contract employees supplied by labour contractors and employment agencies (Fapohunda, 2012). Fapohunda (2012) further observed that at the level of the organisation the number is much higher with some organisations such as Mobil having over 90%. In relation to the banking industry, the average rate of the incidence of casual/contract employees was 79%, although some individual banks have a higher percentage. Telecommunication industry appears to be worst hit as the majority of the organisations in the industry has over 95% of their workers as contract staff (Fapohunda, 2012).

The energy sector and the manufacturing sector also have a fair share of their workers as casuals/contract workers. In the manufacturing sector, many workers at the production floor as well as supply chain staff are either on a casual or contract basis. The story is not different from the energy sector especially with the implementation of the privatisation and commercialisation programmes. Prior to this development, these industries were known to be engaging their workers on a permanent full-time basis. The service sector, on its part, has adopted flexible labour arrangements as many of the workers in this sector are on a part-time basis. As it is, the decline of permanent full-time employment is apparent across all industries but is pronounced in those with traditionally high levels of permanent full-time employment. This equally suggests that the Nigerian labour market is fast becoming volatile to the extent that jobs that appear permanent may likely vanish overnight.

4.4 Growth in Female Labour Market Participation

Part of the labour market restructuring as being observed today is the increasing participation of women in labour market activities. With increasing demographic changes taking place all over the world, the participation rate in the labour market among women has increased considerably (Fajana, 2000). The analysis of the ILO's time-series data from 1980 to 2010 and data from 2005 cross-section studies by Fadayomi & Olurinola (2014) showed that the female labour force participation rate increased steadily from 36% in 1980 to 47.8% in 2010. Female labour participation by age distribution revealed that females from age 25-54 labour participation rate "rose steadily from 46% in 1980 to 54.3% in 2010, while the age cohorts (55-64) exhibited the highest female labour force participation ranging from 59.9% in 1980, dropped to 50.6% in 1990 and rose steadily to 64.1% in 2010" (Fadayomi and Olurinola, 2014). In general, the previous data shows that female labour market participation has been on the increase over the years. This development can be explained by various factors such as increasing educational attainment of women, a decline in fertility level, emphasis on gender equality, the desire to enjoy a higher quality of life (Fadayomi, Olurinola & Oluranti, 2014) as well as increasing emphasis on affirmative action among others.

4.5 Growing Rate of Outsourcing and Off-shoring of Organizational Functions

Outsourcing which originated in the USA in the 1970s and later spread to Europe, Australia and Asia (Quinlan, 1998) is fast becoming part of the Nigerian labour market. Outsourcing is the practice whereby organisations use external service providers to carry out some of their jobs or functions. It becomes off-shoring (international) when it involves service provider in another country. Organisations today distinguish between core and peripheral or non-core functions and tend to outsource their non-core jobs while concentrating on their core functions. Generally, all the sectors in Nigeria are involved in the practice of outsourcing; however, the degree varies from organisation to organisation. Although there is no comprehensive data on the incidence of outsourcing in Nigeria, the observed pattern shows that the telecommunication industry is currently at the top in outsourcing their functions. The banking industry, oil and gas industry and the manufacturing industry have a fair share of outsourcing in Nigeria.

Unlike outsourcing which has become a part of the Nigerian labour market, off-shoring is not much pronounced. However, certain industries such as oil and gas and telecommunication have off-shored some of their technical functions to service providers abroad. This phenomenon is challenging the traditional full-time and direct employment arrangement of many organisations who have seen outsourcing as a strategic choice in achieving organisational goals and objectives. Put differently; outsourcing has introduced a different employment arrangement that has implications for the labour market structure.

4.6 Increase in Labour Shedding

Economic recession as witnessed in the 1990s and 2000s and more recently 2016 and 2017 together with Covid-19 induced recession has affected adversely many organisations. Thus, the Nigerian Labour market has witnessed a rise in the rate of labour shedding which manifested in the form of retrenchment, mass lay-offs and labour downsizing. Some organisations adopt these approaches as business strategies for survival amid unfavourable business environment. The victims of various forms of labour shedding often find themselves back in the labour market and add to the already saturated labour market. Many workers who lost their jobs as a result of the recession and the Covid-19 pandemic have also joined the army of the unemployed, thereby increasing the unemployment rate. In some occasions, the retrenched workers may be re-absorbed as a contract or casual workers which automatically changed their employment status and the rights they used to enjoy as full-time permanent employees.

5. Implications for Employment Relations

The structure and operations of the labour market shape the nature of employment relations within the system. Thus, the shift from a conservative labour market structure to a liberal labour market as currently being witnessed in Nigeria has implications for employment relations within the industry and organisations. One of the direct consequences of labour market restructuring relates to trade union membership. The decline in full-time permanent employment and the increasing adoption of non-standard employment arrangement such as casual/contract workers

part-time and temporary workers have affected union density and their bargaining power. Again, the growing service sector has equally affected union membership since this sector has traditionally not been highly unionised (Peetz, 1990). As a consequence, traditional institutional-based employment relations characterised by trade unions and collective bargaining is fast losing its place in the Nigerian labour market and is gradually being replaced by non-union employee representation and individualized employment relations following the human resource management model. In other words, collective bargaining as a mechanism for reaching agreement on the terms and conditions of employment between the employees and their employers is diminishing in value and is being replaced by an individual contract of employment. Even where collective bargaining is still allowed, there is a growing preference for enterprise-level bargaining as is currently the practice in the oil and gas industry and the banking and finance industry.

The high rate of youth unemployment and underemployment in the Nigerian labour market is equally challenging the bargaining powers of trade unions. The employers see the army of the unemployed as a quick replacement for recalcitrant trade unionists who may refuse the offers of the employers in negotiation. The ability of trade union to negotiate a fair deal for its members is often jeopardised due to excess supply of labour, which tends to push down the market rate of labour. In addition, unemployment provides a fertile ground for the growth of non-standard work arrangement. When employers consider the ease at which they secure workers on contract terms, part-time and temporary terms, they tend to resent standard employment arrangement. The reasons are obvious: the non-standard workers hardly join trade unions and they are not entitled to all the benefits that workers under standard arrangement enjoy – benefits that employers consider as a cost on the organisation. Thus, Wooden (2002) stated that “casual employees, for example, are less likely to receive structured training provided by the employer, typically do not have much influence over organizational decision-making processes, and are less likely to report dealing with a variety of tasks at work.” On the other part, the employers’ desire to making use of part-time labour is frequently aimed at lowering running hours via scheduling work around top durations and minimising wage value through the abolition of additional time. (Bray, Deery, Walsh & Waring, 2011).

Outsourcing and off-shoring remove the organisation from a direct employment relationship with the workers. The workers of the service providers are not under the direct employment of the organisation and therefore cannot enter into a negotiation with the organisation. The service provider recruits, trains and rewards their workers thereby taking away the burden and cost of recruitment, and training of the workers from the organisation. Thus, the employment relations model often adopted by organisations that operate with third-party service providers is akin to the neo-unitary approach which emphasises individualism and employee’s loyalty and commitment to organisational goals.

Furthermore, the growing service sector has equally created a shift in the skill requirements. As observed by Wooden (2002): at the least, the shift from goods manufacturing to services would ordinarily lead to an increase in the relative significance of inter-personal abilities and discount in the importance of motor abilities (i.e., work-related to bodily strength, guide dexterity and motor coordination). The emerging service industry parades a growing number of knowledge workers which presents a challenge to managers. These knowledge workers rely more on the diffusion of information and communication technology and require a dynamic and sophisticated employment relations approach in their labour-management relations. Part of the challenge is in the recruitment and retention of these knowledge workers as the recruitment techniques require a certain degree of sophistication and reliance on information and communication technology such as electronic recruitment. This is also accompanied by a flexible reward system that recognises the contribution of individual workers to the achievement of the organisational goal such as a performance-based reward system.

The increase in female participation in labour market activities suggests “that women have far greater access to employment opportunities than ever before, and in large part, this is a direct result of the declining standard employment model, linked as it is to the concept of male breadwinner family units” (Wooden, 2002). As such, this development has resulted to issues such as work-life balance and flexible working hours. Many women who are caregivers prefer to take up employment arrangement that would enable them to attend to the demands of their private lives or family needs while at the same meeting up with their job demands. Therefore, in order to conform to the requirement of work-life balance, employers are designing jobs that may require less face-time and provide flexible working hours. In such an arrangement, the employment relations may require setting targets and timelines for the affected employees to complete the assignment but with the leeway to choose the most convenient time to carry out the assignment.

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