

# Cross-Sector Learning as a Driver of Performance and Employee Engagement in the Nigerian Public Sector

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**Abstract:** The Nigerian public sector is often characterized by low innovation, weak employee engagement, limited motivation, inadequate training, and administrative rigidity. In contrast, the private sector demonstrates higher performance through flexible management practices and continuous learning systems. This study examined the extent of cross-sector learning adoption in the Nigerian public sector and its effect on performance and employee engagement. Using a quantitative design, data from 393 respondents were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings showed a moderate level of cross-sector learning adoption ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ), indicating that such practices are present but not fully institutionalized. Administrative structure had a significant but weak positive relationship with cross-sector learning ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Additionally, cross-sector learning was positively associated with performance and employee engagement ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The study recommends formalizing cross-sector learning, restructuring administrative systems, and strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration.

**Keywords:** Administrative structure, Cross-sector learning, Employee engagement, Organisational learning, Public sector performance

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## 1. Introduction

Enhancing the performance of the Nigerian public sector has remained a major concern for policymakers and researchers. Despite several reform efforts aimed at addressing inefficiency and improving service delivery, progress has remained limited. Persistent challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and poor remuneration continue to undermine effective performance in the sector (Ikeanyibe & Ukah, 2022). It is apparent that public sector organisations in Nigeria continue to face structural and operational challenges, including bureaucracy, inefficiency, inadequate resources, and low job satisfaction, despite several reforms. Some critics argued that the sector is often characterised by rigid, regressive, and overly bureaucratic administrative systems that constrain effectiveness.

Okwo et al. (2022) identified weaknesses in accountability as a major factor affecting financial performance and management outcomes in the Nigerian public sector. They observed that repeated reform efforts and disciplinary measures have had limited impact in curbing attitudinal decay, corruption, abuse of official processes, and mismanagement of public resources. Consequently, an arousal of demands for improved public sector performance, noting that leadership style and adherence to ethical standards significantly influence organisational outcomes.

Comparatively, the private sector is often viewed as more efficient and performance driven as Monday (2011) observed that private organisations are generally associated with higher efficiency levels due to differences in operational approaches. Practices such as performance-based incentives, competitive remuneration, and the adoption of innovative management systems are commonly used to enhance productivity and attract skilled personnel. In contrast, the public sector is often characterised by weak incentive structures, corruption, bureaucratic delays, and inefficiency. There is need for a stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors, including internship and partnership arrangements that enable knowledge sharing and adoption of best practices (Ikeanyibe & Ukah, 2022).

Cross-sector learning is apparently increasingly recognised as a mechanism for improving organisational performance. It involves the exchange of knowledge, practices, and innovations across public, private, and non-profit sectors to enhance policy effectiveness, efficiency, and employee engagement. This may occur through benchmarking, partnerships, study visits, secondments, and collaborative learning initiatives. Such approaches support capacity development by strengthening organisations' ability to solve problems, perform core functions, and achieve strategic objectives.

Benchmarking, secondments, partnerships, and collaborative learning are practices essentials to cross-sector learning and organisational development within public organisations. Benchmarking supports employees to adopt more resourceful procedures, enhance service delivery, and heighten accountability. Exposed employee often gains consciousness of higher performance standards, develop problem-solving and innovation skills, become more motivated to increase output and service quality and aware of clearer performance expectations. Secondment is the temporary transfer of an employee to another organisation to learn and acquire experience. In the public organisations, secondments offer practical acquaintance to diverse leadership styles, organisational cultures, and operational systems. It fosters technical and managerial capabilities, improved adaptability and flexibility, higher employee self-confidence and career satisfaction, knowledge and best practices transfer back to the home organisation. Often, secondment returnee displays higher level of creativity, leadership capability, and commitment to organisational goals. Partnerships refer to collaborative relationships between organisations (public, private, NGOs, academic etc) in a bid to expose employees to new concepts, skills, knowledges and management practices. These relationships stimulate employee's performance and engagement through purposeful granting opportunities for training and professional development, sharing resources and knowledge, heightened teamwork and inter-organisational interaction, and better sense of purpose and public value creation. Employees involved in partnerships in most cases feel more esteemed and empowered as they partake in wider decision-making and innovation developments. Collaborative learning comprises employees learning together through teamwork, knowledge sharing, seminars/workshops, mentoring, and combined problem-solving undertakings. In public institutions, collaborative learning promotes institutional memory and heightened shared capacity. The influence of collaborative learning comprises enhanced interaction and relational relationships, improved teamwork and collaboration, faster sharing of knowledge and innovation, and improved employee morale and engagement. It also fosters a culture of constant learning, which is vital for public sector institutions confronted with complicated governance and service-delivery challenges.

Empirical evidence suggest that structured learning initiatives significantly improve employee engagement and productivity. Paul and Chandramouli (2025) argue that comprehensive learning programmes enhance both engagement and performance outcomes. Also, Gifford and Young (2021) established a strong relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance, including retention, innovation, and efficiency. Work engagement has also gained increasing attention in management and positive psychology literature according to Change (2025) noting its growing relevance over the past two decades.

Despite insights to benefits of cross-sector learning, studies comparing learning practices between the public and private sectors in Nigeria remain limited. There is a lack of empirical studies on how cross-sector learning influences performance and employee engagement in the public sector in Nigeria. Thus, this study, examines the Cross-Sector Learning as a driver of performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian public sector.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Numerous reform initiatives in Nigeria's public sector had taken place since her independence in 1960. Basically, these reforms focused on capacity building, digital transformation, improved conditions of service, and professionalisation. However, the desired improvements in performance and service delivery have remained largely elusive. As it appeared, best practices of private sector organisations that make them more efficient and performance-driven have not been sufficiently adopted by public sector organisations to enhance performance and employee engagement.

Scholarly and policy discourse consistently reflects concerns about the state of the Nigerian public service. Oikhala (2022) notes a broad consensus that the public service is widely perceived as dysfunctional, citing El-Rufai (2013), who describes public servants and service delivery as falling below expectations and averred that the public service is often viewed as an employer of the unmotivated and inefficient. Adepoju et al. (2024) argue that the public sector is often characterised by rigid, regressive, and overly bureaucratic administrative and managerial structures. In contrast, private sector organisations are commonly associated with flexible management practices, performance-oriented human resource systems, and continuous learning mechanisms that enhance both employee engagement and organisational performance.

Existing literature have examined public-private collaborations, administrative reforms, and performance management systems. However, limited attention has been given to how learning from private sector organisations' best practices can be systematically and strategically adopted within public organisations to enhance performance and employee engagement. This is a significant gap in both academic research and administrative practice. To support this view, Ogueyungbo et al. (2019) argue that learning from external organisations can enhance employee motivation, improve problem-solving capacity, and foster innovation. Therefore, this study examines the Cross-Sector Learning as a catalyst for performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian public sector. Addressing this gap will offer practical insights for public sector administrators and contribute to the existing body of academic literature.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

The general objective of the research is to examines Cross-Sector Learning as a driver of performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian Public Sector. .And specifically, to:

1. Appraise the impact of the administrative structure of the Nigerian public sector on cross-sector learning.
2. Examine the influence of cross-sector learning on organisational performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian public sector.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The study responded to the below research question:

1. What is the level of impact of administrative structure on cross-sector learning in the Nigerian public sector?
2. How does cross-sector learning influence organisational performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian public sector?

### 1.4. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated for this research are:

- H<sub>01</sub> Administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria has no significant impact on cross-sector learning initiative.
- H<sub>02</sub> Cross-sector learning does not have any influence on performance and employee engagement in the public sector in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Conceptual review

#### 2.1.1 Organisational and cross-sector learning

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön introduced the theory on organisational learning during the late 20th century. The theory rooted in the broader context of organisational behaviour, management science, and systems

thinking. It aimed to resolve the gap between individual and organisational learning, stressing that organisations must learn as entities to continue to be competitive and innovative.

The concept underlines single and double-loop learning, directed to how organisations detect and correct errors, and how they challenge and modify existing assumptions to promote deeper change and adaptability.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1978) described Cross-sector learning as a deliberate plan or moves to obtain knowledge, ideas, insights, and best practices from organisations operating in other sectors, e.g., public, private, not-for-profit, and international agencies, to enhance performance improvement, innovation, and engagement. Cross learning is based on the opinion that organisations can derive benefits from external learning paths rather than depending exclusively on internal experiences and its goal encompasses the adoption of best practices from sectors with verified records of successes in employee engagement, efficiency, innovation, and adaptability.

Mechanisms for cross-learning include staff exchanges or secondments, collaborative training programs, policy learning and adaptation, and benchmarking best-practices. The process is about leveraging knowledge outside established boundaries to achieve improved outcomes in one's own sector.

Cross learning is important to organisations as Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1978) suggests that cross-sector learning can enhance employee engagement and performance regardless of the sector. The Scholars highlighted areas that can be explored such as reward systems and recognition, performance management practices, communication and feedback culture, training and development initiatives, and innovation, flexibility and autonomy. Obviously, private organisations are doing better in the aspects mentioned above and it will be more beneficiary to public sector to adopt the practices of private sector where the gaps are imminent.

Literature confirmed that private organisations use both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards such as promotions, bonuses, recognition for accomplishments, providing career development, and other non-pecuniary benefits to attract employees and improve their performances, hence public sector can learn and adapt the schemes through a deliberate initiative to motivate employee without contravening public-sector pay guidelines.

Also, in the aspect of performance management practices, private sector organisations is known to habitually set clear goals and deploy clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), collect regular feedback, and use performance appraisals to keep employees motivated, therefore public sector in Nigeria can adopt this approach as a tool for transparent performance measurement schemes, enhancing engagement by giving recognition for accomplishments and recognising growth opportunities.

Furthermore, open communication and feedback culture is one of the hallmarks of private sector organisations where employees understand the vision, the process and expectations after all. Many private sector organisations deploy monthly town halls meetings, suggestion boxes and regular internal newsletters to reach out to their employees, thus public sector organisations can learn this process through cross-sector learning to enhance its performance and engagement.

Training and development initiatives where organisations invest in continuous learning and development to heightens employees' skills/careers is a booster of engagement and performance. Private organisations are known for such an investment, hence through cross-learning, public sector can adopt and implement organised training, workshops, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing programs stimulated by private-sector practices and collaborations.

Moreover, innovation, flexibility and autonomy are recent developments in the work environment which allows private sector employees to enjoy autonomy, flexibility and problem-solving authority while carrying out their responsibilities. This enables positivity of employee overall well-being, higher motivation, optimised productivity and greater comfort and less stress. If public sector find gap in this respect, it can initiate a process that will enable its employees to contribute knowledge, ideas, and involve in decision making, and initiate a work-life balance scheme as a process to enhance employee sense of belonging and engagement.

### **2.1.2. Employee Engagement**

Monje-Amor (2025) described engagement as a positive, sustaining, job-related state of mind characterised by dedication, vigour, and absorption. A strategic approach that promotes a positive and productive work

environment, empowering employees to devote their capacities and align with organisational objectives and values. Vigor is described to denote high degrees of strength and mental resilience employees exerted; dedication stipulates a sense of importance, enthusiasm, and pride the employee exhibits on the job, and absorption indicates profound depth and commitment the employee gives to the job. Rao et.al. (2021) conceptualised employee engagement as the gauge that determines the connection of an employee with his or her organisation and the disposition to add value to their organisation beyond just the performance of their roles.

Mansor et al. (2023) held that employee engagement is the emotional attachment and level of participation that employees deploy towards their job, their co-workers, and the organisation that transcends just job satisfaction, but which reflects a profound relation that stimulates employees to surpass basic obligations. Similarly, Lee et al. (2022) inferred that employee engagement is a stimulus, attachment, and craving for work performance exhibited by employees to achieve organisational goals. Gupta and Chowdhury (2018) described employee engagement as a positive attitude displayed by an employee with respect to the organisation and its values. Chukwuma et al (2021) summarized employee engagement to denote employees' involvement, productivity, motivation, satisfaction, and passion for work, and means heightened emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, and behavioural relationships employees hold for their job, organisation, or other employees, which stimulate the usage of discretionary exertion in their work.

Drivers of engagement in both private and public sectors in Nigeria include, but are not limited to:

**Leadership:** According to Knotts and Houghton (2021), leadership performs a crucial role in promoting employee engagement and heightening organisational performance. The trust in leadership and honesty displayed during communication and execution of schemes that will cause employees' happiness can foster engagement. Odunayo and Olajide (2025) inferred that effective leadership stimulates employees' performances, assures the accomplishment of organisational goals, initiates a constructive working environment, and heightens employees' satisfaction and motivation.

**Reward System:** Uzochukwu et al (2023) held that an employee's inclination to remain on the job essentially could depend on the reward system offered by the organisation, which has been explored. The level to which employees are content with their job and their willingness to continue in an organisation is determined by the reward system. Sepahvand and Khodashahri (2021) claimed that organisations that habitually appreciate and recognise the efforts of employees experience a higher engagement level. Recognising and rewarding employee accomplishments, regardless of the quantum, enhances drive and passion, motivation, and total engagement, leading to heightened organisational performance.

**Motivation:** Okine et al. (2021) inferred that employees' motivation is a challenge for both public and private organisations. Gift RAA and Obindah F. (2020) expressed that motivation is an inner state that stimulates actions that propels behaviour towards a goal. It is concern with the motives triggering behaviours. Where there is motivation, performance is inevitable.

**Commitment:** Commitment of leaders to the well-being of employees drives performance. Nkansah, et. al., (2023) ascribed that commitment is one of the drivers of engagement in organisation. Saito et al., (2024) argued that satisfying basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfilment needs of employees are crucial to achieving psychological growth, autonomous regulation of one's behaviour, and well-being.

**Job autonomy:** Enabling employees to have autonomy over job responsibilities to a certain extent is one of the key drivers of engagement. According to Thani et. al. (2023), the institution of improved independence in work plan management heightens organisational performance. Similarly, Sarmah et. al. (2022) stated that enabling employees to be independent and have more control over how they execute their jobs substantially impacts their well-being and output.

Performance in the Nigerian Public and Private Sectors has been influenced by employee engagement.

The public sector in Nigeria is running on formalised, structured, and bureaucratic processes with a strong adherence to rules and public accountability. Apparently, these characteristics offer stability and fairness, notwithstanding that they are incessantly criticised for rigidity, being averse to change, and limited initiatives.

Regardless of the criticism, Adeosun and Adegbite (2024) and Ojeleye et al. (2023) ascribed that initiatives like Human Resources development programmes and policies reformation in the public sector have shown positive impacts on engagement when employees observe organisational support and commitment to their growth. Johar and Roopalatha (2024) held that contemporary organisations have realised that engaging employees enhances relationships and connections among employees and optimises corporate philosophy. Gifford and Young (2021) stated that “it is commonly believed that when employees feel engaged with their job role or the organisation, they are not only likely to be happier, healthier and more fulfilled but will likely deliver better performance, contribute more and be more innovative. Moreover, they inferred that the argument is not just that engagement and performance go hand in hand (or correlate), but that engagement increases performance. Gyensare et. al. (2017) held that engaging employees is fundamentally and critically important to organisational success and performance, traversing various dimensions. They highlighted significant reasons why engagement matters, such as improving performance and output; enhancing employee retention; improving employee well-being and satisfaction; fostering innovation and creativity; enhancing consumer satisfaction and loyalty; aligning organisational goals; creating a positive organisational culture; inspiring resilience and adaptability; and improving financial performance and sustainability.

### **2.1.3. Organisational Performance**

Organisational performance is the total efficiency and record of success with which an organisation accomplishes its goals. Strong organisational performance is critical for enduring accomplishment and ensuring competitive advantage. The determinant includes productivity, profitability, stakeholder satisfaction, creativity, and employee retention, among others.

Performance is related to engagement. According to Deepalakshmi, et., al. (2024), employee engagement has evolved as a critical factor that influences organisational performance and success. Performance Indicator is a determinable value that bespeaks how efficaciously and expeditiously an individual, group, team, or organisation accomplishes a particular objective. The specific purpose is the provision of actionable insights by enabling organisations to monitor performance for a period, recognise aspects or sections that require enhancement, set targets for success, and make data-driven decisions. It is also useful in charting progress toward strategic goals and in measuring the degree of success of several activities or initiatives. Its characteristics are usually referred to as SMART, denoting (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound).

According to Ștefan and Brezoi (2021), measuring performance in public sector establishments may differ from private sector entities. The Scholars inferred that establishing a scheme of performance indicators in public organisations would be a herculean task since not all objectives can be measured, often adopting benchmarking analyses. However, the measurement of contributions of employee engagement to the public sector can be achieved through deliverables and outputs. In their views, performance indicators can be adapted to address the peculiarity of each sector. Accordingly, the performance evaluation of public sector entities is referred to as a “value for money audit,” which evaluates the level to which an establishment’s objectives and programmes have been actualised or executed, considering risks, costs, precision of achievement of objectives, and consumption of resources made available (including human resources).

Performance evaluation in public sector is concerns with evaluation of the efficiency use of public funds, the degree to which it was controlled to optimise the cost of resources used, without compromising the accomplishment in perfect conditions of the explicit objectives, determining the achievement of the anticipated performance. Furthermore, performance measurement in public sector entities also focuses on assessing efficiency and correlation between the acquired results and the resources deployed to achieve the objectives. It assesses effectiveness and the level of achievement of the objectives, and correlation between the expected impact and the real impact achieved. Some Key Performance Indicators seem peculiar to private sector, notwithstanding they can be adopted by public sector for process improvement such as Financial KPI to measure revenue growth, Operational KPI to measure turnover on inventory, Customer KPI to measure consumer satisfactions, Project KPI to measure the rate of milestone completion.

According to literature reviewed, system of measurement of organisational performance differs depending on the sector, organisational size, and explicit goals. However, there are some generally applicable metrics highlighted that provided valued insights into an organisation's inclusive performance and accomplishment regardless of the sector. These include financial metrics which assesses revenue and profitability growth; operational metrics which evaluates the efficiency of operations and effective resource utilization and customer satisfaction; compliance metrics which measures compliance to regulations and legal requirements; Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) metrics which assesses activities related to environmental sustainability, such as carbon footprint and waste management, measures activities related to social responsibility and community engagement, measures actions associated with ethical practices, transparency, and leadership efficiency.

Nkansah, et. al, (2023) held that organisational productivity can be influenced by employee's engagement. Deepalakshmi, et., al. (2024) stated that employee engagement has evolved as a critical factor that influences organisational performance and success and has a fundamental role to exert during the process of total success of an organisation which produces relationship between engagement and Key Performance Indicators. The views of the scholars above evidently showed that there is symbiotic relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance. Ştefan and Brezoi (2021) highlighted how engagement leads to organisation performance such as: improved performance and responsiveness resulting to higher productivity and improved services deliveries; innovation and goal achievement - engaged employees are aligned with organisational goals and work assiduously to ensure that the goals are achieved; service satisfaction and public trust - engagement inspires employees to provide higher-quality services, enhancing satisfaction and public trust; higher engagement level encouraged employee to be associated with greater accountability and transparency, which are fundamental for sustaining public trust.

#### **2.1.4 The Nigerian Public and Private Sectors**

The Nigerian public and private sectors have distinct peculiarities as they run under different purposes, social dynamism, ethical configuration, structural design, leadership, and regulatory frameworks. Each of the sectors performs fundamental, distinct, and crucial roles in driving economic growth, provides employment opportunities, and delivers essential services. While the private sector drives innovation, economic development, and competitiveness, the public sector concentrates on governance, policy implementation, and public service provision. The Public Service in Nigeria is made up of the civil service that carries out ministerial functions to serve the citizens in the federal, state, or local capacities, as well as its allied extra-ministerial agencies that also serve citizens through the federal, state, or local government. It comprises of the Armed Forces, Judiciary, Public Corporations, Parastatals, Commissions, etc., in a broader concept. Public-sector focus on services to the public, where some of these services are exclusive, concurrent, and residual, which include education, power, security, food security, safety, welfare, the legal system, infrastructure, natural resources, public transportation, social housing, and health services.

Oikhala (2022) held that a wide consensus amongst Nigerians regarded public service in Nigeria as dysfunctional and broken, citing El-Rufai (2013) who stated that, "the quality of public servants and the services they provide to Nigerians are both below expectation and the public service is perceived as an employer of the dull, the lazy and the venal." Also cited Okoye and Oghoghomeh (2011), who inferred that - "reliance on efficient service delivery of public service to citizens in most developing countries has always resulted in disappointing results." Adepoju et. al. (2024) stated that some critics inferred that the public sector is habitually characterised by organisational and management methods that are viewed as regressive, rigid, awkward, and bureaucratic structures.

The Nigerian public sector is enmeshed in some challenges. According to Nebo and Okechukwu (2015), Nigerian public service has been branded by opinionated politics, red-tapism, leaks, wastage, non-professionalism, uncreativity, redundancies, and over-stuffed ghost workers from one administration to another since the independence of 1960. The Scholars highlighted some other challenges such as: Bureaucracy - a phenomenon bewildering public sector till date with cumbersomeness of its administrative processes; Corruption in all shades which has become the emblem and bane of performance; Funding limitations despite

the supposed exposure to government funds, public sector is still limited in budget allocations which invariably affect service delivery and infrastructure development; Retirement and less replacement as retirements age and year of public servants are pegged at 60 years or 35 years of pensionable service as provided in the Public Service Rules (PSR). But there is incommensurate recruitment to replace the exited employees and, in most cases, creates gaps between manpower requirement and actual manpower available; Indiscipline and lack of commitment are menaces as public servants handle their job with levity, lack work moral principles and in most cases indifference to their jobs; Frequent changes in Government policies is another challenge where government is prone to changing policies; and lack of patriotism, trust deficit and political will of the political leaders that suppresses the performances of public servants.

Literature reviewed revealed some basic contrast between the public and private sectors. The contrast between the two sectors evolved from the perspective of: Purpose and Goals – while public sector delivers public service, welfare, and policy implementation, private sector engages in market competitiveness, shareholder value and profit maximisation; Ownership –Government owned public sector establishments, while private sector is owned by individuals, group of people and corporate-owned; Structure- the structure of public sector is multilayer, decisions making authority is spread across departments and agencies and governed by laws, regulations and policies that drive operations, whereas private sector structure is hierarchical, i.e., clear lines of control and command, authority, and reporting, centralized decision-making process, i.e., decisions are often made by the Senior Executives and flexible i.e., ability to swiftly adapt to market dynamism and competitive demands; Values - public sector is service-oriented, concentrating on public service, citizen welfare, meeting the needs of the society, upholds public trust through ethical conduct, fairness, and impartiality whereas private sector emphasizes competition, accomplishment, and greater market share, performance-driven, client-centric, giving attention to individual and team performance connected to financial incentives and priority to customer satisfaction and market sensitivity; Leadership - leadership style in public sector is bureaucratic, with concentration on permanence, continuity, and compliance with laws and regulations, dedicated to adherence to policies and regulations while leadership in private sector is , transformational, performance management, focused on driving change, provide innovation, incentives for profitability and engage in market competitiveness; Engagement and job satisfaction - engagement in public sector is driven by job security, benefits, a feeling of public obligations, and effect of job on society whereas, engagement is naturally driven by competitive financial compensation, performance-based rewards, career development opportunities, and a dynamic work environment in private sector; Motivational Drivers - employees in public sector are presumed to enjoy job security benefits, resulting to higher allegiance but potentially minimal engagement because of bureaucratic limitations, whereas employees in private sector tend to experience higher engagement due to competitive pay and professional growth opportunities, in spite of being confronted with job insecurity.

## **2.2 Theoretical review**

Two theoretical frameworks underpin this research are Organisational Learning Theory by Argyris and Schön (1978) and Social Exchange Theory by George Homans (1958) and Peter Blau (1964). Organisational Learning Theory and Social Exchange Theory elucidated how organisations acquire best practice knowledge beyond intra-organisational milieu, understand it, communicate and adapt it for organisational improvement and how employee's engagement prospers on mutual relationships between organisation and employee's vis-a-vis benefits received such as recognition, reward, support, and the contributions they make.

### **2.2.1. Organisational Learning Theory**

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön propounded organisational learning theory in 1978. They resolved the gap between individual learning and organisational learning by stressing the need for organisations to learn as entities to continue to be competitive and innovative. The theory underlined how organisations obtain, understand, and transmit knowledge. Cross-sector learning spreads out learning outlets beyond intra-organisational bases. Organisational learning is essential on several grounds, such as adaptability that enables organisations to react more effectively to external changes; fostering innovation and development of

new insights; fostering a competitive edge as persistent learning supports organisations to have a competitive edge; and improved performance through continuous learning from mistakes and successes.

The theory established that a learning organisation encourages a transparent culture where testing, feedback, and reflection are stimulated, and such a culture promotes teamwork, openness, persistent improvement, and resilience in confronting challenges.

The theory is relevant to this study as it underpinned the relevance and importance of learning from other organisations for the improvement of own processes. Cross-sector learning presents prospects for skill attainment, intellectual reframing, and organisational regeneration, which are essential drivers of employee motivation and engagement.

### **2.2.2. Social Exchange Theory**

Scholars George Homans and Peter Blau developed social exchange theory in 1958 and 1964. The theory established that employee's engagement is a function of reciprocal relationships between organisation and benefits offer to employees such as recognition, reward, support, and the contributions they make. The theory accepted that social relations and belongingness depend on cost-benefit analysis, where employees pursue optimising rewards such as salary, wage, compensations, recognition, and support while curtailing costs such as stress, effort etc. The theory also indicates that exposure to varied work environments and practices can improve employees perceived value of their work and organisational support, thereby fostering engagement.

Cook (2013) posited that when employees feel valued and see their contributions being reciprocated, engagement levels increase. Also, Scholl et al., (1981) argued that the second instrument that is operational in the evolution of normative commitment is the theory of exchange, or rule of reciprocity. The assertions of the above two authors complemented the social exchange theory. The theory is relevant to this study as it presented the existing correlation among rewards system, commitment, development and growth, job satisfaction, leadership, and engagement.

### **2.3. Empirical review**

Ogueyungbo et al. (2019) established that learning from external organisations can stimulate employee motivation, improve problem-solving, and heighten innovation in a study conducted to examine the effect of organisational learning on employee engagement and the mediating influence of supervisory support in some selected pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria. Stratified sampling technique was deployed, and out of 541 copies of the questionnaire sent out, 434 were used for analysis. Structural Equation Model (AMOS 23) was adopted for the analysis. The results showed that learning and supervisory support significantly influence employee engagement.

In another development, Akinbo and Ogah (2024) examined the complex relationship between reward management systems and the commitment levels of public servants within selected Nigerian agencies. The study was grounded in a robust theoretical framework, encompassing Human Capital Theory, Equity Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The study engaged a significant cohort of 1,485 respondents obtained through a rigorous sampling technique across six key agencies. The result of the study indicated that there is a strong correlation between an effective reward system, especially in training and development, and elevated levels of commitment.

Ojeleye and Salami (2023) conducted a study to examine the impact of workplace harmony on employee performance in selected banks in Nigeria, as well as the moderating role of employee voice. A descriptive research design and a quantitative research approach were adopted. Data was collected from 150 employees of selected banks in Kaduna State, Nigeria using convenience sampling, out of which 143 valid responses were retrieved and analysed to test the hypothesized relationships. The study result revealed that workplace harmony has a significant positive impact on employee performance, and employee voice positively moderated the relationship between workplace harmony and employee performance. The findings underscored the significance of a harmonious work environment and strategically integrating employee voice to optimize performance.

Johar and Roopalatha (2024) researched: Factors affecting employee engagement and its impact on employee performance and innovation. The research deployed the theory of the 'Cameleon Employees' to investigate

the composite relationship between employee engagement and the development of ideation by the employees in organisations in an environment where society places a premium on the need for innovation. It therefore becomes very germane to know the drivers of innovation from within the organisation. A survey method combined with qualitative analysis was deployed to analyse the level of engagement and the relationship between the employee and the environment that promotes innovation. The result established that engaging the employees can enhance the organisation's capacity to support and encourage innovation and performance through good policies and leadership.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1. Design**

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research method to explore the adoption of cross-sector learning and the impact on performance and employee engagement in Nigeria's public sector organisations. This method aids objective assessment, hypothesis testing, objective assessment of underlying concepts, and generalisation of discoveries amongst the administrative contexts of Nigeria's public sector.

#### **3.2. Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study encompasses employees from academia, ministries, departments, and agencies (MDA) at the federal and state public sector in Nigeria. Participants were selected at random from the target population by research assistants. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula appropriate for large populations. Assuming a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and maximum population variability ( $p = 0.5$ ), a minimum sample size of 384 respondents was derived. However, to take care of instrument mortality or cases of incomplete responses, an additional 10% of the derived sample was added. This brought the participants number to 422, however 393 responses were found useful for the study.

#### **3.4. Description of Research Instruments**

A structured questionnaire (4 Likert scales) was used to obtain primary data from participants. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections: Section 1- elicited questions on respondents' socio-demographic profile; Section 2- focused on Cross-Sector Learning and Private-Sector Practices; Section 3- focused Cross-sector learning and Employee Engagement; Section 4- focused on Leadership Style and Bureaucratic Structure.

#### **2.5. Administration of Research Instrument and Data Collection**

Data was collected through a structured questionnaires administered through physical and electronic formats to participants with the aid of research assistants drawn from the MDAs and academics. Data collection process was carried out over a period of nine weeks.

#### **3.6. Ethical consideration**

The questionnaire was administered having secured the consent of the participants with the assurances that the process is for only academic purpose. Authors were correctly cited according to the preferences to acknowledge their contributions and avoid plagiarism.

#### **3.7. Validity and Reliability of the research instrument**

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the validity of the research instruments, and joint validity was confirmed over correlation coefficients, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR), while discriminant validity was weighed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Internal consistency of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's Alpha formula  $\alpha = (k / (k-1)) * [1 - (\sum s^2 / s^2)]$  to analyse the responses obtained from 60 participants. The result of the test showed a standard deviation =  $\alpha=0.998$ . This implied that excellent internal consistency among the instrument values was above 0.9, which largely suggests that the instruments are highly reliable.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Presentation

##### Data Analysis

The preliminary data were analysed using SPSS. The hypothesised relationships were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which is appropriate for analysing latent constructs and accounting for measurement error. Model fit was evaluated using established fit indices.

##### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

**Table 1: Gender and status distributions of the respondents**

This table depicts the number of respondents in terms of gender and status in numbers and percentages.

Gender				Status							
Male		Female		Executives		Management		Middle		Junior	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
244	62.09	149	37.91	24	6.11	237	60.31	112	28.50	20	5.09

**Table 2: Age and Years in Service Distribution**

This table depicts the ages of respondents in years and years of service in numbers and percentages.

Age in years						Years in service							
18-30 yrs		31-44 yrs		45-60 yrs		1-10 yrs		11-20 yrs		21-30 yrs		30-35 yrs	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
41	10.43	147	37.40	205	52.16	81	20.61	163	41.48	105	26.72	44	11.20

**Table 3: Organisation type and educational background distribution**

This table shows the type of organisation and the highest qualification of the respondents in numbers and percentages

Organisation										Highest Qualification Level			
Ministry		Department		Agency/Parastatal		Local Govt		Academics		First Degree & Below		Postgraduate Degree & Professional	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
114	211	27	6.87	211	53.69	25	6.36	16	4.07	167	42.49	226	57.51

Source: Field Survey

#### 4.0. Data Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation

##### 4.1. Answer to Research Question

**Research Questionnaire:** What is the level of adoption of cross-sector learning in the public sector in Nigeria?

**Table 4: Level of Adoption of Cross-Sector Learning**

Percentile analysis was used to analyse the responses to determine the level of adoption.

Variable	N	Mean	Mini.	Max.	SD	Interquartile (Percentile)			Decision
						25 <sup>th</sup>	50 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>	
Level of Cross-Sector Learning	393	3.47	1	4	0.52	3.28	3.57	3.85	Moderate

Table 4 shows the rating of the level of adoption of cross-sector learning:

1. Low level of adoption of cross-sector learning scores = below 3.28 (below the 25th percentile).
2. Moderate level of adoption of cross-sector learning scores = between 3.57-8.54 (between 25th and 75th percentile).

- High level of adoption of cross-sector learning scores = less than or equal to 3.85 (above the 75th percentile)

Since the mean score is 3.47, which falls below the median, it was concluded that the overall level of adoption of cross-sector learning in the public sector is moderate.

#### 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** The administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria has no significant impact on cross-sector learning initiatives.

**Table 5: Administrative Structure of Public Organisations and Cross-Sector Learning Initiative.**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark	Decision
Administrative Structure of Public Organisations	393	2.61	0.62	0.2144	0.000018	Sig.	Ho Rejected
Cross-Sector Learning Initiative.		3.48	0.52				

$p < 0.05$

Table 5 presents the relationship between administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria and impact on cross-sector learning initiative. The result shows a weak positive relationship between administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria and impact on cross-sector learning initiative. This result is significant at 0.05 level of significance ( $r(393) = 0.2144$ ;  $p = 0.000018$ ). Therefore, null hypothesis which states that administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria has no significant impact on cross-sector learning initiative was rejected. This shows that administrative structure of public organisations in Nigeria to some extent has impact on cross-sector learning initiative.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** Cross-sector learning does not have any influence on performance and employee engagement in the public sector in Nigeria.

**Table 6: Cross-Sector Learning and Employee Engagement**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Remark	Decision
Cross-Sector Learning Initiative	393	3.48	0.52	0.2211	0.0000	Sig.	Ho Rejected
Employee Engagement		3.09	0.69				

$p < 0.05$

Table 6 presents the relationship between adoption of cross-sector learning and employee engagement in the public sector. It shows a weak positive relationship between adoption of cross-sector learning and performance and employee engagement in the public sector. This result is significant at 0.05 level of significance ( $r(393) = 0.2211$ ;  $p = 0.0000$ ). Therefore, null hypothesis which states that adoption of cross-sector learning does not have any significant impact on employee engagement in the public sector in Nigeria was rejected. This implies that adoption of cross-sector learning to some extent has a positive impact on employee engagement and performance in the public sector.

#### 4.3. Discussion of Findings

The demographic of respondents showed more male respondents than female 62.09% to 37.91% and greatly concentrated in management-level staff attracting 60.31%, and fewer executives and junior staff. Age distribution showed that between age 45–60 years are in a majority with 52.16% and most respondents have spent more than 10 years in service. The analysis revealed a moderate, but weak adoption of cross-sector learning initiatives among a predominantly experienced and highly qualified public sector workforce. It showed

that Cross-sector learning exists in the Nigerian public sector but not yet established or entirely integrated, which suggests that what is in existence is periodic, informal, or policy-driven instead of culture-centric.

The result of the hypotheses showed a probability that the weak correlation between cross sector learning and engagement may be due to other factors such as leadership, policy incentives and organisational culture which play a more substantial role. It also pointed to generic issue in public sectors where formal structures exist, whereas they do not effectively translate into practice. Moreover, the analysis showed the likelihood that Cross-sector learning is being employed in a restricted or shallow way, as such employees may not be fully experiencing its benefits due to poor incorporation into daily work or lacking incentives, or limited experience and exposure.

A consistent trend was observed across all the outcomes of the analysis, i.e., there is a statistically significant relationships, among cross-sector -learning, engagement and performance but they are weak. Adoption of cross-sector learning is moderate but not robust. Impacts on engagement are positive but limited. The above suggests that Cross-sector learning in Nigerian public sector is at an evolving or provisional stage. Although, there may be some awareness and implementation, but not sufficiently penetrating or consistent to yield strong results.

Notwithstanding, the findings demonstrate that while cross-sector learning is gaining relevance in Nigerian public sector, its extant level of adoption and effect remains limited and under-optimised. Organisational structures and learning initiatives contribute largely, but their weak effect prompt the need for stronger and strategic integration, leadership commitment, and institutionalisation to attract discernible improvements in employee engagement and organisational performance.

## **5. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Suggestions for further studies**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

The research appraised the adoption of cross-sector learning and its influence on performance and employee engagement in the Nigerian public sector, exploring Social and Organisational Learning Theories. The findings showed a moderate degree of adoption, implying that though external learning off organisational boundaries happens, yet to be copiously integrated within *public service frameworks*.

In consonant with Organisational Learning Theory, which postulates that organisations enhance performance via knowledge acquirement and transfer, the research discovered that cross-sector learning has a substantial positive relationship with performance and employee engagement.

This infers that exposure to varied practices heightens employees' skilfulness, views, and work-related attitudes.

Conversely, the weakness of the relationship signals the effect of structural limitations, as described by Institutional Theory. The weak but significant correlation between administrative frameworks and cross-sector learning indicates that bureaucratic inflexibility and characterised formalised procedures of public organisations may demean the level to which learning creativities are successfully implemented.

Generally, the research sums up that whereas cross-sector learning supports recognised theoretical prospects as a driver of organisational enhancement, its strength in the public sector in Nigeria remains underutilised owing to establishment and structural constraints.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Sequel to the theoretical understandings, this research recommends that the Nigerian public sector should show a sense of commitment by institutionalising cross-sector learning as a core organisational learning strategy. This recommendation supports Organisational Learning Theory, which highlights the necessity for structured systems to facilitate knowledge acquisition, retention, and sharing.

Administrative restructurings are sine qua non to resolve institutional inflexibilities underlined by Institutional Theory, thus establishing a more flexible circumstances for invention and inter-organisational partnership. Leadership should also proactively prioritise shaping and strengthening learning behaviours, consonant with Social Learning Theory.

Moreover, capacity-building programs should be reinforced to heighten employees' competence to attract and employ knowledge acquired from other sectors. Public sector organisations should also strengthen collaborations with private and not-for-profit organisations to boost constant knowledge exchange. Lastly, incorporating cross-sector learning into performance management frameworks will strengthen its significance and foster sustained engagement.

### 5.3. Suggestions for Further Studies

This research suggests further research to explore the influence of cross-learning on public sector service delivery and consumer satisfaction. Also, to conduct longitudinal research to evaluate the long-term effect of cross-sector learning on employee engagement and organisational performance in Nigerian public sector.

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**How to cite/reference this article: BODUNDE Kolawole Johnson, (DBA) Cross-Sector Learning as a Driver of Performance and Employee Engagement in the Nigerian Public Sector, *Asian. Jour. Social. Scie. Mgmt. Tech.* 2026; 8(4): 18-33.**