

Employee Expectations, Actuals, and Workplace Harmony: A Deep Empirical and Theoretical Investigation into the Emergency Management Sector in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Employee expectations constitute a foundational determinant of organisational behaviour, workforce morale, and workplace harmony. In the emergency management sector—where operational effectiveness is contingent upon teamwork, psychological safety, and coordinated crisis response—the alignment or misalignment between employee expectations and organisational realities carries profound implications for institutional performance and disaster response outcomes. This study presents a deep empirical and theoretical investigation into the relationship between employee expectations, organisational actuals, and workplace harmony within Nigeria's emergency management sector. Anchored in psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989, 1995), equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), and organisational justice theory (Greenberg, 1987; Colquitt, 2001), the study employs a mixed-methods explanatory research design integrating a structured survey instrument administered to 320 employees across the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and selected State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs). Quantitative data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation analysis, multiple regression modelling, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with 28 purposively sampled senior staff were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that expectation gaps relating to welfare provisions, hazard allowances, career progression, professional development, and leadership transparency exert statistically significant negative effects on workplace harmony ($R^2 = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). Leadership transparency emerged as the most influential mediating variable. Institutional analysis of NEMA's HR governance framework identifies systemic policy-implementation gaps as structural antecedents of expectation-actuality discrepancies. The study contributes original theoretical synthesis through a proposed Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) integrative model and advances targeted policy recommendations for HR governance reform within Nigeria's emergency management architecture.

Keywords: employee expectations, workplace harmony, emergency management, psychological contract, equity theory, organisational justice, Nigeria, human resource management, NEMA

INTRODUCTION

Human resources constitute the most critical and irreplaceable asset within any organisation, particularly those entrusted with managing complex humanitarian and environmental emergencies. In disaster management institutions—agencies that operate at the intersection of public administration, humanitarian logistics, and crisis response—the psychological state of employees, their motivation, and the degree of harmony that characterises inter-staff relations are not peripheral concerns but core operational imperatives. The capacity of an institution to respond rapidly and effectively to disasters is, at its foundation, a function of human capability, coordinated behaviour, and institutional trust.

Employee expectations represent a deeply embedded psychological construct that shapes how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their organisational environment. From the seminal work of Argyris (1960) on the employment relationship to Rousseau's (1989, 1995) foundational articulation of the psychological contract, organisational scholars have consistently demonstrated that employees enter the workplace not merely with formal contractual obligations but with a rich constellation of implicit expectations—regarding

remuneration equity, leadership fairness, career advancement opportunities, welfare provisions, and organisational recognition. These expectations, when met, serve as catalysts for commitment and performance; when violated, they generate disengagement, conflict, and institutional dysfunction.

In Nigeria's emergency management sector, this dynamic takes on particular urgency. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), established under the National Emergency Management Agency (Establishment) Act of 1999, and its affiliated State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) constitute the primary institutional architecture through which Nigeria coordinates its disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations. These institutions manage a diverse and demanding portfolio of hazards—floods, droughts, communal conflicts, insurgency-induced displacement, disease outbreaks, and industrial accidents—often under conditions of resource scarcity and operational pressure.

Employees deployed within these institutions frequently encounter conditions that heighten their expectation of robust organisational support: hazardous fieldwork, extended working hours, psychological stress from repeated exposure to humanitarian crises, and the physical risks inherent in disaster-affected environments. The extent to which NEMA and SEMAs are able to honour these expectations—in terms of welfare provisions, hazard compensation, leadership transparency, career progression systems, and professional development—has direct consequences for workplace harmony and, ultimately, for the quality and effectiveness of disaster response.

Yet, as this study reveals, significant expectation-actuality gaps persist across Nigeria's emergency management institutions. These gaps are not merely the product of individual managerial failure; they are, to a considerable degree, the product of structural inadequacies embedded within Nigeria's public sector governance architecture—including budgetary constraints, bureaucratic rigidity, weak HR governance frameworks, and policy-implementation deficits.

Understanding the nature, causes, and consequences of these gaps is essential for designing evidence-based reform interventions that can enhance workplace harmony and institutional effectiveness in the sector.

This study therefore investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant employee expectations within Nigeria's emergency management sector?
2. To what extent do gaps between employee expectations and organisational actuals exist in NEMA and affiliated SEMAs?
3. How do expectation-actuality gaps affect workplace harmony in the emergency management sector?
4. What role do leadership transparency and HR governance systems play in mediating the relationship between expectation gaps and workplace harmony?
5. What policy and institutional reforms are required to align employee expectations with organisational realities in Nigeria's emergency management sector?

The study makes four principal contributions to existing knowledge. First, it generates original empirical evidence on employee expectations and workplace harmony within a context—Nigeria's emergency management sector—that has received limited scholarly attention.

Second, it proposes a novel integrative theoretical model, the Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) Model, that synthesises insights from psychological contract theory, equity theory, expectancy theory, and organisational justice theory. Third, it advances a rigorous mixed-methods methodology combining quantitative regression modelling with qualitative thematic analysis. Fourth, it produces targeted policy recommendations grounded in empirical findings and institutional analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Expectations: Conceptual Foundations

Employee expectations are cognitive representations of the outcomes and treatment individuals anticipate receiving from their employing organisation. These expectations are not static; they are formed, revised, and reinforced through multiple channels including organisational onboarding experiences, peer interactions, leadership communications, policy documents, and broader societal norms governing employment relationships (Schein, 1965; Herriot & Pemberton, 1997).

Morrison and Robinson (1997) distinguish between two categories of expectations that are particularly germane to this study: promised obligations—beliefs arising from explicit or implicit organisational commitments—and anticipated obligations—beliefs arising from social norms, industry conventions, or generalised expectations of employment. In the public sector context, both categories are highly salient: employees form expectations based on government policy announcements, civil service regulations, and broader normative frameworks regarding public sector employment conditions.

Kickul (2001) demonstrates that the fulfillment or violation of employee expectations has measurable consequences for organisational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, and intention to leave. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) extend this analysis to show that the reciprocity norm embedded in psychological contract theory is particularly powerful in predicting employee commitment: employees who perceive that their organisation has delivered on its obligations exhibit significantly higher levels of discretionary effort and in-role performance.

Within African organisational contexts, Worku (2017) and Osei-Bonsu (2014) note that employee expectations are frequently shaped by patronage networks, ethnic affiliations, and informal institutional norms that overlay formal HR governance frameworks. This complexity makes expectation management particularly challenging in Nigerian public sector organisations, where informal relational dynamics often coexist with—and frequently override—formal administrative procedures.

Workplace Harmony: Theoretical and Empirical Dimensions

Workplace harmony is a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses cooperative inter-staff relationships, productive communication patterns, shared organisational values, and the effective management of conflict (Luthans, 2011). It is conceptually proximate to—but distinct from—related constructs such as organisational climate (Schneider et al., 2013), psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and team cohesion (Beal et al., 2003).

Robbins and Judge (2019) situate workplace harmony within a broader framework of organisational behaviour, arguing that harmonious workplaces are characterised by low levels of dysfunctional conflict, high levels of affective commitment, and strong interpersonal trust. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that workplace harmony is positively associated with team performance, employee well-being, and organisational effectiveness (Lencioni, 2002; West, 2012).

In the emergency management context, workplace harmony acquires additional operational significance. Kapucu and Garayev (2011) demonstrate that inter-agency coordination during disaster response operations is fundamentally dependent upon trust, mutual respect, and effective communication among personnel. Where workplace harmony is compromised, coordination failures emerge, response times increase, and humanitarian outcomes deteriorate. These findings are corroborated by Comfort et al. (2012), who identify psychological safety and team cohesion as critical predictors of emergency response effectiveness.

Zhenjing et al. (2022) provide more recent evidence confirming that workplace environment quality—encompassing both physical conditions and relational dynamics—is a significant predictor of employee performance across diverse organisational contexts. Their analysis, drawing on evidence from multiple countries, underscores the universality of the relationship between workplace harmony and performance outcomes while acknowledging the importance of contextual moderating factors.

Human Resource Management in the Nigerian Public Sector

Human resource management (HRM) in Nigeria's public sector is characterised by a complex interplay of formal regulatory frameworks, informal institutional practices, and persistent governance challenges. The Federal Civil Service Commission and various state civil service commissions provide the formal regulatory architecture governing recruitment, promotion, training, and discipline within the public service. However, implementation of these frameworks has been consistently undermined by bureaucratic inefficiency, politicisation of HR decisions, and resource constraints (Hope, 2014; Adegoroye, 2006).

Adeleke and Aminu (2012) identify promotion stagnation, irregular salary payments, inadequate welfare provisions, and weak training infrastructure as the principal sources of employee dissatisfaction within Nigerian public sector organisations. These findings are consistent with the broader African public sector literature, in which Olowu and Adamolekun (2005) document systemic HR governance failures across sub-Saharan African governments, including the absence of merit-based promotion systems, inadequate remuneration benchmarking, and the marginalisation of employee development within organisational strategy.

Nwosu and Ugwu (2020) specifically examine HR management challenges within Nigeria's emergency management institutions, finding that NEMA and SEMAs frequently struggle to retain experienced personnel due to competitive salary differentials between government emergency management agencies and international humanitarian organisations (UN agencies, international NGOs) operating within Nigeria. This 'brain drain' dynamic further exacerbates expectation-actuality gaps by consistently depleting institutional capacity.

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) provide a comprehensive framework for understanding strategic HRM as a system of aligned practices that collectively generate employee commitment, capability, and congruence with organisational goals. Their analysis highlights the critical importance of HR governance architecture—including performance management systems, career development frameworks, and employee engagement mechanisms—in sustaining employee motivation and reducing expectation-actuality gaps.

Emergency Management Workforce: Specific Challenges

The emergency management workforce occupies a distinctive position within the public sector labour market, characterised by high occupational stress, exposure to secondary trauma, irregular working patterns, and the expectation of sustained operational availability during crisis events (Halpern & Tramontin, 2007). These characteristics generate specific and often elevated employee expectations regarding welfare support, psychological well-being provisions, and institutional recognition.

Van Wart and Kapucu (2011) demonstrate that leadership quality is a particularly salient determinant of employee performance in emergency management institutions, given the high-stakes, time-pressured nature of disaster response operations. Leadership transparency, responsiveness to employee concerns, and the ability to create psychological safety within teams are identified as critical competencies for emergency management leaders.

Waugh and Streib (2006) examine the challenges of managing emergency management personnel within bureaucratic public sector systems, arguing that the inherently adaptive, improvised nature of disaster response frequently conflicts with the rigid procedural norms of public administration. This tension creates specific stressors for employees who must balance formal administrative obligations with the practical demands of emergency operations, and generates expectations of organisational flexibility and managerial empowerment that are often frustrated by bureaucratic rigidity.

Oginni et al. (2018) investigate work expectations among Nigerian service sector employees, finding that expectations regarding recognition, fair treatment, and career advancement are consistently the strongest predictors of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. These findings are directly relevant to the emergency management context, where operational demands are high but institutional recognition of employee contributions is frequently inadequate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in a multi-theoretic framework that draws on four complementary theoretical traditions: psychological contract theory, equity theory, expectancy theory, and organisational justice theory. The synthesis of these frameworks generates an integrative analytical lens capable of capturing the full complexity of the relationship between employee expectations, organisational actuals, and workplace harmony.

Psychological Contract Theory

The psychological contract was first conceptualised by Argyris (1960) and elaborated by Levinson et al. (1962) as the implicit, informal set of mutual obligations that characterise the employment relationship. Rousseau's (1989) seminal reconceptualisation defined the psychological contract as individual beliefs, shaped by the organisation, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between the individual and the organisation. This definition grounds the psychological contract in cognitive perception rather than objective reality, emphasising the role of subjective interpretation in shaping employee expectations.

Rousseau (1995) distinguishes between transactional psychological contracts—characterised by specific, monetised, short-term obligations—and relational psychological contracts—characterised by open-ended, socio-emotional, long-term obligations. In the public sector context, relational contracts are particularly prevalent, as employees typically enter public service with expectations of job security, career progression, and institutional belonging that extend well beyond purely transactional considerations.

Morrison and Robinson (1997) develop a model of psychological contract breach and violation that distinguishes between perceived breach—the cognitive assessment that the organisation has failed to fulfil its obligations—and psychological contract violation—the affective and emotional response to that breach. Their model predicts that breach leads to violation, which in turn reduces trust, commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour. This model directly informs the study's analysis of how expectation-actuality gaps translate into deteriorating workplace harmony.

Guest (1998, 2017) extends psychological contract theory to the HRM domain, arguing that the relationship between HRM practices and employee outcomes is fundamentally mediated by employees' perceptions of the psychological contract. HRM practices that signal organisational investment in employees—training programmes, career development support, transparent communication—strengthen the relational psychological contract and generate positive reciprocal responses. This insight underpins the study's emphasis on HR governance reform as a strategy for managing employee expectations.

Equity Theory

Adams' (1963, 1965) equity theory posits that employees evaluate the fairness of their employment relationship through a process of social comparison in which they assess the ratio of their inputs (effort, skill, experience, commitment) to their outcomes (remuneration, recognition, advancement opportunities). When this ratio compares favourably with those of referent others—colleagues, peers in other organisations, or generalised expectations of appropriate treatment—employees experience a state of equity and respond with motivation and satisfaction. When perceived inequity exists, employees experience psychological distress and are motivated to restore equity through various behavioural strategies.

In the Nigerian public sector context, equity theory is particularly applicable because employees frequently engage in cross-institutional comparisons—between their own conditions and those of employees in international organisations, private sector firms, or better-resourced government agencies. These comparisons frequently generate perceptions of under-reward inequity that, according to equity theory predictions, reduce employee effort, increase withdrawal behaviours, and contribute to workplace conflict.

Greenberg (1990) extends equity theory to encompass procedural justice—the perceived fairness of the processes through which outcomes are determined—alongside the distributive justice originally theorised by Adams. This extension is particularly relevant to the emergency management context, where employees are

concerned not only with the magnitude of their rewards but also with whether promotion, training allocation, and welfare provisions are distributed through transparent, consistent, and meritocratic processes.

Expectancy Theory

Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory provides a complementary motivational framework that explains how employees allocate effort based on their beliefs regarding the relationship between effort, performance, and outcomes. The theory posits three key cognitive assessments: expectancy—the belief that increased effort will lead to improved performance; instrumentality—the belief that improved performance will lead to specific outcomes; and valence—the subjective value attached to those outcomes. When any of these three cognitive links is weak or absent, motivational force diminishes.

In the emergency management context, expectancy theory is particularly germane to understanding how employees evaluate their development and advancement prospects. When employees doubt that training investment will translate into promotions (low instrumentality) or when career advancement opportunities are perceived as being determined by non-meritocratic factors rather than performance (low expectancy), their motivation and workplace engagement decline. This decline, in turn, contributes to the deterioration of workplace harmony through reduced discretionary effort and increased interpersonal friction.

Organisational Justice Theory

Organisational justice theory, as elaborated by Greenberg (1987) and Colquitt (2001), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding employees' fairness perceptions across four dimensions: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes), interpersonal justice (respectful and dignified treatment by supervisors), and informational justice (provision of adequate explanations for decisions). Colquitt's (2001) empirical research demonstrates that each dimension of organisational justice independently predicts employee outcomes including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and compliance with organisational rules.

Within the emergency management context, all four dimensions of organisational justice are relevant to the expectation-workplace harmony relationship. Employees who perceive unjust outcomes (inadequate remuneration), unfair processes (opaque promotion systems), disrespectful treatment (leadership dismissiveness of employee welfare concerns), or inadequate information provision (poor communication regarding organisational decisions) are likely to experience expectation-actuality gaps that undermine workplace harmony.

The Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) Model: A Proposed Synthesis

Building upon the four theoretical traditions reviewed above, this study proposes an original integrative model—the Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) Model—that conceptualises the relationship between employee expectations, organisational actuals, and workplace harmony as a dynamic, multi-determined process. The model has four key components:

First, employee expectations are conceptualised as complex, multi-dimensional constructs shaped by psychological contract beliefs (Rousseau, 1995), equity comparisons (Adams, 1965), expectancy calculations (Vroom, 1964), and justice perceptions (Colquitt, 2001). These expectations span five primary domains in the emergency management context: welfare and hazard provisions, career advancement, professional development, leadership transparency, and institutional recognition.

Second, organisational actuals are conceptualised as the objective conditions provided by the organisation, as interpreted through employees' subjective perceptual frameworks. Organisational actuals are determined by HR governance architecture, budgetary constraints, leadership behaviour, and the broader public sector institutional environment.

Third, expectation-actuality gaps are conceptualised as the perceived discrepancy between employee expectations and organisational actuals. These gaps are influenced by the completeness of the psychological

contract (Rousseau, 1995), the severity of perceived inequity (Adams, 1965), and the magnitude of justice violations (Colquitt, 2001).

Fourth, workplace harmony is conceptualised as the outcome variable, mediated by leadership transparency and HR governance quality. The model predicts that larger expectation-actuality gaps produce lower levels of workplace harmony, with leadership transparency and HR governance quality serving as critical moderating factors that can attenuate the negative relationship between expectation gaps and harmony outcomes.

Figure 1: The Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) Integrative Model

EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS → [Psychological Contract | Equity Comparisons | Expectancy | Justice Perceptions] → EXPECTATION-ACTUALITY GAP → [Mediated by: Leadership Transparency + HR Governance Quality] → WORKPLACE HARMONY

Note. EAH = Expectation-Actuality-Harmony. Arrows indicate predicted causal relationships.



METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy and Design

This study is grounded in a pragmatist research philosophy that rejects the ontological rigidity of pure positivism or constructivism in favour of a flexible, problem-centred approach that selects methodological strategies based on their capacity to generate valid, actionable answers to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Morgan, 2007). A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was employed, in which quantitative phase findings were supplemented and contextualised by qualitative evidence gathered in a subsequent phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design was chosen because it allows for the statistical testing of theoretical predictions derived from the EAH model while also capturing the nuanced experiential dimensions of expectation-actuality gaps and their workplace harmony consequences that resist quantitative reduction.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised employees across all cadres—operational, administrative, and managerial—of NEMA’s federal headquarters, six NEMA zonal offices, and the SEMAs of six purposively selected states (Kano, Lagos, Rivers, Borno, Benue, and Anambra). These states were selected to ensure geographic diversity and to capture variation in emergency management institutional capacity across Nigeria’s geopolitical zones.

Quantitative phase: A stratified random sampling strategy was employed to select 320 respondents across the three staff cadres (operational: $n = 144$; administrative: $n = 112$; managerial: $n = 64$), proportionate to the estimated cadre distribution within the target institutions. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for unknown population proportions, with a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. Of 320 distributed questionnaires, 308 were returned and 294 were deemed complete and usable (response rate = 91.9%).

Qualitative phase: A purposive maximum variation sampling strategy was used to select 28 senior staff (NEMA and SEMA managers, unit heads, and HR officers) for semi-structured interviews, ensuring variation in gender, institutional tenure, geographic location, and staff cadre.

Research Instrument

The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study through a three-stage process. In Stage 1, a comprehensive item pool was generated through systematic review of validated scales in the extant literature, including Rousseau's (1990) Psychological Contract Inventory, Colquitt's (2001) Organisational Justice Scale, and Hackman and Oldham's (1975) Job Diagnostic Survey. In Stage 2, a panel of five academic experts in organisational behaviour and public sector management reviewed all items for content validity and contextual appropriateness. In Stage 3, a pilot study with 35 NEMA employees not included in the main sample was conducted to assess instrument reliability, resulting in three items being deleted and four being revised based on pilot feedback and item-total correlation analysis.

The final instrument comprised 42 Likert-scale items (five-point: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) across five subscales: (a) Employee Expectations (9 items, $\alpha = 0.86$); (b) Organisational Actuals (8 items, $\alpha = 0.84$); (c) Leadership Transparency (7 items, $\alpha = 0.88$); (d) HR Governance Quality (9 items, $\alpha = 0.83$); and (e) Workplace Harmony (9 items, $\alpha = 0.87$). Overall instrument reliability was Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and average variance extracted (AVE) analysis, confirming adequate construct validity (AVE values ranged from 0.54 to 0.71; all composite reliability coefficients exceeded 0.80).

The qualitative instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide comprising 18 open-ended questions probing respondents' subjective experiences of expectation formation, expectation-actuality discrepancies, and their consequences for workplace relationships. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data collection was conducted over a 10-week period following the receipt of institutional approval from NEMA's Director-General's office and the relevant state government authorities. Research assistants trained in data collection procedures administered questionnaires in person at institutional premises, ensuring an explanation of study purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality protections. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately following administration to maximise response rates.

Qualitative interviews were conducted in the month following quantitative data collection, allowing preliminary quantitative findings to inform interview probing. Interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms at participants' institutional premises to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS Version 27.0 and analysed through the following sequence of analytical procedures. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentage distributions) were computed for all variables and demographic characteristics. Second, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine bivariate associations between the study variables. Third, multiple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was conducted to examine the independent and combined effects of employee expectations, organisational actuals, leadership transparency, and HR governance

quality on workplace harmony, controlling for demographic covariates. Fourth, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with Promax rotation was conducted on expectation and harmony subscale items to examine their factorial structure. Missing data (< 5% across all items) were handled using multiple imputation. Preliminary analyses confirmed that the data met the assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk tests, $p > .05$), homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test, $p > .05$), and multicollinearity (all VIF values < 3.0).

Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework. Transcripts were first read and re-read to enable familiarisation. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data. Related codes were clustered into candidate themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. Analytical rigor was enhanced through member checking (returning preliminary themes to three participants for validation), peer debriefing (review of thematic structure by two independent researchers), and reflexivity journaling to minimise researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the African University of Science and Technology, Abuja (Approval Reference: AUST-IRB-2023-047). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The study adhered to principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. Data were stored on encrypted institutional servers accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 294)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	190	64.6
	Female	104	35.4
Staff Cadre	Operational	133	45.2
	Administrative	103	35.0
	Managerial	58	19.7
Educational Level	OND/NCE	41	13.9
	HND/B.Sc.	142	48.3
	Postgraduate	111	37.8
Years of Service	0-5 years	72	24.5
	6-10 years	98	33.3
	11-20 years	85	28.9
	20+ years	39	13.3

Institution	NEMA Federal HQ	85	28.9
	NEMA Zonal Offices	109	37.1
	SEMAs	100	34.0

Note. OND = Ordinary National Diploma; NCE = National Certificate in Education; HND = Higher National Diploma; B.Sc. = Bachelor of Science.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 294)

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
Welfare Expectations	4.28	0.63	1.80	5.00	-0.41
Career Advancement Expectations	4.12	0.71	2.00	5.00	-0.37
Professional Development Expectations	3.97	0.78	1.60	5.00	-0.29
Leadership Transparency Expectations	3.84	0.82	1.40	5.00	-0.18
Institutional Recognition Expectations	3.91	0.76	1.50	5.00	-0.22
Organisational Actuals (Composite)	2.87	0.74	1.20	4.60	0.14
Leadership Transparency (Actual)	2.93	0.80	1.00	4.80	0.21
HR Governance Quality	2.76	0.83	1.00	4.70	0.33
Workplace Harmony	3.12	0.71	1.20	4.90	-0.08

Note. Scale range: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 2 reveals a consistent pattern of high employee expectations across all five expectation dimensions (M range = 3.84–4.28) juxtaposed against markedly lower scores for organisational actuals (M = 2.87), leadership transparency (M = 2.93), and HR governance quality (M = 2.76). The overall workplace harmony mean (M = 3.12) falls below the scale midpoint of 3.50, indicating that employees generally perceive sub-optimal levels of workplace harmony within their institutions. The negative skewness values for expectation variables indicate ceiling effects consistent with high expectation levels.

Expectation-Actuality Gap Analysis

Table 3 Expectation-Actuality Gap Scores by Expectation Domain

Expectation Domain	Expectation M	Actuals M	Gap Score	Gap Classification
Welfare & Hazard Provisions	4.28	2.54	1.74	Critical
Career Advancement	4.12	2.71	1.41	Significant

Professional Development	3.97	2.83	1.14	Moderate
Leadership Transparency	3.84	2.93	0.91	Moderate
Institutional Recognition	3.91	2.98	0.93	Moderate

Note. Gap Score = Expectation M - Actuals M. Classification: Critical (≥ 1.50); Significant (1.00–1.49); Moderate (0.50–0.99).

The gap analysis reveals that the welfare and hazard provisions domain exhibits the most critical expectation-actuality gap (gap score = 1.74), indicating that employees have very high expectations in this domain but perceive extremely poor organisational delivery. Career advancement gaps are also substantial (gap score = 1.41), while professional development, leadership transparency, and institutional recognition exhibit moderate but still substantial gaps.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 294)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Employee Expectations (Composite)	—				
2. Organisational Actuals	.41**	—			
3. Leadership Transparency	.38**	.59**	—		
4. HR Governance Quality	.36**	.62**	.67**	—	
5. Workplace Harmony	.53**	.71**	.74**	.69**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Correlation coefficients are based on composite scale scores.

The correlation matrix reveals that workplace harmony is most strongly associated with leadership transparency ($r = .74$, $p < .01$) and organisational actuals ($r = .71$, $p < .01$), followed by HR governance quality ($r = .69$, $p < .01$) and employee expectations composite ($r = .53$, $p < .01$). All inter-variable correlations are statistically significant, providing initial support for the EAH model's propositions. The strong correlations between leadership transparency, HR governance quality, and organisational actuals ($r = .59$ – $.67$) suggest that these constructs share substantial common variance, consistent with the theoretical position that leadership transparency and HR governance are key determinants of the quality of organisational actuals.

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple OLS regression model was estimated with workplace harmony as the dependent variable and employee expectations composite, organisational actuals, leadership transparency, and HR governance quality as independent variables, controlling for gender, cadre, educational level, and years of service.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Results: Predictors of Workplace Harmony (N = 294)

Variable	β	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI
Employee Expectations	.24	.27	.06	4.21	.000	[.15, .39]

Organisational Actuals	.38	.43	.07	6.58	.000	[.30, .57]
Leadership Transparency	.31	.36	.06	6.02	.000	[.24, .49]
HR Governance Quality	.19	.22	.07	3.47	.001	[.09, .35]
Gender (Female = 1)	.04	.03	.04	0.71	.477	[-.05, .11]
Staff Cadre (Mgmt = ref.)	.07	.06	.05	1.28	.202	[-.04, .16]
Years of Service	.06	.01	.01	1.14	.255	[-.01, .03]
Constant		0.84	.18	4.67	.000	[.49, 1.19]

Note. $R^2 = .68$; Adjusted $R^2 = .67$; $F(7, 286) = 84.13$, $p < .001$. β = standardised beta coefficient; B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

The regression model explains 68% of the variance in workplace harmony ($R^2 = .68$), a substantial proportion that indicates the four primary predictors collectively account for the large majority of systematic variance in the outcome variable. Organisational actuals ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest independent predictor, followed by leadership transparency ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), employee expectations composite ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), and HR governance quality ($\beta = .19$, $p = .001$). Demographic control variables were not statistically significant predictors, indicating that the relationships between the study variables and workplace harmony are consistent across gender, staff cadre, and tenure categories.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the 28 semi-structured interviews yielded five major themes, which are presented below alongside representative participant quotations.

Theme 1: The Paradox of Hazardous Work Without Commensurate Welfare

The most consistently expressed concern among interviewees was the perceived injustice of being required to undertake hazardous operational duties without receiving commensurate welfare protection. Respondents described welfare expectations as the “most fundamental” and most consistently violated dimension of their psychological contracts.

We go to flood-affected communities, we work in disease outbreak environments, we are exposed to things that no ordinary civil servant faces. And when it comes to insurance coverage, hazard allowance, even basic protective equipment – it is either inadequate or does not come at all. There is a profound injustice in that. (Senior Operations Officer, NEMA Zonal Office)

This theme aligns with equity theory predictions (Adams, 1965) regarding under-reward inequity: employees perceive a systematic mismatch between the extraordinary inputs they contribute and the ordinary or sub-ordinary outcomes they receive.

Theme 2: Promotion as a Contested and Opaque Process

Career advancement was consistently described as a domain characterised by opacity, inconsistency, and political influence, generating strong perceptions of procedural injustice.

Promotion in this agency is not about performance. It is about who you know, which state you come from, whether you have a godfather in management. Someone can work diligently for fifteen years and watch a colleague with connections get promoted over them. After a while, you stop trying. (Administrative Officer, SEMA)

This theme has direct implications for expectancy theory's prediction regarding the instrumentality link: when employees perceive that performance is not reliably translated into career advancement outcomes, motivational force is systematically undermined (Vroom, 1964).

Theme 3: Leadership Communication as a Determinant of Trust

Leadership transparency emerged as a critical mediating variable in participants' accounts of workplace harmony. Interviewees consistently linked the quality of leadership communication to levels of institutional trust, team cohesion, and willingness to collaborate.

When the director communicates openly about budget constraints, about why promotions were delayed, about the challenges we are facing – even if the news is bad, people accept it. What destroys morale is silence, inconsistency, and rumour. Leadership that does not communicate creates a toxic environment. (HR Officer, NEMA Federal HQ)

Theme 4: Training Aspiration Versus Institutional Reality

Professional development emerged as a domain characterised by significant aspiration-reality gaps. Employees expressed strong expectations for capacity building but described an institutional environment in which training opportunities were scarce, inequitably distributed, and frequently cancelled due to funding constraints.

We receive invitations to international emergency management conferences and training programmes. But funding is rarely approved. International organisations train their staff constantly. We are expected to perform at the same level but without the same investment in our development. (Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, NEMA)

Theme 5: Expectation Gaps as Drivers of Interpersonal Withdrawal

A fifth theme described the process through which unmet expectations translated into deteriorating workplace relationships. Participants described a pattern of progressive interpersonal withdrawal in which employees experiencing consistent expectation violations gradually reduced their investment in collegial relationships, collaborative problem-solving, and team activities.

When people feel the organisation has failed them, they stop going the extra mile. They do the minimum required. They stop sharing information informally. Team meetings become formal exercises rather than genuine collaborative discussions. The energy drains away. (Senior Programme Analyst, NEMA)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the EAH model's core propositions and generate several important insights that advance the theoretical and practical understanding of employee expectations and workplace harmony in the emergency management sector.

The Welfare-Expectation Crisis: A Critical Institutional Risk

The identification of welfare and hazard provisions as the domain exhibiting the most critical expectation-actuality gap (gap score = 1.74) constitutes the study's most operationally significant finding. This gap represents not merely a source of employee dissatisfaction but a systemic institutional risk. Emergency management personnel who do not trust that their organisation will protect their welfare and recognise their hazard exposure are likely to exhibit conservative operational behaviour, reduced risk tolerance, and reluctance to deploy in high-risk environments during disaster response operations.

These findings resonate with Armstrong and Taylor's (2020) framework for strategic HRM, which identifies employee well-being investment as a foundational element of organisational commitment generation. They also align with Halpern and Tramontin's (2007) analysis of occupational stress in emergency response workers,

which identifies institutional support failure as a primary driver of burnout, compassion fatigue, and service departure among emergency personnel.

Organisational Actuals as the Primary Determinant of Workplace Harmony

The regression analysis identifies organisational actuals as the strongest independent predictor of workplace harmony ($\beta = .38$), ahead of leadership transparency ($\beta = .31$), employee expectations ($\beta = .24$), and HR governance quality ($\beta = .19$). This finding has important practical implications: it suggests that interventions aimed at improving workplace harmony must prioritise the substantive delivery of organisational obligations rather than purely communication or expectation management strategies.

This finding is consistent with Morrison and Robinson's (1997) distinction between promise fulfilment and expectation management as strategies for maintaining psychological contract integrity. While expectation management (helping employees form more realistic expectations) can reduce the magnitude of perceived gaps, it cannot substitute for actual improvement in the quality of organisational deliverables. Employees in NEMA and SEMAs do not need to be persuaded that their expectations are unreasonable; they need their organisations to deliver on legitimate, reasonable expectations regarding welfare, career advancement, and professional development.

Leadership Transparency as the Critical Mediating Variable

The correlation analysis reveals that leadership transparency has the strongest association with workplace harmony ($r = .74$) of all study variables. While the regression analysis controls for multicollinearity among predictors and thereby reduces leadership transparency's independent coefficient, its bivariate association with workplace harmony is the strongest in the model.

This finding is consistent with Van Wart and Kapucu's (2011) analysis of leadership quality in emergency management institutions and with Edmondson's (1999) extensive research on psychological safety, which consistently demonstrates that leadership behaviour is the primary determinant of team psychological safety and, through it, team performance. The qualitative evidence is particularly compelling in this regard: participants describe leadership communication not merely as an instrument of expectation management but as a fundamental signal of institutional respect and organisational justice.

Colquitt's (2001) informational justice dimension—the provision of adequate explanations for organisational decisions—is directly implicated here. Employees who receive explanations for promotion delays, budget constraints, or training cancellations are able to interpret these outcomes within a framework of procedural fairness, even when the outcomes themselves are disappointing. The absence of such communication generates attribution processes that typically default to unfavourable explanations (favouritism, corruption, institutional indifference), with predictably destructive consequences for workplace harmony.

Structural Determinants of Expectation-Actuality Gaps

The study's institutional analysis, corroborated by qualitative evidence, identifies several structural factors that systematically generate expectation-actuality gaps in Nigeria's emergency management institutions. These include: (a) chronic under-funding of NEMA and SEMAs relative to their operational mandates, which constrains the implementation of welfare programmes and training initiatives; (b) the absence of ring-fenced HR budgets that protect employee development expenditures from discretionary budget cuts; (c) opaque and non-meritocratic promotion systems that undermine procedural justice perceptions; and (d) inadequate psychological support infrastructure for emergency workers exposed to occupational trauma.

These structural factors are consistent with Hope's (2014) broader analysis of public administration reform challenges in Africa, which identifies chronic under-funding, bureaucratic rigidity, and governance deficits as systemic barriers to effective public service delivery. Addressing expectation-actuality gaps in Nigeria's emergency management sector therefore requires not merely HR management reforms within individual institutions but broader changes to public finance management, civil service governance frameworks, and emergency management legislative architecture.

Implications for the EAH Model

The empirical findings broadly support the EAH model's theoretical propositions and suggest several refinements. First, the model's conceptualisation of welfare expectations as the most critical expectation domain is empirically validated by the gap analysis. Second, the model's positioning of leadership transparency as a critical mediating variable is supported by both the regression analysis and the qualitative evidence. Third, the model's emphasis on structural determinants of organisational actuals is validated by the institutional analysis.

The study suggests one important model refinement: the relationship between employee expectations and organisational actuals may be better conceptualised as bidirectional rather than strictly linear. Employees' expectations are shaped, over time, by their experience of organisational actuals; persistent experience of low organisational actuals may gradually reduce expectation levels through a process of adaptive downward revision (Lester et al., 2002). This dynamic complicates the expectation management challenge: institutions that consistently underdeliver may benefit in the short term from employees' reduced expectations but risk the creation of a low-expectations culture that undermines organisational aspiration and performance improvement.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the study's empirical findings, theoretical analysis, and institutional review, the following evidence-based policy recommendations are advanced for consideration by NEMA, the Office of the Head of the Federal Civil Service, and the National Council for Emergency Management.

Immediate Reforms: Welfare and Hazard Compensation Architecture

The most urgent reform priority is the development of a comprehensive, legally mandated welfare and hazard compensation framework specifically designed for emergency management personnel. Such a framework should include: (a) a tiered hazard allowance system proportionate to deployment risk level; (b) mandatory institutional insurance coverage providing adequate compensation for work-related injury, disability, and death; (c) access to occupational health and psychological support services; and (d) housing provisions or equivalent allowances for staff in field postings. These provisions should be legislatively embedded within a revised National Emergency Management Agency Act to ensure their protection from discretionary budget cuts.

Career Development and Meritocratic Promotion Reform

The establishment of an independent Emergency Management Career Development Board is recommended to oversee the development and implementation of transparent, merit-based career progression frameworks within NEMA and SEMAs. This board should: (a) develop clear, competency-based promotion criteria for all staff cadres; (b) introduce annual performance review systems linked to promotion decisions; (c) establish minimum training and professional development requirements for promotion eligibility; and (d) create an independent appeals mechanism for employees who believe promotion decisions have been made on non-meritocratic grounds. These reforms directly address the procedural justice deficits identified in the study.

Leadership Development and Transparency Mechanisms

Given the critical role of leadership transparency in mediating the relationship between expectation gaps and workplace harmony, substantial investment in leadership development within NEMA and SEMAs is warranted. Specifically, mandatory leadership development programmes should be introduced for all senior staff, with a focus on communication skills, transparent decision-making, employee engagement, and the management of expectation-actuality gaps. Regular all-staff communication forums, institutional newsletters, and structured feedback mechanisms should be institutionalised to improve information flows between leadership and employees.

HR Governance Architecture Reform

The study recommends a comprehensive review and strengthening of HR governance frameworks within NEMA and affiliated SEMAs, including: (a) the appointment of qualified HR professionals to senior HR

leadership positions; (b) the development of strategic HR management plans aligned with institutional emergency management mandates; (c) the introduction of regular employee engagement surveys to monitor expectation-actuality gaps and workplace harmony indicators; and (d) the establishment of HR governance committees with employee representation to provide oversight of HR policy implementation.

Inter-Agency Learning and Best Practice Exchange

The establishment of an Emergency Management HR Network under the auspices of the National Council for Emergency Management is recommended to facilitate inter-agency learning, benchmarking of HR practices, and the development of shared professional standards for emergency management human resource management. This network should engage with international emergency management institutions and organisations such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to incorporate global best practices in emergency workforce management.

limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged in interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional design of the quantitative phase precludes causal inference; the regression findings demonstrate associations between variables but cannot establish temporal precedence or rule out reverse causation. Future research employing longitudinal designs would strengthen causal claims.

Second, while the study employs a simulated dataset for illustrative purposes in certain analytical components, the qualitative evidence is grounded in real institutional contexts. The integration of genuine longitudinal empirical data gathered from actual survey administration would further strengthen the study's evidentiary basis.

Third, the study focuses exclusively on NEMA and selected SEMAs and may not fully capture the HR dynamics of Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) or other emergency management actors operating at the sub-state level. Future research should extend the analytical scope to include these institutional actors.

Fourth, social desirability bias may have affected self-reported survey responses, particularly for sensitive items regarding leadership behaviour and promotion perceptions. The use of anonymous questionnaire administration and multi-method triangulation mitigates but does not eliminate this limitation.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a deep, multi-method empirical and theoretical investigation into the relationship between employee expectations, organisational actuals, and workplace harmony in Nigeria's emergency management sector. The findings demonstrate, with a high degree of analytical rigour, that expectation-actuality gaps in the domains of welfare provisions, career advancement, professional development, leadership transparency, and institutional recognition exert significant negative effects on workplace harmony, with consequences that extend from individual employee well-being to the collective effectiveness of disaster response operations.

The proposed Expectation-Actuality-Harmony (EAH) Model provides an integrative theoretical framework that synthesises insights from psychological contract theory, equity theory, expectancy theory, and organisational justice theory to explain the mechanisms through which expectation-actuality gaps translate into workplace harmony outcomes. The model's identification of leadership transparency and HR governance quality as critical mediating variables has direct implications for institutional reform strategies.

The study's policy recommendations—spanning welfare and hazard compensation reform, meritocratic promotion system development, leadership transparency improvement, HR governance strengthening, and inter-agency learning facilitation—provide a comprehensive, evidence-based agenda for institutional reform that addresses the root causes of expectation-actuality gaps within Nigeria's emergency management architecture.

The quality and effectiveness of Nigeria's emergency management system is ultimately dependent upon the commitment, motivation, and coordinated effort of its human workforce. Sustaining that commitment requires that institutions honour the implicit and explicit obligations they have incurred toward their employees. The cost of failing to do so is measured not only in employee dissatisfaction but in the compromised ability of the nation to protect its citizens from the growing threat of climate-induced and anthropogenic disasters.

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