

# Managing a Country's Human Resource through Flexible Work Arrangement Policy: A Strategy to Reduce Unemployment in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** It is already an established fact that Nigeria is blessed with human and material resources. While this is true, obvious challenges exist that questions her ability to manage these two set of resources. For instance, widespread unemployment and poverty suggest clearly that the country's human resource is largely underutilized. This paper examined the issue of how human resource can be managed through the use of a flexible work arrangement policy that enables numerical and temporal variability in Nigeria's work environment. To achieve this aim, the paper adopts the content analysis approach for data gathering and by extension the qualitative technique for data analysis. Hence, the Marxist political economy theory was adopted as a theoretical framework to further strengthen the analysis in this paper. It, therefore, argued that in most countries where the unemployment rate is not as high as that of Nigeria, numerical and temporal variabilities as ways of mainstreaming flexible work arrangements have been adopted to make jobs fairly available to citizens. Based on this, the paper submits that human resource management in Nigeria is not consciously driven by a flexible work arrangement policy. This goes a long way to undermine the human resource base of the country as more people who ordinarily would have been able to secure jobs under a numerically and a temporally varied work scenario remain unemployed. Hence, the paper recommends that the Nigerian government through a policy framework should create the enabling environment that ensures numerical and temporal variability in her public sector. This would go a long way to make jobs available to more people, reduce unemployment as well as widespread poverty in the country.

**Keywords:** Human resource, flexible work policy, numerical and temporal variability, unemployment

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Date of Submission: 04-10-2018

Date of acceptance: 19-10-2018

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## I. Introduction

There is a strong convergence in existing literature within the social and management sciences that makes it easy to argue that there is an established fact that Nigeria is highly blessed with both human and material resources. While this is true, obvious challenges exist that questions the country's ability to manage these two set of resources. Perhaps, that is why Fajana, Elegbede, and Gbajumo-Sheriff (2011), as well as Chris and Otu (2012), hold a similar opinion that the human resource base of Nigeria is populated with people who crave to put in their best in terms of work. However, despite this widespread willingness to seek and gain access to paid employment, many have remained in the unenviable space of unemployment with far-reaching consequences for household and country-level growth. This scenario suggests two things. The first is that the government is not dynamic enough to stimulate a domestic industrial revolution that is necessary to catalyze change in the job demographics of the country. The second is that the government has not been able to develop a labour policy that would respond to the demands of the labour market as well as the peculiar human resource challenges facing the country. As a result, Nigeria has continued to witness a progressive increase in unemployment and poverty over the years.

The second scenario described above, presents a major problem for human resource management because conscious labour policy efforts go a long way to shape and or reshape the job demographics in any society. It is the position of this paper, that the work environment in Nigeria is defined by weak policy frameworks and by extension, the social architecture of the labour market becomes relatively fragile. Flexible work arrangement policies have become the best possible strategy to manage several issues related to the changing job demographics in many societies. This is perhaps why Price (2011) who is one of the leading authors of the idea of flexible work arrangements has argued that flexibility has become an unquestioned good in terms of dealing with the rigidities of the labour market in most societies. However, while flexible work arrangements in most countries function as a way of addressing rigid employment policies associated with

firms, in places like Nigeria, it may serve a different purpose. This is because the fundamental challenge of labour in Nigeria is not about the rigidity of human resource policies it is about the absence of human resource policies that directly address the pain of widespread unemployment and by extension poverty.

The problem of having a surplus supply of unemployed manpower in any society as is the case with Nigeria is already considered a human resource disaster. But the point is that previous focus on flexible work arrangement especially the numerical and temporal variants as a strategy to address employment or work-related problems is a conscious policy attempt in other societies designed to manage issues related to lack of mobility, refusal to accept new conditions, unorthodox working hours among others (See; Martin, 2010; Price 2011). The understanding of flexible work arrangements as a conscious attempt by the government to address human resource issues has received very little academic concern in Nigeria. Those who have ventured into this area, have only succeeded in discussing specific flexible work arrangement or what has been referred to as flexi-time arrangement in most organizations especially the banking sector (Adeleye, 2011) and the oil and gas industry (Fakunle, 2010). Interestingly, the parameters used by the above scholars to describe the nature of flexible work arrangement in the organizations they studied, have tilted towards the welfare of already employed staff with a narrowed focus on nursing mothers.

The above academic endeavours, though useful in terms of understanding the use of flexible work arrangement at the organizational level, they only succeeded in addressing the internal needs of staff without necessarily dealing with how the strategy can be used to address the crisis of unemployment as a much intense labour market challenge in Nigeria. Again, and more related to this paper, previous works downplayed the potential of flexible work arrangement as a policy instrument that governments can consciously use to manage as well as increase the job openings, thereby reducing unemployment and poverty. It is against this foregoing that this examined the need to deploy flexible work arrangements, especially the assumptions of numerical and temporal variabilities (Price, 2011) as a conscious tool or policy to address the human resource disaster of unemployment in Nigeria's work environment as opposed to using flexi-time for already employed staff within organizations.

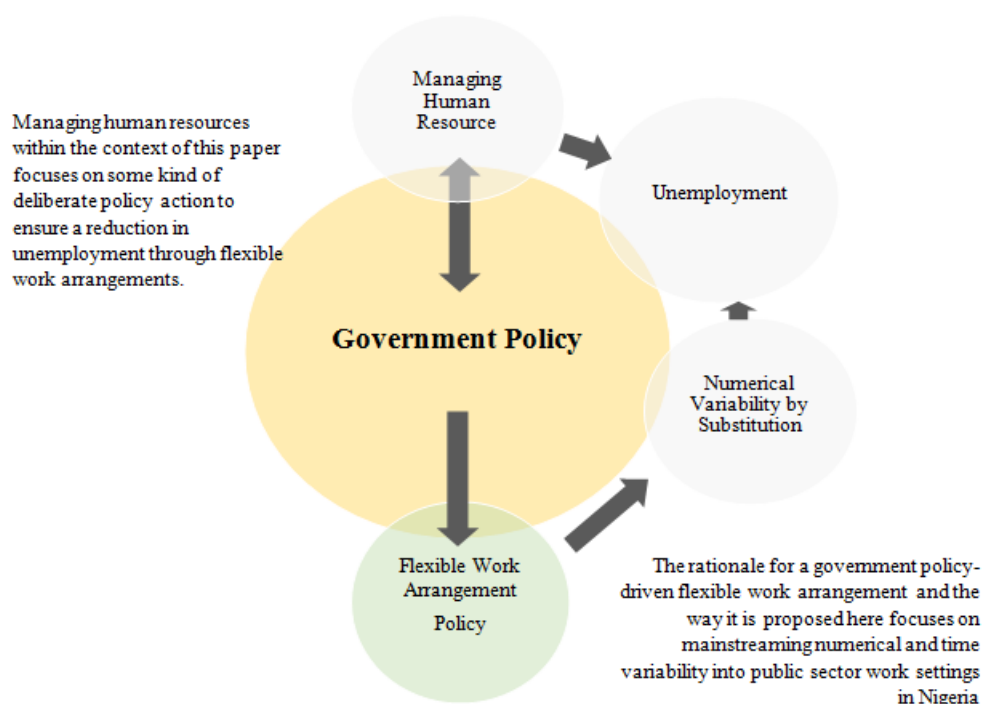
As a result, the objectives of the paper are to; provide a conceptual framework for understanding the link between flexible work arrangement policy and human resource management focusing on unemployment reduction; discuss the issue of human resource management in Nigeria from a Marxist political economy perspective, show how flexible work arrangement policy can be used in the management of human resource, and, examine how numerical and temporal variability as indicators of a flexible work arrangement can be strategically deployed to address the unemployment problem facing Nigeria.

## **II. Concetual Clarification / Framework**

The major concepts in this paper are; managing human resource and flexible work arrangement policy. These concepts are defined in this section. However, the main concern is to provide the conceptual framework that explains the analytical relationship between them. In doing this, the link between the two main concepts and other key variables such as numerical and temporal variabilities as well as unemployment shall be established.

*Managing human resource:* As applied in this paper, the concept managing human resource or human resource management refers to the process and method devised by a government or management of organizations for the purpose of ensuring the coordination of human component of society or narrowly organizations. This definition goes beyond the narrow conceptualization of the concept as solely an activity involving the management of people in organizations. This is in line with Fakunle's (2010) position that managing the human resource is a holistic process that encompasses governments' ability as well as those of management within organizations in terms the coordination of people or staff in society or organizations as the case may be.

*Flexible work arrangement policy:* Traditional definitions of flexible work arrangements have focused more on seeing the concept as the act of scheduling work along variables such as numbers, finance, space, location and function. Sadly, existing definitions have tended to concentrate on conceptualizing flexible work arrangements as a distinctive strategy of firms rather than a framework that can equally be adopted by governments. This could be because most of the works on flexible work, have focused on societies where the labour market is not saturated with non-working or underemployed human resource. For this reason, flexible work arrangement policy is defined here to mean the conscious attempt by the government to numerically vary the work environment as a way of addressing unemployment and underemployment challenges



### **III. Theoretical Framework: The Marxist Political Economy**

The Marxist Political Economy (MPE) theory given its emphasis on the link between the economy and the political structures in society is adopted as the theoretical framework in this paper. The MPE is one of the dominant variants of the larger political economy approach and it is associated with the work of Karl Marx the notable German social, economic and political thinker. As stated above, the Marxist variant of the political economy theory as put forward by Karl Marx is known to address the structural link between the economic system and the political system on the one hand, and how this link affects other social structures in the society on the other hand. Writing on the Marxist Political Economy and its analytical logic, Ryazanskaya (1993) opines that the theory's fundamental assumption is that the relationship between the economy and the political system is intricate and vital to the explanation of other happenings in society. In the same vein, this established relationship between the economy and the political system becomes the unavoidable foundation upon which the overall values as well as culture and norms of any society rest. In addition to this, the MPE professes the adoption of the dialectical method in the analysis of social reality in human society. As a result, it focuses on the high-level discussion of the dialectical relationships between the different social structures in society taking into account the peculiar economic infrastructure within the context of this analysis. In the final analysis, the MPE approach locates class and class struggle within the economic base of society as the major driving force for change with particular reference to the structural historical circumstances underpinning the society in question.

Within the context of the Marxist political economy theory, the central role of the mode of production becomes highly evident especially when the prevailing social or class relations associated with it is closely examined. In doing this, Marx believed that the outcome of the class relation that is found within the mode of production provides the necessary foundation upon which the political culture and structure in any society can be understood. Echoing the views of Marx, Ryazanskaya (1993 p2), points out that "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in their development of material forces of production". Corroborating the above position, Raimi (2017) points out that the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a political superstructure and to which correspond deferent forms of social outcomes. What this implies is that the general social parameters that underpin the Marxist political economy perspective are driven by the economic system to the extent that what goes on within it strongly determines how other social spheres are organized especially the political sphere. As a result, the Marxist political economy approach gained its analytical popularity due to the central thesis which holds that the ensuing class relations and the contradictions thereof, determines significantly the nature of all other social relationships in society.

Based on the assumptions above, it can logically be argued that the ruling class in conjunction with the owners of the means of production perpetrate what Marx has referred to as ruling class ideology which pushes forward the agenda of the dominant class in society against that of the subordinate class. Much as this is the

case, the theory makes it easy to see why the seeming absence of innovative ideas that promote the necessary conditions to deal with the numerous challenges of society such as unemployment and poverty, is considered a deliberate attempt by the ruling class to perpetually keep the masses in control. By extension, the Marxist political economy theory makes it easy for us to see why initiatives such as the introduction of policies that could create enabling environment for the reduction of unemployment and poverty are consciously and systematically avoided. Hence, it is the argument in this paper that the political economic structure of Nigeria puts it in a position that undermines efforts at addressing socio-economic problems affecting the poor masses.

#### **IV. Methodology**

For the purpose of this paper, the content analysis approach was adopted for data gathering, while the qualitative technique was adopted for the data analysis. However, as a way to corroborate and strengthen the analysis in this paper and beyond its use as a theoretical framework, the Marxist political economy approach is further deployed here as a supportive analytical tool. As Goldfrank (2005 cited in Raimi, 2017) has observed that the Marxist Political Economy theory has evolved into a robust social paradigm that is now mostly deployed in social sciences as both a theory and a method. This is based on the fact that the Marxist political economy as a theoretical perspective given its emphasis on the dialectical method allows for a clear understanding of the contradictory and or opposing forces that shape social relations in any society. In the light of this, the paper, following the combination of the qualitative method and the MPE, presents its argument in thematic form while using the dialectical approach to explain them.

#### **V. Managing Human Resource in Nigeria: A Political Economy Analysis**

Theoretical and empirical works on the management of human resources have been largely focused on discussing the subject matter at the organizational level. This literature focus is not necessarily founded on any form of academic bias but simply driven by what we choose to refer to here as the mistake of formative discourse. By this, we mean that the formative narrative on the issue of human resource management began by narrowing the subject matter to covering mostly how organizations coordinate the affairs of employees to meet their goals and objectives in their various work settings. While this is a good starting point, managing human resource is much more broader than this obvious narrow scope presented by the mistake of discourse associated with the literature. This is because, the act of coordinating the human content at the group, organizational and societal levels all qualify to be referred to as human resource management (Putnam, 1995). In the light of this, the latter understanding of managing human resource fits the scope of this paper since it provides conceptual clarity on how countries initiate and implement policy actions as a way of defining the labour market to either respond to unemployment challenges or address issue related to how organizations respond to their employees.

In his writings on the management of human resources, Mungala (2016) observed that too much academic energy has been dissipated in the attempt to discuss the management of human resources at the organizational level when in reality, the exercise actually begins with the state. In other words, there is a state-based political economy scenario surrounding the theory and practice of the management of human resource. In the light of this, the political space responds to the economic space by deliberately designing and implementing policies that address the needs of the labour market as the case may be. What this simply implies is that government has the formative responsibility to provide an enabling environment for organizations to operate either in terms of how its human and material resources are treated by organizations operating within its territorial confines. Mazden (2016) reports that in Singapore for instance, the government under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew embarked on a deliberate labour policy that provided direction on how companies would operate with regard to hiring and firing of labour, flexibility issues as well as virtual work. Under this policy environment, Singapore's unemployment rate reduced drastically as more people were able to gain access to jobs within a fairly regulated policy scenario.

However, in the case of Nigeria, despite having a progressive unemployment rate, very little attempt has been made in terms of policy actions to reduce this problem. This has been strongly attributed to the fact that the ruling class in Nigeria are more comfortable with the unemployment disaster since in most cases it goes a long way to serve their selfish political interest. Fagade (2017) is of the opinion that the ruling class in Nigeria consistently cash into the weak labour market situation and use it for their own benefit rather than trying to resolve it. Unemployed youths in the country serve as a ready army for big politicians who by virtue of controlling enormous wealth, manipulate this category of youths to become election thugs who perpetrate all kinds of violence in favour of the taskmasters. This clearly describes the reason why the political economy of human resource management in the country is strongly underpinned by the inaction of successive governments to address the problem. On the other hand, there are those who believe that long years of weak policy regimes in the labour sector by the government generated the necessary condition for the accumulated challenge of unemployment that the country now faces (Dike, 2011 and Nnamdi, 2017).

It should be noted that where there is little political will to address the problem of unemployment in any country, the human resource becomes vulnerable to all sorts of adverse conditions. In Nigeria, the economic climate is one that is highly characterized by widespread unemployment that increases the depth of poverty. The political economy of this negative economic condition can be viewed in two mutually reinforcing ways. The first is that unemployment is a falloff of bad governance by a corrupt ruling class that only feels obliged to make policies that promote their interest rather than those that are aimed at improving the living conditions of the masses. The second is the fact that the non-working human resource in the country is channeled or forced into illicit activities that equally serves the interest of the ruling class. Whichever this is looked at, this goes to show that the political economy surrounding the management of human resource in Nigeria reflects a ruling class ideology that is centered on perpetually impoverishing the masses by doing relatively little in terms of policy action to address the greatest problem of the country which is youth unemployment.

## **VI. Flexible Work Arrangement Policy and Nigeria's Management of Human Resource**

Although the literature on flexible work arrangements which focus more on the organizational level deployment of the approach undermine if not totally neglect its state-wide utility, applying it at the country-level through conscious policy effort could be one way of providing enabling environment to address some of the labour market challenges associated with countries like Nigeria. There are mostly four distinct types of flexible work arrangements discussed in the literature. These are; numerical, functional, pay (Price, 2011) and temporal (Martin, 2010). All of these flexible work domains provide an opportunity for contractual work scenarios that allows corporations or organizations to vary their work settings as well as their employees to achieve the best possible result. However, the numerical (number) and temporal(time) variants of flexible work arrangements are particularly relevant for the purpose of this paper. It should be emphasized that while these types of flexible work arrangements are strategically designed to fit the context of organizations, some critical human resource situations may make the approach useful to countries at the policy level.

The human resource scenario for Nigeria makes it imperative for the design and implementation of policies that target the reduction of unemployment even at the contractual level while waiting for larger more stable interventions that could permanently address the problem. For instance, the country could deliberately introduce contractual staffing as a deliberate policy action for its public sector or civil service work setting while varying the working hour to allow for work-shifts that substitute workers with others within the day and night space. The new flexible work arrangement policy is expected to promote two relatively independent work scenarios where the government chooses to either pursue a process that involves the substitution of a whole set of workers with an entirely different set of workers to do the same job at different times or choose the option of working round the clock with new set of workers replacing another set of workers on the same job only this time at night.

Desperate situations require desperate measures to address them. The unemployment situation in Nigeria is particularly alarming and this will continue to increase given the fact that new graduates are produced every year without hope of jobs. Driving a policy environment where the public sector in Nigeria works round the clock (i.e. day and night) or twenty four hours through a deliberate action to substitute workers who work by day with entirely new ones who are expected to work throughout the night would go a long way to manage the human resource disaster now currently facing the country. Under this flexible work arrangement policy scenario, workers are free to choose which period of the day to work and get paid relatively the same salary or slightly varied salary than those who work by the day or vice versa. Most advanced countries of the world have evolved to this kind of work environment even when their unemployment rate is not as heartbreaking as that of Nigeria which remained at 21.73 percent from 2014 and reached an all-time high in the third quarter of 2017 at 33.10 percent (Trading Economics, 2017).

## **VII. Using Numerical and Temporal Variability as Unemployment Reduction Strategy in Nigeria**

Again, we must begin by stating that the discussion of numerical and temporal variants of the flexible work arrangement as solely a strategy for organizations to coordinate their affairs with regard to human resource management strongly undermine its potency as a useful tool for country-level labour policy actions. While the argument may be that deliberate government action to mainstream flexible work arrangements into the public sector is not likely feasible in Nigeria, there is the need to understand that the labour climate in the country is in serious crisis requiring very strong decisions to address. Hence, deploying a labour policy that allows for public sector organizations to increasingly introduce numerical and temporal variability into the workplace may go a long way to address the problem of unemployment.

As captured earlier, promoting a policy environment that introduces time shifts in such a way that the same number but different set of employees now work nights instead of shutting down government parastatals completely from four (4) o'clock in the evenings until the next working day, has the potentials for creating more

jobs, increasing productivity as well as reduce poverty drastically. This situation reflects what the International Labour Organization (Zeng, Lu & Sa'ad, 2005; ILO, 2011) refers to as a method of organizing work time in such a way that workers succeed one another at the workplace so that the establishment can operate longer than the hours of work of the individual workers. While there may be challenges especially the issue of stable power supply, fear of insecurity mostly at night among others as is normally the case with new policy actions, the outcome which would ensure that more people get into job spaces and by extension reduce the unemployment level in the country may turn out to be the best thing that has happened to Nigerians especially youths. However, where round the clock working hour for different sets of employees is considered difficult, there is also the chance of numerical and temporal variability to enable shifts within the existing working hours as a deliberate attempt to reduce unemployment. This practice has been done in most European countries where unemployment is not as high as the case in Nigeria. Reporting on the latest trends and initiatives regarding working hours, the OECD (2012) has argued that in some European countries where unemployment has been stubbornly high, interest has re-emerged in the potential of so-called "work-sharing policies where average hours of work per person employed is reduced in order to increase the number of people in employment.

With the growing trend in unemployment, the focus of most governments around the world is shifting towards flexible work arrangement policies that aim at promoting an enabling environment to increase job opportunities. While the consideration in most countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Finland among others) has been to vary the number of hours worked within the day suggesting a shift from more permanent to contract and or part-time work scenarios, in a country like Nigeria where the unemployment rate is high, the need for round the clock (24 hours) work policy that sees a different set of employees working during the day and the same number but different set of employees working during the night is imperative. While the first scenario has the reverse outcome of affecting salary levels, the second scenario is likely to keep salaries at the same level while expanding the number of people in paid employment as well as increase productivity.

Labour policies in Nigeria starting with the Labour Act of 2004 till date have not been driven by conscious efforts to address the peculiar work demands of the country. This goes a long way to show that the successive governments have shown little sense of dynamism with regard to adopting desperate measures to address the crisis of unemployment through policy initiatives that increase the chances of getting jobs by unemployed people. It is the argument of this paper that initiating a flexible work arrangement policy that creates the enabling condition as well as environment for public and private sector organizations to adopt numerical and temporal variabilities at the workplaces mostly on a full-time basis would go a long way to address the problem of unemployment in the country, increase productivity and reduce widespread poverty. Interestingly, while this policy may seemingly be directed at the formal sector, it has the potential of stimulating the informal sector as the informal sector will equally thrive in the same direction. While Price (2011) thinks that numerical variability is difficult to achieve on a full-time work schedule, it is our position in this article that with conscious policy effort and the right political will, this can be achieved.

It should be noted, however, that in order to adopt the kind of flexible work arrangement policy environment suggested in this paper, the Nigeria government must also prepare to address some structural historical challenges that may undermine the process. As already mentioned above, round the clock power (electricity) is necessary to enable people to work throughout the day and night. Similarly, there may arise the issue of security challenges which also require that the government upgrades its security outfits to tackle the new problems that may arise. However, it is the belief that when more young people get access to jobs as a result of the new labor policy, there is that chance that insecurity may reduce drastically since unemployment is known to be one of the most potent drivers of insecurity in the country.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

The traditional focus of flexible work arrangements have limited the narrative as well as the technicality of deploying the process to the firm level on the one hand, and to contract work scenarios on the other hand. While there is a lot of formative wisdom in the traditional thought process that has characterized theoretical and empirical literature on the subject matter of flexible work arrangements over the years, changing trends in the demographics of (un)employment especially in a country like Nigeria has called for desperate labour policy measures. The central position of this paper is that adopting a slightly modified approach of the numerical and temporal variants of the flexible work arrangements at the national policy level in Nigeria to enable longer working periods where different number of staff work during the days and another set of staff work during the nights would go a long way to drastically reduce the unemployment challenges in the country.

While the arguments of this paper may seem like an uphill task at the moment, a careful consideration of the benefits to the country in terms of reduction of unemployment, increase in productivity and poverty alleviation all converge as a necessary incentive for action in this regard. Initiating and deploying a flexible work arrangement policy as highlighted in this paper will help in managing the human resource challenge of the

country as more people do not have jobs are now more likely to be employed under the proposed flexible work arrangement policy scenario.

## IX. Recommendations

Based on the nature of the argument presented above, the paper recommends the following.

### 9.1 Scenario 1 (least preferred):

Government policy should target numerical and temporal variabilities on current working hours: While this is not the preferred option, altering the number of workers and the duration of work under the current work schedule in the country may also help in reducing unemployment but may not have a significant positive effect on productivity and poverty reduction. Again, it should be noted that this option may necessarily lead to the contract staffing option which is likely to come with a reduction in salary levels.

### 9.2 Scenario 11 (most preferred):

Government policy should encourage numerical and temporal variabilities under a twenty-four (24) hour work scenario: It is important to stress that this option will alter the labour environment significantly. However, this is likely to have the best possible outcome of reducing unemployment as well as poverty and increase productivity while keeping salaries intact or insignificantly reduced. This option requires that government through a hard-nosed policy make efforts to completely change the Nigerian work environment to get people to now work at night outside the already existing day-time working scenario that the country labour market is familiar with. By doing this, the chances of increasing the number of people working on full-time under the different work-periods increases with the end product of drastically reducing unemployment levels in the country.

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IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) is UGC approved Journal with SI. No. 4481, Journal no. 46879.

Raimi Lasisi. "Managing a Country's Human Resource through Flexible Work Arrangement Policy: A Strategy to Reduce Unemployment in Nigeria." *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)* 20.10 (2018): 17-23.