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**Doctor Of Business Administration**

**London Campus**

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**Module: LCDB7007 – Research Principles & Philosophy**

**Assessment: Critical Literature Review Report**

**Topic:**

**Research Philosophy and Methodological Perspectives on Employee Training and Organisational Performance in Nigerian Manufacturing Companies**

**WORD COUNT--7602**

**(EXCLUDING REFERENCES & TABLE OF CONTENT)**

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# **Research Philosophy and Methodological Perspectives on Employee Training and Organisational Performance in Nigerian Manufacturing Companies.**

## **1. Introduction**

Employee training and development (ETD) has become increasingly important to organisations as they seek to remain competitive in business environments characterised by rapid technological change and growing dependence on knowledge and skills. Rather than functioning solely as a human resource activity, ETD is now recognised as a strategic capability that enhances workforce competence, organisational learning, innovation and long-term organisational performance (Noe and Kodwani, 2021). Within manufacturing organisations, where productivity, quality improvement and technological capability depend heavily on employee competence; investment in training has become a key mechanism for improving organisational effectiveness while responding to rapidly changing competitive pressures.

The strategic importance of ETD is particularly evident within emerging economies such as Nigeria, where manufacturing organisations face persistent challenges including technological transformation, infrastructure constraints, skills shortages, international competition and declining productivity. These challenges have stimulated considerable academic interest in understanding how, and under what conditions, employee training contributes to improved organisational performance. Although many empirical studies report positive relationships between ETD and organisational outcomes, others present mixed or context-dependent findings, suggesting that the effectiveness of training is influenced by factors such as leadership, organisational culture, employee motivation and technological capability (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Noe and Kodwani, 2021). Such variation indicates that differences in research findings may arise not only from organisational contexts but also from the philosophical assumptions and methodological decisions underpinning the research process.

Although the relationship between ETD and organisational performance has been widely studied, less attention has been given to the philosophical and methodological approaches used to investigate this relationship. The findings produced through research are influenced by how researchers understand reality (ontology), what they consider valid knowledge (epistemology), the role of values in the research process (axiology), and the methodological approaches used to collect and interpret evidence. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). These assumptions

influence every stage of the research process, from problem formulation and research design to data collection, analysis and interpretation. Consequently, methodological choices should emerge from the research problem and remain philosophically coherent rather than reflecting researcher preference or familiarity with a particular method.

The importance of philosophical coherence is especially significant within Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) research, where scholarly rigour must be integrated with professional relevance and organisational impact. Other doctoral research primarily seeks theoretical advancement, DBA research aims to generate actionable knowledge capable of informing organisational decision-making while maintaining methodological integrity. As researchers especially in the field of business the expectation is to demonstrate critical understanding of how philosophical assumptions shape methodological choices, ethical responsibilities, research quality and the credibility of knowledge claims. This researcher-practitioner orientation requires continuous reflection on positionality, conceptual frameworks and methodological alignment to ensure that research is both academically robust and practically meaningful.

Accordingly, this report critically examines the philosophical and methodological foundations of research on employee training and development and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing organisations. It begins with a critical review of contemporary literature and the principal theoretical perspectives underpinning this field. The report then evaluates the philosophical assumptions and methodological approaches that shape existing research before critically appraising a recent empirical study. Finally, it synthesises the key insights arising from the review and considers their implications for the proposed DBA research on employee training and organisational performance in the Nigerian manufacturing sector.

## **2. Critical Literature Review**

### **2.1 Employee Training and Development: Conceptual Foundations**

Employee training and development (ETD) is widely recognised as a strategic human resource management practice that enhances employee knowledge, skills and capabilities while supporting organisational adaptability and long-term competitiveness. Contemporary organisations increasingly view ETD as a strategic investment rather than an operational expense because it contributes to workforce capability, innovation and organisational resilience in rapidly changing business environments (Noe and Kodwani, 2021). Within

manufacturing organisations, effective training supports productivity, quality improvement and technological adaptation by equipping employees with the competencies required to respond to evolving operational demands.

Recent studies generally indicate that ETD can improve organisational outcomes, although its impact differs depending on the organisational setting and wider institutional environment. (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Goswami and D'Silva, 2025; Kim, Chang and Bell, 2026). While some studies report direct improvements in employee productivity, innovation and organisational performance following investment in training, others argue that these outcomes are contingent upon complementary organisational factors, including leadership support, organisational culture, employee motivation and opportunities to apply newly acquired skills (Lartey, B. S., & Ampofo, S. Y. 2025). Consequently, training alone does not guarantee improved performance; its effectiveness depends on how learning is integrated into wider organisational systems and practices (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Belkhamza and Abdullah, 2019; Salas et al., 2012).

This perspective reflects a broader shift in strategic human resource management from viewing training as a discrete activity to understanding it as part of an integrated capability-building process. From this perspective, organisations derive value not simply from providing training but from creating organisational conditions that facilitate learning transfer, knowledge sharing and continuous employee development. Such an approach is particularly relevant in manufacturing organisations operating within emerging economies, where technological change, resource constraints and skills shortages require organisations to continually strengthen workforce capability (Hecklau et al., 2016; Acerbi, Rossi and Terzi, 2022).”.

However, the literature also reveals important inconsistencies. Although many studies conclude that ETD positively influences organisational performance, empirical findings remain context dependent, with variations attributed to differences in organisational size, sector, leadership practices and national institutional environments. These inconsistencies suggest that the relationship between ETD and organisational performance is more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship and reinforce the need for research that considers both organisational context and methodological approach. This provides a strong rationale for examining employee training and development within Nigerian manufacturing organisations, where relatively limited context-specific evidence remains available.

## **2.2 Organisational Performance: Conceptualisation and Measurement**

Organisational performance can be understood as the extent to which an organisation meets its strategic goals by making effective use of its resources. Rather than being assessed solely through financial results, performance is increasingly evaluated through a broader range of measures, including operational efficiency, product quality, innovation, customer satisfaction and employee outcomes. Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate multidimensional performance frameworks that capture both financial and non-financial indicators, particularly in knowledge-intensive and manufacturing organisations where long-term competitiveness depends upon organisational capability rather than short-term financial returns.

Within the strategic human resource management literature, employee training and development is widely regarded as an important antecedent of organisational performance because it enhances workforce capability, supports innovation and strengthens organisational adaptability. (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Sung and Choi, 2014; Kim, Chang and Bell, 2026).

However, contemporary empirical evidence indicates that this relationship is neither direct nor universal (Tharenou, Saks and Moore, 2007; Kim, Chang and Bell, 2026). While numerous studies report positive associations between training and organisational outcomes, others argue that the effectiveness of training is mediated by organisational culture, leadership support, employee engagement and opportunities for knowledge application. These findings suggest that improvements in organisational performance depend not only on investment in training but also on the organisational systems that enable employees to transfer newly acquired knowledge into improved workplace performance.

The complexity of organisational performance is particularly evident within manufacturing organisations operating in emerging economies such as Nigeria. Manufacturing firms frequently encounter technological change, resource constraints, infrastructure limitations and increasing competitive pressures, all of which influence organisational performance independently of training initiatives. Consequently, evaluating the contribution of ETD requires consideration of the broader organisational context rather than assuming a simple causal relationship between training investment and organisational outcomes. This reinforces the importance of context-sensitive research capable of identifying the organisational conditions under which ETD contributes to sustainable performance improvements.

### **2.3 Competing Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning Employee Training and Development and Organisational Performance**

Understanding the relationship between employee training and development (ETD) and organisational performance requires an appropriate theoretical foundation capable of explaining how investment in human capital contributes to organisational capability and competitive advantage. Among the most influential perspectives in this field are **Human Capital Theory (HCT)**, the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** and **Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT)**. Although each theory provides a distinct explanation of organisational performance, they collectively emphasise that sustainable organisational success depends on developing, utilising and continually renewing employee knowledge and capabilities (Becker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997).

Human Capital Theory views employee knowledge, skills and competencies as valuable forms of capital that enhance organisational productivity and performance (Becker, 1993). From this understanding, expenditure on training is regarded as an investment that can improve organisational performance and create lasting benefits through improved employee capability and productivity. While HCT provides a strong justification for investment in workforce development, critics argue that it tends to assume a direct relationship between training and performance, giving insufficient attention to contextual factors that influence whether newly acquired knowledge is effectively transferred into organisational outcomes.

The Resource-Based View extends this argument by suggesting that competitive advantage arises not simply from possessing skilled employees but from developing valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable organisational resources (Barney, 1991; Wright, McMahan and McWilliams, 1994). Consequently, training contributes to organisational performance only when employee capabilities are embedded within broader organisational systems and are difficult for competitors to replicate (De Saá-Pérez and García-Falcón, 2002). Dynamic Capabilities Theory further develops this perspective by emphasising an organisation's ability to continually strengthen and adapt their internal capabilities to keep pace with technological developments and changing business conditions. (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997; Teece, 2007). Together, RBV and DCT highlight that organisational performance depends not only on acquiring employee knowledge but also on the organisation's capacity to adapt, learn and renew its capabilities over time (Hung et al., 2010; Fainshmidt et al., 2016).

While these theories provide complementary explanations of the ETD–performance relationship, none independently captures the full complexity of organisational performance within manufacturing organisations in emerging economies. Human Capital Theory explains why organisations invest in employee development, RBV demonstrates how workforce capabilities become strategic organisational assets, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how these assets are continually renewed in changing environments. Collectively, they provide a robust conceptual framework for examining employee training and development within Nigerian manufacturing organisations, where technological change, competitive pressures and institutional constraints require organisations to develop both skilled employees and adaptive organisational capabilities.

## **2.4 Critical Synthesis of the Literature and Identification of the Research Gap**

The literature reviewed demonstrates broad agreement that employee training and development is a strategic organisational resource capable of enhancing workforce capability, organisational learning and long-term performance. Nevertheless, the relationship between ETD and organisational performance remains conceptually and empirically complex. While many studies report positive organisational outcomes following investment in employee development, others conclude that these outcomes are contingent upon organisational culture, leadership effectiveness, technological capability and opportunities for knowledge application. These inconsistencies indicate that ETD should not be viewed as an isolated intervention but as one component of a broader organisational system that shapes employee and organisational performance.

The review also highlights important theoretical and methodological limitations within the existing body of knowledge. Theoretical perspectives such as **Human Capital Theory, the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory** each provide valuable but partial explanations of the relationship between ETD and organisational performance. Similarly, much of the empirical literature relies on cross-sectional quantitative studies that reveal associations between variables but offer limited understanding of how training actually contributes to organisational performance. (Tharenou, Saks and Moore, 2007; Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). Consequently, existing research often explains how relationships exist without adequately explaining how or why they occur within specific organisational contexts.

These limitations are particularly evident within the Nigerian manufacturing sector, where comparatively few studies have integrated philosophical reflection with methodological rigour to investigate employee training and organisational performance. Much of the existing research emphasises statistical associations while giving limited consideration to the philosophical assumptions that shape research design, evidence generation and interpretation. This represents an important gap, particularly for DBA research, which seeks to generate contextually relevant knowledge that is both academically rigorous and practically applicable.

However, the present report argues that a philosophically coherent and methodologically integrated approach is required to advance understanding of the relationship between ETD and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing organisations. This provides the rationale for the subsequent examination of research philosophy and methodology, which explores how different philosophical assumptions influence the production, interpretation and application of organisational knowledge.

### **3. Research Philosophy and Methodological Perspectives**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Understanding the relationship between employee training and development (ETD) and organisational performance requires more than selecting appropriate research methods; it requires careful consideration of the philosophical assumptions that underpin the research process. Research philosophy shapes how organisational reality is understood, what constitutes valid knowledge and how evidence should be generated and interpreted (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Crotty, 1998; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Therefore, the researcher's philosophical position shapes the entire research process, including how research questions are developed, methods are chosen, data are gathered and findings are understood. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Within management research, different philosophical positions offer alternative perspectives on organisational phenomena. Ontology considers the nature of organisational reality, epistemology examines how knowledge can be generated, while axiology recognises the role of researcher values in the production and interpretation of knowledge (Crotty, 1998; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). These philosophical dimensions are operationalised through research paradigms, which provide coherent frameworks linking philosophical assumptions to methodological decisions. For DBA researchers, ensuring alignment between

philosophy, methodology and the research problem is essential because the objective is not only to advance academic knowledge but also to **generate evidence** that informs organisational practice.

Drawing on these principles, this chapter critically evaluates the principal philosophical perspectives relevant to the proposed research before justifying the adoption of pragmatism as the most appropriate research paradigm. It further examines the methodological implications of this choice and demonstrates how philosophical coherence strengthens the credibility, rigour and practical relevance of research investigating employee training and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing organisations.

### **3.2 Philosophical Foundations of the Research: Ontological Perspectives**

Ontology represents the philosophical foundation upon which all research is constructed because it concerns assumptions regarding the nature of reality and what can legitimately be regarded as existing. Within management and organisational research, ontological assumptions influence how organisational phenomena are conceptualised, how research questions are formulated and what researchers consider to be legitimate objects of investigation. Consequently, ontology is not an abstract philosophical exercise but a practical consideration that shapes the entire research process. Contemporary reviews of management research emphasise that explicit ontological positioning is essential because philosophical ambiguity frequently leads to methodological inconsistency and weak theoretical justification. Researchers are therefore increasingly encouraged to articulate their ontological assumptions before selecting research methods or analytical techniques.

Within research on employee training and organisational performance, two broad ontological positions dominate the literature: objectivism (or realism) and constructionism (Crotty, 1998; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). An objectivist perspective assumes that organisational structures, employee capability and organisational performance exist independently of individual perceptions and can therefore be objectively observed and measured. This assumption underpins much of the quantitative literature examining the relationship between training investment and organisational outcomes, where concepts such as productivity, efficiency and performance are treated as measurable organisational realities. The strength of this position lies in its capacity to support systematic measurement, hypothesis testing and comparison across organisations. However, critics argue that reducing complex organisational phenomena to measurable variables may overlook the contextual and social processes

through which employee learning and organisational performance are created and experienced.

In contrast, constructionist ontology argues that organisational reality is created and continually reshaped through human interaction, interpretation and shared organisational experiences (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). From this perspective, employee training cannot be understood solely by examining key performance indicators (KPI) because the meaning and effectiveness of training are influenced by organisational culture, leadership practices, employee perceptions and workplace relationships. Consequently, organisational performance is viewed not only as an objective outcome but also as a socially constructed concept whose meaning varies across organisational contexts. Recent management scholarship increasingly recognises that organisational change, innovation and learning are deeply embedded within social interactions, making constructionist perspectives particularly valuable for understanding complex organisational behaviour.

Although these ontological positions have traditionally been presented as competing alternatives, contemporary management research increasingly advocates ontological pluralism. Rather than assuming that organisational reality is either entirely objective or entirely socially constructed, recent philosophical reviews argue that complex organisational phenomena often contain both objective and subjective dimensions that require complementary forms of inquiry. Such an approach acknowledges that measurable organisational indicators, including productivity and operational efficiency, coexist with less tangible organisational processes such as knowledge sharing, leadership influence and employee learning. This movement towards pluralism reflects a broader recognition that contemporary organisational challenges cannot always be adequately explained through a single philosophical lens.

For research examining employee training and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing companies, a purely objectivist or purely constructionist position appears insufficient. Organisational performance can be assessed through observable indicators such as productivity, quality improvement and operational effectiveness. However, understanding how employee training contributes to these outcomes also requires investigation of managerial decision-making, organisational culture, employee motivation and learning transfer. Consequently, the phenomenon under investigation encompasses both observable organisational realities and socially constructed organisational experiences. This ontological

complexity suggests that the research problem, rather than philosophical allegiance, should determine the ontological position adopted.

Accordingly, this report adopts the view that ontological assumptions should support a comprehensive understanding of organisational reality rather than constrain it. Recognising both measurable organisational outcomes and socially constructed workplace experiences provides a stronger foundation for examining the relationship between employee training and organisational performance. This position also provides a foundation for examining epistemology, shifting the focus from what constitutes organisational reality to how reliable knowledge about that reality can be developed and supported.

### **3.3 Philosophical Foundations of the Research: Epistemological Perspectives**

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and the processes through which knowledge is generated, validated and interpreted (Crotty, 1998; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Within management research, epistemological assumptions determine what constitutes credible evidence, how researchers establish truth claims and the criteria used to evaluate research quality. Consequently, epistemology extends beyond methodological choice by influencing how organisational phenomena are investigated and how research findings are interpreted within different organisational contexts. Contemporary scholarship increasingly argues that researchers should make their epistemological assumptions explicit because these assumptions therefore shape the research process as a whole, influencing how research questions are developed, how evidence is examined, and how the resulting findings are interpreted and applied.

. Recent reviews further suggest that greater epistemological transparency enhances methodological coherence and strengthens the credibility of management research.

Within research on employee training and organisational performance, positivist epistemology has historically dominated empirical investigation. Positivist researchers assume that knowledge is derived through objective observation, systematic measurement and empirical verification (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Consequently, studies adopting this position frequently employ quantitative methods to examine relationships between employee training, organisational capability and performance outcomes. Such approaches have made an important contribution by generating statistically robust evidence regarding the effectiveness of training interventions and by enabling comparisons across industries and organisational settings. However, contemporary scholars

argue that the exclusive reliance on quantitative evidence may oversimplify organisational reality by reducing complex processes such as organisational learning, leadership influence and knowledge transfer to measurable variables. As organisational behaviour is shaped by context, social interaction and organisational culture, objective measurement alone may not fully explain why similar training initiatives generate different organisational outcomes.

In contrast, interpretivist epistemology maintains that organisational knowledge is socially constructed through human experience and interaction (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Rather than seeking universal laws governing organisational behaviour, interpretivist researchers aim to understand how organisational actors perceive, interpret and assign meaning to organisational phenomena. Within the context of employee training and development, this perspective enables researchers to explore how employees experience learning, how managers understand organisational capability development and how organisational culture influences knowledge transfer and performance improvement. Such insights are particularly valuable for understanding the processes through which employee development contributes to organisational effectiveness. Nevertheless, interpretivist research has been criticised for its limited capacity to generate findings that can be readily generalised beyond the organisational settings in which they were produced. This limitation is particularly relevant where research seeks to inform policy or organisational decision-making across multiple organisations.

Recognising the limitations associated with exclusive reliance on either positivism or interpretivism, contemporary management scholarship increasingly supports epistemological pluralism. Rather than treating objective and subjective knowledge as mutually exclusive, pluralistic approaches acknowledge that different forms of evidence may be required to address different aspects of the same organisational problem. Christofi *et al.* (2024) argue that advances in management research increasingly favour methodological pluralism because complex organisational challenges rarely conform to a single epistemological tradition. Similarly, Sun and Zuo (2024) suggest that management researchers should embrace epistemological pluralism and dynamic reflexivity to produce knowledge that is both theoretically rigorous and practically relevant.

This shift towards epistemological pluralism is particularly important within Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) research. Unlike conventional academic research, DBA studies seek to generate knowledge that is academically rigorous while simultaneously

addressing practical organisational problems. Rigg, Ellwood and Anderson (2021) describe DBA research as being grounded in an "epistemology of practice", where scholarly inquiry, critical reflection and organisational experience are integrated to generate actionable knowledge for professional practice. Likewise, Parry *et al.* (2021) argue that management research should balance methodological rigour with contextual relevance, particularly when addressing complex organisational challenges that cannot be adequately understood through a single form of evidence.

For the proposed research examining employee training and organisational performance in Nigerian manufacturing companies, a purely positivist or purely interpretivist epistemological position would be unnecessarily restrictive. The proposed study seeks to understand measurable organisational outcomes while simultaneously exploring the organisational processes, leadership practices and employee experiences through which those outcomes are achieved. Consequently, an epistemological position that values multiple forms of evidence provide a stronger foundation for the research than adherence to a single philosophical tradition. This conclusion naturally leads to the evaluation of research paradigms, where ontology and epistemology are integrated into coherent philosophical approaches that guide methodological decision-making.

### **3.4 Research Paradigms: Evaluating the Most Appropriate Paradigm for Research on Employee Training and Organisational Performance**

Research paradigms provide the philosophical framework through which researchers integrate ontological assumptions about reality, epistemological assumptions about knowledge and methodological decisions into a coherent approach to inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Consequently, paradigms shape how organisational phenomena are conceptualised, how evidence is generated and how research findings are interpreted. Within management research, paradigm selection has become increasingly important because contemporary organisational problems are characterised by complexity, uncertainty and multiple stakeholder perspectives that cannot always be adequately addressed through a single philosophical tradition. Recent methodological debates therefore argue that researchers should move beyond rigid adherence to individual paradigms and instead justify paradigm selection according to the nature of the research problem and the intended contribution of the study (Christofi *et al.*, 2024).

Positivist approaches have traditionally been widely used in research investigating the relationship between employee training and organisational performance. Positivist research

assumes that organisational reality is objective, observable and capable of being measured through systematic empirical investigation. Consequently, research informed by positivism typically employs quantitative methods to test hypotheses and examine statistical relationships between variables such as training investment, employee capability and organisational performance. This paradigm has contributed significantly to the development of evidence-based human resource management by enabling researchers to produce replicable findings and identify patterns across organisations. Nevertheless, its emphasis on objectivity and measurement has attracted sustained criticism. Contemporary management scholars argue that an exclusive focus on measurable variables may overlook the contextual, behavioural and cultural processes through which employee learning is translated into organisational performance. Such limitations are particularly evident in organisational settings where leadership, organisational culture and employee perceptions influence the effectiveness of training interventions.

Interpretivism emerged partly in response to these limitations by arguing that organisational phenomena cannot be understood independently of the meaning's individuals attach to them. Instead of searching for universal explanations of organisational behaviour, interpretivist researchers focus on understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences and the realities they encounter within the workplace.

Within the context of employee training and development, this perspective enables researchers to explore employees' perceptions of learning, managerial interpretations of organisational capability and the influence of organisational culture on knowledge transfer. Such insights are particularly valuable because the effectiveness of training frequently depends upon how learning is experienced, supported and embedded within organisational practice. However, interpretivism has also been criticised for its limited ability to generate findings that are readily transferable across organisational contexts. While rich qualitative evidence enhances contextual understanding, it may provide less certainty regarding broader organisational patterns or causal relationships, particularly where policy or strategic organisational decisions require evidence capable of supporting wider application.

Increasing recognition of the strengths and limitations of both paradigms has encouraged greater acceptance of methodological pluralism within management research. Christofi *et al.* (2024) argue that long-standing divisions between quantitative and qualitative traditions have unnecessarily constrained methodological innovation and limited researchers' ability to

address complex organisational challenges. They contend that the future of management scholarship lies not in defending philosophical boundaries but in selecting approaches that best address the research problem while maintaining methodological rigour and practical relevance. This movement reflects a broader shift towards recognising that different forms of evidence can make complementary contributions to understanding organisational phenomena.

Within this evolving landscape, pragmatism has become increasingly influential, particularly in applied management and mixed-methods research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Feilzer, 2010). Pragmatism rejects the assumption that researchers must remain committed to a single philosophical tradition and instead argues that methodological decisions should be driven by the research question, the practical context and the intended use of the findings. (Morgan, 2007; Feilzer, 2010, Parry *et al.* 2021) demonstrate that methodological pragmatism enables researchers to balance scientific rigour with contextual relevance, particularly in complex organisational studies where ideal methodological designs may not be feasible or appropriate. Rather than viewing methodological compromise as a weakness, they argue that pragmatism allows researchers to generate evidence that is both academically credible and practically meaningful across different organisational contexts.

The growing prominence of pragmatism is particularly relevant to Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) research. DBA programmes are designed to produce research that contributes not only to academic knowledge but also to professional practice and organisational improvement. Consequently, researcher-practitioners must often investigate organisational problems that require both measurable evidence and contextual understanding. For the proposed study examining employee training and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing companies, the research seeks to understand if employee training contributes to organisational performance while simultaneously exploring how organisational culture, leadership and workplace practices influence that relationship. Addressing these complementary objectives requires methodological flexibility and the integration of multiple forms of evidence (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). A pragmatic paradigm therefore provides the strongest philosophical foundation because it supports methodological coherence while recognising the complexity of organisational reality and the applied nature of DBA research. This position also creates a logical foundation for the methodological discussion that follows, where the implications of adopting a pragmatic paradigm for research design, data collection and analysis are critically evaluated.

## **Chapter 4: Critical Appraisal of an Empirical Study**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Selected Empirical Study**

To demonstrate the practical application of the philosophical and methodological principles discussed in the preceding chapter, this section critically appraises the empirical study conducted by Onikoyi *et al.* (2023), entitled *Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Employees' Behavioural Outcomes in the Manufacturing Sub-Sector of South-West Nigeria*. The study investigates the extent to which human resource management (HRM) practices influence employee behavioural outcomes within manufacturing organisations operating in South-West Nigeria. More specifically, the authors examine six HRM practices: recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation management, performance appraisal, occupational health and safety, and career development. They investigate how these practices influence employee outcomes, including competence, commitment, motivation, job satisfaction, cooperation, compliance and attendance.

The study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey design involving 381 middle-level managers drawn from manufacturing organisations in Lagos State and analyses the data using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and regression techniques.

This study is particularly relevant to the present report because its focus closely reflects the proposed DBA research on how employee training and development relates to organisational performance in Nigerian manufacturing companies. Consequently, the appraisal extends beyond assessing the study's findings and instead critically examines the philosophical orientation, methodological coherence, research quality and implications for future DBA research.

### **4.2 Critical Evaluation of the Research Problem, Aim and Theoretical Foundation**

A major strength of the study lies in its clear articulation of the research problem. The authors argue that although Nigerian manufacturing organisations invest substantially in HRM practices, including employee training and development, the sector continues to experience relatively poor productivity and operational performance. They further contend that existing empirical evidence linking HRM practices with employee behavioural outcomes is dominated by studies undertaken in developed economies, leaving an important contextual gap within developing countries such as Nigeria. On this basis, the study seeks to determine how specific HRM practices influence employee behavioural outcomes within Nigerian manufacturing organisations.

From a DBA perspective, the identification of a context-specific research gap represents a notable strength because it demonstrates both academic relevance and practical significance. Rather than replicating findings from developed economies, the study recognises that institutional conditions, labour market dynamics and organisational practices within Nigeria may influence the relationship between HRM practices and employee outcomes differently. This contextual sensitivity is consistent with contemporary DBA research, which emphasises the production of knowledge capable of informing organisational decision-making within specific professional environments.

The study is theoretically underpinned by Social Exchange Theory and Organisational Support Theory. Social Exchange Theory proposes that employees reciprocate favourable organisational practices, such as investment in training and development, with positive attitudes and behaviours. Organisational Support Theory similarly suggests that employees develop favourable behavioural responses when they perceive that their organisation values their contributions and supports their wellbeing.

Although the selection of these theories is appropriate, the integration of theory into the research design could have been developed more critically. The authors primarily use the theories to justify the anticipated relationships between HRM practices and employee behavioural outcomes but devote relatively limited attention to alternative theoretical explanations or competing perspectives. For example, theories such as the Resource-Based View, Human Capital Theory or the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework may also have provided valuable explanations of how investment in employee training contributes to organisational capability and sustained performance. A more comprehensive theoretical comparison would have strengthened the conceptual foundation of the study and enhanced its explanatory power.

Furthermore, while the study focuses on employee behavioural outcomes, it does not directly measure organisational performance despite acknowledging that improved employee outcomes are expected to contribute to broader organisational effectiveness. This distinction is particularly relevant for the proposed DBA research because it suggests an opportunity to extend existing knowledge by investigating not only behavioural outcomes but also the direct relationship between employee training and measurable organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing organisations.

### **4.3 Critical Evaluation of the Study's Philosophical Assumptions: Ontology, Epistemology and Research Paradigm**

A notable characteristic of the study by Onikoyi *et al.* (2023) is that, like many empirical studies published in business and management journals, it does not explicitly state its ontological, epistemological or paradigmatic position. Instead, these philosophical assumptions must be inferred from the research objectives, methodological design, methods of data collection and analytical procedures. While this is common practice in management research, contemporary methodological scholars argue that making philosophical assumptions explicit enhances transparency, methodological coherence and the credibility of research findings. Consequently, the absence of an explicit philosophical justification represents a limitation of the study because it requires readers to infer the assumptions underpinning the research rather than evaluating them directly.

From an ontological perspective, the study reflects an objectivist (realist) orientation. The authors conceptualise human resource management practices and employee behavioural outcomes as objective organisational phenomena that can be identified, measured and analysed independently of the perceptions of individual participants. Constructs such as training and development, compensation management, employee commitment and job satisfaction are operationalised as measurable variables and examined using structured survey instruments. Furthermore, the development of hypotheses proposing statistically testable relationships between HRM practices and behavioural outcomes suggests that the researchers assume these organisational phenomena possess an objective existence capable of empirical measurement.

Although this ontological position is appropriate for examining relationships between predefined organisational variables, it inevitably narrows the scope of organisational reality under investigation. Employee behaviour is influenced not only by formal HRM practices but also by organisational culture, leadership style, informal relationships and contextual experiences that cannot easily be reduced to structured questionnaire responses.

Consequently, while the objectivist position facilitates statistical analysis, it provides only a partial understanding of the complex organisational processes through which training and development influence employee behaviour. A more pluralistic ontological position might have enabled the researchers to capture both measurable organisational outcomes and the lived experiences of employees, thereby producing a richer understanding of organisational reality.

The study also demonstrates a predominantly **positivist epistemological** orientation. Knowledge is generated through the formulation of hypotheses, the collection of numerical data using standardised questionnaires and the application of statistical techniques to determine whether significant relationships exist between variables. The emphasis on objectivity, measurement and empirical verification is further reflected in the authors' assessment of construct reliability and validity prior to hypothesis testing. Such procedures are consistent with positivist assumptions that credible knowledge is derived through systematic observation, measurement and empirical testing.

The adoption of a positivist epistemology provides several methodological advantages. Standardised instruments enhance consistency in data collection, while statistical analysis enables the identification of patterns across a relatively large sample of manufacturing managers. These characteristics strengthen the reliability of the findings and facilitate comparisons with previous empirical studies. Nevertheless, exclusive reliance on quantitative evidence limits the researchers' ability to explain why HRM practices influence employee behavioural outcomes or how organisational context shapes these relationships. For example, the study demonstrates that training and development is associated with positive behavioural outcomes, but it provides limited insight into employees' perceptions of training quality, leadership support for learning or organisational barriers that may affect the application of newly acquired skills. Such questions are more appropriately addressed through qualitative inquiry.

The philosophical assumptions underpinning the study therefore indicate an implicit positivist research paradigm. This inference is supported by the use of deductive reasoning, hypothesis testing, structured questionnaires and Structural Equation Modelling to test predefined relationships among observable variables. Although these methodological choices are internally consistent, the authors do not explicitly justify why positivism is the most appropriate paradigm for investigating employee behavioural outcomes within Nigerian manufacturing organisations. This omission weakens the philosophical transparency of the study because readers are left to infer the relationship between the research problem, philosophical assumptions and methodological decisions.

From an academic perspective, greater philosophical reflexivity would have strengthened the study considerably. Explicit discussion of the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology would have demonstrated that the research design emerged from carefully

considered philosophical assumptions rather than methodological convention. Moreover, incorporating complementary qualitative evidence through interviews or case studies could have provided deeper insight into how employees experience training and development initiatives, thereby enriching the explanation of the statistical relationships identified in the study. Such methodological integration would have been particularly valuable in the Nigerian manufacturing context, where organisational culture, leadership practices and institutional conditions are likely to influence employee behaviour in ways that cannot be fully captured through quantitative surveys alone.

#### **4.4 Critical Evaluation of the Research Methodology, Sampling and Data Collection**

The study by Onikoyi *et al.* (2023) adopted a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine the relationship between human resource management practices and employee behavioural outcomes within manufacturing organisations in South-West Nigeria. This methodological choice is consistent with the study's implicit positivist orientation because it enables the measurement of predefined variables and the statistical testing of hypothesised relationships. The use of a structured survey also allowed the researchers to collect standardised data efficiently from a relatively large sample of respondents.

A notable strength of the study is its use of stratified random sampling to select 381 middle-level managers from manufacturing organisations in Lagos State. This approach enhanced the representativeness of the sample by ensuring that relevant organisational groups were proportionately included, thereby reducing sampling bias and improving the credibility of the findings. However, limiting participation to middle-level managers may have restricted the diversity of perspectives captured. Employees who directly participate in training programmes may have provided different insights into the effectiveness of HRM practices and their influence on behavioural outcomes. Consequently, the findings largely reflect managerial perceptions rather than the experiences of the wider workforce.

The researchers employed a structured questionnaire adapted from previously validated instruments to measure both HRM practices and employee behavioural outcomes. The use of established scales strengthens measurement consistency and facilitates comparison with previous studies. Nevertheless, because all variables were measured through self-reported questionnaires administered at a single point in time, the study remains vulnerable to common method bias and social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the reported relationships. Although the authors acknowledge certain limitations, they provide

only limited discussion of the procedural or statistical measures adopted to minimise these risks.

Overall, the methodological design is appropriate for examining statistical associations between HRM practices and employee behavioural outcomes. However, its cross-sectional nature limits the ability to establish causal relationships or capture how employee attitudes and organisational practices evolve over time. From a DBA perspective, incorporating qualitative interviews or adopting a longitudinal mixed-methods design would have strengthened the study by providing deeper insight into the organisational processes through which training and development influence employee behaviour. Such an approach would also have enhanced the practical relevance of the findings for manufacturing organisations operating within the Nigerian context.

#### **4.5 Critical Evaluation of Data Analysis, Research Quality and Ethical Considerations**

Onikoyi *et al.* (2023) employed **Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)** to examine the relationships between human resource management practices and employee behavioural outcomes. The use of SEM strengthens the study by allowing several relationships between latent variables to be analysed simultaneously while also taking measurement error into account. Compared with traditional regression techniques, SEM provides a more comprehensive assessment of complex organisational relationships and is therefore appropriate for investigating multidimensional HRM constructs. Prior to hypothesis testing, the authors assessed the reliability and validity of the measurement model using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The reported reliability coefficients exceeded recommended thresholds, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency, while the validity assessments provided evidence that the measurement scales were appropriate for the constructs under investigation.

Although these procedures strengthen the statistical credibility of the study, several limitations remain. The analysis relies exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data collected from a single respondent group at one point in time. Consequently, the study is susceptible to common method variance, which may inflate the observed relationships between HRM practices and employee behavioural outcomes. While the authors report reliability and validity statistics, the discussion of potential common method bias and other sources of measurement error is relatively limited. A more explicit explanation of the

procedures adopted to minimise these risks would have strengthened confidence in the findings.

The study also gives limited attention to ethical considerations. Although participation appears to have been voluntary and anonymous, the article provides relatively little information regarding informed consent, confidentiality procedures, ethical approval or data protection measures. For organisational research involving employees, greater transparency regarding ethical governance is essential because participants may perceive pressure to participate or may be reluctant to express negative opinions about organisational practices. Explicit discussion of ethical approval, participant rights and data management procedures would therefore have enhanced the transparency and trustworthiness of the research.

Overall, the study demonstrates strong statistical rigour through the application of SEM and appropriate reliability and validity testing. However, the limited discussion of common method bias and ethical procedures reduces methodological transparency. From a DBA perspective, future research could strengthen the quality of evidence by triangulating quantitative findings with qualitative interviews and providing more comprehensive reporting of ethical safeguards. Such improvements would enhance both the credibility of the findings and their practical relevance for organisational decision-making within the Nigerian manufacturing sector.

#### **4.6 Critical Reflection: Strengths, Limitations and Implications for the Proposed DBA Research**

The study by Onikoyi *et al.* (2023) makes a valuable contribution to the literature by providing contemporary empirical evidence on the relationship between HRM practices and employee behavioural outcomes within Nigerian manufacturing organisations. Its principal strengths include a clearly defined research problem, an appropriate theoretical foundation, a relatively robust sample, and the application of advanced statistical techniques to examine complex organisational relationships. Furthermore, the study addresses an important contextual gap by generating evidence from the Nigerian manufacturing sector, thereby increasing its relevance for researchers and practitioners interested in organisational performance within emerging economies.

Despite these contributions, several limitations reduce the explanatory power of the research. First, the exclusive reliance on a quantitative, cross-sectional design limits the researchers' ability to establish causal relationships or explore the organisational processes through which

HRM practices influence employee behaviour. Second, the absence of an explicit philosophical discussion weakens the methodological transparency of the study, requiring readers to infer its ontological and epistemological assumptions from the research design. Third, data were collected only from middle-level managers within manufacturing organisations in Lagos State, limiting the diversity of organisational perspectives and reducing the generalisability of the findings to other regions and organisational contexts. Finally, although the study demonstrates statistical rigour, it provides relatively limited discussion of ethical governance and the management of potential sources of research bias.

These limitations provide important lessons for the proposed DBA research on employee training and development and organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing companies. Rather than relying exclusively on quantitative evidence, the proposed study will adopt a pragmatic mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of organisational reality. Such an approach will enable the investigation of both measurable organisational outcomes and the experiences of employees and managers responsible for implementing training initiatives. In addition, explicit articulation of the study's philosophical assumptions, methodological choices and ethical procedures will enhance transparency, methodological coherence and the credibility of the research. By addressing the limitations identified in the reviewed study, the proposed DBA research seeks to generate evidence that is not only academically rigorous but also capable of informing managerial practice and organisational decision-making within the Nigerian manufacturing sector.

## **5.0 Contribution to the Proposed DBA Research**

The synthesis also has important implications for the proposed DBA research. Existing evidence supports investigation of measurable relationships between ETD and performance but demonstrates the limitations of relying exclusively on quantitative evidence when the research problem also concerns organisational processes and experiences. The proposed research therefore has the potential to contribute by examining how, why and under what organisational conditions ETD contributes to multidimensional organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing organisations, rather than simply retesting whether an association exists.

A pragmatic philosophical position provides an appropriate foundation for this contribution because it permits methodological choices to be driven by the research problem while

accommodating complementary forms of evidence (Parry *et al.*, 2021; Christofi *et al.*, 2024). Integrating quantitative evidence concerning ETD and organisational performance with qualitative insights into leadership, culture, learning transfer and organisational context would enable statistical relationships to be interpreted alongside the processes that may explain them. The contribution of the proposed DBA research therefore lies in developing a more context-sensitive, philosophically coherent and practically relevant explanation of the ETD–performance relationship, capable of extending theoretical understanding while generating evidence that can inform workforce-development decisions within Nigerian manufacturing organisations.

### **5.1 Implications for Theory and Management Practice**

Theoretically, no single perspective fully explains the ETD–performance relationship. Human Capital Theory explains investment in employee capability, while RBV and Dynamic Capabilities Theory demonstrate how individual capabilities can become organisational resources and support adaptation. Their combined application therefore provides a stronger explanation of how individual learning may translate into organisational performance.

For practice, Nigerian manufacturing organisations should evaluate training beyond participation or immediate employee outcomes. Training should be strategically aligned and supported by leadership, opportunities for knowledge application and appropriate organisational resources. Managers should therefore assess whether the organisational environment enables employee learning to contribute to productivity, quality, innovation and adaptability.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This report critically examined the philosophical and methodological foundations underpinning research on employee training and development (ETD) and organisational performance, with particular reference to Nigerian manufacturing organisations. The review of contemporary literature demonstrated that although ETD is widely recognised as a strategic mechanism for enhancing employee capability and organisational performance, the relationship between training and organisational outcomes remains complex, context-dependent and influenced by multiple organisational factors. The literature further revealed that differences in empirical findings are attributable not only to organisational characteristics but also to the philosophical assumptions and methodological approaches adopted by researchers.

A central argument developed throughout the report is that robust management research requires coherence between research philosophy, methodology and the research problem. The critical evaluation of ontology, epistemology and research paradigms demonstrated that philosophical assumptions shape the way organisational reality is conceptualised, how knowledge is generated and the methodological choices that researchers make. In this respect, the report argued that pragmatism provides the most appropriate philosophical foundation for investigating the relationship between employee training and organisational performance because it accommodates methodological pluralism and supports the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for DBA research, where the objective extends beyond theoretical explanation to generating knowledge that is both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

The critical appraisal of the empirical study by Onikoyi *et al.* (2023) reinforced the importance of philosophical and methodological alignment in management research. While the study demonstrated methodological rigour through its quantitative design and statistical analysis, the appraisal also identified limitations relating to philosophical transparency, reliance on cross-sectional self-reported data and limited discussion of ethical governance. These observations highlighted the value of adopting a more explicit philosophical position and a broader methodological approach when investigating complex organisational phenomena such as employee training and organisational performance.

Overall, this report has demonstrated that understanding the effectiveness of employee training requires more than measuring organisational outcomes. It requires careful consideration of the philosophical assumptions that underpin research, the methodological decisions through which evidence is generated and the organisational context in which knowledge is produced. These insights provide a strong conceptual and methodological foundation for the proposed DBA research, which will adopt a philosophically coherent and contextually relevant approach to examining how employee training and development contributes to organisational performance within Nigerian manufacturing companies. By integrating methodological rigour with practical relevance, the proposed study seeks to contribute not only to academic scholarship but also to evidence-informed management practice within the Nigerian manufacturing sector.

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