



Review Article

Workplace Redundancy and Retrenchment in Nigeria's Public Sector: Evidence from Mdas Gombe State

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates redundancy and retrenchment in Nigeria's public sector, drawing on evidence from Ministries, Departments, and Agencies in Gombe State. Grounded in labour process theory and the political economy of work, it argues that workforce reductions are shaped by institutional inefficiencies, neoliberal reforms, and fiscal austerity. Rather than purely economic decisions, these practices reflect shifting state priorities and power asymmetries. Redundancy policies often exacerbate inequality, weaken employment security, and erode worker identity. The paper advocates for socially responsive employment frameworks that reconcile organizational efficiency with equity, worker protection, and the broader goals of decent work in developing economies.

Keywords: Workplace redundancy; Retrenchment; Public sector employment; Labor process theory; Neoliberal reforms; Employment relations; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, workplace redundancy and retrenchment have grown an importance within Nigeria's public sector. Even though they are frequently presented as cost-cutting, administrative, or prudential measures, they still have significant institutional and social repercussions. These actions are used in numerous Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) not just to get rid of extra labor but also to bring public institutions into line with budgetary reform plans and neoliberal efficiency principles. (Elegbede, Gbajumo-Sheriff, & Olusegun, 2025).

However, in reality, redundancy frequently goes beyond economic reasoning and represents systemic conflicts between social welfare and state efficiency as government agencies attempt to strike a balance between job security and payroll restrictions. This is

especially noticeable in states like Gombe, where recent workforce verification efforts and the layoff of unnecessary employees have been justified by rhetoric about fiscal accountability and anti-corruption, but they have caused anxiety among employees who are facing uncertain futures (Adetayo, 2024; Ibrahim & Uba, 2023).

Beyond its administrative appearance, redundancy is ingrained in the Nigerian state's institutional and sociopolitical structure. Retrenchment policies are socially and politically sensitive since public sector employment has historically been a major source of economic stability and social mobility. Research indicates that when retrenchment exercises are handled badly, they can lower organizational productivity, damage employee morale, and undermine trust in management (Okonkwo & Agba, 2022; Adegoke, 2021).

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Such activities also run the risk of escalating perceptions of procedural injustice, ethnic bias, and favoritism in Nigeria's bureaucratic environment. According to Eze and Onu (2020), redundancies in the public sector are usually viewed through the prisms of marginalization and inequality, leading impacted personnel to doubt the impartiality and openness of administrative choices. Redundancy in MDAs is therefore not a neutral technical act; rather, it is an expression of bureaucratic control and power dynamics influenced by political economic dynamics.

The Labour Process Theory (LPT) offers a theoretical framework for comprehending redundancy as a type of managerial control ingrained in larger bureaucratic and capitalist systems. A logic that applies to contemporary public bureaucracies was first illustrated by Braverman (1974), who showed how capitalist production restructures function to solidify management authority. Applying this concept to public-sector reforms, modern scholars contend that redundancy is a means of redefining capabilities and disciplining labor in austerity situations (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023; Oladeinde, 2022). Nevertheless, micro-level studies of justice and fairness must be added to such structural theories. By examining procedural, distributive, informational, and interpersonal aspects, Organizational Justice Theory (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt et al., 2015) provides important insights into how workers view the legitimacy of redundancy procedures. When retrenchment is seen as unjust, it undermines compliance, organizational citizenship, and institutional trust (Onyishi & Ugwu, 2019).

Redundancy and retrenchment in the Nigerian public sector can be examined holistically by combining the labor process and organizational justice frameworks. Organizational Justice Theory clarifies how employees perceive and react to such changes, whereas Labour Process Theory reveals how managerial and institutional logics frame workforce cutbacks. This dual viewpoint is especially pertinent to

Gombe State's MDAs, where changing governance agendas, fiscal limits, and bureaucratic reforms collide. Therefore, the research makes the case that redundancy in this setting is a contentious social practice mediated by institutional power relations and notions of justice, as well as a result of structural economic rationalization (Musa & Yahaya, 2024; Bello, 2023). One of the biggest gaps in Nigeria's public and industrial sectors is the lack of comprehensive theoretical explanations for redundancy in subnational bureaucracies.

Therefore, the purpose of this theoretical study is to examine the conception, implementation, and experiences of redundancy and retrenchment in the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of Gombe State. It investigates the underlying financial and structural forces behind workforce reduction, the managerial reasoning behind these actions, and the fairness of these procedures for the impacted workers. The research specifically poses the following question: How are retrenchment and redundancy discursively constructed and justified in Gombe's MDAs? What financial and structural factors influence these choices? How much do retrenchment procedures adhere to or depart from distributive and procedural justice principles? What are the wider socioeconomic ramifications of these procedures, and how do employees perceive and oppose them? By posing these queries, the study portrays redundancy as a theoretical and political phenomena that calls for a socially responsive framework to comprehend work, power, and justice in Nigeria's changing public sector, rather than just as an administrative act.

Conceptualizing Redundancy and Retrenchment

The concepts of redundancy and retrenchment occupy central positions in the discourse on employment relations, organizational restructuring, and public-sector reform. Redundancy is generally understood as the involuntary termination of employment arising from an employer's operational requirements

rather than an employee's misconduct or incapacity. It typically occurs when a role or position ceases to exist due to reorganization, downsizing, or technological change (Olusegun, Gbajumo-Sheriff & Elegbede, 2025). In the Nigerian Labour Act (CAP L1, Laws of the Federation, 2004), redundancy is defined as an involuntary and permanent loss of employment caused by excess labour in an establishment.

Retrenchment, on the other hand, is a broader term referring to deliberate workforce reduction initiated by management to enhance efficiency, control costs, or adapt to new strategic directions (Okonkwo & Agba, 2022). While redundancy and retrenchment are sometimes used interchangeably, redundancy is more specific implying that the job itself disappears whereas retrenchment may include selective layoffs or performance-related dismissals. In public-sector contexts, retrenchment has also become a tool for fiscal rationalization and administrative reform (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023).

In Nigeria, both concepts have acquired a socio-political dimension. Employment in public institutions is not merely an economic arrangement but a form of social contract between the state and citizens (Eze & Onu, 2020). Consequently, redundancy and retrenchment evoke anxieties over fairness, job security, and social mobility. These concepts, therefore, extend beyond managerial vocabulary to represent processes that reconfigure the moral economy of work and citizenship in the Nigerian state (Bello, 2023).

Historical and Institutional Context of Redundancy in Nigeria's Public Sector

Nigeria's public sector's history of layoffs and retrenchments is indicative of larger political and economic changes. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pushed Nigeria and other African nations to privatize state-owned businesses, cut payrolls, and streamline public services during the 1980s and

1990s structural adjustment period (Adegoke, 2021). Retrenchment and redundancy were used as fiscal austerity measures by these programs. Despite their stated goal of modernizing governance, they frequently resulted in a large loss of jobs and damaged workers' faith in government agencies.

Similar reformist inclinations continue to exist in the Fourth Republic (1999–present) under the pretexts of "right-sizing" and "public service efficiency." To get rid of "ghost workers" and lower salary bills, the federal and state governments, notably Gombe State, have conducted workforce audits and personnel verification exercises on a regular basis (Adetayo, 2024). Although such actions save expenses, they usually make it difficult to distinguish between true change and secret retrenchment.

Institutionally, Political favoritism, a lack of accountability, and inadequate performance review procedures are characteristics of the bureaucratic structures that underpin Nigerian public employment (Ibrahim & Uba, 2023). Because of this, decisions about redundancy are susceptible to bias and manipulation, which calls into question the impartiality and transparency of the process. Retrenchment decisions, as noted by Onyishi and Ugwu (2019), frequently reflect institutional cultures of political allegiance, ethnic balancing, and preference rather than just administrative efficiency. Therefore, it is impossible to comprehend redundancy and retrenchment in Nigeria without considering the interaction of political power, bureaucratic norms, and budgetary reform goals.

Labour Process Theory and Redundancy

Based on Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital (1974), Labour Process Theory (LPT) offers a fundamental paradigm for understanding redundancy as a management control mechanism as opposed to a neutral technological adjustment. According to Braverman, management constantly

reorganizes labor under capitalist organization in order to enhance control, efficiency, and profit often through technological substitution, deskilling, and surveillance. Even though LPT was created for industrial capitalism, it is still applicable to comprehending management practices in the public sector, where labor power is reclaimed through changes that are frequently presented as rationalization (Oladeinde, 2022).

Redundancy exercises are commonly explained in Nigeria's MDAs as being required to eradicate corruption and inefficiency. However, these acts also serve as control and discipline methods. According to Adeleke and Yusuf (2023), the introduction of contract or casual labor frequently occurs concurrently with workforce downsizing, so undermining job security and collective bargaining ability. As a result, redundancy turns into a tactic for reinventing the labor process and producing a more obedient and adaptable workforce that supports political or management goals.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of labor-process analysis, redundancy represents a reorganization of the state-worker power dynamic. Employee awareness and dedication to company objectives are altered when they believe their positions are unstable and their roles are readily replaced. This supports Braverman's argument that managerial restructuring alters employees' identities and feeling of agency in addition to job procedures. Redundancy jeopardizes the moral order of work itself in MDAs, since public employment is typically seen as reliable and respectable (Musa & Yahaya, 2024).

Organizational Justice and Employee Perceptions of Retrenchment

While Organizational Justice Theory (OJT) discusses the psychological and subjective components of how employees feel legitimacy and justice in the process, LPT sheds light on the structural feature of redundancy. Employee views of fairness in resource distribution and

decision-making processes were the initial definition of organizational justice given by Greenberg (1990). Distributive justice (fairness of results), procedural justice (fairness of procedures), informational justice (adequacy and honesty of explanations), and interpersonal justice (respectful treatment) are the four aspects that Colquitt et al. (2015) extended it into.

These notions of fairness become crucial in situations of layoffs. Perceived unfairness during redundancy causes emotional tiredness, poor performance, and organizational mistrust, according to Okonkwo and Agba (2022). Employee perception of management legitimacy in public-sector settings is influenced by procedural justice clarity, transparency, and consistency of retrenchment criteria (Eze & Onu, 2020). Redundancy undermines trust in institutional justice systems when it seems selectively applied or politically driven.

Additionally, interpersonal and informational fairness are crucial in reducing the psychological effects of losing a job. Workers frequently react less hostilely and more acceptingly when they receive prompt explanations, counseling, or compensation. However, workers frequently feel confused and resentful as a result of Nigerian public organizations' poor communication around redundancy choices (Bello, 2023). Justice frameworks thus emphasize that the issue of redundancy in MDAs is not only economic but also moral and psychological, as it relates to how employees perceive their treatment by the government.

Integrating Labour Process and Justice Perspectives: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis

Combining the normative perspective of Organizational Justice Theory with the structural perspective of Labour Process Theory is necessary to have a thorough conceptual understanding of redundancy and

retrenchment in Nigeria. OJT describes how employees encounter, fight, and validate these processes, whereas LPT explains why redundancies occur by highlighting systemic imperatives of control, austerity, and efficiency. Together, they show that redundancy is a location of moral negotiation as well as a tool for structural change.

This integration is especially pertinent to the MDAs in Gombe State. In addition to being management acts, workforce rationalization initiatives, payroll audits, and fiscal changes are ingrained in the lived experiences of employees, who interpret them in terms of security, legitimacy, and fairness (Ibrahim & Uba, 2023; Musa & Yahaya, 2024). Thus, redundancy is a dialectic between human cost and institutional necessity. The integrated approach emphasizes that understanding public-sector layoffs requires looking at the intersections of political and economic imperatives with labor relations and notions of justice.

As a result, this research views layoffs and redundancies as socially entrenched phenomena rather than merely administrative measures. The Nigerian state's political economy, the bureaucratic logic of control, and the moral implications of justice all have an impact on them. In Nigeria's changing public sector, this theoretical synthesis offers a foundation for examining why retrenchment continues despite its negative effects and how more compassionate and open frameworks might balance organizational effectiveness with social justice (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023; Olusegun et al., 2025).

Redundancy and retrenchment in Nigeria's public sector, especially in Gombe State's MDAs, function at the nexus of social justice, economic reform, and management rationalization, according to the conceptual assessment. Although they are frequently defended as tools for administrative effectiveness and budgetary restraint, they also speak to more fundamental concerns about

justice, authority, and control. A strong analytical framework for examining these dynamics is provided by the combination of organizational justice theory and labor process theory. These two perspectives on redundancy highlight the necessity for policies that manage public employment in a way that respects the values of equity, dignity, and procedural clarity in addition to achieving economic efficiency.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Justice Theory (OJT) and Labor Process Theory (LPT) serve as the main theoretical pillars of this work. By combining these theories, a multifaceted understanding of redundancy and retrenchment is made possible, connecting micro-level conceptions of legitimacy and justice with macro-structural forces of control and efficiency. OJT stresses the moral and psychological factors that influence employees' experiences and responses, whereas LPT places redundancy within the political economy of work. When combined, these theories offer a thorough analytical framework for comprehending layoffs and redundancies in Nigeria's Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).

Labour Process Theory (LPT)

The Marxist critique of capitalist labor relations served as the foundation for Labour Process Theory, which Harry Braverman popularized in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974). In order to keep control, maximize efficiency, and extract surplus value, Braverman maintained that management continuously restructures work. Employees frequently lose their independence throughout this process, become deskilled, and come under increased managerial scrutiny. Although LPT was first used in private industrial settings, later researchers have expanded its application to public bureaucracies, showing how managerial reforms and restructuring, including redundancy, serve comparable control and

rationalization purposes (Thompson, 1990; Oladeinde, 2022; Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023).

Application to the Public Sector

Reformist arguments of "right-sizing," "cost efficiency," and "modernization" have been used to defend layoffs and redundancies in Nigeria's public sector. But according to Olusegun, Gbajumo-Sheriff, and Elegbede (2025), these practices are not neutral technical corrections; rather, they are forms of administrative discipline intended to establish control, curtail worker resistance, and reorganize labor relations. Adegoke (2021) claims that the implementation of short-term contracts and performance-based evaluations frequently accompany retrenchment operations in Nigerian bureaucracies, indicating a move away from steady, career-based employment and toward flexible and unstable labor arrangements.

Redundancy drills are a response to governmental orders to streamline governance and financial constraints within Gombe State's MDAs. However, they can create a culture of insecurity and subservience among employees who are afraid of being fired. Braverman's (1974) claim that restructuring is a managerial tool used to divide and discipline the workforce is consistent with this dynamic. Accordingly, redundancy in Gombe's governmental institutions might be interpreted as a component of a larger labor process restructuring in which compliance, power, and control are renegotiated in the name of efficiency (Musa & Yahaya, 2024).

Theoretical Implications

Thus, LPT contributes to the understanding of the ideological and structural causes of layoffs and redundancies. Instead of seeing these practices as discrete administrative decisions, it sees them as part of the capitalist and bureaucratic drive to rationalize labor. According to the idea, workforce reduction is a technological and political act that reflects managerial power, governmental interests, and

the demands of international neoliberal reforms (Bello, 2023; Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023). According to this viewpoint, redundancy is a social process that reshapes the power dynamics between the state (as employer) and employees (as subordinates), rather than solely an economic adjustment.

Organizational Justice Theory (OJT)

Employee perceptions of justice in organizational procedures and results are the main emphasis of Organizational Justice Theory, which was developed by Greenberg (1990) and extended by Colquitt et al. (2015). Perceptions of justice have an impact on commitment, trust, and motivation, especially during delicate procedures like restructuring, layoffs, and redundancies. Four important dimensions are distinguished by the theory:

- The perceived fairness of results, such as compensation or redeployment, is known as distributive justice. Fairness of the decision-making procedures used to arrive at conclusions is known as procedural justice.
- Adequacy and truthfulness of explanations given to impacted employees is known as informational justice.
- Interpersonal Justice: the level of dignity and respect given to workers in encounters.
- Employees may get resentful, exhibit low morale, or act counterproductively when they see injustice in any of these areas (Onyishi & Ugwu, 2019; Okonkwo & Agba, 2022).

Application to Redundancy and Retrenchment

Important insights on how employees in Nigeria's public sector understand redundancy choices can be gained from the Organizational Justice Theory. Employees are frequently left out of participatory decision-making processes and communication regarding layoffs is opaque in many MDAs. According to Eze and Onu

(2020), widespread perceptions of discrimination and favoritism are caused by a lack of procedural and informational justice. Furthermore, retrenched workers' mental suffering is made worse by a lack of interpersonal respect, such as when counseling or compassionate treatment is not provided (Bello, 2023).

Post-redundancy results are also influenced by feelings of justice. While employees who feel unfairly treated may rebel, file a lawsuit, or stop working for the company, those who feel fairly treated are more inclined to accept layoffs as a necessary organizational requirement. Making sure procedural and distributive justice is crucial for preserving institutional credibility in the setting of Gombe State, because choices on layoffs are entwined with political and financial factors (Ibrahim & Uba, 2023; Adetayo, 2024).

Theoretical Implications

OJT emphasizes that redundancy has ethical and psychological repercussions in addition to its financial use. The legitimacy of retrenchment procedures is determined by fairness in decision-making, openness in communication, and respect in treatment. Thus, the theory highlights that the efficacy of redundancy policies is contingent upon their implementation and perception in addition to their financial results. OJT offers a crucial framework for examining the validity of managerial actions from the viewpoints of employees in Gombe's MDAs, where layoff

Theoretical Propositions for the Study

The following conceptual claims are put forth in this work based on the synthesis of organizational justice and labor process theories:

1. Structural Proposition: Fiscal austerity, neoliberal reforms, and bureaucratic rationalization are structural forces that reshape power relations between the state and its workforce, resulting in redundancy

exercises are frequently politically delicate (Musa & Yahaya, 2024).

Integrating Labour Process and Organizational Justice Perspectives

Although OJT and LPT come from different academic backgrounds Marxist political economy and social psychology, respectively their combination provides a richer and complementary paradigm for comprehending retrenchment and redundancy in Nigeria. Redundancies are explained by labor process theory, which places them within the structural imperatives of cost containment, bureaucratic reform, and control. On the other side, organizational justice theory focuses on how employees perceive fairness, legitimacy, and moral worth in order to understand how they experience and interpret redundancies.

By combining the two theories, redundancy is revealed as a twofold phenomenon: a moral process mediated by views of justice (as proposed by OJT) and a managerial approach of control (as proposed by LPT). This synthesis is essential for examining the unique circumstances of Gombe State's MDAs, where bureaucratic traditions, political power, and financial limitations combine to create intricate retrenchment dynamics (Ibrahim & Uba, 2023; Bello, 2023). According to Adeleke and Yusuf (2023), this kind of integration is in line with recent demands in sociological research for multi-level theoretical frameworks that encompass both the macro-structural and micro-experiential aspects of work.

and retrenchment in Gombe State's MDAs (Braverman, 1974; Oladeinde, 2022).

2. Procedural Proposition: The legitimacy of redundancy procedures and the level of acceptance or opposition among impacted employees are greatly influenced by employees' sense of procedural and distributive justice (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt et al., 2015).
3. Integrative Proposition: Whether

redundancy results in institutional efficiency or social alienation depends on how managerial control (LPT) and justice views (OJT) interact (Okonkwo & Agba, 2022; Musa & Yahaya, 2024).

4. Contextual Proposition: Local bureaucratic culture is a crucial factor in how retrenchment is implemented and experienced, as the distinct political-administrative climate of Gombe State affects both structural and perceptual aspects of redundancy (Adetayo, 2024; Ibrahim & Uba, 2023). The theoretical framework concludes by emphasizing that administrative or economic reasoning alone is insufficient to explain redundancy and retrenchment in Nigeria's public sector. While Organizational Justice Theory reveals their moral and psychological components in influencing workers' behavior, Labour Process Theory reveals their structural foundations in managerial control and financial rationalization. The study creates a strong theoretical lens that can handle both the macro and micro levels of investigation by combining both viewpoints. By placing redundancy and retrenchment within Gombe State's MDAs as both institutional imperatives and social experiences reflecting tensions between organizational justice, state efficiency, and the lived realities of work in Nigeria's public sector, this integrated framework will serve as the basis for the analysis that follows.

Theoretical Position of the Study

The critical sociological and theoretical stance taken in this research sees workplace redundancy and retrenchment in Nigeria's public sector as socially created and politically mediated processes rather than just as administrative or economic necessity. The study makes the case that the

larger institutional logics of legitimacy, power, and control that shape employment relations in the public sector are ingrained in redundancy and retrenchment. This paper conceptualizes redundancy as a moral process influenced by workers' ideas of justice as well as a structural tool of managerial control, drawing on Labour Process Theory (LPT) and Organizational Justice Theory (OJT).

According to Labour Process Theory, redundancy in Gombe State's Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) is a managerial tactic used in the context of neoliberal reform and fiscal austerity to restructure labor relations, rationalize costs, and strengthen bureaucratic control (Braverman, 1974; Oladeinde, 2022; Adeleke & Yusuf, 2023). It is a reflection of governmental institutions' ongoing efforts to enforce efficiency measures that frequently put administrative interests ahead of worker autonomy. Redundancy is therefore viewed as a component of the political economy of public sector restructuring in Nigeria rather than as a neutral reaction to overstaffing.

On the other hand, the moral and perceptual aspects of layoffs and redundancies are highlighted by organizational justice theory. Employees' perceptions of fairness in processes, results, communication, and interpersonal treatment play a major role in whether they accept or oppose redundancy policies (Greenberg, 1990; Onyishi & Ugwu, 2019; Okonkwo & Agba, 2022). Perceptions of injustice tend to increase animosity, lower trust, and threaten organizational legitimacy in Gombe State, where retrenchment exercises frequently lack transparency and participation.

By combining these two theoretical schools, the study adopts the stance that layoffs and redundancies are manifestations

of management ideology and state authority, implemented under the guise of reform but perceived by workers as tools of marginalization and control. A comprehensive understanding of redundancy as a social experience as well as a structural requirement is made possible by this dual interpretation. Thus, the main argument of this study is that retrenchment and redundancy in Nigeria's public sector are a reflection of the interaction between

management control and notions of justice, leading to results that go beyond simple economic rationale. They stand for the conflict between workers' demands for justice and dignity in public employment and the state's drive for efficiency. As a result, the study presents a critical sociological viewpoint that urges a reconsideration of redundancy procedures due to its social, ethical, and political ramifications for Nigerian labor relations.

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