

THE WORK ETHIC OF NIGERIAN WORKERS AND ITS EFFECTS ON PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

The poor attitude to work of Nigerian workers has been a source of concern to most employers; most Nigerian workers have imbibed bad work ethic therefore affecting their productivity. A significant proportion of Nigerian workers engage in various unethical practices, which are not in the interest of their employers and the organizations in which they work. Despite wage increase, the attitude of Nigerian workers especially in the public sector has not changed significantly. Therefore the increase productivity that is expected as a result of increase in wages has been an illusion. This paper examined the work ethics of Nigerian workers and comparison was made between the private and public sector workers. The papers also focused on reasons for the bad work ethics and some ways of redressing it to ensure better productivity.

Introduction

Employees are normally full of enthusiasm when they are newly employed more especially when the job they are engaged in conform with their expectations. In Nigeria most employees as soon as they assume duty, join the existing workers in the laissez-faire attitude to work. The normal slogan of most Nigerian workers is if you can't beat them you join them. Most workers have continued to join the train of workers with bad ethical attitude in work places, which has resulted in the low productivity of Nigerian workers. No matter how good the plans are or how efficient the organization is, nothing happen until the people who make up the organization are stimulated to perform. The resources of organization comprise of money, material, machinery and men. Flippo, E. B. (1980) stated tht 'Humans constitute the greatest resource on the planet ranking only slightly below the angels.' These human resources are the only resource which is most difficult to manage. There has been a problem of productivity in the country, due to a lot of bad work ethic on the part of Nigerian workers.

In considering the work ethic of the Nigerian worker whether in the private or public sectors we would first consider how people view work whether salary or non-salary job.

For many people, work is the least rewarding part of their lives. The hours they spend each week at work are often hours of endurance rather than hours of pleasure. For others work is a necessary evil'. Something which has to be done to earn a living but which brings little personal satisfaction. Famines, C. J. and Milbourn, G. (1985) said that if you ask people why they work, the answer would vary a great deal, many people would respond in terms of money or what the money earned allows them to do. Others would be more interested in the challenge their job offers and the potentials to achieve. People with high levels of social needs may see their employment as being the primary way of satisfying those needs, there will always be a certain percentage of wealthy bored or retired people who work for something to do. There are of course countless reasons why people work and why their jobs are important'. Times of high employment, many feel grateful to have jobs even though they do not particularly enjoy the work they do. On the other hand, other people find their work interesting and rewarding, especially if it gives them the opportunity to make full use of their skills and abilities. If their wages and working conditions are good, so much the better.

Mcgregor Douglas (1960) propounded two theories, X and Y. Theory X states that human beings naturally dislike work while Theory Y states that an average human being likes to work and would always like to take responsibility. The two theories corroborate on how people perceive work.

Motives Of Employers

The motives of an employee and the perception of how its own objectives are being fulfilled at work contribute substantially to the work attitude of a worker. An understanding of the motives which inspire men to work is essential for good understanding of workers attitude to works, the objectives of the employer and those of the employees have to be reconciled so that both aim for a common goal. In management this is referred to as 'Principle of Harmony of Objectives'. Although

an employee may be in his job simple to get all he can from it, the good employer channels his effort in such a way that the employer's needs are also satisfied.

Work Ethic

Ethic is defined in Websters Dictionary as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation". Therefore we would describe work ethic as just and fair conduct at work to achieve maximum productivity which goes beyond observing laid down laws and regulations of the work place. It means compliance with moral obligations of good performance at work and behaving in a way people ought to act to contribute maximally to organizational goals.

Determinants Of Good Work Ethic

There are many factors that contribute to workers' work ethic and to achieve the best from an employee, an employer would need to examine some of these factors to see how much the working condition allows for a good work ethic.

Sociological And Cultural Background

(i) The sociological and cultural background of a worker plays a very important role in the determination of his attitude to work, some tribes are naturally hardworking and have good attitude to work. Also the family trait of a particular worker may also determine his attitude to work. In some family, they may be generally lazy while the trait of another may be that of hard work.

Working Conditions

(ii) The working conditions to a large extent determine the ethic of a worker at work. The working condition include the following:

- (a) Wages and salaries.
- (b) Facilities available for job performance.
- (c) Good working environment.
- (d) Opportunity for achievement.
- (e) Training opportunities.
- (f) Fringe benefits.

Reward System

The reward system in an organization would also play a major rule in the work ethic of the workers. The reward system relates to effort and incentives and offences and discipline. Organization's incentive system co-ordinates the organization's reward with its workers' efforts, while the disciplinary system co-ordinates the organization's punishment with workers' offences. If efforts are not adequately rewarded or offences appropriately punished it would lead to bad work ethic.

Comparison Of The Private And Public Sectors

Public sector workers could be described as those working in Government establishments and parastatals; these include Government Ministries, institutions and parastatals. The wages and conditions of service of the public sector workers are based on grade levels as determined by the Federal or State Government. While some groups of Government workers like doctors and university teachers have their salary scale different from the general salary scale for public servants. Some Government owned parastatals are now either privatized or commercialized and they now fix their salaries and conditions of service based on what is obtainable in the private sector. Private sector workers are people working in sectors other than the public sector.

Factors Affecting The Work Ethic Of Workers

The following factors affect the work ethic of workers and they have significant effect on the productivity of workers.

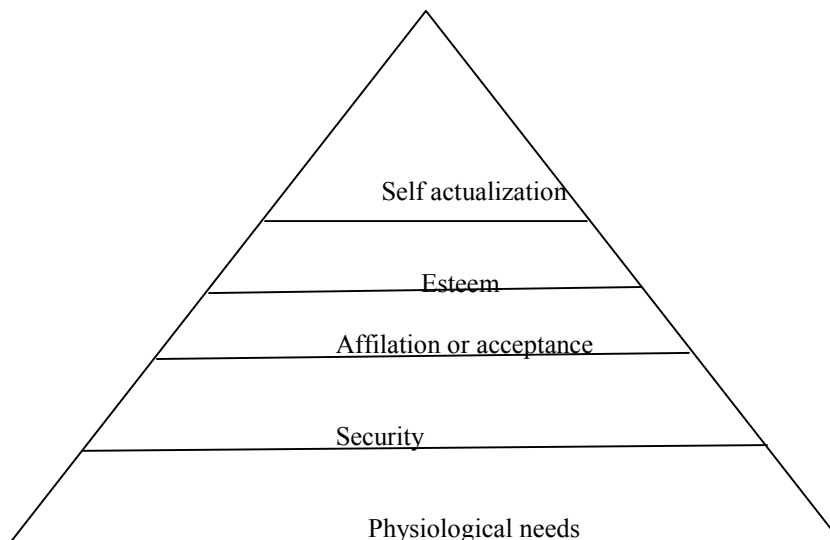
1. Sociological And Cultural Background

The cultural and sociological conditions would affect the work ethic in the same way whether in private or public sector, as this relates to social or family traits or religious belief. If a worker has a social trait of being very lazy, he would still display the laziness whether he is in a private or public sector. Nigeria is a heterogeneous country and each group has its different trait, therefore the social and religion do not affect all Nigerian workers the same way since we have diverse social, cultural and religious beliefs.

2. Working Conditions Wages And Salaries

Wages and salaries play an important role in determining the ethic of a worker. If a worker believes that he is not adequately rewarded for his efforts, he is likely to develop a bad work ethic. Generally, it is believed that the poor pay structure in the public service in the past has contributed to poor working habit of our public servants. In most private sectors where good profit is earned, workers are paid good salaries and workers are properly monitored to ensure that he justifies every kobo he earns, the controls reflected in their work ethic. Generally 110 employee would want to leave on organization where his motives are being satisfied. Like Theory Y of **McGregor Douglas**, people would like to work and take responsibility but this would only be so when a worker feels that he is being adequately remunerated.

The salary of a worker has some degree of relationship on how he would be able to take care of the family needs. If a worker is not able to take good care of his family, he would not always be happy at work. However, the worker's salary does not seem to have direct relationship with work ethic. The salary in some private sector is also very poor even when compared with that of the public sector, however, because of the private sector orientation, the ethic still tends to improve productivity. The recent substantial increase in salaries of public servants has not made significant improvement in the laissez faire attitude of our public servants. This is a clear indication that salary is not the only motivating factor that can improve productivity. **Abraham Maslow (1954)** stated the hierarchy of needs as in the diagram below:



From the hierarchy of needs above, it is assumed that monetary reward will merely satisfy the lower needs hence the reason for little impact of wage increase as booster of workers productivities.

Fredrick I lerberg (1960) perceived money as only an hygiene factor. Therefore in the Nigerian context the recent salary increase for Nigerian workers especially in the public sector was only overdue before it was implemented. Most public servants were already living below the poverty line. For example, before the salary increase, a level 12 officer in the public service could not earn a monthly salary of a clerk in the oil sector.

Fringe benefits are one of the major things that contribute to what we could refer to as the total package of any employee. In most profitable private sector, the fringe benefits are very attractive. This includes good entertainment allowance, domestic servant allowance, free education for about 4 children up to University level, free health and others. The presence of good fringe benefit encourage workers to develop good working ethic as they see the organization as taking care of their own objectives. The labour turnover in this type of employment is very low. On the other hand, the fringe benefits in the public sector is grossly unattractive until recently except for few top public servants and this has effected the work ethic of our public servants.

The result of the low take-home pay of public servants in the past has made them to resort to various unethical practices on the job to improve their take-home pay. There are now engrossed in this unethical practices to the extent that increase in salary does not deter them from such practices.

It will take the government a long time to re-orient our public servants to be committed as it was the case of the early Nigerian public servants, in the past in Nigeria work is regarded as having spiritual meaning buttressed by such behavioural norms as punctuality, honesty, diligence and frugality. The wave of retrenchment in the public service has not helped matters. The inability of our pensioners to get their pension as at when due or the long waiting for the gratuity to be paid, all these fear of the future has contributed in no small measures to unethical behaviour of the public servants.

Facilities Available For Job Performance .

If facilities that are needed for effective performance were not readily available it would affect the morale and work ethic of an employee. It is a known fact that mostly in public sector we usually have inadequate facilities necessary for effective job performance. This contributes to the non-challant attitude to work of many public servants. Let us take for example a hardworking surveyor who is to go to the field for a fieldwork but could not get a vehicle to convey him to the field for more than two weeks. This would definitely lower his morale gradually leading to bad work ethic. Some of the problems of inadequate facilities which affect the work ethic of public servants mostly include poor office, accommodation, poor office equipment and inadequate infrastructural support. The lack of adequate facilities would no doubt affect worker's productivity.

In most well organized private sector, the employers always try as much as possible to make sure that there are adequate facilities for a worker to perform. For example a Secretary in a private sector who is well paid and has all modern equipment needed for a secretarial job would definitely be happy and develop good work ethic than a secretary in a public sector who uses an old manual typewriter that mal-functions most of the time.

Opportunity For Advancement

The work ethic of an average worker would also be determined by the way he sees himself progressing on the job. Workers could not put in their best when they perceive that there are little opportunities for them to progress on the job due to paper qualifications and certain number of s ears, service before advancement with little regard to actual job performance.

In most private sector rules and conditions for advancement is not as bureaucratic as we have in the public sector and there is good flexibility in the private sector to ensure that actual job performance is actually rewarded. In most profitable private sector, Christmas bonus are usually declared and this is completely absent in the public service. In terms of training opportunities we could say that training opportunities abound both in the private and public sector. Over the years, the public sector has invested so much in the training of its personnel but the training has not brought the desired result because the training has not been matched with appropriate motivation. In a situation where a staff has been sent on study leave and he has to wait for over two years before he is placed on the appropriate salary grade after his course is a very common feature in the public service.

3 Reward System

The reward system of most organization does not encourage good work ethic. In most public sector organizations an officer would be promoted even when he is not working hard because his counterparts are promoted. When this is done, it does not encourage hard work. There must be a way of reward effort and punish offences as adequately as possible in any organization. The reward system in most private sectors is better than in the public service because in the private sector in most cases there is a relationship between effort and reward.

Vroom Victor .H. (1964) in his Valency-Expectancy Theory articulates the concept of effort and reward as a cardinal factor in motivation. Empirical evidences have shown that many Nigerians do not perceive any satisfactory relationship between their effort and their organization's reward for their effort.

We shall now examine some of the workers ethic and compare the situation in both private and public sectors.

1. Staying On The Job

In most private sectors, worker's tend to stay on their jobs than those in the public sector. The syndrome of not on sit' is common in the public sector. In most cases an official may be away from work for hours especially in the public sector for private business. This is because the person needs extra income to make ends meet. The personnel control in the public sector is very weak unlike in the private sector. For example teachers in private schools works harder than the counterparts in public schools, not because their pay is higher, but because of effective personnel control.

2. Lateness To Work

This is a common feature in both private and public sector but it seems to be more rampant in the public sector. For example, lateness is not common in most bank and other commercial houses but in our Ministries where work starts by 8.00am, you may not get anybody to attend to you until after 9.00am. Successive governments in Nigeria have always tried to instil the principle of early arrival at work on our public servants, but there is yet to be any significant improvement.

4 Absenteeism

Absenteeism is more common in the public sector than in the private sector. The degree of control on the worker in the public sector is not as stringent as in the private sector and this is one of the of the reasons why absenteeism is very common. In the private sector the principle of 'hire and fire' is strictly adhered to but in the public sector one has to go through rigid procedures before a confirmed officer could be sacked.

Poor Human Relations

Job satisfaction is lacking for many Nigerian employees but the lack of job satisfaction is more rampant in the public sector. The lack of job satisfaction always leads to poor attitude to work and bad human relations. In most cases, employees relate badly to many people who patronize their offices for one business or the other and these poor attitudes develop mostly from lack of motivation and job satisfaction.

Lack Of Interest In Work

Many Nigerian workers belong to McGregor Douglas Theory X group that would need to be coerced to work. This is a common feature in both public and private sectors, however because of the improved motivation in some private sectors, the degree is lesser than in the public sector.

Improvement In Productivity Through Improved Work Ethic

The increase in the productivity of Nigerian workers would be an illusion if there is no conscious crusade in changing our orientation towards work. The corruption that has eaten deep into the fabric of this nation has also contributed to inefficiency of our working class who believe that the reward of their effort is being enjoyed by the less privileged few. The work ethic of Nigerian workers would improve if only the employers can ensure the following:

- i **Constant Increase In Wages And Salaries To Match Inflation Rate:**
Workers should not be fighting for their rights by going on strike before an employer increases the wages. Yearly increase in wages and salary in line with the inflation rate would make the worker comfortable rather than an award after so many years of static salary scale which will be offset by attendant increase in prices.
- ii The job insecurity in the Nigerian labour market is too high even both in the private and public sectors, workers have the fear of the future and this make them to find ways of ensuring a better future by engaging in many unethical practices. Carson C. R. (1977) stated that honesty is conditioned by positive security. If workers perceive their jobs as reasonably secure, their attitude to work will be improved.
- iii Social Security: The current wave of crime in Nigeria is a serious concern to the people and this has also affected the productivity of workers. A worker whose area was attacked by a night marauder who killed some people and who was lucky to escape death would be working with the psychological effect of the horrible incident for some days before he gets over it, and during this period his productivity will be seriously effected. Such incident too would be the talk of the town in the environment leading to gossiping in places of work, thus reducing productivity. Government must make a conscious effort to reduce crime.
- iv There must be effort to reduce outside destructions such as environmental disturbances that infringe on rest period. These disturbances are bound to lesson the normal drive of neglect or abandon completely the work he has to do.
- v Employers must make available necessary equipment for the effective achievement of goods.
- vi There must be adequate supervision of employees and good reward and disciplinary system.

Conclusion

Good work ethic is definitely one of the very important factors that improve productivity.. Therefore, for the productivity of Nigerian workers to increase employers must put strategies in place to improve work ethic. The strategies most include information about what medications that would lead to positive outcome on work ethic, identification of action levers that lead to increases in productivity and quality of working life, identifying the context of the organization and the way workers react to work improvements and the general re-orientation of Nigerian workers ethic towards their jobs.

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