



Ethical Behavior of Non-Academic Employee and Performance of Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There is a renewed scholarly and secular effort aimed to repositioning organizations for optimal performance. The educational institutions are also part of this effort especially through the transformational strategies of government. It requires that all workplace factors that are likely to influence performance be properly examined; therefore, this study examined the ethical behavior of non-academic employees of higher institutions. The study was carried out in the universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. From a sample of 2165 non-academic staff of the public universities, data were obtained and analyzed. The findings indicated that there is a positive and significant link between ethical behavior of employees represented by prompt attention to tasks, regularity, integrity and non-discriminatory practices with organizational performance measured by improved service delivery to all stakeholders and increased productivity. The study concluded that ethical conduct among non-academic employees is imperative for realization of performance goals of higher institution and it is recommended that ethical training programs be put in place for employees to enhance ethical competency as a strategic resource for goals.

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1.0 Introduction

There is a growing concern for increased level of work place misdemeanor on the part of employees and management (Trevino and Nelson, 2004; Samson and Lecille, 2007). What this aptly suggests is a renewed effort at ensuring ethical practices that serves all interests and stakeholder. Literature undoubtedly is rich in terms of ethics at work (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Ambrose et al, 2002; Dirks & Ferin, 2002; Trevino and Nelson, 2004; Grandey et al, 2005; Colbert et al, 2009; Hollinger et al, 2011). Ethical practice, in all of these positions has a prominent place in organizational activities and actions aimed at achieving desired goals because as it were, it instills norms and mould a behavioral and attitudinal form that typifies the organization and her activities and creating integrity asset that is valuable among stakeholders.

Ethical culture amongst employees in work organizations has been advanced that it promotes quality interpersonal relationship among work members and adherence to structural composition of work thereby building on the efficiency margins. In fact Morowei (2010) has conceptualized ethical practice as the pivot of the relational approaches that an organization establishes with her external constituents and this in turn reinforces patronage. The thinking here is that an interface exist between ethical conduct and aggregate performance of

work organizations both in terms of stakeholder acceptance, quality service delivery, attainment of efficiency and effectiveness goals.

Importantly, the degree of ineptitude, indolence, and poor work skills amongst workers in public work organizations have attracted concern as they are core elements of the ethical mix of organizations (Greenberg, 2002; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Schminke et al, 2006). This is in addition to customer complaints for unpleasant norms of dishonesty and inequitable practices. Essentially, there exist scholarly works that have dealt with ethical issues in work organizations but with obvious dearth of focus on employee ethical behaviour in academic institutions. These institutions have the primary charge of creating and disseminating knowledge with profound recourse to ethical practices. This is likely to impede performance of the institutions and in this study; we investigate the relationship between ethical behaviour of non academic employees and performance of institution of higher learning (universities) in Nigeria.

1.01 Justification of the study

The government of Nigeria through her transformation agenda is making frantic effort at repositioning the educational sector to achieve its desired objective of providing quality knowledge for national development. The tertiary institutions are highly priced as being strategic to the ultimate goal of human capital development through training and education which they offer. Lybrand, (2008) have noted that one of the primary and strategic attempt at goals is managerial ability to synergize all constituent parts. With this thinking in focus, the non academic employees of the universities are central to the repositioning of the universities for optimal performance. It is not uncommon to argue that there are behavioral trends that symptomize unethical behaviour among employees in public work organizations which the studied sector belongs (Jaja, 2009). Chukwuigwe (2004); Parry (2010) have emphasized and empirically shown that the brazen level of unethical behaviour is the reason for both conceptual and practical misconception of the term bureaucracy. Employees according to the authors do not promptly attend to work tasks thereby making it increasingly difficult for timely attainment of goals. James et al (2007) has equally linked unethical work behaviour in terms of absenteeism and theft to overall productivity goal. What can be simply deduced is that, an aggregation of such counter work productive behaviour is likely to impinge on performance, therefore the dare need to investigate the nature of relationship between ethical behaviour of non academic employees and performance of universities.

2.0 Literature review

The concept of ethics has been vexatiously treated in modern management discourse owing to increased rate of work place failures that are traceable to employee behaviour in relation to customer attention and assigned tasks (Batson et al, 2002; Vallerie, 2007, Imanga, 2008; Erana et al, 2008; Lammers et al, 2010). The many streams of position taken by scholars are also indicative of the fact that social psychology and moral psychology which ethical behaviour practically represents are major forces that describe employees' actions and inactions that culminate to his support for goals. Thau, Aquino & Poorrdiet (2007) in their works, channeled focus on finding out what prompts unethical behaviour which is a deliberate shift or undermining agreeable norms and standards that drives the effort of organization at goals. The authors had found that increased quest for self gain, need to outwit competitive workers and retaliation against organization are primary reason for unethical behaviour which diminishes focused and coordinated efforts at organizational goals.

Myrseth and Fishback, (2009) stressed the saliency of ethical standards as the fore running behaviour from goal setting to full implementation of planned actions which facilitates the attainment of set goals. Their position simply amplifies the dare need for more credible and generally acceptable practices as a thrust for organizational goal. Ethical saliency in achieving desired work goals is also amplified in Shu, Gino and Bazeman (2011). They had argued that though individuals may seemingly take a disproportionate position different from that of the organization in terms of ethical beliefs, which may result to a passive attitude to ethics, adherence to organization prescribed ethics is needed for performance and goals. Ethics in the first instance provides the work codes that guides behaviour and organizational expectation therefore, if such codes are undermined, it amounts to unethical behaviour which according to Shu and Gino (2010) creates unguided and negative behavioral multiplicity that will not be favourable to organizations' attempt at reaching.

Kalza and Bryne (2011) argues that ethical behaviour in work organization reflects a comprehensive set of actions that shows individual readiness to abide by laid down codes, rules and commitment to moral norms that essentially builds integrity asset across work members and the organization. Ethics according to the author is a comprehensive acceptable standards of behaviour that have the end point of ensuring performance both at the micro and macro levels of work. The ethical behavior content of Kalza and Bryne (2011) identify promptness to duty and assigned tasks which are recipes for effective and timely services delivery. The rate at which employees promptly attend to tasks that are assigned by managers ensures that production function is

successfully and timely done. This is increasingly the case in work flow process that requires the close of one task to commence another.

Adherence to workplace rules and regulation has been described as a primary ethical behaviour that needs to be sustained at work. [Bernize et al \(2010\)](#) had attributed failures in indigenous manufacturing firms to poor quality product due to neglect of standards and disregard for work rules and regulations. The violation of workplace rules promote unethical culture that brews non corporative work attitude. The implication of non compliance and disregard for rules and regulation according to [Phillips \(2009\)](#) consequently brew pseudo-relational feuds which ultimately affect productivity negatively and a non-supportive work climate. Contemporary evidence attest to increased rate of absenteeism, irregularity in attendance to work tasks as assigned as being phenomna1 amongst employees ([Parry et al, 2002](#); [Lammers et al, 2010](#); [Ekong, 2012](#)). For instance in [Ekong \(2012\)](#) study of unethical practices among civil servants, it was found that absenteeism and lateness were dominant experiences among workers. The study results portend unethical culture that indicates that much of organizational productive hours are spent without consideration for their far reaching implication on intended goals. Expectedly, employees are to imbibe the practice of regular attention to work tasks and at same time ensure regularity to work in order to undertake strategic roles that facilitate timely and non impeded attention to customers/clients. It simply suggests that behaviour that deviates from regularity impedes expected work outcomes that may not be value-added.

[Christopher and Leebari \(2012\)](#) have found integrity as a core behavioral expression required of managers and subordinates to promote cohesiveness and commitment to goals. It is a positive organizational behaviour that inspires attraction to managerial directives and in turn employee assurances. According to [Christopher and Leebari \(2012\)](#) the integrity constituent amongst work members instigate the premise for customer/client continued patronage and commitment to such organizations. Integrity is an ethical recipe that prepares the platform for adherence to multiple ethical considerations ([Choko, 2010](#)). In other words, integrity formulation has a heuristic characteristic that ensures overall ethical behaviour in work organizations. The discourse on ethics and workplace outcomes is essentially relational which simply suggests that the focus is to establish the nature of empirical links which best prescribe the need for behavioral expressions that help the organization to strategically achieve desired goals. From the following, we hypothesize thus:

H₀₁: *Ethical behaviour relates significantly with organizational performance in institutions of higher learning.*

3.0 Methodology

3.01 Sample

This study is carried out within a mono-cultural setting where similar tasks are carried out. The South-South Region is made up of 6 states with 13 universities (6 federal universities and 7 state owned universities). The number excludes the private owned universities. We have obtained the population of non-academic employees from the establishment units of 8 conveniently sampled (4 state and 4 federal) universities and this summed up to 5314 employees (non-academic) using the [Krejcie and Morgan \(1978\)](#) sample size determination table, we have 2165 as the sample size for the study. Through a stratified random sampling exercise the sample subjects were obtained.

3.02 Data collection

In collecting the data for the study, we have considered the financial resources available and applied cost cutting means that will not diminish the quality of the research as a potent instrument for theory building. First, 2 research coordinators were appointed in each of the universities and we mailed especially to Cross River, Akwa-Ibom and Edo States which were further away from the researcher. A copy of the questionnaire was mailed to the coordinators who in turn made copies of the instrument available to respondents. We allowed the respondents one calendar month to respond to the instrument before retrieval. The coordinator's with whom we constantly exchanged emails on the progress made, retrieved the questionnaire and through courier sent the filled questionnaire. The retrieval was huge in terms of the number, 1816 were retrieved which is 83.8% of the instrument administered.

3.03 Measures

In order to measure ethical behaviour, the [Victor and Coallen \(1987\)](#) 21 item ethical climate scale was adapted. The scale has shown a high reliability Cronbach alpha value of 0.82 when used by [Merana \(2006\)](#). In the case of organizational performance, the study combined [Ezirim \(2004\)](#), [Olotu \(2009\)](#) 16 item scale which was also seen to be reliable in the works of [Peterson \(2012\)](#) with a reliable alpha value of 0.74. In adopting this scale, four

items were however reworded to reflect the nature of services and established productivity parameters that are peculiar to the institutions studied. For example, the item on finding out grams of an industrial product produced daily was changed to what number of students do you normally attend to daily. These were made on 5 point Likert scale of 5 for Strongly Agree to 1 for Strongly Disagree.

4.0 Results

Table 1: Pearson correlation matrix for ethical behavior and performance

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Promptness	1.00	.25**	.46**	.23**	.36**	.64**	.23**
Adherence to Work Rules	.25**	1.00	.33**	.48**	.28**	.35*	.41**
Regularity	.46**	.33*	1.00	.26**	.51*	.30**	.62**
Integrity	.23**	.48**	.26**	1.00	.21*	.20**	.28**
Non Discriminatory/Harassment	.36**	.28**	.51*	.21*	1.00	.37**	.21**
Improved Service Delivery	.64**	.35*	.30**	.20**	.37**	1.00	.62*
Increased Productivity	.23**	.41**	.62**	.28**	.21**	.62*	1.00

** correlation is significant @ 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* correlation is significant @ 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson Correlations between all components of ethical behaviour and performance of higher institutions (universities) were positive and significant at 0.01 level (2 – tailed) this revealed support for the hypothesis stated. This is further explained by the multiple regression analysis which explains the extent to which the predictor explains the behaviour of the dependent variable.

Performance of higher institutions was regressed against the components of ethical behaviour (promptness, adherence, regularity, integrity, non discrimination/harassment). The equation for performance was expressed in the following equation.

$$Y_s = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5$$

where

Y_s = Performance

β_0 = Constant (coefficient of intercept)

X_1 = Promptness

X_2 = Adherence

X_3 = Regularity

X_4 = Integrity

X_5 = Non Discriminatory /Harassment

$\beta_1 - - \beta_5$ = Regression Coefficient

Table 2(a): Coefficient from regression analysis of the studied variables model summary

Model	R	R ²	AdjR ²	Std Error Est	F. Charge	Sig	Distribution
1	.634	.401	.393	.43187	46.234	.000	2.377

(a) Predictors (constant) Promptness Adherence, Regularity, Integrity, Non Discriminatory/Harassment

Table 2(b) ANOVA (b)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Sf	F	Sig
1 Regression	8.811	5	8.811	46.234	.000
Residual	12.869	1810	.187		
Total	21.680	1815			

a Predictors (Constant) Promptness, Adherence, Regularity, Integrity, Non Discriminatory/Harassment

b Dependent Variable: Performance of Higher Institutions (University).

Table 2(c) Coefficients (a)

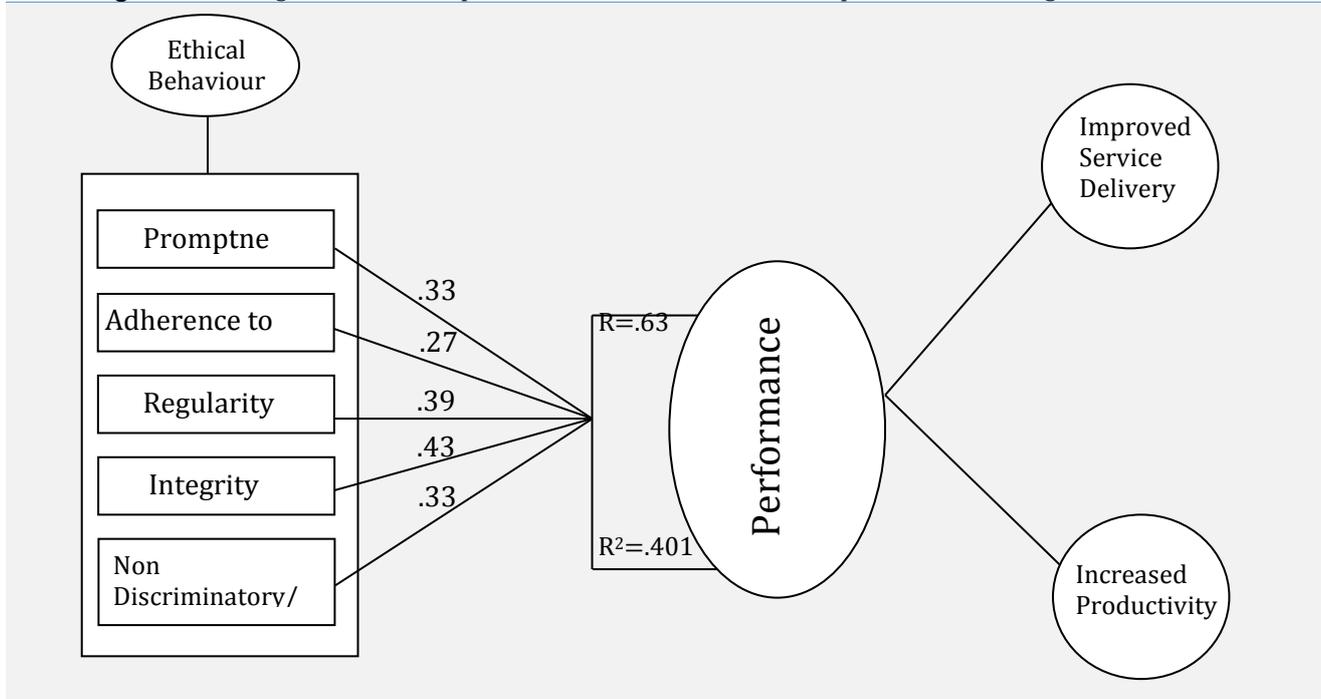
Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		Sig
	Beta	Std Error	Beta	T	
1 (Constant)	1.324	0.38		3.423	.001
Promptness	0.003	0.081	0.339	3.072	0.11
Adherence	0.438	0.079	0.279	1.117	0.00
Regularity	0.416	0.116	0.392	3.221	0.00
Integrity	0.327	0.080	0.435	5.548	0.00
Non Discrimination/Harassment	-0.133	0.086	0.332	2.431	0.01

Dependent Variable: Performance of Higher Institutions (University).

In order to predict the goodness of fit of the regression model, the multiple correlation co-efficient (R) Coefficient of determination (R²) and F-ratio were examined. First the F value of 46.254 (P=0.00) is significant

which mean that the results of the regression did not occur by chance which also implies goodness of fit in predicting the variance of performance in relation to the examined components of ethical behaviour. The R value of .0634 shows a strong positive relationship between ethical behaviour components and performance. Further, the R^2 value of 0.401 suggests that 40.1% of the variation in business performance is explained by ethical behaviour. In the regression, the beta coefficients explained the relative importance of the five components of ethical behaviour in contributing to the variance of performance of higher institutions. Amongst the five components, integrity with $\beta = 0.435$, $t = 5.548$ has the heaviest weight on the criterion variable (performance). $t = 3.221$ and $\beta = 0.339$; $t = 3.072$ respectively. From the study findings, the heuristic model below (fig 1.0) illustrates.

Fig 1.0 Showing the relationship between ethical behaviour and performance in higher institutions



5.0 Discussion of findings

This research attempts to investigate ethical behaviour of non-academic employee and performance of higher institutions. The statistical analysis has shown empirical support for ethical behaviour as a core component of work that relates with performance. This implies the imperatives of ethical conduct among non-academic employees. The findings of the study reinforced [Batson et al \(2002\)](#), [Dinen et al \(2006\)](#), [Imanga \(2008\)](#) views in terms of unethical behaviour and its role on organizational desired outcome. The emphasis on behavioral expression of employees that undermines organizational action towards targeted goals have a vast space in literature ([Shu et al, 2011](#); [Kalza & Bryne, 2011](#)) and the finding of the study reiterates employees' need to ensure goal attainment through ethical conducts that are likely to fast track service delivery for both internal and external constituents of work organizations.

Ethical concerns examined in this study have revealed that employees prompt attention to work tasks, regularity and adherence to work rules are essential incentives for improving on productivity and improved service delivery. [Marcus and Schuler \(2004\)](#) had suggested that low level of productivity is due to the non-challant and poor commitment attitude of public servants. The findings here share both theoretical and practical position with what the author noted. In addition, the integrity component of ethical behaviour and performance conforms to [Christopher and Leebari \(2012\)](#) which established empirically that integrity is an asset for enhanced organizational value. Employees who conform to ethical codes expectedly exhume good sense of integrity characteristically and this describes their behaviour to clients or customers. Ethically oriented employees eschew discriminatory practices that undermine the diversity associated with modern organizations. [DiMaria \(2011\)](#) argued that one of the major challenges of the evolving global network that describes today's work organization is that of harassment and discrimination against minorities at work. The implication is a demoralized work force and in turn affects their attitude to service delivery. The study findings show a strong correlation between unethical conduct in terms of discriminatory practices of non-academic employees and performance measured by productivity. Our findings suggest the centrality of ethical behaviour as in organization instrument for driving their performance goals.

6.0 Conclusion/Policy implications

This study has primarily examined the nature of relationship that exists between ethical behaviour and performance of universities. In order to scientifically conduct this, it has operationalized ethical construct with recourse to extant theoretical underlay using such dimensions like prompt attention to tasks, adherence to rules and regulations, regularity and integrity. The performance of the institutions was measured in relation to desired goal of improved service delivery to all stakeholders (internal and external) and productivity. From the data generated and analysed, it is empirically assertive that ethical behaviour among employees in work organization create a climate that is considered important for achieving goals. Indeed, the various streams of ethical actions are typical of a focused and goal driven organization with employee behaviorally expressing ethical conduct (Ayai & Gino, 2011). The ethical dimensions which the study explored reminisce the basic ethical expectation shown in the ethical codes and standards that require employee compliance.

The findings of the study undoubtedly provide the premise for a more strategic orientation that will instigate ethical actions as a basis for effective functioning of the academic institutions. An appropriate mix of ethical behaviour and actions largely will enhance performance of institutions of higher learning. The study therefore has strongly suggested ethical training to acquire ethical competency which is a strategic resource for reaching goals in terms of improved service delivery and productivity. Capacity building in adherence to work ethics through codes that represent the culture of work is reiterated for delivering high performance.

Suggested for further search

There is no doubt that ethical practices are reliable instrument that guides behaviour of employees and helping to institute a work culture that promote efforts at goals. It will therefore be useful to carry out similar study in other sector especially the evolving sector like telecommunication in Nigeria with high demand for service and satisfaction. It is also important that further works be done in exploring work place structural composition that facilitate adherence to ethics and those that promotes unethical behaviour among employees with a view to erecting frameworks that promote ethical behaviour at work.

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