

Work Ethics and Employees' Performance in Private Universities in Anambra State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between work ethics and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was used and the sample size selected was 166 academic staff. Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation and the result revealed that there is no significant positive relationship between racial discrimination and employees' performance; ethical compliance has a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities and fairness has a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Therefore the study concludes that work ethics has a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study recommended that the management of the private universities should employ motivational strategies as a continuous process in their plan to ensure smooth services and effective employees' performance. It is also important that management of private universities should ensure that these work ethics are made available and adhered to by all members of the staff. The study also recommends that institutions should adopt work ethics to improve employees' performance. The universities should continue to encourage training and additional skills of employees on matters of professional conduct through internal education programs, and networking with other institutions to improve their competency, and policies and procedures should be put in place by the university management towards ensuring the ethical compliance of employees which should continually be put under scrutiny to ensure that they are still effective.

Keywords: work ethics, racial discrimination, ethical compliance fairness, employees' performance

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is something of a subjective topic, but it is nevertheless of immense importance across all areas of business. Ethics consists of the standards of behavior to which we hold ourselves in our personal and professional lives. Ethical behavior is essential for the smooth operation of the organization and a key to achieving performance and long-term sustainability. As such, it establishes the level of honesty, fairness, empathy, ethical compliance and trustworthiness and other virtues by which we hope to identify our personal behavior and our public reputation. In our personal lives, our ethics sets norms for the ways in which we interact with family and friends. In our work place (professional) lives, ethics guides our interactions with customers, clients, colleagues, employees, and shareholders affected by our business practices. The work ethics an individual displays come from his/her values. Our values are dependent on our environment, experiences, and life-long influences. These influences include our parents, teachers, friends, peers, competitors, etc., anyone or anything that has helped to shape or form our opinion of the world.

Towing this line of thought, Meyer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum (2010) found that ethics consists of two things. First, it refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, families, or specific virtues. For example, ethics refers to the standards that impose reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, theft, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. These ethical standards also include those that enjoin the virtues of honesty, compassion, integrity, and loyalty. Workers exhibiting good work ethics are considered eligible for higher positions and more responsibilities. They know that their actions have a direct impact on other people at work. This conscientiousness persuades them to cultivate a responsible outlook on every action they take. These people do not need prodding or constant supervision. They are self-motivated and valuable to their organizations. These workers are highly reliable and are appreciated by their superiors for what they bring to the work place.

Ethical values provide the moral compass by which we live our lives and make decisions: 'doing the right thing' because it's the right thing to do, not because of personal or financial gain. They

also highlight why organizations should focus on creating a shared ethical culture where employees feel empowered to do the right thing rather than simply following a set of rules. The way we make decisions is important for organizations because the wrong decisions or decisions that have been implemented badly can have a significant impact on people's lives and the reputations of organizations. But when we make decisions based on good principles and live by good values, we can improve the lives of others, the experiences they have at work, and make work more meaningful.

Consequent upon this above, the challenges in the workplace, the diverse background of the employees, the impact of globalization and technology have all contributed in making the practice of work ethics very difficult. Managers are increasingly finding out that in making business decisions they select from alternatives that are neither wholly right nor wholly wrong. In such case, there is no clear moral compass to guide leaders through the complex dilemma of what is right or wrong. The study of workplace ethics provides us with the parameters of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It provides the standard against which people can compare their behavior. It provides a focus and common goal. It helps us to deal with managerial mischief which includes illegal, unethical, or questionable practices of individual managers or organizations.

Employee's performance has been identified as the significant key for organizations, whether private or public, to gain competitive advantage and superior productivity. Noticeably, the only enduring competitive advantage in this global economy is a high-quality, well-motivated workforce that is willing to work together as a team to achieved optimum performance. Similarly, Shmailan (2016) asserted that employee performance is an action of what employees do in carrying out the work done by the company. Therefore, It is vital for human resource professionals to define ethical behaviour, identify unethical behaviour, and take steps to create a shared ethical culture that avoids this type of behaviour. Given these observations, the present study attempts to examine the relationship between work ethics and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Unethical workplace behaviour can vary from minor transgressions

to illegal activity, but they are essentially actions that harm the legitimate interests of the organization, its workforce, customers, and wider society. It includes the following: theft, fraud, deception, bullying and harassment, sabotage. This unethical behaviour could result in absenteeism, tardiness, rule-breaking, disengagement, and defensive outbursts and could lead to an increased attrition rate amongst those affected by such unethical behaviour. There are several major ethical issues pertaining to the organizations. Managers are also faced with the problem of evaluating the effect of this unethical behavior on the performance of an organization (Adeyemo, 2012). In addition, unethical behaviour may be found in the advancement of financial gain, such as price-fixing, putting profit above safety, withholding vital information, and misrepresenting facts, is inherent in the workplace. These actions may not necessarily be illegal, but it can be unethical to engage in or encourage this type of behavior. Organizations must deal with the risk of such behaviour becoming custom and practice, and work to emphasize the importance of ethical behaviour when pursuing financial gain. Another important factor is how competent they are in performing their duties, whether they are ethically compliant, trustworthy, transparent, and fair to the organization. Therefore, this study set out to examine the relationship between work ethics and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to examine the relationship between work ethics and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- Ascertain how racial discrimination is related to employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.
- Determine the nature of relationship existing between ethical compliance and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.
- Investigate the nature of the relationship between fairness and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Research Question

- How does racial discrimination relate to employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria?
- What is the nature of relationship existing between ethical compliance and employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria?
- To what extent does fairness influence employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H₀¹: Racial discrimination has no significant positive influence on employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

H₀²: Ethical Compliance has no significant positive influence on employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

H₀³: Fairness has no significant positive effect on employees' performance in private universities in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Concept of Work Ethics

Workplace ethics is a system of moral principles applied in the workplace. It is a whole new scientific term because it combines law theory and politics as much as philosophical and historical documents. Ethics as a term is very flexible and have many different aspects. Workplace ethics provide guidelines for acceptable behaviour by organizations in both their strategy formulation and day-to-day operations. An ethical approach is becoming necessary both for corporate success and a positive corporate image. Especially nowadays ethics in the workplace are obligated because many organizations are only interested in making money despite the ethical costs or the harm they would probably cause to people or even to nature (environmental pollution). Ethics encompasses a set of moral principles and rules of conduct that provide guidance for our behavior (Bernard et al, 2015; GLS, 2015; Ezigbo, 2012).

Moral principles or ethical principle relates to human conduct as regards the rightness or wrongness of a specific action and ends thereof, or beliefs regarding what is good or bad (Bartels, et al. 2015; Bernard et al, 2015; Ezigbo, 2012). This means that ethics is a moral principle that governs a person's behaviour in attaining a common goal in the provision of safety to members of the community (Oyende Adeleke, 2015; Soleymani N, et al. 2012), as well as shared beliefs regarding standards of behavior expected or required by a community or societal group. However, ethics is not only about distinguishing right from wrong but also with the commitment to do what is suitable (Getachew and Mohan, 2016). This means that to be ethical is not a matter of following one's interests or feelings; police officers who follow their feelings may recoil from doing what is right; in fact, one's interests might deviate from what is considered ethical by members of the public. Therefore, work ethics are set of rules outlining the social norms and rules and responsibilities of, or proper practices for, an individual, organisation, group or the society, and are morally accepted by the majority of the people of an organization, or community (Azma Zaineb, 2016; Getachew and Mohan, 2016; Oyende Adeleke, 2015; Müller, et al. 2014). By being moral, employees harness their potentials and efficient service delivery.

However, law enforcement careers come with a number of duties and responsibilities for which moral behaviour is mandatory. It is the moral principles and or ethical stance that shape the police officers' decision making and the exercise of discretion. Widely acknowledged ethical principles include honesty, integrity, openness, fairness, diligence, and respect for the rights of others, (Seid and Mohan, 2016; McCartney, S., & Parent, R. 2015).

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination exists in straightforward actions but also in complex systems of social relations that produce racial inequities in social outcomes. Some analysts view all racial disparities as the result of discrimination; others restrict the concept to those acts intended to limit a group's resources. The first view is too broad, the second too restrictive. Social scientists have made a useful distinction between direct and indirect discrimination. The direct form occurs at points where inequality is generated, usually intentionally. The indirect form develops when the inequitable results of direct discrimination influence later decisions; it

perpetuates and magnifies the original injury. Employee protection at the workplace requires the employer to use the same workplace requirements for all individuals and to ensure that they do not exclude persons in a particular racial group. However, research shows that discriminatory practices persist and manifest themselves in a variety of ways. In working relationships, racial discrimination implies the unfavorable treatment of a person, applicant or employee, on the grounds of belonging to a particular race or because of the personal characteristics associated with the race. Racial discrimination is not, as popularly thought, simply the accumulation of individual acts of unfairness between members of different groups. It consists as well of an elaborate web of institutional arrangements that produces group inequalities, a web that becomes racial discrimination when the groups perceive each other as separate 'races.' Studied throughout the social sciences, these inequalities can involve political power, economic resources, and cultural access.

Ethical Compliance

It is the practice of norms and values by employees of organizations based on expectations of society. Schwartz (2011) find that a minimal ethical compliance would exist in the organizations by the differences in the awareness levels on workplace ethics and it reveal that once the employees are conscious of ethics at workplace they are less affordable to comply with ethical practices of organizations. Thomas & Kamalanabhan (2012) suggest that workplace ethics is highly needed for greater self-compliance among employees. Ngang & Chan (2015) argue that for greater ethical compliance at workplace it is desirable to extricate the employee's views on workplace ethics before they join the organizations. Nair et al., 2017 appeal that organization's efforts to vigilant the employees on disasters at big corporations like Enron and the other corporate scandals that occurred around the world would rather demand the employees to uphold high ethical compliance at workplace.

Ethical compliance is simply being able (by an organization) to count on delivery of any promises made to a cluster of customers as a when due (Ferrell, 2004). Customer value on the hand relate to an expectancy that exchange partner's word, written statement or actions can be relied on. This simply relate to the degree of being benevolence. That is, a situation of one exchange partner (the

organization) being genuinely interested in the wellbeing of the other partner (the customer) and seeking to develop a win-win relationship environment.

Furthermore, because of the critical role ethical compliance play in an organization, some studies have been carried out.

Fairness

Fair evaluation of employees based upon their achievements of individual and group performance and their skills is very necessary for the growth and development of organizations. Employee motivation is positively influenced by fair evaluation. If the evaluation of employees in organization is unfair and unjust, it would lead to their de-motivation which in turn will affect their performance. Treating employees with fairness and respect at work is not only mandatory but, in the long run, it can generate positive economic result for both the employee and the organization. “A large and growing body of empirical evidence from laboratory and field experiments, surveys, and observational data, as well as neuroeconomic research, suggests that workers ‘perceptions of fairness and trust are also key drivers of their work effort’”. A professional educator should exemplify ethical relations with members of her profession by treating them with respect, dignity and fairness as their cooperation and teamwork, which is crucial to their effective service to their students (Dobrin, 2002; Sidgwick, 2015). Among other things, the educator should at all-time refrain from revealing confidential information or make false and derogatory statements concerning colleagues (Davis, 2002).

Employee Performance

Performance comes from the word job performance or employee performance which means work performance or actual achievement achieved by someone. Definition of performance (work performance) is the work quality and quantity achieved by an employee in carrying out his function in accordance with the responsibilities given to him. According to (Al Mehrzi and Singh, 2016) Performance is the result or level of success of a person as a whole during a certain period in carrying out tasks compared to various possibilities, such as work standards, targets or targets or predetermined criteria that have been mutually agreed upon. Furthermore (Yang et al., 2016) state that performance is basically what employees do or do not do. Performance management is the

entire activity carried out to improve the performance of a company or organization, including the performance of each individual and work group in the company. According to Shmailan, 2016, employee performance is an action what employees do in carrying out the work done by the company. Performance in carrying out its functions is not independent, but always relates to employee job satisfaction and the level of reward given, and influenced by individual skills, abilities, and traits.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Ethical Theory

Institutional theory was propounded by William Richard Scott in 1995. This theory states that organizations are

product of social reality that is constructed by human interaction and symbolic and relational systems, routines, and artefacts. It is a theory on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure which considers the processes by which structures, including schemes; rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour. Different components of institutional theory explain how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse (Foote, 2008).

Scott (1995) in defining institution stated that there is “no single and universally agreed definition of an institution’ (workplace) in the institutional school of thought”. He asserts that institutions are

social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. They are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artefacts. Institutions operate at different levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships. Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous.

This framework is selected for this study because of the uniqueness in ways of approach to the notion promoting the ethical structure in the organization. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemes; procedures, standards, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour which is the bases of workplace ethics.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

S/N	Name of Author	Title of the Paper	Year	Methodology	Conclusion
1	Arjay and Joelyn	Work Ethics and Job Performance of Employees in Local Government Unit Philippines.	2022	Descriptive correlational research design.	Local Government Employees may be encouraged to participate in the programs and trainings offered by the city and incorporate ethics into all aspects of their work in order to sustain the delivery of services to its constituents.
2	Cynthia	Workplace spirituality, work ethics, and organizational justice as related to job performance among state university educators in Philippines.	2018	Survey-correlation	The spirit at work can enhance a sense of justice, lead to improved ethical behavior, and action for organizational justice.
4	Obalade and Arogundade	Ethical climate and deviant behavior among employees of selected public and private universities, Nigeria	2019	Multistage sampling technique	Management of public and private university should ensure adequate training of staff and compliance with professional ethics to the occurrence of deviant behavior.
5	Jitendra and PitriRaj	Impact of ethical behavior on employees' performance in the Nepalese commercial banks.	2021	Descriptive research design	Teamwork followed by discipline and racial discrimination is the most influencing factor that explains employee performance in Nepalese commercial banks.
6	Agbionu, Anyalor and Nwali	Correlate of principals' ethical leadership dimensions	2018	Descriptive and correlation research designs	Management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria need to develop and nurture engagement by

		and teachers' job commitment in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.			providing adequate training opportunities for academic staff to increase organizational visibility and ranking.
7	Murage, Sang and Ngure	Ethical Issues in Recruitment, Selection and Employee Performance in Public Universities in Nyeri County, Kenya.	2018	Analytical survey design	Universities should come up with policy on ensuring that ethic and integrity is adhered to during recruitment and selection process.
8	Owusu, and Leburn	Best Work Ethics Practices in Public and Private Institutions of Ghana (Ghana Police Service And Thomas Security).	2020	Descriptive research design	Decision-making ethics encourages loyalty, brings discipline, increases efficiency and productivity, boosts institution reputation and enhance advancement.
9	Muoghalu and Tantua	Workplace Ethics and Employee Commitment of Oil and Gas Companies in Rivers State.	2021	Cross-sectional survey	Management of oil and gas companies should develop a way of finding building integrity among employee to help build trustworthiness and commitment.
10	Ezeanyim and Ezeanolue	Business Ethics and Organizational Performance in Manufacturing Firms in South-East, Nigeria.	2021	Descriptive research design	Decision makers should set use of ethical conducts as priority towards improving organization performance by set adequate resources and commitment to achieve this ends.

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METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The

target population comprised 166 academic staff of the selected private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Due to the manageable size of the population the entire population was use as the sample size for the study. Content validity was adopted. Test retest was used to test the reliability to determine the level of internal consistency of the questionnaire. The results obtained were not the same but highly correlated which implies that the research instrument was reliable for the research work. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation were employed to test the hypotheses and establish the relationship between work ethics and its implications on employees’ performance.

Presentation of Data

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The inferential statistical tool used was Pearson product moment correlation statistics. This was used to find out the extent of relationship between the dimensions of work ethics and employees’ performance.

Hypothesis One

H0¹: There is no significant positive relationship between Racial Discrimination and employees’ performance.

The result of the analysis is presented on table below:

Table 1: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Racial Discrimination and Employees’ performance.

N	Racial Discrimination	Employees’ Performance	P-value	Decision
Racial Discrimination	139	1	-.480**	
Employees’ Performance	139	-.480**	1	
.000 Significant				
Source: Researcher’s Field Survey (2023)				

The result above shows that there is a negative relationship between Racial discrimination and Employees’ performance among academic staff in selected private universities in Anambra State, $r. (139) = -.480, P < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which indicated no significant positive relationship between variables was accepted.

Hypothesis Two

H0²: There is no significant positive relationship between Ethical compliance and Employees’ performance.

The result of the analysis is presented on the table below:

Table 2: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Ethical compliance and Employees’ performance

N	Ethical Compliance	Employees’ Performance	P-value	Decision
Ethical Compliance	139	.510**		
	.000	Significant		
Employees’ Performance	139	.510**	1	

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey Result (2023)

The result above shows that there is a significant positive relationship between Ethical compliance and Employees’ Performance among academic staff in selected private universities in Anambra State, $r. (139) = .510, P < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which indicated no significant positive relationship between variables was rejected.

Hypothesis Three

H0³: There is no significant positive relationship between Fairness and Employees’ Performance.

The result of the analysis is presented on the table below:

Table 3: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Fairness and Employees’ Performance

N	Fairness	Employees’ Performance	P-value	Decision
Fairness	139	.631**		
	.000	Significant		
Employees’ Performance	139	.631**	1	

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey Result (2023)

The result above shows that there is a significant positive relationship between fairness and Employees’ performance among academic staff in selected private universities in Anambra State, $r. (139) = .631, P < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which indicated no significant positive relationship between variables was rejected.

Findings

The result of findings revealed that there is no significant positive relationship between racial discrimination and employees' performance; ethical compliance has a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities and fairness has a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State. Therefore the study concluded that work ethics had a significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

As revealed from the results that work ethics enhance employees' performance in the universities, it is necessary that these universities adopt and implement work ethics such as fairness, integrity, and ethical compliance to improve their services.

The management of private universities should employ motivational strategies as a continuous process in their plan to ensure smooth services and effective employees' performance.

It is also important that management of private universities should ensure that these work ethics are made available and adhered to by all members of the staff. The study also recommends that institutions should adopt work ethics to improve employees' performance.

The universities should continue to encourage training and additional skills of employees on matters of professional conduct through internal education programs, and networking with other institutions to improve their competency.

A clear monitoring and evaluation procedure should be set up to regularly test the work ethics of the employees working for the universities. Policies and procedures should be put in place by the university management towards ensuring the ethical compliance of employees which should continually be put under scrutiny to ensure that they are still effective.

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