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## MORALITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between morality and employee engagement in an organization. The approach adopted is theoretical as it assesses based on extant literature. The result of the study revealed that sound empirical conduct or moral behavior at work improves employee engagement and brings about organizational growth. Also, an improvement in workplace morals and ethical behavior improves employee engagement. Therefore, for the firm to upscale productivity, the organization should drive engagement through an objective ethical and moral behavior at work. It is recommended that management of organizations should have sound morals and ethical behavior, this will improve engagement. Again, organizations should put in place robust corporate governance system, this will guide workplace behavior and morals.

**Keywords:** *Morality, Employee Engagement, Organizations*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Organization is made up of human capital and this is the most important element or asset at work. All other assets of the company are subservient to the human capital. Therefore, there are standard forms of behaviour or ethical conduct expected of employees at work. This standard or prescribed behaviour, norms, regulations and principles are designed by top echelon management to predict engagement of employees in order to drive successful organizations (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013). This standard form of behaviour may be seen as the presence of positive moral values like honesty, sincerity, integrity and trustworthiness that make employees feel positive about their job and organization as a whole. Morality is what would make an employee not go late to work and close when it is expected, the issue of bribery and corrupt practices would not appeal to any employee with such conduct. Even when it becomes the norms of an organization to give 'kick backs' after a contract has been awarded, organization with high level of morality would not be found in such a list. Organisational/employee morality would dissuade window dressing, creative accounting and off-balance sheet transactions in order to create a positive and reputable image in the society. Behavioural conducts and ethics in the company are laudable to the success of employees and the workplace (Adeyeye, Adeniji, Osinbanjo & Oludayo, 2015). As members of an organization, there are prescribed codes of conduct that guide how employees should and not behave at work (Qui & Peschek, 2013; Pattison & Edgar, 2011).

Morality shapes the way the employees experience their work and organize their existence or status in the workplace making people go beyond the usual limits and practice in the absence of rewards. It is important to note that behavioural ethics and conducts at work affect the emotional commitment employees feel towards their organization and the actions they take to ensure the firm's success. Sound work place morals and ethical standards will make employees to be engaged, demonstrate care, attachment, dedication, enthusiasm, accountability, result and productivity orientation (Qui & Peschek, 2013). Prescribed and acceptable way of behaviour predicts obedience and desired actions among employees at work.

Morality could be defined as the standards and rules of conduct in an organization and which demands that members of an organization behave in accordance with the prescribed behavioural conducts and rules which is intended to promote the general good of members of the organization (Stoner *et al*, 2013). Morality makes claim upon the lives of all organizational members more than the claims of law and takes priority over individual employee interest. As employees at work, we have basic duties and obligations for the company. There are certain things we must do and certain things we must not do (Adeyeye *et al*, 2015). Worker's failure to uphold ethical behaviour within the context of employment relationships necessitated the construct of morality at work.

Employee engagement is the emotional attachment of the individual to the organization at work. This is shown as something given by the employee which can benefit the organization through commitment and dedication, advocacy, discretionary efforts, using knowledge, skills, talents and competences to the fullest and being supportive of the company's goals and values (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2011; Asthana, 2010). Engaged employees are those workers who work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. The employees drive innovation and move the company forward.

Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby, (2010) summarized that engaged employees perform better, are more innovative than others, are more likely to want to stay with their employers, enjoy greater levels of personal wellbeing and perceive their workload to be more sustainable than others. These employees will stay longer with the organization and continually find smarter and more effective ways to add significant value to the firm. Organizational morality may therefore affect employee job attitudes positively thereby ensuring a high level of service orientation through their sense of commitment, satisfaction, creativity, engagement, etc. towards their organization and customers (Katzenbach, 2003).

Morality, as earlier mentioned may be seen as the presence of positive moral values like honesty, sincerity, integrity and trustworthiness that make employees feel positive about their job and organization as a whole. Understanding this relationship is pertinent to goal actualization and image creation in any organizations. However, there is dearth in literature regarding morality and employee engagement within Nigeria context, also the studies of Joo, McLean and Yang (2013) indicates the need to add other variables such as work satisfaction, performance, commitment etc., in the list of human relations to employee engagement.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory**

The relationship between morality and employee engagement is based on Blau's (1964) social exchange theory and the equity theory of Adams (1965). According to these theories, better engagement can be achieved only when the social exchange between organizations and employees is fair and equal. Therefore, when employees perceive that their organization is committed to a code of ethics (morality) and to ethical perceptions and behaviors, they are likely to respond with greater engagement to the organization. Moreover, management acts as role model, encouraging employees via its own exemplary ethical behavior to promote organizational aims and goals. Therefore, morality is likely to greatly affect employee work engagement. Such an ethical environment would increase trust between employees and the organizational management, and therefore promotes their engagement to their organization and work.

#### **Morality**

Workplace morality or behavioural ethics in the organization is the standard rules of behaviour and conducts expected of all employees throughout the organization. Organization and its members are expected to exhibit behaviours or morals that are acceptable to the generality of people at work (Kaptein, 2015). It is the duty of top echelon management to design the right code of conduct that will objectively regulate the conduct of employees without compromise at any levels of the firm (Adejeye et al., 2015). It is important to note that, ethical behaviour and the prevailing system of employment relations in any work place is very laudable for the growth and development of the firm; the production or manufacture of goods and services within the domestic market and the international or oversea markets (Muafi, 2011; Obasi, 2003; Pattison & Edgar, 2011).

How well an institution adhere to sound ethical standards, determines the health of the organization and the general well-being of all stakeholders; employees, management, shareholders, customers,

suppliers/distributors including the publics. This will impact positively on the productivity of the organization at the micro-level and national productivity and output (Adeyeye et al., 2015). Morality is a fine construct to drive any institution positively, be it private or public organization. Most corporate failures at work are necessitated by lack of ethical conduct or morals which mean most organizations who found themselves in this kind of challenge are involved in corporate governance infractions (Muafi, 2011, Pattison & Edger, 2011).

Morality or moral character according to Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse and Kim (2014), are standards of right and wrong conduct, harmful act which are broadly construed as the hallmarks of ethical or moral attitude/behaviour. It means that morality are those acceptable rules governing right and wrong in the workplace of which members of the organization should adhere to in order to drive successful companies (Wong, 2013). Morality as a construct makes claims upon each of us that are stronger than the claims of law and takes priority over self-interest.

Every organizational members have basic duties, responsibilities and obligation for the firm. There are certain things we must do and certain things we must not do. This means organizations have ethical dimension which regulate the way employees carry out their roles and responsibilities. It also encompass relationship exchanges between employees, between employees and management, between management and shareholders including the firm's relationships with external stakeholders; customers, suppliers and distributors and the publics. There is workplace ethical conduct guiding all these organizational relationships (Wong, 2013; Pattison & Edger, 2011).

## **2.2 Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is the process by which workers are more committed to the organization, put in their emotional and physical abilities and working towards the progress of the firm Human capital which represents employees is expected to work for the organization for the firm to achieve success. Management and shareholders expect workers to put in their best into production for the company to achieve its market and financial objectives (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013).. The construct of employee engagement connotes as something given by the employee which can benefit the company through commitment and dedication, advocacy, discretionary efforts, using talent to the fullest and being supportive to the corporate or firm's goals and objectives.

Engaged workers feel a sense of attachment towards their company, investing themselves not only in their specific roles, but in the company as a whole (Robertson-Smith & Marwick, 2011). People who are engaged with the institutions they are associated or the firm they work for over a period outperform their peers in terms of production and productivity and consistently act as advocate of the company (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Cateeuw, Flynn & Vanderhorst, 2007). Such commitment and attachment of employees with the firm will always drive worker performance and significantly improve the firm's bottom-line results (profits). Engaged individuals invest themselves fully in their work, with increased self-efficacy and a positive impact upon health and well-being, which in turn evokes increased employee support for the organization. These set of employees see themselves as empirical stakeholders of the company.

It is pertinent to note that employee engagement levels vary according to seniority, occupation and length of service in the company but not by industry. The workers at the top echelon are seen to be

more engaged. Employees at senior management positions are seen to be most engaged relative to support staff at the operational floor level of the firm (Stoner, Gilbert & Freeman, 2013). However, this is relative or varies between firms. Again, engagement can also be driven by biographical and personality characteristics. New entrant to the workplace may be positive and more committed when they first join the workforce but quickly become disengaged. People who are highly extravert and adoptable individuals find it easier to engage. Worker engagement is a choice, it is a function of what staff consider worth investing themselves in.

There are factors that significantly drive employee engagement in the workplace. These factors are; the nature of the work, the job that has transparent meaning and purpose, career development opportunities, recognition and reward opportunities at work, building respect and assertive relationships, open communication systems that inspires leadership and mentorship opportunities (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2011). The implication is that for every engagement there is a salient reason or factors that either motivate employee engagement or demotivate workers and lead to lack of engagement. According to Wellins, Berthal & Phelps (2015), in a study conducted in multiple countries and across industry sector revealed that employees who are passionate and committed to their jobs are in the minority. Again, it goes further to state engagement drives productivity and contributes to firm's profitability.

However, the low engagement will always make an organization to loose money. This is evident in the case of United Kingdom and Japan where unengaged workers or employees made their companies to lost productivity at the tune of \$64.8 billion and \$232 billion respectively (Wellins, Bernthal & Phelps, 2015). This is clearly evident that engagement is a good thing that should happen to both an individual firm and a nation. If it is analyzed in a macro perspectives, it is seen that, workers who are engaged across industries and sectors of a nation will improve national productivity and output thereby significantly driving the gross domestic product (GDP) of the nation. If the reverse is the case, the nation will lose the value of goods and services produced in an accounting period.

Engagement represents a deep emotional bond between employees and their work. It is characterized by combined dedication and deep identification expressed via willingness to go above and beyond the formal requirements of the job (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). According to the authors, studies indicated that employees, who are engaged with their work, play a vital role in establishing an excellent and effective work performance. Moreover, the superiority of psychological incentives over tangible ones is perceived among engaged employees, as opposed to satisfied or involved employees (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

### **3.0 Morality and Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement which is the emotional attachment workers have for the firm in contributing their quota to the advancement of the organization can be informed by number of factors. Workplace morality and behavioural ethics have a strong nexus with employee engagement. Workers will be more engaged if the organization or work place have an objective moral and ethical behaviour (Kaptein, 2015). A good code of conduct and behavioural ethics in the workplace is a sound predictor of employee engagement. This is empirically validated by studies (Kaptein, 2015; Adeyeye *et al.*, 2015; Cohen *et al.*, 2014). According to Martin & Cullen, (2006) morality in organizations is considered to be a prime component of determining organizational identity, reflecting on employee

conduct efficacy and overall work and organizational performance. It mirrors an organization's policy and code of conduct as well as instills principles of appropriate behavior for situations posing ethical dilemmas.

The effect of workplace ethics on employees and organizational productivity in Nigeria was investigated by Adeyeye *et al* (2015). The authors investigated the correlation between workplace ethics and employee workplace ethics on organizational productivity in the context of Nigeria private and public institutions in Lagos. The study used structural equation modeling to measure the variables investigated. It was revealed that ethical standard at work has positive and significant relationship with worker engagement which brings about organizational productivity. It was discovered that employee engagement is a strong mediating construct between workplace ethics and organizational productivity.

Moral character in the workplace upheld by all organizational members improves employee engagement. The study of Cohen *et al.*, (2014), supports the foregoing. They examined organization's moral character and worker engagement and their study revealed that moral character in the workplace improves employee commitment and result to more engaged employees at work. The implication of this study is that, managers of an organization should always create the enabling environment for the organization's moral character to be improved and this should influence the behaviour of all employees positively. The result of sound moral character in the workplace is increased in the number of engagement and productivity.

Employee engagement at work brings about workplace productivity. Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2011) studied the relevance of employee engagement on private companies and national productivity using United Kingdom and Japanese organizations. It was revealed that lack of engagement of workers in the two countries made overall productivity to be low. This finding is also supported with the works of Wellins, Bernthal and Phelps (2015) that engagement brings about workplace productivity. It is important to note that what strongly mediate the relationship between employee engagement and worker productivity is ethical conduct at work. Sound ethical conduct always bring about employee engagement which subsequently birth productivity at work.

A good workplace moral improves organizational commitment. This position is justified with the study of Safikhani (2016). The author investigated the relationship between morality and organizational commitment in the context of teachers in secondary schools in Tehran. Their study reveals that there is significant relationship between morality and organizational commitment of teachers in girls' secondary schools in Tehran. Thus, a sound moral at work brings about overall commitment in the workplace. This findings is also supported with the works of Hough, Green and Plumles (2016). These authors studied the impact of ethics environment and organizational trust on employee engagement. The result of the findings is that ethics environment significantly influences employee engagement through the mediating factor of trust. Again, this study is also corroborated with the study of Agha, Nwekpa and Eze (2017), the scholars examined the impact of ethical leadership on employee commitment in the context of Innoson industries limited in Nigeria. The study made use of regression analysis, the findings of the study is that ethical leadership at work brings about employee commitment. Hence, organization with sound ethical leadership improves employee commitment at work. This is also supported by the work of Muhammad, Qing, Hwang and

Shi (2019), who argued that ethical leadership improves affective commitment, work engagement and worker creativity. Morality is a good treatment factor for employee engagement in both public and private institutions.

## CONCLUSION

From the empirical literature reviewed, it was discovered that companies with good ethics and moral standards improves the engagement of employees in the workplace. This means organization's significant investment in morality and work ethics supported with a robust corporate governance system will bring about significant improvement in employee engagement. It is therefore recommended that management of modern organization should pay attention to workplace morality, have a good governance systems and rules that will guide the conduct of all firm's mentors. This will improve worker engagement and bring about improvement in productivity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on our findings

- i. Companies should put in place the right code of conduct and ethics
- ii. This ethics and moral should be binding on all employees irrespective of their position at work
- iii. The companies should periodically measure employee level of engagement and take proactive measures when engagement rate is dropping
- iv. Companies should have sound corporate governance and ethics systems to guide the firm morals.
- v. The companies should have the right leadership to drive the process without discrimination among employees.

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