

Employee Construct of Work-Values among University Support-Staff

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Abstract: Work-values of employees often determine the attitude and disposition that they are likely to display, while discharging their daily duties. In addition to the extrinsic and intrinsic values attached to work by employees in organisations, social factors, such as family roles and responsibilities are also major determinant of how people conceive their jobs and tasks allocated to them. In essence, the conception that workers have about their jobs affect their level of commitment and performance. This study examined employees' construction of work-values. Specifically, the study highlighted work-values of staff in terms of gender, cadre and profession constructs. The self-determination theory explained the theoretical underpinnings the study. The research design was descriptive which relied on quantitative and qualitative research methods. A total of 312 questionnaires were administered and twenty-four in-depth interview conducted in six clustered departments. Qualitative and quantitative data were analysed using NVIVO and IBM_SPSS. The study submitted that staff's construct of work-values varied with regards to gender, cadre, and professions. Married female employees preferred the intrinsic part of their job, such as convenience, autonomy, and hours spent at work which allowed them to attend to their domestic roles of a wife and mother. The majority of the junior cadre conceived job security as illusionary, thereby, making them extrinsically oriented, however, work-values varied among the professions, which were clustered along departmental lines.

Keywords: Work-values, organisational commitment, reward system, job security, employee construct.

INTRODUCTION

The belief system in the larger society has to do with the conception of people about their communities and some feature present in them. There are some cultural similarities shared among various African societies which are different when compared with cultures of other continents of the world (Abdulla, 2018; Idang, 2015). In the same vein, workers within a particular profession and/or organisation have certain beliefs about their job tasks, organisations and their professions. As organisations have different organisational culture and values, so do individuals attach different levels of importance and value to the tasks that they are employed to perform (Lin *et al.*, 2015). Such beliefs, ideas and conceptions are referred to as 'work-values' which may likely differ, among individual employees within the same organisation. In essence, work-values of the individual worker determine the attitude and disposition likely to be displayed while discharging his/her daily duties (Liao *et al.*, 2012; Ros, Schwartz and Surkiss, 1999). The backdrop of such dispositions and attitudes determine the level of organisational productivity (Lin and Shen, 2014). In addition to the extrinsic and intrinsic values attached to work by employees, within organisations, other social factors, such as ethnic affiliation, family

background, political affiliation, indigeneship among others, may also be a major determinant of the construct people have about their jobs (Adewole and Metiboba, 2009). Organisational performance, organisational commitment, a harmonious workplace, effective integration of organisational and individual goals, therefore, can be achieved when consideration is given to both the values and behavioural disposition of workers and the organisational tasks (Chen and Chiu, 2009; Schein, 1992). Several studies have indicated that workplace values are highly regarded by employees, however, several researchers have found that workers value the extrinsic aspects of reward over the intrinsic ones (Bolton, 2018; Chumba and Gachunga, 2016). On the other hand, employees with intrinsic motivation are likely to perform better in more challenging job tasks requiring special skills, and will have stronger organisational commitment (Nadeem *et al.*, 2019).

Work-values define the exact meaning of a task to an individual. The definition of work would vary from place to place and from one individual to another. In this respect, Brown (1996) defines 'work-values' as the value that individuals believe should be satisfied as a result of their occupational work. If values that matter to the employee are not satisfied, then it is most likely that the actual commitment of the worker to job tasks will be low. As such work-values determine the underlying organisational behaviour of an individual worker, as well as work groups (Platis *et al.*, 2015). The

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importance that employees' place on various characteristics and rewards of employment are the values attached to such work (Johnson and Elder, 2002; Wray-Lake *et al.*, 2011); this informs the level of commitment, productivity and continuance among employees. An employee's sense of commitment may be to the entire organisation or a certain department within the organisation (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010). It is important therefore, for employers to consider the commitment level of employees before postings and allocation them to job tasks, in order to foster efficiency and productivity.

It is also essential to note that work-values are both individual and organisational-based; they are basic-work characteristics shared by the employees and the organisation. In situations where employee and organisational values tally, studies have shown that the emotional investments in work situations of the individual workers, are maximised (Dose, 1997). This convergence has a positive impact on the satisfaction of workers, increases organisational commitment, their intention to remain and to develop career in the organisation (Hirschi, 2010; Muogbo, 2013). There is a dearth of empirical researches on work-values which are an embodiment of all forms of compensation a worker could get in return for performing a job task. Studies in this area, however, have concentrated mainly, on some specifics of work-values, such as job security, rewards and pay, autonomy, recognition, promotion, convenience, relationship with co-workers, career and resource adequacy (Suresh and Kodikai, 2015). This study addressed the employee construction of work-values among support staff of Lagos State University, specifically examining the conception of work-value that workers have about the job they are employed to do.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work and Work Values

The term 'work-value' is presented by authors and researchers from different points of views. It is evident from the numerous definitions that the idea of an attitude towards or orientation with regard to work constitutes the central theme of most of the interpretations. For instance, one of the most significant facts that come to the fore from the theories of work and work motivation is that, workers differ radically with regards to the reasons they have for working, factors that motivate them most in their work and the needs they want to satisfy through work. Adewole (2012)

supported this view and argued that it is not everyone who looks for satisfaction of higher level needs and creativity in his/her job. This has lent credence to the fact that what serves as a motivator to one employee may not serve the same purpose for others to work, or that what a worker seeks to satisfy through his/her job may be sharply different from what others seek through the same job, even within the same work environment. Much of the interest in work-values and organisational commitment arise from a fear for the behavioural outcomes from job satisfaction and organisational commitment; these have been found to be related to productivity, turnover, retirement, attendance at work, participation, and psychological withdrawal from work (Kumar, 2019; Uluma *et al.*, 2019).

Like basic values, work-values are beliefs pertaining to desirable end-states or behaviour. The different work goals are ordered by their importance as guiding principles for evaluating work outcomes and settings, and for choosing among different work alternatives. Much of the interest in work-values and organisational commitment arise from a fear of the behavioural outcomes from job satisfaction and organisational commitment that have been found to be related to productivity, turnover, attendance at work, and psychological withdrawal from work (Kumar, 2019).

Work-values refer only to goals in the work setting that are more specific than basic individual values, but they refer to what a person wants out of work, in general, rather than to the narrowly defined outcomes (Chung *et al.*, 2008). Work-values represent cognitive expressions of the various needs or goals that are addressed through one's work and working, including monetary security, social interaction, intellectual stimulation, status, esteem and self-actualization needs (Josephat and Ismail, 2012).

Akinyele (2010) viewed work-values as the various motivators that drive the individual to work, hence, they are regarded as values extrinsic to, as well as intrinsic in, work satisfaction. This may be seen as the by-product or the outcomes of work, as well as those things which men and women seek in their work activity. All workers are not regarded as being alike, hence, Akinyele (2010) emphasized that workers come in assorted shapes, sizes, experiences, attitudes and ambitions. Some work for a living, while for some, working is a form of living. In other words, to some workers, work is regarded as the central goal in their lives, whereas others think about work as a way of providing for the daily necessities and then regarding

time away from work as the joy in life. Individuals, therefore, are more inclined to choose jobs with value framework similar to their own value orientation. In essence, individuals would prefer jobs that suit their expectations rather than accept a job because of its availability (Judge and Bretz, 1992; Rahman and Kodikai, 2017). In essence, work-values connote desirability and not mere availability.

The belief by individual that being involved in work-related activities is a crucial aspect of life forms a major pressure to attend to work (Cherniss and Kane, 2004). In a related opinion, Van Pletzen (1986) believes that every individual holds certain evaluative disposition or inclination regarding work in general. Also, work-values consist of a strong affective component and are evaluative in nature; that is a question of whether the jobs individuals are employed to do are bad, non-beneficial, satisfactory, motivational, or otherwise (Tubey *et al.*, 2015).

The Concept of Work Attitude

Attitudes are propensities, or tendencies, to react in a favourable or unfavourable way toward an object. The object could be almost anything in the world around us. Attitudes reflect a person's likes and dislikes towards other persons, objects, events and activities in their environment. It makes sense to study and know about attitudes because any strong attitude will very likely affect a person's behaviour, therefore, influencing attitudes toward supervision, pay, benefits, promotion; in other words, anything that might trigger positive or negative reactions (Anitha, 2014). As a result, employee satisfaction and attitudes represent some of the key areas of measuring organisational effectiveness. Due to the importance of the links among tasks, contextual and ethical performance as well as measures of organisational effectiveness, one of the key goals of managers should be to create linkages between employee performance and their satisfaction (Bakker *et al.*, 2012).

It is not easy to change a person's attitudes about their work. Attitudes and satisfactions at work can and do change, sometimes quickly, as events change, hence, employees who were once happy and productive, can become dissatisfied and resentful overnight as a consequence of some managerial actions. The attitude of a worker determines his/her organizational behaviour, that is, their tendency, for example, to engage in unethical practices that may negatively affect organizational productivity. There is

an urgent need for organisations to monitor their employees periodically, especially, frequent violators. Definitely, workers who have high work-values would have less tendencies to engage in unethical practices, while, workers with low work-values have higher propensities to violate organizational rules (Arciniega *et al.*, 2017). Employee attitudes can provide significant information about the effectiveness of different management strategies. Job-related attitudes play a major role in shaping the work behaviours of managers in organisations (Avey *et al.*, 2011).

Factors Influencing Employee Attitude

The factors influencing employees' attitude include dispositional, value/cultural, and work situation influence (Staw and Ross, 1985). In addition, one of the most important areas of the work situation to influence job satisfaction is the work itself, which is often overlooked when addressing job satisfaction. Hofstede (1980) identified four cross-cultural dimensions of work attitudes: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance versus risk taking, power distance and masculinity-femininity. Hofstede is of the view that the individualism-collectivism is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. He posited further that on the individualist aspect, the relationship among members of the society is weak; everyone is expected to look after himself/herself and his/her immediate family. On the other hand, collectivists or societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, often in the form of extended families, continue protecting each other in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, thus, man's search for truth. People in 'uncertainty-avoiding' societies are more emotional and motivated by inner nervous energy.

In this light, Kompa and Witkowska (2018) submitted that the masculinity-feminism issue is a very relevant aspect when considering employees' work attitude since labour-market situations are often gender-based. It has been indicated by many scholars that that men are more inclined towards monetary and economic benefits alongside other motivating factors, like independence, dominance, competitiveness, and long-term career objectives, while women are more inclined towards social endorsement, therefore, the importance of socio-demographic factors as predictors of work values and workers attitude cannot be undermined (Fan, 2018; Thakur *et al.*, 2019).

The work situation also matters in terms of job satisfaction and organisational impact. The most notable situational influence on job satisfaction is the nature of the work itself often called 'intrinsic job characteristics'. Researches revealed that when employees were asked to evaluate different facets of their job (such as supervision, pay, promotion opportunities, co-workers, among others) the nature of the work itself generally emerges as the most important job facet (Judges and Church, 2000). It is not that well-designed compensation programs or effective supervision are not important, rather, it is that, much can be done to influence job satisfaction by ensuring work is as interesting and challenging as possible (Avery *et al.*, 2007). Unfortunately, some managers think employees are most desirous of pay to the exclusion of other job attributes, such as its interesting nature. One of the major job determinants for desirability is satisfaction with the nature of work itself which includes job challenge, autonomy, variety and scope; this best predicts overall job satisfaction, as well as other critical outcomes, like employee retention (Adebayo and Lucky, 2012).

Theoretical Orientation

The study adopted the Self-Determination Theory as its theoretical underpinning. It is a motivation and personality theory concerned with growth tendencies and psychological needs of the worker. In this theory, intrinsic values, such as personal growth, emotional intimacy, community contribution, and health are differentiated from extrinsic values, such as financial success, appealing appearance, status, and power (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2008). These different value orientations are suggested as being associated with different outcomes. As intrinsically oriented individuals are focused on developing and actualizing their inherent potential, they are likely to satisfy their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and

relatedness, therefore, function optimally (Ryan and Deci, 2017). The extrinsically oriented individuals, in contrast, adopt an outward-oriented focus and they try to impress others by acquiring external signs of worth or importance. Managing this impression might lead them to engage in various stressful interpersonal comparisons and to develop a contingent sense of self-worth, which are likely to forestall their well-being and performance (Ryan and Deci, 2000). An excessive focus on extrinsic values might also come at the expense of the pursuit of intrinsic values and is therefore unrelated or even antagonistic to basic psychological need satisfaction; this might further undermine individuals' adjustment and optimal performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the construct of non-academic employee of a university in Lagos State, Nigeria, about the job they were employed to do and some aspects of it that they attach much value to. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods for the purpose of triangulation, hence, to complement findings from quantitative means of enquiry with the qualitative ones. The selected university has a number of campuses; the main campus was purposively selected because it is the largest in terms of staff population and departments for non-academics. The departments were clustered into six major areas in terms of job tasks. Using the Yemane sample size determination formula,

$$n = N$$

$$1 + N (e)^2$$

a total of 312 respondents were selected for questionnaire administration while 24 respondents were purposively selected for in-depth interviews.

Table 1: Study Population and Technique of Data Collection

S/N	Departments	Questionnaire		Total	In-depth Interview		Total
		Senior	Junior		Senior	Junior	
1	General Admin	26	26	52	2	2	4
2	Accounts/Finance	26	26	52	2	2	4
3	Health Services	26	26	52	2	2	4
4	Information Technology	26	26	52	2	2	4
5	Educational Services	26	26	52	2	2	4
6	Works/ Technical Services	26	26	52	2	2	4
	Total	156	156	312	12	12	24

From Table 1, a total of 52 copies of questionnaire were administered among junior and senior staff from selected departments making a total of 312 while 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants. The quantitative aspect of the data was analysed using IBM-SPSS while qualitative data were analysed using NVIVO, however, interests, rights, consents and confidentiality of respondents were protected.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that there were more females than males in the sample which reflected the nature of the total population of staff in the selected university, in Lagos State, Nigeria. The proportion of male respondents was 40.7% while that of the females was 59.3%. This is typical of civil service jobs in Nigeria where females tend to apply more due to the flexibility and simple nature of the jobs which allow them to attend to other trades and domestic activities. The condition of service in other sectors, like banking, and oil and gas production required more time which leads to females employed in those jobs allocating traditional domestic roles to individuals like, foster parents, teachers, nannies and family members; this finding is supported by a similar study by Ukeka and Raimi (2016). The low engagement of males in civil service might be informed by their interest in more challenging jobs, with more remuneration, higher risks and more rigorous tasks.

Regarding the marital status, 51.5% of the sampled populations were married with females constituting about 73% of this; the singles were 35.9% of the sampled population while 12.6% were separated. The higher percentage of the females being among the married buttressed the argument that nature of the tasks provided an avenue for the females to attend to domestic chores and still stay employed. Females prefer jobs in the civil service, especially when they are married, and domestic responsibilities multiply. Some may even decide to leave jobs in the private sectors and multinationals to take up government jobs for this single reason.

There were more single males than single females; the males in this category represented 53.6% of the respondents in this category. This situation informs the movement of males to a more remunerated jobs in other sectors after marriage in order to earn more to cater for the needs of their newly established and

affiliated families as attested to by a male staff in the in-depth interviews:

Responsibility increases when one gets married. The new family is affiliated to other families with members. For example, my wife's family and mine are now connected, therefore, especially in Yorubaland, the man is expected to cater for those families without any bias, if not there will be crises. One cannot take care of his family only, but also his in-laws. In fact, a lot is expected of the man and we are getting a job that pays higher is the option that most of us seek. (IDI/male/37yrs/Senior Cadre/General Admin)

The ages of respondents were grouped as follows: below 20 years, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60 and above. The age cohort of, below 20 years, had the lowest proportion of 0.9% while 40-49 had the highest proportion of 48.9%. This might be informed by the declining employment rate for some years now. The working population in the civil service was getting older posing a threat to the replacement of experienced workers with well-trained ones. If the trend continues, the civil service would be faced with problem of understaffing and most likely job mismatching to suppress the threat of inexperience, therefore, workers who had spent many years in the civil service may be asked to take up designations that they had not majored in (Pitan and Adedeji, 2012).

On educational qualification of respondents, 71.9% possessed a minimum of BSc/HND. All senior staff fell within this category signifying the minimum entry requirement for senior designation, however, 30.5% among those with BSc/HND were in the lower cadre. The reason for high level of educational qualification might be due to the fact that the work environment is academic. There are opportunities for workers to work and apply for study leave to engage in full-time programmes or work full-time and attend part-time and weekend programmes within the University.

The study found that there were differences in the ways males and females construct their work-value. Among the females, 83.6% prefer jobs that will allow them the time to engage in other activities, such as domestic assignments, attending social function, attending religious programme and also time for leisure, especially, with the children even if their husbands were not available.

Also, the females, in as much as they indicated financial rewards as one of the most important reason for engaging in formal employment, still preferred jobs that were less challenging and that require less exertion of energy and time. They, therefore, value more the intrinsic aspects of their jobs, such as autonomy, job security and convenience. This was supported by a response from an in-depth interviewee:

I value a lot of things about my job. Even when I would prefer a job that pays more like that of my husband, the roles I play as a wife and mother would not allow me to take up such jobs. As a wife, I must attend to all parties and meetings when required from my husband's side since he's not always available. Aside convenience, the most important value I am deriving from this job is job security. Government parastatals cannot be closed down within the twinkling of an eye like the private ones. (IDI/Female/38yrs/Senior Cadre/General Admin).

A junior staff also said:

Working in a government establishment is safe. One may not have to look for job but just seek for qualifications to move and get promoted especially from junior to senior. (IDI/male/42yrs/Junior Cadre/General Admin).

The males were more concerned about the financial provision that the job is meant to offer. On their work-value preference, 'pay' was regarded as the most important by 91.2% of the male staff. Job security was second on their scale of preference, although, it was among the only reason they were engaged in the job since the financial remunerations were not as attractive as those obtainable in the multinational companies. As mentioned earlier, this could be due to their role of a provider and head of family that men are traditionally ascribed. Unlike the female workers, the males gave a strong indication of leaving a job for a better one that pays more even if the job was outside the educational sector and civil service. By this, it was most likely for males to move than females. The movement may as well be a contributory factor for the lower number of males' staff in the institution. On this an IDI respondent said:

Money is the most important reason for me to engage in any form of work. I will

definitely change my job if I get another that pays higher than this one in any sector. What I am after is to acquire enough assets before retirement age of course job security is useless after retirement, therefore it is better to take risks now when one is younger. (IDI/MALE/36yrs/Senior Cadre/Works).

The study sampled an equal number of respondents among the senior and junior cadre of non-academics' staff of the University. Generally, 54.6% of the respondents value more the intrinsic aspect of reward against 46.4% who cherish more the extrinsic aspects. Specifically, 56.8% of those among the senior cadre prefer the intrinsic aspect of their jobs, irrespective of gender. With the lower cadre, 63.8% of them prefer the extrinsic aspects of reward. In this regard, while more staff in the senior cadre prefers the intrinsic part of reward, the employees among the lower cadre value the extrinsic aspects, especially, financial reward. A male staff corroborated this assertion and said:

For a junior staff like me, I work for the money. At my age, I may not be able to cross to senior level so what I work for is the little money I am getting, as much as I could make before retirement. And if there is any form of restructuring, it is those of us with 'small-small' certificated that will be lay-off so job security does not cover us. (IDI/MALE/42yrs/Junior Cadre/Works)

The study identified 6 clustered departments: The General Administration, Accounting/Finance, Health Services, Information Technology, Educational Services and Works/Technical Services. In the General Administration Department, 73% of employees value more the intrinsic aspect of reward, same as those in Educational and Health Services Departments; in these Departments, there were concentrations of females. Employees in Information Technology, Account/Finance and Works /Technical service valued the extrinsic aspect of reward, more than the intrinsic with the percentages of 81.8%, 66.5% and 91.5% respectively.

The results showed variation in what workers, from the various departments, value in the work they were employed to do. This was informed by the number of female/males in each of the departments and the aspirations which construct their work-values. Also, the nature of job tasks was also mentioned as a factor

influencing employees' work-value. This was observed in the in-depth interview conducted with staff of Technical/Works and Information Technology Departments. The male staff reported working for longer hours at some point in time while the females were excused at the normal closing hours. Information Technology personnel said:

We work for more hours compared to other members of staff especially during examination. I do not think that there is any one here who likes to work without considering the financial gain and constant promotion. Staying glued to the computer for long hours causes health challenges such as eye problems, back/spinal issues and so on. Although I love what I am doing but it will be more meaningful with adequate financial reward. Sometimes we excuse our female colleagues at the normal closing hour in order to attend to domestic chores. No one does that in a multinational company. (IDI/MALE/40yrs/Senior Cadre/IT).

It is, however, clear that females especially the married ones would prefer to continue to work in government establishments due to such considerations as indicated by the IDI respondent.

DISCUSSIONS

The construct of work-values among non-academic employees of university was examined in terms of gender, cadre and departmental/profession constructs. It was found that employees' construct varies in various areas supported by some socio-economic factors. A larger percentage of the females valued the intrinsic aspects of their job. Among the females, issues of harmonizing work and home was major and difficult to manage, thus, it was even reported that women in the banking sector give birth to fewer children for that reason. The disposition of males for being extrinsically oriented was informed by their traditional roles of fending and impressing their family members and people within their immediate community, in terms of their importance, personal worth and interpersonal comparisons as conceived in the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Employees' construct of work-values also varied in terms of the cadre of the individual worker. A larger proportion of the junior employee valued the extrinsic

aspects of work-values, such as financial reward and promotion, because, the majority conceived that a junior employee may not likely enjoy job security in the long run, since the senior employee can perform most of the tasks assigned to the junior ones; the jobs of junior employee, therefore, are threatened in that regard. On the other hand, a significant number of employees among the senior cadre value the intrinsic aspect of compensation as compared to its extrinsic aspect. This is connected to a better condition of service and larger salary scale compared to those within the junior cadre. Also, the difficulty of crossing over to the senior cadre, as mentioned by some respondents during the in-depth interview sessions, discouraged the junior staff from embarking on such endeavours, thereby, crushing their intrinsic value initially attached to the job. It was reported that the work-values of staff varied in terms of professions and departments. While a significant proportion of employees in General Administration, Health and Educational services value intrinsic values more than the extrinsic ones, most employees in the Department of Information Technology, Works/Technical Services and Account/Finance valued extrinsic aspects of reward.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Factors concerning employees' beliefs about their job are very significant to organisational commitment and productivity. From the findings, it is deemed necessary for employees to consider various factors before they are allocated to various departments and job tasks. Gender, age, marital status, among others are factors that should be considered before initiation of the employment process. Also, the supposed hours to be spent at work, the rigorous of job tasks, health and ability of candidates are pertinent factors. A married female worker would value more, a less rigorous job task with lesser number of hours spent at work, compared to a more rigorous one with longer hours at work. The reason for this is that married women are faced with the challenge of marrying the traditional roles of being a wife with that of being a formal employee of a particular organisation.

Males, whether married or single and single females should be allocated rigorous tasks and/or tasks that require long hours at work to perform. Workers should be remunerated in that regard even within the same department. In essence, instead of excusing married females from being employed in a particular department or organisation, this study recommends that extra reward be awarded to those who work for

longer hours and do more rigorous work in comparison to a worker who does tasks to a lesser extent but are in the same cadre and department. The work value of individual employees could either be determined by individual factors, social factors and the conditions of work, although, social factors contribute to the individual values while these determine application and adaptation to job tasks.

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