Attitudinal Change: Overcoming Lethargy in the Nigerian Civil Service

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Abstract

It is a common generalisation to hear statements such as, an average civil servant in Nigeria is lazy and has a poor attitude to work. Such generalizations are, however, sweeping and ought to be discouraged because attitudes to work differ and are attributable to many varied circumstances. This study attempts an analysis of the attitude prevalent in the Nigerian work environment. Rules and policies are also considered to present a holistic picture. The social learning theory as propounded by Bandura has been adopted by the study. The main methodology adopted is content analysis of mainly secondary data. Findings of the study revealed that there are many factors which influence attitude to work in the Nigeria public service. These factors include state of mind and disposition of the individual, diverse backgrounds and competencies, and the prevalent work environment. Thus, the findings showed that there is the need for total overhaul of the Nigerian civil service right from recruitment, training and ensuring proper reward systems and job security to ensure maximum utilisation of the work force. The study concludes with a call for change in attitude to work in the workplace. It further makes recommendations that will help the Federal Government and other policy makers to ensure a positive change in the attitude and predisposition of workers in the Nigerian Civil Service.

Keywords: Attitude, Change, Civil service, Lethargy and Workplace.

Introduction

The Nigerian public service sector under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria consists of (though not limited to) civil service, ministries and extra ministerial agencies and public bureaucracy composed of service of States and National Assemblies. Others are the Judiciary, Armed forces, Paramilitary, Educational and Regulatory Parastatals/ Agencies. The International Labour Organisation ILO during the UN General Assembly in 2015 made stipulation for decent work and the four pillars of the decent work agenda; employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue to become integral elements of the new 2030 agenda for sustainable development and provides that 'decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all men and women'.

In line with this, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment in Nigeria created its National Employment Policy 2013 which was reviewed and approved by the federal

executive council on 19th July 2017. The National Employment Policy, Nigeria 2018 has as one of its aims, to promote decent work in line with international labour standards… incorporating issues of social protection, fundamental rights of workers and social dialogue promoting labour productivity. Other components of the policy include; human capital development, employability of labour force, skills acquisition, labour based public works and decent work components. The workplace environment should be ideal to properly incentivise and engage workers at all levels. Lethargy refers to a state of mind that is despondent or without enthusiasm. This is prevalent in the Nigerian civil service due to a variety of factors such as poor conditions of work, lack of leadership and resources. This inevitably leads to demotivated workers who lack motivation and commitment. The Nigerian Civil Service has been described as shoddy, with a debilitating environment, low educational standard, lacking in training and inferior management standard (Yesufu, 2000).

Conceptual Clarification

Civil service

The civil service can be defined as the administrative machine within which the work of government is carried out (Ezeani, 2006). Idode (1986) defined it as the array of administrative and professional staff employed, on permanent and pensionable basis to established posts to advise and execute the policies of State. The Civil Service is built up of a body of men and women employed in a civil capacity and non-political career basis by the Federal and State Governments primarily to render and faithfully give effect to their decisions and for implementation (Ipinlaiye, 2011).

Attitude

Myer (2002) defines attitude as a favourable or unfavourable evaluative reaction towards something or someone often rooted in one's belief and exhibited in one's feelings and intended behaviours. Attitude can therefore simply be defined as our opinion or feeling about something usually shown by our behaviour. A worker's attitude is the sum of his feelings towards his work, contract, organizational situation or environment.

Lethargy

Lethargy refers to diminished energy or capacity and a general lack of enthusiasm. When this concept is added to the workplace, it is observed that lethargy which can be internal to a person or extrinsically generated plays a role in the engagement of workers, their motivation and overall performance (Macy and Schneider, 2008).

Workplace

Workplace can simply be defined as the space or place where people carry out their jobs or perform functions in the course of their work. Work place can also be used to define

the environment within which people work. The work place must be a safe environment or zone free from disrespectful behaviour, harassment or bullying. The workplace encompasses the physical, psychological and social working conditions under which an employee is expected to perform. Workplace policies form part of the environment that can influence workers and lead to high performance. The workplace environment is critical in the civil service today and ought to be diverse and constantly changing.

Theoretical Framework

While many theories abound on attitudes and behaviour as they relate to the work place such as Daryl Bem's self-perception theory of attitudinal change which asserts that people adjust their attitudes to match their own previous behaviour, and the classic theory by Leon Festinger of cognitive dissonance, that addresses inconsistencies in behaviour and attitudes based on the principle that people prefer their cognitions, or beliefs, to be consistent with each other and with their own behaviour.

This study however adopts the Social Learning Theory as propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. Bandura theorises that most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling where individuals can learn by observation in the workplace. The theory involves specific actions undertaken by an individual learner through a four-stage process of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. Therefore, new employees observe the status quo and work culture of the organisation from their superior and other older staff rather than following the rulebooks or guides given upon their employment. Consequently, observing the actions of their co-workers and attendant consequences, influences them. If for instance, a colleague stays away from work or resumes late repeatedly and gets off with a slight warning or not at all, many of the new workers will attempt same and will soon internalise this as the normal behaviour in such work place or environment. Workers are thus more likely to behave properly when a good example has been set for them. There are other factors that influence the attitude and behaviour of the average worker such as perceived loyalty from their employers. This theory states that these social behaviours at work places are also internalised by the response of management of such organization to their actions and consistent and equal treatment of all workers. This means that behaviours that positively affect performance must be contingently reinforced. This reinforcement is primarily by money, feedback and social recognition. It is clear therefore that where one gets into the civil service, they learn in a short time by observation the acceptable behaviour and outcomes or consequences. This theory however has its shortcomings because some people are innovators and come into an organisation or work place to create change rather than follow the status. Focus may not always be on behaviour but on established structures and rule books. Additionally, some workers may decide to observe and deviate or keep away from perceived mistakes of others instead of joining the crowd mentality.

224

Research Methodology

The method adopted in this work is qualitative content analysis through review of mainly secondary data. Existing literature on the topic such as books, journals, conference papers, policy handbooks and credible internet sources were used to generate information used in this study.

Attitude and Behaviour in Workplace in the Nigerian Civil Service

The Business Dictionary (2018) defines attitude as, 'a predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person or situation. Attitude influences an individual's choice of action and responses to challenges, incentives and rewards (altogether called stimuli). Other than as provided for by the law and public service rules governing the workplace, attitude plays a part in our ethical behaviours and conduct; lack of ethical behaviour is seen clearly by the actions of workers in the civil service such as corruption, embezzlement of government funds, creating bureaucratic bottlenecks and seeking gratification to perform every mundane task, and lack of confidentiality; resulting in leaking or outright sale of secret government documents. There are agencies that have been set up to investigate and prosecute erring civil servants, and ensure right conduct such as Independent Corrupt and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and SERVICOM which was established by the Presidency in 2004 to monitor and report the progress made by Ministries and Agencies in the performance of their obligations.

It is a generally accepted fact that there are problems with the Nigerian civil service. Wammako (2013) said, in almost all its faces without exception, the civil service in Nigeria was characterized by indiscipline, inefficiencies, ineffectiveness, lack of commitment to service, disloyalty, partisanship, absence of ethics, disregard for procedures, disrespect for constituted authority, rules and regulations, poor work attitudes, lack of commitment, etc.

The courage to accept change is subject to our own mental power, the more we resist, the bigger the problem. The only thing permanent is change; it is inevitable. With the myriad of problems in the system as enumerated above, there is need for a change in the attitude of workers towards their job to ensure productivity and full realisation of their potential.

Many Nigerians have not imbibed the culture of queuing up in public places. This is observed daily in banks, bus stops and filling stations. It is also not unusual to see people urinating or defecating in the open and in unauthorised places or civil servants misusing governments' property put in their care. These negative attitudes have been of great concern to the government over the years. Various programmes, including the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) were introduced to sensitise Nigerians on the need to develop the right attitudes. The Nigerian civil servant has often been described as, 'lazy and non-chalant; tardy and unwilling to put in a day's job and driven by a mind-set that takes work

performance as unattainable and unnecessary leading invariably to a lack of work commitment' (Odiaka, 1991).

Relationship Between Attitudes and Behaviour

It is said that attitudes do not always translate to behaviour since many variables influence a person's behaviour (Chrismani, 1986). Three major approaches have been utilised in understanding behaviour in the workplace according to Davis & Luthans (1989);

i.   Behaviour as a function of the person; which uses internal psychological reasoning to understand personality traits and perceptions.
ii.   Behaviour as a function of the environment; concerned with the role that contingencies play in maintaining and changing behaviour.
iii.   Behaviour is a function of a person and his environment; this recognizes both internal cognitive variables and external environmental variables.

Considering these approaches, every worker in the civil service comes from a different background or environment. Everyone has his own psychological makeup based on factors such as upbringing, beliefs and other value systems that will influence his attitudes and behaviour. The work environment will also have an influence on behaviour; is it a hostile environment, is it welcoming, is there a willingness to learn and impart knowledge? Or is everyone secretive and guarded. Once an individual finds himself in any of the environments above, he will without doubt adapt by developing a coping mechanism, which may be to copy what he has witnessed, or retreat into himself (especially where the environment or behaviours are alien to his personal value system.

Factors affecting Attitudes/Behaviour to Work in Organisations.

It is typical in the work place to see people doing the barest minimum, which may be just coming to work because a staff bus is available. This mind-set that it is not your personal business often creates a lackadaisical attitude to work.
In the work place, some factors that can influence ones attitude include;

i.   Being underpaid and overworked (poor motivation/remuneration).
ii.   A Boss who 'dislikes' you.
iii.   Being a favourite
iv.   Tribal\religious sentiments
v.   Educational qualification/Skills
vi.   Envy/rivalry
vii.   Job security and satisfaction

Positive attitudes lead to attributes such as;

i.   Integrity which leads to honesty and dependability
ii.   Self discipline and self development which will help one push himself to attain a high standard and drive one to perform better and seek new knowledge to develop oneself.

iii. Diligence in the discharge of duty where a person displays diligence, the result will be satisfactory outcome of work or assigned tasks.

iv. Punctuality is a good attribute as it shows respect for rules and consideration of others.

v. Work ethics refers to the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity. There is a need therefore to work on our ethics. There is a marked difference between knowing what is right and the willingness to do what is right. There are many guiding principles such as the Public Service Rules, and the Bangalore Principles of Ethical Conduct for staff of the Judiciary. Adopted in Nigeria in 2003.

Negative attitudes lead to;

i. Insubordination and disdain for constituted authority is prevalent in the system, as many workers have been employed by nepotism or to fill quotas. There is widespread wilful disobedience as some workers see themselves as superior to their bosses or feel they have friends or family in high places who can protect them even when they misbehave. This works both ways because some superiors who were only appointed by virtue of their connections may be looked upon with disdain by the junior staff especially where they are unable to perform the functions of their office.

ii. Primarily the work environment in the civil service causes late coming/absenteeism. Workers have no designated seat or office and are left to hang around or malinger in the corridors or general places. It then becomes easy for someone to come at any time he decides or absent himself from work totally considering that the possibility of being looked for is slim. Most offices have notebooks where workers are expected to sign in when they resume work but there is no proper monitoring so many people sign for their colleagues and falsify signatures or do not sign entirely.

Many workers lack initiative and are unable to work without detailed supervision. This can be traced to poor recruitment practices, lack of educational qualification or sometimes, there are too frequent policy changes and reversals which workers are unable to keep up with and inevitably feel confused or demotivated. (Obasa, 2015).

iii. Age falsification and certificate forgery is caused by a number of factors in Nigeria. The social policy and care for retirees leaves much to be desired hence the apprehension for workers to truthfully declare their ages. The pressure of life after retirement with no prospects for other source of income and family needs lead to such behaviour. In other cases, the workers know that the civil service does not have proper records or facilities to confirm details of age or certificates from the schools and use the opportunity to perpetrate fraud in the system.

Attitudinal Change and Behavioural Modification

Attitude change occurs whenever an attitude is modified. Thus, change occurs when a person goes from being positive to negative, from slightly positive to very positive, or from having no attitude to having one. Because of the functional value of attitudes, the processes that change them have been a major focus throughout the history of social psychology.

Attitude change processes require a greater use of mental resources. When a person is motivated and able to invest high effort in making a judgment about an issue or object, attitude change can occur due to characteristics of his or her thoughts (e.g., whether the thoughts are favourable or unfavourable).

Behaviour modification refers to techniques used to try and increase or decrease a particular type of behaviour or reaction. There are various methods employed in ensuring a change of behaviour, such as social influence; positive reinforcement and punishment.

Social Influence

According to Kelman (1963) there are three processes of social influence; compliance, identification and internalization. Compliance is said to occur "when an individual accepts influence from another person or group because he hopes to achieve a favourable reaction from the other. Sarri and Vinter (1976) have pointed out the role of compliance in-group work with juvenile delinquents. One of the consequents of compliance is that when the group worker wishes to change an induced response, he must change the perception of the conditions for social rewards. Identification can be said to occur when an individual adopts behaviour derived from another person or a group because this behaviour is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group." The relationship is self-defining because it gives one a sense of identity. It is all-important precisely because it gives one a sense of identity. Identification can be defined in terms of the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the individual. Finally, Internalization occurs "when an individual accepts influence because the induced behaviour is congruent with his value system." The important factor here is the individual's credibility. Put technically, the subject accepts certain attitudes because he perceives them as conducive to the maximization of his values. There will of necessity be selectivity as the group member does not feel bound to adopt all the opinions of the group leader, because he is concentrating on the intrinsic worth or validity of what is said or expressed and not on the attraction of the group worker.

Positive Reinforcement

This includes the attachment of a positive stimulus to good behaviour. This may be in form of public commendation, praise, an award or a gift. This creates a positive attitude in an individual, which then inspires him to do even better.

Punishment

This is designed to weaken behaviour that is considered bad or unpleasant by attaching a n unpleasant stimulus to such behaviour. A query, demotion and other punishments are consequences designed to deter an individual and steer his thoughts away from perceived negative behaviour. This will ultimately lead to a change in attitude.

Conclusion

This study has examined the prevailing attitude and behaviour in workplace in Nigeria civil service and the problem of lethargy. The study has shown that there are many attributes needed to ensure commitment and the eradication of lethargy in the work place. Workers must have positive attitudes, skills and be intentional about putting in their best at work. It all starts with an individual decision to do better and live a positive life. Governments however need to address such issues as poor wages and poor working conditions. Lack of incentives and opportunities for career growth also dampen workers morale. It is pertinent to state here however that the average worker needs to do better with self-development and advancement. Another important factor that comes to play is competence. Proficiency motivates one to perform. Workers will be eager to show their competence in the work place by performing their tasks diligently. On the other hand, where one is not fully competent, there will be a greater tendency to shy away from work. The work environment is another crucial factor to be considered; are there adequate seats and facilities and amenities. In all, there is a correlation between job satisfaction and productivity so policies should be efficient and tailored to fit the Nigerian workforce to ensure greater productivity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:
   i.   Great care must be taken not to generalise and give bad labels to the entire work force in the public sector. Many hard working workers remain in the system and should always be recognised and appreciated.
   ii.   Work conditions must be improved upon for maximum performance; obsolete equipment and inefficient infrastructure and services.
   iii. Adequate incentives and provision of adequate trainings and advancement opportunities to close the skill and knowledge gap.
   iv.   Holistic approach should be employed in understanding the psyche and mentality of the Nigerian worker especially with regards to corruption and mediocrity, lack of positive examples and consequences of all actions.

To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often. – Winston Churchill

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