

Examination of Work Place Behaviours and Comportment in the Nigerian University System

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ABSTRACT : The paper examined work place behaviours in the Nigerian university system. The concept of work was explicated and the work environment, which is the university, was construed as a centre of excellence in teaching, learning and research, and a factory for the production of quality manpower required for the technological, economic, political and social development of a nation. The paper identified unacceptable behaviours such as falsification of records and absence from duty without leave. It highlighted the attributes of an efficient university worker which include exemplary conduct and resourcefulness. The paper provided useful behavioural tips for university workers including the admonition to avoid bicycle leadership orientation in which the individual (worker) bows to those on top, mocks those behind and presses down on those below.

Keywords: Work Place, Behaviours, Comportment, University, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work is inextricably tied to human existence. In the biblical story of creation, one of the charges God gave to the first man he created, Adam, was for him to tend, dress and maintain the Garden of Eden. Implicit in the above command was that the man must work to survive and lead a meaningful life. Adam was not instructed to remain in a particular location and have all his needs supernaturally provided by the creator. On the contrary, he was mandated to work, maintain and dominate his environment, the Garden of Eden.

University campuses are generally beautiful to behold. The ambiance, serenity, edifices, greenery, lawns, paved roads, flowers and trees combine to provide the aesthetic aura that university environments are generally associated with. Just as the hood does not make the monk, the beautiful atmosphere does not make the university. It is the work force and the students that constitute the university. The workers in the university have to work to produce (graduate) the students. The work force in the university can be broadly categorized into two, namely, the academic staff and the non-teaching staff. Academic or teaching staff are primarily involved in teaching, learning, research and community/public service. On their part, non-teaching staff provide the support services that facilitate the work of the academic staff and the achievement of the university's mandate. By the structure of their work, the schedules of the academic staff are flexible and mobile as they are expected to conduct researches which in many cases take them away from their offices. Teaching is also done away from the office, with few exceptions. The case of the non-teaching staff is different as they (non-teaching staff) are required to be in their work places throughout the duration of the day's work, save when they are attending meetings or engaging in work related activities.

The above clarification is necessary because some of the workplace behaviours and comporment highlighted in this paper apply more to the non-teaching staff than the academic staff. What actually is the concept of work? What is the character of the university as a work place? What constitutes unacceptable behaviour in the work place? Are there behavioural guides that university workers can find beneficial? These are the focus of this paper.

2. What is Work?

According to Armstrong (2006) work is the exertion of effort and the application of knowledge and skills to achieve a purpose. The Merriam Webster College Dictionary (2006) defined work as a specific sustained job or activity, physical or mental, which a person engages in, especially in order to earn money. A worker is a person who does a particular kind of job either in the office, factory, farm etc. A workaholic is a compulsive worker, one who is obsessed with work. Work, in the context of this paper, is conterminous with employment, occupation, calling, pursuit and business.

As Nwachukwu (2000) points out, work is an extension of personality, it is a way of defining oneself; it is a measure of self-worth and humanity. Consequently prolonged unemployment creates severe psychological disturbances not only because of economic deprivation, but because it undermines self-respect and pride. Work satisfies the need for belonging, companionship, group identification and social bond. Armstrong (2006) also affirms that apart from monetary reward, people also work because of the other satisfactions it brings, such as doing something worthwhile, a sense of achievement, prestige, recognition, the opportunity to use and develop abilities, the scope to exercise power and companionship.

The Bible recognizes the imperative for work and thus commands that whoever does not work should not eat (2Thes3:10). Work has no gender restriction; it is necessary for women and essential for men. In fact the scripture says it is a sin for a man not to work. 1Cor.5:8 states that "a man who cannot provide for his family is worse than an infidel".

We have deliberately done this exegesis on work to underscore the value, in deed, necessity of work. The work a person is doing now may not be what that person desires. However, a bird at hand is better than a dozen in the bush. Each worker should endeavour to make the best of whatever societally acceptable work he/she is doing. Cherish your work and excel in it. Also workers should recognize the fact that the reward for hard work is more work.

3. Nature and Character of the Work Place (University)

Etymologically, the word university is derived from the Latin word Universitas, which means corporation and was not restricted to institutions of higher learning. Consequently, there was Universitas Magistorum (Corporation of Masters) Universitas Magistorum, et Scholarium (Corporation of Masters and Scholars/students). As Iloeje (2004) points out, in the course of time, the term began to be used by itself with the exclusive meaning of a self-regulating community of Teachers and Scholars whose corporate existence had been approved by the civil or ecclesiastical order. The exact origin of universities has been contentious (Okafor, 1971). Jega (2007) argues that the University of Magnaura founded in 849 in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) was the first institution to be recognized as a university. However, other scholars with the support of the Guinness Book of records contend that the University of AlKaraouinein Fez, Morroco established in 859 was the first university. Other notable universities with long history include University of Bologna (1088), University of Paris (1100), University of Oxford (1167), University of Cambridge (1209), University of Servile (1254) and Havard University, (1636) (Omeire,2010).

From the above it could be seen that the university has a long history, tradition and culture. A pertinent question that arises is: what is the nature, character and function of the University? We may respond by indicating that a university is:

A tertiary institution that awards degree to certified graduands.

A Centre of excellence in teaching, learning and research.

An institution dedicated to the pursuit of truth, seeks truth, teaches truth, preserves truth and promotes truth (Igwe, 2008).

A factory for the production of quality manpower required for the technological, economic, political and social development of a nation (Nwaoma and Omeire, 2014, Orisakwe, 2008).

A repository of knowledge and a reservoir of experts.

An institution that conducts research and brings about innovation and solution to societal problems.

An institution that offers public service to the community, state and nation.

An institution that accommodates creative skepticism, constant questioning, disputation and argumentation (Awuzie, 2001).

An ivory tower, above the society, yet not unaffected by it (Omeire, 2009)

In addition to these, another defining character of the university is the fact that it is a sacred institution. The other two sacred institutions in the society are the church/mosque and the law court. The university as a sacred institution has the Vice Chancellor as the Chief Priest, the academic staff as the Priest, the non-teaching as the Aaron and Hur supporting and strengthening the hand of the Chief Priest, and the students as the Congregation. A sacred institution evokes an aura of reverence, requires decorum and high level comportment. It is a solemn place for deep reflection, focus and serious business. It is a place wherein you are careful and mindful of your dressing, speech, carriage and general behaviour. A sacred environment is not a place to be casual, flippant or lackadaisical. For example, it will be strange and unacceptable for a person to start whistling in the court room while the court is in session.

4. Behaviour and Comportment Defined

The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2006) defines behaviour as the manner of conducting oneself. It relates to the disposition, orientation, attitude and perception of a person. In the context of the work place, behaviour has to do with how the person views, reacts to and handles his job, superiors, subordinates, peers, students, clients and the general public. If a worker has a positive attitude towards his work, it will reflect in his behaviour in the workplace. Conversely, if a person has a negative perception or orientation towards his work, it will manifest in the person's behaviour in the workplace. Positive attitude will lead to enhanced productivity while negative attitude will translate to low productivity. Comportment refers to the way in which a person behaves or conducts himself/herself.

5. Unacceptable Behaviours and Comportment

Every work place has its culture which is referred to as organizational/corporate/institutional culture. Arifin et al (2014) indicate that organizational culture is an assumption implicitly accepted and owned by an organization that determines the way an organization feels, thinks, and reacts to diverse environments. As McDaniel and Gitman (2008) point out, the corporate culture embodies the philosophy, values, attitudes and standard of behaviour of an organization that distinguishes it from another institution. Organizational culture evolves overtime and is based on the accumulated history of the organization, including the vision of the founders. It is also influenced by the dominant leadership style within the organization.

The institutional culture of most Nigerian universities includes quest for excellence, hard work, discipline, decency (in conduct and appearance), respect for constituted authority, esprit de corps, obedience to rules and regulations, and adherence to due process. Are members of the work force aware of corporate culture of their work place? If they are aware, to what extent do they conform to the behavioural requirement of the organizational culture? Are there behaviours and comportment in the workplace that contradict the university culture?

The Nigerian Public Service Rules(2008) which is relevant to the university in some respects defines misconduct as a specific act of wrong-doing or an improper behaviour which is inimical to the service (university) and which can be investigated and proved. It can lead to termination of appointment and retirement from service. Misconduct includes:

- (a) Scandalous conduct such as: (i) Immoral behaviour (ii) Unruly behaviour (iii) Drunkenness (iv) Foul language (v) Assault (vi) Battery
- (b) Refusal to proceed on transfer or to accept posting

- (c) Habitual lateness to work
- (d) Deliberate delay in treating official document
- (e) Failure to keep records
- (f) Unauthorized removal of public records
- (g) Dishonesty
- (h) Negligence
 - (i) Membership of cults
- (j) Sleeping on duty
- (k) Improper dressing while on duty
- (l) Hawking merchandise within office premises
- (m) Refusal to take/carry out lawful instruction from superior officers
- (n) Malingering
- (o) Insubordination
- (p) Discourteous behaviour to the public.

The Public Service Rules (2008) distinguishes between misconduct (minor) and serious or gross misconduct. Serious misconduct is a specific act of improper behaviour which when investigated and proved attracts more severe penalty, including dismissal. Serious misconduct includes:

- (a) Falsification of records
- (b) Suppression of records
- (c) Withholding of files
- (d) Conviction on a criminal charge (other than a minor traffic or sanitary offence or the like)
- (e) Absence from duty, without leave
- (f) False claims against government officials
- (g) Engaging in partisan political activities
- (h) Bankruptcy/serious financial embarrassment
- (i) Unauthorized disclosure of official information
- (j) Bribery
- (k) Corruption
- (l) Embezzlement
- (m) Misappropriation
- (n) Violation of oath of secrecy
- (o) Action prejudicial to the security of the state
- (p) Advance fee fraud (419)
- (q) Holding more than one full time paid job
- (r) Nepotism or any other form of preferential treatment
- (s) Divided loyalty
- (t) Sabotage
- (u) Willful damage to public property
- (v) Sexual harassment
- (w) Any other act unbecoming of a public officer.

Nwachukwu (2000) identified the reasons for improper behaviour in the workplace among Nigerian workers to include economic factors, sociological/cultural factors, technology factors and managerial factors.

6. Behavioural Attributes/Qualities of a Good Administrative Officer

By qualities we imply those attributes which operate conjointly to produce a reliable, efficient and effective administrator. The basic duty of an administrative officer, irrespective of his/her area of posting, is to provide necessary support services which would enable the university achieve its mission statement/goal. Asagwara (2013) identifies the administrator's roles to include: record keeping, general secretary, adviser/interpreter,

compliance officer, university communicator, crises manager, university image maker, general duties officer, role model, problem solver and counselor. To be able to play these roles excellently, the administrative officer needs to possess some personal and professional qualities. The personal qualities of the good administrative officer should include the following:

- (i) Integrity
- (ii) Exemplary conduct
- (iii) Courage
- (iv) Resourcefulness
- (v) Excellent human relations.

A brief comment on these qualities may be pertinent.

Integrity

This refers to the need for absolute honesty, impartiality and selflessness on the part of the administrative officer. No person will respect an administrator whose character and intentions are open to doubt even when he is not actually guilty of any offence. In his dealings with superior officers, colleagues, students and members of the public, the administrative officer cannot afford to do anything that might arouse suspicion regarding his integrity. He should consequently thoroughly examine his conscience before taking any action which could give rise to any misapprehension. Integrity on the part of the administrator enables him to resist temptations from students and members of the public. Finally, the administrative officer who has integrity should examine and treat every problem that comes before him/her with utmost objectivity even if the issue involves the person's friends or relations.

Courage

A good administrative officer should have the courage to fearlessly pursue the right course at any given time. A courageous administrative officer is one who gives the right advice to his superior, even if such advice is unpalatable or unpopular. A good administrator, in carrying out his function of interpretation and implementation of the rules and regulations of the university, should have the courage and tact to insist that rules are not bent by his superior officer. A good administrative officer should possess enough courage to resist any subtle or overt attempt by his/her colleagues who are academic staff to intimidate/stifle him or her.

Exemplary Conduct

The administrative officer has as part of his/her schedule, the supervision of subordinate staff in the unit or department. This responsibility thus means that the officer must comport himself/herself in such a manner as to show good example to those who look up to him/her for leadership, inspiration and direction. For example, the administrative officer must endeavour to be time conscious by reporting to work punctually. By personal example, the administrative officer should instill in his/her subordinates the administrative etiquette that you do not normally close work or leave the office until after your superior/boss has closed for the day, except he/she permits you. Also the officer should through his/her dressing, impart the need for formal and decent dressing to subordinates. Furthermore, the administrator should be exemplary in his conduct and relations with members of the public.

Resourcefulness

This refers to the need for the administrative officer to be hardworking, creative and innovative. A resourceful administrator simplifies the work of his superior officer. He/she initiates fresh and relevant ideas, reminds his superior officer about necessary follow-up actions. It has been pointed out that an administrator who has not been able to initiate any change in existing regulations or procedures or introduce new ideas within the area of his/her competence should not consider himself/herself a success. A resourceful administrator adopts a critical

approach to his work and is willing and capable not only to identify shortcomings but also come up with alternative lines of action.

Excellent Human Relations

The secret of good administration is successful public relations. The administrative officer by virtue of his official position is bound to interact with people. A good administrative officer is expected to be courteous, humane and friendly in his relations with people. Often times the impression outsiders have about an organization is based on their experience with staff of that institution. A good administrative officer should relate cordially with superiors, colleagues and subordinates because cooperation is very essential for the achievement of good result in administration. Effective communication is essential in every organization for promoting understanding and insight, meaningful relationships, influence and persuasion (Onyechi, 2013). It has been observed that some human tendencies negatively impinge on the development of good human relations. For example, selfishness destroys trust; dishonesty and disloyalty deny confidence while weakness breeds disrespect.

In addition to the personal qualities highlighted above, the administrative staff should also possess the following professional qualities:

Good Secretary

Writing is an integral component of administration. To be effective, an administrative officer has to be a good secretary. A good secretary has the following as part of his/her duties; (i) Preparation of the agenda for meetings, after consulting with the Chairman. (ii) Issue of invitation to members. (iii) Ensuring that meeting venue is secured and tidied. (iv) Recording of notes, minutes. (v) Provision of information or advice to the Chairman. (vi) Provision of light refreshment, if and when required. (vii) Drafting of minutes, within forty eight hours, for the approval of the Chairman. (viii) Circulation of draft minutes after the Chairman's approval. (ix) Following up on decisions taken at meetings. A good administrative secretary is neither a glorified stenographer nor a mere scribe. In addition to taking notes, he makes valuable verbal contributions, when necessary, at meetings. The secretary guides the meeting by calling attention to appropriate regulations and applicable precedents.

Loyalty

Loyalty implies the obligation of the administrative officer to serve the university devotedly and wholeheartedly. The officer does this by demonstrating allegiance to the constituted authority of the institution. As evidence of loyalty, the administrator accords due respect to his/her superior officer and accepts all lawful duties assigned by the superior. Loyalty does not mean subservience rather it involves the acceptance to cooperatively work with one's superior officers for the achievement of the organization's goal. Apart from being loyal, the administrative officer is professionally expected to refrain from private conduct that might bring discredit to the university. This is another way of saying that the exemplary conduct expected of the administrative officer does not terminate at the close of each day's work but extends to his private lifestyle.

The administrator is also expected to be effective in record-keeping. Records provide guidelines which are written, unambiguous and well understood in the form of circulars, minutes, briefs, etc for the day-to-day transaction in the institution. Records preserve precedents thus bringing about uniformity or consistency in governance. Records reduce the tendency to predicate decisions on human memory and personal prejudice (Omeire, 2013).

An administrative officer must possess professional ability to ensure that privilege or classified information are not divulged. Another professional expectation of the administrative officer is that he should strive to avoid conflict between duty and private interest. In situations of unavoidable conflicts, the good administrator is expected to subordinate private interest. Furthermore, the administrative officer is professionally expected to be reticent in matters of public political controversy. This is an extension of the demand of anonymity which

requires that the administrator should be seen but less loquacious. A good administrative officer is expected to be methodical in approach, a proactive planner, a good communicator and an effective mobilize of men and materials. A good administrator is humane but not weak; firm but not autocratic; tactful but not deceptive; self confident but not arrogant; delegates but not laissez -faire. Like the leader that he/she is, the good administrator earns rather than demands respect.

Iloeje (2008) sums the qualities of the good university administrator thus:

The good university administrator must therefore not just be seen as an efficient bureaucrat but also as a caring guardian, a sort of parentis locontis. He must possess the tact of human relations, the intricate knowledge of all the regulations and administrative machinery, the gifts of fairness and even-handedness peculiar to a good law-enforcer who is also a guardian angel, and the dexterity of a balanced judgment and accuracy in decision making. He must have the humility of calmness, cooperativeness and tact for working with and under the direction of the Vice Chancellor.

7. Useful Behavioural Tips

Below are some tips that the administrative or non-teaching staff may find beneficial:

- Do not leave the office or close from work before your boss or superior officer, except he/she permits you to leave.
- Do not be afraid of your boss, respect him/her.
- Do not rebuke your subordinate in the presence of his/her juniors.
- Treat timid, sensitive people gently and persuasively.
- Treat tough, bullying types with strength and firmness.
- Be helpful to those who are earnest but ignorant.
- Do not despise your boss, if the person is “difficult”, tolerate him/her.
- Ensure that records are efficiently managed.
- Do not snub or disobey your superior because you are related, or have access to a higher officer.
- Through personal example, ensure that subordinate staff in your unit are punctual, stay on the job and always remain productive.
- Never punish a subordinate for an offence of which you are yourself guilty.
- Be sympathetic and understanding with those who are trying their best.
- Do not envy your boss, he/she must have paid the dues to be at the top.
- Always be courteous in your official communication. It is advisable to begin a request and even directive with words like “please” or “kindly”. Even when responding to a query, be civil and polite. Apologize when you are wrong.
- Do not specialize in fault finding, identify a strong point or good quality of your subordinate, colleague or superior and praise him/her for it.
- Avoid bicycle leadership orientation, even at your own level.
- In bicycle leadership you bow to those on top, mock those behind you and press down those below you. This is bad. Treat your subordinates as politely as you treat your seniors and be frank with both.

8. Conclusion

Work is an indicator that a person is alive. The dead cannot work. Man lives to work and works to live. The paper limpidly maintained that work is very important to a person’s physical, financial, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The paper identified unacceptable work place behaviours to include sleeping on duty, refusal to carry out lawful instructions from superior officer, falsification of records and absence from duty

without leave. The paper postulated that a good public officer must be resourceful and possess integrity, in addition to being exemplary in conduct. It provided tips that could be beneficial in the work place, including the advice for a superior never to punish a subordinate for an offence of which he/she is equally guilty.

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