

INFLUENCES OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SELF-REGULATION ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS UNETHICAL WORK BEHAVIOUR AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NASARAWA STATE

Ojo Sunday Stephen (Ph.D), Agara Jummai Jakonda and Pojwan Martina Alexander

Department of Social Development, Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia, P.M.B. 109, Lafia
Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *As custodian of knowledge and agents of change, the academics has a responsibility to demonstrate ethical behavior, maintain a professional working environment and provide services with a benevolent and caring attitude. In recent time, there has been an upsurge in the rate of unethical work behavior among academic staff which is becoming alarming. Despite all that is required of them with regard to ethics and discipline, a critical observation of the conduct of some academic staff in Nigeria has revealed a departure from this norm. Therefore, the study set out to examine the roles of emotional intelligence and self-regulation on attitude towards unethical work behavior among academic staff of Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study is an ex-post facto survey, with attitudes towards unethical behavior as a dependent variable and emotional intelligence and self-regulation as major independent variables. The study sample comprised two hundred and fifty members of academic staff randomly selected from the three selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State. The instrument of data collection for this study is questionnaire and were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The study revealed that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, age, gender and educational qualification contribute significantly to variance in attitude towards unethical work behavior. Recommendation includes that proper orientation and refresher workshop should be enhanced to include value analysis, with regard to ethical principles that may be unclear to academic staff. The analysis should include basic explanations of professional ethics.*

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Self-Regulation, Attitude, Unethical Work Behavior, Academic Staff

INTRODUCTION

Academic staffs are expected to exhibit professional and ethical behavior. As custodian of knowledge and agents of change, the academics has a responsibility to demonstrate ethical behavior, maintain a professional working environment and provide services with a benevolent and caring attitude.

In recent time, there has been an upsurge in the rate of unethical work behavior among academic staff which is becoming alarming. This is contrary to code of conduct or work ethics that guides academic staff towards effective performance and productivity in the workplace. In reaction to this, all Academic unions have been mandated to set up Ethics and Privileges Committee in their various institutions to curtail the menace. Different punitive measures are awarded to faculty based on the nature of the offences committed. The consequences of these misconducts include dismissal, reduction in rank, withholding or deferment of increment, reprimand, query etc.

According to Jones (1991), unethical work behavior is illegal and morally unacceptable to the larger community. Unethical work behaviors include lying, cheating, stealing, interpersonal aggression etc, (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Among Academic staff, unethical work behavior is much more serious, it involves bribery, falsification of results, favouritism and nepotism, abuse of duty, plagiarism, violence and torture (Newburn, 1999:4-6).

Despite all that is required of them with regard to ethics and discipline, a critical observation of the conduct of some academic staff in Nigeria has revealed a departure from this norm. The consequences of condoning unethical behavior include undermining the integrity of the lecturers, distrust and inhibition of amicable relation and reduce productivity among academic staff. It is noteworthy that dissatisfaction with unethical behavior among academic staff is not only expressed by members of the public and students who have had unfortunate experiences with the faculty, but their colleagues also express feelings of disappointment and frustration over their co-workers that engage in such shameful practices.

Abiding by professional ethics largely depends on the attitude of academic staff. Attitudes represent a cluster of beliefs, assessed feelings, and behavioural intentions towards an object (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; McShane and VonGlinow, 2000). Thus, whether an academic staff conducts himself in accordance with the ethics of his profession depends on his attitudes toward these ethical norms. This raises questions such as:

- Why would an academic staff engage in unethical work behavior, despite having knowledge of the consequences?
- Why would academic staff ignore ethics that guide his profession?

Deviant disposition of academic staff in institutions of higher learning violates the ethical standards that guide their practice. The prevalence of unethical behavior in tertiary institutions is viewed to negate the core values of education at this level. Forms of unethical behavior among lecturers include demanding huge amount of money, sex from female students for high grade, etc. In Nigeria, which has the largest higher education system in Africa, areas where corruption occurs most frequently among academic staff are in promotions, falsified research for publication in journals, fake journals, obligating students to buy texts written by the professor and other corrupt practices related to publications. Some professors indulge in extortion of money for handouts and marks, and sexual harassment (ASUP, 2016).

Tertiary education is a social good impregnated with values. Unethical behavior among academics is threatening the core values of higher education which must be vigorously fought and won; if not, the national and global consequences could be too serious to be contemplated. It is based on this, that the study attempt to examine the underline causes of unethical behavior isolating the systemic factors and paying more attention to individual attributes and disposition. Several studies have identified causes of corruption as located in the society, structural defects etc but less emphasis has been placed on what motivate individuals' disposition in the conduct of their work.

Therefore, the study set out to examine the roles of emotional intelligence and self regulation on attitude towards unethical work behavior among academic staff of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Although the influence of emotional intelligence and self regulation on attitude towards unethical work behavior has not been investigated, the review of literature on organizational behavior, industrial and organizational sociology/psychology has demonstrated the influence of personality factors on unethical work behavior, counterproductive work behavior, workplace aggression and violence.

Generally, emotional intelligence represents ‘skills in empathy, cooperation, ability to reach a consensus, understand people’s feelings, control one’s impulse and anger, calm oneself down, and maintain a positive attitude in the face of setbacks’ (Goleman, 1998). Thus, it appears that all academic knowledge in the world means little if a person has poor emotional intelligence. The fact that some faculties are academically intelligent may not prevent them from engaging in unethical practices. This shows that emotional intelligence is crucial to the reduction of unethical work behavior. In fact, the results of a study carried out by Gibbson and Barsade (1999) reveal that people who have low tolerance levels and are not able to read other people’s feelings, no matter how talented or intelligent they may be, cannot be successful in their profession.

Another area of interest in this study is self-regulation, which is the ability to control or redirect emotional outbursts and other impulsive actions (McShane and Von Glinow, 2000). For example, a faculty may refrain from yelling at a student and manage to remain calm when is provoked. Self-regulation includes the ability of individuals to suspend judgment and think about the consequences of their behavior rather than acting on impulse (McShane and Von Glinow, 2000).

Kreitner (2002) revealed that individuals have unique combinations of personality characteristics, values, and moral principles, leaning towards or away from ethical behavior. The authors further stated that the personal experience of being rewarded or reinforced for certain behaviours and punished for others shapes the individual’s tendency to act ethically or unethically. Numerous personality traits have also been examined for their association with counterproductive work behavior. These include: anger (Domagalski and Steelman, 2004; Douglas and Martinko, 2001; Hepworth and Towler, 2004), negativity and affectivity (Douglas and Martinko, 2001; Hepworth and Towler, 2004), self control (Douglas and Martinko, 2001; Marcus and Schuler, 2004), emotional stability (Salgado, 2002), self esteem (Harvey and Keashly, 2003), and anxiety (Fox and Spector, 1999).

The review of literature on the relationship between gender and unethical work behavior has also revealed mixed results. Some studies found that females tend to be more concerned with ethical issues compared to their male counterparts (Ang, 1996). Others have failed to support this gender differences in ethical attitudes, behavior and beliefs (Swaidan, 2006).

Empirical findings have included age in ethical reasoning. Peterson (2002), found age to be a significant predictor of ethical behavior and that older people possess higher ethical standards (about work) than younger people. Adebayo (2005) also reported that gender and age are significant predictors of unethical beliefs. Studies conducted by Swaidan (2006), however, revealed that highly educated individuals have higher ethical values compared to their counterparts with low education level.

The link between emotional intelligence, self regulation and unethical work behavior is implied in the general theory of crime, which explains criminal/unethical behaviors based on the theory of self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). The theory of self-control posits that developmental and environmental condition, such as nurturing and limit-setting shape an individual's impulse, low tolerance and need for immediate gratification. This means that an individual may consider the consequences his action might have in the future before satisfying his immediate needs. However, individuals with low emotional intelligence and self-regulation are likely to have a poor history of nurturing, limit-setting and moral framework that promote spontaneity and frustration associated with criminal (unethical behavior) (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Thus, self-regulation is associated with unethical work behavior at work.

In conclusion, therefore, the review of literature generated two hypotheses: that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, age, educational qualification and gender would contribute significantly to attitude towards unethical behavior; and that there would be a significant interaction of influence of emotional intelligence and self regulation on attitudes towards unethical work behavior.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an ex-post facto survey, with attitudes towards unethical behavior as a dependent variable and emotional intelligence and self-regulation as major independent variables. The study sample comprised two hundred and fifty members of academic staff randomly selected from the three selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State as follows: Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia (Total 247), 110, College of Education, Akwanga (Total 240) 107, College of Agriculture, Lafia, (Total 72) 33

The instrument of data collection for this study is a questionnaire which is subdivided into four sections. Section focuses on demographic variables, Section B measured emotional intelligence on a 33-item emotional intelligence scale (EIS). Section C measured self-regulation on a 10-item self-regulation scale (SRS) while section D measured attitude towards unethical behavior on a scale to measure attitudes towards professional ethics.

However, out of the two hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaire administered, only two hundred and twenty-five (225) were adequately completed and returned. The completed copies were then scored, processed and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The statistical tools employed in this study are Pearson's moment correlation; used to establish the relationship among the variables of a study and Multiple Regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS**Table 1. Correlation matrix showing the relationships between variables of study**

| Variable | N | X | SD | Age | Gen | Edu. | EI | SR | UWB |
|-----------------|-----|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|---------|------|---------|
| Age | 225 | 34.34 | 7.92 | - | | | | | |
| Gender | | 225 | 07.12 | 4.73 | .07 | - | | | |
| Educ. Qual. | 255 | 30.67 | 7.18 | .04 | .06 | - | | | |
| Emotional Int. | 255 | 35.30 | 6.42 | .19* | -.12* | .37** | - | | |
| Self-regulation | | 225 | 28.84 | 6.60 | .25** | -.16* | .21* | -.07 | - |
| UWB | 225 | 41.65 | 9.71 | -.24** | -.22** | -.29* | -.53*** | | -.43*** |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Key:

Gen = gender; Edu. = educational qualification; EI = emotional intelligence; SR = self-regulation; UWB = unethical work behavior

Table 1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations and zero-order Pearson's correlations for the variables investigated in this study. Age was negatively related to attitude towards unethical work behavior ($r = -.24$; $p < 0.01$). Gender was also negatively related to attitudes towards unethical work behavior ($r = -.22$; $p < 0.01$). Moreover, there was a significant negative relationship between educational qualification and attitude towards unethical work behavior ($r = -.22$; $p < 0.01$), emotional intelligence and attitudes toward unethical work behavior ($r = -.53$; $p < 0.001$) and lastly between self-regulation and attitude toward unprofessional behavior ($r = -.43$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Stepwise multiple regression analysis using emotional intelligence, self-regulation, age gender and educational qualification to predict attitude towards unethical work behaviours among the Academic staff.

| Predictors | R^2 | R^2 | β | t |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| Gender | 0.57 | 0.57 | -0.14 | -2.1** |
| Educational qualification | 0.60 | 0.03 | -0.15 | -2.2** |
| Age | 0.62 | 0.02 | -.016 | -2.2** |
| Self-regulation | 0.64 | 0.02 | -0.27 | -2.3*** |
| Emotional Intelligence | 0.66 | 0.02 | -0.44 | -5.9*** |

$f = 5.66$; $df = 5,219$; $p < 0.001$

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The result revealed that educational qualification, age, gender, self-regulation and economic intelligence were significant predictors of attitude towards unethical work behavior ($R^2 = 0.66$; $F(5, 219) = 5.66$; $p < 0.001$), explaining sixty-six percent (66%) of the variance in attitude towards unethical work behavior. This means that these variables are important in understanding attitude towards unethical work behavior.

Table 3: Multiple comparison analysis of influence of emotional intelligence and self-regulation on attitude towards unethical work behaviour

| Groups | N | Mean | SD | 13 24 |
|---------------------|----|------|----|---------------------|
| Low EI and Low SR | 91 | 50 | | - |
| 8 | | | | 6.33*** |
| Low EI and High SR | 60 | 43 | | 7.80*** 1.96* |
| 8 | | | 44 | 7.88*** 2.68** 0.89 |
| High EI and Low SR | 41 | 10 | | - |
| High EI And High SR | 30 | 40 | | |
| 6 | | | | |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Note: High scores reflect favourable/positive attitude towards unethical work behaviour.

The results revealed that academic staff who scored highly in emotional intelligence and self-regulation ($m = 39.61$) reported a significantly favourable attitude towards ethical work behavior ($m = 49.62$) than those who scored low in emotional intelligence but highly in self-regulation ($m = 43.23$), and those who scored highly in emotional intelligence but low in self-regulation ($m = 40.88$), as well as academic staff who scored highly in emotional intelligence and self-regulation ($m = 39.61$). In other words, academic staff that scored high on emotional intelligence and self-regulation possesses higher ethical values than their colleagues.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis, it was revealed that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, age, gender and educational qualification contribute significantly to variance in attitude towards unethical work behavior. These findings mean that emotional traits (emotional intelligence and self-regulation) and demographic variables (age, gender and educational qualification) are significant in explaining attitudes of academic staff towards unethical work behavior.

The findings also revealed a significant influence of age on attitude towards unethical work behavior. Relatively older persons are more inclined toward ethical behavior than younger persons. The findings also support the significant influence of educational qualifications on attitude towards unethical work behavior. Highly educated individuals tend to have more ethical principles, compared to their counterparts with low levels of education. A significant influence of gender on attitude towards unethical work behavior was also revealed in this study. This is closely related to Adebayo (2005), which showed that females are more concerned with ethical issues than their male counterparts.

The findings of this study also emphasized a significant influence of emotional intelligence and self-regulation on attitude towards unethical behavior. The findings clearly substantiate the authors' hypothesis that high levels of emotional intelligence and self-regulation enhance an individual's control of his behavior. Thus, the findings showed that people who have high emotional intelligence and self-regulation know how to control their emotions. Emotional intelligence and self-regulation are qualities that every faculty should possess, so as to be able to deal with the students, public and their colleagues in order to enhance their productivity.

CONCLUSION

This study found that emotional intelligence, self-regulation, age, gender and educational qualification contribute significantly to variance in attitude towards unethical work behavior. These findings mean that emotional traits (emotional intelligence and self-regulation) and demographic variables (age, gender and educational qualification) are significant in explaining attitudes of academic staff towards unethical work behavior which hampers their productivity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore suggested that:

1. The management of tertiary institutions should include emotional intelligence and self-regulation measures in its assessment tools during recruitment exercises.
2. More female academic staff and applicants with higher educational qualifications should be recruited.
3. The new and younger academics should have a realistic view of the job. This will go a long way in containing inordinate behaviours among them.
4. The Ethics and Privilege committee should be more active and effective.
5. Proper orientation and refresher workshop should be enhanced to include value analysis, with regard to ethical principles that may be unclear to academic staff. The analysis should include basic explanations of professional ethics.
6. Different punitive measures should be awarded to faculty based on the nature of the offences committed.

REFERENCES

- Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) 2016. NEC Communique, March, 2016.
- Adebayo, D.O. (2005). Gender and attitudes toward professional ethics: A Nigeria police perspective. *African Society Review* 14(2).
- Ang, S.H. (1996). Spot the difference: Consumer responses towards counterfeits. *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 25 (4) 272-277.
- Aquino, K. & Reed, A. (2003). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83: 1423-1440.
- Domagalski, T. & Steelman, L. (2004). The impact of work events and disposition on the experience of employee anger. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of management Conference, New Orleans.

- Douglas, S.C & Martinko, M.J. (2001). Exploring the role of individual differences in the prediction of workplace aggression. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86:547-559.
- Eagly, A.H & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The Psychology of Attitudes*. Forth Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Johanovich.
- Fox, S. & Spector, P.E. (1999). A model of work frustration-aggression. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* 20: 915-931.
- Gibbson, D.E & Barsade, S.G. (1999). The experience of anger at work: Lessons from the chronically angry. In R.R. Callister (Chair), Anger in organizations: Its causes and consequences. Symposium presented at the annual meeting of the academy of Management Conference, Chicago.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Gottfredson, M.R & Hirsch, T. (1990). *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Harvey, S. & Keashly, L. (2003). Predicting the risk of aggression in the workplace: Risk factors, self esteem and time at work. *Social Behaviour and Personality* 31: 807-814.
- Hepworth, W. & Towler, A. (2000). The effects of individual differences and charismatic leadership on workplace aggression. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 9:176-185.
- Jones, T.M. (1991). Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review* 16: 366-395.
- Kreitner, R., Kinicki, A. & Beulens, M. (2002). *Organizational Behaviour (Second European Edition)*. London: McGraw Hill Publishing Company.
- Marcus, B. & Schuler, H. (2000). Antecedents of counterproductive behavior at work: A general perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89:647-660.
- McShane, S.I & Von Glinow, M.A. (2000). *Organizational Behaviour: Emerging Realities for the Workplace Revolution*. New York, McGraw Hill.
- Newburn, T. (1999). Understanding and preventing police corruption: Lessons from the literature. *Police Research Series Paper 110*
- Ojedokun, O.A. (2008). Attitude towards unethical work behavior among police personnel: The Role of Emotions. *Ibadan Journal of Social Sciences* Vol 6(1).
- Peterson, D. (2002). Ethical beliefs of business professionals: A study of gender, age and external factors. *Journals of Business Ethics* 38:327-338.
- Salgado, J.F. (2002). The big five personality dimensions and counterproductive behaviours. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 10: 117-125.
- Swaidan, Z. (2006). Consumer ethics: The role of acculturation in U.S Immigrants populations. *Journal of Business Ethics* 64 (1): 1-16.