

# Workplace Ethics, Productivity and Professionalism in Library Organizations in Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigates workplace ethics, productivity and professionalism in the library organizations in Nigeria. The researchers employed the conventional content analysis approach (desk research method). They have adopted the analysis of existing documents that contain the information about the phenomenon under study. Information needed to actualize this paper was gathered from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, online sources. This involved reading meaning into materials consulted for purpose of achieving a reliable conclusion. The main objective of this study is to investigate the imperative of ethical behaviour to productivity and professionalism of workers in the library organizations in Nigeria. The study revealed that, library organizations experience increased productivity and huge success whenever management actively works to improve culture by improving attitudes, quality of work life, and job satisfaction of employees.*

**Keyword:** Workplace, Ethics, Productivity and Professionalism

## I. Introduction

Nigeria faces crises not only of development and governance but also crises of ethical issues capable of providing damaging principles for politics and business. According to Muhammed and Umar in Sev (2015), this explains why predatory use of state power and fraudulent business practices have been such recurrent phenomena at almost all periods of Nigeria's history. Predatory habits of political and administrative office-holders manifest themselves in the exhibition of nonchalant attitude towards users/prospective users or customers. This manifests in the library organizations in Nigeria.

The perceived deterioration in workplace ethics is evidenced in the violation of integrity by many employees in our contemporary work organizations (Adelabu,2008). This behaviour manifest itself in a number of frauds ranging from cutting costs, fraudulent price hike to outright embezzlement of funds. Notable scholars are of the opinion that to remain or become industry champion, ethical behaviour must be institutionalized (Sey, 2015; Osibanjo 2014).

Ethical behaviour and the prevailing system of employment relations in any work organisations is very crucial for national development, the production of goods and services for creation of national wealth, the attainment of political stability and the inclusive benefits of sustainable human development. In other words, how well organisations adhere to ethical standards, obviously, determines the well-being of all the stakeholders, the organisation's performance and subsequent profitability, as well as the macroeconomic growth and development of the nation (Adeyeye & Aina. 2012).

In practical terms, nations exist to provide security, safety and most importantly development to people who have surrendered their sovereignty in exchange for the aforementioned necessities of life, using organisations and all human resources available to them. Indeed, organisations advance the fortunes of nations

through efficiency, productivity, output level and performance as engendered by the institutional labour or a group of people known as workers. These workers are human beings with aspirations, hopes and feelings. They render their human efforts (labour) in exchange for equitable wages and salaries, good physical working environment and longevity of employment relationship, anchored on ethical standards and human resource best practices (Adeyeye,2010).

Productivity is a concept that depends on the context in which it is employed. It does not have a singular definite criterion measure or operational definition. In most organisations, ethics in the workplace is linked to productivity. This is confirmed by studies made by Qiu & Peschek, (2013) and Abiodun, Osibanjo, Adenji & Iyere, (2014). Most Codes of Ethics in the libraries, world over, try to cover some important and fundamental aspects of operational laws, rules, and principles of professionalism for their members.

The Ethics Resource Centre (2003) pointed out that in African countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya and Ghana, codes of ethics are developed for the purpose of meeting the needs for the effectual communication of organizational ethics benchmark. The objectives include ensuring that every employee receives a copy of, or has easy access to, the code; that every employee understands their personal responsibility to abide by the provisions and standards laid out in the code; that the organization's commitment to the code is unambiguous and clear to every employee; and that employee are exposed to abundant cases of the code's utility, and how collective questions about its intent and application have been determined. Attitude is very essential and even more credible than facts and figures. Attitude can make or mar an organization if not properly monitored and handled (Anchor, 2009; Swindoll, 2012). That is why Organizations experience increased productivity and huge success whenever management actively work to improve culture by improving attitudes, quality of work life, and job satisfaction of employees (Anchor, 2009). The most focal employee attitude is job satisfaction. That is why most successful organizations consider job satisfaction to be vital for work performance. This is because they believe that employees who demonstrate increasing levels of ability are influenced by commensurate increase in job satisfaction. These employees are passionate about their work and are always ready to make sacrifices at all times. Sequel to this development, Meyer (2002) opines that employee who are highly satisfied with the organisation hardly portray any form of negative attitude. This depicts that negative employee attitude stems from dissatisfaction and other concomitant variables. Job satisfaction is highly important because it is significant to the physical and mental well-being of employees as well as the organisation.

It is also the employee attitude that is most often related to organisational outcomes. It is highly unfortunate that Nigerians, both young and old have a poor attitude to work. Surprisingly, the rate at which employees exhibit lackadaisical attitudes in the libraries is heart-rending and disheartening. This has made this a subject matter of intense interest by professional scholars and researchers from different walks of life. This is proven by employees' non-challant attitudes towards their jobs. These non-challant attitudes to work of our employees are independent of geopolitical zones, religion, race, colour, educational qualification, sex and age. Workers at all levels in the libraries lack values, sense of accountability and commitment which are the basis on which effective attitudes is anchored. In the light of this study, myriads of factors have been considered to affect employees' job attitude. These factors include quality of work life, job perception, ability, effort, competence, motivation, and employee attitude and job satisfaction. This study aim is to investigate the effect of workplace ethics on the employee productivity and professionalism in the library organizations in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the imperative of ethical behaviour to productivity and professionalism of workers in the library organizations in Nigeria. The study shall also reveal the relationship between workplace ethics and work productivity as well as how workplace ethics is related to professionalism.

### **Statement of the problem**

In librarianship, code of ethics of professionalism serves as the foundation upon which librarians operate and make decisions. A professional code of ethics demands that, librarians and libraries have an understanding and knowledge of what is expected from them in terms of behaviour towards library users, the parent organisation, co-workers, and the host community while being mindful of the productivity. Adeyanju (2014) notes that, librarians are obliged to obey certain ethical principles of library profession and organisational ethics, which include honesty, integrity, social responsibility, accountability and fairness. Most library organizations fail to practice this; more so that librarianship has become more complex and the borderline between what is legitimate and illegitimate become fuzzier thus bleeding unethical behaviours. This has a way of affecting the productivity in the library organisations. This makes the need for workplace ethics, productivity and professionalism in the libraries in Nigeria an imperative one.

### **Method of Study**

The researchers employed the conventional content analysis approach (desk research method). They have adopted the analysis of existing documents that contain the information about the phenomenon under study. Information needed to actualize this paper was gathered from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, online sources. This involves reading meaning into materials consulted for purpose of achieving a reliable conclusion.

The choice of this approach became necessary because of the need to adequately expose the need for the awareness and interrelatedness of the concepts of workplace ethics, productivity and professionalism as applied in the library organizations in Nigeria

## **II. Conceptual clarification**

### **Workplace Ethics**

Ethics refer to a set of rules that describes acceptable conduct in society. Ethics serve as a guide to moral daily living and helps us judge whether our behaviour can be justified. Ethics refers to society's sense of the right way of living our daily lives (Anyam 2016). It does this by establishing rules, principles, and values on which we can base our conduct. The concepts most directly associated with ethics are truth, honesty, fairness, and equity. Workplace ethics therefore may be defined as a set of rules that describes acceptable conduct in the workplace. In the context of library establishments, ethics serve as a guide to moral daily living and helps us judge whether our behaviour can be justified

Workplace ethics also known as ethics at work can be referred to the ways employees govern themselves and their work attitude, but it can also refer to the morality or lack thereof surrounding a workplace. Workplace ethics are not the same as work ethic. The work ethic you have is your personal standard for how you do your job. It is about how detail-oriented you are, what sort of quality you are intent on delivering for every project you do, whether you are punctual, how you treat your colleagues, if you take accountability for what you do and so much more. These are all things that can be taught, but they also come down to an employee's internal moral code.

Workplace ethics can go two ways. One is how the employee governs herself within the workplace, but the other is the ethics at play in the corporate culture and how the organization conducts itself both inside and also in the larger world. Each of these can affect morale, performance, loyalty, job turnover and even employee work ethic. They are ethical principles or standards that are used to define professional or workplace ethics. Typical values include honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, honor, responsibility, patriotism, respect and fairness (Adeyeye, 2010). Honesty can also be linked with trust and confidence, strong belief in doing good always, reliability and belief in doing the right thing (ethics). Confidence is confiding in or telling one's secret or person who is trusted with private affairs of somebody, belief in oneself or what is said or done on behalf of others. Lawal (2018) averred that bank rely on public confidence which is the pivot and essence upon which financial intermediation revolves. This shows that, workplace ethics apply to banking business too and it has a way of ensuring efficiency, commitment, positive work attitude which translate into productivity.

### **Productivity in the library**

Employee productivity has been conceived differently by different people and different elements have been identified as being linked to employee productivity. According to Mathis and John (2016), productivity is a measure of the quantity and quality of work done, considering the cost of the resources used. The more productive an organization, the better its competitive advantage, because the costs to produce its goods and services are lower. Better productivity does not necessarily mean more is produced; perhaps fewer people (or less money or time) was used to produce the same amount. Anyam (2016) further states that, results are usually the final and specific outputs desired from the employee. Results are often expressed as products or services for an internal or external customer, but not always. They may be in terms of financial accomplishments, impact on a community; and some results are expressed in terms of cost, quality, quantity or time.

He further notes that measuring productivity involves determining the length of time that an average worker needs to generate a given level of production. You can also observe the amount of time that a group of employees spends on certain activities such as production, travel, or idle time spent waiting for materials or replacing broken equipment. The method can determine whether the employees are spending too much time away from production on other aspects of the job that can be controlled by the business. Employee productivity may be hard to measure, but it has a direct bearing on a company's profits. An employer fills his staff with productivity in mind and can get a handle on a worker's capabilities during the initial job interview. However, there are several factors on the job that help maximize what an employee does on the job.

Employee productivity is the amount of goods and services that a worker produces in a given amount of time. Employee productivity can be measured for a firm, a process, an industry, or a country. It is often referred to as labor productivity because it was originally studied only with respect to the work of laborers as opposed to managers or professionals (Lester, 2010). According to Business Solution Consulting Group (2008), productivity pertains to how efficiently the resources of any organization are allocated and utilized. Basically, the relationship between the amount of goods or services produced and the resources utilized in production explains employee productivity. Thus, the central focus in the measurement of employee productivity is production efficiency or increase in quality by reduction in wastages. Kaplan and Norton (2017) suggest that there are three Es in productivity or performance management literature which are: Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness. Efficiency and effectiveness are critical benchmark for measuring organizations' performance. In addition, Anchor, (2009) noted that employee productivity is influenced by level of satisfaction which depends on a number of situational and environmental factors such as pay packages, working conditions, relationships and autonomy.

### **Professionalism in librarianship**

The term 'profession' was derived from a Latin word 'profite or,' meaning to profess, which can also have the connotation of "making a formal commitment in the sense of taking a monastic oath". This root might suggest that a professional is someone who claims to possess knowledge of something and has a commitment to a particular code or set of values, both of which are fairly well-accepted characteristics of professions (Lester, 2010). According to Magali (2017), profession could be classified into four or more groups depending on the era when they began to professionalize. Generally, these are: the ancient professions (the priesthood, university teaching, law and physicianship); the mediaeval trade occupations (including surgery, dentistry and architecture); the industrial-era professions (typified by engineering); and various groups that emerged or professionalized in the twentieth century (from teachers and social workers to accountants and personnel managers). From the classification above, librarianship can be grouped as part of ancient profession as we cannot isolate librarianship from the university teaching as it provides the needed organized knowledge for the teaching profession.

On the other hand, Yaya, & Adeeko 2015 citing Lester (2010) observed a professional as a person who embodies the idea inherent in 'profite or'. A professional is a member of a profession. The term also describes the standards of education and training that prepare members of the profession with the particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform the role of that profession. In addition, most professionals are subject to strict codes of conduct enshrining rigorous ethical and moral obligations. Professional standards of practice and ethics

for a particular field are typically agreed upon and maintained through widely recognized professional associations. Some definitions of "professional" limit this term to those professions that serve some important aspect of public interest (Yaya, & Adeeko 2015) and the general good of society. In some cultures, the term is used as shorthand to describe a particular social stratum of well educated workers who enjoy considerable work autonomy and who are commonly engaged in creative and intellectually challenging work.

Besides, professionalism can be regarded as the objectivity, rules and codes of practice of a profession. Professionalism consists of some professional standards (i.e. the skill, competence or character) expected of a member of a highly trained profession. Thus, librarianship as a profession has some set of rules and codes of ethics that regulate the activities and practice of its members in the society.

### **III. Librarianship Professional Ethics**

The membership of librarianship profession is being guided by some numbers of professional ethics so as to add credibility to the profession and to prevent its members from engaging in any unholy activities in the society. In the United States, professional librarian ethics are codified in the ALA's Code of Ethics (Wiki books, 2013); these are what we adapt for this paper. Therefore, the ALA's 2009 codes of ethics for librarianship include:

**Highest level of service to all users** – Librarians are to provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources (printed and electronic); equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests (ALA, 2009). This implies that there should be no discrimination when providing library services to users. Every reader should be treated equally and justly.

**Intellectual freedom** – Librarians are to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources (ALA, 2009). In support of this ethic, Yaya, Achonna and Osisanwo (2013) in their article "Censorship and the Challenges of Library Services in Nigeria" strongly opposed the censorship of any literary work; they advocated that intellectual resources should be made available to everyone and it should not be restricted in whatever form. Unfortunately, Intellectual freedom is a major area of conflict within libraries. Intellectual freedom is a goal that most library workers can agree on in theory, but situations in everyday library work can complicate this seemingly simple rule (Wiki books, 2013).

**Privacy and confidentiality** – Librarians are to protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted (ALA, 2009). As librarians, we should maintain privacy and confidentiality rights of our clientele; it implies that we should not divulge information that pertains to any of our user to the third party.

**Intellectual property rights** – Librarians are to recognize and respect intellectual property rights (ALA, 2009). However, Wiki books (2013) painfully noted that Intellectual property rights are a difficult issue. They were of the view that while most of the rest of the ALA's Code of Ethics talks about how libraries should provide unrestricted access to information, copyright and other intellectual property rights can sometimes provide restrictions on this flow of information.

**Respecting fellow library workers** – Librarians are to treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of their institutions (ALA, 2009).

**Users Right and Dignity** - Librarians should have respect for the users right and dignity without prejudice to race, gender, religion, tribe, physical characteristics, age, place of origin, etc. Librarians should note that library users are human being like them that has blood, flesh, moods and feelings; so, their rights should be respected.

**Non-advancement of private interests** – Librarians should not advance private interest at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions (ALA, 2009). This implies that the interest of library users should be paramount above every other personal interest. We should know that library is not a personal estate of anyone where it is being ruled by personal and selfish ideas; rather, library resources and personnel are being guided and controlled by the information policies that are set up by the library management. Therefore, advancement of personal or private interests should be jettisoned.

**Distinguishing between personal convictions and professional duties** – Librarians are to distinguish between their personal convictions and professional duties and should not allow their personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of their institutions or the provision of access to their information resources (ALA,2009).

#### **The Nexus between Ethics and Productivity**

Productivity can be affected adversely when individuals are overwhelmed with laziness, negligence, irresponsibility, favouritism, self-interest and lack of self-determination. Apparently, if managers and employees are not self-disciplined, the organisation will become a lawless community which will eventually make increased productivity far from sight.

A professional code of ethics sets a standard for which each member of the profession is expected to meet. It is a promise to act in a manner that protects the public's well-being. A professional code of ethics informs the public what to expect of one's doctor, lawyer, accountant, librarian or property manager. Each profession or trade has its own problem of ethics. The conduct of members must be judged by its consequences to the group itself and to the community. From the forgoing, it is clear that libraries must operate ethically; this is because duty demands that high ethical standards are required of them to earn the confidence of users/potential users and the parent organisation.

The work attitudes, integrity, self-discipline, teamwork, emphasis on quality, commitment and productivity of the Nigerian workers have painted a rather negative picture of an apathetic, uncommitted men and women, who are unresponsive to motivational techniques. The Nigerian workers have been described as indolent, apathetic and unresponsive to motivation and generally, not willing to put forth maximum productive efforts (Salau, Faiola, & Akinbode, 2014). Whichever way we look at it, the Nigerian workers are what we have, hence we must encourage them to make meaningful contribution to the development of the nation by becoming more productive.

#### **The Nexus between Ethics and Professionalism**

Odozi (2007) defined ethics as the rules or principles of appropriate behaviour or conduct for morality and encompasses doing what is good and right, even when that will bring us some pain. Adelabu (2008) explained that ethics is the study of moral principles, beliefs, attitudes and how people should conduct or behave in social interactions. Therefore, personal, business and professional ethics have consciously and/or unconsciously evolved over time in order to regulate, control and improve service delivery professionally. Professional ethics involve the standards of competence and practice or code of conduct expected of the professionals or trade group or association, both written and unwritten.

However, when ethics and professionalism are combined as professional ethics, it involves a nexus of written and unwritten norms and best practices such as honesty, integrity, competence, loyalty, transparency, accountability et cetera. (Odozi, 2007). Ethical and professional standard must be set by the individual employee, groups, organization and professional bodies so as to prevent human excesses in terms of greed, lust for power, fraud and other malpractices usually exhibited by workers in the organizations such as libraries.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

There is a connection between workplace ethics, productivity and professionalism. A healthy or positive interrelationship of the three concepts by workers on an organization will have a positive impact on the organizations' aims and objectives. But as can be seen in the literature, when workers in the library organizations exhibits unethical attitudes at work, it will result to unprofessionalism and will affect productivity in those library organizations in a negative way.

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