First Name Office Culture and Employee Behavior in Work Places

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Abstract *The examination of the behavioural responses of the reciprocal first name exchange as a policy in firms in Nigeria was the main objective of this research. It was also the intent of this empirical work to highlight the challenges and issues of the transferability and applicability of contemporary work culture within the context of the Nigerian cultural environment. For this study, the cross sectional survey design was adopted and the questionnaire method of data collection was used .A non parametric Bivariate Correlation was employed for the purpose of data analysis. The findings revealed that the lower the level of comfort employees felt with the reciprocal use of first names as a policy in workplaces the more dysfunctional their behaviours. It was recommended among other things that corporate policies, practices and strategies must take cognizance of local national cultural specifics.*

General Terms: *Organizational Behaviour; Diversity Management; Cross-Cultural Management*

Keywords: *First Name; Title; Corporate Culture; Employee Behaviour; Nigeria; Cross-Cultural Management*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a multicultural country is host to many firms, whether they be regarded as indigenous, local or domestic on one hand or foreign, multinational, multi-domestic, global or international on the other hand, the logical thinking is that each of them should benefit from the host and contribute to the host to make it attain its desired position among the comity of nations. The thought processes, emotions and behaviour of the persons who work in these firms are governed by beliefs and values of the cultural set they have been socialized and encultured into. In other words an organizations environment may tend to exert considerable pressure capable of affecting its performance and ultimate survival. (Bamgboje-Ayodele and Ellis, 2015)[6].With abundant human resources, it is expected that the behaviour of the employees should be such that firms achieve their desired goals, survive and continue to thrive. However, Nigeria's cultural dimensions are very diverse and coordinating and managing the persons from the different cultures within the organizations represents one of the greatest challenges of managers.

Before the advent of the British colonialists, the employment relations system in practice in Nigeria was paternalistic in nature. The family heads had the role of the employers and the employees were members of his immediate family. Present socio-relational job context have changed dramatically. Nigerian firms are going global and the potentials of Nigeria's vast population and enormous natural resources make her an investment haven for foreign investors as multinational firms continue to extend their presence across her geographical regions. She is still one of the highest destinations of foreign direct investment, being the largest economy in Africa (African Development Bank Group, 2014)[3].

As the number of multinational firms increases and more indigenous firms assume global stance, there is the tendency to observe the adoption and adaptation of many 'foreign' workplace cultural practices as well as global management philosophies and theories in the Nigerian business environment. These workplace practices may have been seen to be highly motivational and beneficial in some other environmental contexts (Kraimer, *et. al.,*2014)[20]. However, it is not uncommon to see workers in these organizations in Nigeria, confused, frustrated, disillusioned and even angry when they observe these 'strange' cultural value differences being imposed on them. Many cross-cultural business exchanges seem not to consider local social cultures as important and appear to be oblivious of the implications of this neglect on the work behaviour of their employees. The managers who may have fared well elsewhere tend to overestimate their own competence in the imposition of these values, while the employees on their part may tend to define and redefine what they do and how they do them thus exhibiting certain dysfunctional behaviours which may be detrimental to the organization's ultimate goal.

This work intends to fill the gap by highlighting the challenges and issues of the transferability and applicability of contemporary work culture within the context of the Nigerian cultural environment and make theoretical and practical contributions to the existing literature on cross cultural management as well as cross-cultural theory building. Suffice it to say that the behaviours being exhibited by the employees may have

nothing to do with their specific skills and competences which gives credence to the old adage that people are hired for their talent and fired for their behavior but if nothing is done to arrest the situation, the health and ultimate survival of the organization may not be guaranteed as persons often fail at work by exhibiting patterns of behaviour that are detrimental to the health of their organizations.

The reciprocal first name exchange policy for all employees at all levels in some organizations is one policy that negates traditional Nigerian values. The shock the employees feel may not only be within the persons but also between them. There is a struggle to understand and give meaning to the situation such a policy places on them.

It is common knowledge that the persons who work for organizations could make or mar the organizations by their behaviour and conduct. In this paper, the reciprocal use of first name exchange as a policy in organizations in Nigeria was critically looked at with a view to elucidating and highlighting the cultural implications for the employees and the behavioural responses exhibited with the attendant implications for the organization.

2. LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Corporate culture is the set of key values, beliefs, understandings and norms that members of an organization share (Daft, 2013)[10]. The corporate culture is expected to guide the behaviour of employees and stake holders over a period in such corporations. With over four hundred and fifty ethnic groups, Nigeria could easily be described as a cultural maze (Adegboye, 2013)[2]. Culture in Nigeria, though very many and varied based on the various ethno religious and language divides have certain common values (Falola, 2001)[13]. The concept of culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create. It refers to the way of life of the individual member of groups within a society; how they dress, their religious ceremonies and leisure pursuit (Oni 2005)[25]. People consider culture to be important for a number of reasons. It could be seen as defining peoples' identity and consequently, it has been argued that a people without culture are a people without identity. By defining peoples' identity, culture helps to distinguish between or among peoples of different societies or communities. Adedimeji (2009) declares that to be removed from one's culture is to be deprived of one's identity. To lose one's identity is to be tossed in the wind, fluttering along like a leaf separated from its tree. Again, culture is considered to be very important in ensuring the survival and development of a community. To buttress this, Adedimeji (2009)[1] opines that a society robbed of its culture can only marginally survive and anyone that loses his cultural or linguistic legacy is bound to expire. Culture plays a critical role in ensuring continuity in any given society by helping to transmit values, beliefs, rituals, and so on from one generation to the other since culture usually evolves as human beings attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment (Nwaegbu, *et.al, 2011*)[23].

In the light of the above preamble, this work draws heavily from the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957)[15] as well as the Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987)[8]. Cognitive dissonance is the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas or values (Festinger, 1957, 1962)[16]. The Politeness Theory is based on the concept that people have a social self image also known as 'face' that they consciously project and try to protect. The politeness theory holds that people use various strategies to protect the face of others when addressing them. Sometimes a face-threatening act may occur. A face threatening act (FTA) is an act which challenges the face wants of an interlocutor. FTAs may threaten either the speakers or the hearers positive or negative face. When they do certain behaviours are exhibited (Brown and Levinson, 1987)[8]. For example, expressions, comments or other acts which seem rude or as a taboo to a hearer, threaten the hearer's positive face.

Hofstede (1980)[18] having looked at a number of variables identified five dimensions of national culture that can be seen to illustrate different values in different national cultures and show which values lie deeply embedded in people from different cultures. These values may have consequences on how people in different cultures behave, and how they will potentially behave in a work related context. The dimensions include Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Individualism vs. Collectivism and Long vs. Short Term Orientation. Generally, power distance could be high or low. If one belongs to a culture displaying high power distance, there will be the tendency to view power as a reality of life and believe everyone has a specific place in the hierarchy of power and expect that power will be distributed unequally and there is a better acceptance of autocratic and paternalistic power relations. In this case, subordinates simply acknowledge the power of superior based merely upon his relative position in the hierarchy of authority. A leader is followed because of the social position in the family, business or government. Orders are seldom questioned and are followed simply because of the role in the hierarchy is to follow orders. In cultures with low power distance, people are likely to expect that power is distributed rather equally, are furthermore also likely to accept that power is distributed to less powerful individuals and expect power relationships to be participatory, democratic and consultative. The leader is viewed as an equal regardless of his or her formal position or title. As opposed to this, people in high power distance cultures will likely both expect and accept inequality and steep hierarchies. Uncertainty Avoidance refers to a lack of tolerance for

ambiguity and a need for formal rules and policies. This dimension measures the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations. The majority of people living in cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, are likely to feel uncomfortable in uncertain and ambiguous situations while people living in cultures with a low degree of uncertainty avoidance, are likely to thrive in more uncertain and ambiguous situations and environments. Masculinity vs. Femininity is concerned about the extent of emphasis on masculine work related goals and assertiveness, as opposed to more personal and humanistic goals. In individualistic cultures people are expected to portray themselves as individuals, who seek to accomplish individual goals and needs while in collectivistic cultures, people have greater emphasis on the welfare of the entire group to which the individual belongs, where individual wants, needs and dreams are often set aside for the common good. The Long vs. Short Term Orientation is based upon the teachings of Confucius and was initially called Confucian dynamism (Hofstede and Bond, 1988)[19] . The long-term orientation reflects a dynamic, future-oriented mentality while the short-term orientation is oriented toward present and past and reflects a relatively static, tradition-oriented mentality (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011)[21].

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigeria falls into the very large power distance category, this means that persons are more attuned to status, hierarchical and power differences. Understanding the differences in cultures is becoming ever more important as we continue to become an integrated global economy. Specifically, how one views power relationships will affect how that person will act in business negotiations, as managers, and as employees. Using a low power distance management or negotiation approach on someone accustom to a high power distance viewpoint may very well backfire and be counter-productive. The reverse is also true. In spite of Nigeria's diversity, there appears to be a common emphasis on the values of the age-grade system which forbids the young to call and refer to the older by his/her first name (Oghojafor, ,et. al,2012).

The reciprocal use of first name as a policy in organizations is one with a high potential of dissonance. The theory of cognitive dissonance focuses on how humans strive of internal consistency. An individual experiencing dissonance tends to become psychologically uncomfortable and is likely to try to reduce this dissonance as well as actively avoid situations and information likely to increase it (Festinger, 1957)[15].

3.   FIRST NAME OFFICE CULTURE

A name may be seen as a word or phrase by which a person is known. To some persons, a name is simply used for personal identification. In traditional African settings, names are more than tags for identification. In Nigeria in particular, every name is supposed to have a meaning. The name one is called should have a reason, explanation

or justification. The name may signify the circumstance of birth, an experience, event or phenomenon. However, in some workplaces, managers in their bid to encourage a flatter organizational structure, open communication, teamwork and creativity have the policy of reciprocal first name exchange for all employees at all levels.

Nigeria is a hierarchical society and Family relationships are guided by hierarchy and seniority. Age and position earns, even demands, respect. Age is believed to confer wisdom so older people are granted respect. The oldest person in a group is revered and honoured. In a social situation, they are greeted and served first. In return the most senior person has the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.

Reciprocal first name use seems often to be taken by some persons with western orientation to indicate that an encounter is proceeding well. . However, in Africa, Titles are important and taking titles is a cultural thing. The titles were conferred on deserving citizens based on the worthiness as a socially relevant personality in the community. However, the current trend is a proliferation of titles which demand appears to be growing by the day (Uwalaka, 2014). The titles appear to be indices for assessing achievements and growth for individuals and the society in general. These appendages, be it of cultural, professional, career, academic, religious and even secular variations, usually bestow upon the bearer that feeling of self accomplishment and grandeur. It is believed that an average Nigerian who has severally been described as "title crazy' will resist any attempt to be addressed by any appellation devoid of any title and being referred to simply as 'Mr." may not suffice. In the early 1980s the *Guardian* had a long-running campaign against the use of traditional chieftaincy titles, calling for Nigerians to be addressed simply as "Mr" or "Mrs"(Asuzu ,2005)[5].This campaign may have lost its fervor. The usual preference is an honorific title plus any academic or professional title and the surname. In other words in Nigeria where titles are highly revered and the age grade system disallows the address of seniors by name, this policy may be seen as highly provocative to many. This practice is in direct conflict of the traditional value of respect of elders (Adegboye, 2013)[2]. In some cases, employees resort to a situation referred to as name avoidance (Morand, 2005)[22]. This is a situation where workers are not sure of the norm of addressing superiors and avoid calling them anything at all. The higher the rank the less likely employees were to address a boss by name. This "conversational black hole" where nothing is said creates unnecessary tensions in the work place (Morand, 2005). In most Nigerian cultures, especially among the South Western geo-political region, where the culture forbids the younger to refer to the older by first name, this "conversational black hole" may be featuring prominently.

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4. EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR

One of an organization's most important assets is the employees. The life and death of organizations are in the hands of the persons who work there. This is so because they control all the organizations resources and make all the decisions there. Employee behaviour refers to the way employees react to situations and circumstances and the manner by which they interact with one another in the work place. To Griffin and O' Leary- Kelly (2004), employees may put up a number of workplace behaviours to include performance behaviours, withdrawal behaviours and organizational citizenship behaviours. To these authors, the total sets of work-related behaviours that the organization expects the individual to display are the performance behaviours. Absenteeism and high turnover rates constitute withdrawal behaviours in organizations while organizational citizenship behaviours are the behaviours of individuals that make a positive overall contribution to the organization. Organ (1988)[26] defined Organization Citizenship Behaviour as individual behaviour that is discretionary but not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. It has been opined that citizenship behaviours must be monitored and properly managed in order to enhance employee job satisfaction and performance as well as corporate performance (Mart and William,2003; Sharma, et. al,2011)[30]. Carmeli, et. al, (2006)[9] posit that innovative behaviour in the workplace begins by an employee identifying a work-based problem which is followed by the development of new ideas and solutions for the problem. The final step in the innovative process is to develop support for the new ideas and solutions, so they become embedded within the organization. The authors simply define Innovative behaviour as the process of bringing new problem solving ideas into use, thereby enhancing a product, service or process.

In trying to understand how to react to certain office cultures employees may present a variety of behaviours, which Brown and Levinson (1987) referred to as negative and positive politeness. Negative politeness can be called "politeness as a strategy for self-protection". In this situation employees may feel that keeping a safe distance from others is best. The feeling may be that familiarity breeds contempt. On the other hand, positive politeness is one that saves or maintains the other person's self-image. It is concerned with their need for inclusion and social approval. Scollon and Scollon (1995)[29] are of the opinion that it is preferable to refer to such strategies as 'involvement' or 'distancing' strategies as these terminologies avoid the implicit evaluation contained in Brown and Levinson's terms. They also suggest that the concept of face has built into it both aspects as involvement and independence must be projected simultaneously in any communication. The negative feelings about certain discomfort in an employee has in

the work environment could influence his/her behaviours. People may cooperate with, compete with, support or undermine one another as their beliefs and feelings about themselves, their coworkers and the organization shape their behaviour (Daft, 2013)[10]. Several workplace behaviours have been identified to include but not limited to workplace deviance, antisocial behaviours, organizational aggression, retaliatory behaviour, organizational misbehaviour, and organization-motivated aggression (Anwar, et.al, 2011,;Fagbohungbe,et.al,2012; Rafiee,et.al, 2015.)[4][12][27]. The Behaviour employees exhibit could distract the organization from its goals or help achieve the goal beyond expectations. Griffin and O' Leary- Kelly (2004) [17] believe that pattern of actions by the members of an organization directly or indirectly influences organizational effectiveness. By understanding what causes the exhibition of various behaviours, managers can exercise leadership to achieve desirable outcomes (Daft, 2013).

5. METHODOLOGY/ DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

To obtain a sample from the population comprising firms operating the reciprocal first name exchange policy, the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination was used. Respondents were drawn from Multinational companies, Banks and other private firms in this category. For a population of 5000 employees, the sample size was 370 employees going by the aforesaid formula. To analyze the primary data, the cross sectional survey design was adopted. The primary data collection method was the questionnaire method. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to employees of firms operating the reciprocal first name office policy located in three cosmopolitan cities of Port Harcourt, a hub for the South –South and South-East geo-political zones; Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital, located in the South- West Zone and Abuja, Nigeria's capital and a central hub for North-east, North-west and North-Central geopolitical zones. The Choice of the cities was to obtain data from a wide range of subjects from different geographical, ethnic and religious backgrounds, which forms the basis of the different cultural orientations of Nigerians. To give meaning to the variables, the predictor variable, first name office culture was operationally defined as the level of comfort employees felt with the reciprocal use of first name and this was looked at in terms of the comfort level of the called(CLCD) and the comfort level of the caller (CLCR). To measure the Predictor Variable, a five point Likert – type scale instrument design was generated. The scale ranged from 'very uncomfortable' or the least degree of occurrence to 'Very comfortable' or the highest degree of occurrence .To measure the Criterion Variable for this Study, Communication was seen as the level of willingness to share information and ideas with others ; Citizenship Behaviour was looked at as the willingness to contribute beyond given task requirements ; Propensity to

leave was operationally measured as the degree of the employees desire to leave the firm based on the prevailing circumstance; Creativity was measured in terms of the amount of new ideas as suggested by employees. To ensure internal reliability, the survey instrument was assessed by means of Cronbach Alpha coefficients. Items that returned alpha values of 0.7 and above were be considered as reliable. Frequency tables and charts were used to present demographic data in the area of

descriptive statistics. A non parametric bivariate Correlation (Speaman's Rho) was employed for the purpose of data analysis. Two hundred and sixty-eight (268) out of the three hundred and seventy (370) copies of the questionnaire distributed were returned. This response rate of 72.4% was regarded as significant in this work.

6. RESULTS/FINDINGS

Table 1: Shows the Summary of results of Correlation Analysis

Correlations

			CLCD	CLCR	COMMUNICATION	CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR	CREATIVITY	PROPENSITY TO LEAVE
Spearman's rho	CLCD	Correlation Coefficient	1.000		.775**	.727**	.645**	-.442*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	268		268	268	268	268
	CLCR	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	.722**	.626**	.619**	-.223*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N		268	268	268	268	268
	COMMUNICATION	Correlation Coefficient	.775**	.722**	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.			
		N	268	268	268			
	CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR	Correlation Coefficient	.727**	.626**		1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.		
		N	268	268		268		
	CREATIVITY	Correlation Coefficient	.645**	.619**			1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			.	
		N	268	268			268	
	PROPENSITY TO LEAVE	Correlation Coefficient	-.442*	-.223*				1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				.
		N	268	268				268

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results as summarized in Table 1 indicate an inverse correlation between the reciprocal use of first name and rate of employee propensity to leave the organization and a direct correlation between the reciprocal use of first name and employee communication pattern, organizational citizenship behaviour and employee creativity. The results were significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels. Looking at the results from the operational stand point, the findings are that the lower the level of comfort employees felt with the reciprocal use of first names as a policy in workplaces the less freely they communicated and shared information, the less the they contributed willingly to the firm's success beyond ordinary levels, the less innovative and creative ideas they came up with and a higher propensity to leave the firm and vice versa.

7. DISCUSSION

In contemporary workplaces are persons with diverse cultural perspectives. Globalization has been seen as being responsible for inter-cultural exchanges and the coming together of people of diverse persuasions. However, efforts to manage organizations by stipulating office cultures to enhance corporate goals and objectives as well as prevent overt and covert conflicts within and between persons abound. In these organizations, it is not uncommon to observe subordinates addressing superiors by their first names. In Nigeria, the cultural context in

which the employees are used to makes some of them sometimes reluctant to call more powerful others by their first names as this may be indicative of levels of familiarity, social distance or intimacy while at other times they eschew the use of an alternative title and last name because of its connotation of deference and formality. To reduce the discomfort felt by callers the use of *madam* to refer to a female and *oga* (common term for Mr.) to refer to male are common. Note that this effort to reduce the callers discomfort goes against the corporate policy and the callers fear the organizational consequences. In Nigeria, it is common to find the members of an extended families working together as a unit through life. The extended family system is the backbone of the social system and there remains a strong tradition of mutual caring and responsibility among the members. Thus, it is not uncommon to find spouses, members of the same immediate or even extended family working and interacting in the same organization. Also, there are likely to be situations where the callers, in the bid to feel comfortable, choose not to call others in the firm any name or title. This results in what Morand(2005)[22] refers to as name avoidance and awkward silence .

The effects of globalization on various aspects of the life of developing nations have always been controversial. For example, it has been acknowledged that the crisis in the Nigerian cultural environment is as a result of

globalization which appears to have alienated the people from their roots (Eze, 2014)[11]. Ugbam,*et.al* (2014,)[32] are of the view that globalization aims at cultural homogenization .To them, *g*lobalization has impacted both positively and negatively on the Nigerian cultures to the extent that one cannot convincingly prove that its net effect is negative and to state also that the negative effects came as result of Nigerians copying what was wrong in foreign cultures of their own freewill. However, many scholars and practicing managers seem oblivious of the apt advocacy of the adaptation of the phrase 'think globally and act locally', this is sometimes expressed by converging the words 'global' and 'local' into the single word 'glocal' hence, 'glocalization' (Robertson,1992[28]; Swyngedouw,2004).

In today's borderless and wireless world few societies are immune to foreign concepts, values, and lifestyles (Fang, 2011). Today, cultural learning takes place not just longitudinally from one's own ancestors within one's own cultural group but all-dimensionally from all possible potential cultural orientations, that is, from different nations, different regions, different cultures, and different peoples in an increasingly borderless and wireless workplace, marketplace, and cyberspace. As a result, each culture has the opportunity to acquire its own unique cultural profile over time by balancing between cultural ecology and cultural learning through selecting values from among globally available value orientations.

When employees are not comfortable with their work environment, there may be the tendency to behave in certain manners such as regularly staying away from work or even deciding to leave the organization all together. Employees may have a high propensity to leave their firms but with high unemployment and underemployment rates like that of Nigeria and in the absence of better alternatives if they leave, there is the decision to remain and stay aloof, making themselves inaccessible and unapproachable. They also engage in behaviours such as gossiping , backbiting, rudeness, yelling and angry outbursts, not rendering support in the workplace ,show of vindictive behaviours ,especially towards the 'disrespectful colleague' ,in-fighting as well as other disruptive behaviours. All of these are done to 'deal with' whatever and whoever they reckon to be the cause of the high level of discomfort being felt. Suffice it to say that, when employees are uncomfortable with an office culture, the behaviour they exhibit directly affects colleagues; especially those individuals who they feel give them the most discomfort. As stated elsewhere in this work, all of these behaviours have been found to trigger low productivity and poor performance in organizations.

8. CONCLUSION /IMPLICATION FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

From the results, one can conclude that the lower the level of comfort employees felt with the reciprocal use of first names as a policy in workplaces in Nigeria, the more

dysfunctional their behaviours. This work highlighted the need to pay closer attention to work place culture and brought to the fore, the behavioural implications of the reciprocal use of first name as a policy in organizations. It was neither a campaign to boycott foreign culture nor a call to shut borders to foreign influences as it may also be extremely difficult if not impossible to return to pre-historic times. However, caution should be the watch word in the adaptation of foreign culture.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Similar studies could be carried out in countries with cultural orientations akin to that of Nigeria to obtain behavioural outcomes.
2. The behavioural responses of other predictor variables which have implications on issues of the transferability and applicability of contemporary work culture.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Office cultures such as the reciprocal use of first name in organizations in Nigeria should not be set as a policy rather individuals should be allowed to relate with others in the firm in away they feel most comfortable, taking cognizance of the comfort of others.
2. Any office culture to be introduced must weigh the immediate external environmental culture as well as the potential level of comfort of the employees.
3. Corporate policies, practices and strategies must take cognizance of local national cultural specifics.

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