



IMPACT OF BUSINESS ETHICS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN KADUNA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of business ethics on employee performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kaduna North Local Government Area, Kaduna State. The main objective of the study is to assess the impact of business ethics on employee performance of SMEs in Kaduna North LGA. A sample size of 304 registered SMEs was used. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used to determine the sample of this study. Data for this study were collected through primary source using questionnaires and SPSS version 20 was used to analyse the data. Using multiple regression the study found that discipline, trust and justice have a significant positive impact on employee performance of SMEs in Kaduna North Local Government Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study concludes that increase on employee performance is dependent on the effectiveness of discipline, trust and justice. It is, therefore, recommended that SMEs management should pay greater attention to these variables (discipline, trust and justice) in determining their optimal business ethics and elevate the level of employee performance.

Keywords: Business Ethic; Employee Performance; SMEs; Trust, Discipline; Justice

1. Introduction

Work ethics plays a major role in the success of organisation because it reflects the confidence of employees on their organisation that will lead to the employees' development, transparency, integrity, organisational reputation, and better work processes. In the same context, organisations focused on goals and principles, values and ethics in the performance of employees. Ethical behaviour is very significant when dealing with stakeholders that have a right on and an interest in a company, such as the shareholders, managers, employees, suppliers and distributors, customers, community and society as a whole. Employees can have the right to benefit or have a great loss by the company's actions (Ebutu & Buredugo, 2015).

Business ethics is very important in modern business practices. Surviving long term businesses require conducting it ethically and doing its business on ethical lines, while unethical actions and decisions may yield results only in the very short run. Also, social component cannot be overlooked due to the problems that arise from the relationship between the business and the society (Paswan & Asansol, in Buhari, 2018).

In Nigeria today, unethical conduct is an intrinsic vice within the business community. Most SMEs managers display exploitative behaviour such as dishonest, corrupt business practices



with tax evasion, inappropriate use of business resources, illicit business participation coupled with opportunism, lack of confidentiality, favouritism and funding embezzlement. SMEs treat employees unfairly, produce substandard goods and mislead customers about product needs and trends. Many SMEs are avoiding product quality assurance certification by the Standard Organisation of Nigeria. There is also evidence of unethical public procurement conduct and behaviour in Nigeria with many SMEs, failing to adhere to contractual obligations. Owing to the aforementioned problems this study is carried out to examine the impact of business ethics on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kaduna North Local Government Area (LGA). The main purpose of this study is to assess the impact of business ethics on employee performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kaduna North LGA. Specifically, the study aims at highlighting the impact of discipline on employee performance of SMEs in Kaduna North LGA; identifying the impact of trust on employee performance of SMEs in Kaduna North LGA; and examining the impact of justice on employee performance of SMEs in Kaduna North LGA.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Ethics involves moral principles that guide behaviour, which reflects what is right or what is wrong in terms of the human behaviour practiced by individuals or organisations. Mrayat (2011) sees ethics as the compatibility with standards, values, behaviours or literature that specialises mostly in professions, also known as the standards of the act and behaviour that we expect to be followed by people or employees and personal morality relate to individual daily act.

To Gamlund (2012) ethics is asystematic reflection on moral views and standards (values and norms) and how one should assess actions, institutions and character traits. Furthermore, Russo (2012) views ethics as the critical and rational examination of questions of right and wrong in human action. Ethics is a rule or standard governing the relationship between people or employees and organisation. Furthermore, Anam (2011) added that decisions are based upon ethical principles, which are the perceptions of what the general public would view as correct. Having such a distinction ensures that public administrators are not acting on an internal set of ethical principles without first questioning whether those principles would hold to public scrutiny. It also has placed an additional burden upon public administrators regarding the conduct of their personal lives. Public sector ethics is an attempt to create a more open atmosphere within governmental operations. Ethics must be seen as an ongoing activity and not as a status to be attained.

Ferrell, Fraedrich and Ferell (2008) see business ethics as “inquiry into the nature and ground of morality where the term morality is taken to mean moral judgment, standards, and rules of conduct. Gbandi and Oseyomo (2014) in Abdulmalik (2019) opined that business ethics is a code of moral principles and values that direct the behaviour of an individual or a group in terms of what is right or wrong. Business ethics in this study is regarded as any activity that is considered right or wrong in an organisation. It is a very important aspect in every organisation that provides a foundation for understanding how to succeed in business. Business ethics involves standards and values that are used to administer decisions and actions within



organisations. It assesses the ethical and moral principles and difficulties that arise in a business environment. Cole (2014) defines business ethics as a contemporary organisation's standards, principles, set of values and norms that govern the actions and behaviour of an individual in the business organisation. Barsh and Lisewski (2014) referred to business ethics as a systematic process that commercial organisations use in order to evaluate actions as right or wrong. In addition, Lewis (2015) defines business ethics as a rules, standards, codes or principles which provide guidelines for morally rights behaviour and truthfulness in specific situations. Ebutu and Buredugo (2015) added that business ethics is identifying and implementing standards of conduct that will mold employees' demeanors and perceptions that conform to established standard in the organisation.

Discipline entails the action or inaction that is in conformity to the rules and regulations framed in order to have an acceptable behaviour. Discipline also involves the rules and conditions that are inflicted on employees by management in order to correct or avert behaviours that are unfavorable to an organisation (Abdulmalik, 2019). According to Adams (2003), organisation rules and regulations are among the strategies designed to instill good conduct of employees just like students in a school. This ensures self-control, orderliness, good behaviour and obedience to organisation authority (Adams, 2003). Also on employment, employees are given prospectuses, which spell out some of the expectations (Adams, 2003). These rules and regulations specify in most cases what new staff should do and what they should not do. Despite this expectation, in most cases in Turkana County, staff break these rules and regulations with wide spread indiscipline acts such as absenters from work without permission, taking of alcoholic drinks, and participating in frequent strikes these among others affect employees performance.

Furthermore, Dimisan (2013) observed that in regard to employee behaviour, discipline entails keeping order and control among a group of workers in the organisation by using methods that build morale, esprit de corps and obedience, which is one of the most basic demands an organisation has to accept and adhere to them. Moreover, Knight (2014) also defined discipline as a pattern of behaviour which can be traced back from a particular training. Marucha (2014) viewed discipline as part of business ethics in which employees or individuals are subject to specific regulations in order to enhance their performance towards the duties assigned and also consist of rules, regulations and process that have to be followed so as to ensure a conducive environment for carrying out the business. Discipline is a punishment enforced by management to employees for wrong doing in an organisation to ensure proper respect or obedience (Abdulmalik, 2019). Welch, Hinnan and Moon (2005) see trust in public institutions as a means to which personnel honor and relate to administrative rules, standards, laws and regulations relating to provision of services and information so as to enhance proper code of conduct. Cook and Wall (2013) recognise trust as "faith in the trustworthy intentions of others" and "confidence in the ability of others". Furthermore, Das and Tang (2013) stated that trust is "the degree to which the trustor holds a positive attitude toward the trustee's goodwill and reliability in a risky exchange situation".

Trust implies confidence in the honesty and capabilities of others, while tracking their records based on past accomplishments. Trust is very significant to organisations as it is the foundation in the development of teamwork, which makes it more probable for employees to increase



efficiency and decrease cost (Freund, 2014). Lewicki (2014) also underline that trust is usually connected with positive expectations of the other side. Furthermore Dyer and Chu (2014) “trust is one party’s confidence that the other party in the exchange relationship will not exploit its vulnerabilities. Ajazzaf (2014) defined trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the action of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust or irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.

Justice entails moral values that involve fairness in all activities that are carried out individually or within an organisation. It also reflects giving each person what he or she deserves and fair allocation of the organisational resources. Rowland and Hall (2012) defined justice as the fair allocation of the organisation’s resources, the fairness of the systems and processes according to which decisions are made and the fairness of interpersonal treatment.

Furthermore, Iqbal (2013) viewed justice as the fairness in protection of rights and punishment of wrongs, while all legal systems aim to uphold this ideal through fair and proper administration of the law. Joubert (2015) sees justice as the legal or philosophical theory by which fairness is administered and are concerned with punishment for wrongdoing. The definition given by Rowland and Hall (2012) will be adopted as it suits best for this study. This is because, the researcher sees justice as part of ethical conduct in business process and decisions are made based on such foundation of just and fairness. Faruk (2016) justice, without regarding the decision process behind the distribution of organisational outcomes, focuses on the equity regarding the economic and social outcomes of the decision making process. Hanum (2016) justice is the fair treatment to employees and is divided into three types: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. Thus, the relationship between study organisational justice and job performance is not only dependent on job tasks but also involves interpersonal elements and motivations which also contribute to job performance.

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2008) stated organisational justice is when an individual feels treated well at work, and it attracted a large amount of research attention. Because the theory of equality justice focused on the results of all employees to promote a high level of motivation, it was often referred to as the theory of distributional justice. Distribution of justice in organisations, such as pay, promotion, and working conditions and task requirement, is an important contributor to the perception of organisational justice. According to Wang, Lioa, Xia and Chong (2010) organisational justice is the fair treatment of employees. Justice is divided into three: “distributive justice” focuses on the reasonableness or fairness of an organisation evaluate the work of the payment and promotions, “procedural justice” stressed the reasonableness or fairness of the decision process based on the work accomplished, and “interactional justice” describes the concerns of interpersonal behaviour provided by the organisation for the implementation of the circular (Abdulmalik, 2019).

Employee performance entails method used in organisations to verify the capabilities and output of the employees. It is also a way used in appraising the employees for their effectiveness and efficiency in the organisation. Thao and Hwang (2015) define employee performance as the successful completion of tasks by a selected individual or individuals, as set and measured by a supervisor or organisation, to pre-defined acceptable standards while efficiently and effectively utilising available resource within a changing environment. Employee performance is defined



by Mrayat (2011) as the way to perform the job task according to the prescribed job description and to complete the task within the defined boundaries. Awan and Tahir (2015) also define employee performance as the job related activities expected of a worker and how well those activities were executed. Mangkunagara (2001) sees the term employee performance as the result of the quality of work achieved by an employee in carrying out their duties in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to them. Moreover, business personnel directors usually assess the performance of each staff member on an annual or quarterly basis so as to help them identify areas for improvement.

Nowadays the markets are also very competitive and for every organisation, it is difficult to start, survive, stabilise and excel in the business, the firm that gets the advantage over other competitors through their talented and dedicated manpower can take the lead in the market. The contribution of employees on job is the most important factor for development and excellence in business. The performance of employees on different jobs in close coordination is needed for success of the unit.

Business Ethics and Employee Performance

Shukurat (2012) studied impact of ethical leadership on employee job performance. Despite the growing concern of researchers in the field of business ethics, cases of unethical practices have continued to manifest in corporate organisations. Corporate leaders engage in decisions that have resulted in lack of trust in the organisations leadership; and lack of commitment to organisation's goals. The paper tried to examine the concept of ethical leadership, the characteristics of an ethical leader, ethical leadership and its impact on employee job performance and how organisations can develop leaders that are not only sound in character but sound in action. Corporate business leaders are expected to be persons of "strong characters" and serve as role models to their employees; which without, the organisation's goals may be undermined. Two important variables; trust and commitment were discussed for better understanding of ethical leadership and employee job performance. The study concluded with some suggestions from the literature.

Stephen (2012) indicates that there was a positive relationship between disciplinary procedure and employee performance. He further states that in an organisation, it is very important to have a good relationship between the managers and employees. Mulyanto (2015) found that discipline have no effect on workers performance and need to pay attention on the business. Murachi (2014) in his study found out that manager were not well trained in handling disciplinary cases and often they overlooked some procedures, this impacted negatively on employee performance. Brigata (2015) in his study found that business ethics has a direct relationship with employee performance and the organisation.

Alanazi (2013) states that to provide best outcome in the business, it is important to follow some business ethics because it is directly linked to the employees' performance and ultimately the business. He further states that, in an organisation, it is necessary to have good terms between the employees and employer and among employees. Abu Samak (2017) shows that there is a positive relationship between business ethics and employees performance. The study shows that ethics has a great role to play in the profitability of the organisation and also, helps in governing



the conduct of the employees. There was no much study that link business ethics and employee performance, but the variables were linked to employee performance.

Kalay (2016) in his study indicated that organisational justice, distributive justice has a significant impact on employee performance while procedural justice and interactive justice have no significant impact on employee performance. Anthony (2017) shows that employees' knowledge and discipline led to promotion of employee's performance.

3. Methodology

The study adopts descriptive survey research. The population of the study covered all the registered SMEs in Kaduna North Local Government Area. The total population of SMEs in Kaduna North LGA stood at 1282 sourced from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN, 2019). A sample size of three hundred and four (304) registered SMEs was used. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample size determination table was used to determine the sample of this study.

Sample size formula for arriving at a finite population is;

$$S = \frac{x^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + x^2 P (1-P)} \dots\dots\dots 1$$

Where;

- S = required sample size
- X = z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)
- N = population size
- P = population proportion (expressed in decimal) (assumed to be 0.5) 50%
- d = degree of accuracy (5%) expressed as a portion (0.5); it is margin of error.

The study used primary data collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire contained structured questions relating to the study variables; productivity level, discipline, trust, and justice. The data collected for the study were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. The reliability coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, and its suitability for the study. The procedure also enabled the establishment of internal consistency of the instrument.

The study has three objectives and research questions which were achieved through the use of the multiple-regression.. The model of the study is specified mathematically thus:

$$BUSETH = (DIS, TRS, JUS) \dots\dots\dots 2$$

Where: *BUSETH* represents business ethics. *DIS* represents discipline. Trust is represented by *TRS* and *JUS* represents justice. Since employee performance is to be measured by productivity level then the second equation will be as such:

$$EmPerf = (PROLVL) \dots\dots\dots 3$$

Where *EMPERF* represents employee performance and *PROLVL* represents productivity level. Drawing from these equations it will be depicted that employee performance will be dependent on business ethics, because of this the third equations comes as such;



$$PROLVL = f(DIS, TRS, JUS) \dots\dots\dots 4$$

This equation shows that productivity level is a function of discipline, trust and justice. In order to ascertain the level at which business ethics impacts on employee performance as related to the study, equation (3) and (2) will be put together.

$$PROLVL = \alpha + \beta_1 DIS + \beta_2 TRS + \beta_3 JUS + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots 5$$

Where PROLVL is productivity level, α is the intercept. $\beta_1 - \beta_3$ represents the coefficient of the independent variables, while ε is the error term. From the above equation, equation (5) becomes the model that was used in the study to ascertain the relationship between the variables business ethics and employee performance.

Table 1: Bases of Measuring the Study Variables

Variables	Measurement
Dependent Variable Proxy (Employee Performance)	Productivity Level (Awan & Tahir, 2015).
Independent Variable Proxies	
Discipline	Non-compliance (Anthony, 2017).
Trust	Honesty between employees (Joanna, 2013).
Justice	Respect for right and property (Bies & Moag, 1986).

4. Results

A total number of three hundred and four (304) respondents were randomly selected and questionnaires were administered to them. However, only two hundred and ninety eight (298) respondents representing 98% of the target sample size responded.

Correlation Result

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	EMP	DISC	TRU	JUS
EMP	1			
DISC	0.701	1		
TRU	0.517	0.110	1	
JUS	0.611	0.636	0.162	1

SPSS Output, 2019

Employee Performance (EMP) has a strong and positive relationship with Discipline (DISC) which can be seen by the coefficient value of 0.701. Trust (TRU) has a strong and positive relationship with EMP which can be seen by the coefficient value of 0.517; while TRU has a weak and positive relationship with TRU which can be seen by the coefficient value of 0.110. Justice (JUS) has a strong and positive relationship with EMP and DISC which can be seen by the coefficient value of 0.611 and 0.636 respectively; while JUS has a weak and positive relationship TRU which can be seen by the coefficient value of 0.162.



Regression Result

Table 3: Regression coefficients

Variables	Co-efficient	T-statistics	P-values
Constant	0.241	2.433	0.015
DISC	0.430	12.847	0.000
TRU	0.318	13.431	0.000
JUS	0.166	5.177	0.000
R ²	0.713		
Adj. R ²	0.710		
F-Statistics		243.479	
F-Significance			0.000
Durbin Watson	2.055		

SPSS Output, 2019

Cumulatively, R² and Adjusted R² have a coefficient value of 0.713 and 0.710 respectively. This explicates that the Independent Variables (DISC, TRU, JUS) were able to explain the Dependent Variable (EMP) 71% the remaining 29% are not captured in this study. The regression result reveals fitness of the model for having F-statistics value of 243.479 which is above F critical value and F-significance of 0.000. The implication of this result is that the overall impact of the explanatory variables on the dependent variable is significant at 1% level, with 99% level of confidence. Lastly, the finding shows that the Business Ethics plays a significant role in the Employee Performance SME's in Kaduna North LGA at the period of the study.

Discussion of Result

The summary of all the major findings as well as the test/proof of hypothesis will be discussed under this section. Discipline (DISC) has a moderate and positive effect to employee performance at 1% significant level; denoted by a co-efficient value of 0.430, t-value of 12.847 which is above the F critical value and p-value of 0.000. This implies that Business ethics measured by Discipline has a positive and significant impact of employee performance of SME's in Kaduna North LGA at 99% confidence level.

Thus, the finding provides evidence to reject the null hypothesis which states that DISC has no significant impact on employee performance. The finding is in agreement with studies of Mangkengara and Octorend (2015), Mulyanto (2015) and Elqadri, Wigayata and Priyono (2015).

Trust (TRU) has a weak and positive effect and significant impact on employee performance at 1% significance level as denoted by a co-efficient value 0.166; t-value 5.177 which is above F critical value and p-value of 0.000. This implies that TRU has a positive and a significant impact on employee performance SME's in Kaduna North LGA at 99% confidence level.

Hence, the findings provide evidence to reject the null hypothesis which states that TRU has no significant impact on employee performance. The finding is in treaty with the studies of Barries, Chaher and Yehia (2014), Latifi and Shoostarian (2014) and Piekani and Shamri (2016).



Justice (JUS) has a moderate and positive effect and significant impact on employee performance at 1% significance level as denoted by a co-efficient value 0.318; t-value 13.431 which is above F critical value and p-value of 0.000. This implies that JUS has a positive and a significant impact on employee performance SME's in Kaduna North LGA at 99% confidence level.

Hence, the findings provide evidence to reject the null hypothesis which states that JUS has no significant impact on employee performance. The finding agrees with the studies of Joubert (2015); Azeem, Abrar and Zubair (2015); and Kwong and Quoc (2016).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the finding of the study suggests that business ethics had significant impact on employee performance of small and medium enterprises. The study concludes that increase in employee performance is dependent on the effectiveness of discipline, trust and justice, as such, these variables should be considered very important when making decisions concerning employee performance.

Based on the findings from the results, the following recommendations are made. In line with the results of this study, SMEs management should pay greater attention to those significant variables in determining their optimal business ethics and elevate level of employee performance of their core business operations and hence, overall performance increase. SMEs should improve justice by being sensitive to information and changes in grievances of the employees, as this has tremendous impact on the employee performance of SMEs in Nigeria. Also, SMEs should continue to invite experts to train their employees on discipline and trust so that they can learn from internationally recognised practices. SMEs should concentrate seriously on serving their employees within short time and helping them access their needs and rights efficiently and effectively as this is the best way to improve the employee/management relationship.

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