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Workplace Ethics and Organizational Performance of Owner Managers Businesses in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study investigated the relationship between workplace ethics and organizational performance of owner managers businesses in Rivers State. The survey design was adopted and a population of one thousand three hundred (1300) small and medium-sized businesses that are managed by the owners were covered. A sample size of 297 owner managers were drawn from the population. The systematic sampling technique was used in this study. Data were collected using copies of questionnaires. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient. The study found that there is a significant relationship between the dimensions of workplace ethics (integrity and trustworthiness) and the measures of organizational performance (corporate reputation and profitability). It was concluded that workplace ethics in terms of integrity and trustworthiness help in boosting the total performance of owner managers businesses in Rivers State. The study recommended that the owner managers of business organizations should ensure they act with high level of integrity as such will help enhance the firm's reputation.*

Keywords: *Workplace Ethics, Organizational Performance, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Corporate Reputation, Profitability.*

1.0 Introduction

In today's workplace, ethics is a crucial concern because organizations cannot thrive if both employers and employees don't regularly uphold high standards of conduct. The system of moral values, guidelines, and behaviour is known as ethics. Workplace ethics is the practice of acting morally according to the established standards of behaviour to prevent harm to others when carrying out organizational operations Ugoji (2009). It is a collection of ethical precepts, conduct norms, or set of values pertaining to correct behaviour at work. Employees or employers that act against these moral principles and established norms are acting unethically because workplace ethics involves moral principles, standards of behaviour, or a set of values guiding right conduct in the workplace.

Ethics are defined as moral principles or views about what is right or bad by Jones, George, and Hill (2000). These ideas serve as a framework for determining what is, and is not appropriate behaviour and serve as a guide for how people interact with other people and groups (stakeholders). Workplace ethics is designed to instill predetermined standards of conduct among employees of the organization. Every firm in the highly competitive world of today faces new difficulties in achieving sustainable productivity and a dedicated workforce. Today, no organization can function at its highest potential unless every person is dedicated to the goals of the company. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the idea of organizational success and its realistic result.

Etuk, Etuk, & Michael (2014) ethics and morality are aspects of axiology concerned with what is good, what is beautiful and what is wanted or desirable human behaviour. The connection between people and their institutions is governed by modern norms or standards of conduct, which are the subject of ethics. Ebitu and Beredugo (2015) define ethics as a collection of moral principles or values that an organisation uses to guide the behaviour of both its employees and itself in all of its business endeavours, both internally and externally. According to Turyakira (2018), "ordinary decency" includes qualities like integrity, honesty, and justice and is a necessary component of ethics in the world of organisation business. It is believed that acting ethically is an aspect of an organization's social responsibility, which is dependent on the idea that businesses should have an impact on society in ways other than just maximising profits.

The performance of an organization is sometimes based on the ethical work climate. Ethical work climate expresses the ethical reasoning of the organisation as a whole. Thus, robust ethical culture gives workers a basis for considering moral dilemmas (Abiodun, & Oyeniyi, 2014), although organisation members may have sound arguments for what is morally right, putting those arguments into action depends on the limiting impacts of two additional contextual factors: collective moral sentiment (in the form of collective empathy) and collective moral competence. Over the years, several empirical studies have been conducted by academics to explore ways to improve workplace ethics and organizational performance (Ezeanyim, & Ezeanolue, 2021; Azowa, & Tantua, 2020). Despite the work done by scholars, there is still a shortage of work that explores how workplace ethics relates with organizational performance of owner managers businesses in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Etiquette, honesty and self-control have inevitably been impacted by the productive enterprise's eagerness to meet corporate objectives and employees' desire for equity, which has indirectly affected performance and productivity within the firm. Given a favourable work environment, Nigerian workers have historically been considered among the best in the world. Because Nigerian workers mainly care about what they may get from an employment relationship, the rating has fallen much below average in recent years. The ultimate goal of this study is to identify how workplace norms and advantageous circumstances might increase organizational performance in terms of profitability and brand reputation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to examine the relationship between;

i. Integrity and corporate reputation.
ii. Integrity and profitability.
iii. Trustworthiness and corporate reputation.
iv. Trustworthiness and profitability

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between integrity and corporate reputation of owner managers businesses in Rivers State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between integrity and profitability of owner managers businesses in Rivers State.

H03: There is no significant relationship between trustworthiness and corporate reputation of owner managers businesses in Rivers State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between trustworthiness and profitability of owner managers businesses in Rivers State.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

The theory underpinning this study is Institutional theory propounded by William Richard Scott (1995). According to this idea, organizations are "products of social reality, which is created by human interaction, symbolic and relational structures, routines, and artifacts. This theory examines the procedures by which frameworks, such as plans, rules, norms, and routines, come to be recognized as authoritative standards for social behaviour. It focuses on the deeper and more robust aspects of the social system. Different facets of institutional theory can all be used to describe how these qualities are created, diffuse, adopt, adapt, and diminish over time and geography (Foote, 2008). There is "no unique and generally recognized definition of a 'institution' (workplace) in the institutionalised school of thought," according to Scott (1995), who defined institution.

Operational framework

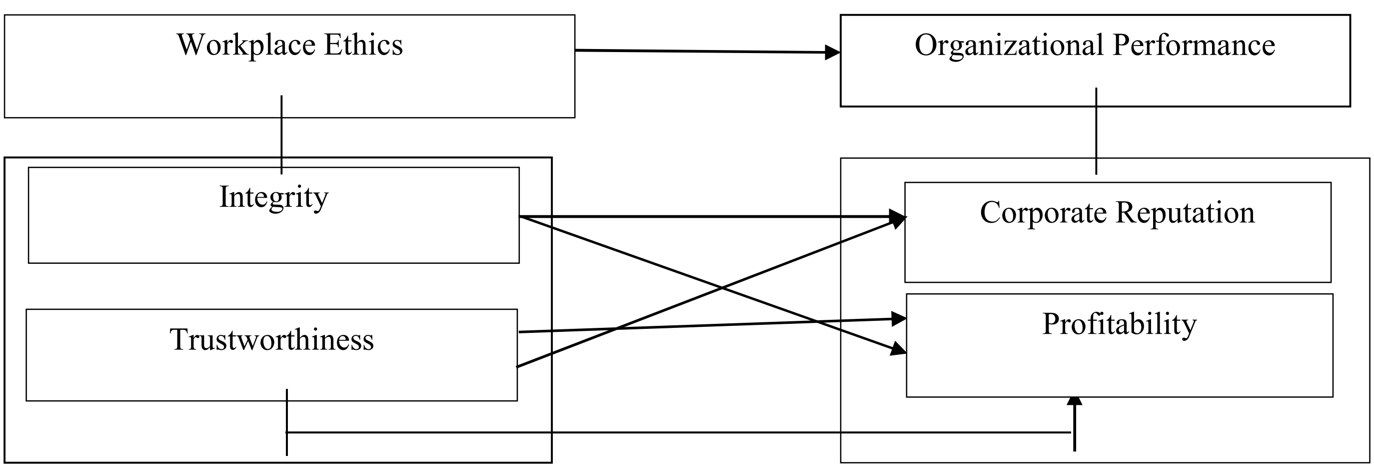

Fig. 1: Operational Framework of Workplace Ethics and Organizational Performance
Source: Researchers Conceptualization

Workplace Ethics

Workplace ethics is a framework of moral standards that are used in the workplace. It is a completely new field of study because it incorporates political theory, legal doctrine, philosophical writings, and historical records. The term "ethics" has evolved into one that can mean many different things. Workplace ethics offer standards for appropriate behaviour by organisations in both their daily operations and the development of their strategies. A person's actions and behaviour within a business organization are governed by current organisational guidelines, tenets and collection of values, and conventions, which are referred to as business ethics. There are two types of business ethics: normative business ethics and descriptive business ethics. The field is predominantly normative in nature as a business practice and a professional specialty (Stead, Worrell and Stead 2010). A set of moral standards that are implemented in the workplace is what is known as workplace ethics. It is an entirely new branch of the scientific community since it brings together philosophical and historical sources in addition to legal theory and political discourse. According to Schwartz (2007), the term "ethics" has grown increasingly fluid and may refer to a wide variety of facets. He went on to elaborate that ethics in the workplace offer rules for appropriate behavior by firms in the process of formulating strategies as well as in their day-to-day operations.

Integrity

Based on this simple definition, integrity can be simplified as a key to an achievement of an outcome of quality work entrusted to an individuals or organizations based on integrated and comprehensive work characteristics. According to Mocamber (2019), integrity is thought of as the sincerity and truthfulness of a person's deeds. Hypocrisy is in opposite to it. Integrity standards judging entails seeing internal consistency as virtue. It is now clear from a number of studies that enhancing the culture of integrity has grown to be a top priority and is crucial for an organisation (Kebede and Lemma, 2020). According to Vaduva et al. (2016), integrity ensures that an ethical concept is applied consistently not only locally but also worldwide.

Trustworthiness

Trust is both a noun and a verb—a feeling and action that is a crucial means by which individuals or groups interact (Gold, 2017; Kerasidou, 2017). Credibility is founded on the knowledge and understanding that the other person is reliable and upholds the best interests of the person or group, helping them in accordance with their requirements and choices (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020). According to Fullmer and Gelfand (2012), trust in the work environment is a crucial element of teamwork. For instance, trust promotes the growth of organizational capability; and trust that provides a means of mediating, moderating and overcoming challenges so that complex outcomes and strategic goals can be realized (Hernandez et al., 2014). It is both horizontal and vertical and optimistic when individuals trust one another. According to Fullmer and Gelfand (2012) and Legood et al. (2016), it encompasses connections between leaders or managers (referred to as "leaders"), leaders and employees, and relationships both within and among teams. According to Hernandez et al. (2014) and Hungerford et al. (2016), mutual obligations such as benevolence and fairness in interpersonal communication exist in every trusting connection. In times of disruption, trust is especially crucial because it helps individuals and groups respond, navigate, adapt, and change as needed (Gustafsson et al., 2020). In addition to providing a means to an end, then, trust is also an end in itself, with long-term trustworthy leaders and team members inspire greater levels of confidence among their subordinates (Owens & Johnson, 2009).

Organizational Performance

According to Khandekar and Sharma (2006), organisational performance is essentially the results that show or reflect a business's effectiveness or inefficiency in terms of its brand reputation, abilities, and financial performance. Work performance is the way employee perform their work. An employee's performance is determined during job performance review, with an employer taking into account factor such as leadership abilities and output to assess each employee individually. A worker's suitability for a rise, for promotion, or even for termination can all be determined by job performance evaluations, which are frequently conducted annually (Rowold, 2011). The definition of performance has included both efficiency-related measures, which relate to the input/output relationship, and effectiveness related measures, which deal with issues like business growth and employee satisfaction. Performance has also been conceptualised using monetary and non-monetary metrics from objective and subjective sources. Financial metrics from secondary sources, such as return on assets, return on investment, and profit growth, are examples of objective measures. These measurements are impartial and are particularly useful for single-industry studies because of the measuring consistency across all organizations in the sample (Venkatraman & Ramunujam, 1986).

Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation is an evaluation of a firm's quality (Love, Lim, & Bednar, 2017). It represents how a firm is perceived by its stakeholders, who evaluate the firm's actions in light of the actions of other businesses as well as their own pragmatic and cognitive standards for conduct (Deephouse, Newburry, & Soleimani, 2016). Lange, Lee, and Dai (2011) summarise three aspects of a company's reputation: being known, being known for something, and generalised favorability. This is part of a comprehensive evaluation of prior studies on corporate reputation. In this study, we emphasise the generalised favorability component and define a company's reputation as the sum of public perceptions of the company. According to Fombrun (2005), companies can enhance their reputations by implementing CSR programmes. A company's reputation is enhanced when it acts in a socially responsible manner, which positively affects the public's perception of the company.

Profitability

The ability to turn a profit from every business activity is what is meant by profitability. It demonstrates the effectiveness of utilising all of a company's resources in order to turn a profit. Profitability is the capacity of a given investment to generate a return from its use, according to Horward and Upton (1953). The two types of profitability are book value (an accounting-based calculation) and market value (a marketing-based evaluation). Book value is one such Indicators of past business viability include; return on assets (ROA; Rahman & Saima, 2018; Muhammad, Rehman, & Waqas, 2016); return on invested funds (ROIC; Enqvist, Graham, & Nikkinen, 2014); gross operating profit (GOP; Tu & Nguyen, 2014); and net operating profit (NOP; Lazarides & Tryfonidis, 2006). According to Vashti, Sokmen, and Cenenak (2012) and Mohamad & Saad

(2010), market value is an indicator that reveals shareholders' long-term expectations for profitability, such as Tobin's Q.

Empirical Review:

Turyakira, (2018) analyzed the Ethical practices of small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries, aims to evaluate various facets of business ethics, including their importance to SMEs, their ethical issues, especially in developing nations, and provides solutions to these challenges. Peer-reviewed publications from recent journals were studied to determine the components of business ethics, the importance of business ethics to SMEs, the ethical issues and dilemmas faced by SMEs, and the suggested solutions to these challenges and dilemmas. It is obvious that commercial organisations cannot continue to ignore corporate ethics. There are continuous business failures as a result of unethical practices, especially those associated with employees and top executives. This article has contributed to the amount of knowledge already available on the moral behaviour of SMEs in developing nations. In order to enhance company image and competitive advantage, SME owners and managers can use the research from this article to create ethical policy structures and recommendations.

Anyim, Ufodiama and Olusanya (2018) researched on Ethics standards and practices in Nigeria public sector. In order to conduct the study, government organisations and parastatals in Lagos, Nigeria were chosen using a proportionate stratified sampling technique, and standardised tests were modified and administered to the sample. Using a proportional random and stratified selection technique, 200 respondents from agencies and parastatals, including senior, mid-level, and junior staff, were chosen as the study's sample. The data collected was analyzed using Frequency distribution expressed in percentages and Chi-square (X2) statistics to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. Aside from the fact that the human resource department is not a part of the ethical facilities, data research revealed that there is no promotion of ethics in the Nigerian public sector. The results' consequences were discussed extensively.

Ebitu, Tom and Beredugo (2015) investigated relevance of code of ethics on guiding the performance of service industry and examined also their compliance level on the established code of ethics. The study adopts descriptive research design while data were collated from 176 respondents cutting across selected Banks and GSM organization in Calabar, Cross River State. Our hypotheses were tested using Chi-square (X2) and all were supported by extant literatures. Results show that effective performance of service industry was dependent on code of ethics [X2cal = 18.082 > t 0.05 = 7.815] and that the compliance level of established code of ethics for service industry was high [X2cal = 13.801 > t 0.05 = 7.815]. Therefore, based on our research, it is vital for organisations to tighten sanctions against those who violate ethical standards. Specific mechanisms should be in place to always detect and address ethical misbehaviour.

Adeyeye, Adeniji,.,Osinbanjo and Oludayo (2015) examines the effects of etiquette and unethical behaviour on employee commitment and productivity in Nigeria. A descriptive survey research method was adopted for the study using one hundred and eleven valid questionnaires, which were administered on Employees in Government Establishments. Each item was based on a 5-Point-Likert scale. AMOS 22 was adopted in testing the study hypotheses; the data was presented with the use of SPSS while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized due to its generality and flexibility to evaluate the validity of regression and correlation between the observed variables. The results show that significant relationship exists between ethical standards and organizational productivity, in Nigeria and that integrity cum discipline have negative impact on improved productivity level of the organization, which could be attributed to the nature of these virtues being abstract and could only be seen or observed overtime. The study suggests that all government agencies such as National Pension Commission (PENCOM), Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), Economic &Financial Crimes Commission & Independent Corrupt Practices, etc. saddled with the duty of ensuring etiquette in workplaces, should discharge their responsibilities more diligently and sanction organizations found guilty of unethical conducts in business concern and employment relationships.

3.0 Methodology

This study utilized the survey research design and one thousand three hundred (1300) registered small and medium scale enterprises in Port Harcourt were covered as the population of the study. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample size determination was used to arrive at a sample size of 297. The systematic sampling technique was used in this study. Data were collected using copies of questionnaires. The independent (workplace ethics) variable was operationalized using integrity and trustworthiness. 5 items were used in measuring each of the items. The dependent variable (organizational performance) was measured using corporate reputation and profitability. Each of the variable was measured with 5 items. The data was analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation.

4.0 Results

297 copies of questionnaire were distributed and only 291 were retrieved and used for the analysis. The result for this test is presented below;

Table 1: Integrity and Measures of Organizational Performance

			Integrity	Corporate Reputation	Profitability
Spearman's rho	Integrity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.869**	.901**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	291	291	291
	Corporate Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.869**	1.000	.859**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	291	291	291
	Profitability	Correlation Coefficient	.901**	.859**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	291	291	291

Confirmation on the nexus between integrity and measures of organizational performance such corporate reputation and profitability are experiential to be significant at a Pv < 0.05 in the two hypotheses. The result shows that integrity has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with corporate reputation at a Rho = 0.869 and a Pv = 0.000 and integrity further contributes strong and positive correlation towards profitability at a Rho = 0.901 and a Pv = 0.000. The result presents integrity as having a significant and positive impact on the two measures of organizational performance and as such contributing significantly towards the owner managers ability to maintain and keep its business flowing. Therefore, we reject null hypotheses one and two relating to integrity and corporate reputation and profitability, because the Pv (0.000) <0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: Trustworthiness and Measures of Organizational Performance

			Trustworthiness	corporate reputation	profitability
Spearman's rho	Trustworthiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.708**	.601**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	291	291	291
	corporate reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.708**	1.000	.442**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	291	291	291
	profitability	Correlation Coefficient	.601**	.442**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	291	291	291

The outcome in table 2 on the nexus between Trustworthiness and measures of organizational performance such as corporate reputation and profitability are experiential to be significant at a Pv < 0.05 in the two hypotheses. The result shows that Trustworthiness has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with corporate reputation at a Rho = 0.708 and a P-value = 0.000 and Trustworthiness further contributes strong and positive correlation towards profitability at a Rho = 0.601 and a Pv = 0.000. The result presents integrity as having a significant and positive impact on the two measures of organizational performance and as such contributing significantly towards the owner managers ability to maintain and keep its business flowing. Therefore, we reject null hypotheses three and four relating to Trustworthiness and corporate reputation and profitability.

Discussion of Findings

This covers the findings from the test of hypotheses (Ho_1) and (Ho_2). The result of Ho_1 and (Ho_2) indicated that strong relationship exist between integrity and corporate reputation and profitability respectively. Further, the positive correlation between integrity and measures of organizational performance is evidenced in Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient where 243 respondents equivalence of 83.5% and 48 respondents equivalence of 16.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that "statement items on integrity on organisational performance. Similarly, the positive correlation is attuned with the findings of previous studies like Febrina and Syamsir (2020) which indicated that integrity is vital in enhancing the wholistic performance of organizations. Furthermore, the findings from the test of hypotheses three indicated that a positive and strong relationship exist between trustworthiness and corporate reputation and that when organization are able to maintain high level of trustworthiness, such will go a long way in enhancing their corporate reputation. Similarly, the outcome of the hypothesis four indicated that a positive and strong relationship exist between trustworthiness and profitability. The profit margin of the owner business stand a better chances of maintaining higher profitability when they display high level of trustworthiness. This study aligns with the findings of Attahiru, (2021) which maintained that trustworthiness is a key factor in enhancing organizational performance

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the relationship between workplace ethics and organizational performance of owner managers businesses in Rivers State. Performance is a key ingredient for firms that wishes to sustain their stand in the business domain. Organization need to maintain high ethical standard if they must sustain high performance in the industry. Integrity help attract and sustain loyalty of customers which will thus enhance the integrity of the organization and boost the holistic performance of the organization. Building trust among the owner managers firms is vital in improving the performance. Conclusively, workplace ethics in terms of integrity and trustworthiness help in boosting the total performance of owner managers businesses in Rivers State. It is recommended that;

i. The owner managers of business organizations should ensure they act with high level of integrity as such will help enhance the firm's reputation.
ii. Every owner managers should encourage integrity as such will help build integrity and enhance the firms profitability.
iii. Owner managers are encouraged to build trust between them and its customers or business allies which will in turn builds organizations corporate reputation.
iv. Trust is a virtue as indicated in this study hence, Owner managers should not take it for granted as such will help enhance the firm's performance.

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