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A REVIEW OF NIGERIA LABOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK AND LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY

ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, labour productivity has persistently fallen below global standards despite a rapidly increasing labour force. This paradox is more severe in the public sector; where wastage, institutional capacity shortages, and poor work ethics are prevalent. This study examines the dominant work attitudes of Nigerian employees and their impact on productivity in different sectors of the economy, such as the public, private, and informal economies. By way of a critical examination of empirical research, policy documents of governments, and international labour reports, the study isolates prominent behavioural tendencies among Nigerian employees, like lateness, absenteeism, poor morale, and resistance to change that destroy output and productivity. The study also discusses socio-economic and organisational determinants of such attitudes, which include low remuneration, lack of training, poor working conditions, and poor career development opportunities. The paper contends that productivity enhancement in Nigeria is not merely a matter of raising capital investment or macroeconomic change. It demands a strategic priority on work ethic change, institutional accountability, and a culture of performance. The study concludes that it is necessary to tackle the attitudinal dimension of the Nigerian labour force to realise labour productivity gains in the long term and, by extension, national development.

Keywords: *Labour productivity, work attitude, public sector, motivation, organisational performance*

Introduction

Labour productivity is output per labour unit and is the fundamental driver for economic growth, competitiveness, and sustainable development. It indicates the efficiency of labour utilisation in producing economic value and continues to be a central theme of national development planning, especially for developing countries such as Nigeria. High productivity is linked to higher incomes, better standards of living, and enhanced national competitiveness in the international economy (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2020). In Nigeria, however, productivity is alarmingly low despite a growing and youthful working population. Productivity in most sectors, most notably the public sector, has come to a standstill according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) owing to a combination of structural inefficiencies and poor work culture.

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Problems like low morale, poor accountability systems, truancy, and lack of acceptance of performance appraisal have greatly affected the effectiveness of private and public organisations (Adebayo, 2018; Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). Moreover, poor human resource management techniques, demotivation, a lack of training opportunities, and unsuitable work environments have resulted in employees' deteriorating engagement and productivity (Ajayi, Omole, & Olayemi, 2017). In a majority of cases, promotions and salary adjustments are not tied to performance, therefore defeating the purpose of the need to be excellent. These collectively impair national productivity growth and economic diversification plans.

It is necessary to understand Nigerian workers' multi-faceted attitudes towards work and the socio-cultural and economic determinants of these attitudes. This paper examines the relationship between labor attitude and productivity in Nigeria, finds variations across sectors, and suggests policy interventions for boosting productivity through work ethics and organisational culture change.

Conceptual Framework

Labour Attitude towards Work

Work attitude of labour means the general frame of mind and emotional disposition of workers towards work and their work activities in the workplace. It encompasses several behavioural inclinations such as punctuality, industriousness, commitment to tasks, honesty, and intrinsic motivation. Attitudes significantly affect the performance of workers and organisational results (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). Good attitude to work is bound to foster responsibility, creativity, and effectiveness, and hence greater productivity.

Conversely, a negative attitude in the form of absenteeism, tardiness, unconcern, or opposition to accountability will generally lead to ineffectiveness, low performance, and organisational under performance (Ajayi, Omole, & Olayemi, 2017). In the Nigerian context, work attitude is typically driven by socio-cultural norms, organisational practices, and views of reward systems and justice. For example, employees in the public sector commonly give low motivation as a consequence of delayed promotion, lack of performance incentives, and minimal reward for outstanding performance (Akinyemi, 2015). Such conditions have a propensity to generate disengagement and detachment among employees.

Labour Productivity

Labour productivity is typically expressed as the volume of goods and services generated per unit of labour input, often in terms of output per worker or output per hour worked. It is as follows: $\text{Labour Productivity} = \frac{\text{Total Output}}{\text{Total Labour Input}}$

These high productivity levels reflect effective utilisation of human capital and are linked to increased economic growth, competitiveness on a national scale, and income generation (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2020). On the other hand, low labour productivity more common in emerging economies such as Nigeria is generally a sign of structural inefficiencies, skill mismatch, and negative workplace attitudes (World Bank, 2020).

In Nigeria, other research has established the continued decrease in labour productivity in public and informal economies as a result of negative labour attitudes, insufficient investment in employees' training, and weak organisational governance (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021; Adebayo, 2018). Therefore, enhancing labour productivity must be addressed through a multi-faceted method touching on both the technical capability and attitudinal disposition of employees.

Contemporary Labour Attitudes in Nigeria

Negative work attitudes are especially prevalent in the public sector. The problems of persistent tardiness, high absenteeism, low productivity, and absence of accountability continue to be entrenched. Such practices are normally rationalised by blaming structural inefficiencies, non-payment of wages on time, weak supervision, and a culture of tolerating mediocrity (Ajayi, Omole, & Olayemi, 2017). Public officials are not usually sanctioned for poor performance, and this has led to a decline in work ethics and compromised organisational discipline (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). Furthermore, lack of promotions based on merit and the common occurrence of nepotism result in a demoralised workforce (Akinyemi, 2015).

The opposite is true for Nigeria's informal economy. Informal economy workers, in the absence of formal regulation and social protection, are oftentimes said to be very dedicated, resilient, and entrepreneurial. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) says that the informal economy accounts for over 65% of Nigeria's employment and a large share of gross domestic product (GDP). These workers in this sector frequently utilise self-management and creativity to survive in a competitive sector with minimal external assistance (World Bank, 2020).

Within the private sector, attitudes will be variable. Whereas multinational and larger local firms will promote more positive attitudes by way of performance-related rewards and formal human resource practices, smaller firms may still experience low engagement among employees because of fewer resources (Adebayo, 2018).

Determinants of Labour Attitude and Productivity

Labour productivity and attitudes in Nigeria are determined by a set of interrelated structural, socio-economic, and organisational determinants that differ in impact between sectors but cumulatively indicate systemic issues in workforce development and management.

Wages and Incentives: Pay is still one of the most potent stimulators of employee performance. In Nigeria, and even more in the civil service, employees are constantly confronted with problems of low, irregular, or delayed payment. This demotivates, encourages a culture of indifference, and most often forces workers to find alternative sources of survival during work hours (Akinyemi, 2015). In addition, performance-linked incentives like bonuses, reward systems, and career progression are lacking or poorly implemented. This creates an ineffective reward system that is unable to distinguish between high and low performers, deterring initiative and excellence (Ogunrinola & Osabuohien, 2010).

Working Conditions: The working conditions in the majority of Nigerian organisations are deplorable. Poor office conditions, poor lighting and ventilation, lack of digital equipment, and overcrowded workspaces hamper staff productivity and morale. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) stresses that decent working conditions are central to improving health, well-being, and productivity. Without a decent working environment, even skilled and motivated employees may not perform.

Leadership and Management Style: The prevailing leadership culture in the majority of Nigerian workplaces is autocratic and hierarchical. Decentralized decision-making has little room for employee input or participatory management. The top-down orientation of the style causes a disconnect between the management and subordinates, fostering alienation and disengagement (Ajayi, Omole, & Olayemi, 2017). Conversely, organisations that have transformational and inclusive leadership styles have been known to register improved employee attitudes and levels of productivity (Uchenna & Olayanju, 2019).

Training and Skill Development: Ongoing professional development is vital in sustaining a responsive and competitive labour force. Nevertheless, most Nigerian workers especially in the public and informal sectors are not exposed to training and development. It is estimated by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) that most of the labour force lacks modern technical skills and digital competencies needed to function

effectively in a continuously changing economy. The lack of systematic capacity-building programs has therefore resulted in stagnation of productivity and inefficient delivery of services.

Cultural Norms: Cultural norms and social values influence work behaviours significantly as well. Punctuality, attitude to authority, and attitudes to individual responsibility are all determined by general societal trends. An understanding and engagement with these cultural forces are required for the development of successful labour policies and management practices.

Theoretical Literature Review

Classical economic theories such as the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) all point out the skills, knowledge, and attitude of workers as fundamental determinants of labour productivity. Becker is of the opinion that training and educational investments enhance the productivity of workers as well as the quality of output.

Equally applicable is the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which relates personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over behaviour to actual behaviour. Applied to workplaces, positive attitudes and perceptions of job functions of employees increase the likelihood of productive behaviours.

Empirical Literature Review

Ajayi et al. (2017) proved that dismal attitudes towards labour such as lateness to work and absenteeism in Nigeria's public sector seriously minimised efficiency in service delivery. Similarly, Akinyemi (2015) showed that poor remuneration for work and poor working conditions demotivate employees from being productive, thus affecting the levels of productivity.

In the private sector, good human resource management practices were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and productivity (Okolie & Eze, 2016). The National Bureau of Statistics (2021) also posited that skill shortages and poor training are main contributors to low labour productivity in all sectors.

Study by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) identifies the informal sector as playing a central role in Nigeria, with entrepreneurial zeal increasing productivity despite structural issues. Capital access constraints and adequate training restrict sustainable growth.

Knowledge Gap

Most of the studies analyze a single sector or aggregate labour force data without including attitudinal dynamics between sectors (public, private, and informal). There is limited empirical evidence on how socio-cultural factors interact with institutional obstacles to shape the nature of labour attitudes in the Nigerian setting specifically.

Furthermore, very few pieces of work explore in detail how organisational culture and leadership style shape attitude to productivity translation. Most of the literature deals with economic or infrastructural determinants but ignores the nuanced behavioural and psychological intermediaries which shape productivity outcomes.

Contribution to Knowledge

This work contributes to knowledge through providing a complete, multi-sectoral examination of workers' attitudes and their impact on productivity in Nigeria. Through the incorporation of the socio-cultural and institutional factors, it fills the void in the understanding of the way these factors affect workers' behaviour and output.

Besides, the research adds to theory application as it links motivation and behavioural theories to Nigeria's labour market dynamics specifically. It also offers policy and management practical recommendations that aim at both structural reforms and cultural change, thereby presenting an integrated framework for enhancing labour productivity.

Sectoral Comparison with Data Evidence: Employment & Productivity in Nigeria

Sector	Share of Employment	Estimated Productivity Level	Work Attitude & Productivity Challenges
Public Sector	10 % of formal jobs	Low and derived from lagging formal GDP/hour figures	High absenteeism, lateness, poor accountability; weak performance-based incentives (Ajayi et al., 2017; Akinyemi, 2015)
Private Formal	12 % wage-employment overall	Higher than public, but still low globally	Better HR practices in large firms; SMEs struggle with resources and motivation (Okolie & Eze, 2016)
Informal Sector	87–92 % total employment	Very low average GDP/hour (\$6.8)	High self-employment drive, entrepreneurial spirit, and resilient work ethic that drives output despite

			challenges by finance, skills and training (ILO, World Bank reports)
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Source: *Researchers Compilation from NBS (2023) and ILO (2024)*

Sectoral Attitudinal Dynamics (evidenced-based)

Labour culture and productivity levels differ dramatically between Nigerian sectors. Sectoral analysis accounts for the variations and offers sector-specific implications for policy intervention.

Public Sector: Nigeria's public sector is typically marked by job security and permanent employment but also by systemic inefficiencies and low levels of productivity. Akinyemi (2015) also discovers that absence of accountability and performance-related incentives explains the complacency and under-performance of civil servants. Performance appraisal is rare and more ritualistic and does not significantly impact promotion, remuneration, or punishment. This is compounded by bureaucratic red tape, political interference, and lack of oversight (Obadan & Edo, 2016). As such, the public sector remains a major drag on national productivity, while consuming a huge chunk of the national budget. Negative attitudes like absenteeism, tardiness, and lack of performance-based appraisals are prevalent (Ajayi et al., 2017; Akinyemi, 2015). Although there is no publicly available public sector-specific hourly productivity data, aggregate low proportion of wage-employment and low supervision signal labour under-utilisation.

Private Sector: By contrast, Nigeria's private sector is more vibrant, competitive, and result-driven. Institutions in strategic sectors like telecommunications, oil and gas, banking, and manufacturing are more likely to embrace cutting-edge human resource practices such as performance-measured evaluation, ongoing professional development, and employee reward schemes. These practices have been associated with positive work attitude and high labour productivity (Ejumudo, 2014). Nonetheless, small- and medium-scale businesses (SMEs), which are the majority in the private sector, continue to face limitations such as inadequate access to funds and low managerial skills (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). Multinationals and big firms tend to adopt merit-based promotions, training and performance rewards, and thus comparatively better attitudes and productivity (Okolie & Eze, 2016). SMEs lack similar systems.

Informal Sector: The informal sector, which by itself accounts for over 65% of total Nigerian employment (NBS, 2021), is driven chiefly by necessity entrepreneurship and subsistence activity. Although devoid of formal organisation, the sector is often characterised by high productivity at the micro level, particularly in retail trade, artisanal activity, and transport services. In informal economy, the workers tend to possess good work ethic, flexibility, and innovativeness as they have to live from day to day. Yet, productivity and growth

potential of the sector are hampered by limited access to finance, low levels of training, lack of social protection, and illegal status (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2020; World Bank, 2020). Even constrained by infrastructure, skills, and finance, informal workers mostly exhibit commitment, resilience, and necessity entrepreneurship-driven innovation (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

Labour Attitude and Its Impact on Productivity

Good, positive work attitude manifested as punctuality, responsibility, commitment, and motivation has direct relation with better performance outcomes. Workers that perform their tasks responsibly and with intention are more likely to achieve targets, sustain team unity, and provide quality services (Ajayi, Omole, & Olayemi, 2017). This relationship has been demonstrated in several empirical studies in the public and private domains. For example, Ezeani and Oladele (2013) discovered that Nigerian local government workers who exhibited a responsible and proactive mindset were more productive. Likewise, in the private sector, business organisations that promoted meritocracy and staff engagement had greater operational efficiency and innovation (Okolie & Eze, 2016).

Conversely, negative attitudes towards work like lateness, absenteeism, lack of commitment, and corrupt predisposition have also been understood to be significant obstacles to productivity. In the public sector, the occurrence of these behaviours has been attributed to ineffective supervision, lack of punishment, and workers' low morale (Obadan & Edo, 2016). Not only do these negative attitudes impact the productivity of a single worker, but also compromise institutional integrity and service delivery.

Moreover, organisational culture and leadership style are mediators in the attitude-productivity link. Excellence-oriented work environments that allow employees to engage are likely to promote positive attitude and sustainable performance (Ejumudo, 2014). Reforms for enhancing productivity must therefore put high value on workplace culture transformation and ethical work attitude formation.

Strategies for Improving Labour Work Attitudes and Productivity

Strategies for improvement are deliberate, targeted measures to alter the dominant trends of labour attitudes and overall productivity in the Nigerian labour force. They are policy reforms, organisational restructuring, leadership change, skill acquisition programmes, and cultural reorientation designed to address the root causes of poor work ethic, low motivation, and structural inefficiencies. In the Nigerian context, labour productivity improvement cannot be achieved by the simple injection of technology or capital investment but requires a composite intervention to align human resource practice with socio-economic realities. Such interventions

must be both preventive reducing the incidence of counterproductive workplace attitudes and corrective addressing already manifest productivity issues through sustainable reforms. By integrating institutional accountability, workers' empowerment, enabling working conditions, and ethical values into organisations' DNA, these strategies have the aim of creating a workforce that is not only competent but also favourably inclined to work, thereby advancing national economic growth and competitiveness.

Institutional Reforms: Akinyemi (2015) states that by making wages and promotion dependent on quantifiable results, workers will likely increase effort and dedication. Such reforms avoid indolence and foster the meritocratic culture. Additionally, explicit accountability systems such as periodic performance reviews and open disciplinary actions are vital in maintaining productivity gains (Ajayi et al., 2017).

Capacity Development: There is a need for continuous professional development in an attempt to equip employees with the capability to respond to changing technological and market needs. The National Bureau of Statistics (2021) indicates that skill deficiency and obsolescence continue to be significant concerns in most Nigerian workplaces. Training sessions, workshops, and certification exercises can enhance worker competencies, confidence, and productivity (ILO, 2020).

Work Environment: Enhancing the physical and psychosocial work environment greatly affects workers' morale and effectiveness. Most Nigerian work environments have poor facilities, obsolete equipment, and congested conditions that undermine effectiveness (ILO, 2020). Rehabilitation of office structures, providing ergonomic safeguards, and encouraging occupational health and well-being initiatives can enhance workers' satisfaction and decrease absenteeism (World Health Organisation, 2019). A conducive environment favors focus and long-term productivity.

Ethical Orientation: Maintaining a culture of integrity, transparency, and anti-corruption is essential in thwarting negative attitudes toward labour. Unethical attitudes and corruption undermine trust, demoralize staff, and divert organisational resources from planned uses (Obadan & Edo, 2016). Ethical training, whistleblower protection, and definitive codes of conduct establish an ethical work culture that maintains accountability and fairness, promoting overall productivity (Transparency International, 2022).

Participatory Leadership: Embracing participatory leadership styles enables greater staff involvement and peace of mind in the workplace. When employees have avenues through which they can air concerns and contribute to decision-making, organizational commitment and job satisfaction are enhanced (Ejumudo,

2014). Involving such inclusiveness will encourage workers towards responsibility for their job, again enhancing performance results (Okolie & Eze, 2016).

Conclusion

In the public sector, lateness and absenteeism that are rooted in poor performance systems and erratic pay undermine the low 10 % wage-employment ratio reflecting underutilised labour compounded by evidence of weak attitudes. (Ajayi et al., 2017; Akinyemi, 2015). With an entrenched informal sector workforce of 93%, though poorly remunerated, often self-regulate and innovate to survive on a daily basis (ILO, 2020), the labour productivity in Nigeria is barely US \$7/hour. The discrepancy between raw employment and productive performance is a sign of systemic issues in responsibility, motivation, and training.

Institutionalisation of performance management systems based on merit, fair and periodic remuneration, and improved working conditions are some required starting points. Yet, long-term productivity increase also relies on building a culture of accountability, integrity, and ongoing professional development in organizations (Obadan & Edo, 2016). In addition, participatory leadership and inclusive management that engage workers in decision-making can enhance job satisfaction and favourable attitudes towards work (Ejumudo, 2014). These can bridge the gap between organisational goals and individual worker objectives, towards greater motivation and output. Finally, by establishing a culture of excellence, ethical practice, and learning in the workplace, Nigeria will be able to galvanize its workforce more toward achieving national development.

In essence, poor public sector work attitudes manifest themselves as low productivity and wastage of funds, while attitudes of overcompensation in the informal sector manifest themselves as unscalable working patterns with unscalable productivity. Both have their roots in structural impediments like weak systems of governance, ineffective incentives, and a lack of social safety nets that in their turn cause the perpetuation of such attitudes in a vicious cycle that keeps national productivity suboptimal.

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