Chapter 10

Work Values and Work Orientations among University Students

Dejo A. Abdulrahman

Introduction

There is no doubt about the significance of work for human societies. It is through work that the goods and services needed by members of the society for survival and reproduction are produced and distributed. For the individual, work is indispensable to the formation and development of personality, skills and abilities, achievement and a source of self esteem both in and out of the work place (Fox, 1971). This significance of work accounts for the unceasing interest in the study of its various dimensions such as job values, work orientations, job satisfaction, work ethic, motivation, etc, and their precursors and outcomes.

This paper focuses on the job values and work orientations of university students. Commonly expressed views tend to suggest that the work ethics and positive work values of the first post-colonial generation of workers (e.g. punctuality, loyalty, hard work, etc.) have declined over time and continue to do so. A study of university students, therefore, will give us a peep into the future of work and productivity in Nigeria and overall national development. Furthermore, work values have considerable influence on the subjective experience of work

i.e. how people perceive and react to the various dimensions of their jobs. Studying students will enable counselors in our various institutions do a more well-informed job of directing the students to jobs that coordinate well with their values; enable researchers see the consequences of the existence or absence of 'fit' between workers and their organisations; and, see how individuals and organisations change over time as a result of the interaction between the workers' work values and the characteristics of the organisations in which they work.

Methodology

Following Kalleberg (1977:129), we define work values as "the conceptions of what is desirable that individuals hold with respect to their work activity". Based on popular discourse and a review of relevant literature (e.g. Weber, 1930; Sugarman, 1966; Irwin, 1976; Hofstede, 1978; Tayeb, 1988) we identify the following as values that are more likely to promote productivity:
(a) positive time orientation
(b) loyalty
(c) respect for authority
(d) respect for rules and regulations
(e) ability to work with least supervision
(f) selflessness
(g) sense of self efficacy

We sought to measure the students' scores on these values. In addition to information on demographic characteristics, statements were presented on work values, time orientations, independence and loyalty. Respondents were given five options (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to choose from. On the importance of certain job attributes, three options ranging from Not Important to Very Important were provided. The questionnaire was pilot tested

using eight third and fourth year students in the Department of Sociology while three experienced lecturers were used to determine face and content validity.

The Sample

Third and fourth year undergraduate students in three faculties (Education, Social Sciences and Management Sciences) were selected for the research. The choice of third and fourth year students was predicated on the belief that the values under consideration would be more readily observable in these groups of students and also because they would be better able to complete the questionnaire on their own.

Four lecturers teaching some of the very large classes were given fifty questionnaires each and were asked to administer the questionnaires in class, taking a systematic random sample of each class. Seven of the questionnaires from three of the four classes were found not to be fully completed and were removed. The result presented below is for 193 completed questionnaires although there were some missing responses as indicated in the tables.

Table10.1: Demographic Characteristics

1	**Sex**	
	Male	139 (72%)
	Female	54 (28%)
2	**Age**	
	15-20 years	40 (20.7%)
	21-25 years	82 (42.5%)
	26-30 years	55 (28.5%)
	31-35 years	13 (6.6%)
	Missing cases	3 (1.6%)
3	**Marital status**	
	Single	149(77.2%)
	Married	43(22.3%)
	Missing cases	1 (0.05%)
4	**Religion**	
	Islam	167(86.5%)
	Christianity	24(12.4%)
	Others	1(0.5%)
	Missing	1(0.5%)
5	**Level of Study**	
	300	47(24.4%)
	400	133(68.9%)
	Spill over	13(6.7%)

Table 10.2: Work Values

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD	MC
1	Most important activity in life is work	39.9	47.2	3.6	6.2	2.1	1
2	To work hard is a duty of every citizen	54.9	41.5	1.0	2.6	-	-
3	Work is NOT a duty but a means to earn income	32.6	34.7	5.2	22.3	3.6	1.6
4	Only way to success is through hard work	58.5	32.1	1.6	6.7	1.0	-
5	One can be successful if one is lucky	32.1	43.5	4.7	14.0	1.6	4.1
6	Achievement in life is preordained by God	69.9	19.7	2.1	4.7	0.5	3.1

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree;
        U= Undecided; D = Disagree;
        SD=Strongly Disagree; MC = Missing cases

Table 10.3: Time Orientation, Independence, Loyalty, etc.

S/N		AL	OT	OCC	NT	MC
1	I feel emotionally drained from attending lectures	11.9	9.3	37.3	34.7	6.2
2	I feel frustrated whenever I have to attend lectures at specified times	8.3	11.9	28.0	46.6	5.2
3	I can always do at a later time whatever I am unable to do immediately	19.7	25.4	33.7	16.6	4.7
4	I find myself racing against the clock to save time	28.0	23.8	27.5	14.0	6.7
5	I feel frustrated whenever I have to solve problem without direction	20.2	15.5	27.5	32.6	4.1
6	It is necessary to question the authority of one's supervisors	26.9	22.8	26.9	17.6	5.7
7	Obedience to authority is the only way to succeed in work	49.2	19.2	18.7	9.3	3.6

| 8 | There are times when rules/regulations have to be set aside to get things done | 26.9 | 19.7 | 38.9 | 13.0 | 1.6 |
| 9 | The hours spent reading is NOT a guarantee for passing an examination | 33.2 | 23.3 | 26.4 | 15.0 | 2.1 |

Note: AL=Always True; OT=Often True; OCC= Occasionally True; NT = Never True; MC = Missing cases

Table 10.4: Importance of Job Attributes (%)

S/N		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Missing cases
1	High income	82.6	12.6	3.0	1.0
2	Opportunities to use one's skills and abilities	77.7	19.7	1.0	1.0
3	Plenty of leisure time	37.8	39.9	21.2	0.5
4	Position that others look up to	67.9	26.4	4.1	1.6
5	Clean environment	86.5	11.4	1.0	1.0
6	Least supervision	32.6	36.3	29.0	2.1
7	Being self sufficient	75.1	21.8	2.1	1.0
8	Being able to take care of myself before others	75.6	19.2	4.7	0.5
9	Hard working people should be able to acquire wealth regardless of how others live	44.6	28.5	25.4	1.6

Note: VI   =   Very Important
I   =   Important
NI   =   Not Important
MC   =   Missing cases

Result

Table 10.1 shows the demographic characteristics of the students, two-thirds of whom are in their 400 level. The majority are male, Muslim, single and young i.e. within the 21 to 30 years age group.

Table 10.2 shows the students' view on the centrality of work, and sense of self-efficacy. The table shows that majority of the students consider work a central activity in life (39.9 strongly agreed; 47.2 agreed) and hard work a duty of every citizen (54.9 strongly agreed; 41.5 agreed). Only roughly a third each strongly agreed/agreed that work is not a duty but only a means to earn income. On the issue of self-efficacy, we see contradictory or ambivalent beliefs. While 90.6 percent strongly agreed/agreed (58.5/32.1) that the only way to success is through hard work, an almost equal percentage, 89.6, strongly agreed/agreed (69.9/19.7) that success or achievements in life is already preordained or destined by God.

In Table 10.3 we see the students' responses to statements concerning time orientation, loyalty, respect for rules and regulations, etc. It is noteworthy that only about one fifth of the students feels emotionally drained from attending lectures and feels frustrated by the demand for punctuality and regularity. However, about 20 and 25 percent respectively believe it is "always true" and "often true" that they can do later whatever they are unable to do immediately. This means that as many as 45 percent, almost half, procrastinate. Indeed, 51 percent find themselves always or often racing against the clock. Almost half of the respondents think that obedience to authority is always the only way to succeed in work; 19.2 percent think it is often the only way and 26.9 and 22.8 percent respectively think it is <u>always</u> and <u>often</u> necessary to question one's supervisors. Finally a total of 46.6 percent think that rules and regulations sometimes need to be set aside in order to get things done.

Table 10.4 shows the importance attached to various job attributes by the respondents as well as their score on individualism. Not surprisingly, most of the respondents consider high income, opportunity to use skills, a clean environment and position that others look up to (i.e. power) as either very important or important. However, it is also noteworthy that majority of the students want to work with least supervision (68.9%) and more significantly want a job that gives plenty of time for leisure (77.7%) (Almost 40 percent think this is important while about 38 percent consider it as very important). Finally on the issues of individualism/selflessness, over 75 percent consider being self sufficient and being able to take care of oneself before others as very important while about 45 percent think it is very important for hardworking people to acquire wealth regardless of how others live.

Summary

In summary, this group of students can be said to have a strong work ethic in that the majority consider work as a central activity and hard work as a duty of every citizen. The majority are also punctual and respectful of authority. These are all positive values. On the other hand, however, there is poor time orientation, a predisposition to cut corners (i.e. ignore rules and regulations when expedient), a high level of individualism and a tendency towards hedonism as seen in the importance the majority attach to jobs that give plenty of leisure time.

Implications

The foregoing makes one rather pessimistic about the future of work, productivity and further development of Nigeria. This is because the picture that emerges is one of a generation of potential workers who see work as a central life activity but prefer what Kalleberg (1977) has called the

"convenience" features of work i.e. a clean environment, power and leisure. Yet, it is a generation that has a low sense of self-efficacy, is individualistic and predisposed to not obeying the rule of law. Whether one works for self or others, these are not the values that make for productivity and progress.

Japan was able to achieve in about twenty-five years what it took the West about two hundred years to achieve, thanks to its cultural values. These include:

(a)   a high degree of loyalty
(b)   a high degree of commitment to work;
(c)   compulsive attention to details;
(d)   self effacement;
(e)   willingness to get one's hands and pants dirty;
(f)   a collectivistic orientation;
(g)   respect for experience over mere qualification;
(h)   willingness to accept responsibility;
(i)   compliance with laid down rules and regulations. (Abegglen, 1958; De Bettignies, 1973; Dore, 1973; Tayeb, 1988; Kotani, 2004).

These values have not changed in any significant way as the work of Hofstede (2001) and Kotani (2004) have shown. Indeed, Japanese parents seem to have continued to reproduce these values in their children. If Nigeria is to join the league of the twenty most developed economies by 2020, the economy must become productive and efficient to be competitive. To so be, the workers have to imbibe those values that we identified as promotive of productivity. Ironically, these values had existed before and immediately after our encounter with colonialism. All Nigerian cultures value hardwork, punctuality, respect for authority and selflessness. All have proverbs and idioms that relate to, and teach, these values. For instance, the Yoruba people say:

(i)   *Owuro lojo* – meaning the morning is the day: if you waste the morning period, you have wasted the whole day.

(ii)   *Ise ni Ogun ise* - i.e. hardwork is the antidote to poverty.

The lorries and trailers that ply the north to the south and the east to the west carry on them, in one language or the other, the adage- "No food for the lazy man". This is not to say that all our traditional values were good and should be preserved or that our society should remain static. For instance, some of those lorries and trailers have written on them "There is No Hurry in Life". This is comforting given the heavy loads they carry and the inevitable slow pace that they have to move. But Nigeria cannot afford to continue moving at such a slow pace.

The point is, we need to go back to the positive aspects of our traditional values. They are the fundament for productivity and progress. They are the values that made the Sardaunas, the Awolowos, the Aminu Kanos and the Azikiwes who they were and the reason why we still hold them in admiration and reverence today. They are the virtues that made Professor Bande to succeed and the reason why this conference is held in his honour. They are the virtues that I would like to commend to both our present and future generations not only of workers but also of leaders.

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