

Reciprocal Use of Forename and Employee Behavioral Reactions in Nigerian Firms

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study was to find out how workers in contemporary Nigerian organizations are reacting to the policy that requires the reciprocal use of given names in all formal interactions in the workplace. This work is highly interested in the employee behavioral inclinations of this novel adapted corporate cultural work practices in line with the context of the Nigerian cultural milieu. This study adopted the cross-sectional survey design and obtained data through the questionnaire data collection method to determine an empirical position. A non-parametric, bivariate correlation method was adopted to analyse the data so collected. The findings showed that the familiarity of workers with the policy of using forenames interchangeably in the office contributed directly to a rise in workplace dysfunction. This work brings to the fore the challenges of the transferability of management systems and contributes to the growing discourse on cross-cultural management as well as the universality of management. It was suggested that firms should develop policies, procedures, and strategies that take into consideration cultural diversity on a national and regional scale while noting their contextual applicability.

KEYWORDS: communication, cross-culture, diversity, management, name, Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The use of forenames in organizational interactions is one foreign-adapted culture that many local and multinational firms are beginning to employ as a corporate culture for communication and interpersonal dealings in Nigeria. Employees' mental processes, emotional states, and behavioral patterns are all influenced by the culture in which they were raised and socialized. *Ceteris paribus*, firms stand to gain from and contribute to the progress of Nigeria. It is noteworthy to restate that a firm's survival may be in jeopardy due to factors outside its control. This is in line with the thinking of scholars who surmise that the pressures from an organization's external environment have a lot to do with its performance (Adomako & Tran, 2022; Bamgboje-Ayodele & Ellis, 2015). With such a large pool of capable workers that the Nigerian population has to offer, firms should have no trouble meeting their objectives, remaining solvent, and expanding their operations. Nonetheless, due to the country's unique cultural traits, managing employees from different backgrounds is one of the most difficult tasks managers face.

Prior to the introduction of British colonists, paternalism was the norm in the workplace in Nigeria. Family leaders acted as employers, and their members worked for them under this system. Modern workplace social dynamics have undergone a radical transformation. Nigeria's enormous population and rich natural resources have made the country a desirable location for international corporate expansion. Her status as Africa's greatest economy has not waned as the 2023 projection has anticipated an increase in real Gross Domestic Product (IMF, 2023).

As the number of multinational corporations expands and more indigenous businesses adopt a global viewpoint, the business community in Nigeria has a tendency to adopt and adapt numerous imported workplace cultural practices as well as global management styles and principles. Some workplaces may have found these rules and regulations to be very inspiring and helpful, while others may have found them to be counterproductive (Kraemer, et al., 2014; Milak, 2022). Employees in Nigeria may feel confused, unhappy, disillusioned, and even angry when they see these bizarre cultural value discrepancies being forced on them. Several multinational corporations appear to be oblivious to the impact of their employees' disdain of local social conventions based on social and economic operations abroad. Managers who have been successful in the past may overestimate their capacity to enforce these principles, while employees may have the propensity to define and reinterpret their roles and duties in ways that are harmful to the organization's aims.

This Paper demonstrates the challenges of the universality of management and the adaptation of the Western work ethic to Nigeria and attempts to make up for the dearth of theoretical and practical contributions to cross-cultural management and theory-building. Many employees fail to achieve favorable job output because they exhibit patterns of behavior that are destructive to the health of the organization and not necessarily because

they lack unique technical talents and competencies. If nothing is done to address the issue, the health and eventual survival of the organization may be in jeopardy. In certain organizations, even executives are required by policy to identify themselves by their forenames, which are also known as the first names or given names, whenever possible. Employees may experience both external and internal shock. They struggle to comprehend and adjust to the altered circumstances brought on by this policy. It is often accepted that a company's personnel may make or break it. In this research, the use of forenames interchangeably in the Nigerian workplace was examined from a critical perspective in order to shed light on the cultural consequences for individual workers, their shown behavioral reactions, and the organization as a whole.

II. Literature/Theoretical Underpinning

The values, beliefs, and understandings of an organization's members constitute the foundation of its culture (Daft, 2013). The corporate culture of such businesses is supposed to influence the actions of workers and other stakeholders. Nigeria is a cultural labyrinth due to the country's more than 450 distinct ethnic groupings (Adegboye, 2013). Notwithstanding the country's significant cultural distinctions along ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines, Nigerians share several fundamental beliefs and practices (Eiguedo-Okoequale, 2022). Culture refers to a set of shared beliefs, practices, and products that characterize a society or group of people. It is the habits and routines that people in a given culture share, such as how they dress, how they worship, and how they spend their free time. There are many reasons why people value culture. Culture has been claimed to define individuals, hence its absence has been linked to a lack of sense of self. Culture has an important role in establishing social distinctions by defining individual identities within and between groups. Gubam, et al., (2022) believe in the preservation of national culture and heritage that appear to be eroded by many contemporary external influences and making individuals lose their cultural identities, communities and their cultural traditions. As culture often changes as humans seek to address the obstacles of living in their environment, it serves an essential role in sustaining continuity in any given society by helping in the transfer of values, beliefs, rituals, and so on from one generation to the next (Arowolo, 2022).

In light of the foregoing, the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and the politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) provide significant inspiration for the work presented here. One experiences cognitive dissonance when they possess contradictory views, ideas, or values, or when they are presented with new knowledge that disagrees with their already held beliefs, ideas, or values (Festinger, 1962). The politeness theory posits that everyone intentionally projects and strives to defend a certain social self-image, sometimes known as a face. The courtesy hypothesis, suggests that a direct threat to one's person is possible and that individuals take precautions when speaking to one another in order to avoid making their faces seem bad. The act of directly challenging another person's face is known as a face-threatening act (FTA). By saying or doing anything that can be considered impolite or taboo by the listener could cause them to lose face. FTA could be dangerous for both parties involved and adversely affect inter-personal behaviors.

After considering a wide range of factors, Hofstede (1980) settled on five cultural dimensions that serve to depict the range of values present in different national cultures and reveal the extent to which certain values are ingrained in individuals from various backgrounds. These beliefs may affect how people of various cultural backgrounds act and how they would act in a professional setting. Power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, individuality vs. collectivism, and long-term vs. short-term Term Orientation are some of the variables considered in this paper. Power distance can be either very large or very little. Those who identify with cultures with a high power distance are more likely to embrace authoritarian and paternalistic power relations, consider power as an inevitable part of life, and feel that everyone has a predetermined place in the hierarchy of power. In this situation, subordinates recognize their superior's authority only on the basis of his position in the organizational chart. Respect for a leader stems from that person's position in society, be it the home, the workplace, or the government. Most people will blindly obey directives since that is what their job requires of them. People in societies with a small power gap tend to assume that authority is shared fairly and evenly, are more tolerant of subservient positions, and look for democratic, collaborative decision-making from those in positions of authority. Irrespective of the leader's official rank or title, they are treated as horizontal level colleagues. In contrast, members of societies characterized by long distances between levels of authority tend to accept inequality and rigid social structures as normal. Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which persons can stand ambiguity and require clear guidelines. This metric assesses how vulnerable an individual is to uncertainty. Most individuals from cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance do not do well in surroundings with a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty as against persons from cultures with a low degree of uncertainty avoidance. Cultures are also assessed in terms of the degree of masculinity and feminism they adopt. While the masculine focused culture are more emphatic on work-related ambitions and aggressiveness, the feminine cultural values emphasizes self-improvement and service to others. In individualistic societies people are expected to present themselves as autonomous individuals who work towards their own objectives and needs, whereas those in collectivistic societies prioritize the well-being of the community to which they belong, often at the expense of

their own personal desires. The long-term vs. short-term focus has its origins in Confucianism and was originally known by that name (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Long-term thinking exhibits an optimistic outlook on the future, whereas short-term thinking is stuck in the here and now and is reflective of a more traditional way of thinking (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011).

Nigeria has a very high power distance culture which suggests that its citizens are highly sensitive to variations in social standing. As the economy continues to become more global, an appreciation of cultural diversity is more vital than ever. One's behavior in business negotiations, as a manager, and as an employee will all be affected by one's perspective on power relationships. Attempting to manage or negotiate with someone who is used to seeing the world from a high-power distant perspective may not obtain a palatable outcome. The ideals of cultural systems which appear to be widely emphasized throughout Nigeria's many ethnic and religious groups prevent the young from calling and referring to the elder by his or her first name, (Olaniyi, 2017; Samson & Lyanda, 2019). Cognitive dissonance theory examines this need for harmony inside one's own mind. There is a significant risk of discord when using first names interchangeably in the workplace. If one is feeling mentally uneasy due to a disparity between what one believes and an actual activity, it may be that one is experiencing cognitive dissonance and efforts should be made to eliminate it and steer clear of anything that could make it worse.

Reciprocal use of forename

A name is a word or phrase used to refer to a certain person. For some people, a name is only used for identification. In traditional African communities, names are used in place of numerals and symbols. In Nigeria, the meanings of individual names are often very symbolic. A relevant and significant rationale should underlie the designation of each given name of an individual. The meaning of a person's given name might be indicative of their upbringing, a significant life event, or some other occurrence. Despite the foregoing, in some organizations in Nigeria, managers mandate that all employees, regardless of position, address one another by their forenames in an effort to foster a more horizontal organizational structure, more frequent and open communication, more cooperation, and more creative problem solving atmosphere.

Family relationships in Nigeria are determined by seniority and status within the extended family. A person's age and social standing might be a prerequisite for receiving respect. The elderly are treated with deference because of the common belief that they have matured into greater knowledge with age. The oldest person in a group is treated with deference and are given preferential treatment in social situations. The use of first names by both sides in a conversation may be interpreted positively by those whose cultural background is Western. In Nigeria, persons are recognized for their achievements because of their status in the community and titles are given as honor for achievements. Scholars have observed that titles in Nigeria are in high demand and that the demand for them appears to be growing every day (Osaretin, 2019). The honors received seem to stand for standards by which individuals and communities might evaluate their own growth and that of society as a whole. The wearers of such titles, in whatever shape they may take, are often filled with a sense of superiority and pride, and this is true across all cultures, occupations, educational institutions, religious traditions, and even the secular sector. Typical Nigerians are said to love being addressed by their numerous titles and will vehemently object to being called anything else, especially if it does not seem like a befitting title. In other words, many people in Nigeria, where titles are highly esteemed and the age-grade system forbids addressing seniors by name, may find the use of forename in workplaces as contentious because it goes against the cultural norm of deferring to one's elders (Adegboye, 2013). Name avoidance is a common tactic used by certain employees (Morand, 2005). In this case, workers avoid addressing their managers since it creates some cognitive dissonance challenge for them. One of the leading causes of tension in the workplace is the "conversational black hole" that occurs when individuals refuse to say anything at all because of the fear of saying something wrong (Morand, 2005). It is considered rude for a younger person to address an older person by their first name, which may exacerbate this "conversational black hole" in many settings in Nigeria.

Employee Behavioral Reactions

The people who work for a company are among its most valuable resources. Organizations' fates rest in the hands of its employees as they have complete decision-making and control over the organization's resources. The actions and interactions of workers in the workplace, both individually and collectively are referred to here as employee behavior. It has been asserted that common workplace functional behaviors include those associated with performance, engagement, organizational citizenship, cooperative behavior as well as concern for others and their environment (De Cremer & Moore (2020; Francoeur, et al., 2021). The authors believe that, an individual's functional performance behaviors are the sum of all the actions the company wants them to possess in the workplace. Citizenship in an organization, as defined by Organ (1988) is "individual behavior that, in the aggregate, enhances the successful running of the organization but is not directly or openly recognized by the

formal reward system." Employee work happiness and performance, as well as business results, may be improved via careful management of citizenship behaviors (Mart & William, 2003; Sharma et al. 2011). Creative behavior in the workplace begins with an employee recognizing a problem at work and then moving on to brainstorm potential solutions. Creating internal buy-in for innovative ideas and practices as well as ensuring they are finally implemented. Creative behavior should usually end in the implementation of novel ideas for addressing existing problems, with the ultimate goal of improving existing challenges. Dysfunctional behaviors in organizations include aggressiveness, infighting, gossiping, backbiting, rudeness, angry outbursts, incivility, vindictiveness employee turnover and absenteeism and so on, which portends calamity for the organization.

Brown and Levinson (1987) identified two types of politeness that might be displayed by workers when they try to figure out how to fit in with different workplace cultures: negative politeness and positive politeness. Politeness as a technique for self-protection is one name for the negative form of politeness. Employees may feel more comfortable maintaining a distance from one another so that each person may have value and respect for the other. On the other hand, positive politeness is the kind that helps the other person feel good about themselves. It is about how important it is for them to be accepted by others. An employee's actions may be affected by the bad emotions brought on by workplace discomforts. Beliefs and emotions regarding oneself, one's coworkers, and the organization all influence one's behavior at work, which can range from cooperation to competition to support to undermining (Daft, 2013). Workplace deviance, antisocial behaviors, organizational aggressiveness, retaliatory behavior, organizational misconduct, and organizationally driven aggression are some of the behaviors that have been documented (Abubakar, et al., 2021; Anis & Emil, 2022; Yeşiltaş & Gürlek, 2020). Employee actions may derail the company's progress toward its objectives or propel it well beyond its original ambitions. The efficiency of an organization is affected either directly or indirectly by the behavior of its members and managers may be more effective leaders by learning to identify the underlying reasons for employee behavior (Robinson, et al., 2019)

III. METHODOLOGY/ DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

To get an accurate representation of the firms that use forenames interchangeably, Taro Yamane's method for determining sample size was used. The majority of the responders were from corporate entities such as multinational corporations, financial institutions, and individual firms where the use of a given name is a corporate practice. The formula determined a sample size of two hundred and forty-six respondents. The information was analyzed using a cross-sectional survey approach. Information was gathered mostly via the use of a questionnaire. Copies of the survey instrument were sent to three cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria; Port Harcourt, Lagos, and Abuja. The locations were selected so that people from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds could be assessed to obtain a wide variety of cultural ideas and practices seen among Nigerians within the context of the variables of this work. The survey's reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Results were considered reliable if they had an alpha of 0.7 or above. Spearman's rho, a non-parametric bivariate correlation, was used for the analysis in this study.

IV. RESULTS/DISCUSSION

The results showed that the level of the use of forename negatively correlated with altruism (-0.776, $P < 0.01$) as well as with interpersonal communication and cooperative behavior at -0.722 and -0.789 respectively at $P < 0.01$. This implies that the predictor variable which was operationalized as the discomfort level of the use of forename had an inverse relationship with the criterion variable measured in terms of altruism, interpersonal communication, and cooperative behavior all of which are functional work behaviors firms should desire for their employees and for their firms' progress. The findings thus reveal that the more discomfort an employee feels in the reciprocal use of forenames the less desirable-functional work behavior will be exhibited.

In today's global, borderless, wireless world, it is impossible for any culture to exist in isolation. However, each culture has the opportunity to develop its own distinctive cultural profile through time by finding a balance between cultural ecology and cultural learning, and by selecting values from among the available value orientations around the world.

The effects of globalization on poor nations have been the subject of heated discussion for years. For instance, globalization is seen as the root cause of the cultural crisis in Nigeria, which has alienated modern Nigerians from their ancestry (Eze, 2014). Even though certain bad effects of globalization have been felt in Nigeria, it would be wrong to conclude that this is because Nigerians have chosen to imitate the worst parts of other cultures. In Nigeria, some workers may be reluctant to use a more formal title and surname because of the cultural context in which they are used, while others may be hesitant to address superiors by their first names for fear of sending the wrong message about their level of familiarity, social distance, or intimacy. Due to the compulsory use of forename policy persons may feel more at ease if they do not have to use any name or title

while speaking to others within the firm. This awkward silence and avoidance of names is as described by Morand (2005).

Suffice it to say that employees' actions towards others in the workplace could be linked to decreased efficiency and output in a highly competitive business environment.

V. CONCLUSION /RECOMMENDATION

Based on the data, it appears that individuals in Nigerian organizations where forenames are used interchangeably have less desirable-functional work behavior being exhibited with an implication of a higher tendency for the exhibition of dysfunctional behavior. This study brought to light the behavioral consequences of an organization-wide policy of using forenames in all interactions. It is recommended that firms should formulate corporate policies, procedures, and strategies, taking cognizance of the regional and national cultural norms in mind and encourage employees to interact with one another in whichever way makes them feel most at ease rather than prescribing a corporate culture that will lead to employee dysfunctional behavior.

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