

DEVELOPING A GOOD WORK ATTITUDE FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

It is not easy to talk about good attitude to work in Nigeria without talking about the prevalent practices of corruption, bribery, lateness to work and other non-challant attitudes of workers. The development of good attitude to work has to do with the positive behaviours that workers have towards their jobs. Bad attitude to work emanates from inefficiency. Today's offices do not require inefficient workers. They require workers with broad range of competencies that help to improve their work habit in view of the new challenges facing them. The purpose of this paper is to examine what constitutes a good work attitude that can result to effective national development. The methodology adopted for the work is a survey design. Data were obtained through the use of secondary sources. The paper posits that the development of good interpersonal and communication skills would enhance good attitude to work. The paper recommends that Managers in organizations should create an atmosphere for job satisfaction through team building. Team meetings should be encouraged since it provides an opportunity for team members to get together to plan, communicate and make optimal decisions.

Introduction

One of man's persistent dreams has been to free himself from the unhealthy work environment and hazards. For the individual, the experience of work is a personal one. Needham and Dransfield (1999) note that people have a wide range of attitude to work. According to them, people see work simply as a means of earning money while others see it as tremendously rewarding. They opine that attitude to work often depend on how much opportunity individuals are given to express their skills and talents. Furthermore, some works are alienating because people are treated as machines. According to them, some of the things people might look for in a place of work may include: a good rate of pay, a good opportunity for promotion, long breaks and holidays, prestige, opportunity to combine work and family life, job security, friendships with colleagues, opportunity to be creative, a degree of independence, and responsibility.

Individual employees bring their attitudes into the workplace and their attitudes are modified by the environment. Attitudes produced by work situation tend to reflect the attitudes of their supervisors. Workers who find their jobs interesting tend to have a favourable view of their supervisors while those who find work boring tend to resent supervisors. Developing a good work attitude means the positive behaviours people have towards the job they perform. According to Alberts (1974), workers must be willing to accept the challenges brought about by modern technology so as to develop their potentialities. The changing nature of today's employment has brought about new challenges for workers. Employers now hire workers who have a broad range of competencies that are job specific.

To facilitate success in their jobs, workers must be ready and willing to understand the unique attitudes, behaviours and habits common to various cultures. Good interpersonal skills are crucial to strategies that can improve production service and product quality. Workers' collaboration and teamwork, effective communication skills help to improve productivity.

Methodology

The research design used for this study is purely a survey method. The study relied solely on secondary sources of data collection involving the review of textbooks, journals, magazines, conference and seminar papers and other mimeograph relevant to the study.

The Concept of Attitude

According to Luthans (1989), attitude can be defined as a persistent tendency to feel and believe in a particular way towards some objects. A person may, therefore, have a negative or positive attitude towards his/her work. Awoyemi (2003) views attitude as a catalyst that determines the movement of the pendulum in a given situation. In other words, the level of output of an employee in any organization is informed by the in-depth attributes embodied in that individual employee before employment is secured as well as in the course of working in an organization. Attitude, according to Hornby (2000), means the way one thinks, feels and behaves towards something or somebody. Odedele and Egotanwa (2002) observe that attitudes to work make for success or failure in private or government establishments or institutions. Attitude to work, therefore, refers to the way and manner in which we attend to our work. Luthans (1989) avers that attitudes can be characterised in three ways. First, they tend to persist unless something is done to change them. Second, attitudes can fall anywhere along a continuum from very favourable to very unfavourable. Third, attitudes can be broken down into three basic components – emotional, informational and behavioural. According to him, the emotional component involves the person's feelings – positive, negative, or neutral about an object. The informational component consists of the beliefs and information the individual has about the object. It makes no difference whether or not this information is empirically real or correct. The behavioural component consists of person's competencies to believe in a particular way towards an object.

Good or Positive Attitude

Good or positive attitude to work makes for success in organizations while bad or negative attitude makes for failure. Odedele and Egotanwa (2002) identifies good attitude to work to include:

- (a) **Commitment and Dedication** – showing interest and good sense of responsibility in carrying out duties.
- (b) **Punctuality** – this involves attending to duties on time.
- (c) **Effectiveness** – it involves productive capacity of successful result.
- (d) **Efficiency** – that is having the desire for greater achievement of set objectives of the organization.
- (e) **Leisure** – making good use of free time.
- (f) **Civility** – showing good human relations by way of being polite, decent, humble and disciplined in carrying out duties.
- (g) **Service** – being ready always to carry out official duties.

Bad or Negative attitude

According to Okwoma (2008), some of the bad or negative attitudes to work include:

- (a) Truancy at work
- (b) Lack of interest in the particular task
- (c) Taking and giving of bribe
- (d) Misappropriation and embezzlement of funds
- (e) Conversion of organization's property to personal use
- (f) Laziness, laissez-faire and lackadaisical attitude.
- (g) Gossips and quarrels.
- (h) Divided interest and loyalty.

Theories of Attitude

Armstrong (2004) notes that there are three main theories about attitude to work. These are, Labour Process Theory, Agency Theory and Exchange Theory.

Labour Process Theory: This, According to Armstrong (2004), was originally formulated by Karl Marx who noted that surplus is appropriated from labour by paying it less than the value it adds to the labour process. Capitalists, therefore, design the labour process to secure the extraction of surplus value. In other words, the human capacity to produce is subordinated to the exploitative demands of the capitalists.

Newton and Findlay in Armstrong (2004) believe that labour process theory explains how management have at their disposal a range of mechanisms through which control is exercised. Management, according to them, is constantly seeking ways to improve the effectiveness of control mechanisms to achieve compliance. They try to squeeze the last drop of surplus value out of their labour.

Agency Theory: This theory indicates that principals (owners and managers) have to develop ways of monitoring and controlling the activities of their agents (staff). Agency theory suggests that principals may have problems in ensuring that agents do what they are told. According to the theory, it is necessary to clear up ambiguities by setting objectives and monitoring performance to ensure that objectives are achieved.

Exchange Theory: This theory sets out to explain organizational behaviour in terms of the rewards and costs incurred in the interaction between employers and employees. According to Armstrong (2004), there are four main concepts in Exchange Theory. These are: **Rewards** – payoff that satisfies needs energy from the interaction between individuals and their organization; **Costs** - fatigue, stress, anxiety, punishment and the value of rewards that people have lost because of lack of opportunity; **Outcomes** - rewards minus costs. If positive, the interaction yields profit and this is satisfactory as long as it exceeds the minimum level of expectation;

Level of Comparison - people evaluate the outcome of an interaction against the profit they are forgoing elsewhere.

Barriers to changing attitudes

Luthans (1989) observes that employees' attitude can be changed and sometimes it is in the best interest of management to try to do so. For instance, if employees believe that their employer does not take care of them, management would like to change this attitude. Sometimes attitude change is difficult to accomplish because of certain barriers. Luthans (1989) identifies two main barriers to attitude change. The first barrier is referred to as prior commitments. According to him, the prior commitment occurs when people feel a commitment to a particular course of action and are unwilling to change. A second barrier is a result of insufficient information. Sometimes, people do not see any reason to change their attitude. The boss may not like a subordinate's negative attitude but the latter may be quite pleased with his or her own behaviour. Unless the boss can show the individual why a negative attitude is detrimental to career progress or some other desirable personal objective, the subordinate may continue to have a negative attitude. This is particularly true when the attitude is a result of poor treatment by management.

Functions of Attitude

According to Mullins (1989), an understanding of the functions of attitude is of importance to the study of organizational behaviour. Egboro (2008) avers that attitude can help predict work behaviour. For example, if an attitude survey shows that workers are upset by a change in the work rules and the next week absenteeism begins to increase sharply, management may conclude that a negative attitude towards work rules led to an increase in worker absenteeism.

Katz in Luthans (1989) notes that attitude serves four important functions:

The Adjustment Function: Attitudes often help people adjust to their work environment. When employees are well treated, they are likely to develop a positive attitude towards management and the organization. When employees are berated and given minimal salary increase, they are likely to develop a negative attitude towards management and the organization. These attitudes help employees adjust to their environment and are a basis for future behaviour.

The Ego-Defensive Function: Besides helping employees adjust, attitudes also help them defend their self-images. For example, a senior officer whose decisions are continually challenged by a younger subordinate may feel that the latter is brash, cocky, immature and inexperienced. In truth, the younger subordinate may be right in challenging the decision. The senior officer may not be very effective leader and may constantly make poor decisions. The senior officer is not going to admit this but will try to protect the ego by putting the blame on the other party (Luthans, 1989).

The Value-Expressive Function: Attitudes provide people with a basis for expressing their values (Luthans, 1989). For example, a manager who believes strongly in the work ethics will tend to voice attitude towards specific individuals or work practice as a means of reflecting this value. A supervisor who wants a subordinate to work harder might put it this way ‘‘you have to work harder. That has been the tradition of the company since it was founded. It helps get us where we are today and everyone is expected to subscribe to this ethic’’ (Egboro, 2008).

The Knowledge Function: Attitudes help supply standards and frames of reference that allow people to organize and explain the world around them. For example, a union organizer may have negative attitude towards management. This attitude may not be based on fact but it does help the individual relate to management. Thus, everything that managers say is regarded by the union organizer as nothing more than a pack of lies, a deliberate distortion of the truth or an attempt to manipulate the workers. Regardless of how accurate a person’s view of reality is, attitude towards people, events and objects help the individual make sense out of what is going on (Egboro, 2008).

Factors that influence people’s attitude to work

Ejiofor (1980) contends that attitude is a learned disposition to behave in a particular way towards an object while work attitude is the disposition to work arising from concepts, feeling, beliefs and motives. It may be positive, passive or negative and the workers’ experiences, concepts, feeling, beliefs and motives are carried into their work activities. These affect productivity, good health, success, comfort and good environment contribute to the formation of a positive attitude, while illness, failure, hardship and lack of essential facilities lead to the development of a negative attitude. Whichever form this may take, work attitude are the base on which any productivity, efficiency and effectiveness drive rest. Therefore, the attitude to work is influenced by a multiplicity of factors. Ejiofor (1980) discusses these factors as follows:

Historical Factors: The traditional work system was based on the dignity of labour. This was effective because workers were committed and their objectives were well defined. The system of work then was for the people, by the people and for the people’s welfare. People were convinced that they were working for themselves. Work was surrounded by fairness and prompt reward. However, the modern work system, arising from the colonial days was based on a wrong philosophy and on objectives pertaining to the white man and this was not clear to the people. Workers in the colonial era merely provided ancillary services as interpreters, court messengers, clerks and teachers. They had close supervision, adequate facilities to work with and even though their wages were low, they maintained relatively high status and respect in the society. According to him, the experience of the civil war shook traditional morality to its very foundation, the followed by inflation which brought hardship to the people. Civil servants, in order to survive, resorted to fraud, dishonesty, crime and other vices.

Socio-cultural Factors: These affect work attitudes in many ways. Socio-cultural factors include favouritism, nepotism, ethnic loyalty, bribery, corruption, immoral sexual relationships and other undue influences in work places. Our societal value system also affects workers’ attitudes to work. People no longer value honest contributions to work but value accumulation of wealth and money, no matter whether it causes damages to the society’s image or not.

Economic Factors: Ejiofor (1980) notes that this is aggravated by government's fiscal and income policies and the general economic situation. The high rate of inflation persistently increase decreases effective purchasing power and the tax burden falls more on the civil servants than most of the affluent members of the society. The salary adjustment system is slow and rigid and there is constant reduction in the number of fringe benefits available to the civil servants.

Political Factors: The people lack the spirit of nationalism. Instead, there is ethnocentrism, statism, sectionalism and self-centredness. For this reason, self-interest has risen above national interest such that hoarding, greed, bribery, truancy and lack of devotion to duty has become the order of the day. The tendency is that more people are now looting the nation while very few people are seriously building it and those who can neither loot nor grab grumble and shirk their responsibilities. Nigeria, for instance, is frequently changing power. This has a lot of effect on the civil service. A change from the military, for example, to civil rule must call for adequate re-orientation of the workers in order to meet with the changing roles brought about by each system.

Infrastructural Factors: Adequate infrastructural facilities in the form of communication network, transportation facilities, adequate supply of electricity and water lead to high morale and productivity. When the facilities are not available, the workers are affected in two ways – physical incapacity and psychological inhibition. Where facilities are inadequate, workers spend long time outside the office in pretence that they have gone out to ease themselves.

Negative factors to work attitude

According to Obimah (2008), negative factors to work include the following:

Lack of Motivation: Motivation is a method of stimulating and meeting the economic, emotional as well as the social needs of the workers. The needs of the workers have to be satisfied in order to get the best from them because they have moods, likes and dislikes, whims and prejudices. They have to be understood by studying these motives that drive workers to work hard instead of exercising authority which may only adjust workers to their work. Obimah (2008) avers that motivation may be positive such as financial – giving of prizes, incentives, wages, premium and bonus or non-financial such as promotion, praise for work well done, social recognition and participation in management. On the other hand, motivation may be negative such as punishment given to erring workers – demotion, fines, suspension, open rebuke, non-payment of salaries or even removal from office. Obimah (2008) concludes that if these factors are judiciously applied, workers would put in their best.

Lack of adequate job knowledge: This affects productivity. It may arise when a worker is ill-equipped educationally or by training for the job. Insufficient on-the-job training coupled with low academic qualification affect productivity.

Lack of adequate working equipment: Another militating factor against work attitude is lack of co-operant factors for the job. Some organizations find it difficult to equip the place of work with the necessary working materials. This may make a serious worker to be dissatisfied with his job.

Dishonesty: The contract of employment implicitly provides that the worker must be honest, diligent and punctual to work. A worker who comes to work late or engages in pilfering is, therefore, liable for a sanction.

Employee's grievance: An aggrieved employee can never put in his best. He is always moody, depressed and his morale at its lowest ebb. According to Ubeku (1979), a frustrated worker, though physically present on his job, may be one kilometre away from his job mentally. In addition to a decline in his productivity, such a worker may cause industrial accidents.

Skills and attributes needed to improve attitude to work

Cole (1973) opines that skills that can help to improve attitude to work focus on personal images, habits, behaviours, techniques of communication, problem solving and decision making. He summarized these skills as follows:

Individual Competence: Under this group, consequences like communication skills, comprehension, computation and culture should be the skills workers should possess to enable them relate effectively with others. They should be able to demonstrate ability to speak, write and use the non-verbal communication cues to enhance verbal communication and be able to improve listening habits.

Personal Reliability Skills: Workers should be able to develop skills for personal management, ethics and vocational maturity. Follow good grooming practice, good health habits, dress appropriately for the job and develop self-confidence.

Economic Adaptability Skills: These help the workers to develop problem solving skill, learn employability and career development abilities. Be able to use basic social skills, be creative and willing to learn, take pride in the work so that productivity would be enhanced.

Group and Organizational Effectiveness Skills: Be able use interpersonal skills, organizational skills and skills in negotiation, creativity and leadership to work under supervision by co-operating with others in order to achieve organizational goals.

In his contribution, Ukpaa (2007) identifies a range of skills and personal attributes as important, if not more important, to employees than the possession of qualifications.

These personal attributes are:

Intellect: the ability to analyze, critique and synthesize information in order to solve problems

Knowledge: an understanding of basic principles rather than large stock of specialist knowledge.

Willingness to learn: the ability to learn and continue to learn throughout life.

Flexibility and adaptability: the ability to respond to change, to pre-empt change and ultimately to lead change.

Self-regulatory skills: self-discipline, time keeping ability to deal with stress, to plan and prioritise work load, self-motivation, resilient, tenacious and determined, self-confidence, self-direction, and self-promotion.

Ukpaa (2007) also identifies interactive attributes to include:

Communication skills: the ability to communicate formally and informally, verbally and in written form with people both internally and externally to the firm.

Interpersonal skills: the ability to relate and feel comfortable with people at all levels even as circumstances change.

Team working: the ability to work effectively in teams and be able to re-adjust roles from one project situation to another in an ever-shifting work situation.

Conclusion

Workers have moods, likes and dislikes, whims and prejudices. In view of this, they have to be satisfied in order to get the best from them. Workers' behaviours have to be understood by studying the motives that drive them to work hard. Today's offices demand that workers should have a broad range of competencies that would help to improve good attitude to work. Interpersonal skills and communication, therefore, should be enhanced in order to improve collaboration and team work. It is obvious that inefficiency results to bad attitude to work. Workers should, therefore, be encouraged to develop good work attitude in order to be efficient in their work.

Recommendations

Based on findings, the following recommendations were made

1. There should be training and development programmes to underpin core values in an organization. In-service training should be organized for workers to change their mind set.
2. Management should ensure that reward system is developed and managed to achieve equity, justice, fairness and consistency in all aspects of remuneration and benefits.
3. Managers in organizations should create an atmosphere for job satisfaction through team building. Team meetings should be encouraged since it provides an opportunity for team members to get together to plan, communicate and make optimal decisions.
4. The gap between the managers and their subordinates should be bridged through accessibility, effective communication and functional delegation of authority.
5. Managers should be tactical and prompt in responding and appreciating conflict within the establishment and create an enduring interpersonal relationship amongst workers. They should also adopt the culture of appraising and appreciating workers through prompt promotion, long service awards, etc.

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