WORK AND THE NATURE OF WORK IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Although, work means different thing in literature, but it is a common term used by everyone who exert efforts in order to earn something in return, except that the variation in the nature of work lead to different compensation package. Workers have different orientation to work. This is largely due to their attitude to work and management philosophy. Hence, this paper through content analysis of literature, examined the nature of work and how work determines the lifestyles and survival of Nigerian workers in Nigeria. The paper concluded among other things that the nature of one's work determines his/her way of life and status in the society.

Keywords: Work, Nature of work, Living, Survival, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

One of the underlying factor of the past, present and future development of any society is work. Development of whatever kind is the product of work and is determined by work (Doering, 1990). Work with pay is the antidote to poverty; however, the lifestyles and survival of workers in any society is based on the nature of work. Hence, this study will address the following questions: What is the attitude of Nigerian workers toward their work? How does their work influence their life styles? What surviving strategies do they adopt to supplement the pay they receive from their actual work? In achieving these objectives, section one of this paper will address the attitude of Nigerian workers toward their work, section two will focus on how their work influence their lifestyles, section three will identify the surviving strategies that Nigerian workers adopt to supplement the pay they receive from their actual work, while section four will examine the relationships that exist between work and workers' living, and survival. Conclusion and recommendations will be drawn afterwards. However, it is not the prerogative of this paper to enumerate kinds of work. That in it would present an impossible task since it would involve the enumeration of all forms of human activity.

Conceptual Clarification

What is work?

The study of work has a long history. In the 18th century, traditional work rhythms and practices of pre-industrial society gave way to the division of labour and the discipline of the factory system of work organization. At the turn of the 20th century, the essence of the scientific management movement was the opportunity it afforded for increasing the control and coordination of workers' effort. In the 1960s, concern about declining productivity, increasing industrial disputes and worker dissatisfaction led to new work structures that emphasized worker autonomy and participation, and a variety of functional tasks through 'job enrichment'. Technological change and the process of globalization produced 'new' systems of work organization in the 1990s. The managerial mantra of the 1990s was flexibility, and studies of organizational innovations such as flexible specialization, cellular production, lean production, team-based horizontal work structures, re-engineering and virtual organizations are now well

established in the literature (Bratton & Gold, 2003). Much of the rational for new job designs and work structures was initially developed in the context of the USA and then generalized across North America, European economies (Bratton & Gold, 2003) and Africa, to which Nigeria is a part.

Work has been defined as "the carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living within the environment in which they find themselves" (Watson, 1980). According to Okafor and Okunade (2005), Work is an activity that produces something of value for other people. According to them, work serves many purposes. The most obvious is the economic function of producing goods and services. In return for production, the employee is paid wages that are used in buying basic needs like food, clothing and other luxuries of life. Work refers to physical and mental activity that is carried out at a particular place and time, according to instructions, in return for money (Bratton & Gold, 2003). This definition draws attention to some central features of work. First, the notion of 'physical and mental' obviously suggests that the activities of a construction worker or a computer systems analyst are deemed to be work. Second, the tendency for the activity to take place away from home and at set time periods of the day or night- 'place and time'-locates work within a social context. Third, the social context also includes the social relations within which the activity is performed. This means that, it is not the nature of the activity that determines whether it is considered 'work' but instead the social relations in which the activity is embedded (Pahl, 1988). Fourth, in return for physical effort and /or mental application, fatigue and loss of personal autonomy, the worker receives a mix of rewards, including 'money', status and intrinsic satisfaction. Watson (1986) refers to this mix of inputs (physical and mental activities, and so on) and outputs (rewards) as the 'implicit contract' between the employer and the employee.

Attitude of Nigerian Workers toward their Work in Nigeria

Certain expectations are inherent in paid-employment (job), Nigerian employees expect adequate remuneration for the work they do. Adequate in the sense of it being sufficient to maintain a reasonable standard of living, to look after members of the family, and to save enough for life after retirement. In addition, these employees expect security of employment, predictability in employer's behaviour and humane treatment at work (Ona, 1989). All these shape their attitude, whether positively or negatively. In other words, when these conditions are favourable to them, they tend to have positive attitude toward their jobs. Contrary will be the case if these conditions are unfavourable to them. As a result of the current depressed economy, the general attitudinal context of work is one of 'fed-upness' arising from the fact that the expectations of Nigerian employees are not being realized (Ita, 1989:9) cited in Ona (1989).

How the Work of Nigerian Workers influence their Life Styles in Nigeria

Ita (1989:9) cited in Ona (1989) has this to say,

> *"the average Nigerian worker cuts a picture of a hunger-striken pauper who could drop dead with the least physical provocation. He is the fellow in perpetual fear of his land-lord who is always threatening him with quit notice for failure to update his house rent. He is the one always indebted to his customers because his meager salary is always exhausted even before he receives his pay packet. He is the man who camps his brothers and sisters (and in some cases, wife and kids) into a one-room apartment because he cannot afford to rent a flat to guarantee comfort. The Nigerian worker is the fellow who struggles for buses, and in most cases, risks his life by hanging on moving vehicles, all in his*

desperate efforts to report for work in time to avoid the deadly disease called retrenchment".

According to him, the average Nigerian worker has since become the scape goat of the socio-political misfortune of today's Nigeria. They watch in utter amazement as transport fares are hiked with every passing day. Cost of foodstuffs jump out of their reach and that of every other essential commodity (all commodities are now essential) shoots straight to the sky, yet their salaries remain at "minimum wage". To many Nigerian workers, there is no satisfaction in the present and the most painful thing is that, they have no hope for the future (Ita, 1989:9) cited in Ona (1989).

Surviving Strategies Nigerian Workers Adopt to Supplement the Pay they receive from their Work

Workers' surviving or coping strategies burgeoned in the 1980s and 1990s as developing world economies underwent dramatic economic restructuring mainly as a result of the implementation of the neo-liberal inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Influenced heavily by the work of feminist researchers (Sparr, 1994), the research considered how poor people managed to cope in the face of widespread economic exigency that resulted from the implementation of SAPs (Elson, 1992). Drawing on a range of empirical settings, two main types of strategies were conceptualized; first, 'expenditure-minimizing' (Benería and Roldán, 1987) or 'negative' strategies (Gonzáles de la Rocha, 1991) that involved curtailing consumption such as changes in diet, cutbacks in use of utilities and so on; and second, 'income-maximising' (Benería and Roldán, 1987) or 'positive' strategies (Gonzáles de la Rocha, 1991) that entailed generating additional sources of earnings, such as working extra hours or more household members entering the labour market (Chant, 1996). Hence, Ona (1989:10) captured the Nigerian workers surviving strategies as follow:

> *"In spite of the difficult and unpleasant situations confronting employees of all categories in Nigeria, they appear to be coping with varying degrees of success. Typical responses to general questions like: "How is work?" and "How are things?" are as follows: "work dey o", work don finish", "country hard", "we dey manage", "it could be worse", "we are surviving", "we no go die", "we thank God". A distinction is not being made between "work" and "things' generally in the present situation. "How are things?" reduces to "How is work?" and "How is work?" elicits response to "How are things?" because "work" determine other things".*

According to him, Nigerian workers are surviving or coping with their work in different ways, namely:

First, the well-publicized mechanism for coping is checking out of work and out of the country. This strategy popularly referred to as brain-drain has been given a lot of publicity because it involves professionals that are needed in critical sectors of the nation's economy. Emigration extends the frontier of work environment and leads to a change in the conception of work as that which takes place in one's own country for national development to one which takes place in one's own country for national monetary reward and psychic satisfaction. This strategy is, however, open to only very few employees.

Second, some employees simply acquiesce and resort to praying for better times. Others in this category who may not pray take refuge in the saying, "No condition is permanent". The situation, they argue, cannot just continue like this forever. It has to

improve! What will bring about the change is not an issue for this category. The situation has to change since "ups and downs" are necessary aspects of any society.

Third, simply talking and discussing the current situation in coffee rooms, clubs etc. constitute an important mechanism for letting off steam. Employees share pleasant and unpleasant experiences, thereby exposing one another to better ways of coping. Some employees have admitted that cheaper sources of food items, clothing and motor spare parts have been made known to them while sharing experiences with others.

Fourth, conferences, seminars, workshops, symposia and press conferences are structures and formal ways of coping through analysis, criticisms, dialogue and defense of policies. The outcome of some of these conferences, workshops, etc. have resulted in some policy changes and have raised the hope that relevant policy changes in the future are possible.

Fifth, employees of all categories are known to supplement their income in various ways. A common feature of the present situation is the large number of employees engaging in farming of various food items: maize, cassava, yams, tomatoes, etc. Even in urban areas, flower beds and pots are known to have become tomato beds and pots. Some engage in what is known as pp (private practice) directly or indirectly. To some employees, pp is a necessity and a strategy for survival imposed by the obvious inadequacy of reward from work. To others, pp is not a strategy for survival, but an assurance against future declining status. However, to the employers, pp is construed as a sign of divided interest and of lack of commitment.

Sixth, a popular means of surviving or coping and one that cut across occupations and social classes is Fiddling, which Gerald Mars (1983:10) defines as:

> *"the movement of resources to individual private use that do not appear in official accounts- or that appear in official accounts under different headings and which are acquired by individuals through their relationship to a job. These resources may derive directly from the job itself or be allocated from an outside source that relates to the job".*

Fiddling in the Nigerian context includes- pilfering(robbery or stealing) of time and material resources, overcharged expenses, overloading, under-dropping, moonlighting, solicited tips, bribes, use of fake receipts, unauthorized use of organizational resources, and kabukabu (a popular expression for illegal use of private vehicles for commercial purposes). These acts are part of the coping mechanisms and may not be construed as 'crimes' by those who engage in them.

The relationships that exist between work and workers' lifestyle, and survival

To Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman (1979:15), "work is therefore rather like the air we breathe and taken for; it is undramatic, certainly not funny, and yet is an inbuilt part of life". Work, they argue, is "a non- pleasurable activity which attracts a monetary compensation" and they concluded that "if religion was the opium of the masses, then work is the castor-oil of the population''. According to Lee Braude (1975:17), work "is clearly a social product, it cannot be understood apart from group values, from social perceptions of what constitute worth-while and meaningful behaviour". For Arygle (1972:251), "work is the setting for several kinds of basic social behaviour- co-operation

and helping in groups, supervisory relationships, negotiation and bargaining, assessment and appraisal". Thomson (1983:4) contends that "work is not just something that a society organizes to meet social needs, or people carry out in order to survive. It is a framework within which those who own and control economic resources seek to ensure the appropriation of the surplus". Within our society, work is regarded as an antidote for poverty (Ona, 1989). We live to work, work to live and survive to live. According to Okafor and Okunade (2005), work serve the social needs of man at work place when people meet, converse and share experiences. The type of work one does connotes a certain level of social status both for the worker and his family. In addition, work also contributes to an employee's self-esteem by reflecting his contribution to the work group, department and company. To him, man's occupation helps to shade his sense of identity in any community. This implies that the work that Nigerian workers do determine their purchasing power and status, which is a reflection of their lifestyles and how they survive in the society.

THEORETICAL VIEWPOINTS

The study utilizes expectancy, Maslow hierarchy of needs and two-factor motivational theoretical viewpoints.

Expectancy theory

Expectancy theory is a contingency model, which recognizes that there is no universal method of motivating people towards achieving organizational objectives. This motivation, which is derived from the work workers do, determine their lifestyles and survival in any society. The theory was propounded by Vroom (1964) in his study of staff motivation and job satisfaction. The underlying assumption of expectancy theory is that whether a person works hard will depend essentially upon what he expects to get out of the effort put into work. A basic tenet of the theory is that human behaviour is instrumental in attaining an outcome and the subjective probability that the outcome will be forthcoming (Mitchell, 1973). Outcomes may be positive such as pay, security, companionship, trust, fringe benefits, a chance to use talent or skill, or negative such as fatigue, boredom, frustration, anxiety, harsh supervision, non-payment of salary, threat of dismissal among others (Mamoria, 1993). Expectancy theory therefore holds that, motivation of staff to work is closely affected by the amount of rewards that people derive from jobs, while their level of performance, lifestyles and survival is closely affected by the basis for attainment of rewards. Expectancy theory in sum indicates only the conceptual determinants of motivation and how they are related. It is however, of value in understanding workers' behaviour as it is applied in this study. For instance, workers in formal organizations have their expectations. Therefore, in order to get their necessary cooperation for the efficient administration of the organization, which will lead to the attainment of organizational goals or objectives, the manager should strive to discover the workers' expectations and satisfy them accordingly. This is because; their expectations determine their lifestyles and survival in the society they belong.

Maslow's Motivation Theory
One of the most widely mentioned theories of motivation is the hierarchy of needs theory put forth by psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow saw human needs in the form of a hierarchy, ascending from the lowest to the highest, and he concluded that when one set of needs is satisfied, this kind of need ceases to be a motivator.
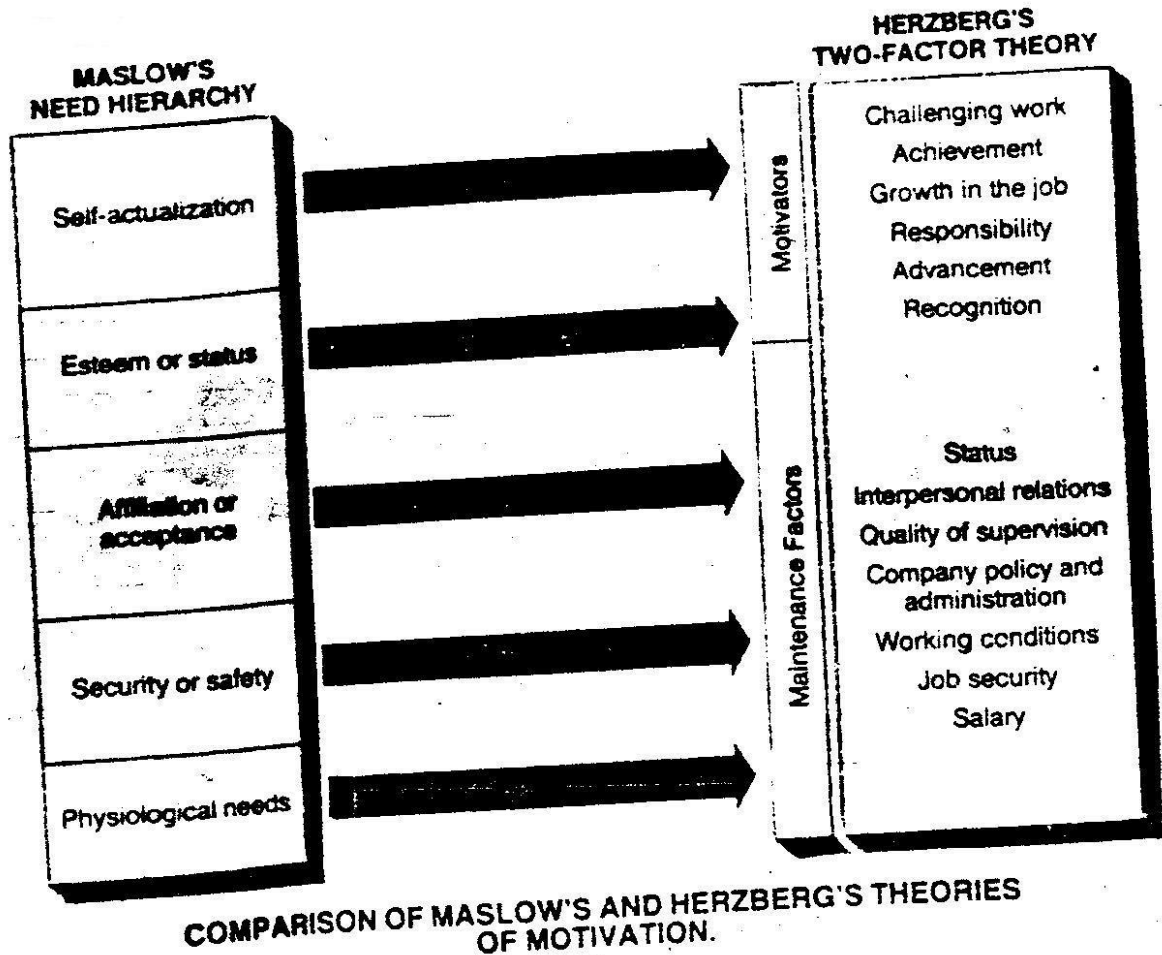
The basic human needs placed by Maslow in an ascending order of importance and shown in Figure below are these:

1. Physiological needs. These are the basic needs for sustaining human life itself, such as food, water, warmth, shelter, and sleep. Maslow took the position that until these needs are satisfied to the degree necessary to maintain life, other needs will not motivate people.
2. Security or safety needs. These are the needs to be free of physical danger and of the fear of losing a job, property, food or shelter.
3. Affiliation, or acceptance, or social needs. Since people are social beings, they need to belong, relate and be accepted by others.
4. Esteem needs: According to Maslow, once people begin to satisfy their need to belong, they tend to want to be held in esteem both by themselves and by others. This kind of need produces such satisfaction as power, prestige, status and self-confidence.
5. Need for self- actualization: Maslow regards this as the highest need in his hierarchy. It is the desire to become what one is capable of becoming – to maximize one's potential and to accomplish something.

What the above theory implies is that, workers have needs that are arranged hierarchically. Hence, Nigerian workers work to achieve these needs, however, the extent at which these needs are achieved by them determine their standard of living and survival in the society.

Two-Factor Motivation

Maslow's needs approach has been considerably modified by Frederick Herzberg and his associates. Their research purports to find a two-factor theory of motivation. In one group of needs are such things as company policy and administration, supervision, working conditions, interpersonal relations, salary status, job security, and personal life. These were found by Herzberg and his associates to be only dissatisfiers and not motivators. In other words, if they exist in a work environment in high quantity and quality, they yield no dissatisfaction. Their existence does not motivate in the sense of yielding satisfaction; their lack of existence would however, result in dissatisfaction. Herzberg called them *maintenance hygiene*, or job context factors. In the second group, Herzberg listed certain satisfiers and therefore motivators-all related to job content. They include achievement, recognition, challenging work, advancement, and growth in the Job. Their existence will yield feelings of satisfaction or no satisfaction (not dissatisfaction). As the figure below indicates, the satisfiers and dissatisfiers identified by Herzberg are similar to the factors suggested by Maslow.

MASLOW'S NEED HIERARCHY

- Self-actualization
- Esteem or status
- Affiliation or acceptance
- Security or safety
- Physiological needs

HERZBERG'S TWO-FACTOR THEORY

Motivators
- Challenging work
- Achievement
- Growth in the job
- Responsibility
- Advancement
- Recognition

Maintenance Factors
- Status
- Interpersonal relations
- Quality of supervision
- Company policy and administration
- Working conditions
- Job security
- Salary

COMPARISON OF MASLOW'S AND HERZBERG'S THEORIES OF MOTIVATION.

Source: Heinz and Harold (2001).

The first group of factors (the dissatisfiers) will not motivate people in an organization; yet they must be present, or dissatisfaction will arise. The second group or the job content factors, Herzberg found to be the real motivators because they have the potential of yielding a sense of satisfaction. Clearly, if this theory of motivation is sound, managers must give considerable attention to upgrading job content so as to improve the status of workers in terms of their compensation so as to improve their standard of living.

Conclusion

This study becomes significant when one examines the nature of work in Nigeria, especially where people go to work very early and come back very late. Work, therefore, is the means to living and survival. The form and nature of work process help to determine the character of a civilization, but in turn, a society's economic, political and cultural characteristics

shape the form and nature of the work process as well as the role and status of the worker within the society. Work is described or defined as human activity designed to accomplish something needed and valued for its functions in civilized life. From this description, a distinction can be made of work as essential in providing the basic and physical needs of food, clothing and shelter and other explanations given at different times for the existence and purpose of work for human survival; and work as a human value for self-fulfillment and thus "re-creational." Although work is commonly applied to manual or physical labour, yet its understanding does not exclude intellectual or other psychological prowess (Ona, 1989).

It can be said that every person who has attained the use of reason spends the great majority of his/her working hours or his/her life at work. This is even truer of the Nigerians whose working life begins much earlier. This is because they are born into the situation where they must struggle in order to survive. The kind of work they do during these many hours and the attitude they take toward that work impact profoundly on their development as persons, on the solidity of their sense of self and on the nature of culture they produce in common. It is an observable fact that the social etiquette about work is gradually changing. The "How do you do?" or "How is work?" pleasantries are so eroding and giving way to "What do you do?" For most people, this is not mere a chanced or an incidental question, it gets to the root of peoples identity. People's identity is becoming closely tied to their work. This is not a problem in itself. It is just that what one does is beginning to determine how one does it and the attitude towards such a work (Ona, 1989).

There are certain works especially among Nigerians that are seen or perceived to have some prestige or dignity attached to them and others without such prestige or dignity. We cannot put a tag on these because they vary from place to place and from one community to the other depending on what value gains the upper hand in a particular locality. The truth is that the attitudes of the subjects toward work are different in terms of positive and negative attitudes. Definitely, the productivity levels would as well be different. It does even happen that those with the so-called prestigious works have allowed their heads to be swollen and their egos magnified by their mere association with such works that their commitment level is at the barest minimum. Thus productivity that should befit such a position and work is not forth coming. Worse still are those who perceive or think that society perceive their work as non-prestigious? Such people are only not proud of their work but they are not happy to be associated with it (Robert, 1991). One can only imagine their level of commitment and consequently the output of their work. These groups are simply at work in order to get their livelihood. They have neither joy nor satisfaction that comes from working; and they care less about the effect of their work on others. There is very little dedication to duty and there is no fulfillment. There are others still who are merely opportunists and lazy especially about what does not concern them. They have a kind of *laisser faire* attitude at work and only wait for their pay. Adebayo (2000) expresses it better when she says: "there are some workers, who knowing that salaries would be paid, would prefer not to work. This is especially applicable to the civil servant who knows that his/her paycheck at the end of the month is constant, whether he/she is seen to work hard or not". In the attitudes such as these, work offers very little to man in terms of growth, productivity, fulfillment and economic emancipation. It becomes merely a means of recognition, status, style, personal significant and survival. Work must go beyond survival and proofing of personhood to the outside world (Umekachikelu, 2012).

However, poor or minimal attitudes towards work is not only the creation of workers, other factors can actually encourage indifferent and lackadaisical attitudes at work. These include poor remuneration, lack of appreciation and poor condition at work place, to mention but

a few. Every worker deserves and expects at the end of his working hours, week or month (depending on the agreed arrangement) a just wage or remuneration. But where the wages are proportionately lopsided compared to the amount of work done, the indifferent attitude of the worker towards the work is not and should not be a surprise. It is actually expected. Worse still is when the wages are not paid at the expected and needed time or the workers' pay package is swallowed up by poor economic and political situations. It is difficult in such a case to have the good disposition of the workers at work or for workers to have a good living and survive well in the society (Ona, 1989). Hence, workers engage in other income generating activity, instead of giving total commitment to the actual work that they do or engage in fraudulent acts so as to enable them cope with the challenging environment they find themselves.

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