

An Empirical Analysis of Workers' Orientation as a Predictor of Attendance Behaviour of Selected Migrant Workers of Nigerian Sugar Company, Bacita, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study attempts to explain the work behaviour of some migrant workers by incorporating differences in their need orientation as the key explanatory variable. This, it does by empirically examining the relationship between the particular need orientation brought to the work situation by the migrant workers and their work behaviour measured in term of work attendance in the context of a stated research hypothesis, using the migrant workers of the Nigerian Sugar Company, Bacita, Nigeria as the study population. The results show that the workers' need orientation has independent effects on the migrant, workers' attendance behaviour. That is in general, the personal value system (orientation) that individuals have has influence on the attendance motivation.

Key words: Workers' orientation, attendance, behaviour, migrants, analysis, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent attempts to account for human behaviours in organizations, theorists have become increasingly aware of the fact that outplant factors (that is factors or characteristics that are peculiar to the individuals that work in the organizations) are important determinants of human behaviours in work situations. Consequently, by the late 1960s, a perspective generally known as action approach had emerged as an explanation to industrial behaviour of employees. The action approach to the explanation of industrial behaviour constitutes an attempt to incorporate socially generated and distributed variables such as aims, attitudes and actions of the employees in the model of explanations of work behaviour. Simply and generally referred to as actionalism theory, it explores the work community nexus.

The action perspective like the behavioural psychology approach, which was being systematically promoted by a number of British and French students of industrial behaviour by the late 1960s emerged as an attempt to correct the biases of the earlier theories. It is important to note here that the action approach derives mainly from the methodological recommendations of Weber (1997). According to Weber (1997), societies (including work organizations) can be studied either as abstract systems of institutions, role-patterns etc. or as the collective artifacts of purposeful human action, which gives meaning to the characteristic activities. This implies

that the first perspective represents society as something independent of man, while the second perspective sees it as man's product.

The methodological and theoretical implications of the second perspective are very relevant in this study and therefore, need further elaboration. Methodologically, the second perspective demands not only that the typical social actions of typical social actors be determined, but also the meaning actors typically attribute to their actions is regarded as essential part of any analysis of patterned conduct. The message here is that actors in a work situation act in accordance with their own interpretations or definitions of the situation. The implication of this is that if we want to achieve a good understanding of observed acts as researchers, we must try to project ourselves into the actor's situation. Weber (1997) believes that to do this would involve sensitive study of their backgrounds and current attachments outside the plant. Weber (1997) belief must have been based on the assumption that different backgrounds and loyalties will result in different behaviours.

The above-mentioned assumption has been practicalized in an earlier study by Dalton (1981) of rate-busters and restricters. In the study, it was shown that readiness to respond to incentives closely matched varying social backgrounds and values of the employees. A simplistic interpretation of this is that workers different backgrounds and loyalties may result in different behaviours.

Another impressive empirical study in actionalism is Chinoy (1975) Automobile workers and the American dream. This study was an examination of the inconsistencies between the harsh realities of the automobile workers' situation and the American success ideology. In this explanation of the automobile workers' behaviour, Chinoy (1975) has the following to say:

Men need more the satisfactions derived from predictable patterns of social interaction on the job from working with a good bunch of guys. They seek in their jobs to satisfy desires derived not only from their co-workers but also from their family and friends and from their experiences as members of the community and wider society

Chinoy (1975) explanation of the automobile workers' behaviour as shown in the above passage simply indicates that there is always an interaction between what goes on in the work-place and the wider society. For instance, the desires implanted by the wider society will normally influence what an individual will desire from an organization and consequently his behaviour. A critical examination of the two empirical studies cited above shows that organizational behaviour (work behaviour) could not be accounted for without paying some attention to factors outside the organization.

Since the researches of Dalton (1981), Chinoy (1975) and Gouldner (1960), some efforts have been made towards the formulation of an action perspective. These efforts have led to the emergence of three variants of action theory, namely the middle-range actionalism theory; the phenomenological actionalism and the historic actionalism. Out of the three sub-theories of actionalism theory, the phenomenological actionalism stresses the possible relationship between orientations and some implant experiences or behaviours. This model emphasizes very strongly on the actor's subjective definitions of a situation. By this model, there is an increasing recognition among sociologists today that social meanings are the fundamental determinants of social action that these meanings are highly complex and problematic and that they must be determined from studies of everyday life situations as meanings originate from the society.

Advocates of the approach explained above have summarized the ideas expressed in it using the concept of orientations to work. The major emphasis in the concept of orientations to work is that men have no innate or genetically given orientations towards work (Fox, 1971). The implication of this argument is that attitude to work or the orientations a man adopts to work are socially and culturally moulded (Brown, 1992). This is interpreted to mean that men are taught what is expected and what they

should want from work through the process of socialization by certain socializing agencies. These agencies encourage certain attitudes to work and discourage others among the individuals on differential basis determined by the individuals social groups or classes. Therefore, out of all the influences upon different social groups and classes, different orientations to work are formed.

Given what has been mentioned above, the objective in this study is to empirically examine the relationship between the goal a worker has come to pursue in the organization (work orientation) and his subsequent attitudes or behaviour with particular reference to attendance behaviour using a migrant workers situation in Nigeria. That is does the orientation brought to work situation influence the attendance behaviour of the workers in general terms? Thus, the present study aims to extend the literature by providing an empirical understanding of the contribution that work orientation factor makes to the prediction of attendance behaviour at work.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

The two concepts, which form the focal point of this work are: the need orientation and attendance behaviour. The word that has been used interchangeably with orientation to work is work expectation. They simply mean the same thing. They both connote what the workers expect from their work situation. In theory, different types of orientation have been mentioned by some scholars in their attempt to classify this concept. In a review of Goldthorpe research by Banks (1969), three types of orientation to work were identified. These are the instrumental, bureaucratic and solidaristic orientations. Ingham (1967) classification is similar to that provided. However, Ingham (1967) substituted solidaristic orientation with instrumental expressive, which he said; could be positive or negative? A somewhat different classification of orientations to research was given by Box and Cotgrove (1966).

In their own classification, they came up with three types of orientation among scientists. First are the public scientists who value autonomy, personal commitment and disciplinary communism. The second category of scientists are the private scientists who are not concerned with the public world of science. The third category consists of the instrumental or organizational scientists who use their knowledge and skills for career purposes.

In Fox (1971) classification, he mentioned two types of orientation, which he called substantive orientation and

procedural orientation. The substantive orientation, according to him, involves what an individual brings to the work setting to bear upon the various dimensions of work. Such orientation may be in terms of more money, greater security, or more challenging work. The procedural orientation on the other hand, concerns the nature of the decision-making procedures. In this case, the worker has two options. In the first place, he may be prepared to reject decision made wholly by others and secondly he may aspire to be part of decision-making process. From the various definitions and classifications of orientation to work, the term is used in this study to mean what the worker brings to the work place and which affects his work behaviour.

Behaviour in this study is conceptualized to mean the expressed action of an employee or worker as regard his work. This implies that behaviour is an overt action. In this study, we are interested in attendance behaviour, which is taken to mean the tendency on the part of a worker to come to or stay away from his work. As mentioned earlier, the objective in this study is to examine and explain the relationship between the orientations brought to the work place by the employees and their job behaviour conceptualized in terms of attendance behaviour.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The focal point of this study were the migrant workers of the Nigerian Sugar Company Bacita in Kwara State of Nigeria. Bacita, the location of the study is situated around Long. 9°0.9'N and Lat. 5°10'E. It is a village located on the flood plain of the Niger-River in Edu. Local Government Area of Kwara State. By road, Bacita is about 119 km from Ilorin via Share and Bode-Sadu road and about 18 km from Lagos-Kano Railway line. Although, the most important mode of transportation is by road, Bacita enjoys the services of railway and has the potential advantages of water transportation from Niger River. These combined advantages enjoyed by Bacita justify the siting of the sugar plantation and sugar manufacturing industry there.

The migrant workers used in this study can be defined as workers who have moved from their former geographical location to take up a seasonal or short-term job after which they go back to their original locations. In this study, we do not include the permanent settlers who though are not indigenes of Bacita Village but merely take up seasonal jobs with the company in order to supplement their income. Such people, by the own conceptualization in this study are not regarded as

migrant workers. Those included in the sample frame are those who were making their first call at Bacita at the time of this survey or those who have been making repeated calls at Bacita, but never stay or reside permanently at Bacita. The migrant workers used in this study came from different part of Nigeria.

Data: The data presented here in were obtained through personal interviews with 239 migrant workers (drawn from a population of 2,390 migrant workers) either working on the sugar-cane plantation or sugar factory at Bacita village at the time of the survey. The data consist of the perceptions of these individuals (migrant workers) regarding their work orientations and the consequence of this on one of their behavioural patterns namely attendance behaviour. The sample, which was randomly selected appears to be representative in its design and selection procedures and also in the representation of various sub-groups (by sex, age, ethnic, occupation and department etc.) in the population.

Statistics used: To adequately analyze the responses obtained from the questionnaire used as the basis of data collection, we opted for non-complex statistical methods. This is because, the issue of the determinants of human behaviour in organization can be examined without making use of any complicated statistical method that may impair clear understanding of the message researchers want to pass across. Consequently, the chi-square (χ^2) statistics with its associated non-complex statistics such as lambda asymmetric and lambda symmetric and Crammer's V were used in this study.

In using the cross-tabulation analysis, the factor (the predictor variable), which in this study is orientation to work/work expectation and behavioural tendency frequency (dependent or criterion variables) were cross-tabulated. The joint frequency distributions were then examined in relation to general relationships and possible predictive associations. These operations enabled us to ascertain whether or not there exists relationship (independence and predictive associations) between these factors (work orientation and the frequency of attendance behavioural pattern) among the subjects. More importantly, they enable us to know whether or not this factor (work orientation) can provide a degree of relative accuracy in predicting work behaviour like employees' attendance behaviour. This study is hinged on the following hypothesis: that there is no relationship between the respondents reported dominant work orientation and their reported behavioural tendency (i.e., attendance behaviour).

RESULTS

Characterization of the migrant workers: The migrant respondents interviewed in this study varied in terms of their demographic and socio-economic characteristics namely: age, sex, marital status, income and number of dependants. On the age structure of the migrant workers, the majority of them were below 40 years of age. Similarly, the male respondents constituted the majority of the respondents interviewed in this study. The analysis of the migrant workers in terms of marital status revealed that most of them were married.

The frequency distribution of the migrants in terms of their level of educational attainment also showed that majority of the respondents had a low level of educational attainment. The observation however, revealed that level of educational attainment was higher among the factory migrant workers as >50% of such workers either reported to have primary education or post-primary education.

On the distribution of the migrant workers in terms of occupational status, the respondents were found to be numerically stronger in the unskilled category than in the skilled and semi-skilled categories. The result of this frequency distribution of the respondents by number of dependants showed that the migrant respondents were more in the below 5.5-7 and 8-10 dependants categories, while only a few respondents were in 11 and above dependants category.

The migrant workers' orientation to work: In this study, we attempt to establish the migrant workers' orientation to work by asking them to respond to research questions on two relevant constructs namely: work expectation and factors that attracted them to work with the company. An examination of the respondents relative to their work expectation shows that 169 (70.7%) respondents expected economic gratification from their work; 19 (8.0%) respondents indicated that they expected social gratification from their work and 51 (21.3%) respondents claimed that they expected career gratification from their research (Table 1).

Table 1 shows that the majority (N = 169 or 70.7%) of the respondents had economic orientation, while <1/3 (N = 70 or 29.3%) had either social or career valuation. The variation in the migrants' work expectation could be due to a number of interwoven factors, which include the kind of job sought from the company, type of artisan training received before joining the company and future work programme of the respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by work expectation

Working expectation	Frequency distribution	
	N	%
Economic	169	70.7
Social	19	8.0
Career	51	21.3
Total	239	100.0

Survey result (2008)

When the migrant workers interviewed were asked to freely comment on their responses in Table 1, the following statements made by some of them in assessing their work expectation are quite revealing. For example, a migrant sugar-cane planter working with the field department and who indicated that his expectation from work is economic said:

Look, I am just a common labourer in this company. You dont expect me to love anything but money

Another migrant worker also in the field department had the following to say:

Before joining this company I expected to have some opportunity to save enough money to start off my own business whenever I leave this company (sic.)

Even for a semi-skilled migrant worker in the foundry section of the factory department the comment goes thus:

I joined this company because I expected from the company some economic betterment

Another migrant who indicated career expectation as what he wanted from the company said:

My only want in this company is becoming a permanent worker in this company. This, I feel is better for me (sic.)

Another migrant in the department who indicated career advancement as his expectation from the company said:

I believe that this job will give me an enriching experience. This is all I hoped for when I was joining this company (sic.)

It appears from these comments that the field migrant respondents expectation are largely expressed in terms of economic and career benefits. Considering all the statements quoted above, the general impression given by such statements is that the field migrants were generally economic instrumentalists, while the factory

migrant respondents who were majorly semi-skilled workers had consideration of their future career as the major cause of their action.

Further on the issue of the respondents work orientation, an item on the questionnaire used for the research asked the respondents to indicate the aspects of job that attracted them to the company. The responses are as shown in Table 2.

As can be shown in Table 2, four statements pertaining to the factors that attracted the respondents to join the company were variously mentioned by them. Of the 239 respondents interviewed 175 (73.2%) indicated opportunity to make a living as factor that attracted them to join the company; 40 (16.7%) respondents claimed that the opportunity to improve skill had attracted them to the company; 19 (8.0%) respondents reported that challenging job attracted them to the company and 5 (2.1%) said that the love for good management attracted them to the company.

From the data presented above, it can be gathered that the main factor mentioned by the majority of the respondents (N = 175 or 73.2%) is the opportunity to make a living, while opportunity to improve skill ranked second (N = 40 or 16.7%) among the respondents. The data presented here imply that the respondents were more inclined towards having their economic and career desires satisfied. The main determining factor of the observed trends here is the level of skill brought to the organization by the respondent. This explains why some respondent who brought some skills into the organization indicated factors other than survival factors as the main factors that pushed them to join the company. It is more informing again to listen to the statements made by some of the respondents about the factors that attracted them to join the organization. A field migrant respondent has this as his reason for joining the company.

In this hard times, I need a job that guarantees my living and this company provides this for me so I joined it (sic.)

A similar view was expressed by another field migrant respondent in the company who said:

At the time I was seeking for an employment, survival was my main objective. Since this company readily provided it though minimally, I joined it (sic.)

There was also the case of a field migrant respondent who claimed to be an ordinary farmer in the sugar-cane plantation who said:

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by the factors that attracted them to the company

Factors attraction	Frequency distribution	
	N	%
Opportunity to make a living	175	73.2
Opportunity to improve skill	40	16.7
Challenging job	19	8.0
Love for good management	5	2.1
Total	239	100.0

Survey result (2008)

Although, the money paid us here is small, but at least one is using it to survive this hard time. This has been my objective for joining the company (sic.)

Theses statements can be contrasted with the one expressed by some respondents from other departments. A factory migrant respondent in the company has this to say:

What has attracted me to this company was the skill I thought I would gain from it. I am a trained electrician by profession, I believe the complex electrical works in the factory will provide me the opportunity to gain more skills in my job (sic.)

Another semi-skilled migrant worker in the foundry section of the factory emphasized a similar factor as above thus:

To be successful in the kind of occupation I was trained for, one needs some kind of practical training which I thought this company would provide for me. Hence, I joined it (sic.)

The general picture provided by these statements is that the factors that attracted the migrant workers to the company range from economic factors to non-material factors.

However, the former were more commonly stressed by the field migrants than among the factory migrant workers. The question then is whether the dominant orientation had by the migrant workers has any significant influence on their work behaviour. In order to answer this question the following stated hypothesis is subjected to statistical analysis:

H₀: That there is no relationship between the respondents reported dominant need orientation and their reported behavioural tendency (i.e., attendance behaviour).

H₁: That there is a relationship between the respondents dominant need orientation and their behavioural tendency.

In testing this hypothesis, the respondents are classified as having either economic orientation or social orientation or work-based orientation. The respondents responses in this regard are then cross-tabulated with the respondents reported level of their attendance behaviour.

Test of relationship between the respondents dominant need orientation and attendance behaviour: To determine the possible relationship between the respondents dominant orientation and attendance behaviour, the two variables are cross-tabulated. Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents by these two variables. Further analysis on the statistical test of relationship between the factors is based on the data shown in Table 3.

A general appraisal of the contingency Table 3 shown the reveals a number of information about the relationship between the two factors being considered. Foremost, the chi-square (χ^2). Table 3 shows the respondents type of orientation to be related to their attendance behaviour. This is because the χ^2 value of 173.86 exceeds the Table 3 value at 0.05 with 14 degrees of freedom (i.e., $\chi^2 = 173.86$; $df = 14$; $p > 0.05$). The statistical judgement arising from the above therefore is that while the null hypothesis is rejected, the alternative research hypothesis, which states that there is a relationship between the respondents type of orientation and their attendance behaviour is accepted.

- $\chi^2 = 173.86$; $df = 4$; significance = 0.000
- Crammer's V = 0.603 $p > 0.05$
- Lambda (asymmetric) = 0.314 with orientation predicted
- Lambda (asymmetric) = 0.429 with orientation predicted
- Lambda (asymmetric) = 0.352

An assessment of the degree of this relationship reveals an existence of a high amount of association between both variables (Cramer's V = 0.603). Besides determining the statistical strength of the relationship, the study also questioned the amount of relative accuracy in predicting each variable from the knowledge of the other. This means that it is impossible to predict the respondents attendance behaviour from the knowledge of the type of orientation they held (Lambda asymmetric = 0.314). In the same way, if we know the respondents attendance behaviour, we infer their type of dominant need orientation (lambda asymmetric = 0.429). From both the chi-square (χ^2) and lambda asymmetric statistics, it can be said that the majority (N = 166) of the respondent who reported being very regular in attendance had economic based orientation, while the modal responses for irregular and very irregular, respondents are social-based orientation and work-based orientation (N = 32).

Table 3: Relationship between the respondents' dominant need orientation and their attendance behaviour

Types of orientation	Attendance behaviour		
	Very irregular	Irregular	Very regular
Economic based	2	1	166
Social based	15	4	28
Work based	3	10	10
Total	20	15	204

Survey result (2008)

The conclusion here is that more of the very regular respondents had either economic-based orientation or work-based orientation. The respondents attendance behaviour thus, varies with type of orientation held by them. Statistically as shown in Table 3, the chance of error in the conclusion is reduced to 32.2% (i.e., lambda symmetric = 0.352). The hypothesis tested in this section reveals that claimed by the respondents. The employees need orientation has significant statistical relationship with the respondents attendance behaviour. That is the attendance behaviour of the respondents is found to vary with the type of orientation held by them.

DISCUSSION

In the final section of this study, attempt is made to discuss the findings presented above in the light of existing empirical works/studies and the theoretical models adopted as explanatory tools in this study. In summary, the study's finding is that the migrant workers' orientation is a determinant of perceived or observed level of attendance behaviour. What this indicates is that it is possible to predict the migrant workers; attendance behaviour by knowing their orientation. Orientation here may mean values and job expectations brought by the workers to the organization.

A number of researchers have shown that the personal value system (orientation) that individuals have has influence on the attendance motivation (Roach, 1971). Such researches on work orientation have shown considerable variable across employees in the extent to which they feel morally obligated to come to work. In particular, several investigations have noted a direct relationship between a type of orientation held by a worker and the propensity to come to work (Gordon, 1955; Sayles, 1958). It then appears here that one major pressure to attend is the belief by individuals that the work activity or work behaviour is an important avenue through, which individuals realize their expectations emanating from the dominant orientation held by them. It is therefore, the desire to fulfil either their economic expectation or career expectation that puts pressure on the migrant workers to attend irrespective of whether they are satisfied or not with the conditions of their jobs.

The relationship found between work orientation and attendance behaviour in this study can be explained in the context of the nature of the migrant workers themselves. Essentially, the migrant workers at the Bacita Sugar Company are target seasonal workers whose primary motivation is either economic or career development. Because people tend to pursue what they think they value in their job, pressure to attend is put on them if that will allow them to achieve their goal. It is interesting to note that this relationship would be expected to be particularly strong in groups with economic orientation as such people will view coming to work as highly desirable since doing so will help them to meet their economic needs.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have examined the determinants of attendance behaviour in the context of the work orientation construct. The method adopted here is by empirically put to a test a stated hypothesis. The test was carried out using some migrant workers in the Nigeria Sugar Company, Bacita, Nigeria. The migrant workers used in this study generally tended to exhibit high level of instrumentalism, which has a far reaching influence on the behavioural pattern (attendance behaviour) of the migrant workers studied. This instrumentalism results from the fact that the seasonal migrants are usually target workers who seek fulfillment of certain needs (mostly the economic needs and rarely some psychological needs) from the work they do. This, in itself, is indicative of an alienated workforce (instrumentalism is a feature of alienated work).

With this characteristic of instrumentalism, the migrant workers became calculative in their relation to the work situation. To this extent, they treat work merely as an instrument, that is, as a means to an end. This means that such workers will view coming to work as highly desirable since doing so will help them to fulfill their work aspirations. This is more so because how much a migrant worker received as income is tied to his attendance behavior and not to his level of job involvement. It is important to note that some of the migrant workers (particularly, the factory migrant workers) were also interested in building a career in the work they do and as such they tend to view job involvement as desirable because it satisfies their aspiration of career building. This means that the workers studied manifested their instrumentalism either by coming to work regularly or being job involved since they perceived that their aspiration (s) could be achieved through any or combination of these behavioural types.

Another conclusion that is related to the one above and which is also drawn from the findings reported in this

study is that variables that largely relate to the economic factor have stronger influence on the migrant workers' behaviour than on the factory migrant workers behaviour. On the other hand, variables that have relational and career contents have stronger influence on the behaviour of migrants working in the factory than on the behaviour of migrant workers working on the plantation (Sugar-cane field). Thus, the two groups of the migrant workers brought different orientations to the work situation and consequently they were influenced by these different orientations. In summary therefore, this study has shown that explanatory models of the employees attendance behaviour must move beyond personal factors and job-satisfaction factor analyses. Therefore, in the study, the construct of type of orientation brought to work by particular employees was offered as an explanatory concept for the attendance behavioural process. Consequently, in the explanation of attendance behaviour in this study, the individual differences in the type of orientation brought to work, are explicitly recognized as an important factor influencing attendance behaviour.

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