



Construction Companies in South-East Nigeria: The Nexus between Organizational Paranoia and Employee Performance

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. The research was jointly carried out by the authors. We made inputs from the inception to the conclusion of the research work. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the extent of relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance in construction firms in Southeast, Nigeria. The work adopted a survey research design using a modified standardized structured questionnaire to elicit data. The population was obtained from selected construction companies during the field survey. A systematic sampling technique was adopted in selecting four (4) construction companies from the region. Taro Yamane and Bowley's Proportional Allocation Formulae were used to determine the sample size and the number of units allocated to each construction company respectively. Spearman Rank Correlation was used to test the formulated hypothesis on the platform of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0. A positive significant relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance in construction companies in South-East, Nigeria was established.

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Organizations should have established norms and values in that would leave all stakeholders satisfied to mitigate fear, anxiety, suspicion, and distrust. Also, organizations need to encourage a friendly work environment that will extinguish counter-productive work behaviour.

Keywords: Organizational paranoia; employee performance; construction companies and Southeast Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Change, they say is the only constant thing. Therefore, the wave of change in organizations made up of men and women who are also dynamic in nature perceive, understand and interpret the actions and inactions of stakeholders, issues, and events differently. However, organizations as the coming together of people to achieve set goals; people from diverse backgrounds, culture, competencies, and behaviours that keep changing cannot be predicted pose serious challenge to managers to cope with. The understanding and interpretation of information differ among employees given differences in their perception, personality, attitude, behaviour, interpersonal relationship, and interests ultimately affect their performance.

Employee performance reflects the production of goods and services over a time period in an organization [1]. In this study employee performance is described as organizational activities carried out by workers as teams with an utmost positive disposition that achieves set objectives and goals. Notably, Iqbal, Ahmad, Haider, Batool and Aria [2] remarked that good organizational performance refers to optimal employee performance. This work considers employee performance (dependent variable) not as a composite concept. Organizational paranoia, on the other hand, is having or showing distrust borne out of suspicions and reactions to inconsistent management policies and practices [3]. It is innate and heightened by organizational factors in the employer/employee relationship to achieve expected goals. Distrust and suspicion are twin evils in any organization. Organizational literature describe paranoia as "heightened and exaggerated distrust that encompasses an array of beliefs, including organizational members' perceptions of being threatened, harmed, persecuted, mistreated, disparaged and so on, by malevolent others within the organization" [4]. Such unhealthy characters require to promote industrial harmony. To this extent, a study on organizational paranoia and employee performance relationship became

imperative in construction companies. Construction companies on different scales of operation and ownership status need a mix of quality of workers to deliver projects as agreed. Therefore, input of every employee is indispensable.

"Given the nature of paranoia, it is unlikely that people with paranoia will thrive in interpersonal relationships. Such individuals normally have a biased perception of reality, often exhibiting, more hostile beliefs" [5]. From the foregoing, conflict becomes rife between the levels of management. While management of companies pay attention to optimum output through task performance they treat pay lip service to helping employees achieve their personal. When manager are aggressive, subordinates become sceptical given room for counter-productive behaviours on the part of workers. Employees cast aspersions on management actions and inactions but strive to take glory for every success in such work environment. Same way, management see workers as not optimal in their contributions. This ultimately creates an atmosphere of mutual distrust, suspicion, fear, anxiety, hate, threat and harm perceived.

The researchers extensively searched empirical literature on the combination of subjects but could only find two empirical studies. One, Ihionkhan and Itua [6] studied "organizational paranoia and employee performance: a case of Nigerian Bottling Company and Seven-Up Bottling Company, Benin Plants, Nigeria". The other work by Monyei, Agbaeze and Isichei [7] looked at "organizational paranoia and employees' commitment: mediating effect of human resources policies on academic staff in five federal universities in South-East, Nigeria. Several gaps were identified leading to this study: "construction companies in South-East, Nigeria: the nexus between organizational paranoia and employee performance".

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Job security remains the topmost in defining the decision of a prospective employee in accepting a job offer. However, this is most feasible where the appointment is permanent as against a

temporary one. In event of the latter, the employee feels underemployed, mistreated, and wronged particularly where the employee has the requisite qualifications, skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and experience needed for the job. Obviously, the employment status will automatically dictate the vigour and vehemence with which the worker would contribute to the organization.

Notwithstanding, good organizational performance refers to optimal employee output. Realizing this critical function of employees, anything short of motivating them to give their best would not in any way help employers. The perceived mistreatment meted out to workers of the companies creates resentment among employees. Construction companies engage a majority of its workforce on temporary employment. This is done to avoid payment of fringe benefits, welfare packages, pensions and gratuities. Employers lay-off workers intermittently under the loose or non-existent terms and conditions of service agreement as cost control measure during unproductive periods like rainy seasons, particularly in Southern Nigeria and when there are no jobs or as jobs wind down. Under the cover of workers employment status, managements issue threats of sack, actual sack, verbal and non-verbal treatment excluding physical contact, attributing failures to staff and take credit for successes, leaving employees in fear and anxiety.

Paranoia is innate in but manifests largely in unfriendly work settings in workers. Temporary employment as against permanent and pensionable employment in no mean measure triggers paranoia. Sadly, temporary employment status of workers has given the management of these companies the impetus to sack workers at will. Therefore, the fear and anxiety of being placed on redundancy, laid off, or sacked leave employees sceptical of management and supervisors.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

H₁: There is no significant relationship between Organizational paranoia and employee performance in construction companies in South-East, Nigeria.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Organizational Paranoia

Paranoia derived its meaning from Greek “par-anoia”, with its root from the verb “para-noeo”, translated to mean “derangement”, or “departure

from the normal” (“para”) in “thinking” (“noeo”) (Stedman cited in Thomas, [8]). The concept evolved to its adoption and inclusion by Johann Christian Heinroth (1818) in his influential *Lehrbuch der Storungen des Seelenlebens*, the same text in which the term, “psychiatry”, he adopted from Reil (1803), was first used.

Later, the American Psychiatric Association [9] described paranoia as the belief that people are conspiring against someone and deliberately trying to harm same. They posited three diagnostic categories of paranoia to include: Paranoid personality, paranoid personality disorder, and paranoid schizophrenia with a peculiar number of features but the sense of being persecuted and conspired against an element common to all three [10]. This is in tandem with the views of Smari, Stefanson and Thorgilson (1994) that paranoia is a significant aspect of psychopathology [11] schizophrenia and sometimes also in depressive disorders. Schizophrenia is a mental illness that is characterized by disturbances in thought (such as delusions), perception (such as hallucinations), and noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life. It often involves an inability to orient oneself with reality, a withdrawal from social interactions, and a failure to integrate or jealousy and by hallucinations (such as hearing voices) chiefly of an auditory nature.

However, Goodtherapy [12] says “paranoia tends to be a symptom of a mental disorder rather than a disease itself”. “Some of the symptom you can expect to see if you are suffering from paranoia include an intense and even irrational lack of trust or even suspicion about something or someone” [13]. It is important to align with the remarks of Galdini cited in Monyei, Agbaeze and Isichei [7] that a common trigger of individual paranoia is fear and lack of trust.

Fenigstein and Vanable [11] suggested that “paranoia is the tendency to be inappropriately suspicious of other people’s motives and behaviours directed towards oneself. This means not all suspicions are paranoia, there are justified suspicions”.

Similarly, Cromby and Harper [14] define paranoia as a way of perceiving and relating to other people and to the world that is characterized by some degree of suspicion, mistrust, or hostility assumptions, self-centeredness and conspirational intent (Ellet and Chadwick cited in Matthias, 2015). Bernstein,

Useda and Sierver cited in Cicero [15] simply define paranoia as a pervasive and unwanted mistrust of others. Freeman and Garety [16] defined it as the belief that harm is occurring or is going to occur, and that the persecutor has the intention to cause harm to the person. More so, from the organizational literature, paranoia was referred to as heightened and exaggerated distrust characterized by the perception of some employees of being harmed, mistreated, threatened, persecuted, disparage and so on by malevolent others within the organization [4].

“Paranoia is thus, inherent in human nature and it is a psychological problem which is hidden and comes out in certain circumstances. This is due to the individual’s feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, lack of confidence, fear, and a host of other complex feelings while working in an organization” [3]. “From the foregoing definitions, paranoia is a common human experience. Researchers agree on unique characteristics of suspicion, loss of trust, attribution style, and perceived abuse. Thus, this study will conceptualize organizational paranoia from the dysfunctional social interaction and social uncertainty perspective in the organization” [4]. The differences in the hierarchical relationship in the organization, characterized by sustained displays of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviour could have a significant effects and far-reaching consequences [17], Burton and Hoobler, [18], Tepper [19], Anwar [20], Fakhar, [21], Ihionkhan and Ohue [6]; Muhammad, Toryila, and Saanyol, [22]; Ojo and Abolade (n.d.).

Subramanian [3] remarked that paranoia is a state of mind in which an individual feels that he/she is a likely victim of harm. Believing that many others are watching, following or monitoring him/her when it is not true, constitute being paranoid. In extreme cases, paranoia poisons almost every functional section of the organization, Subramanian asserted. The above situation thrives where rumours, gossip and hear says’ pervade the organization as against accepted routes of formal communication. Efforts to solve issues at meetings will not arrive at solutions as issues are no longer openly analysed and discussed. This will equally give rise to an unhealthy interpersonal relationship with mutual distrust and suspicion within the organization that would lead to unresolved organizational issues while operations will move away from the once open or obvious way.

Organizational paranoia is a kind of distrustful behaviour by the employees arising out of suspicions and distorted actions of organizational intentions [3], thus, paranoia is a problem rooted in organizational behaviour, which requires care and adequate understanding, particularly the informational and social environment. Paranoid cognition may be the first of its kind of irrational distrust and suspicion, he concluded.

Colby [23] defined “paranoid cognition as: presenting decision and false beliefs whose propositional content clusters around ideas of being harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, vilified, and so on, by malevolent others, either specific individuals or groups”.

Evidently, temporary employment in construction companies leaves workers wronged, mistreated, and threatened by virtue of the nature of their engagement against their wish for a secured job as it were, they are not qualified for permanent employment. Subsequently, non-verbal and verbal maltreatments including threats of sack and replacement become the regular slogan of managers and supervisors to workers. The construction industry is among the topmost in the statistics of involuntary turnover of workers (lay-off, sack, retrenchment, sit at home, restructuring, redundancy and the like) for every real and imagined national and global economic downturn or company’s fortunes with the intention of saving the profit but ironically mortgaging the competitiveness. In pursuing their profitability goal, construction companies disengage workers intermittently.

Remarkably, Subramanian [3] posited that “the harmful effects of paranoid cognition on judgments about distrust and suspicion of others in the workplace can be viewed from two vintage prints. First, they can be approved from the perspective of how they affect the perceiver’s presumptive behaviour of co-workers (that is, a priori expectations about others’ trustworthiness). Second, they can be approved from the perspective of how they affect the attribution they make about others’ observed behaviour”.

2.2 Employee Performance

Aquinis cited in Ihionkhan and Ohue [6] opined that employee performance is about behaviour or the output of the work of employees. Campbell [24] defined employee performance or job

performance as an individual's behaviours regarding self-control and those affecting the achievement of organizational goals. Weerarathna [25] says employee performance means contributing to producing a high-quality product or service. The definitions highlighted to show the centrality of the affective behaviour of workers towards the attainment of organizational goals.

Rather than see performance as behaviour as the way teams and individuals get work done, Mooney [26] suggested that performance is not only related to results, but it also relates to activities of employees to achieve their goals [27]. Campbell defines job performance as activity carried out by a single individual [24]. This differentiates it from more encompassing constructs such as organizational performance or national performance which is at a macro-level. Job performance, however, is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of more than one kind of behaviour. Conclusively, performance means both behaviour and result. Therefore, the growth and success of any organization are hinged partly on employee performance.

Employees create a competitive advantage for the organization through their performance, thus managers need not rest on their oars but strive to get the best from their workers [25]. In fact, an availability of infrastructure, technology, materials, and funds are made meaningless without the coordinating role of qualified human resources [28].

2.3 Organizational Paranoia and Employee Performance

Rotundo and Sakett [29] define "performance as those actions and behaviours that are under the control of the individual and contribute to the goals of the organization". Armstrong cited in Isaiah, Ojiabo and Alagah [30] describes performance is the way and manner in which employees get work done. Suffice it to say that the position of Boshoff and Arnolds and Schippers cited in Rothman and Coetzer [31] that job performance is a multi-dimensional construct which indicates how well employees complete assigned tasks [32] alongside the initiative they take, the resourcefulness they show in solving problems, the way they utilize available resources as well as the time and energy they spend on their task. "Employee performance is a key factor in determining employees' integrity, honesty, and reliability

towards doing his/her job and responsibilities" [33].

Paranoia as a science of culture, society, and organization is not a broadly shared view because traditionally it is seen as a term from the medical sciences and human pathology [34] tend to narrow the idea and its usefulness to just clinical research [35]. "However, paranoia as a human phenomenon is observed as a feeling of excessive distress or concern over a person's future" [36]. This feeling has continued to dominate human cognition to the point of affecting the normal functions of general distrust. For Alqahtani and Alajmi [37] this condition is a fallout of the absence of control over human cognitions leading to thinking symptoms which may interfere with the individual daily routines. In a similar vein, Baruch and Lambert [38] described organizational paranoia as the combined effect of unfavourable feelings and a physiological stimulation that involves complex conduct.

Freeman and Freeman [39] believes that victimization, trauma, and social isolation are triggered by paranoia in modern western society. Supervisors in workplaces represent management in carrying out specific duties and responsibilities in forming and leading work-teams in organizations (Elangowan and Karakowsky; Goldstein and Ford; Noe cited in Azman, [40]). Simply put, supervisors link top management and operational employees down the ladder. Hence, supervisors are used by management in implementing and monitoring activities carried out by operational.

In modern management practices, supervisors play critical role in the well-being of workers, which in turn significantly affects employee performance [41]. Absenteeism and reduced performance of extra-role behaviour follow from low morale among staff. Abusive supervision have twin effect on both the organization and employees. Reduced performance is a typical example of the outcome of an abusive supervisor [42]. The above scenario symbolises the negative impact of abusive supervision on organizational outcomes including subordinate performance [42].

Employees are of the view that abusive supervision is connected to organizational citizenship behaviour [43]; Rafferty and Restubog, [44]; Chan, 2014) and employees' work performance (Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, [17]; Tepper, Moss and Duffy, [19]. Subordinates

to supervisors are considered as good citizens when the supervisors sees the body language of workers as altruistic rather than egoistic motive. Employees with tendencies to promote improvement in organizations through their behaviours have deep affection and perform such behaviour. These employees exhibit organizational citizenship. Going forward, the organization can become more effective and efficient. Similarly, Seligman and Schulman [45] found that there is positive relationship between workers' performance and turnover while a negative attribution style has an averse relationship with success and continuity of the employees, under- performance, and high turnover.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study is supported by Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Cognitive dissonance theory borders on discomfort that arises when a person's opinion, attitude, knowledge, belief, values or behaviour conflicts with reality of any of these elements [46]. Simply put, the theory brings to light the disagreement between cognitions and reality. The relevance of the theory stems from the fact that it is useful in predicting and dealing with employees' opinions, behaviours, attitudes, or beliefs that could produce information which determine ways organizations operate or perform things that influence employees in the organization. That is how they perceive, respond, act or react to events, people, things, processes, policies or practices.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

| Gender | Status of participant | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------|
| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative percent |
| Valid Male | 198 | 72.8 | 72.8 | 72.8 |
| Female | 74 | 27.2 | 27.2 | 100 |
| Total | 272 | 100 | 100 | |

Table 2. Spearman rank correlation of organizational paranoia and employee performance

| | | Organizational Paranoia | Employee Performance |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Organizational Paranoia Score | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .721** |
| | P-Value | | .000 |
| | N | 272 | 272 |
| | | | |
| Employee Performance Score | Pearson Correlation | .721** | 1 |
| | P-Value | .000 | |
| | N | 272 | 272 |
| | | | |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Research Data, 2023

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey research design. Two thousand, eight hundred and eighty-five (2,885) construction workers were drawn from four (4) construction companies in South-East, Nigeria. The companies include: Julius Berger Nigeria Plc, Hartland Construction Company Nigeria Limited, Reynolds Construction Company and Arab Contractors Nigeria Limited. Taro Yamane's 1967 sample determination formula was used to determine the sample size of three hundred and fifty-one (351) workers. Participants were randomly selected. Subsequently, Bowley's Proportional Allocation Technique was used to arrive at the sample size for each construction firm [47]. Data were collected, using a two-section structured, self-administered survey questionnaire [48-53].

Section A was made up of Personal Data while Section B constituted organizational paranoia and employee performance. The structure was a 5-point Scale, weighted 1-5: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). The internal consistency of the constructs was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0 was used to analyze data. Coefficients were used to interpret data. Spearman rank correlation coefficient (rho) was used to measure the relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance.

As shown in Table 1, a proportion of 72.8 percent of the participants is male while 27.2 percent are female. Table 2 shows a positive significant relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance with a (rho) value of 0.721. This indicates that there is 72.1 percent explanation of the relationship between both variables, while 27.1 percent is explained by other variables not considered in this relationship. However, this statement is true as the level of significance of 0.000 is less than 0.05 and 0.01, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and its alternative form is accepted. P. Value = 0.000 less than 0.05 and 0.01 level of significance. This confirms that there is a significant positive relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance in construction firms in South-East, Nigeria.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study found organizational paranoia has a positive significant relationship between organizational paranoia and employee performance in construction companies in South-East, Nigeria. Organizations should foster a polite and courteous work environment. Organizations also need to promote ethical behaviours in the workplace as it would improve both organizational outcomes and the quality of workplace relationships.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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