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Contributions of Perceived Leadership Communication and Achievement Motivation to Counterproductive Work Behaviour

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Abstract

The study explored the contributions of perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation to counterproductive work behaviour among local government nurses in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria. The sample consisted of sixty (60) male and one hundred and ninety-eight (198) female participants drawn from the 31 Local Government Areas of the State. Questionnaire was used to elicit information from the participants. Result of regression analyses showed that there was a significant relationship between leadership communication and counterproductive work behaviour. Result also showed that there was a significant relationship between achievement motivation and counterproductive work behaviour. Implications and limitations of findings of the study were discussed and directions for further research were offered.

Keywords: perceived leadership communication, achievement motivation, counterproductive work behaviour

Introduction

Organizations are primarily set up with the sole aim of making profit. For this goal to be realized, the production capacity of an organization must be broadened through well-articulated supervision of employees. But experiment has shown that several factors seem to prevent organizations from either maintaining or enhancing their production capacity. Scholars have identified counterproductive work behaviour (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001; Spector & Fox, 2002; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh & Kessler, 2006), as one factor that has negatively impacted on organizations and

employees. It can be expressed overtly, such as sexual harassment, stalking and violent actions. These behaviours risk workplace safety and violate rules governing organizations. As a result of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), organizations might suffer a variety of interpersonal problems, including favouritism that leaves some employees out in the cold, backstabbing that sabotages careers, routine complaint that increases negativity and rumour spreading that lowers morale (Fox & Spector, 1999; Sackett, Berry, Wiemann & Laczko, 2006).



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Counterproductive work behaviour has been differently conceptualized by different scholars. Dalal (2005) sees it as employee behaviour that goes against the legitimate interests of an organization. It refers to actions by employees that go against the goals and aims of their employer such as delinquency (Hogan & Hogan, 1989), retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) and Bullying (Knorz & Zapf, 1996). Other scholars (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; Uwa & Etim, 2019) have listed hoarding of information, lying, theft, blackmail, arson and discrimination as aspects of counterproductive work behaviour that have made many organizations lose billions of their economic earnings. So, counterproductive work behaviour is any intentional unacceptable behaviour that has the potential of having negative consequences on an organization and the staff members.

CWB is not necessarily malicious but it is always conscious – it doesn't cover accidental or unconscious behaviours or incidents. According to Bennett and Robinson (2000) and John (2018), the driving force behind counterproductive work behaviour can be very wide and includes environmental factors, lack of training, one's personality and life chances. Counterproductive work behaviours are active and volitional acts as opposed to accidental actions. CWBs don't include acts that lack volition, such as inability to successfully accomplish a task. Nor do CWBs include involvement in an

accident, although purposeful avoidance of the safety rules that may have led to the accident would represent a counterproductive work behaviour (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Five dimensions of counterproductive work behaviours have been proposed by Spector et al. (2006) which include (i) behaviours targeted against others, comprising behaviours directed toward co-workers and others with the aim to harm them physically and mentally through threats, indecent comments, jesting and diminishing one's performance, (ii) production deviance - the purposeful failure to perform job duties the way they should be performed, (iii) sabotage – the purposeful damage to or defacing the organization's property, (iv) theft – the stealing from the organization or others. It includes taking something belonging to employer or employees home without permission, and (v) withdrawal behaviour which includes such acts like coming late to work and leaving early, absenteeism, taking longer breaks than permitted, e.t.c.

In addition to the work of Spector et al. (2006), Duffy (2009) and Olotu (2017) listed the ingredients of counterproductive work behaviour to include (a) absenteeism – this is measured by time lost (number of days absent). Absence fits into two types: excused absence is due to personal or family member illness; unexcused absence includes employees who don't go to work in order to do other preferred



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activities/neglects to call to inform a supervisor, (b) abuse against others – this is a physical act of aggression by any staff member displayed as workplace violence, (c) bullying – workplace bullying consists of progressive mistreatment of an employee by another. It may be verbal abuse, gossiping, social exclusion, spreading of rumours, e.t.c., (d) incivility – this is disrespectful and rude behaviour in violation of workplace norms for respect, (e) knowledge hoarding – this refers to employees' actions impeding organizational knowledge flows, for example, concealing facts needed by other employees, (f) lateness to work – arriving at work later and leaving earlier than required. Tardy and late employees responsible for critical tasks can negatively affect production, (g) sabotage – damaging property, destroying relationships or harming employees or customers and (h) theft – employees taking things not belonging to them from an organization. Employee theft is estimated to account for billions of dollars of loss globally each year (Bowling & Gruys, 2019; Wyatt & Wah, 2011). Research has shown that sabotage and theft are often motivated by perception of organizational injustice and performed with the intention of causing harm to the organization (Spector & Fox, 2002).

Counterproductive work behaviour can harm organizations or people in organizations, including employees and clients, customers, or patients. It has

been proposed that a person-by-environment interaction can be utilized to explain a variety of counterproductive behaviours. As earlier indicated, personality plays a role in the way employees respond to fellow employees. For instance, an employee who is high on trait of anger (tendency to express anger), is more likely to respond to a stressful incident at work (e.g., being treated rudely by a supervisor) with counterproductive work behaviour (Bowling & Gruys, 2019).

Perceived injustice and job dissatisfaction have been reported by researchers (Barclay, Skarlicki & Push, 2005; Bassey & Friday, 2017; Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007) as antecedents of counterproductive work behaviour which may affect employees' attitudes and behaviours at work. In this study, we have chosen perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation as antecedents of CWB, among possible predictors of counterproductive work behaviour. Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has caused many firms to close their businesses, the world over. The few of them that are fledglingly standing, are adopting, including persuasion, various measures to remain in business. Perceived leadership communication, according to Cummings and Molly (2009), is the way employees interpret the information passed to them by employers and organizational leaders based on the leaders' pattern of communication. Davison, Effraty and



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Sirgy (2019) see perceived leadership communication as employees' cognitive understanding of verbal or non-verbal communication of organizational leaders. The way employees perceive and process the communication style of leaders in organizations affect their understanding of the information passed to them and what response they give (Cooper, 2001). He further stated that organizational leaders can cause employees to develop a positive perception of their communication by being concise as possible. Good leaders strive to remain as concise as possible when communicating so that employees listening will understanding the information being sent and respond accordingly (Saraji & Dargahi, 2006).

Research evidence (Periman, 2006) has indicated that when leaders fail to communicate in concise ways, employees are left with different interpretations about the information sent out. Some employees may interpret the information negatively, some will be indifferent, others still will make a positive interpretation of the leaders' information. Additionally, Periman (2006) opines that for employees to know and appreciate communication at work, leaders must be decisive and focused, giving messages and instructions clearly. This implies that during communication between leaders and employees, rambling or desultoriness should be avoided.

According to Saraji and Dargahi (2006), to ensure a positive perception of leaders' communication, organizational leaders should speak only when something meaningful is to be said, expressing all the points in clear terms to the understanding of whoever is being spoken to. Saraji and Dargahi (2006) also pointed out that communicating to employees about the requirements of a new project isn't effective if employees are already halfway through the job. To get the best perception of what is being said from employees, organizational leaders have to be proactive by informing employees early about what is expected of them (Wyatt & Wah, 2011). This allows employees enough time to think on what the leader has said and what could be done, thereby helping the employees arrive at a positive perception (Chan & Einstein, 2017). Furthermore, being available for positive one-on-one discussion is crucial in building a positive perception of leadership communication. Employees tend to develop a positive perception of leadership communication when organizational leaders make themselves available for interface discussion, as team members feel satisfied when they communicate with their leader (Lambert, 2000). He stressed that with this, employees become patient and at the same time appreciate the thoughts and opinions of leaders and are more willing to share problems with them.



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In the literature, perceived leadership communication has been reported to predict counterproductive work behaviour. For example, Danna and Griffin (2016) reported that perceived leadership communication positively predicted counterproductive behaviour in a study they conducted with health personnel in Malaysia. Saraji and Dargahi (2006) also reported that perceived leadership communication was a good predictor of counterproductive work behaviour. In addition, Arts, Kerksta and Van der Zee (2017) reported that the negative the communication of leaders, the stronger the counterproductive behaviour of workers.

Several studies have found linkages between achievement motivation and counterproductive work behaviour. Kuo-Ying (2016) indicates that neglecting to motivate employees result in a dissatisfied workforce and Folger (1993) earlier said that employees who are unfairly treated may respond by way of retaliation, with anger, outrage and resentment. It is true that it is the desire of every employee to excel in his/her career. Excelling in one's career, therefore, demands a high sense of achievement brought about by motivation. While motivation, according to Rose and Waterhouse (2018), directly relates to the achievement in the workplace, achievement in itself deals with the pride and sense of accomplishment employees feel about their work and their employers. Managers who notice

a decline in achievement must take proactive steps to implement strategies to increase such by boosting the morale of their employees as not doing so might spell doom for their organization (Kuo-Ying, 2016).

There are several ways employees can be motivated to achieve: they include employee recognition, prompt promotion and freedom to be in-charge, among others. Employees' recognition goes a long way toward increasing and maintaining achievement. Employees who are valued for their contributions to the overall good of their organizations, desire to continue contributing and striving for success. On the other hand, managers who never appreciate their employees only cause a decline in such employees to achieve (Uksen, 2019). According to Uksen (2019), managers don't need to purchase extravagant gifts as a way to motivate employees; a simple thank you for a job well done makes an employee feel like a valuable part of the team. Other ways to recognize employees include a paid-day off, a card expressing gratitude and flexibility in work schedules. Employee recognition is most effective when employees are earning fair wages and when the recognition is sincere (Ijek, 2019).

Research evidence (e.g., Hunter, Bedell & Mumford, 2017) shows that managers and employees who are driven to success may instinctively want to similarly control the work and



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its outcomes. In addition, persons high on achievement motivation are typically driven either by the desire to feel accomplished, the desire to look good before supervisors, co-workers or customers, the fear of failure or a combination of these variable (Ijek, 2019). As a manager or an employee, the burning desire for business success may contribute to overemphasis on control in operation and decision-making. This can challenge employees' abilities to develop a collaborative workplace efforts focused on shared vision and goals. But where this is lacking and employees feel less or no motivation to achieve, the resultant effects may trigger off anger, pilfering, theft, sabotage, lateness, absenteeism, e.t.c. These are all counterproductive behaviours that do no organization or staff any good (Hunter et al., 2017).

Closely tied to the desire to control work situations and outcome is a higher propensity for stress. People desperately driven to task accomplishment, may experience frustration and hopelessness when a conflict arises. While high achievers usually work through temporary setbacks, they often experience stress from trying to predict the unpredictable, or to pre-empt negative factors (Hunter et al., 2017). Since achievement motivation is a desired outcome, he/she raises the bar for the next project or time frame (Alchian & Demstesz, 1999). Achievement motivation is essentially a need for success or accomplishment. If this need is not met, it can result in

behaviours that are counterproductive to any organization. For employees, it includes the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive an employee towards goals. As a small-business owner, understanding one's own level of achievement motivation as well as that of other employees is very important. Although it can drive performance, achievement motivation also presents some challenges (e.g., stress) in the workplace (Brown, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the possible role of perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation in predicting counterproductive work behaviour among health workers. Specifically, we set out (i) to investigate whether perceived leadership communication will predict counterproductive work behaviour among health workers and (ii) to examine whether achievement motivation will predict counterproductive work behaviour among health workers. Two hypotheses were, therefore postulated:

1. Perceived leadership communication will significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour of health workers.
2. Achievement motivation will significantly predict counterproductive work behaviour of health workers.



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METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and fifty-eight (258) participants drawn from the thirty-one (31) Local Government Area Primary Health Care (PHC) bases in Akwa Ibom State participated in the study. Sixty (60) of the participants were males, while one hundred and ninety-eight (198) were females. One hundred and ninety-nine (199) of the participants were married, 50 were single, 6 were widows while 3 were divorcees. 92% of the participants had RN/RM certificates, 4% had B.Sc and 4% had B.ED/RN/RM respectively. The participants majorly spoke Ibibio, Annang and Oro languages. Their ages ranged between 25 and 56 years, with a mean age of 38.54 years. On the average, organizational tenure was 12.3 years, while job tenure was 11.9 years.

Instruments

Leadership Communication Scale

This instrument was used to measure perceived leadership communication. It is a 12-item scale developed by Schneider, Dick and Medi (2015). It is rated on a 6-point Likert-type response format ranging from 0) = Disagree pretty much to 6) = Agree very much. All items are directly scored. Sample items include: "My supervisor and I can speak openly with each other", "My supervisor is sensitive to the needs of others", "My supervisor and I share an understanding on how we will like to achieve our goal". Schneider et al. (2015) reported a Cronbach's reliability co-efficient of .78. The present authors

obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .81 with Nigerian sample.

Achievement Motivation Scale

The 14-item Achievement Motivation Scale developed by Ray (1979) was used to measure the extent to which employees are motivated. The 14-item instrument follows the Likert-type format ranging from 0) = Not like me at all to 3) = A lot like me. Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13 are scored directly, while items 1, 2, 7, 11, 12 and 14 are reversely scored. The norm for the instrument is 29.93 for females and 31.27 for males, meaning that a score equals to or above the norm indicates high achievement motivation, while a score below the norm indicates low achievement motivation. Sample items include: "Do you get restless and annoyed when you feel you are wasting time?", "Would you prefer to work with a congenial but incompetent partner rather than a difficult but highly competent one?", "Will days often go by without your having done a thing?". Ray (1979) reported a Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of .84. The present authors obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .71 using Nigerian sample.

Counterproductive Work Behaviour Scale (CWBS)

CWBS developed by Benneth and Robinson (2002) was used to assess participants' intentional, unacceptable behaviour that has the potential to have negative consequences on their organization and colleagues. It is an 11-item instrument that is rated on a 5-



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point Likert-type response format ranging from 1) = never to 5) = always. All items are positively worded. Sample items include: "I make fun of people at work", "I purposely waste my employer's materials", "I purposely do my work incorrectly". Benneth and Robinson (2002) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability co-efficient of .86. The present authors, however, obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .81 with Nigerian sample.

Procedure

Questionnaire was used to select participants who volunteered to participate in the study. Three hundred copies of each questionnaire were distributed to all the participants who were randomly selected from the PHC Base of the 31 Local Government Areas that make up Akwa Ibom State. The 31 LGAs are the following: Uyo, Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Ini, Ikono, Obot Akara,

Essien Udim, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Uruk-Anam, Etim-Ekpo, Nsit-Atai, Nsit-Ibom, Uruan, Eket, Esit-Eket, Ibeno, Nsit-Ubium, Ikot-Abasi, Mkpa-Enin, Etinan, Onna, Ibesikpo-Asutan, Mbo, Urueoffong-Uruko, Oron, Urung-Uko, Okobo, Ukanafun and Eastern Obolo. Out of the 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 267 were filled and returned, representing response and return rate of 89%. Of these copies returned, 9 copies were jettisoned due to improper completion and the remaining 258 were organized and presented for the data analysis.

Design/Statistics

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The statistics used was the hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the study variables (predictor: perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation; control: sex, age, marital status, education, L.G.A. bases, organizational tenure, job tenure and criterion: counterproductive work behaviour.



Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. CWB	21.23	7.63										
2. Sex				-.07								
3. Age				-.00	.29***							
4. Marital status				-.14*	-.06	.08						
5. Education				.08	-.17*	-.06	-.19					
6. LGA base				-.07	-.15	-.09	-.17	.14				
7. Org'l tenure				.00	-.18**	-.41***	-.53**	.31***	.22**			
8. Job tenure				.09	-.07	.14*	-.23**	-.04	.13**	-.14***		
9. Per. L'ship com.	23.03	7.71	.63	-.13	.11	.03	.17	-.06	-.17	.14		
10. Ach. motivation	22.19	6.24	-.09	-.14	.02	-.02	-.04	.01	-.05	.08	.01	-.03

Note: A total of 258 nurses correctly completed the questionnaire. Sex (male = 1, female = 2); age (old = 1, young = 2); marital status (married = 1, single = 2, widow = 3, divorced = 4); education (low = 1, high = 2), LGA base (Uyo senatorial district = 1, Ikot Ekpene senatorial district = 2, Eket senatorial district = 3), organizational tenure (short = 1, long = 2), job tenure (short = 1, long = 2). For perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation, high scores indicate high perception of leadership communication or achievement motivation.

TABLE 2: Hierarchical Regression and Test of Moderation

Steps	1	2	3
Variables			
Sex	-.08	-.05	-.07
Age	.08	.07	.06
Marital Status	-.16*	-.09	-.08
Education	-.07	.04	.03
LGA base	-.06	-.05	-.04
Organizational tenure	-.03	.04	.02
Job tenure	.06	-.02	-.01
Per. leadership communication	.53**	.53**	
Achievement motivation	-.09**		
R Square	.03	.29	.29
R Square change	.03	.23	.01
F change	F(7,232)=1.02	N F(8,231)=69.91**	F(9,230)=3.37 N
F values	F(7,232)=1.02	N F(8,231)=12.18**	F(9,230)=10.63**

Key: * = p<.001; ** = p<.05; ~~N~~ = Not significant.



The results of the analysis performed show that the control variables gave an insignificant 0.01% of the variance observed in counterproductive work behaviour (adjusted R square). This implies that when all the control variables were combined, they showed a poor relation with CWB. Of all the control variables, only marital status was significant ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$).

Perceived leadership communication accounted for 28.1% of the variance in CWB, higher than that of the control variables. It was significant ($\beta = .53$), $F(8, 231) = 12.18$, $p < .05$. The result shows that leadership communication significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviour. Furthermore, achievement motivation accounted for the variance in CWB, higher than the control variables and perceived leadership communication. This result was equally significant ($\beta = -.09$), $F(9, 230) = 10.63$, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

We examined the contributions of perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation to counterproductive work behaviour in this study. As we expected, perceived leadership communication significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviour, thereby confirming the first hypothesis that perceived leadership communication will predict counterproductive work behaviour. This means that the more employees perceive communication of their leaders as highly effective, the less they engage in counterproductive work

behaviour. This result is consistent with the findings of earlier research. For instance, Anderson and Pearson (2015), Barrick and Mount (2016), Anderson and Bushman (2017) and Hooper and Martin (2018) found a significant association between leadership communication and counterproductive work behaviour. The result of the present study is also consistent with the findings of Gerstner and Day (2010), Etifit (2017), Ubong and Thank-God (2017), Wilberforce and Thank-God (2019), and Kolawole (2021) that established that perceived leadership communication contributed to counterproductive behaviour and vice versa. Blau's (1964) social exchange theory explains that employees engage in behaviours that are less beneficial to the organization when they perceive unfriendly leadership disposition towards them.

The second hypothesis that achievement motivation would significantly predict counterproductive behaviour among nurses was confirmed. This finding is consistent with the findings of Berry, Ones and Sackett (2007), Sackett and Devore (2012) and James and McIntyre (2014) who reported that employees who are highly motivated to achieve reported less counterproductive work behaviour compared to employees who are low on this measure. The finding is equally in line with the findings of Maxwell and Cole (2007) and Olweus (2012) that found that achievement motivation significantly contributed to various



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work outcomes, including counterproductive work behaviour, that employees who reported lower motivation to achieve engaged more in behaviours that are counterproductive to their organization.

Several practical implications which are beneficial to both organizations and employees could be drawn from this study. It has been established that perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation relate significantly with counterproductive work behaviour. It is now the responsibility of organizations to engage the services of persons who have the managerial acumen to make decisions on how to hire, train, manage and motivate employees. This will help curb workplace counterproductive behaviours. Managers/supervisors themselves should be periodically trained on the best methods to work and relate with subordinates. Any instance that can lead to counterproductive work behaviour should be immediately and timely addressed. Employees should be motivated to work, and no information should be hidden from them, especially information that affects their productivity and welfare plan.

This study was majorly limited by common method bias because the present authors were able to collect data for the study from only one source. Responses from a single source data could be incorrect and biased. The study also make use of a small sample size. Based on these limitations,

generalizing the results of this study to other populations might, therefore be difficult, as drawing such inferences should be done with utmost caution.

Despite the above limitations, however, examining the contributions of perceived leadership communication and achievement motivation to counterproductive work behaviour has reminded managers of help-seeking professionals of the need to re-strategize after the Covid-19 pandemic that halted all economic activities. Health, they say, is wealth. Recently, the resident doctors have issued the federal and states' governments a 14-day strike notice for failure to implement the new hazard allowances approved in 2021 for health workers. Employers of labour in both public and private health institutions should themselves engage in policies that will not engender counterproductive behaviours, by implementing agreements reached with relevant labour unions, so as to prevent loss of lives, material profits, financial resources and so on. It is believed that a situation like this will engender positive feelings among health workers and make them see the need to be committed to their work. This commitment would make them engage in more productive behaviours that would improve the health and well-being of Nigerians.

Some recommendations are worthy to be offered here for future research. Future researchers should endeavour to



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carry out a longitudinal study on counterproductive work behaviour in order to establish a cause and effect relationship. Further research should also use a large sample size and draw data from a wider spectrum of sources, so as to be able to generalize findings to other populations. Also of importance is that future researchers should look into many more forms of counterproductive work behaviour.

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