MODERATING ROLE OF WORK ETHICS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL FRUSTRATION AND EMPLOYEE SILENCE AMONG ANAMBRA STATE CIVIL SERVANTS

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the moderating role of work ethics in the relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among Anambra State Civil Servants. The study adopted a correlation design and moderated regression statistics to test the three (3) hypotheses of the study. The sample was five hundred and twenty –nine (529) civil servants (222 males and 307 females) selected from nine (9) local government councils in Anambra State. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 58 years, with an average age of 42 years and standard deviation of 3.50. The participants were drawn using multi-stage sampling techniques in which purposive sampling was used to determine the choice of samples, whereas systematic sampling was used to samples, whereas systematic sampling was used to select the participants' local government areas while simple random sampling was used to select the individual participants for the study. Study made use of three (3) research instruments for data collection, namely; organizational frustration scale, multi-dimensional work ethic's scale and employee silence scale. The result revealed that Organizational frustration had positive and significant predictive effect on employee silence at β = .06, P < .001 (n = 529). Also, the predictive effects of work ethics on employee silence was negative and significant at β = -.66, P < .001 (n = 529). For the moderation output, moderation estimate is indicative that when work ethics was added to the predictive relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence, the predictive estimate of the relationship was reduced from β = .06 to .02 , P < .001 (n = 529). The study recommended that civil service act be revised to mitigate factors which frustrate employees while promoting employee voice and proactively.

Key words: Employee silence, work ethnics, organizational climate, organizational frustration.

INTRODUCTION

Civil service in Nigeria has a complex structural background that has had negative antecedents impacting employee proactive participation and leading to worker's loss of voice and employee silence (Salihu, 2020). As noted by Adediran and Omotayo (2018), the colonial administration established a centralized, hierarchical civil service that emphasized obedience and loyalty to

superiors, stifling proactive engagement and dissent among employees. This historical legacy has endured and continues to influence the present-day civil service. One of the key challenges to this structure is the issue of political interference with civil service, where politicians use their power to influence civil service appointments and promotions. According to Ayeni and Olarinde (2017), this has led to the appointment of unqualified persons into senior positions, which has, in turn, affected employee motivation and proactive participation in decision-making processes leading to loss of voice in the place of work among the civil servants.

Another structural challenge in Nigerian civil service is the lack of autonomy and independence of the civil service. As noted by Ogundele (2015), the civil service is still highly centralized and centralized power structures limit employee voice and participation. The lack of autonomy also means that civil servants are dependent on political leadership for their job security, making it difficult for them to speak out against poor policies or corruption. In addition, Nigerian civil service suffers from inadequate funding and resources. As observed by Okoli (2018), the lack of resources has contributed to poor infrastructure, lack of training opportunities, and poor remuneration for employees leading to a lack of motivation. This results in employees' loss of voice and employee silence due to situations where civil servants are expected to be loyal to their bosses and may fear losing their income. The problem of corruption also plays a significant role in the loss of employee voice and employee silence in the Nigerian civil service. According to Adelowo and Popoola (2015), nepotism, bribery, and extortion are prevalent in the Nigerian civil service, and this has led to poor service delivery and lack of trust in civil service institutions. Employees in such situations are discouraged from speaking out against the inherent corruption leading to loss of voice, and in extreme cases, silence.

The background of civil service in Nigeria creates a certain climate which makes employees vulnerable because when civil servants fear reprisals for expressing their opinions or challenging the status quo, they are less likely to participate proactively and contribute their ideas, leading to a loss of valuable perspectives and potential solutions to governance challenges. These challenges which predicate employee silence or loss of voice may be manifested as frustration, poor flexibility at work and poor ethical climate. In Anambra State civil service, these workplace attitudes leading to employee silence are also visible (Madubueze et al., 2021). Employee silence or the loss of voice refers to the phenomenon where employees withhold their opinions, concerns, and ideas within the organizational context (Onyishi et al., 2019).

Employee silence denotes a state rather than an action of the employee; in this state, an employee is not willing or disposed to sharing important information, ideas or does something that might be valuable to the organization either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, there is evidence that despite whistle blowing policy; the Nigerian civil service currently ridiculed by corruption (Salihu, 2020) is still abated by a culture of silence for the fear of persecution by their superiors (Wokocha & Babalola, 2018). It is possible to associate silent behaviour of employees to their levels of frustration in the organization. For instance, the prevalence of power distance and the lack of psychological safety in Nigerian organizations further contribute to employee silence. Nigerian employees may perceive power differentials as significant barriers to freely expressing their opinions (Onyishi et al., 2019). For example, Okafor and Edem (2020) found in their study that Nigerian employees feel unsafe to voice their opinions due to the potential negative reactions from supervisors and peers.

In Nigerian public sector, many factors could be attributed to the causes of employee silence among civil service employees; and these factors may be organizational climate based and may equally be in form of policies that limit employee voice (Jafary et al., 2018; Sonika & Kaushik,

2017). Other factors may depend on individual employee's personal experiences and circumstances in the workplace. Whatever these might be, literature is consistent that they undermine the organization due to their negative antecedents which frustrate employees in their workplace. Considering that prevailing climate is central to determining employees' loss of voice, it follows that such climates in Nigerian civil service may be predicated by organizational frustration, workplace flexibility and work ethics.

Organizational frustration also known as employee or workers' frustration or frustration experienced by workers in the workplace is seen as inhibitions or constraints whether real or imaginary which inhabits employees in the workplace (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018; Eissa & Lester, 2017). It also refers to employees' experiences in the job or in the workplace either in the cause of performing job tasks or relating with other employees which may physically, psychologically and/or otherwise threaten the employee or block his or her path towards fulfilling his or her obligations to the organization and/or attaining the stated goals of an organization and that of the goals of the employee (Spector, 1975). Organizational frustration may also be product of many negative work attitudes, work climates and organizational outcomes. Almost, all organizational, employee and environmental outcomes have consequences on the employees, their workplace and organization's goals and objectives (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018). In most cases, if employees are unable to cope with the consequences of any negative job outcomes, they feel frustrated internally and career wise.

Organizational frustration may not be alone factor in employee silence behaviour in the organization, conduct of organizational members may equally be antecedents. Work is also considered as a source of self-respect, satisfaction and fulfillment. Hence, work ethics is guiding principle geared towards actualizing these positive and intrinsic dimensions of work (AIwagfi et al., 2020). Employees with poor work ethics are more likely to be frustrated and silent in consideration to those with high ethical behaviour. In the Nigerian setting, Ogar and Ude (2020) conceptualized work ethics as a cultural norm in the workplace that advocates people to be held accountable and responsible for the work they do based on the belief that work has intrinsic value to the individual (Ogar & Ude, 2020). It also regulates the excess of the every organizational member within acceptable standards. In view of the positive impacts of work ethics in actualizing positive and intrinsic values of work, the researchers contend that TIs enthronement in the workplace will help, reduce frustration and employee silence. Work ethics may also influence the reduction of negative consequences of frustration and silence on job, employee and organizational outcomes. Given this possibility, this study has proposed that work ethics may moderate the relationship between organizational frustration, and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
The aim of this study was to examine the moderating role of work ethics in the relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State, Nigeria. Hence, the specific objectives of this study are to ascertain whether:
1. Organizational frustration would predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra state;
2. Work ethics would predict employee silence among the civil servants in Anambra State;
3. Work ethics would positively and significantly moderate the relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.

HYPOTHESES
Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Organizational frustration would positively and significantly predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.
2. Work ethics would negatively and significantly predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.
3. Work ethics would negatively and significantly moderate the predictive relationship between organizational frustrate and employee Silence among civil servants in Anambra State.

LTIERATURE

Employee Silence

Employee silence or subordinate silence refers to intentional withholding of critical information about organizational problems and practices from others in the workplace (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). Employee silence or Subordinate silence means the same thing. Not every case of non-communication denotes silence though. TI is only when one chooses, due to some strategic reasons or concerns, not to disclose relevant information to others (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). As such, TI is a suppressive communicative behaviour and is related to a broader class of expressive communication behaviours that are referred to as voice (Adamska and Jurek, 2017). These behaviours include issue selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), taking charge (Morrison &Phelps, 1999), whistle blowing (Miceli & Near, 1988), and principled dissent (O'Leary, 2013). While voice (employee loss of voice) and silence are related concepts, they are not two ends of a continuum (Morrison, 2014). The absence of voice does not necessarily imply intentional withholding of information. A person may choose not to use voice, for example, because they have no concerns or questions or simply nothing useful to offer (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Silence is widespread in organizations for instance; a survey conducted by Milliken et al., (2003) showed that almost 85% of the respondents could recall a recent event in which they did not speak up about a problem or something of concern. In the present day civil service and public sector organizations, subordinate silence is real and more pronounced. For example, Quratulain's (2020) study on trust violation and recovery dynamics in the context of differential supervisor-subordinate relationships, a study of public service employee revealed that silence is inherent in the public service. Also, Hassanet al., (2019) linked how empowering leadership reduces employee silence in public organizations. In Nigeria, employee silence is found both in public and private sector organizations. For example, Idowu (2019) found that there is a relationship between employees' expectation and silence while Oyerinde (2020) found association among leadership style, work environment, organizational silence and institutional effectiveness of polytechnic libraries, south-west Nigeria. The evidence of these studies is consistent with the fact that there are causes and consequences of silence in the organization.

Organizational Frustration

Organizational frustration also known as worker frustration is an inhibitor or impediment which prevents employees from attaining either personal goals or the goals of their organization (Spector, 1975). The basic idea of organizational frustration is of two fold; one is that there are organizational or situational factors associated with constraint that contribute to individual frustration with the organization and two; that the individual reaction to frustration can take the form of withdrawal behavior, task performance and abandonment of good goal (Heacox & Sorenson, 2004). Beside task performance, the work on frustration has been concerned with aggression (Spector, 1978; Storms & Spector, 1987).

Organizational or situation factors associated with constraint that contribute to individual frustration with the organization may include; unfavouruable working environment, poor quality of work life, lack of opportunities for growth, partisanship and organizational politics, management/owners exploitation of the circumstances of the employees to their advantage , eg the prevalence of high rate of unemployment. Other factors include; poor organizational democracy , poor human relation, safety and security concerns, non-availability of health and medical services to staff, excessive overload and poor reward system among many others. These organizational and situational factors are known to precipitate varying job (under performance, low quality /quantity of output), employee (tardiness, absenteeism, corruption and sabotage) and organizational outcomes such as inefficiency and ineffectiveness. In an organizational setting, an employee may not show outward aggression in response to frustration, but rather might display it privately in acts of sabotage (spector, 1975). For example, Maul et al., (2022) found that organizational justice was highly impacted by turnover intention as a result of frustration associated with organizational injustice. Thus, organizational injustice may correlate frustration, employee silence and turnover intentions. Maul et al.'s study is supported by the model of this study because the authors found that employee silence had positive outcome on workers' stress which is also a form of frustration.

In the views of the situation and circumstance of the plight of public servants such as civil servants in the States, which hinder their productivity, it is paramount to continue the search into their frustration in the service. This is because their jobs are imperative for nation-building as they help the government in proving essential duties to enhance the public life. There is higher expectation that employees' tardiness and inefficiency probably caused by frustration may likely reduce if sources and causes of frustration are identified and mitigated.

Work Ethics

Work ethics are standards or principles that guide employees in performing their job responsibilities. These principles include values such as honesty, integrity, professionalism, dedication, and accountability. In today's competitive business world, work ethics are critical for successful organizations. They are fundamental aspect of any organization that seeks to establish a culture of excellence in the workplace. According to Walker and Whetzel (2020), work ethics involve honoring the organization's values, being committed to the job, and having a positive attitude towards work.

In Nigeria, ethical conduct in the civil service is a crucial issue. The country has a significant problem with corruption, influenced by a lack of strong ethical principles in the workplace. According to Okoli (2018), unethical practices in the Nigerian civil service include bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, and favoritism. These practices hinder the development of the community and pose a significant threat to the social and economic growth of the country. Work ethics and ethical behavior are essential for successful organizations and a critical issue for the Nigerian civil service. For example Madubueze et al., (2021) investigated Machiavellian traits in public service: subordinate silence and workplace abuse as by-products and the moderation of work ethics among public servants in Anambra State and found that there is high rate of Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse, while there is low work ethics among employees but work ethics was found to moderate the relationship between Machiavellian traits and subordinate silence. Thus, to promote ethical practices in Nigerian public institutions, there is a need for a clear ethical code of conduct, transparent policies, leadership, sensitive data protection, moral values, and social accountability. It is crucial to emphasize the crucial role that stakeholders play in promoting ethical behavior in the Nigerian

civil service as this may be essential in reducing the negative impacts of organizational frustration in the workplace.

FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is embedded on the Conservation of resource theory of stress (COR) by Hobfoll (1989) which propounded that stress occurs primarily because of loss of resources or when the coping resources are limited at the time the host is threatened.

Hobfoll (1989) Conservation of resource theory of stress (COR) is based not on the internal system that receives any form of stress but on how that system responds to the threats posed by the stress through the available coping resources of the system. For a system to mobilize and cope optimally with stressors and stressful conditions, four categories of coping resources were proposed namely; object resources (i.e., physical objects such as home, clothing, or access to transportation), condition resources (e.g., employment, personal relationships), personal resources (e.g., skills or self-efficacy), and energy resources (means that facilitate the attainment of other resources, for example, money, credit, or knowledge).

COR theory provided this study the needed foundation towards understanding that the underlying factors which precipitate workers' frustration in the workplace is not necessarily the conditions of work; but, the inability of the workers to cope with the limited or lack of resources in their workplace. This may be inform of limited or lack of intrinsic resources such as; unsupportive climate which breeds employee silence and loss of voice. Also, poor member interaction, lack of flexibility at work and poor ethical climate can equally orchestrate organizational frustration which is a precursor to silence among other negative outcomes.

METHOD
Sampling Procedure And Participants

The study surveyed five hundred and twenty –nine (529) civil servants in local government areas of the three (3) senatorial zones of Anambra State namely; Anambra South, Anambra North and Anambra Central. Three (3) local government areas were selected from each of the three senatorial districts through systematic sampling method. The local government areas selected were: Anambra South (Aguata, Nnewi North and Orumba North), Anmabra North (Anambra East, Onitsha South and Oyi) and Anamrba Central (Anaocha, Njikoka and Awka South). The participants consist of two hundred and twenty-two (222) males and three hundred and seven (307) females, making it five hundred and twenty-nine (529) participants, whose ages ranged from 26 to 58 years with a mean age of 42 years and standard deviation of 3.50. The participants were drawn using multi-stage sampling technique (purposive sampling, systematic sampling and simple randomization). A cover letter was attached to each of the questionnaire which explained that the survey was for research purpose and also promised anonymity of participants' responses. Two Nigerian youth service corps (NYSC member) were trained by the researchers who served as research assistants in the study and followed to navigate the nine (9) local government areas for the administration and collection of the questionnaires. The demographic information of the participants revealed a close homogeneous characteristic across religion, educational background and ethnic origin except for age and grade level in organization. Thus, control for the two factors as extraneous variables was made by including them as demographics of the study.

MEASURES

The Study employed three (3) research instruments for data collection, namely; Organizational frustration Scale developed by Spector (1975); Multi-dimensional work Ethnics scale developed by Spence and Robbins (1992); and employee Silence Scale developed by Wu and parker

(2017). Organizational frustration scale by (Spector, 1975) was developed to measure employee based frustration in organization. TI is a 29 –Time questionnaire structured in the Likert format. It is designed to assess individual's perception of inhibitions to personal and organizational goals. Spector (1975) reported a construct validity coefficient of .69 and a reliability alpa of.88, while the concurrent validity of the scale is .98. The scale has been validated in Nigeria among civil servants by Etodike (2019) using convergent validity by correlating the scale with Frustration Anxiety Inventory by Giradano and Everly (1979). The correlation revealed convergent validity of .75. Also, Cranach's alpha reliability coefficient analysis was carried out by the researchers which revealed the internal reliability of the instrument at .82. Thus, the Nigerian norm scores will be the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants; scores higher than the norm indicated high levels of organizational frustration while scores lower than the norm indicate low level of frustration.

The second instrument was Multi-dimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) developed by Spence and Robbins (1992) to measure employees' hardwork, leisure, self-reliance, morality and moral reasoning, initiative and helping others, dependability and sense of duty, delay gratification and task focus. The scale is made up of 40 –Times across 8 subscales. Each dimension of work ethics is measured by five (5) Times, which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For this study, only the morality and moral reasoning dimension which has five (5) Times was used. The MWEP has been shown to have good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .72 to .88 for the individual dimensions and a test-retest correlation coefficient of .89 for the total scale (Spencer & Robbins, 1992). The MWEP has also been shown to have good convergent and discriminate validity, as TI correlated positively with measures of achievement motivation, conscientiousness, and job performance, but negatively with measures of boredom proneness and external locus of control (Spence & Robbins, 1992). Overall, the MWEP is a reliable and valid measure of work ethics that can be sued in a variety of research and applied settings to assess individual differences in work-related values and behaviours. For the current study, only the morality and moral reasoning subscale was used and was validated through discriminate method by correlating the scale with 8-item Moral disengagement scale (MDS) developed by Moore et al., (2012). The correlation yielded a discriminate validity measure of -.82. Also, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .74 was obtained by the current researchers. The three instrument employed in this study was Employee Silence Scale developed by Wu and Parker (2017) to measure employees' tendency to remain silent in the workplace when they have concerns or disagree with something in the workplace due to fear of punishment, disfavor or victimization Employee Silence Scale is a 7-item scale which is scored in 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Wu and Parker reported internal consistency of .90, while test –retest reliability over a four –week period was also good, with an intra-class correlation coefficient of .74. For TIs use in this study, the researchers carried out discriminant validity with non-related constructs-proactive behavior and correlation coefficient of -.76 was reported indicating an internal consistency. Also, the researchers obtained a Cranach's alpha reliability coefficient of .72.

RESULT
The result of the descriptive statistics for all variables showing mean, standard deviation and number of participants is presented are presented in table 1. In table 2, correlation matrix for all the variables of the study is presented; while the Table 3, is the model coefficients showing independent predictive effects of independent variables –organizational Frustration and the moderating variable -work Ethics on the dependent variable –employee Silence. Finally, the

Table 4 is the moderation analysis showing moderating impact of Work Ethics on the relationship between organizational frustration and Employee Silence.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for all variables showing mean, standard deviation and number of participants

N	Employee Silence	Organizational Frustration	Work Ethics
N	529	529	529
Mean	32.1	74.6	14.7
Std. Deviation	2.34	4.08	2.40

Finding form the descriptive statistics showed that on the mean scores , employee Silence among the local government civil servants is elevated at M = 32.1, Std.dev. = 2.34 (n=529) which is higher than the norm scores of employee silence at M = 31.9 as obtained from the pilot study. This indicates that the problem of employee silence as identified in the study literature is prevalent among civil service employees. Also, the mean score of participants on organizational frustration, and work ethics were observed at M = 74.6, and M = 14.7 respectively. The researcher also carried out a correlation test to ascertain whether these variables were related.
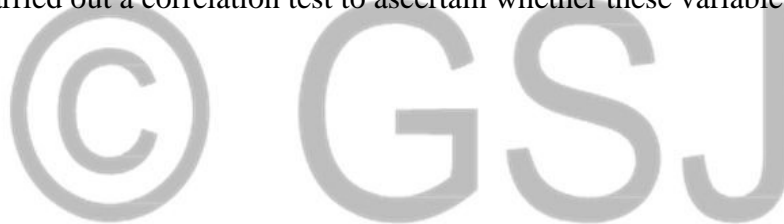
Table 2
Correlation matrix for all variables showing the relationship among variables of the study , namely: employee Silence, Organizational frustration and Work Ethics.

N		Employee Silence	Organizational Frustration	Work Ethics
Employee Silence	Pearson r	–		
	p-value	–		
Workplace Flexibility	Pearson r	-0.587***		
	p-value	<.001		
Organizational Frustration	Pearson r	0.205***	–	
	p-value	< .001	–	
Work Ethics	Pearson r	-0.813***	-0.139**	–
	p-value	< .001	0.001	–

Findings from the correlation matrix table revealed a mixed relationship among variables. Positive and significant correlation was found between organizational frustration and employee silence at r= .21, P < .05 (n = 529) while negative and significant correlation was observed between work ethics and employee silence at r = -.81 P < .05 (n = 529). The relationships indicated that organizational frustration has a significant positive (direct and proportional) influence on employee silence whereas work ethics has negative and significant (inverse)

influence on employee silence. The correlation matrix further reveals that the predictors (organizational frustration and work ethics have significant influence on the criterion variable employee silence. TI is left to be seen whether this relationship or correlation reached predictive value.

Table 3
Model coefficient showing independent predictive effects of independent variables organizational frustration and moderating valuable- work ethics on the dependent variable – employee silence

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	P
Intercept	42.4623	1.1465	37.04	<.001
Organizational Frustration	0.0560	0.0135	4.16	<.001
Work Ethics	-0.6579	0.0261	-25.16	<.001

Finding from the model coefficient table indicated mixed predictive effects in terms of the direction of prediction. Here, organizational frustration had positive and significant predictive effect on employee silence at β = .06, p < .001, (n = 529). This implies that increase in organizational frustration increases employee silence; thus hypothesis 1 which stated that organizational frustration would positively and significantly predict employee silence was accepted. Secondly, the predictive effects of work ethics on employee silence was also accepted at β = -.66, p < .001, (n = 529) implying that enhancement of work ethics reduces employee silence due to the inverse relationship between work ethics and employee silence. Hence, hypothesis 2 which stated that work ethics would negatively and significantly predict employee silence was accepted.

Table 4
Moderation analysis showing moderating impacts of work ethics on the relationship between Organizational Frustration And Employee Silence.

	Estimate	SE	T	P
Organizational Frustration	0.0595	0.01425	4.18	<.001
Work Ethics	-0.7864	0.02401	-32.75	<.001
Organizational Frustration✷ Work Ethics	0.0227	0.00606	3.75	<.001

From the moderation analysis in table 4, Moderation estimate is indicative that when work ethics was added to the predictive relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence, the predictive estimate of the relationship was reduced from beta weight .06 to .02, p < .001 as indicated in the moderation coefficient, showing that work ethics reduced the positive predictive effects of organizational frustration on employee silence. Thus, hypothesis 3which stated that work ethics would moderate the relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence was accepted.

DISCUSSION
This study investigated the moderating role of work ethics in the relationship between organizational frustration, and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State and found in hypothesis one that organizational frustration positively and significantly predicted employee silence among civil servants. The result from the statistical analysis of the hypothesis revealed that positive correlation and predictive effects were found. The findings imply that organizational frustration has direct and proportional relationship with employee silence, such as

that when there is an increase in organizational frustration among employees there is an observed increment in their silence behaviours.

The result is in line with the findings of WU et al., (2019) which ascertained the impacts of needs frustration on silent utilizing the workplace ostracism and newcomers' voice behavior. Wu et al., (2019) found that employee silence was implicated by various forms of frustration including ostracism in the workplace which are averse to organizational wellbeing in terms of fuelling counterproductive behavioiurs e.g. cynicism (Etodike et al., 2017). In relation to the findings in hypothesis 1, Wu et al; (2019) findings imply that stressors associated with frustration can instigate silence behavior in employees when they evaluate the cost of their speaking up in the circumstances which may lead to turnover intentions (Ezeh et al., 2017). The finding also supports Nitafan (2020) result on employee silence, organizational commitment, and job burnout of regular employees in local government units in the Cotabato province, Philippines which found that in inhibitory to employees; this peculiar situation highlight the weight of social dynamics in the workplace (Joe-Akunne et al., 2019).

The second hypothesis which stated that work ethics would negatively and significantly predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State was accepted. The result from the statistical analysis of the hypothesis revealed that negative correlation and predictive effects were found. The findings imply that work ethics has an inverse relationship with employee silence such as that when there is an increase in work ethics among employees, there is an observed decrease in their employee silent behaviours. The result is in with the findings of Madubueze et al., (2021) which found that negative correlations exist between work ethics and subordinate silence, implying that as work ethics increases, silence reduces. This also supports empirical findings by Wang et al., (2023) who explored employee ethical silence under exploitative leadership and the roles of work meaningfulness and moral potency. The negative relationship between ethical silence and moral potency depicts the current study findings buttressing the importance of ethics in promoting justice (Nnaebue et al., 2020), improving creativity (Nwangwu et al., 2021), reducing corruption (Ezeh & Etodike, 2016) and achieving life satisfaction (Etodike et al., 2017). Okoye et al. (2018) also associated high organizational citizenship behaviour as a product of positive climate such as ethical driven climate.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that work ethics would negatively and significantly moderate the predictive relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State was accepted. The finding implies that the prevalence of average or high ethical climate reduces the positive predictive effects of organizational frustration on employee silence such that the more the work ethics, the less the organizational frustration induced silence on the employee. This means that when ethical climate is promoted, the consequences of organizational frustration (such as employee silence) are reduced due to their inverse proportional relationship. The result is line with the findings of Madubueze et al., (2021) in which work ethics moderated the relationship between Machiavellian traits in public service (a type of organizational frustration) and subordinate silence an workplace abuse.

Madubueze et al., (2021) found that ethical climate reduced the consequences of Machiavellianism on employee silent behaviours. The moderation effects also support Wang et al's., (2023) exploration of employee ethical silence under exploitative leadership and the roles of work meaningfulness and moral potency which found that moral potency moderated the relationship between employee ethical silence under exploitative leadership and work meaningfulness. Similar findings emphasize how negative climate such as frustration can kill creativity if coping of employees is poor (Okechukwu et al., 2021). Thus, suggesting that work

ethics may have a soothing quality in reducing organizational vice's or moderating or minimizing them.

Implications of the Study

Based on the results of the current study, there are theoretical, practical and policy implications. Theoretically, the culture of human interaction as exchanges are usually overshadowed by the transactional paradigm which is built on hired or employment contract; when these interactions become frustrating the employees have option to speak or to be silent with certain organizational consequences. Many civil service organizations which build healthy exchanges are predicated on strict enthronement of rule of law and proper ethical conduct. Practically, employees are not machines or objects. They have emotions, thus, the excess of human emotions can influence human performance in the workplace and can have employee and job outcomes such as employee silence. Policy wise, there is need for organizations to promote friendly working environment and working conditions by instituting flexible working conditions in order to counter the frustration and vices in the workplace. Hence, civil service is not likely to evolve without reducing organizational frustration which affect employees' morale, efficiency and productivity.

Limitation of the Study

A few limitations were experienced in the study and effort was made to reduce their impacts on the study to the barest minimum in order to ensure high empiricism and accuracy of the findings. One of such limitation is inherent respondents' bias which the researcher made significant effort to reduce to the barest minimum through multi- stage sampling involving purposive, systematic and randomization of the actual participants for the study. The researchers also ensured that only participants who are willing to take part in the study were sampled during the field work.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the moderating role of work ethics in the relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State. The motivation for the study was driven by the growth of adverse effects of employee silence in civil service which has orchestrated low proactive behaviours, inefficiency and generalized low productivity among civil servants in Anambra State. Using a correlation design, the study found that positive and negative predictive effects of organizational frustration and work ethics respectively, predicted employee silence. However, work ethics moderated the positive predictive relationship between organizational frustration and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State. Findings support that with frustration climate, the tendency that employees may lose their voice in the organization are high except there is an average or high ethical climate to neutralize the effects. This finding is a wakeup call on the dangers of organizational frustration especially in climate with low ethical adherence. It therefore beholds stakeholders to take the findings to practical implementation and explore ways to improve on organizational ills identified in this study in order to boost an improved work force in civil service and by extension the public service.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the result of the current study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Public service code especially civil service act be revised mitigate these factors which frustrate employees and increase harmony and facilitate interpersonal relationship among civil servants.
2. Practically, efforts should be made to improve on the quality of working environment for civil servants to serve as model to other organizations in the country.

3. There is need for aggressive implementation of various pending blue ship and white paper documents of the government through all tiers of civil service. Such aggressive implementation of policies pertaining to employee welfare and reduction of power distance will rapidly increase the competence and capacity of civil servants, especially in Anambra State.

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