



PREDICTIVE INFLUENCE OF WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY ON EMPLOYEE SILENCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF WORK ETHICS AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the predictive influence of workplace flexibility on employee silence: the moderating role of work ethics among civil servants in Anambra State. 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 the samples, where as 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. The study made use of three (3) research instruments for data collection, namely; workplace flexibility scale, multi-dimensional work ethics scale and employee silence scale. The result revealed that workplace flexibility had negative and significant predictive effects on employee silence at $\beta = -.23, P < .001$ (n = 529). Also, the predictive effect of work ethics on employee silence was equally negative and significant at $\beta = -.66, P < .001$ (n = 529). For the moderation output, moderation estimate is indicative that work ethics did not moderate the predictive relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence. The study recommended that civil service act be revised to reflect new realities which frustrate employees due to rigidity of workplace while promoting employee voice and proactivity.

Key Words: Civil service, employee silence, organizational climate, work ethics, workplace flexibility.

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of civil service in Anambra State like all other State in Nigeria is dwindling as a result of many problems including poor policy implementation, corruption and workers' dissatisfaction of the status-quo which have not been addressed over many years of bad leadership in Nigeria (Okoli, 2018). These problems to a large extent have led to a maleficent

civil service which now hunts the efficacy and efficiency of civil service. The long list of malfunctioning traits in the State civil service is predicated by decades of neglect of the workers. Consequently, workers' interest and motivation in the service is low and this has affected proactive participation of civil servants in the day-to-day running of the service leading to loss of voice and employee silence (Uzochukwu et al., (2021). Thus, in addition to usual organizational management challenges, government's insincerity with policies including lack of flexible work system, endemic corruption etc have also exacerbated the problem of employee loss of voice/silence. In view of the dangers of employee loss of voice in civil service, the current study through series of experiences encountered with the civil service environment has identified workplace flexibility (rigid workplace) as antecedents to the problem of employee silence in the civil service.

It is also an observed pattern in the State civil service for superiors to take advantage of these problems to their advantage in the service. For example, corruption can give superiors power over subordinates, preventing them for speaking out against unethical behavior, while civil servants may hesitate to speak out against poorly implemented policies due to concerns about job security and other inherent dangers (Okoli, 2018). Most civil servants speaking out against corruption within the State Civil service policies are often victimized and treated badly in their respective ministries and agencies (Odukoya, 2018), thus highlighting the risk that civil servants face when they speak out against corruption within the civil service. In Anambra State, the tale is same and has endangered Civil servants lives, promotion and benefits. Despite this problem of loss of voice or employee silence in civil service, conscious and systematic efforts from stakeholders to address this anomaly in the civil service have remained minimal. The dearth of literature and paucity of empirical evidence on the antecedents of employee silence in the civil service has also created both pragmatic and theoretical gaps which this study is hoping to fill. In the light of this problem and considering the gaps found in literature, it is important to evaluate workplace flexibility as predictor and work ethics as a moderator of employee silence in Anambra civil service in the hope of addressing workers' silent behavior in the organization.

Employee silence also regarded as subordinate silence is planned, proactive, premeditated behavior with regard to personal reasons of the employee based on cost/benefit analysis of speaking up or not about organizational related matters. Silence is a multifaceted construct (Brinsfield, 2013). An individual may remain silent about a variety of issues including problems about work processes, workload, manager and co-worker competence and behavior, concerns about pay, equity and mistreatment of co-workers, disagreement about organizational policies and decisions and ethical misconduct of organizational members (Milliken et al., 2003; Brimfield, 2013). The targets of silence can also vary considering from superiors to peers to external regulators. Moreover, an employee may remain silent about some issues, for example, a co-worker's intentional absence or minor infraction of organizational rules, but no others, for example, incidences of sexual harassment and racial discrimination. In Nigerian public sector, many factors could be attributed to the causes of employee silence among civil servants and these factors may be organizational based and may equally be in form of policies that limit employee voice (Jafary et al., 2018; Sonika & Kaushik, 2017). Such factors may not be far from institutional corruption (Ezeh & Etodike, 2016), ineptitude in service (Bawuro, et al., 2018) and unhealthy bureaucracy (Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020).

Workplace flexibility refers to the ability of employees to have control over their work, allowing workers to effectively balance their work and personal responsibilities (Adegoke et al., 2020). It is a concept that recognizes the changing needs and preferences of employees in the modern workforce. Workforce flexibility refers to how job designs, job tasks, working periods/schedules

and environment align with general and individual needs of the employees and supports better work-life balance and employee's well-being (Davidescu et al., 2020). It also looks into the autonomy of workers and their independency in decision makings. Considering the above definition, workplace flexibility tends to be tailored to accommodate work-shifts, flexibility remuneration in bits or as per individual worker's needs and weekend and work from home schedules.

Workplace flexibility is a growing trend in the modern day workplace as it moves to create friendlier organizations and reduce workplace rigidity which affects employees in many ways (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). According to (Adisa et al., (2016), frictional workplace or poor flexibility at work usually creates stressful job outcomes and task the coping of workers which may usually result in frustration whenever the limits of workers' coping capacity have been reached. In most organizations especially in the public service, poor workplace flexibility due to bureaucratic routines is real (Ulasi, 2017). The dwindling workers' welfare and conditions of service has remained at the forefront of calls for more flexible workplace which should recognize workers peculiar circumstances and challenges. In Nigeria workplace flexibility is gaining attention as organizations aim to enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. The background of workplace flexibility in Nigeria is being influenced by factors such as technological advancements, globalizations and the desire to attract and retain top talent (Adis et al; 2016). For instance, Adegoke et al., (2020) contends that the adoption of flexible work arrangements in Nigeria universities have led to improved work-life balance and reduced commuting time for employees. However, challenges exist in implementing workplace flexibility in Nigeria, including resistance from management, cultural norms and infrastructural limitations.

Work ethics are standards or principles that guide employee in performing their job responsibilities. These principles include values such as honesty, integrity, professionalism, dedication, loyalty, and accountability and transparency. 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 members within acceptable standards. Work ethics is a set of civic guidelines or moral principles which motivates, guides and sustains workers' job attitudes in the workplace in such a way to create a harmonious interaction within the tenets of organization goals (Alwagfi et al; 2020). Work ethics take cognizance of the needs of individual workers and the goals and objectives of their duties and attempts to provide a conduct needs and goals towards his job, and it is also related to the initiative by a person to accomplish job objectives (Rajagopalasingam et al., 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of this study was to examine the predictive influence of workplace flexibility on employee silence: the moderating role of work ethics among civil servants in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study objectives were to ascertain whether:

1. Workplace flexibility would predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.
2. Work ethics would predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.
3. Work ethics would moderate the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.

HYPOTHESES

Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Workplace flexibility would negatively 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 positively moderate the predictive relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State.

REVIEW

Employee Silence

Employee Silence or subordinate silence refers to “the withholding of any genuine expression about the individual’s behavioural, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his/her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress” (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Silence can either indicate that the person is completely satisfied or is not happy at all with the situation but is uncertain of how he/she can bring about a change to that. It can also indicate an indifferent attitude which arises when the employees are excluded from the decision making process for long enough to make them feel that their opinions or thoughts do not count. Previous studies on employee silence such as (Fapohunda, 2016; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2010; Umar & Hassan, 2015) have posited the perception that workers felt their voices were not needed and respected. It was established that even though the workers had views that are valuable as compared to senior or managerial colleagues, they did not enjoy equal attention (Umar & Hassan, 2013). Morrison and Milliken (2000) explain employee silence as the hard choice made by employees within some organizations to keep their thoughts and opinions quiet and shut themselves away from organization decisions. Silence does not only mean people silence, but also includes not writing, not being present at work, negative attitudes, not being heard and avoidance of organization members. Silence within organizations refers to quieting, censorship, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion and other forms of discounting (Hazen, 2006) and blocks the communication channels which helps employee interactions (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

In the present day civil service and public service organizations, employee silence is real, visible and more pronounced. Quratulain’s (2020) study on trust violation and recovery, dynamics in the context of differential supervisor-subordinate relationships, a study of public service employees revealed that silence is inherent in the public service. Also, 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 (Wokocho & Babalola, 2018). 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).

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Workplace flexibility or what is commonly called a flexible working arrangement is a policy that has been flexibly set by management, which means that they can choose the place and time of workers (Carlson et al; 2010). According to Casper & Harris (2008), employees and organizations benefit from the application of work flexibility. Organizations or companies that offer flexibility in terms of work can be attractive and can also maintain the quality of their workforce or employees who are good at the organization.

Workplace flexibility according to Davidescu et al; (2020) is designing of job tasks, working periods/schedule and environment in a way that they align with general and individual needs of

the employees and supports better work-life balance and employee well-being. Hence, the goals of workplace flexibility are to seamlessly make the conditions of work and the working space tolerant to the required lifestyle of the employees. This conceptualization in the views of Dean and Aeurbach (2018) identifies the individuality nature of what is flexible to employees and therefore may not mean the same thing in the context of other work environments or other types of workers or the changes in the characteristics of the space and working conditions. The meaning of work flexibility (Hill & Carroll, 2014) varies in accordance to organizational circumstances and individual differences. It is not entirely a judgment issue in terms of how, where, when, and for how long work is done (Berg et al; 2014). What determines workplace flexibility is the priority needs of the employees and it has been a priority need for some workers and employees alike (Dean & Aeurbach, 2018). The three most common types of flexibility available to workers are the ability to: change work location; take time off; and change their work hours (Golden & Jaeseung, 2017).

Flexible work practices are expected to have positive impacts on employees' perceptions of their job (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008). Kim et al; (2020) and Golden and Jaeseung (2017) contend that work flexibility can have positive and negative consequences for workers and their families, employers and society overall. Workers seek flexibility to address their personal and family needs, including childcare, eldercare, schooling, and healthcare (Dean & Aeurbach, 2018). Available evidence supports that workplace flexibility in terms of location (Kossek et al; 2015) and work hours (Golden & Jaeseung, 2017) give workers some sense of job satisfaction, thereby improving their health and wellbeing (Kossek et al; 2015). Bond and Galinsky (2011) found that both high-and low-wage workers valued work flexibility in terms of work schedule, and that flexibility was a statistically significant contributor to job engagement and job satisfaction.

Some experts say that flexibility can be beneficial for organizations and employees, but it is not a powerful problem solver, because on the other hand, it can also be detrimental to the employees themselves. A flexible work strategy has a significant effect on employee performance in an organization (Vincent, 2018). Workers who work remotely tend to be over worked by spending long working hours than they would normally do just in the office during normal working hours (Donnelly & Johns, 2020). Flexibility, work-life balance between activities, social and the loss that is the consequence such as reduced trust, over-cost and also multitalented workers of different sexes are certainly an attractive events to be researched to increasing labour productivity, human resource work in organizations (Krasulja et al., 2015). For instance,

Kuo et al., (2018) explored psychological flexibility at work and employees' proactive work behavior as a cross-level moderating role of leader need for structure. Kuo et al. (2018) found that employees' psychological flexibility was positively associated with proactive work behavior. More importantly, the supervisor need for structure played a moderating role, suggesting that employees would demonstrate greater proactive work behavior especially when the supervisors have a high need for structure. This is consistent drawing on the acceptance and commitment model, a new antecedent, psychological flexibility might contribute to employees' sense of actual flexibility at work. Also, Beltran-Martin et al., (2017) found that role breadth self-efficacy mediates between high performance work system (HPWS) and employee proactivity, but flexibility role orientation does not mediate this relationship.

Work Ethics

Work Ethics can simply be referred to as a set of principles relating to morals, especially as they apply to human conduct. It is a moral boundary evolving from organizational beliefs which represents organizational values and conduct in the workplace. It is also organizational acceptable attitudes in the various aspects of organizational setting (Spence & Robbins, 1992). Work ethics according to Black (2007) is a set of principles based on hard work and diligence. Marek et al., (2014) defines work ethics as a “set of values centered on importance of work hard. Social engrainment of this value is considered to enhance character through hard work that is respective to an individual’s field of work” (Marek et al., 2014).

In Nigeria, ethical conduct in the civil service is a crucial issue. According to Okoli (2018), unethical practices in Nigerian civil service include bribery, embezzlement of public funds, nepotism and favouritism, which pose a significant threat to the social and economic growth of the country. To address ethical issues in the Nigerian civil service, it is essential to establish and enforce ethical codes of conduct. The codes of conduct should include principles such as honesty, transparency, accountability, loyalty and respect for the rule of law. According to Adeniji and Olaoye (2017), a clear ethical code of conduct is essential for improving the ethical culture of the civil service. Transparency is essential in promoting ethical behavior in the Nigerian civil service. According to Akpan and Udoh (2020), transparency promotes accountability, ensures the efficient use of resources and strengthens citizens’ confidence in the government. Transparency can be achieved by ensuring that all individuals in the civil service, from top to bottom, are held accountable for their actions. This involves the formulation and implementation of policies, regulations and guidelines to govern civil service conduct.

The responsibility of ensuring ethical behavior in the Nigerian civil service belongs to all stakeholders in the society. Politicians, Journalists, academic scholars, and the general public have a role to play in promoting ethical conduct in the Nigerian civil service. According to Adejuwon (2019) Stakeholders can promote ethical behavior by engaging in social accountability initiatives that seek to monitor and evaluate the behavior of civil servants. Good work ethics play a significant role in neutralizing the effects of poor flexibility at work. According to Ajisafe and Adegbite (2019), employees who maintain high ethical standards are more likely to resist the negative effects of inflexibility. Good work ethics enable employees to maintain a positive attitude, remain committed to their job responsibilities and remain focused on their goals. A strong work ethics help employees to remain resilient in the face of challenges, overcome obstacles, and persevere through difficult situations.

The Nigerian State civil service, especially, Anambra State is no exception, where poor work ethics contribute to the frustration of employees. In the Nigerian civil service, corruption, nepotism and favouritism are prevalent, leading to job dissatisfaction, low productivity, and poor service delivery. According to Oluwaseyi-Adelan et al., (2019), good work ethics, including honesty, transparency, accountability, professionalism, and respect for the rule of law, are essential for neutralizing the effects of corruption in the civil service as well as the effects of poor flexibility at work, especially in the state civil service in Nigeria, where Anambra State is a part. In the view of the researchers, promoting work ethics and flexibility at work in the Nigerian civil service can lead to employees who are dedicated, committed and productive while improving the overall organizational performance. For instance Wang et al., (2023) explored employee ethical silence under exploitative leadership and the roles of work meaningfulness and moral potency and found that work meaningfulness and moral potency mediate the effect of exploitative leadership on ethical silence contingent on performance reward expectancy.

FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is embedded on the motivational theory by Kanugo (1979) propounded that employees' perceptions concerning a job's potential to satisfy their needs represents an influence on involvement in work place activities. Kanugo (1979) contends that individuals develop beliefs that a job's context potentially provides an opportunity for them to satisfy their most important future needs. From this perspective, Kanugo's assumptions emphasized workers' beliefs on the potentiality of the job which have to do with trust without which workers may become cynical (distrusting, disappointed, lacking in faith and having doubts) as regards the potentiality of the job. All these might at extreme cases result to employee silence. The Motivational approach of Kanugo (1979) integrates the different approaches to job involvement, including both psychological and sociological factors, using the basic concept that job involvement is affected by the potential for personal socialization experience and the likelihood that the work environment satisfies personal demand. It is only when the workplace is flexible and ethical climate conducive for workers that their personal demand will be satisfied. The goals of employees which ought to be satisfied by the motivation constructs depend on employees' needs (both extrinsic and intrinsic), as well their perceptions on the job's potential (trust) to satisfy those needs. The strength of this theory was supported by Shahzad and Mahmood's (2012) study which showed that there is a significant positive association among employee job outcome, organizational cynicism, workplace deviant behavior, commitment behavior and performance. For employees' need to be satisfied the work environment should be flexible for them and also good ethical climate encourage in order to neutralize the effect of silence and loss of voice among the employees.

METHOD

Sampling Procedure and Participants

The study surveyed five hundred and twenty-nine (529) civil servants in nine (9) local government areas of the three (3) senatorial zones of Anambra State namely; Anambra South, Anambra North and Anambra Central. The nine (9) local government areas were selected through systematic sampling method. The local government areas selected were: Anambra South (Aguata, Nnewi North and Orumba North); Anambra North (Anambra east, Onitsha South and Oyi); and Anambra 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, who 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 simplerandom sampling). A cover letter was attached to each of the questionnaires which explained that the survey was for research purpose and also promised anonymity of participants' responses. Two crop members (NYSC members) were trained by the researchers who served as research assistant in the study and followed to navigate the 9 local government areas for the administration and collection of the questionnaires. The demographic information of the participants revealed a close homogeneous characteristics across religion, educational background and ethnic origin except for age and grade level in organogram. Thus, control for the two factors as extraneous variables was made by including them as demographic of the study.

MEASURES

The study employed three (3) research instruments for data collection, namely; Workplace flexibility Scale developed by Davidescu et al., (2020); Multi-dimensional work ethnics Scale develop by Spence and Robbins (1992); and employee Silence Scale developed by Wu and Parker (2017). Workplace flexibility Scale by Davidescuet al., (2020) was developed to measure the relative ease of work and working environment in line with work independence,

remuneration process, working from home, flexibility of working hours and shift , office space , wok holiday etc. It is a 9-item questionnaire structured in the Likert format. The authors reported an internal consistency of .83. For its use in this study, the scale was validated with Nigerian sample by the researchers using discriminate technique by correlating the scale with 11-item work overload scale developed by Kaplan (2006). The correlation yielded a negative relationship of $r=-.67$ an indication that workplace flexibility is distinct and inverse to work over-load. Also, Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient analysis was carried out by the researchers which revealed the internal reliability of the instrument at .70.

The second instrument was multi-dimensional work ethnics Profile 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 –items across 8 subscales. Each dimension of work ethnics is measured by five (5) items, 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) items was used. The multi-dimensional ethics profile (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-re- test correlation coefficient of .89 for the total scale (Spence & Robbins, 1992). The MWEP has also been shown to have good convergent and discriminant validity, as it correlates 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). Over all, the MWEP is a reliable and valid measure of work ethics that can be used in 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 discriminant 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 third instrument employed in this study was Employee Silence Scale developed by Wu and Parker (2017), to measure employees’ tendency to remain silence in workplace when they have concern or disagree with something in the workplace due to fear of punishment, disfavor or victimization. Employee silence scale is a 7 –items scale which is scored in 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree and 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 its use in this study, the researchers carried out a discriminant validity with non-related construct-proactive behavior and correlation coefficient of -.76 was reported indicating a good internal consistency. Also the researchers obtained a Cronabach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .72.

RESULT

Table 1

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

N	Employee Silence	Workplace Flexibility	Work Ethics
N	529	529	529
Mean	32.1	21.5	14.7

Std. Deviation	2.34	2.59	2.40
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Findings from the descriptive statistics showed that the means cores of employee silence among the local government civil servants is elevated at $M = 32.1$ as against $M = 31.9$ as obtained in pilot study; std. dev. = 2.34 ($n = 529$). This indicates that the problem of employee silence as identified in the study literature is prevalent among civil service employees in Anambra State. Also, the mean score of participants on workplace flexibility and work ethics were observed at $M = 21.5$, and $M = 14.7$ respectively. The researchers 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, Workplace Flexibility and Work Ethics

N		Employee Silence	Workplace Flexibility	Work Ethics
Employee Silence	Pearson r	–		
	p-value	–		
Workplace Flexibility	Pearson r	-0.587***	–	
	p-value	<.001	–	
Organisational Frustration	Pearson r	0.205***	-0.055	
	p-value	<.001	.205	
Work Ethics	Pearson r	-0.813***	0.490***	–
	p-value	<.001	<.001	–

Findings from the correlation matrix table revealed that negative and significant correlations were observed between workplace flexibility and employee silence at $r = -.59$, $P < .05$ ($n = 529$). Also, negative and significant correlations were found between work ethics and employee silence at $r = -.81$, $P < .05$ ($n = 529$). The relationships indicate that both workplace flexibility and work ethics have negative and significant (inverse) influence on employee silence. The correlation matrix further revealed that workplace flexibility and work ethics have significant influence on employee silence. It is left to be seen whether these influences or correlations reached predictive value.

Table 3

Model Coefficients showing independent predictive effects of independent variables – workplace flexibility and work ethics on the dependent variable - employee silence

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	42.4623	1.1465	37.04	<.001
Workplace Flexibility	-0.2259	0.0241	-9.37	<.001
Work Ethics	-0.6579	0.0261	-25.16	<.001

Findings from the model coefficients indicated that workplace flexibility had negative and significant predictive effect on employee silence at $\beta = -.23$, $P < .001$ ($N = 529$). This implies that when workplace flexibility increases, employee silence decreases due to the inverse relationship; thus, hypothesis 1 which stated that workplace flexibility would negatively and significantly predict employee silence was accepted. Secondly, the predictive effects of work

ethics on employee silence was also accepted at $\beta = -.66$, $P < .001$ ($n = 529$) , 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 Workplace Flexibility and Employee Silence.

Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	T	P
Workplace Flexibility	-0.22443	0.02159	-10.397	<.001
Work Ethics	-0.66464	0.02287	-29.065	<.001
Workplace Flexibility * Work Ethics	0.00671	0.00801	0.838	0.402

From the moderation analysis in table 4, the moderation estimate is indicative that although the predictive relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence was reduced when work ethics was added, the moderation estimate of the relationship was not significant at beta weight is .006, $P > .40$. Thus, hypothesis 3 which stated that work ethics would positively moderate the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the predictive influence of workplace flexibility on employee silence: the moderating role of work ethics among civil servants in Anambra State, Nigeria. Hypotheses one which stated that workplace flexibility would negatively and significantly predict employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State was accepted. The findings imply that workplace flexibility has an inverse relationship with employee silence such that when there is an increase in workplace flexibility among employees, there is an observed decrease in their silent behaviours. The finding shows that workplace flexibility has a positive outcome on the employee behavior such that workplace flexibility can help to reduce the prevalence of employee silence, cynicism and counter-productivity (Etodike et al., 2017). Flexible work is also known to reduce employee turnover intention (Ezeh et al., 2017) while facilitating employee life satisfaction at the place of work (Etodike et al., 2017) and employee citizenship behaviour (Okoye et al., 2018). There are many ways in which civil service can improve workplace flexibility such as flexible salary payment, work shifts, working from home etc which can help to motivate and improve employee voice among civil servants. With empirical evidence provided in the findings of hypothesis one, these situations which are regarded as inhibiting employees' voice (Silence in the organization may be reduced with increasing workplace flexibility both to the advantage of the employee and the organizations in maximizing workers' welfare and organizational effectiveness. The result is supported empirically. The finding is in contrast supports the findings made by Kuo et al., (2018) on psychological flexibility at work and employees' proactive work behavior as a cross-level moderating role of leader need for structure and found that psychological flexibility was positively associated with proactive work behavior suggesting that flexibility in the organization is likely to produce negative relationship with employee silence since it is contrasted in positive relationship with proactive behavior which can promoted job creativity (Nwangwu et al., 2021) and thriving at work (Okechukwu et al., 2021). The result is

also supported theoretically by motivational theory by Kanugo (1979) which contended that employees' perceptions concerning a job's potential to satisfy their needs represents an influence on involvement in work place activities in relation to other social dynamics to enhance thriving (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 findings imply that work ethics has an inverse relationship with employee silence such that when there is an increase in work ethics among employees, there is an observed decrease in their silent behaviours. The finding shows that work ethics has a positive influence on employee behavior such that work ethics helps to reduce the prevalence of employee silence. Ethical climate is provided by code of conduct bureau, civil service Act and organizational policies may usually help reduce organizational vices such as injustice and abuse (Ezeh et al., 2018), counterproductive workplace behaviours (Nnaebue et al., 2020) and Machiavellian tendencies in the workplace (Madubueze et al., 2021). There are many ways in which organizations can improve work ethics or ethical climate such as supervision, enforcement and punishment of offenders; these ideally help to enthrone ethical climate in organization and to reduce employee silence. The negative predictive relationship between work ethics and employee silence can be utilized by stakeholders to reduce both organizational vices and their consequent outcomes on employee silence. This is supported by Victor and Cullen's (1987) theory ethical work climate (EWC) which emphasized that rules of conduct provide common grounds for organizational understanding, cooperation and productivity. Empirically, this finding is supported by the finding made by Madubueze et al., (2021), which found that negative correlations exist between work ethics and subordinates silence, implying that as work ethics increases, silence reduces. This also supports empirical finding 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.

The third hypothesis which stated that work ethics would positively and significantly moderate the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State was rejected. The findings revealed that although work ethics reduced the negative impacts of workplace flexibility on employee silence but its moderation of the relationship was not significant. The findings imply that the prevalence of low, average or high ethical climate did not significantly moderate the positive predictive effects of workplace flexibility on employee silence. This finding negates the moderating role of work ethics established in the study by Madubueze et al., (2021), which found that work ethics has moderating effects over organization vices such as the relationship between Machiavellianism and employee silence. This negation may be understood in view of conceptual differences in the meaning of flexibility between one employee and another based on individual employee need which influence personal and organizational outcomes. Hence, these differences may not account or recognize the impacts of the ethical climate or may override them morally; thus, reducing the efficacy of the moderating effects of work ethics on the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are theoretical, practical and policy implications which arise from the findings of the study which explored the predictive influence of workplace flexibility on employee silence: the moderating role of work ethics among civil servants in Anambra State. Theoretically, the culture of human interactions which are exchanges in the organization are being overshadowed by transactional paradigm which is built on employee contract. These interactions when frustrated

leaves the employees with the option to speak or to be silent with certain organizational activities. Many civilservice organizations which build healthy exchanges are predicated on strict entronement of rule of law and proper ethical conduct. Practically, employees have emotions as human beings that they are. Excess of human emotion can influence human performance in the workplace and can have employee and job outcomes such as employee silence. In the policy aspect, there is need for organizations to promote friendly working environment and working conditions by instituting flexible working conditions in order to counter vices in the workplace. Hence, civil service is not likely to evolve without reducing organizational vice on employee silence which affect employees' morale, efficiency and productivity.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of this study is inherent respondents' bias which the researchers made significant efforts to reduce to the barest minimum. The researchers ensured that only participants who are willing to take part in the study were sampled during the field work.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the predictive influence of workplace flexibility on employee silence: The moderating role of work ethics among civil servants in Anambra State. The motivation for the study was driven as a result of the growth of adverse effects of employee silence in the civil service, especially in Anambra State, which has orchestrated to low proactive behaviours, generalized low productivity, poor service delivery, inefficiency etc among civil servants in Anambra State. Using a correlation design and a moderated statistics, the study found negative predictive effects of workplace flexibility on employee silence while work ethics equally predicted employee silence negatively. However, work ethics did not moderate the positive predictive relationship between workplace flexibility and employee silence among civil servants in Anambra State. This study showed that at low, average and high work ethical climate among civil servants , the positive effects of workplace flexibility is increased. This finding is a wakeup call on the dangers of workplace inflexibility especially in climate without ethical adherence. It is therefore, an eye opener to stakeholders, the government and the general public to take the findings to practical implementation and explore ways to improve on the flexibility of working environment and working conditions for the civil servants in Anambra State to boost an improved work force and improve employee proactivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the importance of providing top quality service and organizational effectiveness to driven national development through public service delivery, it is recommended that public service code especially civil service act be revised to mitigate work conditions which frustrate and distract employees and increase harmony and facilitate interpersonal relationships among civil servants. It is also important to introduce flexible working conditions such as advance salary, working from home, or online and flexible annual holidays which can boost employee satisfaction and decrease in silence.

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