

## Impacts of Cultural Differences on Work-related Values among Employees in Ibadan, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The thrust of this study is to investigate the impacts of cultural differences on the work-related values of employees in Nigeria using Declux Foods Plc, a multi-cultural confectionary Company located in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria as a case study. Data for the study were generated through a multi-stage sampling technique with the use of questionnaires administered to one hundred and five (105) respondents selected from the study population. The work-related values (held in this study as dependent variables) were identified in relevant literature and were tested on a Likert's points of four (4) scale type ranging from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1). Chi-square analysis was used to test the study hypotheses and the results were discussed under the various headings as appropriate. Findings from the study show that culture significantly affects reasons why people engage in work activities, the needs they seek to satisfy through their work, and motivation for work. Surprisingly, this study reveals that although employees are different in cultural orientations but the factor motivates them to put in their best at work is almost the same.*

### Introduction

Over the years, extensively large volumes of research have been devoted to the study of culture in relation to work values. Meanwhile, a general agreement recur in relevant literature that culture has attracted relatively more scholarship attention than other areas of study and life domains such as family, community, religion, and so forth can be explained by the key roles that culture play in both organization and social life (Smith et al, 1999). Besides, the multicultural composition of the Nigeria's population coupled with social and ethnic variations within the country's work places and the country at large (Otite 1987), has led to the concept of culture becoming more and more important and been rigorously researched during the past two decades (Erwee, 1988; Smith et al, 1999).

Seeing Nigeria against the background of a country that is striving towards (i) becoming a global competitor, (ii) attracting foreign investors' interest, (iii) rebuilding its rotten image in the international community as well as (iv) ensuring peaceful co-existence among its various ethnic groups at the work places (and social life), then the role of various cultures in shaping those behaviour which can enhance organizational effectiveness have to be analyzed and studied continuously. For instance, Schein (1992) argues that peak performance, harmonious workplace, effective integration of individuals' goal into the organizational goals and the desired changes in the society cannot be achieved without first considering culture as a primary source of resistance to changes and as a determinant of individual and group behaviour.

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Schein (1992) perceived culture as a phenomenon that is undetachable from the individual and that the process of forming, developing and changing a culture is much clearer when brought down to the level of the organization. Suffice this assertion to conclude therefore that 'if we want to understand the complex aspect of organizational life and how effectiveness could better be attained, we should move away from the superficial definitions and focus on how cultural differences among employees translate to differences in work values and organizational behaviour of the general workforce.

Apart from the above highlighted research analysis, many studies have treated work-values and work motivations as expressions of more general life values, and have made efforts to interpret the differences in terms of broader cultural patterns, reflecting the historical development of the particular region or groups and the adaptation of their environments as the primary determinants of what motivate employees or what an individual seeks in his job daily (Roe and Ester, 1999).

Therefore, the thrust of this study predominantly investigates the correlation between the culture of employees and work related values, with special attention to the Nigerian work organizations. However, it is expedient to note that work-related values and various motivational items are the behavioural variables that were subjected to serious empirical scrutiny in this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is no doubt that central to the growth, viability and survival of any organization, be it public or private, is the effective utilization and management of the organization's human resources who are usually from different ethnic or cultural background and/or who were socialized into entirely different cultures. Sequel to these differences which usually manifest in terms of language, dress, orientations, and so on, managers in today's multi-cultural business community frequently encounter cultural differences which can interfere with the success and survival of their organizations (Erwee, 1988). In their own words, Adewole and Metiboba (2009) view the job of managers to motivate employee as a difficult and complex task because of some factors such as; the complexity of human needs and differences in employees' culture which can serve as a major issue in shaping work values of individuals.

Unfortunately, despite the enormous research into the relationship between culture and work values, today's managers still fail to harness effectively, the rich benefits of multicultural diversity of their workforce to the good of the organizations they serve.

Given the inherent differences in multicultural work places, leaders in the present day workforce have to direct organizations through difficult times of having to deal with the complex issue of

cultural diversity. It could however be argued that understanding the richness of this diversity and being able to apply its knowledge to the economic and social benefits of the organizations they serve has become one of the most difficult challenges for both researchers and human resource managers in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

In specific outline, the objectives of the study are to;

- i. examine the relationship between employees' culture and work-related values,
- ii. determine whether employees' culture affects their orientation towards work itself,
- iii. investigate the correlation between employees' cultural background and their motivation for work,

### **Research Hypotheses**

Deriving from the research objectives and statement of the research problem, the following hypotheses were formulated and were tested through the respondents' opinions obtained from the research instrument;

*Hypothesis 1:* there will be no significant relationship between employees' cultural background and work values

*Hypothesis 2:* the culture of employees would not significantly influence what motivate them to work.

*Hypothesis 3:* there is no significant relationship between employees' culture and their orientation toward work itself.

### **What is Culture?**

Culture is a very complex social construct. This complexity is evident from the approaches that various authors follow to describe the construct 'culture'. Hodgetts et al. (1997) argues that there are many ways of examining cultural differences. The authors concluded that although leaders and researchers have been found struggling with the concept of culture but the concept is hard to define, hard to analyze, hard to measure and hard to manage. To further justify the complex nature of culture, Hofstede (1980) maintained that no single definition is likely to do justice to its complexity.

As broad and complex as the concept of culture, there are many definitions for culture as there are many theories on it. However, a general trend running through all these descriptions is that "culture refers to shared concept of life and that it guides the behaviour of individual and groups through strongly held beliefs and values which are transferable to generations after".

Smith et al. (1999) were of the view that culture is unique to each society or group of people and therefore it could be regarded as the collective personality of the group. Consistent with this view, Hofstede (1980) stated authoritatively that culture constitute to a human collectivity what personality is to an individual. Similar to the general definition of personality as “the interactive aggregate of personal characteristics that influence an individual’s response to its environment”, Hofstede viewed culture as the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human (collective) group’s response to its environment. Thus, culture plays significant part in determining the identity of a human group.

After naming several examples of cultural differences to explain his analogy, Van der Walt (1997) gave the following conclusions about culture;

- i. Culture gives identity: there is no aspect of human life that does not fall under the potential influence of culture. Thus, all human behaviour within organization and in social life can be explained and influenced by culture.
- ii. One’s own culture is normal for oneself: One is normally not aware of his/her own culture or of the fact that it might be unfamiliar or strange to others. This has been linked to anti-social behaviour called ethnocentrism.
- iii. One of the best ways to come to grip with one’s own culture is to seriously study and understand other cultures through cross-cultural education or informal learning. Van der Walt believed that one can not separate self understanding from understanding others. To reach the one, one has to start with the other and vice versa.

Schein (1992) presented a definition for culture which could be regarded as representative of most other points of view on culture. He defined culture as;

*“a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”*

The general conclusion that could be drawn from the various definitions of culture that have been reviewed in this section which also forms the operational definition of culture as far as this study is concerned is that culture represents the whole complex of ‘things’ acquired, shared and/or held in common by members of a group who also transmits same to generations after it.

### **The Concept of Values**

Discourse on the concept of values tends to reveal contradictions. Notwithstanding, researchers in general agreed that values could be regarded as the central theme in the study of human behaviour, as well as the foundation on which the individual personality and outlook in life are

based. In this regard, Rokeach (1973) stated that the concept of values is the core concept in the study of all social sciences.

According to Rokeach, values are the most important dependent variable in the study of culture, society and personality, and at the same time, the most significant independent variable in the study of social attitudes and behaviour. Theron (1992) argues that it is possible to translate differences between cultures, social classes, work orientations, etc. into question concerning differences in the individual's underlying values and value system. The author also underlined the fact that managers should have a thorough understanding of the important role of values in human functioning and behaviour.

A generally acceptable definition of values is that of Rokeach (1973) which states that "value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode or end-state of existence". This definition implies therefore that values serve as criteria upon which evaluations are of good or bad, like or dislike are made.

Review of various Studies in behavioural sciences has it that values are generally formed during the childhood years through the influences of a person's family. According to Marrow (1983) and Cherrington (1980) the same applied to work values. In these authors' views, a worker learnt to prefer certain intrinsic or extrinsic content of his/her job over and above others even right from the early age or early years of his career. The worker thus makes major career decisions based on this acquired prejudice about the job motivation.

### **Conceptualizing Work Values**

As in the case with culture and values, the literature is replete with various views on the concept of work values. The term "work values" is presented by different authors and researchers from different points of views. However, it is evident from the numerous definitions that the idea of an attitude towards or orientation with regard to work constitutes the central theme of most of the interpretations. For instance, one of the most significant facts that come to the fore from the theories of work and work motivation is that workers differ radically with regards to the reasons they have for working, factors that motivate them most in their work and the needs they want to satisfy through work. Biesheuvel (1984) supported this view and argued that it is not everyone who looks for satisfaction of higher level personality need through work they do and it is in fact, an intellectualist fallacy and mirage to assume that everyone seeks opportunity for responsibility, independence and creativity in his job. This has lent credence to the fact that what serves as a motivator to one employee may not motivate others to work, or that what a worker seeks to

satisfy through his job may be sharply different from what others seek to satisfy through the same job, even within the same work environment.

Like basic values, work values are beliefs pertaining to desirable end-states (e.g. high pay) or behaviour (e.g. working with people). The different work goals are ordered by their importance as guiding principles for evaluating work outcomes and settings, and for choosing among different work alternatives. Because work values refer only to goals in the work setting, they are more specific than basic individual values. But they refer to what a person wants out of work in general rather than to the narrowly defined outcomes. Work values represent cognitive expressions of the various needs or goals that are addressed through one's work and working, including monetary security, social interaction, intellectual stimulation, status, esteem and self-actualization needs (Ros et al., 1999; Super, 1995; Zytowski, 1970).

Super (1995) viewed work values as the various motivators that drive the individual to work. In Super's word, work values are regarded as values extrinsic to as well as intrinsic in work satisfaction. This may be seen as the by-product or the outcomes of work as well as those things which men and women seek in their work activity. Aweda (1987) does not regard all workers as being alike. He argues that workers come in assorted shapes, sizes, experiences, attitudes and ambitions. Some work for a living while for some working is a living. To some workers, work is regarded as the central goal in life, whereas others think about work as a way of providing for the daily necessities and then regarding time away from work as the joy in life.

Steers and Rhodes (1979) indicate that the belief by individual that being involved in work related activities is an important aspect of life (almost irrespective of what the nature of the job is) forms a major pressure to attend to work. In a related opinion, Van Pletzen (1986) believes that every individual holds certain evaluative disposition or inclination regarding work in general. In Pletzen's words, work values consist of a strong affective component and are evaluative in nature, i.e. the question of whether work is good or bad.

To broaden our horizon on the concept of work values, a few definitions of the concept were considered below;

- Work values are an index of a person's attitudes towards work in general, rather than his/her feelings about a specific job" (Wollack et al, 1971).
- Work values refer to the usefulness, or general worth that a person assigns to some behaviour or conceptions of work (e.g. physical efforts) and non-work activities (e.g. leisure) (Wayne, 1989).

- A set of concepts which mediate between a person's affective orientation and classes of external objects offering similar satisfaction (Zytowski, 1970).

Work values, in summary, are indicatives of an individual's inner attitudes or ways of thinking towards work and other conditions that do not merely apply to his own position or certain tasks but rather, to work in general. This summary therefore forms the operational definition of work values for the purpose of this study.

### **Development of Work Values**

As mentioned earlier, values are generally formed during the childhood years through the influence of a person's family. Cherrington (1980) argued that same applied to work values since no one is born with values, they are therefore learnt. Research results of Cherrington shows that the parental home (socialization) has a significant influence on the establishment and development of the work values of the individual.

Van Pletzen (1986) hypothesized that work values represent a personality variable and that it is formed together with the personality of the individual. Work values are not inherent characteristic of any individual, they are learnt. Pletzen highlighted eight (8) management principles that contribute considerably to a positive development and changes in work values in an organization;

- i. Commitment to excellence and positive work values should be supported by the organizational climate.
- ii. The organization's expectations and required quality of work should be communicated clearly to employees.
- iii. The values and exaltedness of work and service delivery should be explained to employees.
- iv. Through effective delegation, responsibility of employees must be ensured.
- v. Through individual choice and participation, personal involvement of employees must be promoted.
- vi. The organization should make sure of performance assessment when providing feedback with regards to work achievements.
- vii. Effective work performance should be adequately rewarded.
- viii. Employees should be continuously supported to ensure personal growth and development.

Obviously, it is clear from these aforementioned principles that apart from being a personality variable that are formed or learnt from childhood years through the process of socialization, the

organizational and direct work environment could have significant influence in forming and maintaining work values.

### **Appraisal of Literature**

Attempt has been made in this study to review several scholarship orientations on the concept of culture as a major social construct that determine people's behaviour within the workplace and in social life. Culture was variously defined by different authors from different view points. However, one common feature that runs through all the definitions is that culture represents a system of shared meaning which dictates what people do, how they do it and what they regard as important to them. Thus bringing down to the organizational level, through culture, values in respect of life and work are organized into mental programme that determine how employees behave within the workplace and in group life.

Also, relevant literature reviewed in the course of this study revealed that human beings do not like work very much and will avoid it as far as possible. Thus, it becomes a question to be answered via a thorough empirical study the fact that though human beings hate work but still engage daily in work activities. Therefore, the simple fact that answers this question is that the values that human beings attached to work and generally the motives for which they engaged in work activities varied greatly from person to person and across cultures.

On the other hand, the concept "work values" is presented by different authors and researchers from different points of views. However, it is evident from the numerous definitions that the idea of an attitude towards or orientation with regard to work constitutes the central theme of most of the interpretations. This has lent credence to the fact that what serves as a motivator to one employee may not motivate others to work, or that what a worker seeks to satisfy through his job may be sharply different from what others seek to satisfy through the same job, even within the same work environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical paradigm that explained work values from a broad cultural context is the theory of basic values. First, it specifies ten (10) motivationally distinct types of values, including power, achievement, hedonism, and stimulation. Others are self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security. These motivational values were postulated to be recognized by members of most societies and to encompass the different types of values that guide them.

This approach is sometimes sub-divided into two namely; private values theory and group values theory. As the name implies, the basic private values theory holds that the life of an individual and



those factors (values) which motivates him/her to act or fails to act depend solely on personal values which guides the individual's behaviour. The theoretical tradition in the former thus believes that what an individual seeks to satisfy in his/her job is personal, desirable and as well serve as the guiding principles to the employee's personal life, career decisions and actions (Super, 1973). On the other hand, the group values theory views work values of an individual as culturally originated. The theory postulates that what guides the behaviour of an individual employee both at the workplace and in social life is the culture of the group he/she belongs.

Indeed, following the theoretical perspective in the latter, we conclude in this paper that in order to understand the meaning that one attributes to work, the personal structure of values and/or the processes linking these various components (the 10 types of values mentioned above), it is necessary to study the cultural and social context in which the individual lives and works. Consistent with our conclusion in this paper, Schwartz (1999) argued that exploring the meaning of work within a cultural context is important as the cultural context may shape and modify values.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a survey research design of a descriptive type to investigate the relationship between cultural differences and work-related values of employees in a multi-cultured work organization. Data for the study were generated mainly through multi-stage sampling technique by the use of structured and unstructured questionnaire administered to a sample of 105 respondents randomly selected from Decxul Foods Plc, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Out of a total of 105 questionnaires distributed to subjects on the issue under study, 102 turned in their completed questionnaires. This forms 97 per cent of the total and this is considered statistically significant enough to continue with the study. Respondents were selected from all the cultural groups represented at the selected work organization.

The questionnaire utilized in this study was divided basically into 2 sections. Section A of the questionnaire titled **RESPONDENTS' BIO-DATA** elicited information on the socio-demographic background of the respondents such as age, sex, level of education, ethnic affiliation, marital status, religion, years of experience, etc. Section B of the self-administered questionnaire was titled **CULTURE AND WORK VALUES SCALE (CWVS)**. This comprises both structured and unstructured questions meant to obtain information on respondents' culture and how it relates to or influences their orientation about work, premium placed on work, orientation about motivational/reward systems, relation with others at work, and so forth.

Respondents were asked to answer questions related basically to various work values identified in relevant literature, and same were hold in this study as independent variables subjected to empirical scrutiny. The questionnaires were administered at the premises of the

selected work organization (Decxul Foods Plc) by the researcher after due approval from the Human Resource Manager of the company.

### Quality Control

Test and pre-test of the research instrument was done to ensure reliability and validity of the research tool. Validity tests and pre-tests of the research instrument were done at the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. A reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained with the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient.

### Results and Findings

**Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents According to their Socio-Economic Characteristics**

Variable/ Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	86	84.3
Female	16	15.7
Total	102	100
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 25	5	4.9
26 – 30	19	18.6
31 – 35	48	47.1
36- 40	22	21.6
41 & above	8	7.8
Total	102	100
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Primary	12	11.8
Secondary	27	26.5
NCE/ND	48	47.0
HND/BSc	11	10.8
Postgraduate	4	3.9
Total	102	100
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	16	15.6
Married	79	77.5
Divorced	7	6.9
Total	102	100

<b>Ethnic Affiliation</b>		
Hausa	22	21.5
Yoruba	46	45.1
Igbo	27	26.5
Others	7	6.9
Total	102	100
<b>Religion Affiliation</b>		
Islam	39	38.2
Christianity	51	50.0
Others	12	11.8
Total	102	100
<b>Job Position</b>		
Manager	4	3.9
Supervisor	9	8.8
Foreman	11	10.8
Machine Operator	48	47.1
Others	30	29.4
Total	102	100

Source: Researcher's survey, 2011

Table 1 above shows the socio-economic backgrounds of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were male while the female constituted 15.7% of the participants. Also, a cursory look at the table shows that 47.1% of the respondents fall within the ages of 31 – 35 years while 4.9, 18.6 and 21.6% were within 20 - 25, 26 – 30 and 36 – 40 years respectively. The marital status shows that majority of the respondents 77.5% are married, 15.6% are singles while only 1 of the respondents is divorced. In terms of the cultural affiliation of the respondents, 45.1% are Yoruba, 21.5 are Hausa, Igbo constituted 26.5% while 7.9% belong to other ethnic backgrounds. Further analysis of Table 1 above reveals that half of the respondents are Christians, 38.2% are Muslims while 11.8 practices other religions. Also, the job position of the respondents shows that Machine operators formed 47.1% of the total, 3.9% are Managers, Supervisors constituted 8.8% of the respondents, 10.8 are Foremen while 29.4% belong to other job positions.

Three hypotheses were generated and tested in this study based on the respondents' opinion obtained from the research instrument. Chi-square analysis was used to test the hypotheses and the summary of the analyses are presented in table 2, 3 and 4 below:

**Table 2: Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship Between Employees' Cultural Background and Work-related Values**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	45.590 <sup>a</sup>	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	48.107	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.552	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	102		

$$X^2_c = 45.590, X^2_t = 16.919, df = 9, \text{Sig. level} = 0.05$$

**Hypothesis 1:** *states that there is no significant relationship between employees' cultural background and work values*

Table 2 above shows that the chi-square calculated value  $X^2_c$  (45.590) is greater than the chi-square table value  $X^2_t$  (16.919) at the 0.05 significant level. This shows that the result was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Thus, it is confirmed in this study that there is significant relationship between employees' cultural background and work values.

**Hypothesis 2:** *The culture of employees would not significantly influence what motivate them to work.*

From Table 3 below it could be observed that the relationship between employees' cultural background and factors that motivate them to work was not significant. Result of the analysis shows that the chi-square calculated value  $X^2_c$  (5.514) is less than the chi-square table value  $X^2_t$  (16.919) at the 0.05 significant level. The alternative hypothesis is therefore rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 3: Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Employees' Cultural Background and Factors that Motivate them to Work**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.514 <sup>a</sup>	9	.787
Likelihood Ratio	5.364	9	.801
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.024	1	.312
N of Valid Cases	102		

$$X^2_C = 5.514, X^2_t = 16.919, df = 9, \text{Sig. level} = 0.05$$

**Hypothesis 3:** *The there will be no significant relationship between employees' culture and their orientation toward work itself.*

**Table 4: Chi-square Analysis of the Relationship between Employees' Cultural Background and their Orientations about Work**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.175 <sup>a</sup>	9	.264
Likelihood Ratio	12.429	9	.190
Linear-by-Linear Association	.190	1	.663
N of Valid Cases	102		

$$X^2_C = 11.175, X^2_t = 16.919, df = 9, \text{Sig. level} = 0.05$$

Table 4 above revealed that the chi-square calculated value  $X^2_C$  (11.175) is less than the chi-square table value  $X^2_t$  (16.919), the analysis showed that the result was not significant. The null hypothesis is thus accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, this study confirmed that there is no significant relationship between the cultural background of the Employees and their orientation towards work.

### Discussion of Findings

This study has amply demonstrated through empirical investigation, the relationship between employees' cultural background and their work-related values. Result obtained from hypothesis one of this study was significant and thus confirmed that cultural background of employees determines their work-related values. While some employees' work value was to accept responsibilities, others seek opportunities as they perform their jobs daily. This finding is consistent with Van Pletzen (1986) assertion that every individual holds certain evaluative disposition or inclination regarding work in general. In the same manner, Aweda (1987) does not regard all workers as being alike. He argues that workers come in assorted shapes, sizes, experiences, attitudes and ambitions.

Another major finding from this study is that although employees are different in cultural orientations, what motivate them to put in their *best* at work is almost the same. It was found out in this study that for most of the respondents, pay rise is the only motivator that makes them to work more efficiently. Congruent with the scientific management orientation that man is an *economic* animal who is motivated by cash; this study confirmed that money is a major motivating factor, especially within the Nigeria context. This finding was also supported by Adebisi (1995) in his study titled "Productivity as a function of Incentive System". Thus, the study revealed that the differences in the culture of employees do not translate into differences in what factor motivates them to put in their best at work. We therefore conclude based on this finding that motivation is independent of culture but depends on individuals' present *physiological* and *psychological* needs.

Perhaps, the most interesting revelation from this study is that culture was found to have no significant relationship with the work orientation of the employees. This is because most of our respondents indicated that they are working to make a living, only few of them signified that they work because working is their lives while fewer work to enjoy social interaction or to ensure self-actualization. As may be expected, most of our respondents in this study indicated that they are working to meet their basic daily needs and to provide for their families. A minute portion of the respondents signified that they are working for the fun of it, to enjoy social interaction or for self-actualization. It is instructive however to stress the fact that this finding is not peculiar to the Nigerian employees' because findings have revealed that largest proportion of workers, the World over, do so mostly to make a living and make life better for themselves and family members.

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