The Behavioural Implications of theCurrentReward System for Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: Organizations are formed to realize goals. Consequently, efforts of organization members are intended to be directed at achieving organizational goals. However, the extent to which organization members will contribute efforts to organizational goal realization is contingent, to a very degree, on the rewards attached to goal-directed efforts or behavior. Research has shown that behavior that is rewarded is the behavior that is more likely to be repeated. Thus, in organizations, the extent to which rewards are linked to goal achievement will have implications for the display of goal-directed behaviors. This study attempts to ascertain the behaviourial implications of the current reward system for academics in Nigerian universities. The study reveals that a majority of Nigerian academics believe that teaching is the primary purpose for establishing a university, but that the reward system is linked more to research and publications rather than teaching. They then submitted that they would rather spend more of their time doing research than teaching, a trend which is capable of jeopardizing effectiveness in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Academic staff, goals, reward system

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are established for realizing goals. It is expected thus, that whatever reward organization members receive must relate to the extent to which they are contributing, or have contributed towards the realization of the goals of the organization. In essence, organizational members ought to be rewarded to the extent to which their actual work behaviour corresponds to the expected work behaviour necessary to accomplish the stated goals of the organization. Through the application of rewards, organizations ought to be able to reward the behavior they desire and discourage undesirable behavior by ensuring that only desirable behavior is rewarded. Organization member will be thus drawn, to exhibit behaviors or engage mainly in those activities that are rewarded by the organization irrespective of whether or not such behaviors are goal directed. Those who design reward systems in organizations, without doubt, take into cognizance, the goal or goals of the organization, and the effort that organization members contribute towards its/their actualization. It will thus be expected, that rewards will be contingent upon an individual's contribution to organizational goal attainment. However, evidence exists of the prevalence of reward systems in organizations that reward behavior A while hoping that organizational members will be engaged in B (Kerr, 1995). The very behavior that the organization expects from employees may go largely unrewarded, leaving employees to direct their efforts towards other activities that may not be the primary objective of the organization, but which is rewarded by the organization. This is the form of reward system that Kerr (1995) has described as fouled up." A good example is an organization that emphasizes teamwork but rewards individual performance.

In Nigeria, there have been agitations for improved conditions of service for academic staff in Nigerian universities. The most recent of such agitations resulted in a strike that lasted for four months in 2009. Apart from agitations for improvement in the monetary package for academic staff, there have also been indications that the criteria for advancement on the job do not encourage the performance of the primary function for establishing universities. The suggestion is that the reward system (in terms of advancement on the job) for academic staff in Nigerian universities may be "fouled up." This study was thus intended to find out the extent to which the reward system (in terms of advancement on the job) for academic staff in Nigerian relates to the objective of establishing a university and the implications of such reward system for their behavior. The study shows that the current reward system in Nigerian universities does not take into consideration, teaching, which is considered to be the primary goal for establishing a university. Thus academics would rather dedicate their time to research/publications, which the reward system seems to emphasize than teaching.

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RELEVANT LITERATURE

The nature of organizational goals: Organizations are purposeful collection of people who join together to achieve goals. The goals of an organization are the reasons for its existence and the activities of the organization are directed to their attainment. The goals of an organization will determine the nature of its inputs and outputs, the series of activities through which the outputs are achieved, and interaction with its external environment (Mullins, 2002). The idea of organizational goals is a complex one (Hodge *et al.*, 1996). Organizations may have more than one goal; some clear and some ambiguous; and some that may even contradict each other. Thus, the concept of goal attainment or organizational effectiveness is even of a more complex abstraction. A goal is a future expectation; some desired future state (Mullins, 2002). It is a desired future state that an organization attempts to realize (Daft, 1998). Goals are statements that identify an endpoint or condition that an organization wishes to achieve (Hodge *et al.*, 1996). If a goal is a future state that the organization is seeking to bring about, it then follows that where goals are clear, its attainment becomes the focal point of organization members and it will be expected that organization efforts and resources will be directed at reaching them. One of the purposes of goals is that it serves as motivation for employees. The achievement of goals do not just happen because goals are set rather, it is the presence of goals that encourage workers to do those things. However, the extent to which organizational members will direct their efforts at goal attainment will depend among others things, on the clarity of the goals, and the extent to which the employee's goal directed behavior is rewarded by the organization. Where goals are unclear, or largely immeasurable even to those who design them, tying rewards to goals becomes an almost impossible task, ab initio. Thus, behaviors that are rewarded by the organization may largely be goals unrelated and even worse, will be the seeming bewilderment on the part of management on why they cannot get organizational members to contribute efforts towards the attainment of the 'goals' of the organization.

Some literature on reward and its implications for behavior: According to Kerr (1995), "…most organisms seek information concerning what activities are rewarded and they seek to do (or pretend to do) those things, often to the virtual exclusion of other activities not rewarded." Behavior is contingent upon presentation of rewards, delivery of punishment, or withholding of rewards (Ivancevich, 2004). The relationship between pay and performance though controversial is established in literature, see for example Adams *et al.* (2005), Bebchuk and Fried (2004), Bebchuk and Grinstein (2005), Jansen and Murphy (1990), Nicholas and Subramanian (2008), Shields (2005), and Elaurant (2008). In organizations, behaviors that are likely to be repeated are behaviors that are rewarded irrespective of whether or not such behaviors align with the goals the organization is seeking to achieve. Some of the theories that relate rewards to behavior are Thorndike's Law of Effect and Skinner's Operant Conditioning Model. According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2004), Edward L. Thorndike, writing in the early 1900 observed in his psychology laboratory that a cat would behave randomly and widely when placed in a small box with a secret trip lever that opened a door. However, once the cat accidentally trips the lever and escaped, the animal would go straight to the lever when placed back in the box. Based on this observation, Thorndike formulated his famous law of effect, which states that the consequences of a response determine whether the response will be repeated in the future. Similarly, Skinner, according to Kreitner and Kinicki (2004), refined Thorndike's conclusion that behavior is controlled by its consequences. In his 1938 classic, The Behavior of Organisms, Skinner drew an important distinction between two types of behavior: respondent and operant behavior. While he labelled unlearned reflexes, or stimulus-response connections, respondent behavior, he attached the label operant behavior to behavior that is learned when one 'operates on" the environment to produce desired consequences (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004). Skinner experimented with a rat in a cage with a trip lever. In the first instance, while wondering about in the cage, the rat accidentally tripped on the lever and a food pellet drops. Subsequently, the rat learned that depressing the lever rewarded it with food, and hence would depress the lever whenever it wanted food. After some time, Skinner removed the food pellet and connected electricity to the lever. What the rat got for depressing the lever subsequently became an electric shock instead of the food pellet. Consequently, the rat learnt to avoid the lever. Thus, Skinner concluded that the probability that certain behavior will be repeated is contingent upon the reinforcement that comes to the individual for behaving in such manner.

Contingent consequences, according to Skinner's operant theory, control behavior in four ways: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment and extinction. Positive reinforcement is the process of strengthening (increasing the frequency of) a behavior by contingently presenting something pleasing. Negative reinforcement on the other hand, is the process of

strengthening behavior by contingently withdrawing something displeasing. Punishment is the process of weakening behavior through either the contingent presentation of something displeasing or the contingent withdrawal of something positive. Extinction is the weakening of behavior by ignoring it or making sure it is not reinforced. For Skinner, it is thus possible for organizations to elicit desirable behavior from their members and discourage undesirable behavior, by simply rewarding or positively reinforcing desirable behavior or punishing, or at least refusing to reward undesirable behavior.

The implication of these reinforcement theories for motivation, and hence behavior, is that organizational members will be motivated to exhibit certain behaviors or engage in certain activities only if such behaviors or activities are positively reinforced. Behaviors that are expected from organization members by the organization but which go largely unrewarded may be perceived by organization members as secondary, and hence, deserving less attention. Where rewards are located in areas other than those that are related to organizational goal attainment, members of the organization will be motivated to concentrate energies in those areas, and it will not matter if the goals of the organization are not achieved. Yusrizal (2009) has attempted to address this problem in Malaysia by developing an assessment package.

METHODOLOGY

The research site is one of the largest tertiary institutions in Nigeria and has well over 800 academic staff. A purposeful sample of 50 respondents drawn from all ranks within the academic staff cadre (Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer I and II, Assistant Lecturer, and Graduate Assistant) was chosen. The questionnaire was used as the data gathering instrument. Out of the 50 questionnaires administered, 32 questionnaires, representing 64% were returned and found usable. The data was analysed using simple percentages and content analysis.

The data: The data is presented for each of the research objectives in the study, namely; Nigerian universities expectations from academic staff; the criterion for rewarding academic staff in Nigerian universities; the extent to which the current reward system for academic staff in Nigeria matches the primary goal of establishing a university; the behaviourial implications of the current reward system for academic staff in Nigerian universities; and the constituents of appropriate reward system for academics in Nigerian universities.

Table 1: The objective(s) for establishing a university

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Teaching	27	84.4	84.4	84.4
Research	5	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: The University's expectation from academics

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Teaching	16	50.0	50.0	50
Research	16	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Which activity is more important and deserves more of your time?

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Teaching	16	50.0	50.0	50
Research	16	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Nigerian universities' expectations from academic staff: To obtain information on what universities expect from their academic staff, and by implication, the activity that academic staff considers important, the following questions were asked.

- What is/ are the objective(s) for establishing a university?
- Which activity, in relation to the goal of establishing a university, does the university expects you to put most of your effort in?
- Which activity do you consider more important, and hence deserves more of your time?

As Table 1 shows, 27 respondents, representing 84.4% of the total number of respondents ranked teaching before research and community service as the primary objective for establishing a university while 5 respondents or 15.6% believe that the primary objective of a university is research followed by teaching, and then community service.

Table 2 shows that 16 respondents, representing 50% of the total number of respondents stated that the university expects academic staff to teach, while an equal number and percentage also stated that the university expects academic staff to conduct research. On the activity that academic staff considers important and hence deserving more of their time, Table 3 shows that the respondents were equally divided as in Table 2 on the choice of teaching and research.

The criterion for rewarding academic staff in Nigerian universities: A single question requesting the respondents

Table 4: Criterion for rewarding academics

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Teaching	4	12.5	12.5	12.5
Research	28	87.5	87.5	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Current reward system matches the primary goal of establishing a university

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Strongly agree	3	9.4	9.4	9.4
Slightly agree	11	34.4	34.4	43.8
Not sure	2	6.2	6.2	50.0
Slightly disagree	5	15.6	15.6	65.6
Strongly disagree	11	34.4	34.4	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: How do you apportion time between teaching and research?

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
No value	2	6.2	6.2	6.2
2:4	6	18.8	18.8	25.0
3:3	5	15.6	15.6	40.0
4:2	15	46.9	46.9	87.5
5:1	4	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: How much current reward system affects time apportionment

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
No value	1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Very much	11	34.4	34.4	37.5
Much	6	18.8	18.8	56.2
Not sure	3	9.4	9.4	65.6
A little	8	25	25	90.6
Very little	3	9.4	9.4	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

to state the criterion used for rewarding academics in Nigerian universities was used to operationalise this variable. The analysis as shown in Table 4 reveals that 28 of the respondents, representing 87.5% stated that research was the criterion used for rewarding academic staff in Nigerian universities, while 4 respondents, representing 12.5% stated that teaching was the criterion used for rewarding academic staff in Nigerian universities.

The extent to which the reward system for academic staff in Nigeria matches the primary goal of establishing a university: A single Likert-type question asking the respondents to state the extent to which they agree that the current reward system for academic staff in Nigeria matches the goal of establishing a university was used to operationalise this variable. The analysis as contained in Table 5 shows that 3 of the respondents representing 9.4% of the total number of respondents said they strongly agree to the statement. 11 respondents, representing 34.4% said they slightly agree, while 2 respondents, representing 6.2% said they were not sure. 5 of the respondents, representing 15.6% said they slightly agree, while 11 respondents, representing 34.4% said they strongly disagree.

The behavioural implications of the current reward system for academic staff in Nigerian universities: Rewards have implications for motivation, and hence, behaviour. The four questions that were used to operationalise this variable were:

- How do you apportion your time between teaching and research using a ratio of 1 to 6?
- How much does the current reward system influence how you apportion time between teaching and research?
- How much does the current reward system motivate academics to teach?

- Based on the current reward system, which activity between teaching and research would you rather expend energy on?

On how time is apportioned between teaching and research, the analysis in Table 6 reveals that 6 of the respondents, representing 18.8% of the total number of respondents said they apportioned their time between teaching and research on a ratio of 2:4, respectively. 5 respondents, representing 15.6% said their time was equally apportioned between teaching and research on a ratio of 3:3. 15 respondents, representing 46.9% said they apportioned their time on a ratio of 4:2.4 respondents, representing 12.5% said they apportioned their time on a ratio of 5:1. 2 of the respondents, representing 6.2% did not respond to this question.

On the extent to which the current reward system affects how the respondents apportion time between teaching and research, Table 7 shows that 11 of the respondents, representing 34.4% stated that the manner in which they apportion time between teaching and research is very much influenced by the current reward system. 6 of the respondents, representing 18.8% said that the current reward system affects much of how their time is apportioned between teaching and research, while 3 respondents, representing 9.4% said they were not sure. 8 of the respondents, representing 25% said a little influence is what the current rewards system bears on how they apportion time between teaching and research, while 3 respondents, representing 9.4% said the influence was very little. 1 respondent did not answer this question.

On the extent to which the current reward system motivate academic staff to teach, 4 of the respondents, representing 12.5% said academic staff were very much motivated to teach by the current reward system, while 6 respondents, representing 18.8% agree that the motivation

Table 8: How much current reward system motivate academic staff

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
No value	1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Very much	4	12.5	12.5	15.6
Much	6	18.8	18.8	34.4
A little	11	34.4	34.4	68.8
Very little10	31	.2	31.2	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: Based on the current reward system, you would rather expend more effort on-

	Frequency	(%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Teaching	4	12.5	12.5	12.5
Research	28	87.5	87.5	100.0
Total	32	100.0	100.0	

was much (Table 8). 11 of the respondents, representing 34.4% said academic staff were a little motivated to teach based on the current reward system, while 10 respondents, representing 31.2% said the motivation was very little.

On which activity respondents would rather expend more effort on based on the current reward system, Table 9 shows that 4 of the respondents, representing 12.5% said they would rather expend more effort on teaching, while 28 respondents, representing 87.5% said they would rather expend their effort on research.

The constituents of an appropriate reward system for academics in Nigerian universities: In operationalising this variable, the respondents were first asked to give their evaluation of the current reward system for academics in Nigerian universities, and secondly, to state what in their opinion, constitute appropriate criteria for rewarding academics in Nigerian universities. The responses from this section were content analysed and presented below.

A good number of the respondents (65.6%) stated that the current reward system for academics in Nigeria was poor. 42.6% of these respondents added that the current reward system was inconsistent with the purpose of establishing a university. 15.6% of the respondents said that the current reward system was fairly encouraging. 2 respondents pointed out that the reward system was in crisis. In fact one of them said "the whole thing is a paradox". One of the respondents also said that the reward system was political.

On what should constitute appropriate criteria for rewarding academics in Nigeria, the analysis shows that 50.0% of the respondents stated that teaching and research should be equally weighted. Another 9.4% stated that the quality of teaching should be given more weight than research, while a similar percentage said that the criteria used in developed nations should be adopted. 2 respondents believe that the criteria used in the public

should be adopted. Contributions to the goal of establishing a university; length of service; quality of research and publications, were each separately identified by 1 respondent each as the appropriate criterion for rewarding academics in Nigerian universities.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

A clear understanding of the goal of an organisation enables employees to direct their efforts towards its realisation. Goals serve as a guide to action (Daft, 1998). The result of the analysis shows that, most importantly, most academic believe that teaching is the primary objective for establishing a university, but the research and community service are also important. Despite this belief about the primary objective for establishing a university, it appears that Nigerian academics are divided on what the university expects from them. While some believe that the university expects them to teach, others believe that the university expects them to conduct research. Consequently thus, some academic believe that teaching deserves more of their time, while other believe that research should take the lion's share of their time. If teaching is considered to be the primary objective for establishing a university, the belief by a good number of academics that research deserves more of their time can only find explanation in something else other than aligning with the primary goal of establishing a university. The result from the analysis of the criterion for rewarding academics in Nigeria universities provides an explanation as to why some academics believe that research deserves more of their time. The result of the analysis shows that academics generally believe that research (publications) was the major criterion for earning reward (advancing on the job) in the university. Reward is a major determinant of what forms of behaviour are exhibited by individuals (Singh, 2009; Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004; Kerr, 1995). Where rewards are not linked to organisational goals, employees may not be fully committed to the goals (Daft, 1998; Griffin, 1999). A majority of academics also believe that the current reward system does not match the primary goal of establishing a university because a majority of them are constrained to apportion more time to teaching as against conducting research, but largely rewarded for research and publications. This explains the reason why most academic staff submitted that the current reward system offers very little motivation to teach. It is therefore not far-fetched that a majority of academics said they would rather expend more effort on research instead of teaching. The behaviour exhibited or activities engaged in will obviously be skewed in the direction where the reward is coming from. Thus, a majority of academics think that

appropriate reward criteria will be one that weighs teaching equally as research publications.

CONCLUSION

One of the major purposes of reward is to motivate organization members to contribute efforts towards the realization of the goals of the organization. This is premised on the thesis that behavior that is rewarded is more likely to be repeated, while unrewarded behaviors are likely to cease. Reward, thus becomes a means for directing the behavior of organization members towards organizationally desirable ends. It follows thus, that wherever the reward is located, that is where members will direct their efforts. The current reward system for academic staff in Nigerian universities, to a very large extent, does not align with the goal of teaching. If the trend continues, and academics have their way by devoting more of their time to research, Nigerian universities may very well soon be competing with notable research institutions across the globe, rather than imparting knowledge through teaching. While this study has looked at the behaviourial implications of the current reward system in Nigerian organizations and has offered us some insights, the smallness of the sample size may yet a generalization. We therefore suggest that the investigation should be carried out with a larger sample size across major universities in Nigeria so as to ascertain the extent to findings from this study can be generalized.

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