

Relational Virtues and Organizational Health in the Nigerian Aviation Sector

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Abstract

Beyond management of tangible organizational asset as a basis for attaining goals, there is a renewal attention at some intangible assets that will help to strengthen the competitive ability of firms. The imperative need for this is further heightened by the failing state of health of firms due to increased competition across sectors. In this vein this study investigated the relationship between relational virtues and organizational health of the Nigerian Aviation sector. In order to conduct this investigation, the relationship virtue construct is examined with its components as trust, integrity, reciprocity and esprit de corps. The study primarily relied on the questionnaire instrument for generating data. The data generated were analyzed and the results showed that relational virtues strongly relates with organizational health in the studied sector. We concluded that such intangible relational virtues like trust, integrity reciprocity and esprit de corps are strong predictors of organizational health. It has been recommended that evolving the culture of emphasizing relational virtues should be considered strategic to position the aviation sector in line with desired organizational and national goals.

Keywords: trust, integrity, reciprocity, esprit de corps, organizational health

1. Introduction

In a changing and increasingly competitive environment, firms must constantly search for germane and strategic values inherent in organizational life and translate them into improved performance results. Successful companies today are those who are able to transform shared inherent socio-psychological norms into customer cherished values (Olotu, 2009; Asiegbo, 2010). They aggressively use this to capture new opportunities and improve on profitability and ensure that their market share is sustained and maintained through relational practices. At its core, relational virtues create value by fostering connection between individuals. Lesser (2006) noted that relational virtues results from social relationships which exist within the internal and external environment of firms and are capable of creating affection guided bond that is value added on organizational efforts at goals.

The thesis on relational virtues as been central to organizational survival and corporate health has been thrown up strongly Fagbenro (2004). He espoused on the subject that the bane of business failures amongst indigenous firms is their sharp business practices that do not attract customers' confidence at the external level and diminish manager subordinate confidence which in turn diminish valued commitment asset of employees. In extension he linked his argument to labour management issues that have trailed most work organization as product of poor relational virtues which are vital for the health of organizations.

We are aware of the geared interest on the relational virtues of the firm especially in the private sector driven context with its associated competitive tendencies. In such environment, the relational climate amongst work members will undoubtedly stimulate a mix for vitality. Millwright (2008) had explored and validated some dimension of relational virtues which we believe are required for value-added operations and improved corporate health. The Nigerian Aviation sector is fast witnessing several revolutionary actions aimed at repositioning and building customer confidence. Ultimately, the goal is an efficient and quality service delivery sector. The many inefficiencies that characterize evolving sectors leaves us with fears of how quality oriented are the relational concerns of the sector which is expected to deliver high premium and delicate services from pre-take offs, take-off and arrival operations.

Extant literature provides some evidence on the link between vital relational characteristics and performance of organization (Millwright, 2008; Benala, 2009). It has also emphasized socio-psychological underpinning that guarantee employee affective commitment to work goals. All these notwithstanding, we cannot sufficiently lay claim to the universal application as sectoral uniqueness cannot be undermined therefore this study is set to examine the influence of some relational virtues on the corporate health of the aviation sector in Nigeria.

As earlier noted, Millwright (2008) had explored relational virtues with such dimensions as employee trust, community, and reciprocity. In this study the need to expand on the empirical referents of the construct is considered therefore we examined it in terms of trust, integrity, reciprocity, and esprit de corps.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Trust

Trust is a relational virtue that has been highly rated in extant basic psychology literature on its ability to create a reliable and confident climate whenever behaviour is interpreted to mean trust (Emego, 2008). There is also a realization of the fact that it is a multidimensional construct that ordinarily has been defined in relation with context, relational, tasks, situations and those concerned (Hardly & Gruth, 1989), though this conceptual variegation exist, a frequently used concept stresses interpersonal relationships and a “willingness to be vulnerable” (Mayer, et al., 1995) based on the belief that the leader is proficient, concerned, and dependable. Hence when trust declines, expectedly, people exhibits a lack-lustre approach to risk taking and commitment will be withdrawn, demanding greater defenses against possibility of betrayal and increasingly insist on costly means to defend their interest. Millwright (2011) has maintained that trust is an essential ingredient in the relationships that exist at all levels of work. The author further noted that trust exceeds organizational boundaries to customers. Their patronage result from the degree they can trust the organization through their ethical and social responsibility action. Philemon (2006) had described trust as a competitive dosage that incubates reliance and employee support that needs to acquire market. Trust determines organizational character, influence structure, control mechanism, communication, commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour (Zeffane & Connell, 2003). Olotu (2010) reiterated that these are essential ingredients that strengthen the organization and leverage its disposition to a healthy state that can compete in her environment. Based on the foregoing, we hypothesise thus;

Ho₁: Trust does not significantly relate with organizational health.

2.2 Integrity

Integrity in leadership has attracted much concern both in secular and organization discourse. This is because, the integrity concept connote an intricate invisible but expressed phenomenal behaviour that constitutes the basis for continued and sustained relationship among members of same group. Majesu (2010) had argued that integrity provides the enthusiasm for a glued relationship and brew all life time confidence on leaders by subordinates. Though integrity has not had a common definition in literature, there is a seeming consensus that expresses it as a cherished value that enjoys ethical prescription. It is however embedded within the moral relational tradition in which perception of appropriate behaviour varies across culture. Again, while this cultural perceptual variation thesis holds, it does not rob-off the moral potency that makes integrity a desirable relational asset that will add value to the social relationship between managers and subordinates on the one hand and the organization and her customers on the other hand (Solomon, 2009; James & Cornes, 2010; Rollings, 2010; Laurinho, 2012). Further, we are also inclined to creating a path for clear understanding of the importance of integrity as an asset therefore in this study we will rely on the definition given by Alloy (2008) that integrity is not a perceived feeling but an actioned behaviour that is positively appreciated and capable of instilling affection from all affected. In addition, Muoghere (2010) argued that ethical compliance among a workforce is a sure means of showing that integrity is inherent. His analytical focus no doubt offers a platform that actually directs the understanding of integrity. Murphy (2011) had also broadened the integrity discourse through his analytical perspective that describe proactive managers as those that have concern for how their integrity virtue is viewed by their subordinates and Chief Executives. He had argued that managers with high integrity attitude are voracious in seeking information about their business environment and that provides the basis for being proactive to maintain and sustain the vitality that survives the organization. Joe (2008) noted that the organizational competitiveness requires that firms should show commitment to ethics which are strategic guides for both internal operations and external relationship. From the position advanced, we hypotheise thus;

Ho₂: Integrity does not significantly relate with organizational health.

2.3 Reciprocity

Extant literature had scarcely attended to reciprocity but there is however a conceptual link that had often associated it with social exchange theoretical positions (Dess, 2001; Kramer, 2005; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). The gamut of ideas linking it with the exchange belief reiterates the thinking that reciprocity is a candid and friendly exchange borne out of genuine feeling of satisfaction. It confers expectations that are characteristically that of cooperation and outright willingness to show committed return for an action that was considered satisfactory. Alaska (2009) argued that reciprocity creates the cohesiveness and group confidence required for sustained bonding among all. Customers have a candid expectation of the ethical commitment to quality service delivery from organizations. This expectation stimulates in turn continued patronage. The sustainability of patronage results from reciprocal gestures in terms of quality product offers and relational attitude that is characteristically empathic. Reciprocity has a psycho formation that is capable of triggering emotional feeling which also suggests that were reciprocity is not phenomenally considered as a relationship bonding element either at the organizational level or other relationship with the external stakeholders, it tends to defy social exchange conceptualizations. The underlying implication according to Villazer (2009) is that the potent beneficial outcomes in the relationship depletes and are likely to create an entropic milieu that diminishes the ability to attain goals. Garaneer (2011) had espoused that a reciprocal gesture is fundamental as a social behaviour both at the organizational level and individual employees' levels to attract commitment needed for environmental positioning. These positions notwithstanding, there is no concrete empirical evidence that relates reciprocity with the needed vitality to stay competitive. Considering this, the various attempts at vitality of health of firms may not be wholesomely achieved therefore we hypothesize as follows:

Ho₃: Reciprocity as a virtue does not relate significantly with organizational health.

2.4 Esprit De Corps

The concept of esprit de corps though has been initiated in early management works, there is a renewed momentum based on the relational theories that are fast evolving as a means of involving all organizational internal and external constituents to achieve desired goals. Nashra (2000) espoused that esprit de corps creates sense of communalism that stem loyalty. Houston (2000) had also noted that esprit de corps imprints in the minds of organizational members and other stakeholders alike that the organization is more important than the individual. An emphatic dimension on esprit de corps is found in the long standing position of Little et al (1958) where it is defined as "a spirit of jealous regard for the corporate honour and interests, and for those of each member of the body as belonging to it". Effiong and Basha (2003) Spencer (2005) espoused that esprit de corps instills among group members the essence of membership thereby helping to build confidence that transcend mere commitment to a more passionate behaviour that sustains and reinforce group objectives.

The different positions are tailored towards showing a friendly climate that will be favourable to commitment to organizational goals. It also implies the existence of shared bond between the internal members of the organization and the external constituent who for some obvious reasons are satisfied with the organization. These views though plausible in terms of member relational attitude as desired to achieve organizational goals, the domain of empiricism in relation to how such a valuable virtue relates with performance is scantily explored. Again much of the works on esprit de corps and performance are largely domiciled in military and para-military domain (Barrister, 1994; Marzilliano, 1998; Alvesson, 2000; Metcalfe & Dick, 2001), a situation that has almost left ownership of the construct to these areas. Our thinking is that considering the composition of the construct, it will add value to the competitive ability of the firms in terms of providing the vitality needed. Therefore, we hypothesize thus:

Ho₄: Esprit de corps as a relational virtue does not relate significantly with organizational health.

2.5 Organizational Health

There is fast developing body of knowledge on health of organizations. (Olukeni, 2005; Adisa, 2005, Jaja & Lucille, 2008; Chris & Chris, 2009). The views expressed by these authors are robustly in line with the vitality that organizations will strategically acquire to achieve their goals. Nashba (2007) clearly linked the theory or organizational health to that which can be described in terms of performance. It reiterated that a healthy firm is that which had overtime achieved its strategic contents in terms of goals and objective. In another instance, Phill (2007) had argued that the state of health provides the platform for long term performance assessment which means that it is a means-end relationship. Kormane (2009) espoused that the thinking on health of firm can only be properly conceptualized if viewed in the light of performance parameter which if objectively viewed through replicates or showcase the state of the health. The authors view would ordinarily suggest that any omnibus measure of performance that meets organization owners desired target in terms of goals would have stated the

health position of firms. Perfney (2009) theorized that a firm is healthy when it has the capabilities to create value for its buyer and agile enough to proactively respond to environment changes. Organizational health emphasizes the intention to achieve optimal performance. This implies a causal relationship between organization health and organizational performance. This seeming relationship is reported in many strategic research works. Olukemi (2010) pointed out that organizational health grows fundamentally through strategic organizational and employee behavioural actions to position the organization for competitiveness. In other words, the basic characteristics of a healthy organization are those that strengthen it and channel performance outcomes.

3. Data Collection

For this study, the target firms were initially contacted through e-mail which was sent to a pre-arranged firm co-ordinator for the research. A week after this e-mail, a personalized letter and a printed copy of the questionnaire was sent to all participants through the research coordinator who ensured delivery. Two weeks later, the research coordinator also went back to ensure that they are retrieved after we had sent an e-mail as a reminder through the firm coordinators.

4. Measures

The relational virtues were measured adapting Fagbemo (2004), Lesser (2006) 30 items scales. These scales have shown high reliability in the work of Benala (2010) with a reliability alpha value of 0.92.

The organizational health questionnaire (OHQ) Kormane (2009) was used to assess organizational health. The scale has been supported in previous research as reliable with a co-efficient alpha of 0.86 (Alagah, 2012). Changes based on focus group and expert feedback were made to this scale including deletion of two items and rewording of two items. This made it an 8 item scale measured on 5 point Likerts type scale anchored by 1-‘Strongly disagree’ to 5-‘Strongly Agree’. Based on the alteration and rewording resulting from the experts opinion exploratory factor analysis was conducted in order to statistically assess the construct validity of the measurement instrument. It was prudent to assess the construct validity of the instrument since the original, pre-existing reliable and valid scales were revised as a response to feedback provided by the expert panel. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are reported in table 1.

Table 1. Results on exploratory factor analysis for relational virtues

	Dimensions	No of Item	Factor Loading
1.	Trust	7	0.74
2.	Reciprocity	7	0.92
3.	Integrity	8	0.77
4.	Esprit de corps	7	0.81

5. Results

The results of the Pearson statistic showed the relationship that exists between the different components of relationship virtues and organizational health in the studied sector. The stated hypotheses Ho₁; Ho₂; Ho₃ and Ho₄ were rejected considering the r values. Trust (r = 0.763; P <0.01); integrity (r = 0.582; p <0.01) reciprocity (r = 0.562; p <0.01) and Esprit de Corps (r = 0.738; p <0.01). The results attest to a statistically strong relationship between the variables examined. The multiple regression outcomes have equally emphasized the relationship between relational virtues and organizational health of the sector. The predictive ability of our model expressed by R² is .737 which means that 73.7% of the behaviour of organizational health is explained by the relational virtues variables and in predicting organizational health, trust is found to be the most important component with (β =.406; t=4.041) and this is followed by esprit de corps (β =.200; t=2.113) as reported in table 3c.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and correlation

Scales	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1. Trust	1.0**					3.9	0.68
2. Integrity	.687**	1.0				4.4	0.64
3. Reciprocity	.596**	.609**	1.0			3.4	0.73
4. Esprit de corps	.660**	.554*	.560**	1.0		3.7	0.80
5. Organizational Health	.763**	.582**	.562*	.738**	1.0	3.7	0.77

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3a. Multiple regression model summary showing the relationship between relational virtues and organizational health

Model	R	R ²	Adj R ²	Std Error of Estimate	F Change	Sig
1.	.858	.737	.731	1.039	136.509	0.000

a. Predictor (Constant), trust, integrity, reciprocity, esprit de corps;

b. Dependent variable: organizational health.

Table 3b. Anova (B)

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	f	Sig
1. Regression	22.997	4	22.997		
Residual	105.736	21	.454	50.67	.000
Total	128.733	217			

a. Predictor (Constant), trust, integrity, reciprocity, esprit de corps.

b. Dependent variable: organizational health.

Table 3c. Coefficients (a)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
1. (Constant)	-166	.219			
Trust	.567	.140	.406	4.041	.000
Integrity	.151	.162	.094	0.885	.000
Reciprocity	.396	.440	.028	0.282	.000
Esprit de Corps	.104	.125	.200	2.113	.000

a. Dependent variable: organizational health.

6. Discussion

The study has the primary objective of investigating the extent to which the relational virtues of firms relates with organizational health. The results of the study are indicative of the strength of the relationship. From the result, trust and esprit de corps had shown dominantly as virtues that firms in the aviation sector should have for functional health. The beta values for the two components of the relational virtue construct emphasized their weight. Faja (2013) emphasized trust and esprit de corps as central to the effective performance of boards of parastatals. In this study though we have not measured performance, Faja (2013) had argued that healthy firms evolve capabilities that help them perform sustainably within their environment. In line with this position our study findings on these relational virtue dimensions agree with the author's position. The finding of the study corroborates this position. Further, esprit de corps which was also noted in the works of Bilanyo (2010) as the emotional glue for cohesiveness and all-time friendly work climate also showed strong. Infact, Manana (2009) in his work on knowledge sharing had highlighted the fact that esprit de corps is required to link the organizational and individual bond for creativeness resulting from knowledge commonly shared. Our study findings are in consonance with these extant positions. If the knowledge sharing position is anything to go by, it is an attempt at strengthening the organization for competitiveness which suggests an attempt at improving on the health. The attainment of this requires a climate of friendliness were all work members relates closely with themselves and on the long-run instigate the emotional tact to offer healthy work operations. Essentially, firms with good relational virtues will command an all time employee and stakeholders confidence that serves a competitive edge. This is empirically emphasized from the multiple regression result having a high R square showing that much of the behaviour of the criterion variable results from the predictor's influence.

7. Conclusion/Policy Implications

This study primarily examined the nature of association between relational virtues and organizational health. In order to achieve this, primary research questions and hypotheses were made and analysed. The outcomes of the analyzed data have certainly proved a valid relationship between the examined variables. It showed that

relational virtues are elements for strengthening organizational health in term of cohesiveness, learning and commitment. In conclusion, relational virtue in the form of trust, reciprocity, integrity and esprit de corps are needed for organizational health. It is our candid belief that these relational virtues will definitely spur organizational outcomes that might be meaningful for the attainment of the overall goal of the aviation sector. Specifically, it is hoped that managers/operators in the sector will make good use of the strategic advantages of relational virtues as organizational assets capable of leveraging the evolving level of competitiveness based on the very recent transformational economic policies and globalization challenges towards developing new markets. Government effort at making the sector viable and reliable considering her strategic roles in the economy can be built around relational virtues that are cherished by employees and other stakeholders alike thereby improving the health of the sector. In this way it is believed that they will have the dynamic competitive capability. From the study findings, managers and subordinates alike are expected to exhibit high sense of trust on themselves through rightly expressed attitude and behaviour that attract confidence of all work place members. In so doing other external stakeholders like customers are also made to relate with confidence. The integrity component of relational virtues is important for some measure of discipline and good conduct that work members can rely on as strength for keeping fate with the goals of the organization. Managers from the study findings should encourage friendliness amongst all as required by esprit de corps virtue. This is to enhance the bonding required amongst all work members to function together as a team towards, achieving organizational goal. The management can through the findings of the study evolve rules and regulations that would ensure a relational climate that strengthen operational confidence and cohesiveness.

8. Suggested for Further Studies

We are aware that extant literature on relational virtues at work is quite expansive and robust in terms of the described components of the construct. Therefore, further studies should investigate the relationship of other components aside the ones covered in this study with employee quality of work life. This will help to locate the discourse at the micro domain that will help shapen behaviour of strategic organizational members. There is also the need to attempt the operationalization of the dimensions of the relational virtues amongst publicly owned organization and how they relate with their performance.

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