

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, WORK ETHICS AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This study discusses the interplay between corporate governance, work ethics and service delivery in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions. In this paper, a conceptual framework was developed, which explains the interplays between corporate governance, work ethics and service delivery, with the help of a schematic model. The meaning of corporate governance was discussed in detail. The meaning of work ethics was also discussed in detail. The meaning of service delivery was further discussed in detail. The interplay between corporate governance, work ethics and service delivery in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions was later discussed theoretical. One of the recommendations, among others, proffered in the paper is that leaders in Nigerian HEIs should endeavor to be people-centered. This is because people (both employees and students) represent a central place in the HEIs and the focus is on service rather than product, and therefore the students should be seen as raw materials.

Keywords: *Corporate Governance, Higher Education Institutions, Nigeria, Service Delivery, Work Ethics.*

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are tertiary institutions available to individuals after secondary education. Examples of HEIs are universities; polytechnics, monotechnics; colleges of education; including those institutions offering corresponding courses like innovation enterprise institutions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013). These HEIs (especially universities) are currently managed and funded by governments, private individuals and general overseers of faith-based organizations such as Redeemer's University, Benson Idahosa University, Covenant University, Landmark University, and many others.

The FRN in its education policy document (Section 8) indicated that the goals of HEIs shall be to: (a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; (2) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; (3) develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments; (4) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; (5) promote and encourage scholarship and community service; (6) forge and cement national unity; and (7) promote national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2013). The education policy document of Nigeria further pointed out that the HEIs shall pursue these goals through: quality student intake; quality teaching and learning; research and development; high standards in quality of facilities, services and resources; staff welfare and development programmes; provision of a more practical-based curriculum relevant to the need of labour market; generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy.

From the above goals, it is obvious that HEIs have a salient role in producing students who

possesses the requisite skills and knowledge to become gainfully employed and engage in lifelong learning tasks immediately after graduation. Despite its potential mission, as exemplified above, the HEIs still experience series of challenges ranging from poor infrastructures (Okebukola, 2002), mass exodus of many brilliant lecturers (Akinnaso, 2012), inadequate funding and socio-political generated tensions (Olujuwon, 2004), improper planning and management, lack of inclusive education, irrelevant curricula to industrial needs, inadequate commitment on the part of students and teachers (Adegoke, 2017). Akinnaso (2012) argued that it is not poor funding alone that has contributed to the present state of underachievement, but rather, the anti-intellectual stance of corrupt and valueless Federal and State Governments since the days of the military administration has also eroded ethical values and academic standards in HEIs. Akinnaso (2012) contended that it is a combination of these issues and problems that led to the weakening of HEIs such as university administration; ineffective teaching and learning outcomes; diminishing research and consultancy traditions; and questionable service to the community. Alubo (2014) also lamented on the spate of poor record keeping in HEIs when he said; “in most HEIs records are poorly kept such that the issuance of academic transcript is a tug of war”. He added that in many instances students wait for months and years for transcripts which may never be issued. The challenges according to him relate to the analogue or old system of records keeping, poor work attitude and muddled up filing system.

In the face of these issues and challenges, the authors of this paper would like to say that HEIs has been finding it difficult to effectively deliver their tripartite mandates (such as teaching, research and community service). Since the HEIs have been experiencing series of issues and challenges, what they believe and practice in the process of fulfilling these tripartite mandates in such an institution is of paramount importance. Hence, corporate governance practices and work ethics becomes important in this regard. This is because corporate governance involves a set of processes, customs, policies, laws and institutions affecting the way an institution is managed, directed, administered or controlled. It is also concerned with transparency in decision-making and accountability of institutions to safeguard the interests of all stakeholders and the investors. Corporate governance involves how institutional management pursues economic objectives that relates to a number of wider ethical and societal considerations. It is the application of best management practices, compliance of law in true letter and spirit and adherence to ethical standards for effective management and distribution of wealth and discharge of social responsibility for sustainable development of all stakeholders. Work ethics on the other hand deals with the question of what is right and/or wrong, good and/or bad in human behaviour. It also deals with how workers (both teaching and non-teaching) ought to behave in their institutions. This is why Abun, Julian and Ballesteros (2022) opined that HEIs must find strategic ways of equipping their employees with the right values and work behaviours considering the importance of the organization’s strategic direction and financial capital to support the implementation of the vision and mission.

The theoretical discourse consists of five major parts. The first part is the conceptual framework, which explains the interplays between and among the key concepts, with the help of a schematic model. The second part is the clarification of concepts that specifically provides the meaning of each concepts in detail. The essence is to deepen the understanding of the study. The third part is the discussion on relating to the interplay between the concepts based on existing literature. The fourth is the conclusion, which was presented in a logical manner. The fifth part is the recommendations for future practice.

Conceptual Framework

The authors support this manuscript with a schematic model (see Figure 1) to describe the interplay between and among good corporate governance, work ethics and service delivery. The author developed a schematic model to provide a clear perspective/direction for the manuscript.

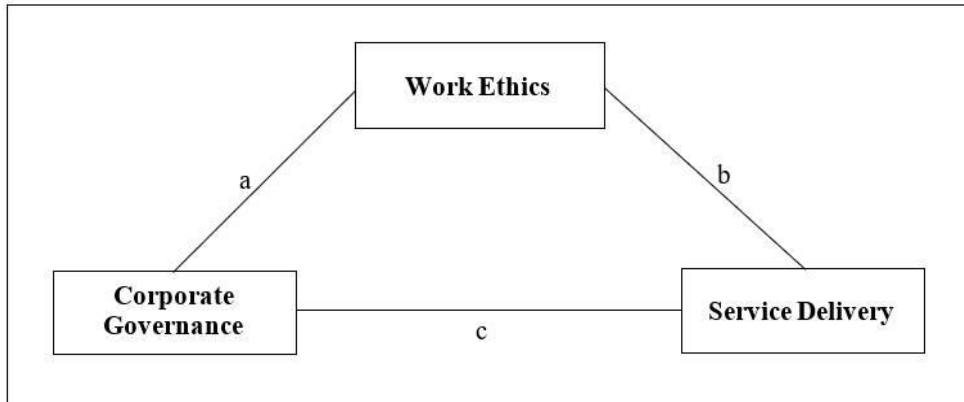


Figure 1: A Conceptual Model Showing the Interplay between the Variables.

Source: Developed by the Authors.

The underlying assumption of this manuscript is that when administrators and other major stakeholders engage in good corporate governance practices (accountability, transparency, and integrity) members of staff will equally exert high level of work ethics. Another underlying assumption of this manuscript is that when administrators and other major stakeholders engage in good corporate governance practices (accountability, transparency, and integrity) members of staff (especially the teaching staff) will experience effective and quality service delivery. Also, when every member of staff (especially the teaching staff) exerts high level of work ethics, they will, in turn, experience effective and quality service delivery. Furthermore, when every member of staff (especially the teaching staff) exerts high level of work ethics, it will positively mediate the interplay between good corporate governance practices and effective/quality service delivery.

Clarification of Concepts

Corporate Governance

A corporation is a meeting place for the principal-owner, the agents and the shareholders. In their transactions, targets are set, goals are met and challenges are surmounted collaboratively, using shared paradigms and set down rules. Governance can be defined as the activity of governing a country or controlling a company or an organization (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010). Simply put, governance is the process by which decisions are made and implemented (Sharma, Sadana, & Kaur, 2013). Governance also involves organizing collective action through the processes of selecting goals, making decisions, allocating resources, implementing policies and generating feedback. Governance determines how power is exercised, how decisions are taken, and how stakeholders (including citizens) have their say (Oliver, 2010). Based on this clarification, it is worthy of note that 'governance' is 'corporate'. Essentially, 'governance' becomes 'corporate' when it is operated in accordance with legal, moral and ethical principles and standards as perceived by people in the society or in an institution or organization.

Corporate governance is concerned with a structure that ensures distribution of rights and responsibilities among the workforce such that a shared vision/mission is attained. It represents a fair and effective way of implementing standards/principles (means) to achieve the goals (ends) of institutions. Corporate governance is founded upon the capacity and reliability of institutions to effectively respond to problems and achieve social unity via various forms of consultation, negotiation and multi-stakeholders' agreements. Corporate governance in HEIs can be defined as a model for policy-making management based on involving relevant stakeholders at all levels (e.g., sectorial, local or regional, national or international) for the setting, implementing and monitoring of goals. Corporate governance, therefore, involves the participation of stakeholders in formulating, implementing, reviewing and monitoring of policies and strategies for the realization of goals. The ETF (2013) opined that corporate governance

refers to the transparent and accountability management of policies for the purpose of making the HEIs a source of attractiveness associated with excellence to improve its image. However, corporate governance in HEIs would help in facilitating the right implementation of policies in ways that are effective, efficient, transparent, accountable, equitable and coherent. Therefore, corporate governance in HEIs relies on effectiveness and efficiency, transparency, accountability, and integrity so as to be able to achieve its goals and contributes to economic growth and development of economies.

Work Ethics

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines work as “exerting oneself physically or mentally, especially in sustained effort for a purpose or under compulsion or necessity”. This definition suggests that work is not limited to physical effort but also a mental effort for a certain objective or purpose. Under this definition, the purpose is not exclusive. A similar definition is also found in Online Dictionary which defines work as “activity involving mental or physical effort done to achieve a purpose or result”. This definition is also not exclusive because it does not indicate specifically the purpose. In resolving this conception of work, Little (1948) defines work in two senses. In a narrow sense, work is manual labour and in a broader sense, work is a deliberate production by man to change matter for man. Manual labour or any kind of actual operation is directly a change of matter. By working, one generates goods, be it material objects, experiences, or a state of mind (Cholbi, 2022) that others can value and enjoy. Thus, in many cases, a person or a worker is compensated because their labour contributes to the production of goods that have objective value (Cholbi, 2022).

According to Singer (2022), a group of philosopher uses the term “ethics” as the moral philosophy that deals with the morality of a certain act or the standards to determine the morality of a certain act. Ethics deals with the question of why a certain act or behavior is good or bad, or in short, it is the study or science of morals. Whereas, morality refers to the code of conduct or moral norms. On the other hand, many philosophers also use the two terms. In a more general terminology, work ethics can be interpreted as a gesture of personality, temperament, character, and belief in something. It involves being personally accountable and responsible for the work that one does or how one feel about the job he/she does. Reeves (2015) sees work ethics as a person who shows up on time with the willingness to do what it takes to get the job done without complain. He outlined some features of “good” work ethics to include: honesty, personal integrity, responsibility, optimism, self-motivation and being a team player, commenting on personal integrity, Reeves (2015) argued that a person with personal integrity and values is trustworthy. This assertion may account for why several scholars and researchers (e.g. Salahudina, et al., 2016; Osibanjo, et al., 2015; Bataineh, 2020; Benedicto & Caelian, 2021; Banister, 2017) proved that work ethics of employees are given priority because they can affect the effectiveness and performance of the organization. They further suggest that management needs to establish policies and practices that guide the employee’s work values and behaviours. Failing to equip their employees with the right work values and behaviours can greatly hinder the organization’s productivity and performance.

Transparency International (2021) and Tasi and Syamsir (2021) reported that several issues of corruption have been traced to the low experiences of work ethics in HEIs. To be able to surmount the issue of corruption in HEIs, Transparency International (2021) suggests some guidelines to prevent corruption such as: anticipating specific threats to ethics standards and integrity in the public sector, strengthening the ethical competence of civil servants, strengthening mechanisms to support professional ethics, and developing administrative practices and processes which promote ethical values and integrity. The negative effect of work ethics problems or challenges is the organization’s inability to improve social services that promote the welfare of the general public and the inability to provide quality services to its stakeholder, which leads to its inability to pay salaries or dept.

Service Delivery

Service delivery can be regarded as the paramount function of any established institution. The principal-owner provides employment for workers to ensure that the services required are provided at the right time. For this paper, service delivery in HEIs may be defined as those services which are mainly, or

completely, delivered by staff (both teaching and non-teaching). Service delivery refers to the actual delivery of a service and products to the customer or clients. In general, service delivery is described as the capability of producing a specific, desired effect, or in other words “getting the right things done” (Drucker, 2004). It has been broadly defined as the orientation towards students’ needs to be understood as encompassing all contacts and all tasks performed by the administrators and staff that affect students. This broad definition encompasses not only contacts between administrators, staff and students, but also the rules regulating those contacts (that is administrative procedures). Service delivery normally should be able to produce several positive outcomes, ranging from reduced costs, increased availability of efficient operations, improved service quality and optimum customer experience.

Good Governance, Work Ethics and Service Delivery: Does Interplay Exist?

Corporate governance is about promoting fairness, transparency and accountability. Key elements of good corporate governance principles include honesty, trust and integrity, openness, performance orientation, responsibility and accountability, mutual respect, and commitment to the organization. Looking closely implies that the practice of corporate governance will provide opportunity for staff to exert high level of work ethics, in turn, lead to quality service delivery. Schreiner (2015) contended that “people who possess a strong work ethics embody certain principles that guide their work behavior, leading them to deliver high-quality work consistently and without the suspicion that some individuals require staying on track”. There are five principles of work ethics which include: reliability, dedication, productivity, cooperation and character. Reliability goes hand in hand with a good work ethics. For instance, if individuals with a good work ethics will always say they are going to attend a work function or arrive at a certain time; they do, as they value punctuality. Individuals with a strong work ethics often want to appear dependable, showing their employers that they are workers to whom they can turn. Because of this, workers put effort into portraying and proving this dependability by being reliable and performing consistently. According to Jenkins (2015), a strong work ethics is vital to a company achieving its goals. According to him, certain factors come together to create a strong work ethics. These include: integrity, sense of responsibility, emphasis on quality, discipline and sense of teamwork. Service delivery is strongly influenced by the work ethic and discipline of employees. For instance, researchers and scholars (e.g. Salahudin, et al., 2016; Osibanjo, et al., 2015) opined that when employees have no proper work ethics or right attitude toward their work, this can affect their service delivery. Sunday and Michael (2018) reported that work ethics can slow the progress of service delivery. Therefore, an employee with a high sense of teamwork helps a team meet its goals and deliver quality services at workplace. These employees respect their peers, colleagues and help where they can, making collaborations go smoother for the attainment of set goals and objectives.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that effective and quality service delivery can be achieved only with good corporate governance and work ethics through dedicated and committed leadership. The HEIs in Nigeria appear to be facing series of challenges ranging from poor infrastructures, mass exodus of many brilliant and competent lecturers, inadequate funding and socio-political generated tensions, anti-intellectual stance of corrupt, to list but a few has affected good governance practices, eroded ethical values and academic standards in the HEIs. It is therefore suggested that institutions of higher learning must put in place mechanism that promotes good corporate governance and encourages good work ethics, in turn, leading quality service delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Leaders in Nigerian HEIs should be people-centered. This is because people represent a central place in the HEIs and the focus is on service rather than product and therefore the students should be seen as raw materials.
2. In addition, staff (Both teaching and non-teaching) should be encourage to imbibe the culture

- of creative thinking (initiative) and learn to speak with one voice.
3. Furthermore, in order to promote best practices, management should create a resourceful working environment to encourage and motivate staff to fully utilize their potentials and contribute positively to service delivery in our universities and all other HEIs.
 4. Finally, there should be flexible service delivery so as to help HEIs deliver and sustain transformational change and improvement, including real efficiency savings and other measurable strategic and educational value through the streamlined flexible provision of administrative and students' services.

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