

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AND EMPLOYEE ALIENATION IN COMMERCIAL BANKS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee alienation in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria. The social exchange theory was adopted as the theoretical foundations in the study. It adopted the cross-sectional survey design. The study populations were 687 permanent employees from nineteen commercial banks in Rivers state. A sample size of 248 was drawn using Krejcie & Morgan table on sample size determination. 248 copies of questionnaires were personally administered to respondents out of which 218 representing 88% were found valid for the analysis. All items on the questionnaire had a Cronbach Alpha threshold of 0.7 and above in the reliability test. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient computed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for bivariate analyses. The results showed significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and measures of employee alienation (powerlessness meaninglessness and self-estrangement). This study concludes that the existence of aggressive behaviour in the workplace negatively influences employees' experience, relationship and perception of others in their organisation leading to their feeling of alienation. The study therefore recommends that the management of banks should institute or develop policies that sufficiently regulate behaviour and actions that tilt toward aggression in the organisation from supervisors and co-workers ensuring that employees are protected and safeguarded against threats and abuse in the organisation.

Keywords: Aggressive Behaviour, Social Exchange Theory, Employee Alienation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement

INTRODUCTION

Employees are significant to the effectiveness of organisations. Apart from the skills and knowledge they bring to the organisations, their level of engagement and emotional involvement with the organisation also plays a crucial role in the extent to which creative and innovative outcomes are expressed in the organisation (Cesario & Chambel, 2017; Yao, Qui & Wei, 2019). This is why concerns of employee alienation have continued to trail organisational research, and is considered as a serious bother, given its implications for outcomes such as productivity and competition.

The Nigerian banking industry, is one which has in the recent decades faced numerous challenges in line with increasing competitiveness of the industry, and the turbulence from the environment. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone's lives in more than one way. It caused people to reconsider their chosen career paths leading to the Great Resignation, which also paved the way for the phenomenon called alienation. Ohuocha (2020) noted that while the industry has thrived and continues to thrive as one of the fundamental facets of the nation's economy, concerns continue to trail the increasing levels of alienation and turnover accounted for in the sector. According to reports (Phillip, 2022; Ripples Nigeria, 2022) over 1949 workers were sacked and about 1900 resigned their jobs between the year 2021 and 2022. This follows Ohuocha (2020) observation that the employees in the workplace are often the first line of impact when it comes to organisational change. This has led to a decline of workplace relationships and a rise in employee alienation.

According to Kurdi (2018) alienation describes a feeling of detachment and the lack of placement within a context. It demonstrates the lack of meaningfulness in roles and relationship with others in the organisation. Alienation can be problematic to the organisation (Yu, Yang, Wang, Sun & Hu, 2019; Kurdi, 2018; Gozukara, Mercanli, Capuk & Yildirim, 2017). This is because it creates dissonance amongst the workforce, negatively impacting on collaboration and correspondence in the organisation. Ozer, Saygili and Songur (2019) reported that there is a steady rise in employee alienation, much of which are linked to

their experiences at work, and most importantly, their inability to influence or alter such experiences. Alienation, as Cetinkaya and Karayel (2019) observed, reflects workers' loss of value and placement in the organisation; thus, affecting their levels of effectiveness, performance and productivity. According to the Gallup State of the Global Workplace study, employees who are alienated at work cost the world economy \$7.8 trillion in lost output (Barr, 2022) Thus, organisations with alienated workers tend to operate or function below their actual potentials, struggling constantly to meet with organisational goals, and also lagging in competitiveness and often performing below standards.

The problem of alienation is such that Kurdi (2018) identified as worsened by the disposition of management to the workers, as well as management's readiness to exploit, take advantage of and even abuse their powers over the workers' condition. More so, when workers are unable to trust their own co-workers, especially when conditions of work allow for back-biting, sycophancy, rumour mongering and character-defamation as a way of getting on the good-books of superiors, the workplace becomes toxic and as such could have degenerating effects on the workers' sense of belongingness as members of the organization.

Alienation of employees working in the bank can be expressed through feeling ignored by one's colleagues, experiencing a lack of transparency and employee involvement in decision making processes, facing discrimination or harassment in the workplace, reluctance to work or being unhappy with going to work, decrease in job satisfaction, a loss of motivation regarding overall negative emotions stemming from a feeling of incompatibility with individuals, work and the organisation (Damar & Celik, 2017). Bank workers are faced with enormous challenges of maintaining high standard which leads to an excessive competition and demands from the workers. Superiors take advantages of lower positioned employees to meet up with what would be their own target and benefits such exploit aggravates to alienation when employees begin to psychologically disconnect or detach themselves from their responsibilities and duties. They begin to lack interest and enthusiasm about their work, feel powerless, meaningless and estranged for

not being able to address issues of pressure and toxins from superiors, coworkers and customers in the bank. There is no research addressing the holistic position (that is as expressed at both leadership and co-worker level) on aggressive behaviour and its impact on employee alienation within the commercial banks in Nigeria; hence this research was an investigation on the relationship between the variables within the specified context.

Conceptual Framework

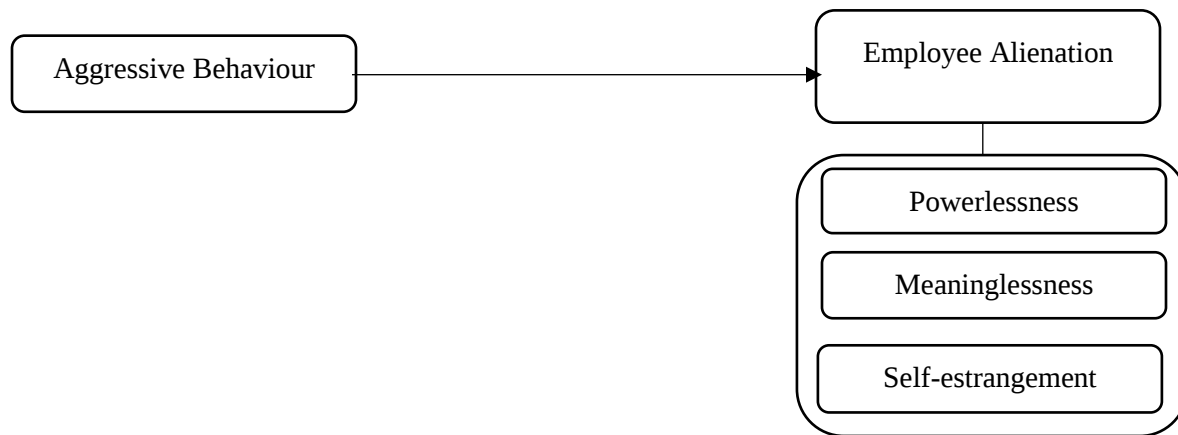


Figure 1: Aggressive Behaviour and Employee Alienation

Source: Researcher's Conceptualization from Review of Related Literature, 2023.

The following are the research questions this study addressed:

- (i) What is the relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee powerlessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- (ii) What is the relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee meaninglessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- (iii) What is the relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee self-estrangement in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) was proposed by George Homans, a sociologist in 1958 and 1961 in his essay “social behaviour as exchange” (Cook and Rice, 2006). SET is premised on the assumption that a person will act in accordance with the rewards and punishment that they are most likely to receive (Cook and Rice, 2006). Homans titled the theory as social behavior, as exchange and as one of the first sociological theorist to focus on interpersonal exchanges, the proponent emphasis was the individual behaviour of actors in interactions with one another. Homans (cited in Cook et al 2013) in his definition of social exchange asserts that social exchange is the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly between at least two parties. Cost was viewed basically in terms of alternative activities and opportunities fore passed by the actor involved. Material cost and rewards can be money, time or a service, they can as well be intangible, like effort, respect, pride opportunity, love, inequality and power. In the context of cost-benefit analysis, rewarded habits would possibly cause repetitions and vice versa.

According to Blau (cited in Cook and Rice, 2006) Social Exchange refers to voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others. He argued that as a reciprocal exchange rule the theory “involves the principle that one person does another a favour, and while there exist a general expectation of some future return, its exact nature is definitely not stipulated in advance” (Blau, 1986, P. 93 cited in Cook and Rice, 2006). Thus, the general expectation of some future return is frequently based on reciprocity norms rather than explicit negotiation

The Social Exchange Theory applies to any social phenomenon or social context. Thus it applies as a theoretical foundation in addressing the relationship between aggressive behavior and employee alienation as it proposes the idea of reciprocation in the relationship where individual actions are based on a cost-benefit analysis, which explains the outcome of behaviour such as alienation. SET outlines that employees expect to be treated in a particular way by the organisations, as well as co-workers and client, and as such,

tailor their actions based upon this perceptions and expectation from significant others (Colquitt and Zipay 2015). Understanding these dynamics can help organisations recognize the importance of fostering a positive and supportive work environment to prevent toxic behaviour and promote employee well-being.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Aggressive Behaviour

Aggressiveness refers to a behaviour which is loud and confrontational in the workplace. It is such that tilts toward violence and the tendency to do harm to others who are considered as weaker or in lower positions (Frost, 2003; park, Cho & Hong, 2014). Aggressive individuals (leaders, clients or co-workers) tend to be abusive and constantly demanding more from others. Aggressive persons are also self-seeking like narcissist and focused on their own interest, most times even to the detriment of others around them. The efforts to harm others in an organisational context range from subtle and covert actions to a more intense active confrontation, the destruction of property, and direct physical assault (Dupre & Barling, 2003). Furthermore, aggressive behaviour includes direct physical assaults (punch), direct psychological harm (e.g. verbal insults or ignoring the victims) and indirect harm (e.g. destroying the victim's belongings and spreading rumours). Dupre and Barling (2003) asserts that perpetrators of these kinds of behaviour includes clients, customers, employees or other individual around the work environment. Frost (2003) noted that aggression create a negative tension within the organisation, where members always feel unsafe and oppressed. Aggressive behaviour has also been identified as contributing to the discomfort of significant others in the workplace and according to park et al (2014), it intensifies the degree of tension and strife within the work environment. Aggressive workers or managers are always constantly in brawls and conflicts with their co-workers or co-managers, and in that way, impact negatively on the level of cohesion or harmony in the organisation (Frost, 2003).

Concept of Employee Alienation

The modern use of alienation as the feeling of separation or estrangement in the context of social relations and society, came into practice during the 19th and 20th centuries, with the advent of theories of alienation by Georg Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx who approached the concept from philosophic, religious and economic perspectives respectively (Morrison, 1995). Karl Marx was an economist, philosopher, writer and social thinker who lived from 1818 to 1883. Karl Marx, among numerous theorist was the proponent of the theory of alienation, meaning the feeling of an outsider or feeling a sense of isolation, strangeness or feeling of having no external connection. Researchers have given meaning to alienation in description of contemporary and modern day phenomenon such as the definition of Dipietro and Pizam (2008) which asserts that alienation is a cognitive sense of separation from work and the workplace, which reflected in a lack of job involvement and organisational identification. Matheson (2007) defined alienation as a state of psychological detachment from work. To alienate is to experience a lack of connection or disconnection, detachment, aloofness, separation, removal or distancing of self from a situation or target (Dipietro & Pizam, 2008). Shah (2015) posits that alienation is a state in which a person feels one-self alone, estranged, worthless and meaningless. Further, a person who suffers this has to bear a psychological impact of alienation. Kanungo's (1992) cited in Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora & Denstent (2003) definition of alienation emphasizes the psychological or motivational aspect of alienation, not the structural or technological condition that separate workers from their work. Damar and Celik (2017) assert that the term alienation is a psychological withdrawal, emotional dissonance, feeling of weakness, negatively effective experiences and low level of efficacy.

According to Kanungo (1979) alienation is the separation of a person from other component of his environment. Alienation occurs when employee perceive that the work environment is personally detrimental to their needs, values and sense of organisational well-being. Employee alienation describes a state of being in which employees are demotivated and apathetic toward their work. They feel alienated or separated from co-workers, supervisors, managers and employers and lacks passion for the work that they

are required to do (Kanungo, 1979). According to Kurdi (2018) alienation describes a feeling of detachment and the lack of placement within a context. It demonstrates the lack of meaningfulness in roles and relationship with others. Alienation as Cetinkaya and Karayel (2019) observed, reflects workers' loss of value and placement in the organisation; thus, affecting their levels of effectiveness and productivity

Measures of Employee Alienation

Powerlessness

Powerlessness is the first measure of employee alienation adopted in the study, it describes the extent to which the employee experiences a lack of control over their situation or condition (Kurdi, 2018). According to Kakabadse (1986) and other authors Seeman (1959) Aiken and Hage (1966) cited in Sarros et al. (2003) powerlessness represents 'the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the reinforcement he seeks'. Simply, powerlessness can be measured with a lack of job autonomy and participation, workers lack freedom to exercise control over issues that concerns them and their work activities. Employees inability to address the system or their circumstances, deprives them of their rights to address issues that hurt them. This way they feel worthless and lose their self-esteem or confidence (Kurdi, 2018).

Meaninglessness

This measure refers to the employees feeling of disenchantment with their work and with the organisation. Seeman cited in Tummer, Bekkers, Thiel & Steijn (2015) argues that meaninglessness occurs when a person cannot comprehend the events in which he or she is involved. In a work environment, meaninglessness arises when workers are not able to understand the ambiguous system of goals in the organisation and its relationship to their own work. When employees feel disenchanting with their work, their lack of meaning points to their emotional disengagement with their work, hence a lack of satisfaction and commitment to their roles (Vinokurov & Kozhina, 2020). Seeman cited in Sarros et al (2003) described meaninglessness

as the inability to comprehend the relationship of one's contributions to a larger purpose. The work condition of meaninglessness is another vital determinant of self-estrangement in work.

Self-Estrangement

Third measure of alienation describes the worker or employee's loss of self and their lack of placement in the organisation. It describes a condition in which workers no longer consider themselves as part of the organisation and that way, tend to act or behave in ways that often do not conform to the norms and beliefs of the organisation (Kurdi, 2018). O'Donohue and Nelson (2014) asserts that self-estrangement is a detachment or sense of identity or personal fulfillment. The effects of loneliness and isolation may culminate in estrangement in respect to both personal and social identities. Bluner in O'Donohue et al (2014) views self-estrangement in terms of feelings of detachment or sense of no identity and impersonal/personal fulfillment. The effects of estrangement someone from being with other people.

Empirical Review

Aggressive Behaviour and Employee Alienation

Caillier (2021) studied the impact of workplace aggression on employee satisfaction with job stress, meaningfulness of work and turnover intentions, his findings were that workplace aggressiveness decrease satisfaction with job stress and meaningfulness of work and increase turnover intentions. Pour, Yosefy, Zardoshtian and Eydi (2020) examined the effect of toxic leadership style on organisational cynicism and job alienation among the staff in the Sports and Youth Ministry of Iran with a mediating role of Machiavellianism. The results showed that toxic leadership relatively influence organisational cynicism and job alienation, Machiavellianism played a mediating role for toxic leadership on organisational cynicism and job alienation, respectively. The finding suggest that managers should minimize poisonous behaviour as much as possible in their leadership style, because the existence and continuation of such

negative behavior ultimately distracts the attention from the organisation and its human resources and provides conditions for pessimism and alienation of employees of the organisation.

The expression of aggressive behaviour in the workplace, creates intimidation and increases the stress levels of the workers (Oparanma & Wechie, 2014; Gabriel, 2018). Wobodo and Oparanma (2019) argued that aggression in the organisation is often linked to violence, increased conflict and frictions between individuals, and groups; hampering organisational productivity and growth. Reed and Olsen (2010) noted that while it is used as a form of power demonstration and coercion, it nonetheless leads to strife and confrontation between groups. Workplace aggressiveness also addressed as hostility or bullying includes a variety of undesirable interactions such as emotional and physical harassment, scapegoating, and making harsh or insulting statements about an employee, all of these types of actions are classified as Interpersonal Conflicts (Schat & Kelloway, 2005). Negative criticism, inability to give assistance, backstabbing, isolating one specific employee, and social undermining are all examples of workplace hostility among employees. It has also been discovered that workplace bullying causes psychological discomfort among employees (Stallworth & Fox, 2017 cited in Arubayi, 2023), which is in relation with poorer self-esteem, suicide thinking, and depression (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Workplace aggressiveness encompasses any negative actions that might occur in an organisational context that are directed towards another employee and can be either verbal or violent in character, resulting in psychological and/or bodily injury to the victim (LeBlanc & Barling, 2004). As a result, the employee's efficiency suffers, lowering the overall efficiency of the firm Reed and Olsen (2010) argued that work environments that tolerate and allow for aggressive displays, are usually high in terms of work tension and employee stress; hence such behaviour has the capacity of leading to employee alienation outcomes such as powerlessness, meaninglessness and self-estrangement. Drawing on the review of the relationship between the variables, the following hypotheses are stated:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and powerlessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and meaninglessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and self-estrangement in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

This research was structured as an explanatory study as it builds on identifying the effect of Aggressive behaviour on outcomes of employee alienation. As such its intent supports the adoption of the positivism philosophy and a deterministic approach toward the investigation of the relationship between the variables. The researcher utilised the cross-sectional survey as the research design for this investigation. The accessible population for this research was made up of six hundred and eighty-seven (687) permanent employees who are involved in routine duties from 19 commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study in this vein focused on the main branches of the 19 commercial banks with national and international licence in Rivers State, Nigeria. The Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table was adopted. The sample size was determined by matching the given population of 687 employees to the corresponding number of 248 on the Krejcie and Morgan's table.) A 20-item questionnaire was used as the primary instrument of data collection. All variables were structured in a five-point Likert Scale: 5 = Strongly Agreed, 4 = Agreed, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagreed and 1 = Strongly Disagreed to measure workplace toxic behaviour and employee alienation. Test of normality and necessary reliability and validity tests were performed to explain the trustworthiness of the measurement instruments. Data generated from the copies of the questionnaire were analysed using frequency tables, percentage, mean and standard deviation. In testing the hypotheses, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test Results of Valid Questionnaire

Variables	Measures	No. of Items	Alpha Values
Aggressive Behaviour		5	0.848
Employee alienation	Powerlessness	5	0.895
	Meaninglessness	5	0.859
	Self-Estrangement	5	0.850

Source: Research Data, 2023

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 2: Correlation of Aggressive Behaviour and the Measures of Employee Alienation

		Aggressive Behaviour	Powerlessness	Meaninglessness	Self- Estrangement
Aggressive Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	1	.903**	.768**	.892**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	218	218	218	218
Powerlessness	Pearson Correlation	.903**	1	.839**	.873**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	218	218	218	218
Meaninglessness	Pearson Correlation	.768**	.839**	1	.886**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	218	218	218	218
Self- Estrangement	Pearson Correlation	.892**	.873**	.886**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	218	218	218	218

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

Source: SPSS Output version 26, 2023

Table 2: reveals the result on the test on the relationship between aggressive behaviour and the measures of employee alienation. Results from the analysis show that aggressive behaviour significantly impacts on the outcomes of powerlessness ($R = 0.903$ and $P = 0.000$), meaninglessness ($R = 0.768$ and $P = 0.000$) and self-estrangement ($R = 0.892$ and $P = 0.000$). The result from the analysis thus demonstrates the significance of aggressive behaviour in influencing outcomes of employee alienation. Thus related null hypothetical statements are rejected as the results show as below:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee powerlessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria

H₂: There is a significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee meaninglessness in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria

H₃: There is a significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee self-estrangement in commercial banks in Rivers State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Aggressive Behaviour and Employee Alienation H₀₁-H₀₃

The findings of this study reveal Aggressive behaviour as evident in commercial banks in Rivers State. The correlation test shows significant relationship between aggressive behaviour and employee alienation, suggesting that aggressive behaviour impact and contributes significantly to permanent employees' level of powerlessness, meaninglessness and self-estrangement in the workplace. It further suggest that the presence of aggressive individuals in the workplace which manifest in negative competition, using sarcastic and offensive words when disagreeing with other workers or between managers and employees, involving in gossip, back-biting and spreading rumours about others in the workplace, are viewed by employees as a component of toxic behaviour that contributes to their negative experience at work, the way they respond to relationships, teamwork and how they exert physical, cognitive and emotional energies at work.

The findings support earlier research that explored workplace aggressiveness in depth and characterized it as a behaviour in an employee that is identified as anti-social and violates workplace norms (Anderson & Pearson, 2019). According to the findings of Baron and Nauman (2023) aggressive behaviour in the workplace is verbal, indirect and passive rather than physical, direct and active. Thus in consonance with that conclusion, this study attest to the evident manifestation of indirect, passive and verbal aggression experienced by workers in the banks of interest. Frost (2003) noted that aggression create a negative tension

within organization, where members always feel unsafe and oppressed. The empirical results of this study corroborate findings of Pour, Yosefy and Eydi (2020) who have shown that aggressive behaviour has significant effect on employee, cynicism, alienation and well-being. Ahmad and Parvez (2017) found significant association between workplace aggressions on employee turnover intention. The authors opined that workplace aggression, irrespective of its form, leaves a negative impact on employees. Corroborating this view Arubayi (2023) revealed that workplace aggressive behaviour significantly relates to employee performance. The study reported that aggression, bullying and violence can have a detrimental influence on an employee's dedication to their job and sentiments for the organization. The findings of Arubayi (2023) corroborates the view of Ahmad et al (2017) that employees who experience aggressive behaviours are more likely to leave their jobs than individuals who have never encountered workplace violence or aggressiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study validates generally held opinions that the level of aggressive in the workplace negatively influences employee experience, relationships and perceptions of others in their organisation leading to their feeling of alienation. In line with the research questions raised earlier, this study, concludes, that: Aggressive behaviour dictates and influences employee alienation of powerlessness, meaninglessness and self-estrangement as such behaviour was found to be antisocial and the kind that violates workplace norms, such behaviour is performed in work-related situation in an intentional attempt to injure others whether physically or mentally, this effect leads to the alienation of victims or targets as it influences on an employee's dedication to their jobs and sentiments for others and the organisation. Based on the results and conclusions, this study recommends that the management of banks should institute or develop policies that sufficiently regulate behaviour and actions that tilt toward aggression in the organisation from supervisors, co-workers or even customers, ensuring that employees are protected and safeguarded against threats and

abuse in the organisation. There is need for further studies to ascertain evidence of relationship between workplace toxic behaviour and employee alienation in public sector organisations in the State or Nation.

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