

CENTRALIZATION AND BUSINESS ETHICS IN NIGERIA DEPOSIT MONEY BANKS

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Abstract:

Decision on delegation of authority can have long term effect on ethical behavior of organisations. This paper examined the effect of centralization on business ethics among deposit money banks (DMBs) in Nigeria. Using survey design, we obtained and analysed data from 376 respondents in the industry comprising of managerial level staff. Our result indicates that centralization moderately influence business ethics among the deposit money banks in Nigeria. The findings suggest that increased level of centralization can indeed improve ethical decision behaviour among the DMBs. As such, even as decentralization can facilitate decision making by granting some level of autonomy to individuals and units, centralization can be helpful in ensuring business ethics in the DMBs in Nigeria.

Keywords: Centralisation, Delegation, Ethics, Deposit Money Banks, Organisation design, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The expected responsibilities of business and how business should behave as one of the dominant institutions in society has captured the attention of both academics and practitioners, and has generated heated argument and debate (Obalola, 2010). In recent years, the relationship between business and society has witnessed a massive transformation from the traditional classical view of business as profit maximizing economic agents to a more ethical outlook that analyzes the greater impact of business activities on the society (Aya, 2015). Consequently, businesses must be guided by certain moral principles of what is right and what is wrong.

More than ever before, firms are expected to deliver value while they act responsibly and ethically towards their stakeholders (Olins, 2014; Martin & Johnson, 2010). Thus consumers, like other organizational stakeholders, are increasingly

aware of socially irresponsible behavior by some companies as noted by Mulki and Jaramillo (2011). Consequently, this has become an emerging issue that is being addressed by business (Balmer, Powell & Greyser, 2011). In response to these developments, writers (Okoye, 2009; Powell, 2011; Balmer et al., 2011) have proposed that organizations must balance the relationship between economic goals and doing the right thing.

To entrench ethics in business and promote ethical outlook however, managers must manage different organizational and individual factors that are likely to predispose the organization and its members to unethical behavior in business. For example opportunity, rewards, and sanctions (McCabe, Treviño & Butterfield, 1996; Treviño & Weaver, 2003) and job insecurity (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017) are among the notable antecedents of ethical decision-making. Although much has been learned from studying situational factors as predictors of ethical decision-making, additional questions remain regarding how and under what circumstances individuals engage in unethical behaviors. One of the organizational factors that remain relatively unstudied is centralization.

Where an organization adopts decentralized organizational structure by focusing on delegation of authority and individual responsibility, such structure may promote unethical behaviour among organizational members because there are independent profit centers which make their own decisions and sometimes these units may deviate from organizational objectives and serve their individual interests. Again, where an organization devolves power to lower hierarchies and units, employees are empowered and granted decision making authorities. Where employees misinterpret such powers; this may lead to immoral acts by employees. There are also chances that middle-level managers when pressured from the top, may exert unnecessary pressure on lower level employees leading to unethical behaviour in the organization. (Weiss, 2009).

Conversely, centralized organizations are characterized by concentration of power at the top with little scope for delegation of authority. Such structures are said to promote unethical behaviour in the organization because there is no interaction between the decision makers at the top and the employees at the lowest level of organization. In such mechanistic structure, there is hardly any upward communication; consequently, people at the top never come to know of unethical activities going on at lower levels. Such a structure also promotes blame shifting as employees may try to transfer the blame for their wrong actions on others. (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2008; Barsky, Islam, Zyphur, & Johnson, 2006).

Authors such as Trevino and Nelson (1995) and Lindsay, Lindsay and Irvine (1996) had suggested that formal structure of an organisation affects the ethical behaviour of workers in a number of ways. This suggests that managerial effort directed at an appeal to the ethical sensitivity of the individual such as ethical training programmes, code of ethics, though necessary, may not be adequate in fostering ethical behaviour within the firm without a formal framework within which employees carry out their works and exercise their authorities. The role of the formal organisation structure is often overlooked and at other times misunderstood in the ethics literature and business community. A look at the summary of empirical works compiled by Loe, Ferrell and Mansfield (2000) and Marmat, Jain and Mishra (2016) on ethics and organisational mediating factors clearly show that researchers have

not been looking in the direction of how organisational structure promotes or hinders ethics within corporations.

This study therefore investigates the impact of centralization of decision making powers on business ethics of Nigerian banks. The rest of this paper is sectioned as follows; a review of relevant literature and development of study hypothesis, a description of the methods used in the study, results and discussions and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Centralization is the degree which indicates the concentration of decision making authority by a person, department or a level in the organization (Schminke, Cropanzano & Rupp, 2002). When the degree of decentralization is high, authority is delegated to all levels, and employees have enough rights to execute their activities in a fast and competent manner without awaiting the approval of an upper level manager (Andrews et al, 2008). This way, decision-making heavily depends on the specialists rather than the managers (Burns & Stalker, 1961) and faster response to changing market requirements is possible through decentralization (Schminke et al, 2002).

Worker participation in decision-making, such as the setting of organizational or work related task goals, has historically been an important variable in the organizational behaviour and human resource management literatures. The particular method of goal-setting that has received the majority of research interest is whether goals are set in a top-down or "autocratic" manner, or made with subordinate participation (Latham, Winters, & Locke, 1994; Leana, Locke, & Schweiger, 1990).

Ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with values relating to human conduct concerning the rightness (or otherwise) of certain actions and the goodness (or otherwise) of the motives as well as outcomes of such actions (Velasquez, Andre, Thomas Shanks, & Meyer, 2015). Müller, Turner, Andersen, and Shao (2014) suggest that ethics is a person- situation interaction phenomenon. They opined that ethics is a person- situation dependent application of moral standards, and are likely to be function of the traditions, values or beliefs that have grown in societies concerning what constitutes a right or wrong conduct.

One problematic issue with assigning performance goals is the likelihood that the goal recipient will engage in behaviour based on goal-related criteria (i.e., that the behaviour will help achieve the goal), while other criteria (e.g., ethicality) is potentially disregarded. However, the likelihood that individuals will pay attention to ethical considerations may be affected by whether they are involved in the decision-making process. Specifically, when a person is simply assigned a goal, evaluation of the available behavioural options is focused primarily on goal achievement. That is, since the goal has already been set, all subsequent consideration of behaviours is made through the lens of the preexisting-goal.

Although, when an individual is involved in setting the goal, the consideration of behavioural options likely begins before the goal is set, and therefore may include other aspects besides effectiveness for goal attainment. Consistent with Latham and Steele's (1983) assertion that participation in decision-making can lead to the development of strategies to accomplish the task, involvement in the decision-making process allows individuals to think more broadly and strategically about behavioural options before an objective is specified.

This additional consideration, specifically towards ethical issues, would otherwise have been ignored or minimized if the performance goal was simply assigned. Therefore, individuals who participate in decision making should be more likely than those who are assigned performance goals to recognize the ethicality of their behaviours, thereby decreasing the likelihood that unethical behaviour will occur.

Two important old studies seem to support this proposition. First, Latham et al.(1994) found that allowing for participation in decision making had the function of increasing the amount of task strategizing in which participants engaged. Thus, instead of the tunnel vision produced by assigned decision making, participation can encourage active evaluation of the process by which the goal may be accomplished, and thereby enhance ethical recognition. Secondly, Ludwig and Geller (1997), in a study on injury control among delivery drivers, found that participative goal-setting produced increases in behaviours targeted by the intervention as well as increases in behaviours not directly targeted by the goal-setting. The authors concluded that participative goal-setting can function to activate internal or personal norms governing behaviour, thereby activating behaviours that are related to goal achievement, even if not specified by the goal. Consistently, the activation of internal or personal norms can have an additional effect of enhanced ethical consideration of behaviours not specified by a performance goal. Taken together, the Latham et al. (1994) and Ludwig and Geller (1997) findings suggest that participation may directly impact an employee's engagement in unethical behaviour during goal pursuit.

Conversely an organization that adopts decentralized organizational structure by focusing on delegation of authority and individual responsibility, such structure may promote unethical behaviour among organizational members because there are independent profit centers which make their own decisions. Sometimes these units may deviate from organizational objectives and serve their individual interests. Again, where an organization devolves power to lower hierarchies and units, employees are empowered and granted decision making authorities. Where employees misinterpret such powers; this may lead to immoral acts by employees. There are also chances that middle-level managers when pressured from the top, may exert unnecessary pressure on lower level employees leading to unethical behaviour in the organization (Weiss, 2009). The study therefore proposes:

Centralization does not significantly impact business ethics.

3. Research methods

The study adopted survey research design. The survey research design was employed not only because it enables researchers to logically undertake the task of collecting evidence required but also answer questions as unambiguously as possible thereby minimizing the chance of drawing incorrect causal inferences from data. Past and recent authors including many of whom tested perceptions on ethics have also adopted similar design (Saini & Sengupta, 2016, Akram & Ahmad, 2014; Royae, Ahmadi & Jari, 2012; Kraft & Singhapakdi, 1991) with only few using experimental design (Ellman & Pezanis-Christou, 2007).

The study was conducted in Lagos state, South-West, Nigeria where headquarters and major branches of over ninety percent of the banks are located in

Lagos State. The state also has the highest number of branches of all deposit money banks in Nigeria (DMBs). Specifically, the population of the study includes the 55,597 permanent staff of the commercial banks in Nigeria according to National Bureau of Statistics (2017) selected banking sector data.

The sampling technique followed a multi-stage sample selection procedure. The researcher used simple random sampling technique to select fourteen banks (67%) of the total twenty one commercial banks in Nigeria as at 2017. In the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select the study area, Lagos state. Stage three of the procedure witnessed a selection of sample elements from the sampling frame proportionately. In order to obtain a result that is true representative of the banking industry and capable of being generalized, a sample of 14 of the existing 21 banks representing (67%) was selected via a probabilistic sampling technique – simple random sampling using balloting method. While past researchers have studied other antecedents of business ethics using samples of business students, sales and marketing managers or managers, this study had used the respondents comprising of both managers and sales / marketing. A total of 399 respondents were chosen for the study using Taro-Yamane (1962) sample determination formulae, as given below, was selected for the study from the sample frame.

$$\text{Sample Size (n)} = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where N = population, n = sample size, e = Error term = 0.05

$$n = \frac{55,597}{1 + 55,597(0.05)^2} = 339$$

Data for the study was obtained via administration of structured questionnaire on sampled staff of the selected banks. The instrument on organization structure was adapted from Shanti (2014), Chung-Jen and Jing-Wen (2007) and Kim (2005), centralization instrument was based on earlier work of Ferrel and Skinner (1988) while instrument measuring business ethics were adapted from Basran (2012). These statements were based on a 5-point Likert rating scale. The instruments respectively consisted of five point Likert scale items that are described by definitely agree (5) to definitely disagree (1). The reliability alphas reported by the authors were reliably above 0.70.

For content validation purposes (before the main data collection was carried out), we conducted a pre-test to examine the adopted items and study measures, which was followed by a pilot study. We involved five experts and practitioners as the participants in the pre-testing process to improve the content and face validity, and, upon their satisfaction with the content and readability of the measures, we proceeded to test the internal consistency of the measures by conducting a pilot study. This pilot was conducted with 30 employees from other non-participating DMBs. To further validate the instruments, confirmatory factor analysis was used which indicated that all the items included were significant indicators of their constructs. The data collected were subjected to descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and multi-regression model. The regression model for the study is implicitly stated as:

$$BUET_i = f(CEN)$$

[1]

Explicitly the model (1) is stated as:

$$BUET_i = \phi_0 + \phi_k(CEN) \quad [2]$$

Equation [2] is stated in stochastic form as:

$$BUET_i = \phi_0 + \phi_k(CEN_{i,k}) + e_i \quad [3]$$

Where; $BUET$ is business ethics, CEN is centralisation, ϕ_0 is the constant, ϕ_k is the slope/gradient, $k = 1,2,3,4...n$, i are surveyed employees of the DMBs and e is the error term.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Demographics of the sample

Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample. The distribution of the demographics of the respondents suggests appropriateness of the sample to provide relevant information to understanding the effect exerted by centralization on business ethics.

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents			
Demographic Characteristics Responses		Frequency	Percent
Gender of Respondents	Male	207	55.1
	Female	169	44.9
	Total	376	100.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	148	39.4
	6-10 years	153	40.7
	Above 10 years	75	19.9
	Total	376	100.0
Academic Qualification	HND/Bachelors	309	82.2
	Masters	57	15.2
	PhD.	9	2.4
	Others	1	0.3
	Total	376	100.0
Respondents Position at Work	Non manager	246	65.4
	Managerial	130	34.6
	Total	376	100.0
Respondents Department	Marketing	143	38.0
	Operations	232	61.7
	Others	1	0.3
	Total	376	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Percentage of male is higher (55.1%) relative to female (44.9%), an indication of more male presence in the business of DMBs. The years of experience also indicates appreciable years of experience for the respondents. For example, almost 61% of the sample has acquired experience above 5 years in the money banking business. Additionally, educational attainment is satisfactory with over 80% having acquired education up to tertiary level.

4.2. Description of the independent variable of the study

In Table 2, the initial descriptive analysis of the independent variable (centralization) is presented. The indication from the sample is that most of the respondents definitely agree to the existence of high centralization in the DMBs. Identified centralization issues centre on the inability of employees to make work related decision in the course of business activity, existence of tight rules that limits expression of business ideas and overbearing regulations that permit limited decision making at the lower level of the organisation and independent of all time management intervention in all operational decisions.

Table 2

Centralization scale

	Centralization scale	Mean	Std. Dev.
I	In this organization, even minute matters have to be referred up for final decision	4.02	1.51
li	There are a lot of rules and procedures for carrying each and every activity in this organization	3.98	0.94
iii	It is not possible to do anything relating to my job business without asking the senior management	4.25	1.09
iv	I am only permitted to do very little action on my own and with regulations	4.13	0.47

Source: Field Survey, 2018

4.3. Scale reliabilities and correlations among the study variables

The reliability of the study variables (Table 3) suggests that the measures of both the dependent and independent variables are reliably to establish relationship and effects. The correlation between the variables is positive and significant ($P < 0.05$), and indication of linear relationship and ethical behaviour of employees in DMBs.

Table 3

Reliabilities and correlations of the study variables

	Scale	Reliability Alpha	1	2
1	Centralization	0.79	1	
2	Business ethics	0.81	0.44*	1

** $p < 0.05$

Table 4

Regression of centralization on ethical behaviour of employees

Multiple R	0.324				
R square	0.105				
Adjusted R square	0.103				
Standard error	1.032				
	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	F	Sig. of F
Regression	1	314.451	314.451	43.831	0.000
Residual	374	2683.156	7.174		
Variables in the equation					
Variable		β	Standard error of β	t	Sig of t
Business Ethics		.324	.028	6.620	0.000
Constant		17.283		17.982	0.000

Source: Data Analysis, 2018

Table 4 presents the regression model summary of the hypothesis. R is the relationship coefficient on how strong the linear relationship is. R (0.324) is the square root of R-Squared shows that there is a statistical relationship between centralisation and business ethics. In addition, the regression analysis results displayed in Table 4.3.4 gives a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 10.5%. This suggests the total variation in the dependent variable; (business ethics) is explained by (centralisation). This shows that centralisation has significant influence on business ethics. The regression analysis indicates value of 10.5% for R Square which shows that centralisation significantly has influence on business ethics of an organization in Nigeria. This result suggests that a unit increase in centralization is capable of resulting in about 10.5% increase in business ethical practices among the banks.

The table accentuates that the relationship of business ethics with independent variable (centralisation) is highly significant and its value is (0.000). The F value of 43.831 is equally significant at 0.000 just as the beta value (β : 0.324) of centralisation is significant at 0.000 which shows that centralisation significantly has influence on business ethics of an organization.

When the degree of decentralization is high, authority is delegated to all levels, and employees have enough rights to execute their activities in a fast and competent manner without waiting the approval of an upper level manager, business ethics, this result revealed, may be considerably enhanced. Numerous recent studies have found decentralization to reduce stress (Chahar-Daoli & Mohsenvand, 2014), increase job satisfaction (Dewar & Werbel, 1997), increase effectiveness (Schminke, *et al* 2002), and Productivity (Tajipour, Serboland & Khodabakhshi, 2014, Sylvia-Maduenyi & Musibau, 2015) because of fast decision making through employee empowerment. Similarly lack of decision making right may cause employees to act unethically and moral disengagement are more likely to occur. The findings of this study lend credence to the conclusion of Pastor (2008) and Barksy, Islam, Zyphur and Johnson (2011)

Therefore, centralization is basically a determination of where the locus of decision making authority lies in an organisation. While decision making is very

centralized in some organizations, others are decentralized in their decision making. There are however others between these two extremes of the continuum. Where an organization falls along the continuum is a major factor used in determining what type of structure exists in the organization.

5. Conclusions

From the analysis and discussions of the findings, the study concludes as follows. How an organization is structured indeed has impact on (adoption of ethical principles) the ethical posture of the organization as attested to by the findings in this study of the Nigerian banking sector.

Centralization of decision making powers at the top level of the organization is likely, other things being equal, to contribute to the ethical practices of a business. Thus, when powers to make decisions are delegated and shared among the various levels of the organization, ability to hold on to ethical principles in the organization may be lower than when it is centralized.

Again, when powers to make decisions are delegated and shared among the various levels of the organization, with attendant high level of allowance for discretionary behavior, by empowering organizational members to decide how they want to carry out their jobs, there is likely to be less consistency thereby allowing for varying decisions even when faced with similar conditions. This is likely to impact business ethical posture of the entire organization

As organizations grant autonomy to branches and lower levels, as practiced among the banks, they are given targets. Unreasonable targets and deadlines that are often unmet creates pressure which cause business units and centres to adopt unethical means of achieving organizational goals. In light of this, managers must set challenging but moderate targets for subordinates and branches.

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