

# Viewing the Performance of Public Service in Southeast Nigeria through the Vistas of Work Ethics

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**Abstract:** *The subpar performance of the civil service in Anambra state necessitated this study to examine the effect of work ethics on the performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria as a broad objective. The study specifically ascertained the link between trustworthiness and the performance of civil service in southeast Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted by the study. The population of the study was 17843 civil servants in three randomly selected states in the Southeast. The sample size was 376, arrived at through the application of Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination formula and Bowley's allocation formula was used in allocating copies of the questionnaire to the states selected. The questionnaire used was Likert-structured and was subjected to both validity and reliability tests. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the hypothesis was tested at a 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that trustworthiness had a statistically significant positive link with the performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria., hence, it was concluded that the performance of the civil service in Southeast Nigeria hinges on the work ethics in the service. Sequel to this, it was recommended that the government through its agencies and heads need to build an atmosphere of trust among the employees by rewarding those who are trustworthy, honest, and dedicated to transparency in the civil service.*

**Keywords:** Performance, Public Service, Nigeria, Work Ethics and Trustworthiness

## INTRODUCTION

No human organization can survive without the input of employees, hence, it has been said that human capital is the bedrock of all organizations, irrespective of its form or size (Arachie, Nzewi, Chiekezie, & Nwakoby, 2022). Similarly, Jufrizen and Erika (2021) opine that the main factor needed in order to realize the expectations of an organization is the human resource factor. It can, therefore, be said that the conduct of employees can either make or mar an organization. The behaviour of workers in the workplace is guided by the principle of work ethics. Ethics is a very pertinent issue in all organizations because it could be the difference between an organization that will survive for a long time and one that might die an untimely death. In line with this position, Alagbogu and Onuoha (2023) aver that ethics is a critical issue in the modern workplace because organisations cannot flourish if neither employees nor employers consistently adhere to elevated standards of behaviour.

Employees are not only evaluated on the premise of their job competencies but also their behaviour and morality at work. This was succinctly captured by Jufrizen and Erika (2021) when they posit that the evaluation of human resource quality extends beyond intellectual capacity to encompass behaviour and attitudes, which are critical indicators for organisations to identify in order to ensure optimal functioning and performance, and this behaviour is guided by ethics at work. Workplace ethics is designed to instil predetermined standards of conduct among employees of an organization (Alagbogu & Onuoha, 2023) and are not limited to any field, but extend beyond all fields of human endeavour. Ethics are not limited to a specific field without the other but include all the aspects of life and business fields (Samak, 2017).

Work ethics has to do with the moral beliefs and values of employees guiding the job performance of employees at work. It refers to moral values such as honesty, justice, and professionalism, that are either present or absent in a worker, official or bureaucrat or in an organization (Onah, Ugwuibe, Nwogbo & Osadebe, 2022). The public service in Nigeria has over the years suffered from ethical issues and a trust deficit among the populace despite the enviable transformational role it is supposed to play in nation-building.

Omisore and Adeleke (2015) state that in situations where political leadership is weak, the public service functions as a catalyst for public policy development. Additionally, it ensures legitimacy and maintains a repository of information regarding previous government actions and protocols. Lastly, it supports the constituted government and creates an environment where public servants can effectively deliver services, thereby contributing to good governance (Ogbonnaya, 2018). The extent to which the public service has played this role has left a lot to be desired as there are blatant ethical issues ranging from late coming, nonchalant attitude to work and bribery. Despite the concerted endeavours of experts, practitioners, commentators, and government officials to establish the ideal service delivery and work environment in public service organisations, the results have been abysmal (Salahudina, Baharuddin, Abdullah & Osmanc, 2016). Workers in Anambra State civil service seem to take the public service as no man's

business, and as such, many of them come to work with their personal business(s), and give more time to it than their paid employment. Files stay longer than normal before they are attended to, if ever they will be attended to without seeking gratifications. All these issues are despite the effort of the government to maintain ethical standards at work through various institutions of government like the judiciary and some policies, regulations and codes such as the Ethical Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, the Civil Service Rules, and Financial Regulations (Onah, Ugwuibe, Nwogbo & Osadebe, 2022). It is against this backdrop that this study was necessitated to examine the effect of work ethics on the performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a) ascertain the link between trustworthiness and performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Work Ethics**

The principles and values that guide the way people behave at work are called work ethics. They are things that influence how an employee carries out his duties and relates to others within a firm define what work ethics is. Qamar and Tanwar (2021) aver that it is the principles and values that guide an individual's behaviour and attitude towards work. It is an inherent attitude that an individual possesses that allows him to make decisions and perform his duties with a positive moral value (Muhammad & Wustari, 2021)

Work ethics regulate how an employee behaves in a workplace. It is the practice of acting morally according to the established standards of behaviour to prevent harm to others when carrying out organizational operations (Ugoji, 2007). It is a collection of ethical precepts, conduct norms, or a set of values about correct behaviour at work (Alagbogu & Onuoha, 2023). Hence, when an employee acts morally, and the employee is trustworthy and has integrity, such an employee is said to have a good work ethic. Therefore, a lot of principles define how to determine the work ethic of an employee. These principles include honesty, responsibility, reliability, professionalism, and a commitment to excellence (Qamar & Tanwar (2021).

Research has shown that values such as the importance of hard work, responsibility, and honesty can significantly influence an individual's work ethic (Bedi et al., 2016). Adeyeye (2010) states that typically, work ethics involves principles such as honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, honour, responsibility, patriotism, respect and fairness. On their part, Oginni, Ayantunji, Lamre-Babalola, Olonade, Ajibola, Balogun and Adebayo (2023) aver that ethical practices include professionalism, accountability, respectfulness, dedication, determination, humility, and dependability. Odu and Akhigbe (2018) state that it revolves around hard work, dedication, discipline, and productivity, however, opine that teamwork, integrity, responsibility, determination, and accountability as well as dependability, humility, respectfulness, and professionalism were integral elements of work ethics practices.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is gotten from trust and according to Fullmer and Gelfand (2012), trust in the work environment is a crucial element of teamwork. It promotes the growth of organizational capability (Hernandez, Long & Sitkin, 2014). Trust is especially crucial because it helps individuals and groups respond, navigate, adapt, and change as needed (Gustafsson, Gillespie, Searle, Hailey & Dietz, 2020). According to Hernandez et al. (2014) and Hungerford, Sayers and Cleary (2016), mutual obligations such as benevolence and fairness in interpersonal communication exist in every trusting connection and are therefore relevant in every organizational setting.

Trust has a pivotal role in diverse domains of human existence, encompassing interpersonal connections, commercial dealings, and the fabric of society. Trustworthiness encompasses the inherent attributes or qualities that establish one's credibility, dependability, and merit in earning trust. The concept pertains to the capacity to be relied upon for exhibiting honesty, ethical conduct, and consistent behaviour. The establishment and sustenance of relationships, be they personal, professional, or institutional, hinge significantly upon the fundamental attribute of trustworthiness. The absence of trustworthiness poses challenges in establishing and sustaining constructive relationships, thereby undermining the basis for cooperation and collaboration. The establishment and preservation of trust necessitate ongoing dedication and adherence to ethical conduct.

### **Performance**

Organizations are created to fulfil certain purposes, and the extent to which they achieve these goals is determined by their performance. Hence, the concept of performance is crucial to the very survival of any organization. The individual performance of organizations goes a long way to determine the cumulative performance of the economy of a nation. Kim and Ployhart (2014), as cited by Abun, Ranay, Magallanes and Encarnacion (2022), posit that the individual work performance of firms is the building block on which the entire economy is based.

Performance can be defined in many respects, but most importantly, it is the output achieved from a certain level of input. It relates to the input/output relationship, and effectiveness-related measures (Alagbogu & Onuoha, 2023). It is the achievement of results after the dedication of resources and time to a particular activity. Patro (2017) sees it as an accomplishment of the assigned tasks for

achieving an organization's goal. This definition measures it from the output perspective. Khandekar and Sharma (2006) opine that performance is essentially the results that show or reflect a business's effectiveness or inefficiency in terms of its brand reputation and abilities. It is the comparison of an organization's goals and objectives with its actual performance in three distinct areas financial performance, market performance, and shareholder value (Ubabuikwe, 2015). Motowidlo and Kell (2012) define job performance as the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioural episodes that an individual carries out over a specified period.

A lot of things influence the performance of employees in an organization or the performance of the organization as a whole. One of such influencing factor is work ethics. Alagbogu and Onuoha (2023) state that the performance of an organization is sometimes based on the ethical work climate in the organization. Similarly, Adeyeye and Aina (2012) posit that how well organizations adhere to ethical standards determines the well-being of all the stakeholders, the organization's performance and subsequent profitability. A strong ethical climate provides employees with a foundation for thinking about moral issues (Ebitu & Beredugo, 2015). The work ethics of employees are given priority because they can affect the effectiveness and performance of the organization (Damianus, Fredolin & Jose, 2022). This is proven by many studies like that of Salahudin, Baharuddin, Abdullah and Osman (2016), Osibanjo, Akinbode, Falola, and Oludayo (2015), Mohammad (2020), and Banister (2017). All these researches suggest that management needs to establish policies and practices that guide the employee's work behaviour. Failing to inculcate the right work values in the employees can greatly affect the organization's productivity and performance (Damianus, Fredolin & Jose, 2022). Individuals who have a work ethic will provide the best, right and sustainable solutions (Bielefeldt Swan, Canney & Knight, 2016).

### **Empirical Review**

Oduonukwe, Agu, and Anah (2023) investigated the correlation between work ethics and the performance of employees inside private universities located in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey research approach, with a sample size of 166 academic staff members. The data obtained from the questionnaire was subjected to analysis using the Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation. The findings indicated that there is no statistically significant positive association between racial discrimination and employees' performance. However, it was observed that ethical compliance exhibits a statistically significant positive relationship with employees' performance in private universities. Additionally, fairness was found to have a statistically significant positive association with employees' performance in private universities located in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Oginni, Ayantunji, Larnre-Babalola, Olonade, Ajibola, Balogun, and Adebayo (2023) researched work ethics practices and employee retention within the manufacturing industries in Lagos, Nigeria. The Nigerian Breweries in Lagos was specifically selected as the unit of analysis for this investigation. The study utilized primary data collection methods by employing a structured questionnaire that was delivered to a randomly selected sample of 300 respondents in order to gather information from the participants. The study employed correlation analysis to examine the prevalence of integrity as a practice in relation to other operational practices within the specified research domain. The findings revealed a noteworthy positive association between work ethics practises and employee retention. Specifically, accountability, respectfulness, professionalism, and integrity practises were all found to be significantly related to employee retention.

The study conducted by Alvarado and Padilla (2022) in the Philippines aimed to assess the level of work ethics and job performance among employees in a Local Government Unit during the year 2020. The researchers employed a descriptive correlational research method to examine the relationship between these variables. The study was carried out with a sample size of 273 participants, consisting of 137 individuals classified as permanent employees and 136 individuals classified as nonpermanent employees. The participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. The statistical methods employed in the study encompassed frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, which were utilised to address descriptive inquiries. The inferential concerns were addressed using statistical tests such as the t-test, Mann-Whitney U-test, one-way ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis H-test, and Pearson product-moment correlation. Based on the utilisation of a researcher-developed and verified questionnaire, the results indicated a notable degree of work ethics among employees, accompanied by a correspondingly high level of job performance. There was a notable correlation observed between the level of work ethics and the job performance exhibited by employees.

In a study conducted by Damianus, Fredolin and Jose (2022), the researchers examined the impact of employees' work ethics on their work performance. The study employed a descriptive assessment and correlational research design. The data from the respondents, who were employees of the Divine Word College of Laoag in the Philippines, was collected via research questionnaires. The research revealed that employees exhibit high levels of work ethics across three key components, namely their attitude towards the work itself, moral attitude towards the work, and intrinsic motivation. The individual demonstrates a high level of work performance, as well as task and contextual performance while exhibiting minimal counterproductive behaviour. The findings of the study revealed a noteworthy association between work ethics and individual work performance in terms of correlation. When considering the many components of work ethics in isolation, it is evident that the individual's job performance is influenced by their attitude towards the work and their intrinsic motivation, in addition to task and contextual performance. Furthermore, the moral disposition towards one's work has an impact on unproductive conduct.

A study named "Addressing Challenges in Public Service Delivery through Appropriate Work Ethics in Nigeria" was conducted by Akinlade, Gberevbie, and Abasilim (2022). The location for the research was the Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital (EKSUTH) located in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The research design employed in the study was a cross-sectional survey. The main data for the study was collected by the distribution of questionnaires to employees of EKSUTH, including both administrative and clinical staff, as well as outpatients. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with four administrative staff members and four clinical staff members. The study employed the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Linear Regression Analysis, and One Sample T-test Analysis to examine the hypotheses. The results indicated a significant association between work ethics and service delivery. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the effective implementation of standard work ethics can enhance efficiency within the public sector. Based on the aforementioned observations, the researcher proposes that EKSUTH Management should use strategic approaches to enhance work ethics, hence facilitating the intended outcomes in public service delivery.

Mohammad (2020) examined the impact of work ethics (specifically integrity, responsibility, equality, and self-discipline) on the job performance of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in Al-Hassan Industrial Estate, Jordan. The responses of 257 employees of SMEs in Al-Hassan Industrial Estate were gathered for a survey. By employing hierarchical regression, the impact of work ethics on employee job performance was modelled. Integrity, accountability, fairness, and self-control are the components of work ethics. The findings revealed that work ethics enhanced the job performance of SME employees in Al-Hassan Industrial Estate. Furthermore, the incorporation of work ethics principles—namely integrity, responsibility, equality, and self-discipline—increased the job performance of employees.

Nurul and Noni (2018) investigated the relationship between academic achievement and ethical sensitivity in Indonesia. The study encompassed a cohort of one hundred students. The information used in the study was gathered via a questionnaire and analysed using Path Analysis. The findings indicated that academic performance was significantly and positively influenced by ethics, academic sensitivity was also significantly and positively impacted by academic performance, and ethical sensitivity mediated the connection between academic performance and ethics.

## METHODS

Given the nature and the structure of this study which collected data from sampled respondents using a questionnaire, the study adopted the use of survey research design. The area of the study is Southeast Nigeria, which is made up of five states, namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo state, in alphabetical order. The target population is 27234 employees of the civil service of these five states, but through simple random sampling, 3 states which are Imo, Anambra and Enugu were selected. The civil service population of these three states are 17843. The sample size arrived at through the application of Krejcie and Morgan's 1970 sample size determination formula is 376 employees. Bowley's allocation formula was used in allocating copies of the questionnaire to the three states' civil service according to the population proportion of each of the states. The questionnaire used was Likert-structured and was subjected to both validity and reliability tests. The validity test option used was face and content validity conducted using experts in instrument and validation, while the reliability test was carried out using Cronbach Alpha and a coefficient of .831 was obtained, meaning the instrument was reliable as it is higher than the threshold of .6. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and hypothesis tested at a 5% level of significance.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 376 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in accordance with the population of the study, in the end, 365 were returned, out of which only 360 were used because 5 of the returned copies were not usable as a result of mutilation and incomplete responses.

**Table 1: Response Distribution**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Mean	Decision
<b>Trustworthiness</b>								
1	People in my office are credible.	67	88	23	132	50	2.97	Reject
2	I can vouch for my colleagues at work.	-	76	-	176	108	2.12	Reject
3	The people I work with are honest.	12	97	10	89	152	2.24	Reject
4	I cannot depend on the people in my office.	78	128	11	143	-	3.39	Accept
<b>Performance</b>								
5	I will do well in my job if I can trust the people I work with.	159	136	-	65	-	4.08	Accept

6	My output will greatly improve if my colleagues are trustworthy.	109	179	-	36	36	3.90	Accept
7	My output has nothing to do with the credibility of others at my workplace.	-	78	21	167	94	2.23	Reject
8	I will give more to my organization knowing that others are dependable.	78	179	10	48	45	3.55	Accept

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses from respondents about the variables of the study. The analysis is done using mean, with a threshold of acceptance of 3, meaning that any questionnaire item with a mean of 3 should be accepted as being true in the civil service in the southeast while any that is less than 3 should be rejected. From the Table, it is seen that questionnaire items 1, 2, 3 and 7 are all less than 3 and, therefore, rejected as not being the case in the civil service of the Southeast while questionnaire items 4, 5, 6 and 8 are all above 3 and hence, accepted as being the case in the civil service in southeast Nigeria.

#### Test of Hypothesis

H<sub>A1</sub>: trustworthiness has a statistically significant link with the performance of civil service in southeast Nigeria

**Table 2: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.892 <sup>a</sup>	.796	.796	1.916

a. Predictors: (Constant), TRUST

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

Table 2 shows the Model Summary for the regression analysis carried out to test the hypothesis which states that trustworthiness has a statistically significant link with the performance of civil service in southeast Nigeria. From the Table, the correlation coefficient (R) is .892 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is .796. This signifies that a positive relationship exists between trustworthiness and performance as shown by the R while an 80% change in performance is caused by changes in trustworthiness as indicated by R<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 3: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5131.077	1	5131.077	1397.563	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1314.378	358	3.671		
	Total	6445.456	359			

a. Dependent Variable: PERF

b. Predictors: (Constant), TRUST

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

Table 3 shows the actual test of the hypothesis in the form of an ANOVA Table. From the Table, the F is 1397.563 and the p-value is represented by sig is .000. Comparing the p-value with the level of significance used which is .05, it is seen that the p-value is less than .05, and going by this therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted and it is stated that trustworthiness has a statistically significant positive link with the performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria.

#### Conclusion

Without a regulated behaviour at the workplace, people will behave in ways that are detrimental to the health and growth of the organization. This is even more so when people from different age groups, cultures and belief systems are brought together as is the case in the civil service in Southeast Nigeria. Following the analysis and findings of the study, it was revealed that trustworthiness which is a variable used for measuring work ethics has a statistically significant positive link with the performance of civil service in Southeast Nigeria. Hence, the study concludes that the performance of the civil service in Southeast Nigeria hinges on the work ethics in the service, and the more the people are guided and abide by good work ethics, the better the civil service performs and leaves up to the expectation of the government and the masses alike.

#### Recommendation



Following the findings herein, the study recommends that:

- a) the government through its agencies and heads need to build an atmosphere of trust among the employees by rewarding those who are trustworthy, honest, dedicated to transparency and dependable as this will go a long way in encouraging others to be trustworthy and this will positively affect the performance of the civil service in Southeast Nigeria.

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