HONESTY AS A MEANS TO OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT GRADUATES’ SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

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Abstract
This study investigates honesty as a means to Office Technology and Management graduates' success in business. This is against the background that honesty is an indispensable tool to success in business. Office Technology and Management graduates who want to succeed in business should see honesty as one of the business ethics. This paper discusses what constitute business or workplace dishonesty, causes of dishonesty in business and consequences of business or workplace dishonesty. It concludes that Office Technology and Management graduates and other stakeholders are expected to exhibit the trait of honesty because true success comes through honest behaviour or act. It recommends among others that employees should realise that dishonest behaviour destroy the reputation and integrity of an individual and the organisation; and should endeavour not to involve in such act.

Keywords: Honesty, dishonesty, Office Technology and Management graduates, business, workplace, success

Introduction
The current financial crisis in Nigeria has affected every sphere of life including businesses. This has brought into limelight the ethical dimensions of the business which plays a vital role in business success. For businesses to be profitable, they must conduct their activities in such a way that can be seen as ethical. Business ethics involves how a business integrates core values such as honesty, trust, respect, integrity and fairness into its policies, practices and decision-making (Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, & Oosthuizen, 2004). Business ethics is about identifying and implementing standard of conducts that ensure a business does not detrimentally affect the interests of its stakeholders (Turyakira, 2018).

Today, there are so many pressures on businesses or organisations to cultivate ethical behaviour since most youths and adults seem to lack ethical behaviours due to the present circumstances in the country most especially developing counties such as
Nigeria where most graduates are underpaid. Most people especially young graduates believed they are suffering and due to this reason they are looking for money by all means. It seems many of the graduates are into businesses not really because of passion they have for it but due to the fact that they want to reap where they did not sow. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have become the worst affected since they lack the funds, experience, strategic planning and relevant alliances with other business owners to implement ethical practices. Customers have become increasingly mindful of the reputations of the businesses they patronise since some of them have fallen victims of fraudsters. Customers have to trust the people they do business with in order to keep them, so owning up to every responsibility is paramount (Levine, 2010).

Workplace unethical behaviour include the following among others lying, cheating, stealing, embezzlement and using unauthorized materials (Rujoiu, 2014). While many large companies have gained their reputations by applying ethical standards, Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries are progressively becoming more aware of the importance of ethical behaviours such as honesty when dealings with employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders. However, SMEs in developing countries still require more understanding of the significance of business ethics. Hence, the study of business ethics such as honesty has become imperative in today's competitive business environment for business to succeed. Honesty means you will “Do What You Say You Will Do”. Honesty is defined as being honourable in principles, intentions, and actions; being upright, fair, sincere, frank, respectable, and truthful; and free from deceit or fraud (Cherrington & Cherrington in Johnson, 2010).

In recent times, many businesses have liquidated in Nigeria due to lack of honesty since individuals are not ready to relate with dishonest businessmen. Customers are now demanding for business owners' trust which is the most vital business asset. Though, dishonesty may not be attributed to the business owners alone but also to the employees, suppliers, debtors, creditors, and customers among others; that is, any individual who exhibit lack of trust. In most cases dishonesty in business is rampant among the employees; which means that, the blame for dishonesty does not appear to fall on the business owners or top management alone but on the employees also. Coffin (2003) reported that employee dishonesty is the fastest growing organisational problem for many companies. Dishonesty in business is not limited to developing countries; developed countries also involved in this act. Contrary to Coffin's findings, Wilson (2004) asserted that several corporate executives have
been indicted and prosecuted for fraudulently enticing investors and stealing corporate assets. This corporate dishonesty created havoc in the United States capital markets, ultimately causing millions of individuals to lose trillions of dollars. Wilson (2004) found that over 46% of the employee thefts were by persons in management positions.

Researchers identified two major causes of dishonesty; that is, personal issues and situational or environmental factors. Personal issues that predict dishonesty appear to account for a relatively small but important amount of the variance in predicting deviant behaviour among workers. They include greed, skewed personality traits, low cognitive ability, and limited self-control. Situational or workplace factors that lead to employee thefts include wanting to be accepted by a worker-related gang, an apathetic work group, or an influential peer. Overwhelming workplace pressures, wanting to satisfy immediate needs or desires, feeling left out or abused, and conforming to or tolerating dishonest group behaviour can lead employees to commit or participate in theft (Mikulay, Neuman & Finklestein, 2001, Martinko, Gundlach & Douglas, 2002; Dilchert, Ones, Davis, & Rostow, 2007). In Nigeria today, unemployment is increasing on a daily basis due to scarcity of white collar jobs; most graduates including Office Technology and Management graduates have established Small and Medium-scale Enterprises.

Office Technology and Management programme is one of the programmes offered in the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. With the advent of the dynamic in the world of work resulting from Information and Communication Technology (ICT); there was a change in the nomenclature of Secretarial Studies Programme to Office Technology and Management programme by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in order to reflect the 21st century best practice. Office Technology and Management programme was designed to equip students with modern secretarial skills for employment in various fields of endeavours. Office Technology and Management students are exposed to Information and Communication Technology based courses relevant to modern secretarial practices as well as in the general education. In addition to the acquisition of quality vocational skills in Office Technology and Management programme, the students are also equipped with effective or quality work competencies and socio-psychological work skills, which are very essential in everyday interactions with others. Office Technology and Management graduates obtained National Diploma and Higher National Diploma certificates at ND and HND levels respectively. These certificates are useful for Office Technology and Management graduates to secure
employment in the industries or to be self-employed. With the knowledge and skills developed by Office Technology and Management graduates while in school; there are different types of businesses they can establish such as business centre, establishment of school, publishing outfit, sales of smartphone and its accessories, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training centre, consultancy services, call centre, Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) phone repairs services, website designing, graphic design, bulk Short Message Service (SMS) business, mobile marketing, and mobile money transfer among others. Honesty is an important trait which is expected to be exhibited by Office Technology and Management graduates for them to succeed in business.

Business success is the capacity to succeed regardless of the situation (Albu, Mandru, & Suciu, 2017). Albu, Mandru, and Suciu (2017) in their study found that factors ensuring business success include: perseverance, profit, respect for competition, integrity, courage, seriousness, talent, profit reinvestment, quality, staying true to commitments, competent and moral people, professional training, correctness, honest partners, consistency, permanent adaptation to market needs, political stability, luck, providing high quality products/services for competitive prices, money, work expertise, strategy, entrepreneurial spirit, trust in oneself and in what an individual is doing among others. Therefore, OTM graduates are expected to be honest in order to succeed in business because dishonesty may have negative effect on business and its profitability. Based on the foregoing, this article discusses honesty as a means to Office Technology and Management graduates' success in business.

**Business or Workplace Dishonesty**

There are different types of business or workplace dishonest behaviours or acts; among them are:

**Lying:** Telling lies upon lies is known as “ethical slippery slope”. Once an individual tells a lie such person may need to cover it up to avoid detection. One of the most common occurrences of dishonesty in business involves lying. Employees may lie to each other, to their superiors, or even to customers. A lot of damage can occur when bosses lie to employees, as employees often tend to mimic the behaviour of the superior officer. Most business owners and employee are involved in this act. Such an act always has negative effect on the reputation of the business. Natter (2019) asserted that employees lie about having completed an assigned task, colour the truth about the success or failure of a sales or fudge their numbers to make themselves look better among their peers.
Theft: Theft is one of the most common reasons for business failure. No business is completely exempted from theft; both employee and executive officers including customers are always involved in this act. When someone takes what does not belong to him or her such as business' money or property, even a pen or file tag; it is an act of theft. Theft reduces business income and may negatively reduce business profitability. Natter (2019) opined that some employees are in the habit of stealing both time and money from their employers or business owners in such a manner that may not be noticed.

Embezzlement: Embezzlement can be seen as a technical term for theft committed by someone in a position of trust. Embezzlement can be perpetrated in different ways either by pilfering money from the cash register, skimming cash from the day's revenue or lapping; that is, the employee holds back part of the business income in such a way that employee doctors account records and statements to cover the misdeed.

Inventory Theft: In most cases; both the executive and the employee are always involved in inventory theft. This act is perpetrated in such a way in which an executive officer or employee resell merchandise, take them home for personal use, or dash out goods to relatives. Inventory theft reduces goods in the warehouse and inventory level. Heibutzki (n.d.) stated that one of the most common forms of workplace dishonesty is theft of cash, merchandise and retail shrinkage.

Time Abuse: It is not all dishonest behaviours at work that involves stealing of money, merchandise or property of the business. The most precious commodity in life and business is time. Business owner cannot afford to play with time because it is very precious. However, employee and executive should take it as a matter of priority to resume work at the right time and not to leave the office before the closing time. The time not judiciously used during the office hour is a waste of time and great loss to the business. Millions of Naira of business contract can be lost if the employee do not take time as a matter of priority and make maximum best use of it. It is a dishonest act for employees to make excessive personal phone calls and avoid performing normal office duty during office hours. Hayes (2008) stated that time theft occurs when an employee clocks in for another employee who is late or absent, leaves early, takes long breaks, or uses the company's time to conduct an outside business.

Unethical Conduct such as Harassment: Unethical conduct such as harassment is a form of dishonest behaviour because it is tantamount to lack of trust. The
executive or employee is expected to be someone who is trusted with the business by the business owner. Most of the employees do not see anything bad in harassing the customers by being rude or talk in an uncultured manner to the customers. Such an act can lead to loss of customers which may eventually lead to business liquidation.

**Absence from Work under False Pretence:** An excessive absence from work under false pretence is also considered as an act of dishonest behaviour. Many employees take permission to be away from office without tangible reasons; some employees always fail to give employer the required proper notice, they usually wait until the last minute before requesting for time off when they knew about the situation well in advance. This may likely hinder the employer to look for an alternative or replacement and may cause a great havoc to the business. Robertson (2020) asserted that many employees learn how to abuse programs that award them time off for vacation, sick leave and personal days.

**Causes of Dishonesty in Business**

Dishonesty in business can be caused by the following among others:

**Lack of Personal Integrity:** Some employees lack integrity; they can do anything to make money either in the right or crude way. Nonis and Swift (2001) asserted that among the reasons that lead to employee dishonesty is accumulated frustration at work, lack of personal integrity.

**Low Morale:** Dishonesty in the workplace can be caused by low morale. Low morale can be as a result of employees’ dissatisfaction with the nature of the work or working condition of the organisation. Job dissatisfaction may likely trigger dishonesty behaviour among the employees.

**Disgruntled Employees:** Employees who believe that they were underpaid may feel inclined to steal from the company or involve in one form of lies or the other in order to acquire undeserved income. Some employees feel that the organisation does not offer sufficient career training and development; and due to this reason their production rate may drop and employee absenteeism increases.

**Low Wages and Salary:** When organisations' wages and salary are lower than their competitors; employees may not be interested to perform to expectation and due to this reason they may involve in dishonesty behaviour by defrauding the organisation. Zhang (2008) and Matuszewski (2010) found that employee theft decreases when wages rise relative to other comparable retail stores.
Lack of Motivation or Rewards: Every employee expects the management or employer to provide incentive that will motivate them to increase their level of productivity; either through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. An employee who is motivated by the executive may not involve in dishonest behaviour. Companies should strive to establish a culture of honesty by establishing a code of conduct that sends an explicit message to all employees that honesty will be rewarded and dishonesty will not be tolerated (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Vardi & Weitz, 2004). Buttressing this, Nagin, Rebitzer, Sanders and Taylor (2002) found that call center workers who feel well treated cheat their employer less.

Consequences of Business or Workplace Dishonesty

Businesses need to be proactive when it comes to addressing dishonesty. Workplace dishonesty not only costs businesses valuable time and resources, but it also has a negative impact on the company. The following are some of the consequences of business or workplace dishonesty.

Loss of Revenue: Dishonest behaviour by the employees may lead to loss of revenue since the income that supposed to be used for business expansion has been stolen by an individual; business profitability may be reduced and this may lead to business liquidation.

Reduction in the Level of Productivity: Employee's dishonesty may lead to reduction in the level of productivity in a situation in which larger percentage of the revenue has been stolen by the employees. This means that the organisation may not have enough money to produce goods; this may negatively affect the profit maximisation of the business and the sustainability of the business enterprise.

Destroy or Loss of Business Reputation: One of the consequences of dishonesty is loss of business reputation. Business reputation may be ruined due to employees' misconduct, lack of ethics and dishonesty. Having the knowledge of knowing what is expedient and what is right creates a good reputation. Unfortunately, a single person can destroy business reputation overnight. Expediency such as ethical lapses, white lies, and stealing among others can destroy the business reputation or goodwill. Trevino (2018) asserted that loss of reputation could lead to several major issues like loss of customer, discontinued partnership, stocks fail, and employee resignation. Workplace theft and fraud are wrong and can harm organizations, other employees, customers, and business reputation (Hayes, 2008).
Lack of Trust: Trust is a fragile glass that once broken, it will be impossible to restore it to its original state. Workplace dishonesty in business is typically caused by deceptive behaviour and it is contagious. Although, employees emulate dishonesty behaviour from their colleagues or contemporaries; when an organisation or business loses its trust, it loses its entire operations because all the stakeholders may not have trust in the business and may lead to business liquidation. In a situation where employee cannot be trusted; the employer may not want to assign responsibilities to a dishonest employee because such employee may disappoint the employer and later bring the employer’s business into disrepute. Roodt (2018) trust is therefore of paramount importance to sustain the employer-employee relationship.

Demise of the Business: The greatest havoc dishonesty can do to business entity is demise of the business. Dishonesty can lead to demise of the business if not controlled at the right time because for business to enjoy long life-span; the employees are expected to desist from dishonest behaviour. Hayes (2008) found that stealing by the employees is in a variety of ways, but the result is always the same: loss of profits, low morale, and even the demise of an entire business.

Conclusion
Honesty is the root of business ethics. Office Technology and Management graduates and other stakeholders are expected to exhibit the trait of honesty because true success comes through honest behaviour or act. Dishonesty destroys the trust relationship between the employer and employee. Once the trust relationship has been destroyed, the employment relationship cannot be salvaged and/or repaired. Nothing that the employee does after the dishonesty has been discovered will not be recognised or appreciated by the employer. However, honesty is easier said than done. To truly live a life of integrity, individual needs to strongly believe that honesty is certainly the best policy. Dishonesty leads to reduction in the level of productivity, lack of trust, and demise of the business among others.

Recommendations
Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

Employers should develop an environment in which honest and open communication is encouraged by both the managers and employees; and that employees should be aware of the potential consequences of dishonesty to their employer.

The employer or management should make it known to the employees that every dishonest behaviour must attract punishment depending on the level of
such dishonest act; some situations may warrant little disciplinary action whilst, some may warrant total dismissal from work. Employer should make thorough investigation on any dishonest behaviour in order to ensure that all the information necessary to make a reasonable decision regarding further action are gathered.

The manager should use monitoring devices such as Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and also adopt the use of monitoring techniques to encourage employees to monitor one another such as the use of incentive or award systems. Even creation of an environment that expects employees not only to work hard and have fun but also to monitor and report the illegal or suspicious activities of other employees. Management should enable employees to understand that the identity of anyone who reports dishonesty, theft, and other deviance behaviours on the part of another employee will be held in strict confidence.

Employers, supervisors, managers, and executives should endeavour to lead by example; when they lead by example, others will emulate them. Employees should realise that dishonest behaviour destroy the reputation and integrity of an individual and the organisation; and should endeavour not to involve in such act in order to maximise the profitability of the business.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Business owners should be vigilant in enforcing comprehensive policies which outline different acts of dishonesty and the consequences for employees who violate those policies. Office Technology and Management graduates should endeavour to motivate their employees with either intrinsic or extrinsic motivational incentives depending on the one that serve as motivational incentive for such employee in order for the employee to desist from dishonesty behaviour.

References


