

## Workers' Incessant Nonchalant Attitudes: Implications of Dummy Authorities in Nigerian Public Parastatals

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**Abstract:** *The Nigerian Civil Service is one arguably fraught with high occasions of insubordination, disregard for professionalism and nonchalance towards role expectations. Scores of previous research have investigated this phenomenon; however, it prevails with consequences most often embarrassing. This research examined the relationship between workers' incessant nonchalant attitude and the powerlessness of most first-line delegate authorities or unit heads in selected public parastatals in Rivers State, Nigeria. The concept of authority and power as regards punishment, sanctions and rewards are broadly discussed. The results from a sample of 12 departmental heads and 14 supervisors reveal a strong link between workers' incessant nonchalant attitude and the inability of relevant first-line delegate authorities to take decisive measures or actions as espoused from the data. The implications of this finding are discussed and recommendations proffered accordingly.*

**Keywords:** *Dummy authority, powerlessness, non-recognition, leadership, workers' nonchalance*

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### I. Introduction

There is a clear distinction between authority and power. Authority refers to a formal position, recognized and awarded a certain degree of reference as regards official matters, whereas power refers to the ability to influence, manipulate and coerce others without necessarily occupying any official or formal position (Kotter, 1985; Gonclaves, 2013). Authority within the organization is geared towards the coordination, direction and harmonization of activities such that goal standards are attained and services rendered within a quantum of expectations; a process most effective when the required power and mediums of addressing "strays" and perceived "abnormalities" are at the disposal of the referent authority figure (Richmond, Davis, Saylor & McCroskey, 1984). Workers nonchalant attitudes can be described as behaviour expressed through various actions or inactions reflecting a lack of commitment and poor motivation towards work or other specified objectives. It has been identified as having a negative and counter-productive impact on organizational activity and poses a form of discouragement and embarrassment to the public which form its client or customer base. Adeoti (2011) opines that the attitude of nonchalance can be learned from experience or imitated from co-workers at the workplace, for like a viral infection; its tendency for contagion has the capacity of rendering an organization ineffective and uncompetitive.

Several studies (Adeoti, 2011; Laximikanth, 2007; Morakinyo, 2003) have dealt extensively with the issue of workers nonchalant attitude, in spite of which the phenomenon continues incessantly. Most of these studies (Suleiman, 2013; Ismail and Bongogoh, 2007; Long, Perumal & Ajagbe, 2012) have linked workers poor and nonchalant attitudes towards work to factors such as insufficient staff training, poor compensation and the incompatibility of leadership styles with situations, without taking into cognizance the implications of hierarchies and power structures which are invariably watered-down as a result of the levels of delegated authority and bureaucracy. Others have focused primarily on factors such as employee wellbeing, motivation and growth as a means of endearing commitment with little or no recourse to the intrinsic value accruable from the combination of these factors with the likes of discipline, control and punishment. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on workers nonchalant attitude by examining the variable as a consequent of the non-recognition or powerlessness of first-line delegate authority figures otherwise referred to within this context as "dummy authorities" who represent authority "trickled down" through multi-level delegation.

We suggest that workers' incessant nonchalant attitude at work is most likely as a result of what we would term the "dummification" of first-line delegate authorities who simply occupy positions of structural reference but lack the capacity to directly induce, coerce or influence subordinates into action; an unfortunate outcome of the bureaucracy that currently cradles most public parastatals within Nigeria. The goal of this research is to proffer answers to three major research questions which guide and form the framework of this study, namely:

- i. What kind of authority can be referred to as a dummy authority?
- ii. Is there a link between dummy authorities and workers' incessant nonchalant attitudes in public institutions?

iii. What practices can be considered most suitable and effective for multi-level delegation of authority?

## II. Literature Review

Dummy authorities as adapted in this study refer to various forms of authority figures; delegated in this case; which seemingly appear to oversee and supervise subordinate activities and work operations but whose offices are helpless, powerless and have no means (e.g. reward or punishment) of controlling and manipulating subordinate behaviour at the workplace without reference to a higher authority or office (Goncalves, 2013; Montana & Chanov, 2000). As a bane of most Nigerian public parastatals, all that most delegated formal authorities are equipped with are reports and queries; which often times hardly yield any positive result, hence most subordinates enjoy field days without regard to work time schedules (opening and closing hours), poor attention to work quality and the abuse of office properties. Nonetheless, Laximikanth (2007) argues that given the tendencies of civil servants in most government and public parastatals to misbehave, such outcomes can be controlled through strict regulations and clearly stipulated codes of conduct geared towards ensuring compliance and cooperation from subordinate staff, however the questions remain that given instances where all these regulatory measures and behavioural guidelines have been instituted and stated, how are instances of subordinate behavioural deviations to be effectively addressed by delegated authorities? To what extent can the offices of these delegated authorities command the required respect and obedience necessary in addressing such deviations or forms of delinquency as expressed by subordinates?

Kahn and Kram (1994) observe that within the workplace, there is a constant; although most often unconscious; negotiation between leaders and subordinates as regards influence and control. The interaction between leader and subordinate is premised on the recognition and appreciation of roles and expectations as defined by office titles wherein both parties are separately but constantly interpreting the authority of the leader which cannot be effective or impact on subordinate behaviour and action unless it is recognized as valid. Hence it is important to note, that although behavioural expectations could be stated and codes of conduct outlined, however, where there is no reverence or respect for the overseeing authority, such are but implied expressions, easily overlooked without fear of repercussions or punishment. Furthermore, given the level of political interference in most Nigerian public parastatals and organizations, with most subordinates appearing to “know their way around” as regards connections to higher authority figures, delegated authorities and front-line leaders or managers are considered “phonies” or better yet as put forward “dummy authorities”, powerless, ineffective and helpless when it comes to exerting authority or influencing behaviour (Gonclave, 2013; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Adeoti, 2011).

The theoretical model (figure.1) serves to illustrate the association between delegated authority and workers' incessant nonchalant attitudes with outcomes such as poor service quality and workplace norms implied as consequences of such incessant nonchalance. Dummy authority (herewith presented as delegated authority) is operationalized using two dimensions, namely – powerlessness and the non-recognition of such authority by subordinates and peers.

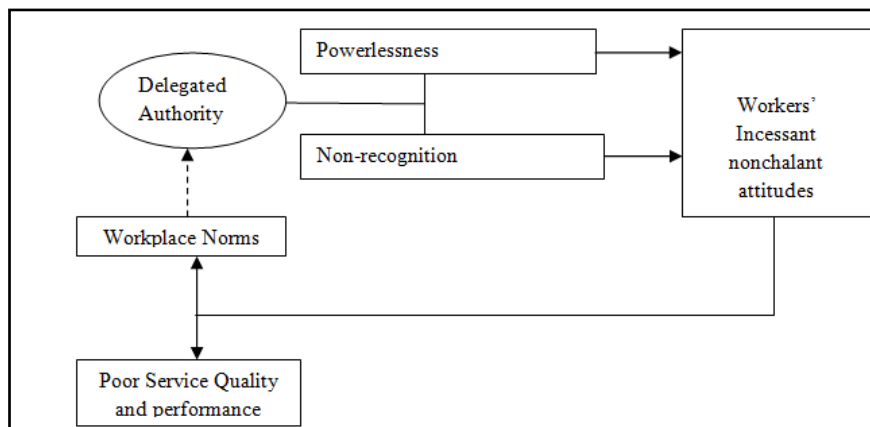


Fig 1. Theoretical model showing association between study variables and the outcomes of such associations

Morakinyo (2003) argues that poor performance amongst other negative behavioural outcomes such as carelessness, nonchalance and absenteeism can be attributed to the underutilization of supervisory strategies and authority within the workplace (Suleiman, 2013), which according to Lawson and Adeoye (2013), is an offshoot of the deterioration of the workplace such as applies to Nigerian public parastatals whose growth in response to political pressures for the expansion of social services; has further reduced service quality, weakened existing authority structures and worsened the economy. This is as Anazodo, Okoye and

Chukwuemeka (2012), in an assessment of the reforms in the Nigerian public service revealed the following activities:

- i. Checks on “ghost worker” incidences through the computerization of payroll and the creation of workers biometric data systems
- ii. Upgrading of accounting and management information systems
- iii. Consistent review of workers compensation and welfare packages
- iv. The installation and follow-up of National health care insurance systems
- v. Structural reforms.

But as observed by Suleiman (2013), in spite of all these efforts, workers yet continue to display poor attitudes and nonchalance towards work. Perumal and Ajagbe (2012) tie the incessant negligence and nonchalance of workers towards work to factors external to them. In their study, Perumal and Ajagbe (2012) argue that poor workers attitudes are consequences of poor organizational cultural values and policy systems which fail to effectively organize, control and coordinate behaviour within the workplace. Hence the argument is that the system is accountable for the nature, characteristic and attitude of its workforce since each worker reacts accordingly and in a healthy manner to the dictates of the environment in which he or she finds himself or herself (Perumal & Ajagbe, 2012; Lee, 2004; Suleiman, 2013).

Studies (Morakinyo, 2003; Montana & Chanov, 2000; Adeoti, 2011) indicate that the essence of authority positions within organizations is that of referent points aimed at workers control and workplace stability, as well as the shaping of workers experiences so as to facilitate conformity and predictability. Similarly, Richmond et al., (1984) note that a major function of managers within the workplace is the identification of effective communication strategies which would in turn influence employee or subordinates behaviour in such a way that yields desired outcomes. In the opinion of the authors (Richmond et al., 1984) the evidence of power lies in its manifestation and recognition by its target audience or subjects, hence an accurate interpretation of influence as projected by superiors within the workplace can come only from the perceptions of such from the subordinate; a theoretical stance which is further corroborated by Fiol, Connor and Aguinis (2001) who opine that the ability and capacity to influence derives mostly from the objects appreciation and recognition of such an ability.

Miller (2003) examined structural power and its utilization within the context of access to resources; the study compared relationships between individuals, groups and organizations and their ability to manipulate, persuade or coerce similar others into taking actions or involving in activities which ordinarily they may not have considered doing. Study (Miller, 2003) revealed that most often power in terms of control and manipulation is subtle and is reinforced by the ability and availability of resources to grant rewards or to dish out punishment. Power can only be adhered to if it inherently is “actionable” and has the capacity to bring about required changes in human activities and behaviour (Aguinis, 2009; Gonclave, 2013). In the same vein, Ajila and Omotayo (2002) observe that the high level of indiscipline which pervades the Nigerian Public sector can be attributed to the tolerance and seeming but erroneous “understanding” of such. In their study, Ajila and Omotayo (2002) argued that although considerable changes can be effected through the administration of punishment for poor and undesirable behaviour at the workplace; however it was imperative that such punishment be geared towards the particular incidence or behaviour of the employee and not directed at the person or character of the individual.

### **2.1 Powerlessness and Workers Incessant Nonchalant Behaviour**

Powerlessness has been described as the perception the individual holds that he or she is ineffective in controlling the outcome of events (Aghion & Tirole, 1997; Rantakari 2011; Dessein, 2002). Pfeffer (1993) opines that power is imperative for organizational cohesiveness as well as the achievement of organizational goals. As a control factor within the organization, power is considered a very sensitive phenomenon which reflects the extent to which the individual is able to manipulate, influence and dictate in relative terms, various outcomes in the his or her interest as an individual within the organization or in the interest of the organization as a leader based on structured organizational networks. Nelson and Quick (2012) argue that the main purpose of delegation is the extension of control systems which are intended to coordinate and streamline subordinate activities and behaviour at the shop floor level as well as service points in such a way that attitudes and actions are patterned to reflect sensibility and responsibility. Hence, the loss of power or a state of powerlessness distorts the intent of “delegation” and places the delegate authority in the position of an “observer of unfolding events” at the workplace (Mookherjee, 2006; Colombo & Delmastro, 2004). Based on this theoretical review, the following hypothesis is postulated to ascertain the extent to which the powerlessness of first line delegate authorities or “dummy authorities” contribute to workers incessant attitudes in Nigerian public parastatals:

**Hypothesis 1.** The powerlessness of first-line delegate authorities contributes significantly to the workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in Nigerian public parastatals

## **2.2 Non-recognition and Workers Incessant Nonchalant Behaviour**

The delegation of authority can only be considered valid given the recognition and actual transfer of authority as well as considerable levels of autonomy to the referent delegate (Cooren, 2010). Benoit-Barné and Cooren (2009) assert that the delegation of authority entails the apportioning of duties and relevant jurisdiction (span of control in terms of subordinates and issues within the department or unit) based on the hierarchical dispensation of the organization, emphasizing on the need for delegates to be visible and recognized as referent authority figures with the required levels of autonomy to act per se on matters and to contribute to matters that might affect their unit or departments. A process referred to as the “presentification” of authority which basically implies the evidence and recognition of such authority (Benoit-Barné and Cooren, 2009). Unfortunately, studies (Nwagwu, 2000; Perumal & Ajagbe, 2012) are yet replete with cases and events of poor delegation and recognition of delegated authority within most Nigerian public parastatals which has resulted in occasions of leader-subordinate conflict, snubs and boycotting of supposed leader initiated events. As a result of the theoretical review presented above, the following hypothesis is put forward as a means to investigating the extent to which the non-recognition of first line delegate authorities or “dummy authorities” contribute to workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in Nigerian public parastatals

**Hypothesis 2.** The non-recognition of the office of first-line delegate authorities contributes significantly to the workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in Nigerian public parastatals

## **III. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research design**

The study is designed as a cross sectional survey and focuses on current events and relationships within the selected public parastatals. A time frame of two weeks was assigned the distribution and retrieval of questionnaire copies given the proximity of the parastatals (all situated in Port Harcourt, Nigeria). The investigation is hinged on the nomothetic (quantitative) methodology as data is based on the observation of regularities, assignment of numerical values and coded to allow for the quantification and summarization of responses to the empirical referents of the constructs under investigation (Sekaran, 2003, Sarantakos, 2005).

### **3.2 Population**

The population for this study comprises of the first-line departmental heads and supervisors of three public parastatals situated geographically in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Given the nature of the constructs and the emphasis on the implications of their relationship on the organization as a whole, the investigation thus adopts the departmental heads and front-line supervisors as units of measurement, hence the sampling is purposive as it focuses on the dispensation and functional attributes of certain individuals within the organization. A total number of 12 departmental heads, and 14 supervisors comprising 26 members from the three public parastatals based in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, formed the accessible population for the study.

### **3.3 Instrumentation**

The structured questionnaire was adopted as the data collection tool for this study and comprised of three sections – the demographic (Section A), Delegated (Dummy) Authority (Section B) and Workers Incessant Attitudes (Section C). Discrete data about the gender, age, qualification, marital status and work experience of the respondents were sort in the demographic section. These items were specifically selected based on their suitability for the study which examines the relative recognition of authority within the workplace which in most cases have been observed to have strong connections with subordinates’ perceptions about leaders’ experience, competency and qualifications to lead. Delegated Authority (Section B): is measured using two dimensions namely – powerlessness and non-recognition. Both variables are further measured on four empirical referent each. The instrument on delegated authority is adapted from Yukl & Seifert (2002) and Yukl, Seifert and Chavez (2008) *influence behaviour questionnaire* with indicator/item values recoded to effectively capture the required information, while the instrument for workers incessant behaviour (Section C) is adapted from George (2015) with the 7-item instrument indicators reversed to negative statements.

IV. Results

Presented in this section are the results for the analysis on the variables of the study using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

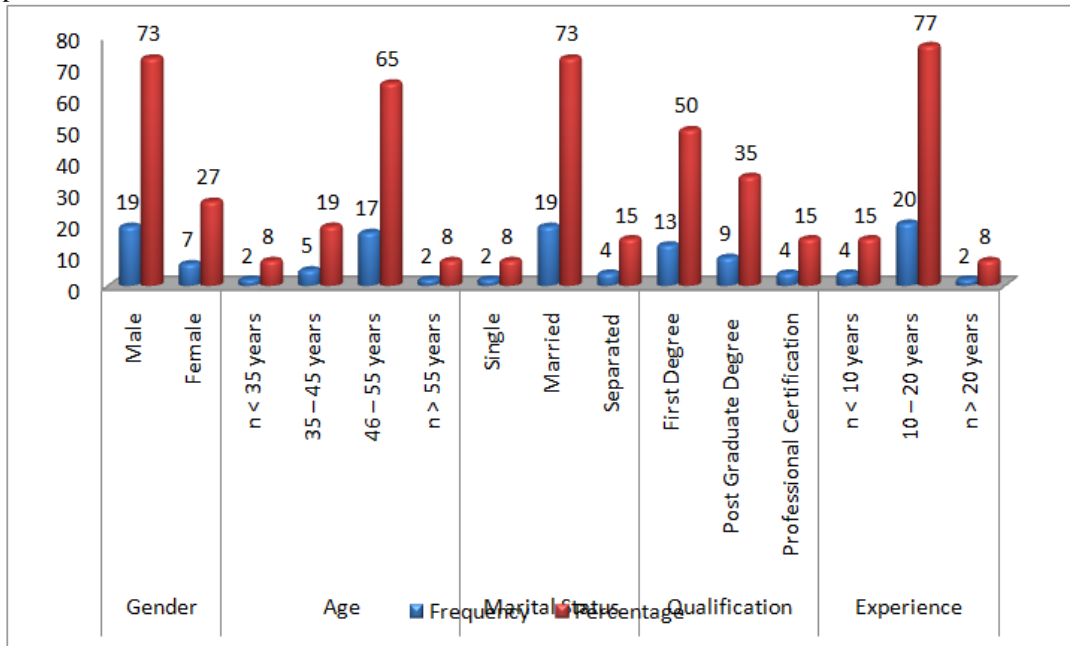


Fig 2. Demographic data distribution

Illustrated in figure 2 is the distribution for the demographic data of the study. Evidence reveals a male dominated population with most between ages 46 – 55 years. Majority are married and have obtained first degree qualifications and with work experiences ranging between 10 – 20 years.

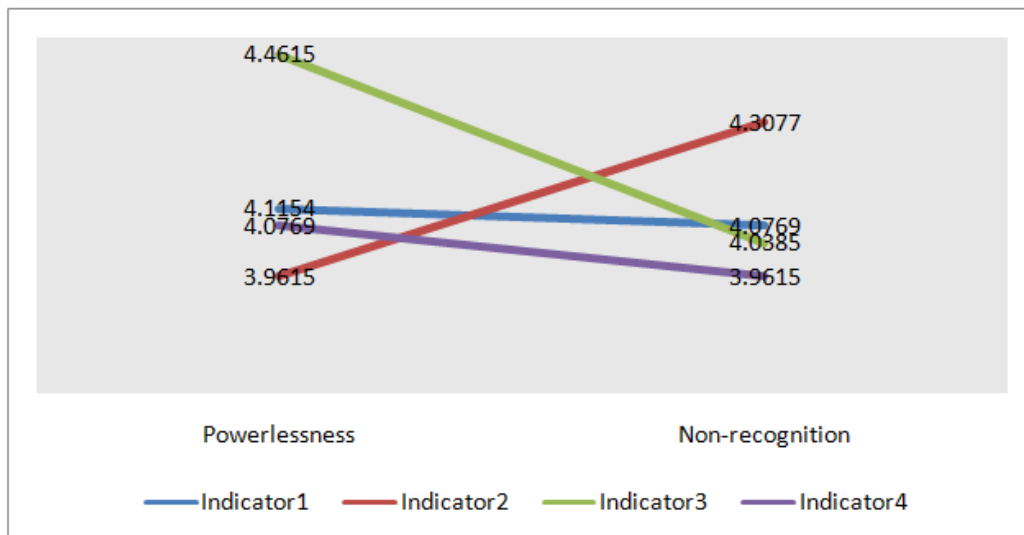


Fig 3. Data distribution for dimensions of first-line delegated (dummy) authority

Figure 3 illustrates the summary distribution for powerlessness and non-recognition (dimensions of dummy authority). The indicators of Powerlessness, the first dimension of the predictor variable: first-line delegate authority (or as referred to herein - dummy authority), reveal a high frequency for agreement to the respondents' lack of possession or poor display of power within their various roles as first-line delegate authorities. The data as illustrated in figure 3 also indicates the summary distribution for non-recognition as having a high frequency of agreement with regards to respondents' poor experiences of recognition and observations of lack of respect for their offices as first-line delegate authorities.

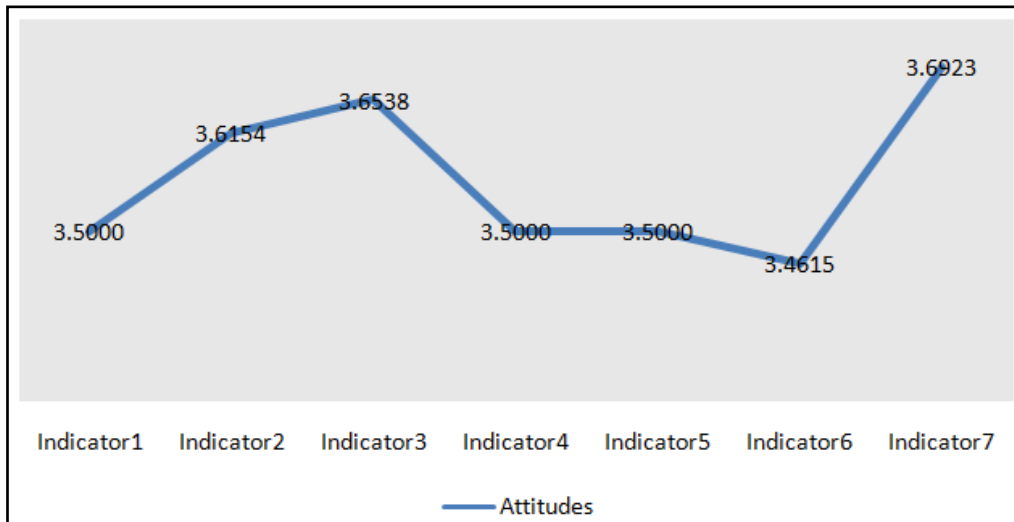


Fig 4. Data distribution for indicators of workers nonchalant attitudes

Figure 4 presents the data distribution for the indicators of workers nonchalant attitude. The evidence obtained indicates a high frequency for agreement to instances and occasions which can be viewed as relating to nonchalance towards work, clients and the organization by workers.

Table 1: Tests for hypotheses

Variables	Statistics					
	Pearson Correlation			Sig. (2-tailed)		
	Attitude	Powerless	Nonrecognize	Attitude	Powerless	Nonrecognize
Attitude	1	.460*	.420*		.018	.033
Power	.460*	1	.416*	.018		.034
Recognition	.420*	.416*	1	.033	.034	

Source: Research survey, 2016

**Hypothesis 1:** The powerlessness of first-line delegated authorities contributes significantly to workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in Nigerian public agencies:

At a 95% confidence interval, evidence from the analysis reveals that there is a significant and positive relationship between the powerlessness of first-line delegated authorities and the incessancy of workers nonchalant attitudes in the selected public parastatals in Rivers State Nigeria (where  $R = -.460$  and  $P = .018$ ). The evidence supports the view of the prevalence of workers nonchalant attitudes as a result of the feeling of powerlessness experienced by first-line delegate authorities in the studied organizations, hence the hypothesis is accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** The non-recognition of the office of first-line delegate authorities contributes significantly to workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in Nigerian public agencies

At a 95% confidence interval, the results as illustrated in table 1 supports the statement of existing significant and positive relations between the non-recognition of the office of first-line delegate authorities and workers incessant nonchalant attitudes in selected public parastatals in Rivers State, Nigeria (where  $R = .420$  and  $P = .033$ ). The evidence furthers the view that the continued indulgence in nonchalant attitudes by workers can be attributed to the non-recognition of the office of first-line delegate authorities in the studied organizations, thus the hypothesis is accepted.

## V. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study are threefold:

- i. The evidence of matured, experienced and well educated first-line delegate authority figures within the Nigerian public service given the data on their demographics with respect to their role expectations within the study organizations
- ii. The prevailing state of first-line delegate authority “dummification” within the Nigerian public service conditioned thus by the powerlessness and non-recognition afforded various first-line delegate authorities in most of these parastatals
- iii. The high rate of impunity, negligence and nonchalant attitudes expressed by workers within the Nigerian public service given the obvious deficiencies in terms of repercussions for actions which can be considered as detrimental to the organization

The findings of this study corroborate previous assertions (Fiol et al., 2001; Laximikanth, 2007; Miller, 2003) on the nature of authority and the relevance of its application in the work setting given the need for control as well as the workplace cohesiveness. It is as Brown and Trevino (2006) argue that leader effectiveness is based on the ability to influence behaviour through decisions which are concerned with rewards and punishment that are imposed on employees, given the observation that individuals are driven by reward or punishment, however socially salient. The implication of this is that within the context of managing (however delegated the authority may be) there is always the need for directing and control, which as pointed out, requires power and recognition (Fiol et al., 2001). This assertion further reiterates the position of Morakinyo (2003) and Laximikanth (2007) that the expression of authority and relative power is imperative for the synchronicity of member values and actions with that of the organization in its entirety as a teleological, goal oriented entity.

Thus in conclusion, this study asserts that one of the major factors which currently conditions, and explains the state of the Nigerian public service especially as regards the behaviour and attitude of its workers is the revealed state of powerlessness and poor level of recognition afforded the office of the first-line managers and delegate authorities comprising supervisory staff, and departmental heads. This assertion is premised on the empirical evidence provided by this report on the investigation between the constructs of the study. Furthermore, it is also possible that these factors could be considered as secondary to other contextual issues not covered by the current study such as organizational politics, organizational culture as well as workplace cliques or informal group activities within the study organizations.

## VI. Recommendations

Drawing from the evidence presented by the results of the analysis as well as the arguments proffered as regards the association between constructs of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- iv. Reporting systems should follow hierarchical structures with emphasis on the responsibilities and expectations of each officer and delegate as regards specific duties or functions in the organization
- v. Offices and responsibilities should be enhanced and strengthened through relevant policies and regulations which should be backed up by strict penalties for defaulters
- vi. The accountability of first-line delegate authorities as regards subordinates activities and behaviour should be emphasized upon with strong reference to their positions as regards communication disseminators and as "bridges" between the junior staff and senior or top management
- vii. Considerable decision-making as regards punishment and reward, based on well-articulated, documented and spelt out instances as well as procedures for the treatment of behaviour or attitude, should be afforded first-line delegate authorities with little interference given the proper adherence of judgment to the aforementioned and clearly stated documents or procedures.

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