

# Decline in Right Attitude to Work: A Contributory Factor to Africa's Poor Productive Life

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined decline in right attitude to work and how it has contributed to Africa's poor product life. Africa is a continent that is blessed with tremendous natural, human and material resources that are capable of catapulting the continent to an enviable position in the world. The questions that boggle the minds are: why is Africa regarded as under developed or more concisely less developed continent in the world despite these resources? Why is the productive life of African continent at a very low level when compared with that of other continents? In an attempt to provide answers to the above questions, the paper adopted logical analysis. The paper discovered that most people do not work for personal improvement, societal development and to solve problems. This has brought about a decline in right attitude to work. The paper is concluded with the suggestion that decline in right attitude to work can be reduced by replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts, at the same time seeing work as a way to express one's unique abilities and talents, something that we do to solve problems and not only to earn a living. This can be possible by holding on to employment meritocracy.

**Keywords:** Right Attitude, Work, Africa, Productive Life.

## INTRODUCTION

The moment that a country appears to be wealthier than others, some enquiry is bound to take place as to the reason for the difference. After Britain has begun to move ahead of the rest of Europe in the 18th century, the famous British economist Adam Smith felt it necessary to look into the causes behind the "Wealth of Nation." At the same time, many Russians were very concerned about the fact that their country was 'backward' in comparison with England, France, and Germany in the 18th century and subsequently in the 19th century (Rodney, 2009, p.15). Today, our main pre-occupation is with the differences in wealth between on the one hand Europe and north America and on the other hand Africa.... (Rodney, 2009, p.15). Why is the wealth and productive life of Africa retarding than that of other continents? What is responsible for the downtrending, slackening and global developmental delay of African continent? Is it that the barber does not know how to cut well or that the blade is not sharp?

The productive life of Africa cannot improve without the right attitude to work. Attitude is the way and manner that one thinks, feels or behaves towards somebody or something which could be good or bad, positive or negative. According to Ukegbu et al, attitude is an organized and consistent manner of thinking, feeling and reacting to people, groups and social issues in one's environment. Attitude is a learnable habit which can be done knowingly or unknowingly in the course of education or training. Attitude is important for survival and for any person to acquire. It is therefore a consistent regard to certain people, objects way of thinking in and events, consistent way of feeling towards political, economic and cultural issues and consistent way of acting or reacting to such issues (2019, p.1). It is attitude that determines how far one will go in life and as Oral Roberts puts it, "it is your attitude that will make you or break you. It is the pattern of your life that will determine the outcome of your existence." Work is the application of physical and mental effort to do something in order to achieve a particular aim, purpose, goal or result. When efforts are not applied properly by exhibiting right attitude, there will be a decrease in one's ability to create something valuable. Many people are unemployed and aspire to work but many do not have the right attitude to work. Some will be employed but they will not go to work, some will go to work but they will not work, some will work but in a wrong way that fruitful results cannot be achieved.

Despite the decline in right attitude to work of some workers, a lot of efforts have been made to improve the welfare of workers. It was as a result of unfavorable working conditions in the 1800s (19th century) like long working hours and hazardous environments in many countries that made workers in the United States to embark on strikes. There was also a strike known as Chicago Strike in 1st May, 1886 where workers made a very solidified appeal that there should be an eight-hour workday. This Chicago Strike is also referred to as Haymarket Affair and it resulted in violence and police inhumanity. In 1889, the Second International for Labour, Socialist and Marxist Parties was established as a result of International Workers Congress that was held in Paris. This Second International declared 1st May as an international day of protest and celebration in support of workers' request for eight-hour day. International Worker's Day which is also known as Labour Day or May Day is celebrated annually to remind people of the rights and achievements of workers and to conduct a campaign for a better working conditions, fair wages, social justice and to promote solidarity to workers.

### **Meaning of Right Attitude to Work**

Right attitude to work means the good or acceptable way that one should behave towards doing something that involves physical or mental effort in order to achieve increased productivity and development. Right attitude to work leads to the organization and mobilization of human and material resources to ensure productivity and success at work. Ukegbu et al sees right attitude to work as the positive practice of doing activities, jobs, duties or functions with every form of seriousness. It shows the willingness and ability to engage in group or collective work for the sole aim of helping oneself and mankind (2019, p.1). Some of right attitudes to work are integrity, discipline, honesty, co-operation, regularity, punctuality, commitment, reliability, consistency etc.

Integrity is the quality of being truthful or honest. Somebody who behaves with integrity always exhibit strong moral principles. Alexander et al notes that integrity relates to general character of someone. A person of integrity is someone who displays all the moral virtues like honesty, loyalty, fair play, tolerance, meekness, probity, non-compromise, among others. Integrity encompasses all the virtues that build the character of a person. That is why people of integrity are highly respected and valued in the society (2015, p.2). Ukegbu et al says that integrity relates to doing what is right always, being faithful and dedicated to whatever duty one is called to do. For them, a man of integrity is a person who can be trusted, at all times and who does not change easily, but is highly principled and firm in whatever stand or case he or she is pursuing. Integrity ensures quality in the production of goods and services. It also helps to build up tourism, generate income and make for quick transformation of the entire society (2019, pp.2-3).

Discipline means acting according to laid down rules and regulations, training of the mind and body to produce obedience and self-control. It is for this reason that a disciplined person is said to be someone who obeys rules and regulations. Disciplined action is an action that is in line with the law of the land, and reasonable to human conduct. Such an action submits one's personal desires and actions to the restraint of orderly social conduct, in recognition of the legitimate right and desires of others (Nwankwo, 2010, p.169). The goal of self-discipline is social interest and self-restraint in pursuit of such goals. This promotes the concept of fair play and the breaking of selfishness. Discipline does not invite excessive routine supervision by an external force, but it is imposed by the individual from within, due to his receptivity to social conditioning (Nwankwo, 2010, p.169).

Honesty is the quality of always telling the truth about someone or something. An honest person neither steals what does not belong to him nor cheat people. Honesty in the view of Alexander, is a positive value that refers to a fact of moral character and denotes positive, virtuous attributes such as integrity, truthfulness and straightforwardness along with the absence of lying, cheating, or theft. Other attributes of honesty are fair play, impartiality, respectfulness, delicateness, earnest, sincerity, understanding and honourable. In addition, an honest person will inform others of opportunities for growth and self-actualization. Thus, honesty, in a real sense means being open about one's life (2012, pp.9-10).

Co-operation is when one works together with other people in order to achieve a particular objective or common goal. Wherever and whenever there is co-operation, there is corresponding tolerance, unity, harmony, peace, success and productivity. On the other hand, lack of co-operation breeds retrogression, backwardness, mutual distrust, disunity and chaos. Co-operation promotes exchange of ideas, wealth, natural resources and manpower. International organizations such as Economic Community of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), etc.

emerged owing to inter- country and inter- continent co-operation (Alexander, 2012, p.11). Regularity and punctuality are good right attitudes to work that should be upheld to a very high esteem. It means that a person must be at his place of work at every work days without unnecessary absenteeism while punctuality implies that an employee or worker should come to work at the correct time and not behind the time. It abhors the notion of African time of going to work or an event behind the appropriate time. If you are regular and punctual to work, you should also be committed to it. Right attitude to work gives rise to commitment to duty. A committed person is not selfish. He is always prepared to make sacrifices with time, energy, talent and resources in order to achieve good name for himself and his nation (Ukegbu et al, 2019, p.3).

Reliability is the quality of being dependable. A reliable person is one who can be trusted by people to do something very well. It is related to truthfulness which means saying the truth all the time. It is only a reliable person that can be truthful and a truthful person can be reliable. A reliable person can perform a task that is assigned to him or her without waiting to be strictly supervised. Such a person gives correct answer to questions without mincing words and is always consistent. Consistency has to do with high degree of reliability, steadfastness and durability in production, distribution and exchange of goods and services in the economy. Consistency brings satisfaction and stimulates goodwill in both the givers and receivers of the services rendered. (Ukegbu et al, 2019, p.3).

#### Classical Management Theory: Decline in Right Attitude to Work and Africa's Poor Productive Life

The need to increase efficiency and productivity has been the major concern of inventors, producers and employers. This has equally led to many theories like classical management theory which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries' to proffer solutions to the challenges of industrialization and the desire to boost efficiency and productivity. The industrial revolution which contributed immensely to the development of classical management theory was marked by rapid technological advancements and increase in factories. This necessitated prompt action in providing a more systematic management approaches to addressing the challenges posed by the increase in workforce, production processes and organization of human and material resources. Proponents of this theory include: Fredrick Taylor, Henry Fayol, Max Weber, Elton Mayo and Douglas McGregor.

Fredrick Taylor who is considered as the father of Scientific Management Movement is interested in the ways that men can effectively be used in industrial organization. His belief is that men could be programmed to be efficient machine. Henry Fayol is the pioneer of Administrative Management Approach or Universal Principle Movement (General Management Theory). According to him, the universal principles that characterize successful administration and management include: planning, organizing, directing, co-ordinating and controlling (PODCC). He equally developed fourteen principles of management and there are: division of work, authority and responsibility, discipline, unity of command, unity of directing, subordination of individual interest to general interest, remuneration of personnel, centralization of authority, chain of command, order, equity, stability of tenure of personnel, initiative and esprit de corps. Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy emphasizes formal structures like division of labour, hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations, and technical competence. His theory influences organizational structures across various sectors. Elton Mayo talks about the need for human relations approach at work place and the effect of physical conditions of work on productivity while Douglas McGregor developed the theory of human management in organization. This theory is also known as theory X and theory Y. Theory X is of the view that human beings always dislike work and avoid responsibility and because of this, they should be properly supervised, controlled and forced. Theory Y management theory says that employees always want to work, seek responsibility and are self-directed and self-controlled. As a result of that, they need lesser supervision.

For any nation to make progress or develop, its citizens must have the right attitude to work. A nation may have abundant resources but if the people do not have the right attitude to work, its resources cannot be well managed. For example, if a driver does not do his work well and there is an accident, people will die. Equally, if a medical doctor does not do his work well, sick people will suffer (Ukegbu et al, 2019:1). Africa is in a state that it is today because of decline in right attitude to work and that is why there is decline in productivity. Ukegbu et al (2019: 4), notes that negative attitude to work brings about decline in the production level of the people. The people produce little or nothing due to lack of interest, commitment, dedication and incentive. Decline in

productivity brings suffering to the citizens, especially the poor and the need. A ... [continent] with decline in productivity is heading towards hunger, suffering, poverty, disease and high rate of mortality. Are the above mentioned problems (challenges) not what we face in Africa? In Africa, there are hunger, high rate of poverty, chronic and acute diseases, high rate of infant and maternal mortality, insurgency, killings, collapse of building and bridges etc. because of decline in right attitude to work both on the part of the leaders and their subjects. That is why Ukoma et al states that, "our leaders cannot face up to the challenges of national deficiencies and the fallen ethical standard because our situation is that of, "like the father, like the son, - like the leaders and the led." (2009, p.189).

The resources in Africa are abundant enough to solve our problem but the problem is how to harness it. Harnessing it can only be done by people who know how to do that and if these people are not accommodated, it will continue to remain unharnessed and if wrong people are to harness it, they will harness it wrongly. (Aka, 2020, p. 12). How can a continent with high rate of workers that are deficient in honesty, integrity, commitment, punctuality, regularity, consistency, co- operation, reliability, truthfulness etc. progress in productivity? In response, Rodney says that one of the most difficult questions to answer is exactly why different people developed at different rates when left on their own. Part of the answer was in the environment in which human groups evolved and part of it lies in the superstructure of human society (2009, p.9). Our environment is a type that there is a decline in right attitude to work which results in slow progressive development. Some national disasters, mishaps or accidents, be it in the air as plane crash, in the sea as shipwreck, on the land as road traffic accident, water pollution, and over-flooding, are all avoidable disasters, which have persisted due to bad attitude to work of some people and careless approach of doing things that we have such disasters. Some people become lawless and do things the way they like, not the way they are supposed to be done and so the result is always one disaster or the order (Ukegbu et al, 2019, p.5). Natural vegetation is tampered with, neglecting the way nature made it. Trees are felled without replacements. Land is reclaimed from water bodies without adequate plans, water drainages are blocked with solid materials such as pure water sachet, polythene and toxic wastes from industries and mechanic workshop. All these give room for natural disasters (Ukegbu et al, 2019, p.5).

When there is decline in right attitude to work, there will be a high rate of production of fake and adulterated products and goods that can lead to death. Fake drugs and foods, bribery and embezzlement of public fund are as a result of decline in right attitude to work and this has led to poor social services. "There are poor services that have led to setbacks and backwardness. These social services provided by a country are of importance equal to that of its material production in bringing about human well- being and happiness" (Rodney, 2009, p. 20). The economy of African continent cannot improve without the right attitude to work.

### **Promoting Right Attitude to Work Through Meritocracy and Workers-Centered Leadership**

The right attitude to work is a critical determinant of national progress in economic, political, and social spheres. While individual values are important, systemic and structural factors such as governance failures, nepotism, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure shape work ethics in profound ways. This work is novel because it depicts how meritocracy and workers-centered leadership can promote positive work attitudes, while also highlighting the need for broader institutional reforms. Drawing comparative lessons from other developing regions, it recommends practical strategies such as leadership development, skills training, performance-based incentives, and stronger accountability frameworks.

The survival and progress of any society depend on the values and attitudes that guide its workforce. Without the cultivation of the right attitude to work, there can be no sustainable economic growth, technological innovation, or effective citizenship. However, in many developing contexts, poor governance, corruption, and structural inefficiencies have eroded productivity and work ethics. This paper argues that right attitudes to work can be cultivated through a dual emphasis on meritocracy and workers-centered leadership, but must also be reinforced by systemic reforms.

### **Meritocracy and Work Ethics**

Meritocracy rests on the principle that opportunities should be based on talent, education, competence, and achievement. When recruitment and promotions are not merit-based, productivity declines, and workers lose motivation. For example, when unqualified teachers are hired due to political patronage, the education suffers

suffers as students receive poor instruction (Aka, 2020). By contrast, employment based on qualifications, competence, and interest fosters commitment and professionalism. Meritocracy should not only shape recruitment but also promotions, financial benefits, and recognition. Transparent systems, independent monitoring bodies, and clear performance benchmarks are essential to ensuring that competence, not connections, drives opportunities.

### **Workers-Centered Leadership**

Leadership that prioritizes worker welfare is central to shaping positive work attitudes. Yet in many contexts, workers are treated with disregard: salaries are delayed, welfare benefits withheld, and promises unfulfilled. Such practices erode morale and reduce productivity. Workers should be respected as partners in national development, not merely as means to an end.

A workers-centered approach requires timely salary payments, access to healthcare, pensions, and retirement benefits. Furthermore, participatory decision-making, where workers' voices are considered, can increase motivation and ownership. As studies on organizational behavior suggest, workers are more productive when they feel valued and supported.

### **Structural and Systemic Challenges**

Promoting the right attitude to work cannot be divorced from systemic conditions. Governance failures, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and high unemployment all shape attitudes negatively. Workers cannot be expected to exhibit high morale when electricity, transport, and digital systems remain unreliable. Similarly, persistent unemployment—especially among youth—undermines work ethics, as many see little reward for effort or education.

Thus, promoting positive work attitudes requires broader reforms: strengthening governance institutions, reducing corruption, and investing in infrastructure. Policies to reduce unemployment through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and job creation are equally essential.

### **Actionable Strategies**

To complement meritocracy and workers-centered leadership, several practical interventions are required:

**Leadership Development** – Training managers and public officials in ethical, transparent, and inclusive leadership.

**Skills Training and Capacity Building** – Regular retraining and workshops to ensure workers remain competent and adaptable.

**Performance-Based Incentives** – Linking pay, promotions, and recognition to measurable contributions.

**Institutional Reforms** – Establishing strong recruitment boards, labor courts, and independent monitoring bodies.

**Worker Support Systems** – Expanding access to subsidized healthcare, pensions, and housing schemes.

### **Comparative Perspective**

Experiences from other developing regions illustrate the importance of systemic reforms. Rwanda and Botswana, for example, have achieved relative success in improving work ethics by strengthening institutions, curbing corruption, and prioritizing merit in recruitment. Conversely, regions where nepotism and corruption persist, such as parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, continue to face low productivity and poor work attitudes. These comparisons highlight the centrality of meritocracy and accountability in fostering a motivated workforce.

## **CONCLUSION**

The decline in right attitudes to work is shaped by both personal values and systemic shortcomings. To reverse the trend, employment and promotions must be merit-based, leadership must prioritize workers' welfare, and

systemic reforms must address governance failures, corruption, and unemployment. By combining meritocracy, workers-centered leadership, and structural reforms, nations can build a culture of excellence where work is not merely a means of survival but a platform for talent,

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