

GROUP CLIMATE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM AS PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYEES' COMPETITIVENESS AMONG A SAMPLE OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STAFF

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined group climate and psychological collectivism as predictors of employees' competitiveness. Employees' competing in organisations is inevitable. This especially involves groups, formal or informal. Group is the force that drives organisation's productivity and growth. This calls for a climate where different groups will play different roles towards achieving the organisational goals and objectives. Nigerians are collectively oriented and as such employers are looking forward to having workers who are psychologically collective in moving his/her organisation forward. Ninety-seven participants comprising 59 male and 38 female employees in the university system were sampled using two-stage cluster sampling technique. Three instruments; Conflict sub-scale of Group Climate Questionnaire (GCQ) by MacKenzie (1983), Psychological Collectivism Scale (PSC) by Jackson, Colquitt, Wesson and Zapata-Phelan (2006) and Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale by Ryckman, Hammer and Gold (1990) were used for data collection. Using correlational design and multiple linear regression statistics; the result showed that jointly, group climate and psychological collectivism accounted for 6.3% variance in employees' competitiveness, with $F(2, 94) = 3.18, p < .05, R = .25$. In the same vein, independently, only group climate significantly but inversely predicted employees' hyper-competitiveness at $(\beta = -.26, t = -2.39, p = .02)$ where as psychological collectivism did not. The researchers concluded that organisational peace and harmony will be hampered if healthy group climate and competitive behaviours are not entrenched and recommended that employees and employers should be wary of the existence of hyper-competitive workers in their organisation and should find a way of curtailing its negative effects.

Keywords: Group climate, psychological collectiveness, competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Competition occurs naturally between living organisms which co-exist in the same environment (Keddy, 2001). However, the disconcerting characteristic of competition when people want to win is how it negatively affects our relationships with one another consciously or unconsciously. This is so among workers in the workplace, that brings divides and disrupts organisational peace and harmony in all ramifications. There are readily available cues in workplaces with regards to groups that are likely to shift the balance between collaboration and competition among workers. Past research has shown that even small contextual cues can profoundly influence how competitively individuals encode their relationships (Kilduff, Elefenbein & Staw, 2010). For example, describing the prisoner's dilemma game as "The Wall Street Game" triggers significantly more competitive behaviour than describing the same game as "The Community Game" (Lieberman, Samuels and Ross, 2004), where participants are more likely to behave cooperatively. Similarly, contextual cues, such as a target's similarity to one's self, the frequency of competitive interactions, and the extent to which past competitions have been evenly matched can promote rivalry and aggressive competition (Kilduff et al., 2010). This past research suggests that subtle cues in organizations may be powerful enough to cause individuals to change whether they view a given colleague as a collaborator or a competitor.

Furthermore, past research indicates that engaging in upward social comparisons is unpleasant and can threaten an individual's self-image (Tesser, Millar & Moore, 1988), in turn harming co-worker relationships, affecting levels of trust (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Rotter, 1980), and triggering hostility (Testa & Major, 1990; Wills, 1981). According to Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model (SEM), upward social comparisons are particularly aversive and threatening to an individual's self-image when the comparison domain is self-relevant and the comparison target is someone psychologically close, such as a peer.

Similarly, related research has found that focusing on the self as an individual while experiencing unfavourable social comparisons can harm relationships (Dunn, Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2012; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Festinger, 1954; Garcia, Song & Tesser, 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Parrott & Smith, 1993; Tai, Narayanan & McAllister, 2012), trigger hostility (Salovay & Rodin, 1984), reduce information sharing (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006), promote deception (Moran & Schweitzer, 2008), and motivate a desire to harm the target (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007) of the comparison. From the foregoing, one will begin to wonder, what happened to the group spirit and collectivism characteristics that Africans are known for. Since, workers engage in all sorts of competitions in the workplace due to one reason or the other.

Group cohesion has been studied for nearly sixty years, the definition and operationalisation of cohesion has been inconsistent. Cohesiveness is generally defined as "the resultant of all forces acting on all the members to remain in the group" (Cartwright, 1968). Group cohesiveness is one of the essential concepts for understanding group dynamics (Zander, 1979) studied for its conceptual similarity with teamwork. Early theorists identified group cohesiveness with other concepts such as group spirit, interpersonal attraction, sense of belongingness, and sense of wellness (Mudrack, 1989).

Sometimes, cohesion is defined at the group level, such as Festinger's (1950) definition that cohesion was "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group" (p.164). Other times team cohesion is defined at the individual level, such as Pepitone & Kleiner's (1957) definition that team cohesion was individual members' attraction to the group. So, group cohesion, the social and motivational forces that bind group members together (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003), are important for a number of groups including work groups in various departments in a school system to exist. Because of this, how groups can be actively managed to be more cohesive has become of interest to researchers and practitioners (Oliver, Harman, Hooever, Hayes, & Pandhi, 1999; Schmidt, Keeton, Slack, Leveton, & Shea, 2009). In this study, group cohesiveness is approached with a traditional view which concentrates

on social cohesion. A social cohesion (i.e., interpersonal aspect) would be a proper concept for examining how workers behave in the workplace with a fellow worker in their group in terms of competition for scarce resources in the organisation. It was believed that based on Nigerians collectivist orientation, workers should engage in healthy way of achieving their individual goals in a given group without disrupting the peace and harmony that exist between workers and within a given group in an organisation.

However, within organizational psychology, a large body of literature asserts that collectivism is a characteristic of a cohesive group (Bahrami & Evans, 1997; Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Cohesion, defined as "a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998), is a construct that represents perceptions of the social connections within a group. In particular, individuals hold perceptions regarding both group integration (closeness and unification of the group) and their own attractions to the group that is, individual affect and motivations influencing adherence (Carron et al., 1998).

Psychological collectivism (i.e. collective orientation) represents a desire for group membership, and its salience has recently been identified in elite individual sport contexts (Evans, Eys, & Wolf, 2013). In general, highly

collective individuals view themselves as members of one or more in-groups, are primarily motivated by the norms of those in-groups, prioritize the goals and well-being of those in-groups, and emphasize their connectedness to other in-group members (Trindis, 1995). Historically, much of the attention devoted to collectivism has identified the construct as a cultural variable, representing overarching patterns present in complex societies (Hofstede, 1980; House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). This approach is largely attributed to Hofstede's (1980) cross-cultural study, which focused on the scope of differences in national work-related value systems. Specifically, Hofstede (1980) generated country level indicators of collectivism based on the differences in samples' responses to work satisfaction questionnaires. This approach operationalizes collectivism as a societal preference by using country mean scores, and cannot accurately account for—or does not attempt to explain—individual behaviour. Recent investigations have taken a different tact, and identified collectivism as an individual difference variable in group settings (Eby & Dobbins, 1997; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001).

Along this line, individuals are believed to vary in terms of their collectivism (termed allocentrism) and individualism (termed idiocentrism) (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). Understanding both the cultural and individual levels of collective orientations is important because within individualistic cultures, roughly 60% of individuals are believed to be

idiocentric, whereas within collectively oriented cultures, 60% of individuals are believed to be allocentric (Triandis & Suh, 2002). This domain specific perspective is believed to more accurately represent the influence of collectivism on basic psychological processes at the individual level (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Interestingly, cooperation is often seen as an essential component for proper team functioning (LePine, Hanson, Borman, & Motowidlo, 2000), and this appears to be facilitated by the presence of collectively oriented team members (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Earley & Gibson, 1998; Wagner, 1995). Given that individuals with higher collectivistic orientations base their identities on group membership and value interdependence, teams composed of collectivistic individuals engage in behaviours that facilitate effective team functioning (Dierdorff, Bell, & Belohalv, 2011).

Theoretically, this study was anchored on Campbell's (1965) realistic conflict theory. Afterwards, known as realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) (Jackson, 1993; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). RGCT is a social psychological model of intergroup conflict (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The theory explains how intergroup hostility can arise as a result of conflicting goals and competition over limited resources, and it also offers an explanation for the feelings of prejudice and discrimination toward the out-group that accompany the intergroup hostility (Jackson, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Whitley & Kite, 2010). Groups may be in

competition for a real or perceived scarcity of resources such as money, political power, military protection, or social status (Campbell, 1965; Jackson, 1993). Feelings of resentment can arise in the situation that the groups see the competition over resources as having a zero-sums fate, in which only one group is the winner (obtained the needed or wanted resources) and the other loses (unable to obtain the limited resource due to the "winning" group achieving the limited resource first) (Jackson, 1993; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). The length and severity of the conflict is based upon the perceived value and shortage of the given resource (Jackson, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). According to RCT, positive relations can only be restored if super-ordinate goals are in place (Jackson, 1993). RGCT is a well-established theory with robust research support from both laboratory and field studies. It is used to understand many of the local and global intergroup conflicts that besiege the world.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that in our Nigerian organisations, workers are often seen trying to carry out their group cohesive and collectivism behaviour in such a manner (for instance; covering up for a colleague who comes late to work, made mistakes etc; buying gifts, sharing ideas, etc) that one begins to desire to work with them. On the contrary, you will also begin to hear of shouting, fighting, poisoning, back-biting, sabotage and the like that workers always complain of. Based on this premise, this research actually diverted from the usual literature on

group and performance, satisfaction etc. to look at the competitions that go on the workplaces despite the fact that they seem to be cohesive and collectively oriented. This study will also close the gap in and contribute to knowledge. This is because there is paucity of studies on the study variables. Hence, the study investigated group climate, psychological collectivism as predictors of competitiveness among employees. Generally, the purpose of the study was to investigate group climate, psychological collectivism as predictors of employees' competitiveness: implications to industrial peace and harmony.

Therefore, it was hypothesised that;

- ✓ Group climate and psychological collectivism jointly and independently will not significantly predict employees' competitiveness.

METHOD

Design

The study adopted a correlational design. This was due to the fact that the study sought to establish a predictive relationship among the variables under study.

Participants

A total of 97 participants 59 male and 38 female university employees between the ages of 27 to 55 years ($M = 36.84$; $SD = 7.83$). The participants were sampled using two-stage cluster sampling (a simple case of multistage sampling, is obtained by first, identifying large clusters and

randomly selecting from among them (first stage) (Kish, 1965). From the selected clusters, you randomly select individual elements (rather than selecting all elements in the cluster) from the population of a private and public university in Enugu state.

Instrument

The Group Climate Questionnaire-Short Form (GCQ; MacKenzie, 1983) is a 12-item self-report measure of the group members' perceptions of the group atmosphere. Participants rate items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely." The GCQ has three subscales which include: engagement (which is composed of items pertaining to self-disclosure, cognitive understanding, and confrontation), avoidance (with items measuring the extent that group members avoid responsibility for their change processes) and conflict (which measures interpersonal conflict and distrust). In this study the researchers adopted the conflict sub-scale, which has 4 items with direct scoring format for this study. According to McClendon and Burlingame (2010), the GCQ is the most commonly used measure of group climate and there are a large number of studies supporting its validity. The Italian version of the GCQ showed good psychometric properties (Costantini, Picardi, Podrasky, Lunetta, Ferraresi & Balbi, 2002). The Cronbach's alphas they obtained were .72 for Engagement, .59 for Avoidance, and .74 for Conflict. However, the researchers obtained the following Cronbach's alphas .74, .69 and .55 for engaged, conflict and

avoiding climate respectively, using 46 participants in a pilot study from corporate organisations.

The Hyper-Competitiveness Attitude scale (HCA) is a 26-item self-report inventory by Ryckman, Hammer and Gold (1990). It is designed to assess an individual's need to compete and win at all costs, to achieve a sense of self-worth, as well as the manipulation, aggressiveness, exploitation, and denigration of others. HCA is rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never true for me) to 5 (always true for me). It has some direct and reverse-scored items. Sample items from the HCA include: "I cannot stand to lose an argument" and "Winning in competition does not give me a greater sense of worth" (reverse scored). Ryska (2002) reported internal consistency coefficient between athletes and non-athletes .65 and .85 respectively. Ryckman et al. (1990) reported adequate internal reliability ($r = .91$) and test-retest reliability ($r = .81$). The researchers obtained internal consistency coefficient alpha of .82 using 46 participants in a pilot study from corporate organisations.

Psychological Collectivism Scale (PSC) is a 15-item self-report inventory developed by Jackson, Colquitt, Wesson and Zapata-Phelan (2006). It is designed to assess how collective members performed their group tasks better, contributed more discretionary citizenship, and were less likely to engage in counterproductive or withdrawal behaviours. PSC has five facets which include (preference which emphasize relationships with in-

group members and prefer to exist within the bounds of the in-group), reliance (which believes that one person's responsibility is the responsibility of the entire in-group), concern (which is motivated not by self-interest but by a concern for the well-being of the in-group and its members), norm acceptance (which focuses on the norms and rules of the in-group and complies with those norms and rules in order to foster harmony within the collective) and goal priority (when actions are guided by the consideration of the in-group's interests). The psychological collectivism measure also possessed strong reliability, whether used as an overall scale (.84) or as five more specific facets. Facet-level reliabilities were as follows: .86 for preference, .81 for reliance, .90 for concern, .90 for norm acceptance, and .87 for goal priority (Jackson et al., 2006). In scoring, the scale has direct scoring of item and were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The researchers obtained an overall Cronbach's alpha of .77 using 46 participants in a pilot study from corporate organisations.

Procedure

The researchers obtained permission from the managements of the population of interest. Cluster identification was carried out. Generally, two clusters were identified which were academic and non academic staff of the universities. Afterwards, two faculties were randomly selected and in each faculty, based on departmental clusters, two-stage cluster sampling technique was applied in sampling the participants for the study from one private and one public university in Enugu State. A total of 120 copies of the questionnaire were administered within 2 weeks after establishing adequate rapport with the participants. A total of 107 (89.17%) copies of the questionnaire were returned, 10 (8.33%) copies were discarded due to non-completion of the items. Hence, 97 (80.83%) copies were scored and used in testing the hypotheses.

Statistics

A multiple linear regression statistics was used in testing the hypotheses as the studies tried to establish a predictive effect of the study variables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Summary table of descriptive statistics and correlations on group climate, psychological collectivism and employees' competitiveness (N = 97)

	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3
1	Competitiveness	94.25	14.94	1		
2	Group Climate	3.44	1.01	-.19*	1	
3	Psychological collectivism	35.35	9.31	.08	.38**	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

From table 1, the correlation analysis revealed that group climate was found to significantly but negatively correlated with employees' competitiveness at ($r = -.19$, $p = .03$) level of significance. On the same hand, the table showed no significant correlation between psychological collectivism and employees'

competitiveness at ($r = .08$, $p > .05$). However, there was a significant correlation between group climate and psychological collectivism at ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). These implied that employees who had interpersonal conflict and distrust in a group lack psychological collectivism and as such exhibits hyper-competitiveness.

Table 2: Summary Table of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Group Climate and Psychological Collectivism as Predictors of Employees' Competitiveness (N= 97)

Model	R	R ²	F	β	t	P
	.252	.063	3.18			
Group Climate				-.26	-2.39	.02
Psychological collectivism				.18	1.63	.11

From table 2, results indicated that jointly, group climate and psychological collectivism accounted

for 6.3% variance in employees' competitiveness, with $F(2, 94) = 3.18$, $p < .05$, $R = .25$. In the same vein,

independently, only group climate significantly but inversely predicted employees' hyper-competitiveness at ($\beta = -.26, t = -2.39, p = .02$) where as psychological collectivism did not.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that group climate and psychological collectivism jointly predicted employees' competitiveness but independently, only group climate did predict employees' competitiveness. These are in line with previous studies' for instance; Dunn et al., (2012) noted that organizations often expect employees to collaborate with and trust the same co-workers with whom they compete for promotions and raises. In their results, they found that both upward and downward social comparisons harm trust. Upward comparisons harm affective trust and downward comparisons harm cognitive trust. Also, no benefits of upward comparisons on cognitive trust, and we find no benefits of downward comparisons on affective trust. Also, Garcia, et al. (2010) hypothesized that people who have high standing on a relevant dimension (e.g., quantity of publications) begin to protect their social comparison context by making recommendations that prevent others, who might surpass them on the relevant dimension, from entering their comparison context. Their studies instantiated this effect in both hypothetical and real decision situations, showing that people tend not to recommend individuals who surpass them on the relevant dimension on which they have high

standing. In furtherance, Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Tai, Narayanan & McAllister, 2012 positions on the study variables, were that when a group that supposes to be cohesive and collective in their dealings allowed bickering, bitterness, other forms of anti-group behaviours, and unfavourable social comparisons will harm employees' relationships. Also, employees' psychological collectivism will be jeopardise and such will lead to unhealthy competitions, because the tendency to self-evaluate by comparing oneself to others, is an important source of competitive behaviour.

However, the outcome of the study is not surprising, looking at the happenings in our workplaces today especially in organisations that have clusters or departments. Workers are always jealous of colleagues who are doing well and will always draw comparisons. For instance, if a worker is working hard, for instance in the academic, publishing papers, advancing him/herself and as result is being promoted or given an award, his or her colleagues will start seeing him/her as a threat to their own existence. This will now strain the relationship they were enjoying as groups and even the psychological collectivism will be hindered, thereby disrupting the organisational peace and harmony. Thus, the cohesiveness in that group will be hampered.

Implications of the Findings

The major implication of this finding was bring to the fore the fact that organisational groups' climate are

no longer a safe haven and our collective orientation has been deeply jettisoned. Employees now engaged in unwholesome competitive attitudes in the work place. There are lack of trust, genuine support, and unwanted comparisons within groups. These have serious implication on the work productivity as employees will be spending much energy in dealing with all these anti organisational behaviour especially unhealthy competition.

Limitations and Future Research

Though the findings of this study are intriguing, it still has limitations. One was that data were collected only from group members and does not allow for wider coverage of the population. Two is the inherent problem in the use of self-report questionnaire and finally, the use of highly sophisticated population. Future researchers, as a way of suggestion should increase the sample size and scope to help in cross-validating the outcomes of this study. Bringing in other variables will also go a long way in broaden this area of study and add to the existing literature.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this study examined group climate and psychological collectivism as predictors of employees' competitiveness. The result showed that group climate and psychological collectivism jointly predicted hyper-competitiveness among employees, independently, only group climate predicted employees' hyper-competitiveness, a significant relationship was noted between

strained group climate and lack of psychological collectivism among the employees. To this end, it was concluded that employees in groups are no longer functioning as groups and as collective entity in organisations and as such, organisational peace and harmony will be hampered with this new trend if healthy group climate and competitive behaviour are not entrenched.

Recommendations

Following the outcomes of this study, the researchers recommend that employees and employers should be wary of the existence of hyper-competitive workers in their organisation and should find a way of curtailing its negative effects. Also, based on group cohesiveness and psychological collectivism employers, governments and other stake-holders should embark on campaign towards reorienting the general populace on the core values and importance of group and collective existence.

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