

Disciplined Character Values and Sustainable Career Success among Graduates of Christian-based Tertiary institutions in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study adopted an opinion survey to determine the relevance of disciplined character in the recruitment and promotion of graduate employees in Ghana. A total of 371 respondents, consisting of 280 students from targeted Christian-based colleges, 16 alumni and 75 employers from targeted industries were randomly sampled. Data were collated with structured questionnaire and interviews as instruments of collation. Chi square test was the statistical tool used for data analysis. For both students and employers, a bad character applicant must not be recruited. Similarly, employers out-rightly and students, closely, objected to an indisciplined character employee not being promoted. They differed, though, in the reasons for their opinions. Employers would rather tolerate just to avoid the cost of unnecessary labour turn-over and litigations. Students appeared to have erroneously and contrary to Acts of Ghana, (Labour Act 651, 2003) assumed a right to promotion even if indisciplined. The variance in opinions of employers and students may have important implications for both educators and industry. hence educators and industries should pay serious policy attention to the variance opinions of the participants of the study.

Keywords: *Character, career success, work ethic, recruitment, promotion*

INTRODUCTION

The employment market is a continually changing landscape, and so university graduates have to compete more than ever due to various reasons including recessions of the global economy. The competition is made keener for all graduates, as students are becoming more diverse, overlapping in the job market and competing on the same fronts more so than ever before. The nature of employment is also changing as individuals are more likely to be employed on projects or temporary contracts compared to 15 years ago (Ulster University, 2011). In short, today's business environment is not only fast-paced, but also highly competitive (Barberman, 2007). In Ghana, the situation is getting worse with the increase in access to university education and the resultant more graduate turn-out. A young graduate today may have to be more than just the sum of paper qualifications because of the fast-pace and competitiveness of business environment to be more appealing to employers, favoured for employment and remaining employed - be it private or public. In a career advice article Paul Powers (2010) asserts that a graduate's stellar background, great track record, prestigious degree and glowing references guarantee nothing in the new economy. The new employment paradigm is: What have you done for me lately?

whether for pay or not. This obviously seems to question or demand justify-your-inclusion qualifications from an applicant: (i) his/her character trait of being sacrificial and (ii) practical skills or competences from experience. So employers expect graduates to exhibit a wide range of personal attributes in addition to the acquisition of a body of knowledge (Harvey, Moon and Geall, 1997) in order to be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke and Knight, 2006). In this sense, graduates must not only work towards only getting a job, but more importantly, keeping it by developing malleable skills and qualities that will help them maximise their potential in any workplace and enable them to realise these potentials (Ulster University, 2011; Barberman, 2007). To keep pace and stay ahead, possession of several key character traits (including work ethics) is a plus for achieving a successful career (Barberman, 2007), probably because while aptitude (knowledge and skills) contributes only 15%, attitude (upheld life values and resultant behaviours) accounts for 85% of success in life endeavours (Egyir, 2011).

Yet some constantly argue that there is no connection between one's personal life and one's business. For instance, work ethic, as a disciplined character trait has been criticised and believed to have become obsolete (André Gorze, 1989). The critics of work ethic believe that it is no longer true that producing more implies working harder; or that producing more will lead to a better way of life. Moreover, the unprecedented scale of increased technological change and the electronic or 'the micro-chip' revolution are rapidly increasing savings in labour, in the industrial, administrative and service sectors. Increasing production is secured in these sectors by decreasing amounts of labour. As a result, the social process of production no longer needs everyone to work in it on a full-time basis. Therefore, work ethic ceases to be viable in such a situation and work based society is thrown into crisis (André Gorze, 1989). Further, in a research as to whether philosophic views affect job performance, Stillman et al. (2010) report that the well-established predictors such as conscientiousness, locus of control, and protestant work ethic fared far below the effect of free will beliefs on job performance indicators.

Probably, with this philosophic view of non-viability of work ethics in modern electronic age of industry, some college students in Ghana tended to vehemently down-play on or even protest against Christian disciplined character promoting efforts of their institutions. Implicit in these protests was students' expectation of university to focus on improving their career potentials and success sustainability with only academic knowledge, minus disciplined character. Although employers either expected good behavioural skills or disciplined character in employees, yet they neither seriously demanding (ACCI, 2002) nor rewarding it (Rynes et al. 2001). If in today's morally corrupt and undisciplined Ghana (Prempeh, 2003), technology is acclaimed reducing labour size and rendering work ethics obsolete (André Gorz., 1989). Does a graduate employee seriously require disciplined character values at all for successful career? It was hypothesised in this study that despite the belief that technology and micro-chip revolution might be apparently rendering it obsolete, disciplined character, as basis for a good work ethic (Hill, 1997), was still relevant to industry and for graduate career success (particularly, recruitment and promotion) in contemporary business organisations. This study is hoped to enable Christian-faith based

universities design appropriate character and personality development programmes that will improve the quality of their graduates. To achieve this objective, two research questions were formulated to guide the study. Hence, the following hypotheses were formulated in null form the questions.

H₀1. Students/Employers and Alumni do not agree that bad character entr ee employee should be employed in any work institution.

H₀2. Students, Employers and Alumni do not agree that bad character employee should be promoted in any work institution.

METHOD

This study was a non-interventional, but quantitative and descriptive opinion survey. Many authors have employed similar approaches in the study of ethical issues (Peslak, 2008; Shaw, 2003; Hilmer, Richardson and Courtney, 2003). The target population, considered as direct stakeholders of education with respect to the study objective, consisted of Students, Employers and Presbyterian University College, Ghana Alumni. The students were drawn from five Christian-based tertiary institutions belonging to the Conference of Private Universities in Ghana (CPUG), namely Presbyterian University College, Ghana (PUCG); Pentecost University College (PUC); Methodist University College (MUC) and Valley View University (VVU) as well as one public tertiary institution - Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education (ABETICO). These colleges were already known for promoting disciplined character through either formal education at pre-tertiary levels or informal Christian education at church levels.

The respondents from the employers category included top leaders of churches that founded private tertiary institutions; senior managerial staff of member enterprises of the Employers Association of Ghana (EAG) and Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), as well as human resource managers at government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). These industrial organisations were believed to hold high probabilities of job opportunities for the targeted students due to their academic disciplines. The Alumni category consisted of the 50 registered members from first and second batches of students that graduated from PUCG in 2007 and 2008, respectively. They were chosen for being the only ones (among all the participating educational institutions) readily accessible to give feedback on some exposure to character promotion programmes informally during their last years before graduating and entering industry. A total of 575 respondents consisting of 425 students, 100 employers and 50 Alumni of PUCG were contacted in the survey. Data were collated using structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions as instruments. The questionnaire was pre-tested with students at Okwahu campus of PUCG; Mpraeso branch of Ghana Commercial bank and Okwahu-East District Assembly Office. The pre-test assessed respondents' understanding of the interrogative items. This resulted in reframing some of them to be relevant for the objectives of the study. It helped also to change from using a Likert-type scale for self scoring to simple trinomial "agreed", "disagreed" and "undecided" type of answers for the closed questions. All 50 registered Alumni were provided with the questionnaire through e-mails and the responses returned

via same way within one month. For students, the questionnaire was administered immediately after a class session, upon soliciting their participation, and collected within one hour. Student participants were selected randomly from those present in the class through balloting. Respondents from the employers category were selected by their managements. Most of them submitted their responses by e-mail; the rest, upon their approval, were interviewed using the same questionnaire, with further interrogation for detailed explanations. Accuracy was cross-checked from permitted voice recordings. Chi square test of goodness of fit of the responses was accepted at 5% level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 64.52% responses were retrieved from the 575 contacts made, consisting of 280 (65.88%) Students out of 425; 16 (32%) Alumni out of 50 and 75 (75%) Employers out of 100.

Opinions on Recruiting Bad Character Applicant: To be successful in their chosen occupations graduates must develop malleable skills and qualities that will help them maximise their potential in any workplace and enable them to realise this potential (Barberman, 2007; Ulster University, 2011). Such malleable skills and qualities include personal attributes (Yorke and Knight, 2006; ACCI, 2002), like disciplined character or work ethic (Barberman, 2007), which are expected to be exhibited in the employee's industrial life (Harvey et al., 1997). Therefore, to determine the relevance of disciplined character to industry and recruitment success of graduates in Ghana, this study analysed respondents' opinions about how seriously character was considered as a quality at the gate of entrée employment.

Table 1 indicates that a significantly high proportion of students (62.50%), employers (64.0%) and Alumni (62.50%) disagreed that a bad character applicant could be employed. The reasons advanced included the need to protect the reputation of the company, avoiding negative influence on other staff, ensuring peaceful industrial environment, retention of customers and avoiding high employee turn-over rate with its associated costs to industry. In support of their opinions, two employers (from a financing company and a government ministry, respectively) gave reasons implying an indisciplined person might not stay long at post for the company to benefit from his excellent academics and job skills, because he lacks the necessary personal values needed for maximum manifestation of his qualities. Similarly, a church leader respondent believed that a first class, brilliant and intelligent accountant who was a thief would dupe the company as a first class thief. A banker also insisted:

"What I am saying is that the banking market is now very highly competitive and getting more technological, although electronic technology is reducing human labour size of industry, the services sector such as banking still requires humans and not robots to handle sensitive areas. This makes the competition keener for the employee who must go beyond technical skills to displaying values that reassure the customer of being in safe hands always. For in the services industry

we deal with humans; students must therefore be made to see moral values as equally important as academic and professional skills development. At the stock exchange the reputation of the bank is important for attracting shares. This starts with the quality of its human resource in both competence and good character values for customer relations".

It was deductive from these responses that employers still paid serious attention to disciplined character of entrée employees, despite the tendency for increasing electronic technology to reduce labour size. A major assigned reason, which agreed with an assertion from Call Centre Managers (OPCE, 2000), was that in the services sector, especially, even the technology-influenced reduced labour size required humans with disciplined character traits for good customer relations and attraction of share holders to keep the company in competition. For the graduate employee, the implication would be a keener competitiveness in recruitment opportunities, with leaner career success if not possess disciplined character.

Opinions on promoting bad character employee: As regards the promotion of an employee with unacceptable character it was hypothesised that applicants with required academic performance and job skills but known to have poor or no self-discipline and morality would not be assigned sensitive responsibilities nor promoted, even if employed. Table 2 suggests an outright objection by the participating employers (54.67%); but the students (50.71%) were only close to objecting that bad character employee must not be promoted. Thus although with varied degree of indications, both categories of respondents did not think a bad character employee should be denied promotion. They advanced diverse reasons for their positions. For Employers, the reasons included:

- (a) Caution against unnecessary human right legalities:
 - (i) To refuse to promote him will be trouble. S/he will take you to Commission on Human Right and Justice (CHRAJ). S/he is a good for nothing person. So don't employ him/her [TWO COLLEGE LECTURERS].
 - (ii) If not promoted it will be equal to not helping him to improve himself. He may sue the company. So avoid engaging him, in the first place, to avoid counter production [CHURCH LEADER].
- (b) Hope for possible reformation on the job:
 - (i) It is possible to help some people reform on the job though it may take time and at a cost [INVESTMENT PROMOTER].
 - (ii) A drunkard-teacher was reformed through pastoral counselling and now not only teaches in a college of education, but also is a traditional ruler [CHURCH LEADER].
- (c) Avoiding redundancy:
 - (i) The person is employed to fill a regular role or vacancy, so he/she cannot be employed and yet not given that role to play, especially after acquiring more skills on the job [ACCOUNTANT].
 - (ii) Knowing that tainted person should not be in sensitive position, don't engage him only to be left idle [ACCOUNTANT].

In the case of the Students, who were close to rejecting the hypothesis, the reasons included:

- (a) The employee has the right: once employed, requirements for promotion were implied.
 - (i) So far as they have the requisite basic qualification they need to be given what they deserve, but a counselling unit should be able to help such persons if and when necessary [MUC; PUCG].
 - (ii) Once the person can do the job and was thus employed, he/she can do it right at the higher level also and so should be promoted [PUC; VVU].
- (b) Employment is for work; not for moral display
Morality and self-discipline only depict the overall character and not the reason to be at or promoted to a post [PUC].
- (c) Not disciplined character, but academics and job skills underscore good job performance
 - (i) Most jobs are not given to people because they have self discipline but it is based on their academics and job competence [PUC; VVU].
 - (ii) Because it is only academic performance and job skill that will let employee excel in the job [VVU].
 - (iii) The fact that one is not disciplined does not reduce one's ability to take technical responsibility. One can fit well in the higher position in question even without good morals [MUC; PUCG].

From the explanations, students believed that implicit in having been employed was qualification for promotion. They felt that once a job seeker was recruited, the prerequisites for even higher or sensitive positions must have been satisfied in principle. Consequently, promotion must not be affected by character, since the purpose of the employee in the industry was to work and work competently rather than demonstrate morality. Moreover, if and when moral issues arose, the employee could be assisted to reform through counselling. Essentially, then both students and employers held same position that once employed a bad character person could be promoted. However, each group advanced different reasons for their opinions. Employers' position was apparently rather more of a precaution and a coping with an otherwise intolerable situation. They preferred the bad character applicant would rather not be employed at all to not being promoted. One of them (a banker) summarised:

'The general rule is that if you have a doubt, don't recruit. It is good to err on the side of caution; so don't engage him to begin with. It is the safest way of managing risk - avoid it'.

Students, on the other hand, assumed a matter-of-course principle that must respect academics and technical skills rather than character values of an employee in the question of promotion. They tended to think of it as an employee-right to automatically be qualified for all opportunities for promotion or being assigned sensitive roles. This mind of students was rather erroneous and contradicted the Acts of Ghana (Labour Act 651, 2003) which states the right for employee promotion to only the employer, who, thus, could insist on

disciplined character as a criterion for employee promotion. Roy (2007) states that today more than ever, employers specifically seek individuals who possess a positive attitude and strong work ethic-traits often recognized within graduates of faith-based colleges. In agreement, Mr. Felix Nyarko Pong cautioned graduating students:

'these days due to keenness of competition in (the banking and finance) industry, employers resort to attitude (implying character) as the final quality rather than intelligence and job skills which most applicants possess'.

The difference in opinions between employers and students (as potential employees) needs significant attention of both educators and industry, because understanding the values of employees is a requirement for any company that wishes to operate with vigour and vitality (Ralston et al., 1997 as cited in Ness et al., 2010).

Table 1: Responses of Students, Employers and PUCG Alumni regarding 'recruitment of bad character applicant

Respondents	Disagreed (= No recruit)	Agreed (= Recruit)	Undecided	Total	Chi-Sq. Value ?=0.05, n=2
Students	175 (62.50%)	47 (16.79%)	58 (20.71%)	280 (100.0%)	2.254
Employers	48 (64.0%)	19 (25.33%)	8 (10.67%)	75 (100.0%)	2.452
PUCG Alumni	10 (62.50%)	4 (25.0%)	2 (12.50%)	16 (100.0%)	2.536

Source: Survey, 2011

Table 2: Responses of Students, Employers and Alumni for 'not promoting bad character employee

Respondents	Disagreed (= Promote)	Agreed (= Not promote)	Undecided	Total	Chi-Sq. Value a=0.05, n=2
Students	142 (50.71%)	75 (26.79%)	63 (22.50%)	280 (100.0%)	4.166
Employers	41 (54.67%)	33 (44.0%)	1 (1.33%)	75 (100.0%)	7.065*
PUCG Alumni	12 (75.0%)	2 (12.50%)	2 (12.50%)	16 (100.0%)	0.842

Source: Survey, 2011

CONCLUSION

The study suggested that technology and micro-chip revolution might reduce labour size, but had not necessarily rendered disciplined character and work ethic unviable. The wheel of industrial technology still required the reduced labour - and not robots - to run it, thereby necessarily increasing competitiveness in recruiting the most useful candidate from a technically qualitative labour market. In such keenly competitive situations some employers would either fall on or be compelled to painfully and reluctantly overlook the factor of character, including work ethic of employees, for assigning sensitive tasks or promotion. Impliedly an excellent academic performance at school may not necessarily guarantee translation into sustainable successful career if it is not supported with disciplined character. Egyir (2011) noted, the fact that a person knows what to do, and how to do it, does not

necessarily imply that he or she will do it the way it should be done; it is the person's attitude (upheld life values and resultant behaviours) that will determine how well he or she would do it. Similarly, in reviewing Laurance Kuper's book on business ethics Charl (2007.) points out that sustainable competitive advantage in business depends on ethical values. Yet, Students erroneously assumed a right of the indisciplined (or unethical) employee to be promoted once considered technically qualified and had been employed, irrespective of morality. It should be recommendable for educators and industry to seriously pay policy attention to the variance in opinions of employers and students, because it may have important implications for both of them. Since this is manifested in the Ghana Labour Act 651, 2003, that employers could only insist on discipline character as a criterion for employee's promotion. The Act was enacted to promote disciplined character among Ghanians.

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