

## CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN THE AFRICAN WORKPLACE

OSITOYE, ADEWALE O. PH.D

Department of Counselling Psychology & Educational Foundations  
College of Specialized and Professional Education  
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria.  
ositoyea@tasued.edu.ng

### Abstract

In the contemporary globalized landscape, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of understanding cultural influences on employee well-being, as the workplace becomes more diverse and interconnected. The paper therefore investigates the cross-cultural analysis of cultural influences and employee well-being in the African workplace using the descriptive survey research design. A sample of 369 employees of organizations in African workplaces was selected through the purposive and multistage random sampling techniques. Instruments used for data collection were the Demographic Data Inventory (DDI), Cultural Influences Scale (CIS) and Employee Well-Being Scale (EWBS). Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using the simple linear regression analysis at the .05 level of significance. Results revealed that cultural collectivism ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t = 9.248$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), power distance ( $\beta = -.218$ ,  $t = -7.632$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) and individualism ( $\beta = .193$ ,  $t = 5.962$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) had significant contributions to employee well-being in African workplaces. It was subsequently recommended, among other things, that organizations should encourage teamwork and collaboration (reflecting collectivism) and recognize and support individual achievements in order to create a harmonious work environment.

**Keywords:** Cultural collectivism, Power distance, Individualism, Employee well-being, African workplace.

### Introduction

In the contemporary globalized landscape, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of understanding cultural influences on employee well-being, as the workplace becomes more diverse and interconnected. The African workplace is characterized by a rich interconnection of cultures, each with its own set of values, norms and social dynamics. With a history shaped by a multitude of ethnicities, languages and traditions, the African continent provides a distinctive setting to explore the relationship between culture and employee well-being. As organizations increasingly operate across borders within Africa and global economic forces continue to shape the world of work, it becomes imperative to understand how cultural elements impact the mental, emotional and physical well-being of employees. Research in the field of organizational psychology emphasizes the significance of employee well-being as a driver of productivity, job satisfaction and overall organizational success (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2018), making it a significant area of exploration.

Employee well-being is a central concern in contemporary organizational research and management practices. Scholars emphasize that the concept extends beyond traditional health measures, encompassing broader dimensions such as psychological, social and even economic aspects (Nurick, 2020). There is a growing recognition that employee well-being is not only a humanitarian concern

but also a critical determinant of organizational performance (Diener et al., 2018). This has sparked a global interest in understanding and enhancing the conditions that contribute to a positive and thriving work environment.

In the era of globalization, organizations are increasingly transcending national borders, necessitating a deeper understanding of cultural influences on employee well-being (Hofstede, 2018). As African workplaces integrate into the global economy, it becomes imperative to explore how cultural factors interact with contemporary workplace dynamics to impact employee well-being. The African continent is characterized by a rich diversity of cultures, each with its unique values, traditions and social dynamics, which influence employee well-being in divergent ways (Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 2018). Understanding how these cultural differences influence employee well-being is crucial for organizations operating in the African workplace, where diversity often spans across ethnicities, languages and historical backgrounds (Nguyen & Seligman, 2014).

Relatively limited attention in existing literature has been given to the cross-cultural analysis of cultural influences and employee well-being in the African workplace context. Yet, exploring cultural influences on well-being in the African workplace is essential for identifying factors that contribute to or hinder employee satisfaction, productivity and retention. This study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a cross-cultural analysis to uncover the ways in which cultural factors impact the well-being of employees across various African cultures. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers and researchers interested in fostering positive work environments within the African context.

Existing research highlights the role of cultural dimensions such as collectivism, power distance and individualism in shaping behaviours and attitudes (Hofstede, 2018). However, the application of these dimensions to understand well-being perceptions within the African context remains underexplored. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by conducting a cross-cultural analysis that considers these cultural dimensions (collectivism, power distance and individualism) prevalent in various African societies, and their impact on employee well-being. By understanding the impact of these cultural dimensions, organizations operating in Africa can tailor their strategies and interventions to enhance the well-being of their workforce, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and harmonious working environment.

Collectivism is the system that operates in collectivist societies, where individuals prioritize group harmony and cooperation over individual pursuits. Collective values in many African cultures may foster a sense of community and belonging in the workplace (Waithaka & Kinoti, 2016). In collectivist cultures, where individuals prioritize group cohesion and collaboration, employees may experience higher well-being due to social support networks and a sense of belonging. In other words, teamwork, social support, and a collective approach to problem-solving may positively impact employee well-being (Howell & Raffaelli, 2017). Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally. High power distance cultures, common in some African societies, may lead to hierarchical organizational structures. Employees might experience greater job satisfaction when they understand and accept these power dynamics, contributing to a positive work environment. A lower power distance, reflecting a more egalitarian distribution of power, may contribute to a workplace environment where employees feel empowered, valued and more positively engaged, leading to enhanced well-being (Rockstuhl & Holt, 2017). In individualistic cultures, individuals prioritize personal goals and autonomy over collective interests. In workplaces with more individualistic tendencies, employees may value personal achievements and autonomy. While this can promote innovation and personal

growth, there might be a need to balance this with maintaining a sense of community and social support for overall well-being. Since individualistic cultures emphasize autonomy and personal achievement, employees may experience higher well-being as they have more control over their work, decisions and career paths (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This research can therefore contribute to the broader field of organizational psychology by expanding the understanding of cultural influences on employee well-being, especially within the African context. The findings can inform future research and interventions and contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and culturally informed organizational psychology framework.

### Hypotheses

Cultural collectivism has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

Power distance has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

Individualism has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

### Methods

#### Design, Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population consists of all employees of organizations in African workplaces made up of government ministries and corporate bodies in the continent. A sample of 400 employees selected from the population through the purposive and multistage random sampling techniques was considered adequate. To overcome language barrier, only 20 English-speaking African countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland/Eswatini, Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Seychelles and South Sudan) were considered. The first stage involved the division of these countries into four clusters including East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa, and a cluster, namely, West Africa was selected. The second stage involved the selection of three countries from West Africa, namely, Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia. The third stage involved the selection of three, two and one organizations from Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia respectively, and the final stage involved the selection of 200, 133 and 67 employees of these organizations from Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia respectively. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample.

**Table 1: Distribution of the Sample**

| Country | Organization  | Sample |
|---------|---|--------|
| Nigeria | Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)          | 64     |
|         | Nestlé Nigeria Plc.                                 | 60     |
|         | Federal Ministry of Education, Science & Technology | 76     |
| Ghana   | Unilever Ghana Limited                              | 70     |
|         | Nestlé Ghana Limited                                | 63     |
| Liberia | Firestone Natural Rubber Company                    | 67     |
| Total   |   | 400    |

### Instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this investigation were developed by this researcher and included the Demographic Data Inventory (DDI), Cultural Influences Scale (CIS) and Employee Well-Being Scale (EWBS). Further information on these instruments is given below.

Demographic Data Inventory (DDI)

A Demographic Data Inventory (DDI) containing four items was developed by this researcher to assess the demographic characteristic of the respondents including country, gender, age and work experience.

#### Cultural Influences Scale (CIS)

The Cultural Influences Scale (CIS) was developed by this researcher to assess cultural dimensions prevalent in various African societies. The CIS contains 18 items and is composed of the following three sub-scales: Collectivism, power distance and individualism. Each sub-scale has six items formatted in a Likert-type instrument with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Sample items on the scale are: 1. I prioritize the needs of my family and community over my individual goals and 2. Personal freedom and autonomy are important in shaping my life choices.

In order to ensure that the CIS consistently measured what it purported to measure, the test-retest method was used to assess its reliability. Consequently, in a pilot study, the CIS was administered on a sample of 30 employees randomly selected from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Abeokuta on two separate occasions with an interval of two weeks between the two administrations. An analysis of the two sets of scores obtained revealed test-retest reliability coefficients of .763, .712 and .824 for the Collectivism, power distance and individualism sub-scales respectively. The test-retest reliability coefficient for the scale as a whole was .759. These indices indicated that the sub-scales and the scale as a whole were reliable since they all yielded stable scores over time. A rule of thumb is that a reliability coefficient should not be less than .7 for it to be acceptable. These high reliability coefficients implied that scores on the scale and on each of the sub-scales did not vary widely over time or when it was repeatedly used. The validity of the CIS as a whole was determined by expert opinion that the items on the scale actually measure what it purports to measure.

#### Employee Well-Being Scale (EWBS)

The Employee Well-Being Scale (EWBS) was adapted from Onunkun's (2017) Life Well-Being Scale (LWBS) to measure subjective well-being among employees used in the study. The EWBS contains 17 items formatted as a modified 4-point Likert-type instrument with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Sample items on the scale are: 1. I am satisfied with my work in this organization and 2. I get along well with my co-workers. A pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability of the EWBS. The instrument was administered on a sample of 30 employees of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Abeokuta on two separate occasions with an interval of two weeks between the two administrations. An analysis of the two sets of scores obtained revealed test-retest reliability coefficient of .781, showing that scores on the instrument are stable over time. The congruent validity of the EWBS was determined by significant positive relationship with occupational well-being ( $r = .48, p < .0005$ ).

### Data Collection Procedure

While ensuring that ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were complied with, data collection commenced. The survey questionnaires were distributed online by means of Google forms to the websites of the organizations used in the study with request that the forms are forwarded to the specified number of employees of the organization as defined by the sample distribution. Of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 369 were returned. This gave an attrition rate of 7.75%.

#### Method of Data Analysis

Each of the hypotheses formulated for this study was tested by means of simple linear regression analysis. The tests were carried out at the .05 level of significance.

## Results

### Test of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** Cultural collectivism has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

**Table 2: Regression Coefficients for the Contribution of Cultural Collectivism to Employee Well-Being**

|                       | <b>B</b> | <b>Std Error</b> | <b>β</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|-------------|
| (Constant)            | 9.403    | 4.528            |          | 11.956   | .000        |
| Cultural Collectivism | .107     | .024             | .265     | 9.248    | .000        |

Dependent Variable: Employee Well-Being

Table 2 indicated significant results ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t = 9.248$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. It was subsequently concluded that cultural collectivism had a significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces. Table 2 further showed that cultural collectivism is positively associated with employee well-being ( $\beta = .265$ ) and that the latter can be predicted from the former by means of the regression equation:

$$\text{Employee Well-Being} = (0.107 \times \text{Cultural Collectivism}) + 9.403.$$

**Hypothesis 2:** Power distance has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

**Table 3: Regression Coefficients for the Contribution of Power Distance to Employee Well-Being**

|                | <b>B</b> | <b>Std Error</b> | <b>β</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|----------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|-------------|
| (Constant)     | 10.105   | 6.073            |          | 12.884   | .000        |
| Power Distance | -.125    | .059             | -.218    | -7.632   | .000        |

Dependent Variable: Employee Well-Being

Table 3 indicated significant results ( $\beta = -.218$ ,  $t = -7.632$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. It was subsequently concluded that power distance had a significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces. Table 3 further showed that power distance is negatively associated with employee well-being ( $\beta = .218$ ) and that the latter can be predicted from the former by means of the regression equation:

$$\text{Employee Well-Being} = 10.105 - (0.125 \times \text{Power Distance}).$$

**Hypothesis 3:** Individualism has no significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces.

**Table 4: Regression Coefficients for the Contribution of Individualism to Employee Well-Being**

|  | <b>B</b> | <b>Std</b> | <b>β</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|--|----------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|
|--|----------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|

|               | <b>Error</b> |       |      |        |      |
|---------------|--------------|-------|------|--------|------|
| (Constant)    | 6.815        | 5.068 |      | 15.290 | .000 |
| Individualism | .119         | .045  | .193 | 5.962  | .000 |

Dependent Variable: Employee Well-Being

Table 4 indicated significant results ( $\beta = .193$ ,  $t = 5.962$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. It was subsequently concluded that individualism had a significant contribution to employee well-being in African workplaces. Table 4 further revealed that individualism is positively associated with employee well-being ( $\beta = .193$ ) and that the latter can be predicted from the former by means of the regression equation:

$$\text{Employee Well-Being} = (0.119 \times \text{Individualism}) + 6.815.$$

## Discussion

The findings of the study provide valuable insights into the relationship between cultural dimensions and employee well-being in the context of African workplaces. The research revealed a significant positive contribution of cultural collectivism to employee well-being in African workplaces ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t = 9.248$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). This indicates that in cultures where individuals prioritize group harmony and cooperation over individual pursuits, there is a positive impact on employee well-being. The findings align with the notion that a sense of community and belonging, inherent in collectivist cultures, fosters a supportive environment that contributes to the overall well-being of employees. Organizations in African workplaces may therefore benefit from promoting collaborative and team-oriented approaches to enhance employee well-being. This finding corroborated the findings of several scholars such as Hofstede (2018) who found that cultural influences impact employee well-being, Triandis et al. (2018) who found that cultural factors interact with contemporary workplace dynamics to impact employee well-being and Nguyen and Seligman (2014) who found that cultures influence employee well-being in divergent ways.

The study found a significant contribution of power distance to employee well-being in African workplaces ( $\beta = -.218$ ,  $t = -7.632$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). The negative beta coefficient suggests that a lower power distance, reflecting a more egalitarian distribution of power, is associated with higher employee well-being. This finding agreed with that of Rockstuhl and Holt (2017) who found that a lower power distance contributes to a workplace environment where employees feel empowered, valued and more positively engaged, leading to enhanced well-being. This finding was also in line with Hofstede (2018) who found that power distance contributes to shaping behaviours and attitudes which can impact employee well-being. In workplaces where there is less hierarchical distance between leaders and subordinates, employees may feel more empowered, valued and positively engaged. This highlights the importance of fostering an organizational culture that promotes open communication, inclusivity and a sense of equality to enhance well-being.

The research identified a significant positive contribution of individualism to employee well-being in African workplaces ( $\beta = .193$ ,  $t = 5.962$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). This implies that in cultures emphasizing autonomy and personal achievement, employees experience higher well-being, possibly due to a sense of control over their work, decisions and career paths. Organizations may benefit from providing avenues for individual growth, acknowledging personal achievements and allowing employees to have a degree of autonomy in their roles.

These findings offer practical implications for organizations operating in Africa. To enhance employee well-being, these organizations could consider fostering a collaborative and team-oriented

environment that values both collective achievements (reflecting cultural collectivism) and individual contributions (reflecting individualism). Additionally, efforts to reduce power distance by promoting transparency, communication and inclusive decision-making processes may positively impact employee well-being. Conclusively, this study clarifies the complex relationships that exist between cultural dimensions and employee well-being in African workplaces.

**Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:**

Organizations should encourage teamwork and collaboration (reflecting collectivism) and recognize and support individual achievements in order to create a harmonious work environment.

Organizations should actively work towards reducing hierarchical distances between leaders and employees. This can be achieved through encouraging open communication, involving employees in decision-making processes and promoting transparency. This can contribute to a workplace culture that fosters inclusivity and empowerment, thereby enhancing employee well-being.

Organizations should create opportunities for employees to exercise autonomy in their roles. Providing avenues for personal achievement, career development and skill enhancement can enhance job satisfaction and contribute to a sense of fulfillment among employees.

Organizations should consider implementing cross-cultural training programmes which can help employees and leaders understand and appreciate different cultural values, facilitating better communication, collaboration and mutual understanding. Cross-cultural competence can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Organizations should implement employee assistance programmes (and support systems to provide resources for employees facing personal or work-related challenges. These programmes can offer counselling services, stress management resources and support networks to help employees cope with various stressors and enhance their overall well-being.

A positive organizational culture that values employee well-being as a priority is essential and should be created. Leadership should actively promote a culture of respect, appreciation and fairness. Recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions, both individually and collectively, can contribute to a positive workplace atmosphere.

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