

Machiavellian Traits in Public Service: Subordinate Silence and Workplace Abuse as By-products and the Moderation of Work Ethics Among Public Servants in Anambra State

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Abstract

Counterproductive work behaviours such as employee silence and workplace abuse are growing in Nigeria public service. Considering their possible negative consequences on organizational efficiency/effectiveness; this study examined subordinate silence and workplace abuse as by-products of Machiavellian traits and the moderation of work ethics. The study sampled 594 public servants in Anambra State, Nigeria whose ages ranged from 23yrs to 56yrs with a mean age of 39.50yrs using multi-stage sampling technique (purposive, cluster and simple randomization). After data analysis, the result revealed that there is high rate of Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse ($M=58.6$; $M=31.4$; and $M = 20.5$ respectively) while there is low work ethics ($M=21.2$) among employees. Also, positive correlations were found among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse at $r(594) = .58$; $.54$; and $.67$, $p < .05$ respectively while negative correlation was found between work ethics and Machiavellian traits at $r(594) = -.60$ $p < .05$; between work ethics and subordinate silence at $r(569) = -.49$, $p < .05$ and between work ethics and workplace abuse at $r(594) = -.72$, $p < .05$. In the regression model, Machiavellian traits positively predicted subordinate silence at $\beta = 1.21^{**}$, $P < .01$ and workplace abuse at $\beta = .92$, $p < .05$ ($n = 594$). Also, work ethics negatively predicted Machiavellian traits at $\beta = -.879$ $p < .05$ ($n = 594$). Furthermore, in model 2 and 3, work ethics was found to moderate only the relationship between Machiavellian traits and subordinate silence at

$\beta = .129^{*}$, $p < .01$ and between Machiavellian traits and workplace abuse at $\beta = .191^{**}$, $p < .01$ ($n = 594$). Findings imply that unhealthy exchange and social climate has negative employee outcomes which affects organizational effectiveness of Nigerian public sector.

Key words: Counterproductive work behavior; Machiavellian traits; Public servants; Subordinate silence; Work ethics; Workplace abuse

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many factors may be responsible for poor service delivery and ineffectiveness of Nigerian public service. Although, institutional and systematic corruption many have endangered public service in Nigeria (Enofe et al., 2017; Ezech & Etodike, 2016), her current dwindling quality may not only be attributable to corruption. Employee outcomes such as subordinate silence and workplace abuse may also be contributory to her current state especially as regards the effects of poor members' exchange and leader-member exchange when these exchanges are Machiavellian driven. Machiavellian trait is becoming a common feature in the workplace; in the views of Aldousari and Ickes (2021), it is an employee's inherent disposition to prioritize manipulation, exploitation, deceit and taking advantage of co-workers' vulnerabilities in order to gain power, wealth and influence to actualized his or her personal goals usually self-serving. According to Zainun et al. (2021), the rank and file nature of public service may affect workers and could make them susceptible to Machiavellian traits with grievous consequences.

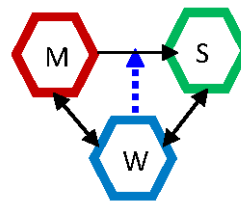
Machiavellian traits may be understood in view of the negative aspects of bureaucratic climate which is common with public service and which in certain circumstances may precipitate negative employee exchanges (Gürlek, 2021) such as; subordinate silence (e.g. pro-social silence, opportunistic silence) and workplace abuse (e.g. abusive supervision or other forms of incivility). Subordinate silence is an absence of employee voice which emanates from a premeditated behaviour to withdraw one's voice out of fear, futility, inefficiency, or negative outcomes which may be directed at the employee especially in the event that speaking up has unbearable cost to the employee (Morsch et al., 2020). Subordinate silence may also extend in the same manner to withdrawal of behaviours and may be common with organizations with Machiavellian tendencies (Duan et al., 2021). Furthermore, one of the consequences of Machiavellian traits is workplace abuse (Duan et al., 2021). Workplace abuse is a form of counterproductive workplace behaviour which leads to emotional or physical harm of the employee usually in form of discrimination, harassment, bullying, violence, and threats (Spector, et al., 2006).

In the presence of Machiavellian traits among employees, the symptoms of manipulation, exploitation and prioritizing power, wealth and influence for personal gain may be worse and adverse to co-workers and overall organizational effectiveness (Younus et al., 2020) and may become antecedents for general lethargy in the organization (Kwak & Shim, 2017). Zainun et al. (2021) contended that without enthroning proper work ethics such as ethical leadership (as may be enshrined in the public service act) to regulate the behaviours of employees and reduce the prevalence of Machiavellian traits, public service delivery may remain ineffective. Work ethic is value orientated and which is hinged on the importance and employee's determination to work within a stipulated regulations and conditions (Marek, 2014). It is also referred to as a workplace norm and expected behavioural conducts of members within an organization (Sharma & Rai, 2015).

Considering the tendency for Nigerian public servants to perceive public service as an end rather than a means to an end as orchestrated by the enabling corruption climate in Nigeria (Onwunyi, 2019), the current researchers are of the opinion that the growth of Machiavellian traits in the public service may abound with the outcomes being inimical to bureaucratic goals of public management and national development. The Machiavellian traits may in many ways affect employees' outcomes by indisposing them to normal life in the organization. Employees besieged with Machiavellian leaders and members may find it difficult to express themselves and may consequently become targets of abuse in the workplace (Kwak & Shim, 2017). In view of these adverse effects (such as loss of voice and physical and

psychological abuse) to the organizational health and the national development, there is an expectation that without enforcement of proper work ethics, the by-products of Machiavellian traits (e.g. subordinate silence and workplace abuse) fuelled by increasing and unchecked counterproductive work behaviours may endanger public service management and its efficiency (Gürlek, 2021). Still in search of pragmatic solutions to the ailing public service in Nigeria, this study conceptualized that work ethics will moderate the relationship among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse.

1.1 Conceptual Model

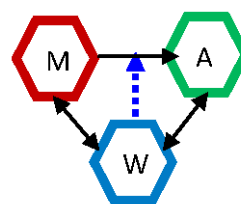


Source: Authors 2021

Figure 1
MACH-Silence model

KEY: M = Machiavellian trait, S = Subordinate silence, W = Work ethics

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model for Machiavellianism-subordinate silence model as moderated by work ethics. MACH-Silence model shows interrelations among variables M, S & W. The relationships indicates that M will predict S, whereas W has dual relationship with both M and S. This relationship (negative) of W is vital to moderating the effects of M on S as shown with the broken arrow in blue.



Source: Authors 2021

Figure 2
MACH-Abuse model

KEY: M = Machiavellian trait, A = Workplace abuse, W = Work ethics

Figure 2 depicts the conceptual model for Machiavellianism-abuse model as moderated by work ethics. MACH-Abuse model shows interrelations among variables M, S & W. The relationships indicates that M will predict A, whereas W has dual relationship with

both M and S. This relationship (negative) of W is vital to moderating the effects of M on A as shown with the broken arrow in blue.

1.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Machiavellianism will significantly predict subordinate silence among public servants in Anambra State.

2. Machiavellianism will significantly predict workplace abuse among public servants in Anambra State.

3. Work ethics will moderate the relationship between Machiavellianism and subordinate silence among public servants in Anambra State.

4. Work ethics will moderate the relationship between Machiavellianism and workplace abuse among public servants in Anambra State

2. LITERATURE

2.1 Machiavellianism and Machiavellian Traits in Public Service

Machiavellianism tends to exploit unethical means in social engagements for the purpose of actualizing self-serving motives in the presence of perceived competition and threats (Fehr & Samsom, 2013). It is a form of unhealthy competition in among individuals in a common endeavour especially relating to socio-econo-political factors. The authors contend that the characterization of the workplace which is made of employees from diverse socio-econo-political backgrounds and varying levels of skills and abilities has made the workplace an inescapable place for the manifestation of Machiavellian traits. This is uniquely so because moving up the organizational pyramid (organogram) is narrower with fewer staff who must compete to ascend certain positions. Also the gains and benefits associated with such positions may also become motivating factor to devise any possible means for ascendance. Thus, in the views of Younus et al. (2020) employees may develop organizational type machiavellianism for the purpose of manipulating, exploiting and deceiving co-workers to advance their cause in the organization to become more competitive in the organizational resource control usually for personal gain. Chang et al. (2009) opined that organizational Machiavellianism is managing one's influence in order to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned means. Fundamentally, non sanctioned means and non-sanctioned ends are problematic to the organization and in essence affect the smooth running of the organization. The antecedents of Machiavellian traits in the workplace endanger organization efficiency and effectiveness because of its usual negative employee outcomes (Duan, 2021). This is the reason why Conner (2006) contended

that the important point to emphasize about organizational Machiavellianism is the legitimacy of both the outcome and the method used to achieve them. Political activities may be classified by political outcomes and political methods; whereas organizational activities are marked with organizational approvals and disapproval especially in view of expected code of conduct and enshrined work ethics. Therefore, if an employee uses political, social, or personal factors which may be positive or negative to influence his or her career paths or those of unsuspecting fellow employees, he or she is in essence exhibiting Machiavellian traits in the workplace. Such traits have known outcomes as they may be adverse to co-workers and overall organizational effectiveness.

In Nigeria public service, the manifestations of Machiavellian traits may be elevated due to other national challenges which have bedeviled the nation such as ethnic cleavages, religious differences and regional colourations (Iyayi & Kadiri, 2019). These national challenges have placed undue premium on scrambling for resources e.g. promotion, management positions etc which have heated up national polity and unhealthy competition among public servants (Oniye, 2015). Although, organizational machiavellianism may abound in Nigerian public service due to employees' individual dispositional traits to manipulate others; however, in views of the authors, unfavourable organizational climate in the public service precedes its prevalence. Such atmosphere may be attributed to unequally distribution of organizational resources and punishments as a result of organizational injustice, poor leader-member-exchange and pay dissatisfaction. However, workers may be motivated by some other counterproductive work behaviours (e.g. subordinate silence) to survive the Machiavellian threats in the organization and where they cannot, several unfavourable employee outcomes may be ensue especially a continuum of manipulation and employee retaliation.

2.2 Subordinate Silence

Subordinate silence is planned, proactive, premeditated behavior with regard to personal reasons of the employee to withdraw his or her voice or other behaviours based on the cost/benefit analysis of speaking up about organizational related matters (Morsch et al., 2020). Typically, in view of any kind of fear, futility, inefficiency, or negative outcomes directed at the employee which may be elevated in the presence of Machiavellian traits, employees may ultimately lose their voice to a greater disadvantage to the organization and members of the organization. Subordinate silence is usually an outcome of employee's perception of unfavourable organizational climate and according to John and Manikandan (2019), subordinates who are silent while organizational tasks consciously withhold potentially information, suggestions, or concerns, from those who might be able to act on upon them to a much disadvantage of the employee

and the organization in general. For example, John and Manikandan (2019) emphasized that the silence climate has an impact on the ability of the organization to detect errors and promote proper organizational functioning.

Loss of employee voice could be detrimental to organizational effectiveness in consideration that some employees often have good ideas, information, and opinion for constructive ways to improve work and organizations; however, depending on the prevailing climate in the organization especially one inherent with employees with Machiavellian traits, they may not share these opinions (Emelifeonwu & Valk, 2019). Although, many other factors could be attributed to the causes of subordinate silence among public service employees (Jafary et al., 2018); majority of those factors border on the quality of organizational members' interaction. In this instance, employees' interactions, members with Machiavellian traits may represent a member of the "dark triad" (Fer & Samsom, 2013). Also, in views of Sonika and Kaushik (2017), other factors could be responsible for subordinate silence and total loss of employee voice and silence in the organization may also be appreciated as a state rather than an action of the employee. For instance, at some point, employees may be unwilling to share information, ideas or something of value to the organization either intentionally or unintentionally; and at other times, he or she may share that information, ideas or values. In this happenstance, silence is a state rather an action of the employee.

In the Nigerian public service, employee silence is evident the rise of employee deviance and counterproductive and retaliatory behaviours which are signs of loss of employee voice. For instance, Oyerinde (2020) associated organizational silence to leadership style and work environment and found that it affected institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, Salihu (2020) contended that the persistence of corruption in Nigerian civil service is as a result of culture of silence especially regarding the fear of persecution by superiors and members. There is the tendency that those speaking out may be singled out and dealt with by those in positions of higher authority or by peers who could sabotage them (Wokocho & Babalola, 2018). The sabotage by peers in context of the current study qualify for manipulation and hence, a Machiavellian trait.

2.3 Workplace Abuse

Generally abuse is high among groups with unequal authority and influence. In the workplace especially in the public service with rank and file, incidences of abuse may be more problematic to deal it considering the bureaucratic nature of work. They occur virtually in various patterns including verbal, gesture, silence, physical attacks and emotional withdrawal (Cho et al., 2020). Workplace abuse refers to behavior that causes workers emotional or physical harassment, discrimination, bullying and

violence are forms of workplace abuse (Ballard & Easteal, 2018). These behaviors aren't always distinguishable from one another because they frequently overlap and have the same type of effects on victims (physical and emotional harm). Most workplace abuse occurs as result of pervasive substandard working conditions and mistreatment in domestic workers da Conceição Figueiredo et al. (2018).

According to Ballard and Easteal (2018), bullying is usually the most visible type of abuse in the workplace but much physical and psychological violence happen in silent spaces of workplace. For instance Pellegrini et al. (2021) contended that bullying, emotional abuse and harassment in workplace have common pathways and could be traced to peculiar causes in the organization which could climate related or employee related. In this perspective we think that Machiavellian trait is a common denominator of these abuses. Regarding its consequence, Cho et al. (2020) reported that among nurses, abuse affects employee efficiency and effectiveness such as quality of care and safety. There are varying patterns of abuse in the workplace such as: use of derogatory remarks, infliction of verbal abuse, physical conduct which suggests threatening, intimidating, or humiliating, or the gratuitous sabotage or undermining of a person's work performance (Nowrouzi-Kia et al. 2019).

2.4 Work Ethics

Work ethics is not a new concept especially in public service as it (public service) has conduct of conduct which governs employees and is closely related to employee work ethics. Literally, work ethics is inclined to moral belief about the benefit work especially regarding how an employee ought to behave in the execution of organizational tasks (Alwagfi et al., 2020). Alwagfi construed work ethics as social responsibility of employees which sets their expectation, ability and value. Sewpaul and Henrickson's (2019) evolution and decolonization of social work ethics emphasized that it is becoming more salient to work according to rules and responsibility. Given Sewpaul and Henrickson's views, ethic may be important in curtailing employees' excesses including the adverse effects of Machiavellian traits. In this perspective, the researchers conceptualized that enthroning work ethics and enforcing same as rule of conduct for employees may be useful in mitigating adverse employee's outcome such as Machiavellian traits and workplace abuse. For instance, Parker et al. (2019) found that work ethics could reduce the prevalence of abusive supervision and employee deviance. Also, Haldorai et al. (2020) established a negative relationship between ethical climate and workplace deviant behavior. These findings suggest that work ethics could moderate employee deviant behaviours such as Machiavellian traits. In Nigeria and among public servants, Babalola et al. (2019) confirmed that perceived leader ethical conviction could moderate on employee discretionary reactions

to ethical leadership. Their finding suggests that work ethics, ethical leadership or ethical climate could regulate employee negative behaviours. In this line of thought, we contend that work ethics having similar effects would moderate the association among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse.

2.5 Gaps in Literature

Subordinate silence and workplace abuse is under reported in the public sector as it is most prominent in the private sector. Usually the bureaucratic nature of public sector which often creates a “don’t talk, do ask” climate have limited researches in the area. Given the effects of corruption, code of conduct or work ethic is not often enthroned in most public organizations; this has led to increasing Machiavellian trend in the public sector. Thus, more employees are finding coping strategies for dealing with co-workers with Machiavellian traits instead of taken organizational action; most common coping strategy is silence. Those who are not silent tend to be abusive as a form of retaliatory behaviour. Not many researches especially in the public sector have considered that work ethics could possibly moderate the relationship between Machiavellian traits and negative employee outcomes. Thus, the authors find gaps in this perspective and hope to explore them.

2.6 Framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour was developed by Ajzen (1978) to understand the organization of human behavior and according to Ajzen behavioural intentions are derived from perceptions of desirability, feasibility, and a propensity to act upon opportunities. The tenets of the theory underpin the consciousness of instituting and sustaining behaviour based on their perceived appeal to the initiator if there are opportunities to initiate them. Hence, perceived desirability is the attractiveness of initiating behaviour, the perceived feasibility refers to the degree to which an individual feels capable of the actions and propensity to act implies the personal disposition to act on one’s decisions. Thus, the three constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour which are: behavioural intention (BI), subjective norms (SN), and attitudes (A) could be associated with the development of Machiavellian traits and its outcomes of subordinate silence and workplace abuse. Also, to conform to work ethics requires some degree of behaviour planning which equally is hinged on the BI-SN-A construct such that the stronger the positive attitudes toward behaviour are and the stronger the social norms toward behaviour are, the stronger the behavioural intention is. If the intention is high, the individual is likely to perform the specified behaviour. The strength of the theory underpins that Machiavellianism, subordinate silence and workplace abuse are all planned behaviour which is determined by the evaluation of worker on their

desirability and attractiveness to the organizational and personal goals. Although, the theory did not highlight intrinsic factors of the associated behaviours, it objectively captures the reasons for the behaviours as goal directed behaviour in the workplace.

3. METHOD

3.1 Sampling Procedure and Participants

The study surveyed 594 public servants who are working in Anambra State, Nigeria whose ages ranged from 23yrs to 56yrs with a mean age of 39.50yrs using multi-stage sampling technique (purposive, cluster and simple randomization). A cover letter which was attached to each of the questionnaire which explained that the survey was for research purpose, and also promised anonymity of participants’ responses. Ethical approval for the participants of the study was obtained after submitting the purpose of study to the Ethics Committee of the State The approval (see appendix IV) granted permission to the authors to carry out the study among the public servants. An administrative officer II who was trained by the researchers served as a research assistant in the study and helped navigate the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The participants completed the surveys during their free period at work and returned them to the research assistant who later handed over the completed surveys to any of the authors. Demographic information of the participants revealed a close homogeneous characteristic across, religion, educational background and ethnic origins except for age and grade level in organogram. Thus, control for the two factors as extraneous variable was made by including them as demographics of the study.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Machiavellianism Trait Scale

Machiavellian trait was measured by Machiavellian personality scale using a 16-item questionnaire developed by Dahling et al. (2009). The authors reported validity of = .84 for the entire scale. The response format was in 5-point likert scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Sample items include: “I am willing to be unethical if I believe it will help me succeed”, “The only good reason to talk to 0.48 0.03 0.20 0.17 others is to get information that I can use to my benefit.” For validity and reliability; the use of the scale in the current study was made possible by enhancing the reliability obtained by the original authors through a pilot study using 51 participants from Enugu State civil service. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient analysis carried out by the researcher revealed an alpha reliability coefficient of .74 for the scale.

3.2.2 Subordinate Silence Scale

Subordinate silence was measured by employee silence scale which is a 12-item instrument developed by

Adamska and Jurek (2017) to measure various forms of subordinate silence in the workplace. It measures the extent to which employees affected in their organization such that they (employees) withhold information that might be useful to the organization of which they are a part, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It is measured on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from fully disagree (1) to fully agree (5) which the participants were expected to respond to. Some of the samples contained in the scale include: *“I remain silent in my place of work because my superiors are not open to proposals, concerns, or the like”* and *“I remain silent in my place of work because of concerns that others could take an advantage of my ideas.”* The scale has for subscales which measures: Acquiescent silence, Quiescent silence, Prosocial silence and Opportunistic silence. The authors of the scale (Adamska &Jurek, 2017) reported internal consistent for the scale as follows: AS-QS = .53, AS-PS = .26, AS-OS = .41, QS-PS = .52, QS-OS = .43, PS-OS = .43 and reported Cronbach alpha of $r = .68$. The researcher carried out a pilot test to enhance the reliability of the instrument and obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .68$.

3.2.3 Workplace Abuse

Workplace abuse was measured using workplace abuse subscale of Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) Checklist. The 32 item counterproductive work behaviour was developed by Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, and Kessler (2006). The 32-item Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist by Spector et al., (2006) was used to measure CWB dimensions such as workplace abuse (measured by items 8, 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 23-32), production deviance (2, 10, 12), sabotage (1, 5, 6), theft (7, 16, 17, 18, 22) and withdrawal (3, 4, 11, 13). Response options range from 1 (never) to 5 (every day), with high scores representing higher incidence of CWB.. Spector et al (2006) reported that coefficient alpha of .81 was obtained under the CWB scale. For its use in Nigeria the 32-item counterproductive workplace behaviour was adapted and validated for the Nigerian population by Adenike, (2011) who reported a cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .68 with test retest reliability coefficient of $r = .52$. However, the researcher conducted a reliability analysis (Cronbach alpha) before using in this study and alpha coefficients of = .58 was obtained.

3.2.4 Work Ethics

Work ethics profile is a 28 item multi-dimensional work ethics profile (MWEP-Short form). The scale was developed by Meriac, Woehr, Gorman, and Thomas (2013). MWEP-SF uses the same 5-point Likert-type scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Its notable difference from the MWEP is that it includes only 28 items of the original 65 (approximately 57% reduction in number of items). The MWEP-SF dimension scales are each comprised of 4 items. Internal consistency estimates for the scale range from .75 to .86, suggesting that the

internal consistency of the short-form scale is high. On the premise that the scale was foreign-based, the researcher subjected it to pilot study using 70 respondents that were different from the original participants used in the study. Using alpha reliability, the researcher obtained an alpha coefficient of .82.

3.3 Control Variables

Obvious extraneous variables which could possible influence the outcome of the findings are age and grade level in service. With reference to Chukwuorji et al. (2019), both were used as control variables to make sure the findings hold irrespective of these individual attribute variables. Age in range (1 = 20-29years, 2 = 30-35 yr, 3 = 36-50yrs, 51-65yrs) was dichotomous variables, and the Grade level in service was measured using three order categories in the present study (1 = 1-7 (junior staff), 2 = 8-14 (middle mgt), 3 = 15 and above (senior staff)).

3.4 Data Analyses

Data analysis explored moderating effects of work ethics in the relationships among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse. Data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22©. Moderated regression analysis was used to establish whether the relationship among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse was moderated by work ethics. The moderation analysis was carried out with PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013).

4. RESULT

Result of the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis which considered the level of significant and correlation among the study’s variables is presented in Table 1, while the Hayes Process Macro regression results can be found in Tables 2.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the study variables

Variables	Mean	1	2	3	4
1 Machiavellianism	33.4	1			
2 Subordinate silence	32.6	.492*	1		
3 Workplace abuse	27.2	.503**	.417*	1	
4 Work ethics	65.2	-.601**	-.510**	-.672**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Data from Table 1 reveal that there is high rate of Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse (M=58.6; M=31.4; and M = 20.5 respectively) while there is low work ethics (M=21.2) among employees. Also, positive correlations were found among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse at $r(594) = .58; .54; \text{ and } .67, p < .05$ respectively

while negative correlation was found between work ethics and Machiavellian traits at $r(594) = -.60$, $p < .05$; between work ethics and subordinate silence at $r(569) = -.49$, $p < .05$ and between work ethics and workplace abuse at $r(594) = -.72$, $p < .05$.

Table 2
Moderated regression results of the relationship among Machiavellian trait (MT), subordinate silence (SS), workplace abuse (WA) and work ethics (WE)

	R2	F	df1(df2)	SE	B	LLCI	ULCI
Model 1 direct	.25	95.01**	2(594)				
MT → SS				.11	1.21**	.91	1.27
MT → WA				.09	.092*	.73	.88
WE → MT				.06	-.087*	.05	.23
Model 2 (indirect)	.11	42.39**	2(594)	.07	.129*	.44	.21
MT→WE →SS							
Model 3 (indirect)	.17	46.27**	2(594)	.05	.191**	.13	.19
MT→WE→WA							

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$

Data from Table 2, indicates that Machiavellian traits positively predicted subordinate silence at $\beta = 1.21$ **, $P < .01$ and workplace abuse at $\beta = .92$, $p < .05$ ($n = 594$). Also, work ethics negatively predicted Machiavellian traits at $\beta = -.879$, $p < .05$ ($n = 594$). Furthermore, in model 2 and 3, work ethics was found to moderate only the relationship between Machiavellian traits and subordinate silence at $\beta = .129$ *, $p < .01$ and between Machiavellian traits and workplace abuse at $\beta = .191$ **, $p < .01$ ($n = 594$).

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the moderation effects of work ethics, in the relationship among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse among public servants in Anambra State. The result indicated that the prevalence rate of Machiavellian traits as well subordinate silence and workplace abuse among employees in public service is high whereas diminishing levels of work ethics was revealed. From the 3 regressed models, findings indicated that Machiavellian trait positive and significantly predicted both subordinate silence and workplace abuse but negatively and significantly predicted work ethics. Consequently, the models were accepted for the 3 hypotheses of the study.

The predictive relationship between Machiavellian traits and subordinate silence provided insights into the consequences of negative organizational climate which affects members' interaction and exchange. Such climates such as one which promote Machiavellian traits diminish members' trust on both fellow workers and the management; and could motivate retaliatory behaviours

such as workplace abuse and subordinate silence. For instance this contention is supported by Oyerinde (2020) which found that leadership style and work environment (relating to climate) influenced organizational silence. The negative employee outcome which can be traced to poor members' exchange occasioned by the consequences of Machiavellianism in the workplace equally affected organizational effectiveness. Extreme threats of Machiavellianism as supported by da Conceição Figueiredo et al. (2018) in the workplace can also be traced to poor or substandard conditions of work which are usual antecedents to provoking members' retaliatory behaviours such as workplace abuse.

Findings of the current study were also supported by Cho et al. (2020) who found that Machiavellian trait is a common denominator of different forms of workplace abuses. In support of this, Cho et al. (2020) reported that among nurses, abuse affects employee efficiency and effectiveness such as quality of care and safety.

As regards the moderating effects of work ethics on the negative impacts of Machiavellian traits on employee outcome, literature is consistent that codes of conduct as enshrined by the organizational policies may help to positively regulate employees' outcome especially as regards poor working environment and planned behaviour in the workplace. This is supported by Parker et al. (2019) who found that work ethics reduced the prevalence of abusive supervision and employee deviance. In addition, support from Haldorai's et al. (2020) study which established negative relationship between ethical climate and workplace deviant behavior found that work ethics moderated employee deviant behaviour which directly buttresses that this type of antecedents may be causative factors to which emanate for the nature of working environment.

In Nigeria and among public servants, ethical support was found by Babalola et al. (2019) which confirmed that perceived leader ethical conviction moderated employee discretionary reactions especially where ethical leadership is institutionalized. It is deduced from the findings of their study that negative employee behaviour such as silence and abuse could be regulate if there is ethical climate or institutionalized ethical leadership. Thus, it could be garnered that code of conduct or work ethic could in like manner elicit same behavioural expectations and thus could have similar effects in the relationship among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse. The consistency of this finding is supported by exchange process theories which prioritize individual employee's interpersonal interaction among organizational members as determinants of reciprocal or retaliatory behaviours.

5.1 Implications of the Study

The findings imply that the public service is not at its best with the threats of Machiavellian growth which

is something that has emanated from the volatility of institutional corruption ravaging Nigeria as a whole. The threat destroys public servants confidence in the government system as well as affects the quality of service delivery in public service. Without proper ethical policy which checkmates negative employee antecedents such as Machiavellian traits, the work environment becomes a jungle with the survival of the fittest at the expense of public and foreign investors whose confidence currently bruised due to ineptitude among public service, poor service delivery, corruption and general inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the Nigerian public service. The instance of these implications is inimical to Nigeria's development vision which must be championed by a public service that vibrant, innovative, responsive and efficient.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Machiavellianism is usually treated as one of the dark triad. As a personality, it is has been recognized to be a consistence pattern of behaviour and hence is difficult to ascertain whether such behavioural patterns are natural to the employee or learned in the workplace. This limitation was managed by indirectly increasing the consciousness of the respondents on the fact that behavioural patterns under study are those which they exhibit in the workplace. This was achieved by adding to the research items a phrase "... in my workplace I."

6. CONCLUSION

Work ethics is a critical factor in the organization without which it may be difficult to checkmate employee excesses such as Machiavellian traits which could endanger the employees, the work and the organization equally. The importance of work ethics and the absence of it is usually highlighted where employees remain unchecked in their organizations. Incidences of incivility, abuse and harassment is common with organizations whose ethics implementation is at its lowest. Such organizations are known grounds for injustice, abuse, silence and other grievous outcomes such as corruption, underperformance and organizational failure. Firms with low ethical policy implementation may be exposed to members' Machiavellian advancement, a factor that is known to discourage collective effort and team spirit. Considering this danger, the study of moderation effect of work ethics on the relationship among Machiavellian traits, subordinate silence and workplace abuse is timely as it has offered insights into the some of the causative factors in which retard the quality of service in the Nigeria public service.

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