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Article

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IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE ON EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Indigenous language is a crucial tool for human daily engagements, functioning as an instrument of communication and a repository of culture, worldview, and philosophy. This paper, therefore, critically investigated how its use in organisational settings enhances employees' motivation. In particular, it examined how such usage enhances employees' interpretation and understanding, and fosters their dignity and community relationships. Leveraging ontological, hermeneutical, and phenomenological theories, as well as structuralism and Marxism, this paper argues that its application in the workplace enhances employee performance. Using conceptual analysis, prior studies, and the author's intuition, this paper found that the utilisation of indigenous language in the workplace breeds employees whose task performance stems from their recognition that the organisation belongs to them. Thus, it concluded that there is a strong correlation between indigenous language use and employee motivation in the workplace, as it enhances understanding of workplace goals, policies, and training, reduces cognitive load, fosters inclusion, and safeguards psychological and linguistic protective cover. At the same time, it cautions against its disproportionate use in organisational contexts, as this can derail organisational goals through linguistic dichotomisation and fragmentation of employees.

Keywords: Employee Motivation, Indigenous Language, Organisational Performance, Philosophical Perspectives, Understanding.

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Introduction

Every organisation uses corporate language to drive its goals, policies and training. Often, employees' effectiveness and efficiency are premised on their competence in this corporate language. In this regard, proficiency in the said language is an indicator of strength, as it enhances uniformity within an organisation. Nonetheless, while appreciating the value of this uniformity, it is crucial to underscore that, most often, its undue stress in organisational settings undermines the linguistic diversity of the employees who constitute an organisation's human resource. Besides, it neglects the fact that this diversity has intrinsic value that could have a significant impact on an organisation. Additionally, it neglects that a rigid emphasis on corporate language does not even align with the contemporary demands of the workplace, which conceives the world not only as a global village (McLuhan, 1964), but also as a world in my palm (Nnaemedo, 2020), thereby promoting a virtual workplace. Given advances in technology, especially in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), currently propelled by artificial intelligence, workplace language multiplicity and diversity, hitherto considered a hindrance to an organisation's corporate performance, are no longer perceived accordingly. These artificial intelligences now enable cross-language translation, fostering a sense of uniformity, as each employee understands this information in a language deeply entrenched in his or her culture and lived experiences (Nnaemedo, 2026).

Under this enriched uniformity, employees' organisational participation shifts from a transactional exercise to a demonstration of creativity and innovativeness, as a portrayal of their authenticity predicated on their identification and recognition as subjects of respect and as ends in themselves (Kant, 2012). It implies that language is not just a communicative tool. It has an ontological dimension. Hence, Heidegger (1947) described it as a house of being, implying that language makes for intelligibility, interpretation, and understanding of reality. Therefore, language is not only a constitutive of institutional reality (Searle, 1995), it is a foundation of all reality and a form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953), forms the basis of social life (Habermas, 1984), controls thought development (Vygotsky, 1986), subsists as an aperture to being (Nnaemedo, 2023), and as necessary for attaining a fusion of horizons through shared meaning (Gadamer, 2004). As well, it can constitute symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), an instrument of mental colonisation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986), a tool of inclusion and exclusion (Foucault, 1972), and a tool of dehumanisation and subjugation (Marx, 1959). Besides, language performs actions, such as promising, contracting, negotiating, authorising, and ordering (Austin, 1962). These actions can have tremendous motivational impacts.

Notably, studies have shown that language affects employee motivation (Nwode & Anyadiegwu, 2023; Tao *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, these studies were mostly conducted in the social sciences. Efforts to understand how language influences motivation have remained philosophically underexplored, especially regarding the correlation between indigenous language and employee motivation. Therefore, this paper argues that using indigenous language in the workplace impacts employee motivation as the usage represents inclusivity in the workplace and a recognition of employees' dignity, which, in turn, inspires them to contribute to their organisation not transactionally, but as an expression of their authenticity as humans who ought to respond to situations to evade bad faith profiling (Sartre, 1943). To support the above thesis statement, the subsequent section provides conceptual clarification of key concepts embedded in this study as a basis for investigating relationships between indigenous languages and employee motivation.

Conceptual Clarification

Indigenous Language: The concept of language is used in two senses: language as a general concept, and language as a tongue (Mondin, 1991). As a general concept, language is Man's capacity for speech. So, it is a faculty in man that enables him to communicate with others. Chomsky's (1965) concept of language as innate aligns with the above view. Besides, consideration of language as innate informed Chomsky's advocacy of universal grammar. Then, language as a tongue refers to the particular languages used by different language groups outside their national languages. Indigenous language falls into this camp. Therefore, an indigenous language is a language specific to a particular language group within a nation with a dominant language. For instance, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and Efik, among others, are indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria, where English is a dominant language. Though these indigenous languages differ in many respects, they converge in other areas, here described as common or general concepts. Typical examples of these general concepts include the words *papa and mama*, used by children across many cultures to refer to their fathers and mothers, respectively. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that the view that these common concepts exist partially misaligns with Chomsky's notion of universal grammar. The former, the idea of common concepts, maintains that there are similar terms across various language groups globally. So, while universal grammar stresses the presence of such general grammar everywhere, the general concept argument stresses the existence of similar terms or words across many cultures, implying that not every culture is involved.

So, as with language in general, indigenous language performs communicative, expressive, descriptive, and ontological functions (Mondin, 1991; Heidegger, 1971). Therefore, in this paper, an indigenous language is a language used by a particular group of people, which serves as its communicative and ontological tool for in-depth interpretation and understanding of the reality around them.

Employee Motivation: In social sciences, employee motivation is an incentive given to employees to reinforce their organisational behaviour and job performance (Nnaemedo, 2025). It could also be described as the energy, commitment, and innovation that employees bring to their jobs (Riak & Bill, 2022). Employee motivation comprises tangible (extrinsic) and intangible (intrinsic) factors. Ryan & Deci (2000) defined extrinsic motivation as a form of motivation that occurs when a person undertakes an activity for a separable outcome. Besides, they viewed intrinsic motivation as a form of motivation that occurs when the attainment of inherent satisfactions is the goal of an activity. Some examples of external motivation are external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulations (Legault, 2016). The following are some triggers of employee motivation: praise/commendation, salary, increments, assignment of new roles, management styles, and management communication styles (Okine *et al.*, 2021). However, in philosophy, triggers of employee motivation transcend tangible aspects and reside in the intangible domain, such as recognition, assignment of new roles, management styles, and communication styles. Besides, whereas the essence of motivation in the social sciences is to increase productivity, in philosophy, the goal is human enhancement. In this consideration, the emphasis is on inspiring employees by reinforcing their intrinsic values; by giving them a sense of belonging; by underpinning their human dignity; and by reducing or removing anything that impinges on their fundamental human rights.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that employee motivation correlates with organisational engagement. Nnaemedo (2024) provides an insight into the nature of this

bond by identifying a strong association between the two. He argued that while motivation triggers or sets employee engagement in motion, employee engagement sustains motivation, implying that the higher the motivation, the higher the engagement. Besides, he contended that the higher the engagement, the greater the maintenance of motivation. Thus, he underscored that they reinforce each other and collectively promote higher output, lower employee turnover, improved customer service, and robust organisational goals. Also, Nnaemedo stressed that the above robust relationship firmly supports Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg motivators and hygiene factors, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, and Vroom's expectancy theory (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg *et al.*, 1959; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vroom, 1964). For instance, Maslow showed how a hierarchy of needs drives individuals. Deci and Ryan recognised three intrinsic motivators: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Vroom revealed how individuals' belief that their efforts will yield strong performance and rewards, in turn, motivates them.

So, from a philosophical perspective, the relationship between employee motivation and engagement hinges on the fact that both emphasise that organisational participation is predicated on employees' sense of belonging to the organisation, rather than on economic productivity alone. Their sense of belonging is indicative of an organisational inclusive posture, which treats each worker as a subject and end in himself and not as a means to an end (Kant, 2012), a pointer to recognition of the humanism of the other (Levinas, 1972). This approach looks beyond productivity to human dignity, treating each as being of invaluable worth. Employees' organisational behaviours are therefore the outcome of this organisational valuation index. In this context, employees' responses are informed by their desire to authenticate themselves through meaningful performance within an organisation. Hence, they act, not just for productivity, but fundamentally as a demonstration of their authenticity, as creative and dynamic human beings who should authenticate their existence by action, conscious of the fact that action reveals being (*agere sequitur esse* -as a being is so it acts).

Indigenous Language and Employee Motivation

Enhances Interpretation and Understanding of Organisational Goals: Using an indigenous language in an organisational setting enhances motivation. This is because its utilisation in the workplace facilitates the interpretation and understanding of organisational goals, policies, and training content. The veracity of the above claim rests on the fact that an indigenous language is an embodiment of lived experiences, being the language of people's daily lives. As it is people's medium of daily interaction, it enables employees to communicate freely and easily with each other with clarity, distinctness, minimal ambiguity, and reduced misconceptions, as they are conversant with the various terminologies in use in the language. Even when technical terms are used, they can be readily linked to concrete examples that drive home the intended message. This approach not only makes the message clear but also adds local content to the discussion, bridges the mind-mouth gap, and helps sediment the discussion in a way that the individuals involved will easily remember and consequently apply in concrete situations. This understanding, achieved through indigenous language use in the organisational sector, enhances employee motivation, as the knowledge it confers offers a certain degree of certainty and power, given that knowledge is power (Bacon, 1872). This power manifests itself in action. Hence, the certainty that comes from using an indigenous language in an organisational setting equips employees with confidence in themselves, their abilities, and their understanding of organisational goals, policies, and

training content, which, in turn, positively affects their organisational performance. It is important to note that when the reverse is the case, there is misunderstanding and its attendant frustration, a hostile workplace, conflict, and poor output.

Additionally, the use of the indigenous language, given its role in facilitating interpretation and understanding, enhances knowledge sharing among employees. As employees' native and daily language, the indigenous language provides a forum for smooth, seamless discursive engagements in the workplace. This knowledge sharing results in enhanced problem-solving, decision-making, robust interpersonal relationships, dialogue, and fusion of horizons. Problem-solving and decision-making enable employees to attain fulfilment by allowing them to deploy their rational capabilities meaningfully. This fulfilment motivates them to contribute to their organisational goal. Interpersonal relationships enable them to relate to one another freely and mutually, thereby shielding them from forced silence, which results when an employee lacks the capacity to communicate with others due to incompetence in organisational language. So, an employee's choice of silence in this regard is a way of safeguarding himself from the embarrassment of speaking in a manner that might be at odds with the acceptable mode of speaking (*modus loquendi*) of a workplace. Besides, when employees fuse their horizons, they create shared meaning (Gadamer, 2004). This shared meaning manifests in their commitment to organisational goals, indicating a motivation to participate actively in the organisation's life. Shared meaning also makes dialogue possible. As employees now view themselves as people united by a common pursuit, it would be easier for them to resolve their differences in the interest of their common goal. Subsequently, they are motivated to pursue their common goal. Also, the use of an indigenous language within an organisation is beneficial for employee training, as it enables trainers to interpret and teach training content in a language the trainees are familiar with. Employees, in turn, learn better when training is mediated through an indigenous language, as this divorces training from the technicalities that ordinarily put trainees off. In this way, using an indigenous language reduces employee cognitive load and provides a learning environment similar to their indigenous cultural settings. Informed by such quality training, employees are apt and duly motivated to discharge their organisational roles responsibly.

Enhance Employee Recognition and Human Dignity

Allowing employees to use their indigenous languages at the workplace is a firm indication of respect for and appreciation of employees and their cultural values. This acceptance and recognition by employees themselves clearly demonstrate that they are persons of worth, with fundamental human rights deserving of respect (Kant, 2012). Giving employees the recognition described above boosts their self-esteem and organisational dedication and allegiance. It disposes them to show greater commitment to their organisation, having realised that the organisation values them and is eager to accord them the recognition they desire. Of course, the above submission reinforces Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs, where esteem needs are the fourth in the pyramid, and comprise self-respect (self-esteem) and the esteem of others. In this motivation theory, Maslow underscored that self-esteem entails strength, achievement, adequacy, confidence in the world, and independence and freedom. Esteem for others entails reputation or prestige (defined as respect or esteem from others), recognition, attention, importance, or appreciation. Hence, he contended that satisfying self-esteem needs leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and a sense of being useful and necessary in the world. In contrast, thwarting them results in feelings of inferiority, weakness, and helplessness. However, esteem needs are not the

endpoint. Maslow noted that they yearn for self-actualisation or self-fulfilment, that is, the tendency for one to become actualised in what one is potentially.

It is crucial to underscore that, before the emergence of Maslow's theory of motivation, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel had already addressed the relationship between an individual and community recognition. Hegel (2018) argued that self-consciousness is a product of society and culture, and is unattainable solely through individual existence. What Hegel meant, according to Solomon (1988), is that "human existence is primordially a matter of mutual recognition, and it is only through mutual recognition that we are self-aware and strive for the social meanings in our lives." (p.68). Likewise, Feilmeier (1992) argued that Hegel's thesis that true self-consciousness can be achieved only via shared or reciprocal recognition is convincing because it offers an external, objective test of our subjective impressions of ourselves. Consequently, Brownlee (2023) contended that the Hegelian idea of reciprocity of recognition stems from the fact that recognition becomes a structure of self-consciousness – of consciousness's knowledge of itself, mediated through its relation to another – only when your act of recognising me completes my act of recognising you. Besides, recognising employees' cultures involves appreciating their cultural heritage, worldviews, ethical norms, and proverbs, among others. Significantly, it implies recognising their cultural values and the overwhelming need to integrate them into their workplace and the transformative effect of such integration, that is, their ability to turn the work environment into a domestic setting where these cultural values, that motivate people in their various settings, can also be utilised as employee incentives. This is because these cultural values are ontologically, epistemologically, ethically, morally, religiously, aesthetically, and anthropologically rooted in employees' psyches and find expressions in their daily engagements.

From an ontological viewpoint, these cultural values contain linguistic content that touches on employees' being. Epistemologically, they provide materials for a profound insight into reality, as knowledge mediation is mediated through linguistic components that are natural to employees. Ethically, they embody normative principles and concepts that are consistent and resonate with employees' sensibilities and daily socio-cultural engagements. Typical instances here are the Igbo concepts that portray various dimensions of solidarity, such as *ibuanyidanda* (load does not outweigh *danda*), *Igwebuiké* (multitude is strength), *onyeaghalanwanneya* (let no one abandon his relation), and *onyekweleuzongange* (let no one allow movements through the exit door). Beyond Igboland, other solidarity-packed concepts, especially in East and South Africa, are *uhuru* (freedom) and *ubuntu* (interdependence). Besides, at the moral level, these cultural values embody content that sustains employees' moral actions and redefines their organisational norms. Likewise, in the domain of religion, these cultural values include concepts that readily predispose employees to spiritual realities, for instance, the Igbo concept, *ndi ichie* (ancestors), which in some parts of Igboland depicts men who lived good lives and died at a ripe old age. These concepts could constructively moderate and modify employees' belief systems and subsequently their organisational behaviours. At the aesthetic level, these cultural values embody many attributes that define and sustain beauty within the Igbo society, as evidenced in the Igbo concept, *agwa bu nma* (character is beauty). Here, beauty transcends physical appearance to fundamentally entail the fineness of a person's character, implying that beauty is more than skin deep.

Lastly, in the anthropological domain, these cultural values embody concepts that shape perceptions, interpretations, and reinforcement of certain human feats within

employees' indigenous societies. A typical instance in this context is the use of Igbo motivational terms, such as *ogbu agu* (killer of lion), as an organisational identification mark to recognise a person who has done a spectacular thing in a society. When an employee is described with the above name tag, he does not need much explanation to understand the meaning of this new ascription to his name, as it is a concept already deeply rooted in his culture as a depiction of bravery. This paper, therefore, argues that when employees perceive themselves as integrally recognised in a workplace, culturally and otherwise, they are motivated to contribute to organisational goals, not merely to improve productivity, but as a concrete and indisputable expression of their authenticity and a clear demonstration that they belong to and constitute essential constituents of the organisation.

Enhance Community and Human Flourishing

The use of an indigenous language in the workplace creates a sense of language affinity, fostering robust interactions among employees. These interactions create strong ties among employees, which subsequently form a community that reflects a culturally humanised workplace not solely driven by productivity. In this new work environment, employees see themselves as closely linked together, given their many areas of cultural convergence. With time, this community grows from strength to strength, graduating into a flourishing community. Consequently, employees in this work environment are motivated not merely by a call to duty, but even more by their vision of their workplace through the lens of their cultural society. This community consciousness, inspired by linguistic linkages, enables employees to discharge their organisational responsibilities as part of their efforts to keep their community afloat, grounded in the principle of self-preservation, as no one would opt to destroy his or her stronghold. Of course, the security of life and property is a fundamental requirement for every human being. Failure to do otherwise is surely a form of self-alienation, a removal of self from one's ontological and hermeneutical foundation.

So, this self-alienation is not a mere isolation from the workplace, but, more fundamentally, a dislocation from the template that provides meaning for one's existence. This is because it is in this community that employees, to a great extent, understand their organisational goal, whose outcome is indicative of their authenticity. Interestingly, previous studies have equally attested to a strong correlation between human flourishing and relationships in a community. This is evident in Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship, Kwesi Wiredu's community consciousness, and Anthony Kanu's Igwebuiké theory (Buber, 1970; Wiredu, 1980, 1996; Kanu, 2015). It implies that the stronger the community, the more human flourishing it offers. Contrastingly, the weaker the community, the weaker the human flourishing it provides. So, whereas a strong correlation between them suggests the presence of a community enhancer, an absence or weak correlation indicates its absence or insufficiency.

However, indigenous languages are not mere community enhancers; they are constitutive of community and so necessary for authentic interpretation of community at a hermeneutic level (Gadamer, 2004). In the phenomenological domain, they are necessary to save the community from alienation by properly situating it in its house, language (Heidegger, 1947). In the Marxist realm, they salvage the community from losing its species-being and nosediving into a dungeon of irrationality as an entity embodying humans bereft of consciousness (Marx, 1959). Besides, they rescue the community from a bizarre scenario where competence in corporate language becomes an index of effectiveness and efficiency, resulting in a new community's currency for rewarding its members (Bourdieu, 1991). At the postmodern and post-structuralist level, they shield the community from a situation in which

power is used as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion (Foucault, 1972). Here, power is not top-down and a tool for marginalisation but an instrument of inclusivity. Hence, it saves the community from the impulsive domination of corporate language, which is used to exert power over employees and to determine who should speak, when, and where, and, correspondingly, legislating what is legitimate and otherwise.

Conclusion

The relationship between indigenous language and employee motivation is not only a subject of the social sciences. It is also the concern of philosophy. This paper argued that using indigenous language in the workplace motivates employees to perform better, as its use helps them interpret and understand organisational goals, policies, and training content, signals their recognition in the workplace, and offers employees a viable, culturally grounded workplace or community. The use of an indigenous language helps employees interpret reality in-depth, given its deep roots in lived experience. Hence, integration of an indigenous language at a workplace shields employees from cognitive overload, intellect-mouth gap, linguistic self-alienation, and dislocation from their psychological mask, shielding them from unwarranted humiliation. Besides, using an indigenous language in the workplace is an indicator of an employer's recognition and acceptance. This motivates employees to perform better, as people naturally perform better in an environment where they are welcomed. Also, incorporating an indigenous language into the workplace fosters a sense of community, inspiring employees to work not just for duty's sake, but also to preserve one of the templates that defines and reinforces their authenticity. Thus, this paper concluded that it is crucial to integrate indigenous languages into the workplace to breed employees who consider themselves duly recognised and appreciated by their organisation and whose task performance stems from these recognitions rather than from the mechanical performance of their job description.

Nonetheless, care should be taken to shield the above integration from disintegrating an organisation along linguistic lines. Rather, it calls for entronement of polyphonic workplace (allowing diverse language groups to coexist actively with corporate language at an organisational setting), valuing the pause (appreciating the reflective, creative and innovative import of taking out sometime before responding to an issue as against privileging language proficiency as indicative of intelligence and competence), and linguistic reciprocity (allowing for mutual sharing of translation burden by at times using other languages other than the corporate language as a mean of communication at a workplace and requiring users of dominant languages to engage in translating them into their language). Therefore, integrating indigenous languages into an organisational setting should not undermine the organisation's corporate goals. Instead, it should subsist as an antidote against language weaponisation. In this situation, language is used as an instrument of monopolisation, marginalisation, and dehumanisation, thereby harming employee motivation and organisational performance.

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